

“Free Maid” Anxiety: Rational Risk Perception and Anti-Marriage Tendencies of Teenage Girls in Urban China

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Abstract

Amidst the de-institutionalization of marriage and rising marital anxiety in urban China, women are increasingly displaying negative attitudes toward marriage. However, while existing literature predominantly focuses on adult women, the marital perceptions of adolescent girls, who are in a critical period for forming these attitudes, remain largely underexplored. To address this gap, this study conducted in-depth interviews with four adolescent girls (aged 14–17) in Shenzhen exhibiting anti-marriage tendencies. Findings reveal that participants conceptualize marriage through the core metaphor of a “Free Maid,” anticipating continuous losses in economic independence, physical health, and self-worth without reciprocal returns. This perception is driven by two main factors: direct observations of gender inequality within parental marriages and the amplification of marital risks (e.g., domestic violence) via social media echo chambers. By integrating rational choice and risk society theories, this study elucidates the dual logic of cost calculation and risk aversion among female adolescents, providing empirical insights into the premature marital anxiety of urban youth.

Keywords

anti-marriage attitudes, “free maid”, rational choice theory

1. Introduction

In recent years, marriage across East Asia, particularly in China, has undergone a profound transformation, increasingly exhibiting the hallmarks of de-institutionalization, a dynamic long observed in Western societies where marriage shifts from a rigid social norm to a fluid, individualized choice [1]. Once viewed as an obligatory life milestone, marriage is increasingly perceived by younger generations as a negotiable option rather than a social necessity. Central to this demographic transformation is a shifting consensus among women, who are increasingly re-evaluating the traditional institution of marriage through the lens of structural inequality and personal autonomy.

While societal narratives often attribute this marriage hesitation to financial constraints or individualism, contemporary feminist scholarship reveals a deeper structural reality: women face multi-dimensional costs within marriage [2]. These encompass a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labor, severe motherhood career penalties, potential physical health risks associated with childbirth, and the erosion of individual identity.

Consequently, marriage is no longer viewed merely as a union of emotional or financial partnership, but as a site where structural disadvantages for women are reinforced.

Despite extensive research on marriage hesitation among adult women (typically aged 20–35), very few studies have investigated how these critical gender perceptions take root earlier in life. Adolescence represents a crucial formative period during which individuals internalize social norms and construct future life scripts. Current research largely neglects the voices of adolescent females, particularly those navigating rapid social modernization in urban environments. To address this empirical gap, this study examines how teenage girls (aged 14–17) in China construct their perceptions of marriage. By utilizing rational choice theory and risk society theory, this paper investigates the key factors driving negative marriage attitudes among adolescent girls, offering early-stage insights into the evolving landscape of gender ideology and marriage formation in contemporary China.

2. Background

Since the proportion of women who are afraid of marriage is higher than that of men, there are increasingly more studies exploring the underlying reasons. A primary driver of marital anxiety among women is the stark inequality in the division of domestic labor under entrenched patriarchal structures. In China, the time spent on household chores by women is still about twice that of men, 76.1% of daily care for children aged 0–17 is undertaken by women; 67.5% of homework assistance is done by mothers, and 63.6% of child pick-up and drop-off is handled by mothers [3]. Given this stark inequality in domestic labor across Western countries and China, it is not surprising that many women experience anxiety or even fear towards marriage.

Beyond unequal domestic chores, women often face significant financial burdens and the motherhood penalty, which disproportionately disrupt their career trajectories and economic independence. Research shows that childbirth has a significant negative impact on women's occupational status and income. The intersection of career penalties and escalating child-rearing costs intensifies women's economic precariousness [4]. Therefore, given that the cost of raising children is already high, not getting a pay raise at work only makes their financial burden even greater. Such cost discourages women from getting married and having children and not only affects their current careers but also requires them to work hard to earn money to raise their children after giving birth.

Furthermore, the profound and often irreversible physical tolls associated with childbearing constitute another major source of women's apprehension toward marriage. Marriage and childbearing can bring a long-lasting toll on women's bodies. According to the World Health Organization (2023), there are at least 40 million women experiencing a severe health problem caused by childbirth every year [5]. All of this indicates that after getting married, women will make many physical sacrifices for the family. The long-term physical consequences from childbirth constitute a direct somatic cost from family formation. Therefore, many women are unwilling to bear such severe consequences and thus choose not to get married.

In addition to visible economic and physical costs, marriage is perceived as a process of identity erosion, where women's personal autonomy is subordinated to domestic responsibilities. After marriage, many women are expected to take a primary share of mundane matters of daily life, such as buying food, paying bills, and managing household chores [6]. Therefore, getting married forces women to make significant sacrifices for their families. This is the price of marriage: many women lose their individual autonomy in mundane domesticity. This kind of marriage where one loses oneself further discourages many women from getting married.

2.1 The Spillover Effect of Fear for Marriage Among Adolescent Girls

For adolescent girls, this anticipatory fear of marriage is often initially catalyzed by the direct observation of persistent conflicts and entrenched gender inequalities within their parents' marriages. Many teenagers express that they cannot accept the fact that their parents often have long-lasting arguments within the family. Prior research discovered that parental conflict scores were significantly negatively correlated with offspring's attitudes toward marriage [7, 8]. Moreover, many teenagers mentioned that they felt there was a lot of gender inequality within their parents' marriage [9]. Many teenage girls have expressed that they anticipate the unfair division of labor and rights in their future marriages. Due to this observation, they develop some negative

thoughts about marriage. In addition to familial observations, negative romantic experiences within peer networks further reinforce adolescents' deep-seated stereotypes regarding male infidelity and unreliability. Many female teenagers discovered men have many undesirable traits, such as infidelity, from their older friends who have experienced relationship issues [10, 11]. Observing the interactions between male and female students during the dating stage signals a negative impression of men for adolescent girls. Consequently, many women are even less inclined to look forward to life after marriage.

Finally, the pervasive influence of social media algorithms creates an echo chamber that amplifies real-life observations, continuously exposing adolescents to concentrated narratives of marital distress and gender-based risks. The Internet contains a large amount of negative information about marriages [12]. The content in the video covers various topics such as family issues, fear of choosing a partner, and the stress in marital life [13]. It also includes themes like losing freedom and personal identity, domestic violence (DV), and infidelity [14]. The information on the internet reshapes the impression of marriage for teenagers.

Despite evidence showing adolescent girls having negative views on marriage, existing research still has three significant limitations. First, most of the studies have focused on the adult population. Teenage girls, aged between 14 and 17, are at a crucial stage in forming their views on marriage and relationships. The reasons for their negative views on marriage and relationships are also important and cannot be ignored. However, not enough attention has been paid to this population group. Second, the research perspective mainly focuses on macro-level demographics, lacking in-depth and micro-level perceptions from the perspective of the teenagers themselves. A deeper understanding of the underlying reasons is something that cannot be ignored and requires more studies to achieve. Last, in the context of China, there is a scarcity of research on the reasons for the negative views of marriage among teenage girls. China is highly suitable for conducting in-depth investigations due to its unique patriarchal cultural foundation and the widespread use of social media platforms. Moreover, it is quite common for many Chinese children aged 14 to 17 to have negative views on marriage and relationships. Therefore, it is highly worthy of study.

To address these gaps, this study aims to make academic contributions in the following three aspects. This study focuses on 14-17-year-old adolescent girls in Shenzhen, China. This study employs qualitative one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews to listen to their true views on marriage, the sources of their fears, and the formation process. Moreover, this study integrates rational choice theory and risk avoidance theory to explain the dual logic underlying young girls' psychological resistance to marriage. The research will reveal how social channels work together to construct the cognitive template of marriage equals a trap for women. Overall, this study aims to understand the marital anxiety among contemporary urban teenage girls in China and to provide empirical evidence for future research on gender education and the marital views of teenagers.

Research Question:

- 1) How do adolescent girls in Shenzhen conceptualize marriage, and what metaphors do they use to express their fears about it?
- 2) How do observations of parental marriages and peer romantic relationships shape adolescent girls' negative attitudes toward marriage?
- 3) How does exposure to social media content influence adolescent girls' negative perceptions of marriage?

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theories: rational choice theory and risk society theory. Rational choice theory, often rooted in classic economics, was notably applied to family and marriage by Gary Becker [15]. The theory is about individuals making choices by weighing the costs and benefits rather than being influenced by emotion and tradition.

Gary Becker wrote that marriage is a rational choice made by both parties when they believe that it will bring greater benefits to them in the future [15]. For example, the study, using rational choice theory, found that economic rationality has become the main driving force for delaying marriage [16]. This theory helps explain why adolescent females in this study choose not to marry as a rationally justified decision. They evaluate marriage through a pragmatic cost-benefit lens and discover that the negative sides of marriage, like

economic pressure, loss of freedom, being a free maid, and physical risks, outrun the positive sides. Therefore, respondents of this study all have a rational perspective toward marriage, using a calculated strategy to conclude that marriage is unnecessary.

The second risk society theory is proposed by Ulrich Beck in the book of *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* [17], argues that modern society's individuals focus more on the production and management of risks, instead of the wealth and goods in the past, like making decisions to gain status and wealth. The primary driver of humans making decisions nowadays is avoiding risks [15, 18]. Risk society theory suggests that adolescent girls are not only worried about losing freedom and money but also afraid of domestic violence and being trapped in the marriage. As such, they hold negative views against marriage.

2.3 Methods

This study employed primary research and qualitative research through using interviews to explore the reasons for possessing a negative marriage attitude among adolescent females. This approach was chosen because it enables in-depth understandings. Each interview lasted at least 90 minutes and was audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and quotations have been translated into English. Four adolescent females aged 14 to 17 participated in this study. Purposive sampling is used in this study, so the researcher set a clear criterion based on research objectives: 14-17 years old adolescent females, negative marriage attitudes and in Chinese-Shenzhen school.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Interview Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	School	Parent's Occupation
Yan	16	Shenzhen International School(private)	Father: Business owner Mother: Charity worker
Helen	14	Shenzhen International School(private)	Father: Businessowner Mother: Teacher
Kido	15	Shenzhen International School(private)	Father: Business owner Mother: Educator
Yolanda	17	Shenzhen International School(private)	Father: Accountant Mother: Homemaker

Moreover, this research strictly adheres to the ethical norms of research. Before the formal interviews began, the researchers explained in detail to each participant and their legal guardians the purpose of the research, the content of the interviews, the way data would be used, and the privacy protection measures. All participants and guardians were clearly informed. Additionally, the researchers promised that all interview data would only be used for academic research and would undergo anonymization processing to ensure strict confidentiality of the participants' identity information. At the end, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a systematic process: transcription, familiarization, coding, and theme development. Moreover, to protect privacy, pseudonyms have been used: Helen, Kido, Yolanda, and Yan.

3. Findings

Based on the interviews, three important patterns appeared around their perspectives and attitudes toward matrimony and what shaped their negative attitude toward love and marriage. Firstly, contemporary attitudes of high school students have been a marked shift toward a de-institutionalized, rational-choice perspective on romantic partnerships in marriage, through the pragmatic lens of personal cost and benefit rather than beautiful expectations for marriage in the past. Secondly, the relationship experiences and stories of others not only color but also solidify the negative attitude on marriage held by teenage girls. All of them emphasize that

witnessing others' relationships can tell me what exactly the real life looks and feels like and is a blueprint for my own future. Ultimately, media plays a leading role in shaping the female teenager's negative married views, which I will expand on later.

3.1 The Prevalence of Negative Attitudes Toward Marriage

Across all interviews, participants unanimously conceptualized marriage not as an emotional union, but as a high-risk institution characterized by structural power imbalances. A recurring metaphor among participants was the concept of the wife as a "free maid". This term reflects their awareness that traditional marital expectations position women in a subordinate role, requiring substantial uncompensated domestic labor.

Participants identified multifaceted costs associated with marriage, spanning financial, physical, and psychological dimensions. Final and somatic strains are most prominently manifested in childbearing. Having a child not merely depletes women's finances, but also depletes physical well-being, which can deplete a woman's personal reserves, including two main parts, like hormonal disruptions and weight gain. These are seen as a direct and undeniable cost to women's bodies, so marriage is a "losing proposition" and a net drain on women's resources:

The cost of raising a child is approximately 100,000 yuan per stage. There are moments I can't help but imagine the financial freedom I would have without this burden. Physically, the changes are undeniable—childbirth can disrupt my hormones and result in weight gain, leaving my health profoundly altered for the worse.

For the conflicts, it's normal for people to quarrel with each other, but in marriage it is different. Through observing their parents' marriage, the interviewees perceived an exceptionally high frequency of arguments. Such conflicts were believed to lead to negative outcomes like wasting time, damaging mood, and hindering healthy communication:

I don't like excessive arguing. However, when two people live together, conflicts and disagreements are inevitable. Resolving them is mentally and emotionally draining and can waste so many times, which is why I don't view marriage in a very positive light.

-Yan

When I was a child, my family members often argued. This created a very negative atmosphere at home, and they were frequently unhappy.

-Yolanda

Moreover, what truly frightens interviewees are the consequences of these conflicts: the dissolution of self-awareness and sense of self-worth during marriage for women. After getting married, women tend to spend a great deal of time to take care of family members. The expectation for women to prioritize family can directly lead to an anxious mindset. Moreover, all interviewees mentioned that "marriage is a kind of bondage," which means women lack freedom to do what they like in the marriage, like they need to spend all the time to take care of the children and husband. Consequently, this creates a sense of a very unequal relationship in the long term; women's main role is to take care of family, and a career is no longer something you should focus on because this is what men's role is.

My mom has been living with a lot of anxiety. She often confides in me, saying she feels trapped and undervalued, as her entire world has shrunk to just her husband and the home since the day she got married.

-Yolanda

Marriage is a kind of bondage. As someone who deeply values freedom, I worry that it would leave me with no time for my career or my passion for singing. To me, that feels like an unfair compromise.

-Yolanda

Ultimately, these fears reflect a third and deepest layer of anxiety: an awareness of the unequal gender power structure and patriarchal family system. The patriarchal power structure that is prevalent in marriage means that the husband holds the unilateral authority and the most important role in the relationship. In contrast, the wife is often positioned as a subordinate who provides domestic, emotional, and labor services in the family.

This inequality is triggering a transformation in how men think — they take it for granted that women's performance of these works is entirely normal. This unequal contribution and distorting male thinking reinforce female teenagers' negative views toward marriage:

Males believe that after the marriage, a wife should be responsible for all domestic tasks, such as housework, without receiving any form of reciprocation, viewing this as an inherent expectation

-Helen

Indeed, some interviewees mentioned that men equated women's marital role to a free maid. This perception reveals an unsettling understanding of the wife's limitless domestic labor and overall contribution within the family. The "free" word here, one step further, belittles the status of women. The housemaid can even get the wage, but a wife does not. The interviewees explicitly identified this thing as a form of exploitation and highlighted a fear of being an unrecognized and unremunerated maid in the marriage. Therefore, interviewees think if a guy marries you with a purpose, it's purely for personal gain:

Some dudes see marriage as the ultimate life hack. Why? Because they basically get a free live-in maid and a free maid all in one. They marry just so they can finally sit back and be taken care of for the rest of their lives.

-Kido

Overall, what these young women truly fear is not numerous conflicts in the marriage, but the consequences of these conflicts, like the loss of power, the erosion of self-worth, and the gradual disappearance of their own identity. They fear the society that already treats women as unequal, expecting women to sacrifice themselves to be the "Free Maid" for the family.

3.2 The Significant Influence of Others' Relationship Experiences on Young Women's Negative Perceptions of Marriage

Adolescent girls' marital attitudes are strongly conditioned by vicarious observations of family, peers, and digital media. In peer dynamics, participants frequently identified patterns of male egocentrism and emotional irresponsibility, fostering a generalized distrust toward male partners:

Cheating is just one of those things that happens. Guys are basically wired to fall for anyone they're attracted to. So honestly, what makes you think your boyfriend would never do it?

-Helen

Men are untrustworthy. At first, my friend and her boyfriend were deeply in love and inseparable, and their relationship was truly beautiful... But after two years, the guy revealed his true color—his feelings for her faded, and in the end, he was the one who ended the relationship.

-Yan

Furthermore, participants perceived marriage as a transactional arrangement structured to benefit men at the expense of women. They noted tactical male behaviors aimed at securing domestic labor, such as deceptive courting or pressure tactics. Concurrently, pervasive male chauvinism in romantic relationships was seen as a threat to female agency:

I just see marriage as a purely transactional relationship, especially for guys. If your family is well-off, he might pretend to be totally in love with you — because not only does it mean an easy life for him without having to work hard, but he also gets a free maid; women actually didn't get any benefits.

-Helen

There is lots of news about a man who intentionally gets a woman pregnant, and the family will take the initiative to propose marriage. This traps women in the marriage, and men get a free maid and partner.

-Yan

The deeper consequence will be the fear of losing one's voice and identity. A pattern of chauvinistic behaviors is observed in some marital and romantic relationships, which shows great disrespect to women. In

the marriage, men may force their wife to agree with their viewpoints during the conflicts, often responding with pronounced irritability when their dominance is challenged. The manifestation reflects and reinforces that women have a very low status in the marriage, cannot even question their husband's viewpoints and need to always conform to their husband's ideas. This feature of power imbalance not merely shows in the marriage but also in romantic relationships; men are generally self-centered in the relationship. They may operate on the expectation of female obedience, equating compliance with being a "good" girlfriend and partner. This attitude reveals a talent-sense of male superiority; they believe that their viewpoints are better and more valid than women's. As a result, an unequal relationship is a progressive erosion of women's own thoughts. Interviewees expressed that they feel like marriage is equal to the engulfment of all of their perceptions; they don't want to just follow the husband for the rest of their life. One of the interviewees ironically uses the term "prince" to characterize the boys' behaviors in the relationship, which means they are arrogant and feel like they are in the highest status, so women need to follow and obey them. The metaphor reinforces a perceived hierarchy that privileges men over women in the marriage:

My dad judges my mom by whether she agrees with him on everything. If she has her own opinion and it's different from his, he gets really mad and angry

-Yolanda

Some of my friends who act like 'prince', they think their girlfriend should be obedient and men are always right. It makes me worry about what if my partner is a prince, then I will lose my own voice and opinions.

-Yan

While offline observations provided real-world reference points, digital content on platforms such as Douyin and Red Note intensified participants' disillusionment. The unexpected breakdown of highly idealized online couple influencers served as a critical turning point, shattering remaining romantic fantasies:

I really love a couple influencers on TikTok called Yingzi; she and her boyfriend have been posting super sweet videos for a really long time, and everyone in the comment including me, said they wanted a relationship like there, but now they've broken up. This made me no longer believe in love

-Helen

I like to follow some cute influencer couples online, like Jinhui Ming. They looked so in love but still broke up in the end. If even they can't make it work, why should I even bother? It all ends the same anyway!

-Yan

Through social media, interviewees have gained a multifaceted understanding of marital complexity by seeing others' relationships. They notice a stark contrast between the pre- and the post-marital life, especially in appearance due to tons of housework. During the interview, they derogatorily term a transition "from beauties to a mess." The "mess" here emphasizes the dramatic negative changes on women, like unkempt hair, pale face and weight gain. Significantly, interviewees described this terrible appearance as making women look "abused." This powerful word reflects and emphasizes their perception that women will become a mess in appearance after marriage and implies that married women often have a low-status position, as if suffering mistreatment from their families. Since interviewees strongly reject becoming like these women, especially the deteriorated appearance and status of wives, reinforce their aversion of marriage:

I can see lots of housewives on Douyin with pale, tired faces — they look like they've been abused by their family. Some of them were very pretty before, but after marriage, they became like a mess. I could never accept becoming someone like that

-Kido

By observing numerous comments from men talking about marriage in social media, the interviewees gained a more direct understanding of the perceived benefits of marriage for men, as well as the underlying self-interest. These sentences are rarely heard in real life but very common to see on social media; due to anonymity, they express their genuine opinions there. These comments frequently reveal a selfish view of marriage, such as some men saying how much they want to get married because they can get a free maid and a caregiver. These comments make female adolescents confirm the inherent selfishness and self-interest in men's psychology, amplifying the essence of masculinity and fueling disgust for marital life:

On Zhihu, I've noticed some men commenting that they want to get married because they think it means they'll have a free maid—someone to do everything for them so they won't have to lift a finger.

-Yan

The stories of others have already shown adolescent females a terrifying picture of marriage, a picture where women become "Free Maids" with no reward. But what makes these stories so powerful and widespread is social media. Nowadays, stories on social media are shared and amplified. This brings us to the next factor, which is how social media shapes young women's negative attitudes toward marriage.

3.3 Social Media Shapes Negative Attitudes

There are two significant ways that form the increasingly negative attitude toward marriage among adolescent females. First, prolonged exposure to negative marital outcomes on social media, especially numerous news reports about domestic violence against women and other behaviors that hurt women. Second, they have a complete understanding of laws in marriage through social media. And lastly, many women seeking help online still fail to receive adequate protection.

Social media exposes interviewees to the darkest possible outcomes of marriage, domestic violence, and severe injury, expanding their fear far beyond the "Free Maid" concept. As heavy users of social media, they are frequently exposed to distressing content featuring women with visible injuries, some pleading for help in front of cameras, others recounting traumatic marital experiences. In their videos, they all say, "You mustn't get married." This sentence leaves a deep impression on them. With the repeated exposure, the message solidifies from the passing caution into a deeply held conviction. The interviewees went from a skeptical mindset to becoming increasingly persuaded that marriage is a detrimental thing and staying away from marriage is the best approach:

At first, I kept seeing people say 'You mustn't get married,' and didn't think much of it. But then more and more posts popped up. And be honest, it just seems unsafe and makes me not want to get married either.

-Helen

Moreover, there are pervasive stories and news online related to the domestic violence for women, including extreme cases where women were beaten into requiring hospitalization and intravenous treatment, or even instances of femicide. Each encounter with such narratives intensifies their disgust toward the marriage and men. This repeated exposure also forces a grim recognition of the physical disparity between men and women; many interviewees expressed a sense of powerlessness, convinced they would be unable to defend themselves against a husband's aggression if they get married. This point of view leads them to conclude that marriage could result in the tragic outcomes suffered by women they see on social media, and this is a kind of abuse that hurts both mental and physical health of women. This ongoing news serves as a powerful deterrent, leading them to view the avoidance of marriage as a self-preservation:

Domestic violence causes both mental and physical harm. I see this kind of thing so often online, and it honestly terrifies me. I am scared I could end up being beaten too one day.

-Yolanda

There are way too many cases of domestic violence against women on social media. So many photos show women beaten so badly they are lying on the hospital beds, and there are countless cases of husbands killing their wives too. With all this, who could date and get married?

-Kido

Crucially, digital media enhances participants' critical understanding of legal frameworks surrounding marriage dissolution. Participants highlighted structural obstacles in divorce proceedings, particularly the requirements for mutual consent and the mandatory marital cooling-off period. Rather than serving as a protective measure, these legal mechanisms were perceived as institutional barriers that trap women in hazardous environments:

It takes two people's consent to get a divorce. That sounds fair in theory, but online I see so many women trapped in the marriages simply because their husbands refuse to agree. This is just like prison. If I were them, how could I get out? No! I can't.

-Yolanda

The divorce cooling-off period is essentially a form of secondary farm-to-men. I have seen lots of abusive men escalate their violence during this time while blaming their wives for getting divorce. If getting divorced is this dangerous and hard, why would anyone even want to get married?

-Helen

These fears reach their deepest and most hopeless level when interviewees realize that the most desperate step, like seeking help online, still had no real protection at all. Several interviewees express that in the beginning, they think seeking help on social media is a sensible choice to solve the problems in the marriage. However, several interviewees found out many things that are detrimental to society, such as domestic violence against women, will gradually lose their traffic and attention, and that the society in order to increase the social stability. Therefore, they described a phenomenon where a case of domestic violence against women initially received widespread attention online but gradually became less visible in feeds over time, leaving them uncertain whether the situation was ever resolved. They realize that society itself offers little help to women harmed within marriage, leaving virtually no reliable support system. This helpless and absurd phenomenon has led adolescent girls to completely lose interest in marriage, making avoiding it altogether their ultimate goal:

Then, so many cases of domestic violence against women get suppressed; they just strangely disappear from our feeds forever, and we never know the ending. It makes me feel like this society can't really protect me either.

-Helen

4. Discussion

This study identifies three core conclusions in shaping adolescent females' negative attitudes toward marriage. Adolescent females no longer view marriage through the lens of traditional ideas. They evaluate it as a practical decision centered on the personal costs versus no benefits. Interviewees believe that marriage forces women to lose their self-worth and autonomy with uncompensated and exploitative labor and financial and physical depletion.

Adolescent females rely heavily on observations of others' relationships, like family, peers, and online influencers, to preview what marriage might look like. Interviewees repeatedly witness infidelity, inequality, conflicts, and male selfishness. All the interviewees said the same word to describe a married woman-Free maid. This means that marriage turns women into unpaid, unrecognized, and exploited domestic laborers, but men don't need to do any things. They confirm that marriage is fraught with risk and there is no positive outcome in the marriage, so they conclude marriage is not worth pursuing. Moreover, social media also plays a significant role in shaping their negative marital views through extreme risks, legal barriers, and systemic failures. Interviewees regularly saw videos of abused women online, some pleading for help on camera, others hospitalized with injuries. Social media also taught interviewees that marriage is easy to enter but nearly impossible to get divorced. Legal barriers like the mutual consent requirement and cooling-off period trap women when husbands refuse to divorce and can cause secondary harm to women during the cooling-off period. Perhaps most damaging, interviewees observe that women seeking help online often receive no real support. Cases of violence initially attract attention but gradually disappear from feeds, sometimes to promote social stability. Therefore, interviewees think no one, even the legal system, can protect married women. Together, these messages convince them that avoiding marriage entirely is the only safe choice.

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Conflicts of Interest

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