

# SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

## Research Question

**What are high-school girls' attitudes towards marriage in China's international high schools?**

## Researcher

Elim Wu- a high school student in a Chinese international high school

## Aim of the research

With the rise of feminism in Chinese societies, I was intrigued to find out more about my classmates' attitudes to marriage. I thought China would be a very interesting place to study this because of the stereotypical "traditional" thinking of Chinese parents. Thus, I placed a large emphasis on asking the interviewees if their parents have given them any pressure to get married and if this has affected them. Also, I thought it would be very interesting to find out more about my classmates in international high schools as they tend to be a bit more "untraditional" than girls who are in national high schools. With this research, I could find out more about the thoughts of girls in China who are going to study

abroad. I also chose girls who were in the same grade as me because they mostly fall in the coming-of-age range who are almost turning 18 (or have already turned 18).

Sue Sharpe also carried out her study of "Just Like a Girl: How Girls Learn To Become Women" in the 1970's and 1994 of London schoolgirls. I wanted to see if what she found could be applied to high school girls in China, and this research could also show if there was a further development of girls' attitudes towards marriage after 24 years.

### **The research should answer:**

- What is the average age that the interviewees want to get married?
- How significant is marriage to the interviewees? Is it a personal goal or aspiration?
- Has media (bachelor shows) affected the interviewees' thoughts on marriage? How?
- Have parents affected the interviewees' thoughts of marriage? How? Do the participants think marriage is something they do for themselves or for their family/culture?
- What are the interviewees' attitudes towards the term "leftover women"? Does it affect their thoughts on marriage? How?

## **Key terms**

- Marriage: the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship
- Leftover women: widely used to describe an urban, professional female in her late twenties or older who is still single
- Pressures: the use of persuasion, influence, or intimidation to make someone do something.
- Individualization: the Postmodernist theory that people tend to focus on their own wants in the current society.
- Feminism: the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.

## **Background study**

Marriage in China has been through huge changes in the past 50 years. This transformation is characterized by the change from traditional structures of Chinese marriage, such as arranged marriage, into one where the freedom and choice is accepted more. However, women still suffer from enormous pressures from parents and culture to get married as soon as possible, and to choose partners that satisfy parents' requirements financially and socially. While divorce remains rare in China, the 1.96 million couples applying for divorce in 2010 represented a rate 14% higher than

the year before and doubled from ten years ago. Heterosexual marriage that results in a normal, nuclear family with children is also still portrayed as the "good" path to take for Chinese teenagers.

There have been multiple changes in Chinese marriage policies in the past 50 years. The 1980 Marriage Law states that marriage is based on the "freedom to choose one's partner, the practice of monogamy, and equality of the sexes." The law also emphasizes the freedom to choose one's spouse by "forbidding marriage decisions made by third parties and the use of money or gifts involved into the arrangement of a marriage." The law has also stated that women's "late marriage and late childbirth should be encouraged." The law also moved up the age requirement to get married by 2 years, becoming 20 for men and 22 for women. This has shown that there is state support for a later marriage. This has also shown a movement from the traditional arranged marriage to a more free, choice-based marriage view. This also fits into the "Postmodernism" theory that people have more choice and we are entering a "pick and mix" society.

The term "leftover women" has been very popular the past few years. Media, especially from the government, have many articles about women regretting their decision not to marry early, and about the "consequences" of marrying at a later age. These "leftover women" are stereotyped as being abnormal and unfeminine, because single women represent a kind of failure despite their potential success in the workplace. The term "leftover women" has also instilled impatience in parents. Parents are still finding ways to exert pressure on their children to form marriages that are beneficial for the family as soon as possible. The women in bachelor shows, such as "FeiChengWuRao", are shown to feel the conflicting desires to satisfy their parents, but to also experience autonomic, romantic love. The shows also portray women as being anxious to get married before 35. They have also shown their desire to change the gender norms of their society by changing the normal "double-burden" that women are expected to carry- a burden in the workplace and in the house. This is also connected to Duncombe and Marsden's theory of a "Triple Shift" for women; they have to carry out their job in the workplace, housework, and emotional work.

Sue Sharpe carried out her study of "Just Like a Girl: How Girls Learn To Become Women" in the 1970's London. She found that early gender stereotyping means girls attach less value to education, however, this trend is changing. Girls priorities were also unlikely to encourage them to attach great importance to their education, they wanted love, marriage, children, job and career (in that order). However, she carried out another study in 1994 to see if there were any changes. She found that girls priorities have had many changes; almost a complete reversal of what she found in the 1970's- shows the changing of girls mindsets. In 1994, there was a greater priority for a career over love and marriage etc.

In the book "Youth Cultures in China," there was a lot of information about teenagers' attitudes towards marriage and profession that I wanted to test out. 812 Fujian youth were asked for their most important goal in life; 57.4% aimed to have a happy family, 52.3% wanted a successful career, and 44.2% chose good health. According to parents, children are who they will invest all their hope for the future, so there is definitely a pressure in children to get married and continue the bloodline and legacy of the family. Age for marriage is also moving upward for both males and females- for females, the age was 23.6 to 26 in the city.

The book also contained a large section on media's impacts to marriage in China. Concerns over dating are now high on the social agenda of the Chinese, which may help explain the success of the TV dating shows FeiChengWuRao etc. The media was also a factor in the shifting to a dating world of uncertainty, vulnerability, and anxiety.

The book also talked about the term "leftover women" that was mentioned above. They are alleged to have imperfections. They portray the idea that girls must learn how to be disciplined to become a normal attractive girl to be courted. In a girl's late 20s or 30s, they are "interpellated into a general anxiety over the possibility of finding the right man for marriage."

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## Methodology

- Semi-structured interviews (With pilot study)

## SAMPLE

- Pilot Study: 2 Respondents

	Age	Where they grew up	Interview
Polly	18	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Ashley	18	ZhongShan, China	Face-to-face

- 6 Respondents

Sonia	17	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Sue	17	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Ally	18	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Sharon	18	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Nora	17	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face
Molly	18	Shenzhen, China	Face-to-face

*\*Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.*

## Data

- Qualitative data

## **Assessment of method**

### **Strengths of semi-structured interviews**

- Validity:
  - The research provides me with a good amount of depth, as the respondent can talk at length and in depth about the subject that I ask. As my goal is to find out more about my classmates' thoughts, high validity can be achieved because I can ask follow-up questions to look deeper into the causes and results of participants' attitudes to marriage.
  - I could also ask follow-up questions and urge them to elaborate.
  - The interview setting also gave me the ability to clarify questions if the participant misinterpreted it.
- Reliability:
  - There is some degree of structure to make it easier to compare the data from the participants because they are asked the same questions
- Participant-based:
  - The participant is able to control a lot of the interview as I asked many open-ended questions such as "Is there pressure for you to get married?" This allows them to talk about what they view as important and what they want to talk about, which provided me with a more thorough understanding because they talked about topics that hadn't even come to my mind when making the questions.

### **Weaknesses of semi-structured interviews**



- Reliability:
  - There is a possibility that participants answer untruthfully in an effort to make themselves seem more “strong” or “independent” as the participants were all friends of mine, and they may be cautious of what I think of them.
  - I might have misinterpreted their answers
  - They might have been flustered by the question and just said what came to their minds instead of actually thinking about the question and their response. I also found that participants could contradict themselves a few times, which proves that they might not have thought carefully about the answers they gave me.
- Practicality:
  - Finding time to interview the respondents was quite hard because I had to continue scheduling times, and it was hard to find times when both me and the respondent were free when it was suitable to carry out an interview.
  - The process of listening to the recordings and typing up the answers was time-consuming as well.
- Experience:
  - As this was my first time carrying out interviews, there was definitely much space to develop my skills. I might have lost the opportunity to develop participants’ answers.
  - I also might have gotten a bit flustered during the interview process and didn’t ask the participants to clarify their answers, despite recording the interview.
  - The questions I asked might’ve also had room to improve.
- Data:

- The qualitative data that I was able to gather was much harder to compare and analyze than quantitative data that I gathered in research before
- Representativeness:
  - Because I had limited time and resources, I was only able to interview 6 classmates from my international high school who were in the same grade as me. Thus, the representativeness was definitely quite low as the results are definitely not applicable to all high school girls in Chinese international high schools.
  - Because of the lack of representativeness, I put more of the focus on the validity of the research to establish depth.

## **Key Findings**

### **Initial questions (before pilot study):**

1. What would you say is your ideal age to get married?
2. Would you say that marriage is a goal in your life? How important is getting married compared to becoming financially independent or getting a job? If your fiance had a job adequate to support the family, would you pick marriage over a dream job?
3. Would you say there is pressure for you to get married? Where does the pressure come from? Would you say that bachelor shows such as

FeiChengWuRao have affected your attitudes to marriage? Has this affected your preferred age to get married?

4. Have parents been a large factor in your attitudes to marriage? Would you say they give you pressure?
5. Do you know the term "leftover women?" Would it affect you if you were called a leftover woman? Does this increase the pressure to get married?
6. Do you know the term "leftover women?" Would it affect you if you were called a leftover woman? Does this increase the pressure to get married?

### **Pilot study findings:**

First of all, the participants touched on a few areas that I didn't think would come up in the research. The participants talked about how their attitudes towards the importance of family and job would be different after they actually have a family. They knew that they would value their family if they actually got married and had a family. However, this doesn't change the questions of the research as the participants do not have a family yet. Also, the participants talked about their ideas of individualization, and they constantly repeated the phrase "this is my life". This made me add the sub-question of "Do you think that getting married is something you do for your own life, or for your parents/other pressures?"

I also made the question "Has this affected your preferred age to get married?" into a sub-question only if the participant answers "yes" to the question "Would

you say that bachelor shows such as FeiChengWuRao have affected your attitudes to marriage? ".

I also changed "would you pick marriage over your dream job?" to "...but you were required to move away from your job, would you pick marriage over your job?" to make it more specific, and because I realized that picking marriage over a DREAM job would be quite hard for many girls, but maybe picking marriage over just any job that's a source of income might allow for more explanation and insight into the girls' attitudes towards marriage.

I also changed "would you say parents give you pressure to get married?" into "Have parents given you any form of pressure? If so, what have they said specifically?" to make the question more specific and less personally focused on the participant, rather the parents' actions. This will show what the parents have actually said or done to give the participants pressure. If the participant does answer with ways parents give them pressure, I will follow up with the question "How has this affected your attitude?"

I also changed "Would it affect you if you were called a leftover woman?" into "What are your thoughts to this term?" to provide more insight into the ideas of the girls' ideas of the term on a more general level; this is because if the girls aren't affected by the term, there would be little room for a follow-up to find out what they think of this term. I then ask what the impact this term has had (if there has been an impact) in the follow up question.

Secondly, the pilot study showed me areas that I had to pay attention to when asking my questions. Because I'm using semi-structured interview as my

methodology, I have the space to follow-up my question, elaborate on my question, and explain it if the participants don't understand clearly. Thus, it is very important to be specific and clear about each question and to elaborate to an extent to ensure that the participants answer the question that I'm asking. Also, the aim of the research should be kept clear in my mind in order for the interview to not stray away from the aims of the research. Follow-up questions should also be constructed clearly in my mind in order to make sure the research is kept on the correct aim. In order to improve this, I've added parentheses next to my questions when interviewing the participants to remind myself what I'm looking for in the answer.

Another area to improve in the interview is to make sure the participants elaborate on their own answers instead of just answering "yes" or "no" in order to attain the highest level of reliability. This can be done by asking the follow-up question of "why is that?" to give them the opportunity to elaborate and explain their answer.

Thirdly, a problem I've realized is that because these are all classmates in an international school, they could be trying to make themselves come across as more "individualized" or "strong" than they actually are. This may be in the form of over-emphasis on how they "don't care about others' opinions" when in reality they do, or how they say they don't think marriage is relevant or important when they actually really want to get married. Thus, my identity as their classmate could potentially be a disadvantaged weakness in the study because my classmates may be cautious of my opinion towards them, despite the advantage that it establishes good rapport. Thus, the solution for this would probably to let

them feel more comfortable talking to me truthfully by nodding my head and showing signs of encouragement and agreement. Also, I will tell them at the start of the interview to be honest with me in the hope of a more reliable interview result. I will also state explicitly that the research will be anonymous. In this sense, if the participants are still quite biased when talking to me, at least it will give an idea of how the participants want to come across as. For example, if the participants do lie and tell me that they don't care what others think of them and they want to get married for only themselves and not their parents, I will be able to see that girls in this international high school do view independence and strength as characteristics to pursue as they want to make themselves seem strong and independent. Thus, the potential bias may not be as harmful to the study.

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## **FINAL FINDINGS**

### **THE FINAL STARTING QUESTIONS:**

1. What would you say is your ideal age to get married?

2. Would you say that marriage is a goal in your life?

a. If not, what is?

b. If yes, why?

3. How important is getting married compared to becoming financially independent or getting a job?

a. If your fiance had a job adequate to support the family, but you were required to move away from your job, would you pick marriage over your own job?

4. Would you say there is pressure for you to get married?

a. Where does the pressure come from?

b. Would you say that bachelor shows such as FeiChengWuRao have affected your attitudes to marriage? Has this affected your preferred age to get married?

5. Have parents been a factor in your attitudes to marriage?

a. If so, what kind of pressure have they given you?

i. How has this affected your attitude?

b. Do you think that getting married is something you do for your own life, or for your parents/other pressures?

6. Do you know the term "leftover women?"

a. What are your thoughts towards this term?

b. Do you think this increases the pressure to get married? What about to yourself?

## **RESULTS AND COMPARISONS**

### *Average age to get married*

The average age that the participants wanted to get married varied.

Molly and Sue said that their ideal age to get married was 24-26. Molly counted the years that it would take her to graduate with a bachelor's degree, 23, and added a year onto that to come up with the number 24-26. It can be seen that she wants to get married quite soon after college. Sue mentioned that 24-26 was ideal, but that later was "okay" as well.

Sharon said that 26-28 would be ideal, but she also mentioned that she has been thinking "why do I need to get married?" which shows that later or maybe not getting married at all would be fine for her.

Sonia said that 28-30 would be her ideal age to get married after some thought.

Ally and Nora directly gave me the number of "30 or later", and they elaborated that they wanted a good amount of time to develop their profession before they get married. Nora mentioned that she "might not want to get married" because her major choice, archeology, probably wouldn't allow her to get married very early. Ally said that it really depends, but if she meets someone before 30 she would prefer to wait until 30 to get married because she wouldn't be happy in a family if she hasn't developed her career.



### ***Personal Aspirations other than marriage or job***

All the participants, except for Molly, denied that fact that marriage was a “goal” in their lives. Ally said that marriage “is an important aspect” but it’s certainly not a goal in her life. Because they denied marriage as being an aspiration, the participants were asked if they had any other goals in life besides marriage. It was expected that they answer their job or profession, but they actually had other answers, which included happiness and finding a person they love.

Sonia, Sue, and Sharon all mentioned that happiness was a goal in their lives. Sonia said that she wants to “make the people around her better and become a better person” which would make her happy, so a goal in her life is happiness. Sue mentioned that she doesn’t have specific goals in her life currently, but after some thought she followed up with the phrase “happiness is the most important” which also shows that she thinks happiness, no matter with marriage or not, is her goal in life. Sharon said that “I know it might be cliché, but I’d say being happy is probably the ultimate goal in my life.”

Making the environment around them better was also a goal in Sonia and Nora’s lives. As mentioned above, Sonia wanted to make the people around her better, and she stated explicitly that this was a goal in her life. When asked about her goal in life, Nora stated that she had a big dream of “changing the archeological environment in China” and that it’s “quite a big idea.” Nora mentioned that if her marriage contradicts with this dream, she may choose her job over marriage.

Finding the right person, rather than marriage, was also a goal in Nora and Sonia’s lives. Nora mentioned that finding a soul mate is a goal in her life, but

not necessarily marriage if it contradicts with her job. She mentioned that if she does find a soul mate, it would make her “very happy”, and that marriage might not be inferior to her job, thus she is quite hesitant about the importance of her job if she finds a soul mate that makes her happy. Sonia mentioned that a goal in her life is to find “someone that loves me (her) and someone that I (she) love(s)” instead of marriage. However, she did follow up that “but it’s not THAT important” which could also show that finding the other half may not be as important as her other aspirations such as becoming a better person. Interestingly, Ally mentioned that she would “probably prefer marriage than living together with a guy and not getting married” which shows that Ally may view marriage as more of a personal goal than just simply finding the right person and not getting married.

Lastly, Sharon mentioned that “getting to know” the world and herself was a goal in her life. She mentioned that her desire to “explore more because the more you explore the more you get to know yourself” was a goal in her life.

### ***Job-related aspirations***

All participants agreed that their job was an aspiration they had, but whether that aspiration held a higher place than marriage varied. The participants were asked to compare the significance they place on “becoming financially independent and getting a job” to “marriage”. The participants were also given a scenario in which they choose to pick marriage over a source of income (a job).

Sonia and Sharon said that they didn’t want to compare the two, but that marriage is probably not as important. Sharon hesitated after she heard the

question and answered that she didn't want to compare the two, but that "becoming financially independent is probably a bit more important for me right now". Sonia mentioned that the two were not comparable because they were "two different stages" of her life. However, she did mention that becoming financially independent is the first stage, and then comes marriage. This shows that she does place a bit more emphasis on getting a job and becoming financially independent because she wants to achieve this and then get married. Sharon and Sonia also mention that if they were to pick marriage over her job, they would want to make sure that they have their source of income after marriage, and Sonia states that "income is probably more important". However, Sonia does state that she is also uncertain of what her actual choice would be because she might "love him (her potential fiance) to death" and choose marriage "without thinking about her job".

Sue, Ally, and Nora had a different approach; they stated explicitly that getting a job is more important than marriage. Sue feels that if she becomes too dependent on the other person the relationship "won't last long". She also stated that it would also depend on the job and the person if she was to choose between the two- if she can find another job that she likes after getting married, and if she likes the other person, she would choose marriage. Ally also mentioned that "getting married is definitely not as important as the other two (becoming financially independent and having a job)". She linked this to her family's and her values, that she was always taught that girls can't be reliant on men and they should learn to become independent. She also mentioned that many men are unreliable. However, she does state that marriage is still nevertheless quite important to her- but she is determined not to become fully reliant on her other half even if she does get married. When asked to choose

between the two, she also stated that it would depend on the job and the person. She believes that if her job can help her achieve "a personal goal" she would probably choose her job, and she hopes that her potential other half can respect and understand this decision- "if he doesn't understand it, I wouldn't get married to him." She also states that she prefers a job that requires her to move around a lot rather than a "boring office job" so she acknowledges that this might actually be a choice that she will make in her life. Nora said that "it wouldn't be very right if I had no job and then I got married, I'd probably want to first find a job" which shows that she does value getting a job or becoming financially independent more important than marriage. She also had a similar response to the other two when asked to choose; if her current job could fulfill her personal goals, she would probably choose her job over marriage. If she was to choose marriage, she would make sure that she has a independence- this could mean getting another job or just finding something else to do other than goals to do with marriage- she says "I need my own personal aspirations".

Molly has another approach- she views becoming financial independence and having a job as separate issues, and she stated that she thinks financial independence is more important than a job or marriage. This would mean that Molly views financial independence as the first step- then she would choose between her job or marriage, which she views as equally important. When asked to choose, Molly stated that "if he's my fiance, I must really like him..." and she stated that she would choose marriage over her job because her other half is "much harder to find than a job." However, when asked if the job was her dream job, she said that she might have to think about it more, and she didn't give me a straight answer, which shows that she might value her dream job over marriage but can't decide at this point. of her life.

### *Media and social pressures*

The participants were told that media shows, like FeiChengWuRao, portray marriage as being an urgent matter for women, especially after 30. All participants except for Nora said that media didn't really impact their attitudes to marriage.

Sonia, Sue, Ally, Sharon, and Molly stated that the current media, in particular the show FeiChengWuRao, haven't really had an impact on their attitudes towards marriage. Sonia, Molly, and Sharon mentioned that marriage isn't something that they personally view as urgent or something they have to do, despite how the media shows portray it. Sue and Ally stated that the media hasn't really impacted their views because they haven't "really thought about it" or haven't "been keeping up" with the shows, which shows that they aren't affected because it doesn't really impact them. However, Nora mentions that the shows would, more or less, have an impact on her. She connects this media to tv shows where women who aren't married after 35 are portrayed as "not desirable", and she states that she doesn't want others to pity her or see her as not having a good life because she isn't married- "I wouldn't feel comfortable". She does mention that this wouldn't pressure her to get married, but it would make her want to get a boyfriend to prove to other people that she is capable of getting married.

The participants were then asked about their thoughts of the term "leftover women" that has been very prominent in Chinese media and society these few years. All participants viewed the term as "offensive", "biased", or "sexist". They

all shared the opinion that women shouldn't be defined by their marriage status, and that categorizing them into these two categories is wrong.

Molly, Sharon, Ally, and Sue mention that they think that the age women getting married is up to them. They believe that women should get married when they want to get married, and this shouldn't be something others judge. Sharon mentioned that "if someone isn't clear as to why they want get married, they shouldn't be anxious to get married" so society shouldn't judge women for getting married later. Molly mentions that the term has a large bias, it conveys the idea that if you don't get married you're a "leftover" and this may not be exactly true- some women just don't want to get married. Ally says that if a woman chooses not to get married, it's her choice. As a Sociology student, she connects this to Postmodernism where people have more choices in how they choose to live. Thus, she says that people are becoming more diverse and they should be more empathetic to accept others' choices.

Nora, Ally, and Sonia mention that this term is sexist because there are also "leftover men" but they aren't judged as harsh by society for not getting married. Nora mentions that there has been cultural influence on this term because "women are encouraged to get married" more than men, which is why she thinks the term is used more to judge women. Ally mentions that it's quite true that men age better than women and are more desirable as they age, which is why they may be treated differently for not getting married at a later age. Sonia thinks that this term has been "demonized" because there are actually many men in society that are also "leftover men" but they aren't judged because society "thinks that men can feed themselves" but girls aren't portrayed quite independently.

Ally had a different approach- even though she agrees that the term is quite inappropriate, she said that it does adequately describe the phenomenon that women aren't "desirable" after a certain age. She mentions that men are, in contrast, more desirable, so she agrees with the term to a certain extent. However, she does mention that she feels the social attitudes towards this term or women who don't get married after a certain age is "getting better". She mentions that now, with the increase of Feminism, women's independence is much more desirable. She believes that women's voices are also stronger, and they know that without a man, they are also outstanding women.

The participants were also asked if this term has (or would) impact their attitudes to marriage, and the responses were quite varied.

Ally and Molly believe that the term would probably affect their attitudes, especially if they were called a "leftover woman". However, they both state that it wouldn't make them desperate to get married, but they would try a bit harder to pay attention to the men around them. Molly also mentions that it "would make me (her) a bit anxious".

Sonia, Sue, Sharon, and Nora don't think the term has affected their attitudes. Sonia states that women "should be confident" and that they should continue to live how they choose to live- the opinions of others isn't important and shouldn't affect them. Sue states that it hasn't affected her currently, but she's hesitant to speak for herself 10 years later because "who knows, I might care about it more". Sharon believes that she shouldn't have a specific age to get married, but she does state that it depends on the situation. She states that the people surrounding her is very important- if they see it as a big deal, she might see it as a big deal, but that isn't the case currently, so she isn't affected by the term. She

also mentioned that it might depend on her mood because she might have a "lonely night" and the term would make her want to get married sooner. Nora believes that there "hasn't really been an influence on me" because the people around her don't care about the term, nor do they use it. She connects this to her family, that she has a cousin who isn't very (in society's point of view) pretty, so my family doesn't like the term "leftover women" as it's a pretty sensitive topic.

Sharon and Sonia connect the term's impact more to society and they believe that the term has had a large impact on society's values. However, they both say that it doesn't affect them by much because they do personally believe that they should choose when they get married.

### ***Parental Pressures***

Because parental pressures was a significant area that I wanted to include in my research, the participants were asked if parents put pressure on them to get married. The responses varied.

Sonia and Molly stated that their parents gave them a lot of pressure to get married. Sonia mentioned that her parents "...are more traditional. They believe that girls should get married sooner to be "protected" and they even feel that period cramps get better after a girl gets married." She states that they would get very impatient if she doesn't get married after 35, and they feel that marriage and a "normal family" is very important in a girl's life. When asked how this pressure has affected her attitudes, Sonia mentions that she thinks it does affect her, because she's very close to her parents. She believes that they are



actually relatively very logical parents, and "I would listen to their advice so it does give me a certain extent of pressure." Molly's parents also give her a certain amount of pressure- they believe that girls should definitely get married sooner. She also states that when she kids to her mom and says she doesn't want to get married, her mom tells her that girls "should get married". However, Molly's attitudes are different to Sonia's- she doesn't think that her parents' views have affected her because she believes that "they can't control my life, my thoughts are more important".

Sue, Nora, and Sharon say that their parents haven't given them any pressure at all to get married. Sue states that "they haven't really talked about it" and that at her current age, marriage isn't really something that her parents have given her pressure on. Nora says that despite her dad wanting her to get married, her mom doesn't really care, so the two of them don't give her any pressure. She says "my parents would give me a pressure to get into a good university and be able to support myself because they don't want to support me when I grow up", which is the only thing they give her pressure on right now. Sharon says that her parents haven't given her any pressure to get married at all, but they do wish that she can find someone who loves her and who she loves- "it's more that they care about me." She also states that her mom doesn't care what age she gets married.

Ally says that her parents are a form of pressure in her marriage, but that they haven't explicitly given her any form of pressure. She connects this to her family, and she has a cousin who was born quite late, and she doesn't have a boyfriend yet and her parents are quite impatient. However, she does state that "they don't pressurize me to get married but they are quite impatient." She believes that her parents haven't really affected her attitudes, but that she might be more open to

getting a relationship, "like pay more attention to the boys around me, if they want me to meet someone I wouldn't say no either."

### *Other pressures*

When asked about pressures to get married, Sonia and Ally mentioned pressures that didn't have to do with media, society, or family.

Sonia mentioned that there was an internal pressure to get married. She said that she knows that if she doesn't get married young, she might not be able to physically "get the goal of like having a baby". Thus, the pressure is more of her own ideas that getting married later could affect her personal aspirations i.e. having a baby.

Ally mentioned two pressures: bloodline and peer pressure. For the pressure of continuing the bloodline, she said that "I'm the only kid from my dad's side, and I think that continuing the bloodline is very important- it hasn't been easy getting here, and if I don't continue this bloodline and have a child, it's "quite scary""- "it's like a waste of good genes." She also mentioned that in order to continue this bloodline, she might bring up her own kid if she doesn't find a guy. Ally also talks about peer pressure- "if my friends are all getting married and having kids it might make me a bit impatient as well." However, she repeats that it would just make her pay more attention to the men around her, instead of go out of her way to find a man.

## *Individualization*

The participants were asked if they view marriage as something they do for themselves, or for others (i.e. family). This question overall asks the participants if they prioritize their own wants in another half over (or equal to) the wants or the other factors such as family. The responses varied, but all participants agreed that they had a say in their marriage.

Sonia and Ally believe that their marriage is both for themselves and for their parents. Sonia says that "it's impossible to block out family thoughts" because she is very close to her family, but that she does think that marriage is for herself as well. Ally says that her family is quite traditional, so she really hopes her parents are "satisfied with who I get married to. Whether it's a decision on income or education level, parents are quite an important factor in my choosing a man." Ally does mention that her parents will definitely be supportive of her thoughts, but that she wants to take care of them as well so she would try to find a man that satisfies their requirements. She mentions that she and her family believes that if a whole family gets along, anything they do will be smooth sailing, so she wants to establish as much harmony in her family as possible, thus she would think marriage is something she does both for herself and her parents.

Sue, Sharon, Nora, and Molly believe that they get married for themselves. Sue states that "it's me getting married, not my parents." Sharon said that marriage is for herself and her other half, because it is a marriage between the two of them, not others. Nora and Molly had little elaboration, but they were very determined when they agreed that it was a marriage for themselves.

Thus, it can be seen that the participants are quite individualized when it comes to their marriage- they do believe that in the end, it is them who are getting married thus they should get a say in their marriage.

## CONCLUSION

First of all, the results of the ideal age of marriage shows an increase from the actual marriage age statistics in girls of the city. This could suggest that the girls who were interviewed may not currently place as much emphasis on marriage, and they believe that becoming financially independent and developing their job is more important.

Secondly, marriage was not a main goal of the participants- all of them had goals that were more important, or equal, to marriage. They placed a strong emphasis on happiness and a source of income, which they viewed as either more important or equally important to marriage. They stated that if they were to get married, they wouldn't want to become a housewife who is fully dependent on their other half. All participants also agreed that becoming financially independent was their priority before getting married.

Thirdly, pressures of marriage were found to be from media, society, parents, culture, internal thoughts, and peers; parents were the main factor because all participants who agreed that there was pressure to get married mentioned parents. However, the amount of how much they were affected by their parents' views varied from participants who valued their parents' input on marriage to participants who ignored the pressure. Also, media and society were factors in a

few of the participants' attitudes to marriage- they agreed that media and society gave them a certain amount of pressure to get married as soon as possible in order to avoid being called "leftover women" by society. Culture, internal thoughts, and peers were small factors that only affected 2 of the participants.

In all, it can be concluded that the girls interviewed are very individualized. They all believe that they should have a say in their own marriage, despite the pressures from society and family. They also believe that a certain amount of independence should be established before they enter a marriage, and that they want something separate from the marriage to do after they get married (research, another job, etc.).

## **OVERALL EVALUATION**

The methodology chosen did pose some difficulties. First of all, in order to ensure the participants were comfortable and able to accurately express themselves, I let them answer my questions in Chinese and English, so there was a problem of translation when I couldn't translate some phrases that were exclusive to Chinese. Secondly, the interviews required me to have a certain level of skill- I found myself confused when I listened to the recordings because I missed out on an opportunity to ask the participant to elaborate, or I skipped a question opportunity. Thus, there might have been areas of the research that could have been elaborated in more depth. In order to improve the methodology, because this was carried out in an international school, I could've encouraged

the participants to only use Chinese when they didn't know how to express themselves in English in order to ensure that I didn't translate anything wrong. Also, I could have conducted the interviews slowly in order to ensure that I wasn't flustered at the questions I had to ask. A certain level of experience and practice would definitely have been helpful as well, and I did find myself getting better at interviewing my classmates by the 5th or 6th interview.

The sample is also quite a problem. I was only able to interview 6 classmates in the same grade who were all my friends. Even though this ensured that they didn't feel weird talking to me (and I didn't feel weird talking to them) that established an extent of rapport, this might have created a bias in their answers as they would've been cautious of what I think of them. Also, the findings found are only applicable to these girls personally- the findings even varied between 6 girls, so the findings are definitely not applicable to all high school girls in our school, even more so for all high school girls in international schools of China. In order to improve the sample, I could've interviewed more girls from different international schools, and maybe even girls from different grades. I could've also dove further into the interview to ask for reasons and elaborations to make sure the participants are being truthful in their answers.

However, the interviews did provide me with a good amount of depth in my research areas. They also do provide an understanding of the ideas that girls have in international high schools as there were overall trends, even if they may not be as representative to generalize onto all girls.

Overall, the research did increase my experience to interview others and carry out research. If I was to do this again, I would've also added another methodology to ensure reliability and representativeness, such as a questionnaire

to girls in international high schools that would've allowed me to reach many more girls. Or, I could've focused on the media pressures and carried out content analysis to further the validity of the research.