

Kalinisang Puri (True Love Still... Waits): Personal Narratives of Chastity Among Filipino Teens

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Abstract - *Some would say that the expression ‘true love waits’ is already passé. It is no longer practice by Filipino teens as shown by the many cases of unwanted pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. These unfortunate consequences simply validate that there is indeed a great decline in the sexual morality of our youth. On the contrary, this paper presents the other side of the coin. It highlights the personal stories of selected Filipino teens who still embody the virtue of chastity. It proves that this expression about love still makes a lot of sense in spite of their sexually permissive culture. This study will draw and weave from their narratives the various root causes of their non-engagement to premarital sex which highlight the virtue of “kalinisang puri” or “may dangal”. Findings reveal that belonging to an intact family, high level of intimacy with respect to one’s partner, positive influence of peers/friends, and regular observance of/attendance to religious rituals were the contributory factors which enable them to make a responsible decision about their sexuality. Additional findings reveal that these root causes are actually the result of the sociocultural influences that shape their everyday life. The outcomes and discussion of the study can help researchers to formulate the content of a sexual ethic that is relevant and effective in their moral formation.*

Keywords: *teens, chastity, sociocultural, interpretative phenomenological analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The virtue of chastity is often associated with one’s virginity in the case of teens. In the Philippine culture, the popular concept of *dangal* or *puri* is the one being highlighted in relation to this virtue. *Dangal* or *puri* is not a specific entity, not a “thing” but represents a sublime notion of one’s personhood or *pagkatao* [1]. This essential element in the humanity of the individual is treasured most especially by every conservative or traditional Filipina teen for it somehow reflects her personality as a worthy bride or a partner of high value in case of getting married in the future. When her virginity is lost the notion of *dangal* or *puri* possibly goes with it. The poor teen may possibly look lowly of herself and most of all, her partner’s treatment towards her is also affected negatively. That is why it is very important for a teen to have that *kalinisang puri* or *may dangal*. If she is able to preserve her virginity until marriage then she had exercised utmost chastity which can enable her to hold her head up high. She is freed from sexual guilt and any social criticisms for she had expressed her sexuality according to moral standards. She had maintained a higher level of *dangal* or *puri*. At present, chastity is treated less important because of the

so-called seeping cultural revolution [1]. At present, sexuality is distinguished by a perspective that is unfairly applied to both sexes and a bit biased. Women are expected to remain virgins until marriage while men are not that strictly forbidden to enjoy sexual freedom. When wives are caught having an affair, they are heavily criticized while husbands who also commit infidelity are just condoned. Teens who lose their virginity before marriage, whether through rape or in a relationship, diminish their chances for a ‘good’ marriage, while young men can ‘sow wild oats’ with abandon and be even admired for being so manly [2]. Nonetheless, chastity in general is still considered as an essential virtue in establishing and keeping a harmonious romantic relationship. Though it is sometimes difficult to practice it because of the presence of numerous temptations, it still remains as an important ingredient of a successful relationship.

Premarital sex (PMS) is a worldwide moral issue involving teens. For some cultures, it is considered as an act of deviation. A deviant act in this context refers to the departure from societal norms that attract social disapproval that is likely to elicit negative sanctions [3]. Its high prevalence in the society validates the gradual

weakening of values among our young ones. This is somehow ironic and quite embarrassing to think that the Philippines is said to be a predominantly Christian country. Moreover, Filipinos are very conservative in nature. They put high value on morality. Nonetheless, in this modern period, the virtue of chastity is neglected and is considered as an old-fashioned quality that are irrelevant to some teens because of the sexually laden culture in which they live. In a recent study conducted among 19,178 young adults in the whole country reveals that one out of three teens have already engaged in PMS [4]. That is from 17.8 percent in 1994 to 32.2 percent in 2013. This increasing sexual involvement by teens posed alarming consequences which has significant impact on public health concerns [5]. There could be a big possibility that as years pass by it can still get worst.

On the contrary, some Filipino teens still occupy a big chunk of the universal expression 'true love waits' In fact, it is not simply an expression but a worldwide movement that fosters chastity for young adults. 'True Love Waits' (TLW) is a worldwide Christian group that promotes the virtue of chastity among teenagers. It began in 1993 as a campaign to encourage Christians to pursue abstinence and called upon those who had lost their virginity to remain celibate until marriage. After a year, more than 210,000 cards from teenagers committing to refrain from sex until marriage were displayed in the National Mall in Washington, D.C. [6]. This group also emphasizes the development of sexual maturity in teens which is very crucial in the coming up of sexual decisions. The attainment of sexual maturity is one of the defining developmental processes of adolescence [7]. It is the stage where the teen is able to control the pressure of sexual desire and divert it in more fruitful ways. In the Philippines, TLW has its local version which is empowered by the website *wagmuna.com*. True Love Waits Philippines, as it is called, believes that impurity is a key struggle in relationships of Filipino Youth, resulting in issues such as broken hearts, mutual understanding, premarital sex, and dysfunctional families. It is committed to impacting youth by teaching them to be pure in heart which will lead them to make the right choices—especially in the issue of sexual abstinence until marriage [8].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main goal of this study is to determine what should be the appropriate content of sexual ethics which will be relevant in the moral formation of

Filipino teens. This can be achieved through finding out the different elements in their personal narratives of experience that affect their moral decisions most especially regarding their sexuality. These identified elements are the ones to be enhanced and strengthened for a better integration into the formation programs for the subject. In addition, it also aims to justify that amidst the booming of sexual immorality in today's culture there are still those who practice and carry within themselves the virtue of chastity. This is very important to point out in order to formulate what kind of formation can be effective to avoid such worsening of moral decline.

METHODS

This study utilized a semi-structured in-depth interview procedure among eight teens ages 16-21 years old. Some of them are the former students of the researcher while the others were recommended by the researcher's wife. The interview sessions were conducted in three separate occasions for every participant that lasted for two hours each. The sessions took place either in the school's conference rooms, coffee shops, and restaurants which are not crowded and are conducive enough for casual conversation. Four males and four females were selected for purposive sampling: all are Roman Catholics; all are residents of Metro Manila, and more importantly, all are in a romantic relationship. It is very important to consider that all the participants should be involved in a romantic relationship in order to determine if they have already sexual experience with their respective partners. The researcher made use of a checklist of flexible questions which is adapted and modified from the Personal Interview Questionnaire Guide of the National Study of Youth and Religion [9]. The objective of the semi-structured interview is to encourage the participants to talk in their own terms in a free-flowing manner. Their responses were then transcribed word for word and reconstructed right after the session so as not to possibly exclude important data. Their responses were then analyzed using the *interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA) which is a data analysis tool popularized by Jonathan Smith. IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience [10]. Its fundamental principle is to explore every single case, give insightful interpretation, before producing any general statements. It implies the commitment to know in detail what the experience of a

particular person or case like. This is the reason why the interviewees were asked to share their experiences from their childhood years up to their life's struggles at present. The researcher has the objective of putting together the bits and pieces of these experiences and then forming a picture of their world by interconnecting the different themes of their lives as well as the pre-established geographies and institutions that make their lives contextualized. In many researches, IPA studies involve a close examination of the experiences of only one participant but most frequently they draw on the accounts of a small number of people (six has been suggested as a good number up to 15) [11]. As mentioned in this paper, there were eight participants and this is a very good number for analysis based on the standard sample which is only six. Lastly, since the topic of the interview is quite sensitive, ethical considerations is well-observed in this study. First, informed consent and parental consent (for below 18 years old) were discussed and signed by the respondents/parents. Code names were assigned to the participants for confidentiality and more importantly, they were not forced to answer sensitive questions or talk about anything that they do not like.

FINDINGS

To synthesize the result of the in-depth interview and its analysis, the researcher identified four recurrent themes that emerged as the common causes of non-sexual engagement by the participants or an expression of the virtue of chastity. These causes will be discussed briefly in this section including an excerpt of their interview that reflects the particular theme.

1. Belonging to an intact family

Belonging to an intact family may provide an environment that communicates and inculcates positive vibes which could bring more joy and hope to growing children—shaping in them a more robust character and a more life-giving behavior. When they grow older, they could be armed with the capacity to share or give that which they have in themselves—not the lonely and troubled kids' vulnerability that constantly longs for (asking for and not being able to give) reassurance and acceptance. Non-practitioners of PMS exhibited more of the essential values of love, trust, honesty, support, sense of attachment/belongingness, etc. which they have received and learned from their elders and their home environment. The so-called 'primary humanization' process shared by their parents has been a positive influence since childhood. F18 and M17,

both non-practitioners of PMS, gave emphasis on the values that were instilled by their respective families who were the primary reasons for contributing directly and indirectly to their decision to postpone sexual engagement. F18 felt so grateful for the great sense of trust and support of her parents to her that is why she was allowed to live separately in a condo as well as being allowed to have a boyfriend with whom she even spent an overnight in Cebu. In the same way, M17 was always reminded by his mother to respect the opposite sex as he had his own mother and sister who can be also disrespected by others. Both of these respondents were also very attached to their families and considered them as their main source of love and other essential values. This fact is clearly manifested in their own testimonies:

F18: Honestly Sir, until we're only up to hugs and kisses. We have been together for three years already but I'm still proud that we have not done it. I will really feel guilty if ever that happens. First, I don't want to break the big trust that my parents have on me, on us... And besides Sir, we have both studied in Catholic schools since elementary up to now and we were brought up by our parents with values and discipline, then why break that trust, isn't Sir?

M17: My mom was so strict right from the start when we were young (together with my sister). Mom reminded me always to respect the opposite sex most especially that I have also a sister. She kept on telling me that once I have cheated or fooled a girl, that could possibly happen also to my own sister or even to my own mother. That is why I have always remained harmless to my friends who are girls and most especially of course to my girlfriend.

Therefore, there is a dire need for a better family – the primary environment for our subjects that is composed of better-equipped elders where their presence, their intimacies, their joys and hopes, their examples, etc. are far better in forming our teens than any kind of law or legal or moral prescription could do. This does not mean that families should always be perfect and there should be no more cases of broken homes, but the thing is, nourishing activities for families should be available which aim of strengthening their bond with one another, most especially for the husbands and wives to keep them faithful to their vows of commitment. If broken

families cannot be avoided, then a caring support program or alternative settings must take the place of the unhealthy home.

2. High level of intimacy with respect to one's partner

A high level of intimacy that is controlled by mutual respect was also evident among the participants. F18 for example knows her precious worth, not only of herself but also by her boyfriend. This worth is very much taken care of by her through self-respect and the respect given to her by her partner. For her, losing her virginity is like losing one's respect of herself and at the same time losing her boyfriend's respect towards her. This high level of respect for her is also associated with the virtue of patience. If she respects herself, it follows that she can be patient enough not to give up her virginity. In the same way, if her boyfriend really loves her, he should respect her decision and not insist on engaging in premature sexual intercourse. As she explained:

F18: I think that's not going to happen (premarital sex) because he respects me a lot in the same way as he respects my parents. For me, I will stick to my decision not to do it ... Why? Simply because if that happens, it seems like I have given up my everything to my boyfriend including the respect that I have for myself. I also know that he can possibly treat me differently after doing it, after surrendering myself. He may look down on me and will no longer treat me special as he used to. Even if many teens have done it at present, why would I be like them?

In a popular book written by Elder Johnson, a teen's respect or having a positive feeling for self-worth is one of the most important factors in avoiding premarital sex. He explained this value of respect to oneself by emphasizing its benefits. According to him:

If you live up to your own values and standards, others will think highly of you, but even if they do not; an inner conflict will not tear you up inside. You will respond to others opinion of yourself with personal integrity and self-confidence. Your appearance, abilities, or social acceptance will not worry you, leaving you free to love as you choose, to work, and to play free of guilt [12].

For the researcher, the most important benefit of having respect for self-worth that is pointed out by the author is that being free of guilt. A teen who is able to postpone sexual engagement is indeed free of any guilt and in fact boost his or her confidence in keeping up with a pure relationship. This is not to say that those who have engaged in PMS are not keeping a pure relationship but it simply connotes that the relationship is firmly grounded on values and that it is worth sacrificing because the lovers have been sacrificing a lot. Because of the many tempting factors in the society and situations which encourage promiscuity that teens encounter, consistently avoiding them is not a walk in the park and it is really difficult. It is a big salute to them if they keep intact the respect of their self-worth.

As mentioned, F18 believes that keeping her virginity is earning the respect of her boyfriend and this is being piled up which makes her a person of great value. This is not surprising that even many teens today are already liberated, there are still who value their virginity. For them, this virginity is equated with the full respect that their partners have on them. A touching testimony coming from a 16-year old teen attested this same belief with F18:

I am sixteen and have already lost my virginity. I truly regret that my first time was with a guy that I didn't care that much about. Since that first night he expects sex on every date. When I don't feel like it, we end up in an argument. I don't think this guy is in love with me, and I know deep down that I am not in love with him either. This makes me feel cheap. I realize now that this is a very big step in a girl's life. After you have done it, things are never the same. It changes everything. [13]

If the person is of lesser value to others, then it is easier for him or her to be taken for granted and left out in the end. The respect of others they say is not freely given but must be earned and one can earn it by showing respect both to oneself and to others as well. Once a person had developed that self-respect and that of others, he or she will leave a memorable and nice impression of himself to others and thus avoid conflict in the end. Aside from this, the self-worth will also be put in a higher level and that will surely bring a feel-good condition.

On the other hand, while there is a strong possibility that being in the relationship for quite some time deepens intimacy, it does not automatically mean that

sexual intercourse should follow. Intimacy as some forms of communications where interpersonal interaction does show a considerable amount of affectionate exchanges [14]. It can be felt from and provided by the family, friends, neighbors, and not limited to one's partner. Such kind of relationship may already presuppose an established bond brought about by familiarity, mutual understanding, support or dependence and all these things do not necessarily aim at having sex but serve to strengthen the commitment and also invest that kind of respect to one's partner which is also a manifestation of care and concern, or love.

3. Positive influence of peers/friends

Having friends or peers who are good influence to our teens can encourage them to make a responsible sexual decision. Peer pressure does not totally mean the negative and one-sided effect of having peers but there is such a thing called positive peer pressure. Positive peer pressure occurs when friends pressure each other into some things that will provide them a good company, improve their health, studies, social life, and make them feel good about their decisions. In the case study, the participants manifested having influenced positively by their respective peers/friends who had probably contributed to their healthy social relationships. Their respective friends share with one another same activities that are good in nature and the best part of it is that they enjoy doing them. They have developed an outlook that doing activity together with the same objective makes their social life more fun and fruitful. This kind of joyful feeling is reflected in the words of the two participants:

M17: I am a proud member of one of the school's student organizations. I registered together with my friends and we used to volunteer during calamities by packing relief goods and then distributing them to those affected areas. It's really exciting and fulfilling Sir because I was able to help needy people and at the same time, we always have a great time, more bonding time together...

F16: I am so close with my churchmates. Whenever we have free time and we have money, we eat outside or just stay at our pastor's residence. It's a great thing that our pastor was so kind and accommodating. Sometimes, we stay overnight and have team building games. We

don't just hang around but we have regular devotion rituals also. It's really fun whenever I am with them because I am enjoying a lot.

The decision-making in teens is not caused solely by their own cognitive and reflective undertakings. There are times that they come from the bits of dictates and reactions of their friends. This is the reason why it is necessary that these partners should share with them reasonable pieces of advice which are coherent to moral standards. In a study about the significance of peers in relation to their sexual expressions, adolescents were most comfortable discussing sexual issues with their friends and those who reported a greater number of topics discussed with their friends were more likely to report the initiation of intercourse and more 'liberal' sexual values [15]. In a traditional Filipino culture, conversation about sex is never talked about in the family. Some teens acquire sexual information from their friends and the Internet. Since both parties belong to the same age bracket and probably share the same perspectives in life, they are open and very accepting of one another's ideas. Having good friends who have a healthy and positive understanding about sex can affect a curious teen in a positive way. Positive peer pressure can help a teen reflect on his or her actions and amend one's ways to become a better person. Having peers who are working hard to achieve their goals will definitely encourage one to step up and strive towards something that is positive, too.

4. Regular observance of/attendance to religious rituals

The last recurrent theme that came out from the interview is about the participants' active involvement to their respective church. F16 and F18 are both active in the participation and observance of their church's rituals and other spiritual activities. They both claimed:

F16: I am an active member of the Born Again Christian Church, Sir. Until now, I am part of the Music Ministry where in we used to sing during worship services. Not only that, I am also assigned as one of the researchers for our discipleship activity. What I do is to look for appropriate and relevant techniques in creating programs for teens and then have it presented to our pastor for approval. It's really a hectic one

whenever I am in our church but I feel happy about what I'm doing.

F18: *Well, during elementary and high school, we have regular novena and rosary praying in school. At present, I go to Mass every Sunday, Sir, sometimes I'm with my mom and brother or with my boyfriend. I also pass by the chapel to say a minute of prayer almost everyday in school and that really energizes me and keeps me going...*

F16 and F18 who are both active in the observance of religious rituals obviously had developed a closer relationship with God as well as with other fellow church members. The built geographies in the city like the availability of churches and even malls where the Christian group usually holds their prayer worship contributed in this closeness. In addition, what made F16 even more firm in her sexual decision is her involvement in the organizations. F18 had also developed the habit of visiting the chapel everyday before going to her classes and that surely made her more aware of divine presence or guidance. The other participants who are not active in the observance of religious rituals had made the decision to engage in sex while the other three participants who are active in terms of observance of these rituals are non-practitioners of PMS. This is not to conclude that being prayerful and faithful to the schedule of religious activities is an automatic measurement for being a chaste person and thus one can avoid PMS. This is simply to point out that this factor is one of the possible ways for having and building a closer relationship with God. If one is close to God, naturally he or she observes and obeys the divine teachings.

There are numerous studies which linked the essentiality of regular observance of religious rituals and practices to the avoidance of premarital sex. Religious practice and placing a high significance on religion are associated with decreased non-marital sexual activity. After parental marriage, religious practice is probably the most significant factor related to reduce teen sexual activity [16]. Religious influence was the strongest significant predictor of less permissive sexual attitudes for both men and women [17]. On the other hand, religiosity indirectly delays coital debut through beliefs about the negative consequences like guilt, embarrassment of pregnancy, perceived risk of disease of adolescent sexual behavior [18]. Conversely, less religious adolescents may be

more influenced by a sexual ideology that is recreational and/or relational so that beliefs about the positive outcomes of engaging in sexual intercourse (pleasure and status enhancement) would predict earlier coital debut. Those who attended religious services more frequently had less permissive attitudes toward sexual activity and less sexual experience than peers who attended religious services less frequently [19]. These different studies show how effective and significant is the role being played by teens' involvement in religious rituals and other activities. It does not only keep them busy which prevents them from being idle but at the same time helps them to build a closer intimacy with God that in the long run will develop in them an open recognition and acceptance of moral teachings and God's authority.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sexual morality of Filipino teens may have been gradually declining in this modern times due to the prevalent cases of PMS. On the other hand, there were still teens who firmly uphold the traditional virtue of chastity. The popular concept of *dangal* or *puri* was clearly still valued by the respondents in this study. Believing that the lost of virginity is equated somehow to the lost of *dangal* or *puri* the respondents firmly pointed out four recurrent themes that were drawn out from their testimonies as root causes of their non-engagement in PMS, thus, preserving their virginity. These themes include *belonging to an intact family, high level of intimacy with respect to one's partner, positive influence of peers/friends, and regular observance of/attendance to religious norms/rituals*. Additional findings reveal that these root causes are actually the result of the sociocultural influences that shape their everyday life. In relation to the society, their character/virtue is formed by the social interactions that they had with the people around them and the social relationships that they had established. The different norms and standards offered and imposed by society are inculcated and some are upon them as their paths of attaining a meaningful life. As they interact and establish relationship within the society, the elements of intimacy and desire play an essential role in their decision-making. With intimacy, there is emotional closeness that results to trust and openness with one's partner. Desire is also another element that can affect their decision-making. With it, a teen is motivated to pursue his or her goal. Regarding culture, the behavior of teens is developed or influenced by the distribution of knowledge about everyday life in a specific context.

They learn to understand themselves and adjust to the demands of their own developing beliefs and behaviors of being in relationship with others. But of course things, values, and behaviors imbibed by our teens are not purely positive. Attached with these are the culture's bad orientations. The learning that one has acquired before constitutes a character formation which is essential for the present. As the participants are greatly influenced by the sociocultural factors, it does not mean, however, that freedom is denied to them. They still exercise freedom and make their own choices with the kind of upbringing that they had and based within the confines of their personal beliefs, moralities, rituals, organizations, patterned practices, and spaces offered by contexts available to them. The teens' own mixing of patterns of beliefs, behavior, and reasons show how objective and subjective realities intersect and produce blends.

These root causes mentioned above can serve as points of reference to future researchers in the formulation of an ethical content that will be relevant for teens. However, some limitations of this study are also important to consider for future research. First, the data came from those respondents who are all Christians and so it does not include non-Christian groups and those who do not believe in any religion. Secondly, the concept of chastity is not solely limited to those who have not engaged in PMS or the so-called "virgins" in spite of having involved in a romantic relationship. Other perspectives also equate chastity for "fidelity" which means that a person who is in a relationship and had already sexual experience but remained faithful to his/her partner can still be considered chaste. Lastly, this study does not include homosexual teens or those belonging to the LGBT community. All the participants are straight.

The result of the interview sessions can be very helpful in the formulation of sexual ethic since they originated from the direct experiences of the participants themselves. In addition, it is recommended that a framework for a proposed sexual ethic must not be solely concentrated on the traditional teaching of the church but must also give into consideration the sociocultural factors that greatly affect the sexual decision of teens. The importance of the community, which is composed of the various institutions that are involved in the life of teens, must be first and foremost the seedbed where the confused teen can be assisted. A one-on-one counseling may not be sufficient and will not have a lasting effect. It has to be a consistent, mutual, and cooperative effort from the members of the

community that can possibly address effectively this moral issue.

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