

## *Full Length Research Paper*

# **Marriage and Parenting on Facebook: An Asynchronous Online Focus Group Discussion**

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**This paper reports an investigation on the changing dynamics of marriage and parenting among Africans all over the world. The high divorce rates; increase number of single parent families and “cold wars” in marriages are no joy for the human race. Despite the obvious and regrettably accepted changes in marriage and parenting among circular cultures, little is known about how these dynamics are affecting the views and opinions of Africans in an increasingly global world. Using Facebook – a social media website, as the platform for a focus group discussion, the research gathered views and opinions of Africans all over the world regarding marriage and parenthood education. The findings have been presented and the implications discussed as an eye opener for readers.**

**Keywords:** Family Life; Marriage; Parenthood Education; Social Media; Grounded Theory

## **INTRODUCTION**

Discussions about relationships, marriage and parenting are often classified as intimate in most conversation circles and voicing out one's opinion on such issues often requires more than just acquaintanceship. The observable predicaments that befall marriage and family life in our world today call for research in this area with the hope of finding solutions that may improve the quality of life in our days. Such predicaments can be properly understood by looking into related literature and with the help of qualitative methodologies that provide insightful information about relationships, marriage and parenting.

Since 2003, online social networks sites continue to gain popularity with millions of users joining each year. These sites are fast becoming the defacto medium for socializing as they provide an interactive platform for the exchange of textual, audio and video information using both computers and smart phones. Facebook is one of such content-rich platforms with over a billion users worldwide, generating hundreds of comments every minute. Interactions among friends, family and

acquaintances on this forum cover a wide range of subject areas including intimate, educational and comic discussions. These interactions some times take the form of live audiovisual exchange of information but more predominantly, asynchronous text based chats. In addition, the platform provides its users the opportunity to paste notes, pictures, audio or video and allow others to make remarks about what has been pasted. Such a platform serves as an affluent environment for sharing one's ideas about day-to-day issues.

One of such issues, commonly talked about today is marriage and parenting. Over the years and across different cultures, the notion of marriage has one theme that runs through it – the union between a man and a woman, for mutual companionship and the begetting and education of Children. Sadly, the joy of being in this union often meets with dissatisfaction and grief leading to separations, lawsuits, divorce and other circumstances that may harm both the body and the spirit. While these demise have been beneficial to some businesses, it poses great challenges and

problems not only to the two individuals involved but, where applicable, to their offsprings and the larger human family. The recent debate on same sex marriage is seen by some scholars as the greatest threat to proper parenting and together with soring trends in separations and divorce, they conspire to deform our understanding of family life.

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper insight into contemporary issues relating to marriage and parenting as well as to discover and understand the suitability of Facebook as a tool for such qualitative studies. The research uses a constructionist approach to understand what a purposeful sample of Africans think about the changing trends in marriage and family structures using Facebook as the platform for the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scientific literature on marriage and parenting is enormous. Studies in the last few decades have focused on the changing trends in family structures (Parke, 2003), the impact it has on parents and children (McLanahan, 1988; McIntosh et al. 2009) as well as approaches that can be taken to deal with these changes (McIntosh et al. 2009). The majority of these studies have used a quantitative approach to research and have been based on carefully collected longitudinal data. Such rich deposits of statistical data are practically absent in Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly those relating to topics like marriage and parenting.

Researchers almost unanimously agree that there is a changing trend in family structure which has been driven predominantly by separation and divorce. Trends from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2000 and Pew Research Center of USA in 2010 both report worrying statistics. Despite the fact that 52% of Millennials (adults born after 1980) in the USA say being a good parent is one of the most important things in life, approximately 43% of all marriages in Australia will end in divorce. Such family structures including divorced families; cohabiting-parent families; step-families; same-sex couple families; widowed parents and never-married mothers are arguable a reflection of the lack of sacrificial love in today's human families.

The consequences of these changing trends in family structure do not only affect children but are a major stressor for parents as well and have been shown to have devastating intergenerational effects

particularly on education. Adults who grow up in one-parent families complete fewer years of school than those who spend most of their formative lives in two-parent households (McLanahan, 1988; Evans, Kelley & Wanner, 2001). Notwithstanding, the effects of these changes seems to be multiplicative and puts society on a vicious cycle as single parenthood increases the rate of becoming a single mother (McLanahan, 1988). The proliferation of such family structures have an immense impact on the economy and looking for causes and remedies is a worthwhile venture.

Goodman and Greaves (2010) hold that the characteristics of the married parents underpins the decision of who gets married. Ethnicity; Religion; Mother's age at birth of first child; Stability and quality of relationship as well as Parental education, occupation and income are among the characteristics they examined. Their study is based on the Millennium Cohort Study that observed about 19,000 new births across the UK, when the children were 9 months old, 3 years old and 5 years old. They used instruments of high reliability such as the British Ability Scale (BAS) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to gather rich data which were statistically significant and in line with the findings reported by McIntosh et al. (2009).

In a nut shell, the changing structure in families is a fact that needs no further investigations and its impact on parents and children has been affirmed by research findings. Looking for causality of these changes is commendable but exploring ameliorative strategies is the focus of our research. Most research (Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbush, 1996; Thoenes & Pearson, 1999; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; McIntosh, 2006) cited in McIntosh et al. (2009) have focused on improving the situation after separation or divorce.

Mary Parke (2003) examined US-based literature on how child outcome varies among these various types of families and found similar results like those of McIntosh et al. (2009) in Australia. Children in these sought of families have worse outcomes than children whose parents are married since they are more likely to experience depression; to be disadvantaged in educational achievements; to live in poverty and to be abused. Such literature informs policy and aids the government in designing new programs for the betterment of her citizens.

*At this point, two clear gaps can be observed in literature. Little is known about the changing*

*family structure in Africa and what do Africans think about ameliorative strategies which try to address derogative marriage situations prior to them evolving into separation and or divorce.*

Literature therefore guides the research to pose the following questions

1. *What are Africans' perceptions of the changing family structures in Africa?*
2. *What do Africans think about the creation of parenthood education in school curricula?*
3. *How do Africans hope to address the changing family structures for the future generation?*

The lack of statistical data about marriage and family structure in Africa and the difficulty in gathering such data inclines our study to a qualitative approach as opposed to the predominantly used quantitative methodology.

In research, online focus groups are advantageous in enabling researchers save costs, allowing for more efficient collection of data, easier management of the data, allowing researchers to accommodate research subjects' schedules, as well as incorporating research participants who may be geographically dispersed (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003; Creswell, 2007). One major drawback of online focus group research is the lack of cohesive bond between participants, which according to Watson, Peacock, and Jones; 2006 (as cited in Stancanelli, 2010) has been proven to be a misconception and untrue.

Harper & Harper (2006) confirms that using blogging for focus group provides an opportunity to reflect on content that the face-to-face classroom often lacks. Their argument was in line with the concept of "zone of reflection" (Kraus, Zack, and Stricker, 2004 cited in Harper & Harper (2006) and is very critical to this study. Exploring what Africans think about ways of managing the changing family structures and its consequences in an online focus group discussion requires participants, and to some extent researchers, to reflect deeply as they engage in the online forum.

## **METHOD**

This paper presents an analysis of a discussion on the issue of changing trends in marriage and parenting, observed in today's society. The discussion was conducted asynchronously, using a popular online social network website – Facebook. The participants for

the discussion were randomly selected from the researcher's friends with the aim of involving those who had meaningful and valuable contributions. On the eve of Valentine's day, the researcher posted an evocative letter on Facebook. The post generated a total of 242 comments; of which 238 have been collected and analyzed in this paper. This section reports a descriptive analysis of the participants, the research procedure and the data collected.

## **Participants**

A random, purposeful sample of friends from Facebook, was selected in real-time to participate in the research. The participants are described in terms of their gender; age-group and geographical residence at the time of the discussion. They have been grouped into three age-groups, living either in Africa or in the Diaspora.

A total of 85 people participated in the discussion; of which 36 were female (42.35%) and 49 were male (57.65%). Four of the participants (4.7%) were in their 40s; Fifty-two of them (61.18%) were in their 30s while the remainder of the participants (34.12%) were in their mid 20s. Although all the participants have an African background, twenty-six of them (30.59%) were participating from the diaspora (predominantly from the United States of America) while the rest (69.41%) were participating from Africa (predominantly from Cameroon). Fifty percent of the participants in the diaspora were female and only one of the male participants in the diaspora was in his 20s; while the rest were in their 30s.

The sample population is a representative group for persons to which the topic of marriage and parenting is most appealing. It is within such group that conversations about love relationships; marriage; childbearing and parenting are often held.

## **Procedure**

On Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, at exactly 9:32AM, an evocative letter was posted on Facebook. The intention was to spur up a conversation on the observable changing trends in marriage and parenting among young Africans. The letter makes a tizzy and vague claim that women need formal education on "house-wife-hood" and "motherhood". The first comment came at 6:40PM on that same day and immediately addressed

gender complementarity – “house-husband-hood” and “fatherhood”.

The moment I received the first comment, I knew many more people would be touched by the letter and being the eve of Valentine's day, I could sense that there would be high traffic on the Facebook network. I stayed up all night to keep the conversation going either directly, on the forum, or through a private one-to-one real-time chat. I encouraged most of those who met me online to read the letter I had posted and the comments and reactions which others had about the letter. I also asked them to post their honest opinion about the issue. The 99<sup>th</sup> comment on the letter was made at 11:59PM on that same day and within 24 hours, the post recorded 186 comments.

Although the process was quite tedious, the rich and insightful comments that were made was a strong source of motivation to keep searching and engaging others in the conversation. While I was away from my laptop, I constantly spoke to friends physically about the conversation, giving them the statistics of the number of comments and the interesting views that others had expressed to wet their appetite. I regularly checked the comments, made clarifications on comments that seemed to derail from the issue at hand and probed others to comment and invite their friends. There were some standard invitation messages, such as “... *Please read through the status post on my Facebook and make some comments!! Thanks in advance!!*” which I used to invite others into the conversation. Mentioning names in comments was a trick used so that Facebook automatically informs the person that his name had been mentioned in a comment. Where applicable, I asked commentators to read the comments which others had made and or be more explicit about their previous comments. In general, my involvement in the data collection process was explicit and geared towards collecting the richest possible data.

## Data Analysis

A total of 238 comments have been collected as the primary source of data for this paper. The majority of the comments (39.91%) were generated by the researcher while 29.83% of the comments were made by female participants. Participants from the diaspora generated 20.59% of the comments while 39.5% of the comments were

generated by participants from Africa, excluding those generated by the researcher. A total of 70347 characters were used in the comments with the largest comment having 2399 characters. On the average, the comments were 295.58 character long, with a standard deviation of 339.83. Most of the comments were made on the 13<sup>th</sup> (41.6%) and 14<sup>th</sup> (40.34%) of February. The last comment, included in this analysis was made on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2014.

LibreOffice<sup>1</sup> 4.2.8.2 and psppire<sup>2</sup> 0.7.9 were used for the quantitative analysis of the collected data while Charmez's (2006) approach to grounded theory was invoked for categorizing and constructing meaning out of the comments. The comments were read two years after being collected and coded using gerunds. The gerunds used in coding the comments included “*Agreeing*” - for phrases and statements that suggest that the commentator was in agreement with the letter; “*Disagreeing*”; “*Stating alternative view*”; “*Blaming*”; “*Sourcing the problem*” - for phrases that tried to attribute an origin to the concerns expressed in the letter; “*Casting doubts on the Educational System*”; “*Demanding gender complementarity*”; “*Suggesting a proposal*”; “*Stating supporting Examples*”; “*Relating to culture*” and “*Relating to faith*”. Most of the comments made by the researcher were coded with: “*Commenting and Clarifying*”; “*Probing and Clarifying*”. These initial codes have been used to structure the findings presented in the section below.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and the discussions have been organized to address the three questions that emerged from the literature review. Initial codes from the data analysis have guided the association of relevant data to specific research. The discussions have been woven with the data to ground the findings in the interpretation of the participants' views. Names of the commentators have been omitted for ethical and privacy reasons.

### RQ1 What are Africans' perceptions of the changing family structures in Africa?

The comments evoked varied interpretations about Africans' perception of the changing family

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1 <https://www.libreoffice.org/>

2 <http://www.gnu.org/software/pspp/>

structures in Africa. The descriptions that arose from the line-by-line analysis of the data include unawareness; ignorance; indifference; “acting-the-fool”; fully-aware; concerned and overwhelmed. Some comments sought to find the cause of this changing family structure and described the change as problematic while others have seen the change as responding to the changing times and not necessarily a deterioration from the times of our parents and grand parents. Some comments: “...*u go kill me with laugh. ... with all due respect what angle are u coming from. From a married mans perspective or from a celibate perspective ...*”; “*You MUST be writing out of experience. Ashia ...*”; “*hahahah, na by force? I no di comment*”; beg the interpretation of unawareness, ignorance and or indifference; while others, not worth mentioning, were just being cheeky. Reading back and forth on some comments, it was difficult to distinguish whether the commentators were “acting-the-fool” or ignorant of the changing family structures in the world at large and particularly in Africa. One could only be encouraged by the thought that truly, some people have not known any different form of family structure. A couple of comments dwelt on the origin of the changing family structures and they associated it with changing economic situations; changing value systems and generational differences.

*“I couldn't agree with you more...In the same thought I feel the morality of society lies in the hands of women... And I believe the moment we started going to work and neglecting family is when everything started crumbling.....”*

*“the issue is times have changed; and things change faster than we adapt to change; comparing our parents and us is not fair judgement because they did not have the same challenges we are having today;to cope with career, wife, chid upbringing.....is not as easy as it seems. coupled to the fact that women do not get as much assistance from their husbands as it was in the past;”*

These comments reveal society's departure from family values as one of the commentators captured, saying “*I think the problem comes from a general misplacement of values*”. The rhetoric question posed by one of the commentators “*I guess the society's changing right ?*” expresses some kind of acceptance of this new path and some see it as an amelioration for this generation.

*“is it really appropriate to assume that the older*

*generation's ways were better? Society is supposed to adapt and evolve, thus a decline in marriage and family values cannot automatically be seen as a bad thing.”*

More of the comments convey the perception that Africans see these changes in family structure as linked to differences in generations yet problematic. They express a break in communication between generations and a hopeful longing to re-establish this communication.

*“So maybe we should check out the cause(s) of the prob b4 the solution. And in my opinion bush falling, modernization, etc re the causes. Most of us live 10000miles away from our mothers, grandmothers etc, so most girls don't have an opportunity for hands-on experience and training from them like they had & trust me no school course(s) can triumph that hands-on training.”*

*“Our mothers were trained by their mothers. So send this message to all mothers to give their girls training on being a good housewife and also their sons on being ever faithful with a listening ear.”*

*“Your proposal is good but what I admire most is the issue you have identified. It is an increasing phenomenon these days. Whether it is bad or good, I cannot judge. But I know it creates some imbalances. ... Part of the problem is media, used to infiltrate traditions and cultures.”*

*“... the degrading/declining moral standards/nature of our generation(via the media, bad societal influences), are capable of changing/destroying the good values or ideologies of some girls ... ”*

Marriage was an obvious airport for most of the comments and particularly for those oriented towards finding the root of the changing family structures. One of the commentators wrote “*Most married couples don't usually know what is supposed to be done to make a good family, may be due to rush in getting married or some other factor. We should know that being madly in love is not the only criteria for getting married, we have to know what marriage is all about, thus the need for orientation.*”. Another commentator wrote “*Many people are married but live as single parents and function as individuals. The roof is not a gaurantee of co-parenting, nor is the signing of a piece of paper in a court.*”.

Another interesting comment re-echoed the changing value system and its link to marriage. “*... signing of documents in marriage is not because of*

*lack of trust. You agree to marry somebody because you trust them, if not completely, at least to the extent of wanting to share your WHOLE LIFE with them. ... Signing of those papers, jst make you value your union more. We humans never appreciate or value the things we get for free. But when we work for them, we take more care of them. So signing papers is not coz of lack of trust, but it shows dat union means something to you"*

The comment solicits the need to review the genuineness of our actions and asks whether we are being authentic or compelled to be authentic especially in marriage.

A striking comment on the difference in marriage and parenting and consequently the changing family structures in Africa expressed the depth to which the letter was received and pondered upon and shows the extent to which the issue is of concern to some commentators.

*"My fellow readers, I Think this is a point very vital to our ever existence on earth. As 21st century Men. Women. young or Old. It's a thing to sleep over. Today and our parents era are completely different. Let's look into this topic and accept than our brother has a point. We should stand n educate the women today but note with sort words n nice tones To add to this . Not only the women need this motherhood education but Men and women of today need Parenthood Education. Love for family, neighbours and also the readiness to educate each other. Happy vals day. Let's note and make every day a valentine 's day. Make calls n gifts a passion."*

This comment challenges us to not look at the changing family structures lightly. It reminds us of our duty to instruct and educate the younger generations, formally and informally; and to not let them wallow in error. Changing family structures is a reality of our time; and being as intelligent as we are, we can theorize and philosophize about but, like one of the commentators said, " ... Any person (man or woman) thinking a fall in family values is not a bad thing is strongly deceived ... ". My point is; what can we do about it?

### **RQ2 What do Africans think about the creation of parenthood education in school curricula?**

There is a conviction that parenthood cannot be taught, especially through formal education but rather learned through instincts and exemplars. The comments quoted below gives an insight into what participants think and are supportive of this finding:

*"You can't teach someone to be a good wife or mother. Maternal instinct is responsible for a woman to be a great mother. To be a good wife, u mostly learn from the women in your life esp your mother. Teaching it in school will not make a difference in my opinion. 'You can take a horse to the stream, but you can't force the horse to drink water.'"*

*"... suggesting a degree program to address matrimony and parenting is a rather difficult if not unrealistic task to accomplish considering that the subject of family on its own is so personalized that it cannot be addressed on a curricula platform. Furthermore, ... being a good parent or spouse could mean entirely different things in different households, let alone different cultures, parts of the world and under different circumstances. ... To sum it up, my take on this issue is that I agree with you that something needs to be done. Something always needs to be done. But not only I am skeptical about the suggested solution ... "*

*"... Fact: There is no universal motherhood/housewife training. Having a University course per your suggestion is mind boggling. Based on whose curriculum? ... "*

*"... but i dont think adding it a course in the educational curriculum is the solution. i want to beleive becoming the right wife is an issue of home training. that should be left for the parents especially the mother to pass on to her daughter all what has made her own marriage sucessful. we dont need to go to school to learn how to take care of our selves cos taking care of our hubbies and kids is taking care of ourselves ... "*

*"... Thoughtful. Timely. Fully appreciated. Though I hold a totally different view on education, I think it's worth mentioning that something is greatly missing in the current system. Women, and to a lesser extent men, must learn the intricacies of homebuilding, but less from formal curriculum more from their homes. ... "*

*"... Times are changing and we have to realize our mums era is diff from the current time. our mums did not have to work as hard as our dads to support the family as ladies do in this current times. Currently a one income family is a struggling family 90% of the time. women now have to put up with work as much as men do with limited time to spend on their family. ... "*

*"... I think that concepts on good housewife and*

*motherhood are rather simple. Simple not in the sense of easy, but in the sense that if left into the hands of academicians, then complications brought by different perspectives might spoil everything....”*

*“ ... i personally think that a school for that's not needed, but this has to be taught first back at home that is learning from our all mothers. And teaching this in school will be more of theory like all the other things the teach here in our country. May be a seminar or conference on these will be of great help. ... ”*

These comments insinuate a kind of stereotypic view about formal education. They suggest that participant see formal education as content acquisition, with little or no impact on the behavior and lifestyle of the educated. They convey a certain fragmentation between the educational and the cultural systems of the participants. The most appropriate comment on this was: “...we need to understand that **BEING EDUCATED NOT REALLY MAKE YOU A BETTER PERSON**, it sure makes you a better businessman/woman or a better accountant/engineer...but it doesn't make you a better person. ... ”. This certainly is true, since formal education as we know it today was only instituted in the colonial and post-colonial era and has been engineered with curricula and methodologies that do not necessary address the concerns of our society and culture. The value proposition of the prevailing educational system highlight economic growth and wellbeing at the expense of social growth. It proposes that Africa can only be better through the development of strong economic institutions and does not seem to attribute the role which strong social structures such as marriage and family life would / can play in Africa's wellbeing.

On the other hand, another group of commentators see the need for formal education on parenting and expressed their consent in various ways: “*exactly.. well spoken!*”; “*true talk*”; “*Yeah, it makes a lot of sense*”; “*what u said is jst the truth.*”; “*this is just the bitter truth u r right its a good idea*”; “*it really sounds offensive lol. But very very true*”; “*I couldnt agree more ... young ladies of today need that education. however, they hv to be willing, and this willing[ness] can only come from within*”; “*I will be glad to be part of this educational process. University should by now be offering at least certificate courses on Motherhood and Marriage*”; “*In a world where Jay Z and Oprah r undergraduate study subjects, mother-care and "housewifery"*

*might not be too irrational as a foundation course. I'll personally prefer that to Civics and Ethics.”.*

Some commentators went further to make proposals on how they think the course should be taught and who should teach the course: “*i think sensitisation programs could be an option to help such people revisit or rediscover the priceless values of real motherhood.*”; “*The school is just a guide, once u have the base u can build knowledge;read widely, observe and make changes;*”; “*teaching this in school will be more of theory like all the other things the teach here in our country. May be a seminar or conference on these will be of great help*”; “*I fully agree with this curriculum but na only successful married 'Mami dem' go deliver the courses at all the academic levels!*”. Some commentators stated exemplars as a means of justifying their position about adding parenthood in current educational systems.

*“What we choose to pass on to the next generation is what we think is important enough to identify our people in time to come. That's why some PTAs go as far as employing teachers to handle what the school proprietors did not deem fit or could not afford to be part of the curriculum, but which they think is too important to be ignored. Unfortunately, these are often for IT and other science subjects which we erroneously think r the sole hope for the future.”*

Despite agreeing with the addition of parenthood in educational curricula, other commentators highlighted envisaged challenges with the implementation: “*but in the sense that if left into the hands of academicians, then complications brought by different perspectives might spoil everything.*”; “*I see a pb wit this era, we just limit education, school, learning to some subject, course, training but i thing the most effective knowledge gaining is aking good use of ur Senses, listen, observe, practice.*”; “*Any1 that thinks the secular system can handle such issues just doesn't know the secret driver of the affairs of this world.*”

One of the most revealing comment was “*what i think is that we the young generations of today do not listen to advice . even when the course 'house wife','motherhood', etc, will be created our young girls will all have 'A' grades for the degree sake, but will never apply, it is difficult today to see a young girl who decides to go and spent holidays with their grand mothers in the village or with responsible elderly women in the family because they want to learn from them .they*

*prefer where they will have the liberty to live the way they want .so i think it is the matter of 'he who wishes will! (celui qui veut peut!)'*"

The findings therefore point to the need for a review of current educational methodologies and particularly should they be audacious and ambitious towards addressing parenthood education. Like one of the commentators expressed, *"there is a great difference in the children God gave to each parent in a way that ,the course syllabus will work for some group only & what will the world say to the other group on which its course wouldn't work?".* Methodologies that emphasize an experience-based, one-to-one touch between the learner and the teacher would be more appealing for such training. Such trainings accent the formation of the heart and could be difficult to squeeze into rigid time frames and curricular.

As far as relying on home education is concerned, the comment *"Not every parent is good so you can't just rely on our parents for such teachings. This is one of the many things which need to be added to our educational programe. I wonder why math is compulsory while something like cooking is not even taught in our Schools "* paints the necessity of some kind of structuring on parenthood education.

### RQ3 How do Africans hope to address the changing family structures for the future generation?

Critically reading through the comments and trying to figure out how Africans hope to address the changing family structures in the future, one could only notice the intersection of fate, culture and faith. Some commentators found it awkward to accept that their outcomes were based on others' experiences *"I believe that someone's experiences should not guarantee another's outcome. When you experience life for yourself, you have your own story and your way to relate with other experiences."* and expressed a reliance on fate *"a woman cross the stream when she gets there"*, Citing biblical examples of women of faith *"Sarah, Hannah, Mary and many others didn't receive any motherhood trainx but they were the best of mothers the world can have."* This could be interpreted as a refusal to appreciate the contribution of others or a deep trust in one's own interpretations of the circumstances in which they find themselves. It also calls to mind the dialogue of faith and reason, profoundly expressed in one of

the encyclical<sup>3</sup> of Saint John Paul II – *Fides et Ratio*.

In response to the successful parenthood of women in the bible, one of the commentators wrote *"I think their training was embedded in the Jewish culture!!"*. Another commentator on the role of culture wrote: *"the ill-preparedness and somewhat immaturity couples face in marriage is as a result of lack of will. The will to inquire and to teach; rooted in the 'tabooistic' nature of our culture to prep the young, even after they are engaged in the 'holy affair' of marriage. ... Inasmuch as there's the argument for 'natural awareness' to cope with this trend, me think it is never sufficient to be wholly guided by our (growth) instincts."* Whether we acknowledge or blame culture, its role in parenthood education is engraved in the fabrics of every living thing. The next generation always inherits and learns from the previous and our various cultures provide that platform to guide and direct our choices. As modernization ruptures and lightens-up our culture, the need to preserve the directorship and guiding ability of our culture is eminent.

More of the comments expressed a reliance on faith with citations from the Holy Bible: *"Proverbs 31:10"*; *"LOVE conquers all!!"*; *"Eph 5:22-33 says it all about marriage, and Eph6 about education."*; *"Ephesians 5:22 - 33 if well read, understood and digested should be enough."*; *"Ephesians 5:22 - 33 if well read, understood and digested should be enough."*; *"We have the Holy Spirit. with the Holy Spirit in u, u can do all thgs thru Christ"* However, with the expressed concerns of changing family structures and the diversity of views towards formalizing parenthood education, one could say that either the Word of God had not taken proper root in the hearts of men or religion has not successfully built proper structures. But more appropriately, that it is a work-in-progress and inviting academia for a helping hand seems to be a humble position.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

I could not think of a better way to begin this section than with a quote from the recent encyclical of Pope Francis: *"learning to love someone does*

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3 The encyclical postulates that faith and reason are not only harmonious, but essential together. And argues that faith without reason leads to superstition. While reason without faith leads to nihilism and relativism

*not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage” - Amoris Laetitia, p158.* This quotation sums up the implications of the findings expressed above. The changing family structures and parenthood education are realities which demand a more conscious approach to be propounded. Like most of the comments suggests, it is an individual action with great social and societal implications, owing to the social nature of human beings. Therefore, the learning process does not suffice to be solely objective from the standpoint of the teacher or the learner but demands to be subjective as well since it involves and integrates others.

The challenge is on the educational system to teach not solely to build competence, but to cause a transformation in the individual; and to valorize this transformation. To focus on the formation of the mind as well as the heart; to lead the individual from possessive love through an affine love of friends to a detached love of all. In the seventh chapter of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – Amoris Laetitia (the Joy of Love), Pope Francis emphasizes the need for a better education of children, not only within the family, but also within educational institutions. With the propensity of marriage break down, and a weakening of children education within the family, the honors is on the educational system to play a supportive role; to engage in the ethical formation of learners; to teach the virtue of patience as well as the values of self-control and of correction. These are per-requisites to learning how to love another person and to good parenthood; irrespective of the culture.

Today's educational systems have been very successful to valorize the acquisition of competence; with the classification of Institutions and graduates. This seems to be thanks to the demands of industries and the corporate world. However, society equally demands good and ethically-sound individuals and most especially, good parents. The above findings and discussions point out the need to properly ascribe value to the transformation of the heart and to offer such a value system to society. Such valorization is not exclusively individual, but has a deeper community dimension demanding the commitment of all.

The implications on the educational system and on the value systems of society, call for further research in diverse areas; chiefly in educational psychology and Sociology. In educational psychology, it would be interesting to investigate

what educational approaches exists that are geared towards the formation of better parents. This involves exploration of existing approaches; Identification of mitigating factors in the applications of such educational approaches; Development of rubrics for various measurements; to name but a few. In the field of Sociology, it would be interesting to look into and accentuate the valorization of human transformation in today's society; How it is achieved, fostered and its effects on culture.

Finally, reflecting on the research process, I must say, it's been an amazing experience. Although some commentators found the platform – Facebook, inappropriate, *“I have read your post and gone through some of the comments. Unfortunately the forum is not of my taste”*, the depth of the conversation and the insights expressed are quite educative. The cohesive bond between the commentators could be seen in the way they referenced each other in their comments, both in circumstances where they know each other so well and where they are meeting for the first time online.

The major pitfalls in online focus group research still remains the lack of non-verbal cues, selection bias and issues relating to computer usage and availability. Deggs et al. (2010) and Harper & Harper (2006) agree to the use of some external motivational parameter to support and or boost participation in online focus group research. The findings in this research support their postulation and mitigates the afore mentioned pitfall of online focus group research.

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