

**MARRIAGE AS IDEAL, COHABITATION AS PRACTICAL:
REVISITING MEANINGS OF MARRIAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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In the Philippines, nowadays, it is common to have news about entertainment personalities who live-in with someone then break up and later live-in with another. Many women are also vocal about their desire to have children outside of marriage while others admit they have had a baby with a partner not married to them. Cohabitation among entertainers and politicians has started to spread among common people as noted in the blog of a well known Catholic priest. Such observations are supported by quantitative data documenting the increase of Filipinos who are cohabiting and the decrease of those formally marrying. Based on the National Demographic and Health Survey, 53 percent of women ages 15 to 49 were formally married and six percent were cohabiting in 1998. A decade later, these figures decreased to 51 percent and increased to 11 percent, respectively. These changes occur in the midst of a still dominantly Catholic country.

In this paper, we revisit and examine the meaning of marriage and cohabitation in today's society with the goal of documenting and teasing out the different dimensions of those meanings. We use data from 12 focus group discussions conducted in 2007. The participants are men and women between ages 25 to 35, ever been married or single. They are from the middle socioeconomic class living in the metro areas of Manila, Cebu, and Davao.

Mynarska & Bernardi (2007) in their analysis of meanings and attitudes attached to cohabitation in Poland found that while "cohabitation was interpreted as a testing period leading to marriage, attitude towards it are still very ambiguous" (p. 519) with the key issue of "commitment" differentiating the two. The study of Korteweg (2001) examining the meanings of marital union in the Netherlands found similar results which underscores the belief that marriage is an ideal relationship.

Our findings show similar results. We find that the normative meanings attached to marriage remain but some of its dimensions have become salient. Marriage remains a natural course in people's life but the attribution of an old unmarried person appears to be more allied with females than males. Marriage has become less of a marker of adulthood in the context of other more pressing considerations like financial security and stability, establishment of careers, or settlement of parental obligations. In the face of unforeseen events, like the occurrence of pregnancy outside of marriage, marriage remains an ideal while more practical considerations gain prominence. For some young people, they are willing to wait when the 'time is right' while for others cohabitation becomes a rational choice. Gender differences will be further explored in view of the findings of Williams,

Kabamalan, & Ogena (2007) using survey data that young women are less likely than young men to approve of cohabitation.

References

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