

Modern “Dalagang Filipina”: Preservation of Christian Moral Values in Having Romantic Relationships

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Abstract. Humans as emotional beings engage in romantic relationships to love and be loved. With modernization, many young people have shifted in the process of entering romantic relationships and have shown a decline in morality. This phenomenological qualitative research explored the practices and experiences of ten (10) female college students in their preservation of Christian moral values in having romantic relationships. Results showed the modern practices include: utilization of online communication, active engagement in social activities, explicit expression of love, confrontation of issues and concerns, and maintenance of a trusting and understanding relationship. Further, four themes emerged from their experiences in preserving Christian moral values: firm belief in the preservation of chastity, engagement in church activities, practice of self-discipline and consistency, conflicting moral values, and social pressures. Finally, collaboration between home and school, as well as activities on spiritual and moral values formation, were suggested as interventions to preserve Christian moral values among youth. The study revealed that despite the influence of modern practices and activities, there are still young individuals who maintain their moral values as Christians in this modern world.

Keywords: Guidance and counseling; Modern practices; Preserving Christian moral values; Tertiary students; Davao del Sur, Philippines.

1.0 Introduction

In the Christian perspective, love is a gift from God, which a man and a woman exercise to form a relationship. This gift is said to be grounded in moral principles that lead people to a life-long commitment like marriage. Thus, this expression of love, guided by Christian principles and values, is being preserved and passed on from generation to generation. However, society is always dynamic and changing. People, beliefs, values, traditions, and activities change. Modernization makes people more knowledgeable, but at the same time, it makes people more materialistic, which then leads to a decline in moral values (Dev, 2017). It is evident today that many people have shifted from face-to-face interactions to using social media platforms as a convenient means for socializing and forming relationships (Duggan et al., 2015). Many young people are using these platforms to find romantic relationships, regardless of the e (Hildebrandt, 2015).

Research showed the implications of social media use among young people in terms of their engagement in romantic relationships. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, 2018) reported that the increasing urbanization, media, and technology led to a higher level of acceptance of sexual expression and

identity, including premarital sexual activity among young individuals. Young adults also used the spread of online dating to find sexual partners (Labor, 2020). In most countries, such as the United States and Mexico, premarital sex often occurs among young people who are exclusively in a romantic relationship (Espinosa-Hernandez & Vasilenko, 2015). Further, Grant (2015) also noted that 84% of Americans aged 18 to 23 years old have had premarital sex.

In Asian countries, despite often conservative sociocultural norms regarding premarital relationships, unmarried young people commonly reported curiosity and interest in dating, sex, and sexuality. UNFPA (2016) reported that many young people, particularly those with strong religious beliefs, stated that they would engage in sexual activities only when they get married. On the contrary, some studies among urban youth suggest a permissive attitude towards premarital sex, in which 21% of young individuals in Thailand engage in intimate sexual activities, and 13% among rural women in Bangladesh reported having had sex.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Gozum (2020) observed that modernization hurts young people's religiosity. He pointed out that younger generations are less likely to participate in church services anymore and have misconceptions about their Christian faith. Cordero, Jr. (2018) also emphasized that chastity is considered to be old-fashioned and seems to be taken for granted among Filipino youth nowadays. For some researchers and experts, the use of social media in romantic relationships is seemingly wrong as it leads to the demise of conservatism among Filipinos (Dulay, 2018). In a series of surveys conducted among Filipino youth aged 15-24, findings revealed that one out of three young people has already engaged in pre-marital sex (Cordero, Jr., 2018). Thus, all these studies reflect the changes in the practices of individuals engaging in romantic relationships.

It is indeed a critical challenge for the church, as today's young generation is dealing with their fragmented understanding of sexuality (Grant, 2015). The bible instructed to flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18), that is why, church leaders in their attempt to preserve the morality of youth, initiated a campaign for making a 'virginity pledge' to abstain from premarital sex. However, it was found that pledging is effective only for individuals who uphold religious beliefs and values, but it is ineffective for young people who have low religious commitment (Montemayor, 2019). Consequently, young people's engagement in pre-marital sex leads to more promiscuous acts and multiple sex partners. Based on the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the Davao Region recorded the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country at 17.9 percent (Colina IV, 2018). Likewise, the Department of Health (DOH) in 2017 also reported that there was an increase in the cases of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), and most of whom are young individuals (Ilas, 2017).

People coming from different generations possess distinct characteristics and practices. Today, there are about 1.2 billion youth aged 15 to 24 years in the world, or 16 per cent of the global population (United Nations World Population Prospects, 2019). Individuals who were born from the mid-1990s to the late 2010s belonged to what is called Generation Zoomers or Gen Z (Moscrip, 2019). Gen Zs are young individuals who are at the stage of life for socialization and forming romantic relationships. The World Health Organization defined romantic relationships as relationships based on emotional and physical attraction that could be developed into long-term relationships. Gen Zs are recognized as the first generation of true digital natives as they have been exposed to the internet, to social networks, and mobile systems (Francis & Hofel, 2018). They have been able to get news quickly and communicate efficiently with people around the world (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). With the technological advances in multimedia, they have become accustomed to interacting and communicating in a world that is connected at all times (Turner, 2015). However, this can also come with a disadvantage for Generation Z if the technology is used as a replacement for social interaction (Twenge, 2017).

There are reported positive uses of technology and social media in romantic relationships. As stated by Jimenez (2017), in today's world, the internet has become a way of life and has gained importance for man. As such, social media is popularly used, especially among young individuals in their search for romantic relationships (Lenhart, 2015). Today, there are 1.6 billion people who use the internet daily, resulting in at least 1 million dates per week (Iqbal, 2020). Online dating attracts individuals to experience an exciting and unique way of getting to know a potential partner. In the last ten years, it is evident that many Americans are increasingly involved in online dating, with 42% of them knowing an online dater and 29% knowing someone who found a spouse through online dating (Bloom & Taylor, 2019). One of the common motivations for using social media is interacting with one's romantic partners (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015).

More advantages of technology in romantic relationships were enumerated by Murray and Campbell (2015). Technology allows couples to send sweet and affectionate messages to one another. In addition, romantic partners may use technology to engage in leisure activities such as watching movies and online games. Technology also provides an opportunity for couples to remain connected even if they cannot be together physically. Thus, couples who begin their relationships online are more likely to sustain their relationships even in long-distance relationships since they can stay connected through technology. However, despite the reported benefits of technology in socialization and relationships, there are also disadvantages associated with it.

The positive use of technology and social media was evident among people in romantic relationships, as well as its negative usage. For other couples in a relationship, they use the internet to monitor their partner's behavior and activities, including reading their text messages, opening their social media accounts, or e-mails, which may lead to adverse relationship outcomes (Murray & Campbell, 2015). For instance, when they found out that their romantic partners are spending too much time on Facebook, this may lead to a higher level of jealousy and misunderstanding.

Moreover, researchers identified online daters creating an image of a potential partner based on their fantasies and ideals. 54% of online daters encountered profiles that misrepresent the online dater (Bloom & Taylor, 2019). People tend to wear masks in the social media world, wherein their virtual identities do not represent their true selves. They are very good at expressing their feelings online, but it is not easy to gauge their sincerity since you cannot look them straight in the eye. It is somewhat discouraging for women that their lovers' projected identity online is different when it comes to face-to-face communication (Mahusay & Romero, 2015). Furthermore, six-in-ten female users ages 18 to 34 said that someone still contacted them after they said they were not interested. At the same time, 57% reported they had received a sexually explicit message or image they did not ask for (Vogels, 2020).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, there are 72 million active social media users with an average of 4 hours spent using social media (Kemp, 2019). In the country dominated by conservative cultures, religion is one of the important factors to be considered in dating and relationships, and having many dating apps online is seemingly an indication of a less moral approach to dating (Labor, 2020). Further, presenting the self in dating apps is perceived as an act that would harm Filipino moral values (Atienza, 2018).

The advent of technology not just boosted interpersonal communication in terms of online dating, but has also increased the production and distribution of pornographic content (Tziallas, 2015). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, paved the way for easy access to pornography (Coletto et al., 2016) and may have enhanced sharing, receiving, and accessing pornographic content (González-Ortega et al., 2015). Easy access to pornography through technology presents another potential challenge to couples. As young people send and share pornographic content, they are more exposed to sexual activities at an early age (Faruq et al., 2017). Moreover, it was also found that pornography consumption may enhance pre-marital sex among young people (Dasgupta, 2017). For instance, people in romantic relationships can share erotic pictures and may engage in sex chat (Arikewuyo, 2019). By doing so, the more they become vulnerable and might develop a distorted connection between love and sex (Karandashev, 2017). Furthermore, based on 2017 statistics reported by Pornhub.com, which is considered the world's biggest porn site, Filipinos spend the most time on the site (Gonzales, 2018). Consequently, the rise of pornography exposure was linked to the rise of teenage pregnancy among Filipino youth. Health officials are concerned about how to address teenage pregnancy in the Philippines, as the country is reported to have one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy cases in the Asian region (Villegas, 2016).

Another practice of modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" in having romantic relationships is the expression of love and affection towards their partners. Research has shown that love can be expressed differently across cultures. In a study conducted by Beichen and Murshed (2015), they found that Westerners were more likely to use verbal expression in conveying love and care. In contrast, Asian participants placed a higher value on gift-giving towards their romantic partners. According to Karandashev (2015), the passionate words, kind tone of voice, smiling facial expression, and special gestures are explicit and direct ways of expressing love to a romantic partner. In contrast, actions and doing something good for a partner are implicit and indirect ways of expressing love. Karandashev (2015) also pointed out that Filipinos' verbal expression of love is more reserved for special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, or anniversaries. He also noted that Filipino people express their love indirectly through

actions such as listening to their partner's stories and problems, laughing at their jokes, and remaining by their partner's side in times of hardship.

Further, Farnsley (2021) used Chapman's Five Love Languages to understand each person's wants and needs in a relationship. These five love languages include words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service, and giving gifts. Whenever a person's primary love language is not fulfilled, that person may experience dissatisfaction in the relationship. This was shown in a study conducted by Bland and McQueen (2018) using Chapman's five love languages, where couples who had more similarly aligned love languages were overall happier in their relationships. In contrast, persons whose love language is not fulfilled by their partners will experience overall dissatisfaction in their relationship.

Christians express their faith and religiosity by attending worship services, abiding in the teachings of God, which are written in the bible, by praying, and by participating in other activities related to spiritual development. However, along with modernization, various changes took place in many aspects of human lives, including religiosity and moral values. In developing societies, there is a continuous change in values, characterized by an increased interest in pleasure, comfort, and amusement, which consequently leads to moral depravity and moral negligence (Dev, 2017). In research carried out by Donahue (1995), religion acts as a source of resilience and compels people not to get involved in promiscuous acts, dishonesty, violence, and/or theft. Nevertheless, in this modern generation, it was observed that many people place more value on material and secular things than on spirituality and moral values. In a study examining religious attendance, the results showed that with the increase in internet use, religious affiliation decreases (McClure, 2016).

Moreover, studies showed a decreasing number of people who believe in the existence of God. According to Bernts and Berghuij (2016), the number of Dutch people who believe in God dropped from 78 percent to 32 percent. In the same way, there was also a drop in the number of religious people in the United States (Smith, 2015), including the continuing decline in religiosity among American youth (McClure, 2016). Moreover, in a survey conducted in Canada, 65.6% of respondents considered themselves somewhat liberal, while 16.5% identified themselves as somewhat conservative. Almost 50% of the respondents think that religious people are being stereotyped in Canada, which leads to difficulty in admitting to being religious. While 23.9% of Canadians name themselves with "no religion" as evidenced by the data from the 2011 National Household Survey (Young & Shipley, 2014).

In the same way, the younger generation's state of spirituality is currently going through a crisis, as they are exposed to values that are harmful to their well-being rather than the values they are exposed to (Ushatikova et al., 2018). They are faced with odd problems in society and are surrounded by people who are practicing immorality. Gozum (2020) highlighted that modernization widens a person's knowledge, awareness, and freedom of choice. However, this increase in consciousness and liberty leads to the rise of premarital sex, single parenting, and broken homes. It was pointed out by Mahusay and Romero (2015) that due to what we watch on the internet, people are more open to courtship, sex, and intimacy, and those conservative types of people will be more open-minded somehow. Many people in our society today think that sex outside marriage is permissible, as they are separating sex from the duty of care for their sexual partners (Doyle, 2016). Further, Dev (2017) considered the influence of entertainment means, such as undesirable films, porn sites on the internet, and obscene novels, as some of the factors of moral degeneration among youth. With this, young people's moral values are put to the test, and many of them engage in premarital sex (Gozum, 2020).

God originally designed sex as the means to bring forth new life. It is the most pleasurable human experience, along with the enormous responsibility on those engaging in sexual activity. However, as people manage to decouple sex from procreation, children who have been the products of these sexual unions are often neglected, if not forgotten (Doyle, 2016). That is why, according to Dev (2017), in this modern society where youths' moral position is challenged, they need to hold on to the moral values they were taught in their childhood. Cordero, Jr. (2018) also pointed out that the influence of social media, pornography, and other forms of modern socialization brought complex challenges for many young people in terms of moral decisions. Therefore, it is important to find solutions for this alarming situation of youth in our country. Villegas (2016) firmly believed that there is no substitute for a real education in chastity, an affirmation of authentic love, imparted first and foremost by parents instead of promoting and instilling a contraceptive or anti-life mentality among young people. As pointed out by George and Uyanga (2014), the moral values of the past can still be practiced by young people today, and they can determine the type of change that is happening in their society, rather than simply following the patterns of this

changing world. This was also highlighted by Davidson and Carlin (2019) that young people in this modern-day society are increasingly active in constructing their life chances, wherein they learn to become resilient by overcoming challenging experiences that strengthen their capacity to stand firm despite the consequences of their choices.

Young people are the next generation's great leaders; thus, their lives and welfare must be protected and preserved for their future success. With the challenges they are facing today, the government, schools, and churches have designed programs and interventions to help young people, especially with their concerns about sexuality. Schmidt, Wndersman, and Hills (2015) noted that in the United States, social reformers viewed sex education as a remedy for problems related to sexuality. They believed that experts can deliver accurate sexual knowledge to young people. Thus, comprehensive education programs that provide information about abstinence, contraceptive use, STIs, unplanned pregnancies, and romantic relations were created. Several evaluations on comprehensive sex education revealed positive effects on young people's sexual behavior, including reductions in the percentage of becoming sexually active, age of sexual debut, and occurrence of pregnancies (Glassman et al., 2015).

Schools are institutions of formal education wherein students are being educated, guided, and shaped by the rules to become morally upright individuals in society (Nurhasanah & Nida, 2016). Teachers play a vital role in the character building of the students in school alongside the professional help of the guidance counselors. Teachers as guides in values education also have the task of creating a suitable environment for students' development (Ulavere & Veisson, 2015). However, Nurdin (2015) found out several factors that influence the failure of values education in schools, such as: the lack of teachers' skill, the assumption that teachers' role is not vital, irrelevant curriculum, and values education that tends to focus on values argumentation rather than the strategy to grow the values on the students. A college president in the Philippines imposed a policy on its students to prevent teenage pregnancies. Out of his frustration whenever a student gets pregnant and stops studying, he forbids the students from having a romantic relationship with the opposite sex as long as they are enrolled in the said school. Six students were expelled from the school for violating the prohibition (Andrade, 2016).

The literature presented has summed up the characteristics, practices, and experiences of young people today. Studies showed that the advent of technology has caused a transformation in the way young individuals form relationships and may have introduced new mindsets and practices that influence their beliefs and choices. Moreover, the changes brought by modernization seemed to challenge young people's preservation of Christian moral values instilled in them in their homes, churches, and schools. Filipino youths, specifically, are in confusion as to how to preserve these Christian moral values in their quest to find true love, given the vast array of online dating and perverted social media content. With these challenges our society is facing today, the church and government leaders have initiated programs and services to preserve our values and morality as Christians, especially with the young generation.

This study was viewed through the following lenses: Divine Command Theory of John Calvin (1536), Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1961), and Theory of Interpersonal Relationships of Harry Sullivan (1953). The first fundamental theory examined in this research was the Divine Command Theory, which postulated that God's rules of righteousness are written in the Bible and that obedience to God's laws leads to a proper and righteous way of life (Jung, 2020). In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, the bible reminds Christians to avoid sexual immorality and to keep their bodies holy and honorable to God. In this study, young women remain faithful in obeying God's law about sexual purity even if they engage in romantic relationships. According to Gibbons (2016), many Christians today are experiencing challenges brought by secularization, such as a decline in religious values, wherein many young people seem to be more liberated and involved in sexual activities outside marriage. Despite these challenges, there are still young individuals today who remain faithful in obeying God's words and are free from sexual immorality.

Moreover, young people's engagement in romantic relationships was viewed from the perspective of Harry Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory. In the late and post-adolescent stages of young people's personality development, intimacy needs arise, which draw out loving and caring reactions from one person to another (Morgan, 2014). This theory supports that young people engage in romantic relationships as they seek fulfillment of intimacy.

Furthermore, the concept of Bandura's modeling process in Social Learning Theory emphasized that these young individuals were looking up to their role models in upholding their Christian moral values. Cherry (2019) pointed out that people who have witnessed societal change often change their own beliefs and practices. In the context of this study, young people who are exposed to an environment where people are still practicing traditional virtues and are continually preserving their Christian values will apply the same things among themselves. On the other hand, young individuals who are raised in a highly modernized environment are most likely to become more liberated and might engage in different promiscuous acts like sexual activities.

Thus, in the context of this study, the divine command theory serves as a moral standard for young people today in preserving their Christian moral values as they engage in romantic relationships. Sullivan's interpersonal theory helps us understand that young people engage in romantic relationships to fulfill intimacy needs, which are vital in their growth and maturity. Lastly, Bandura's perspective on social learning theory supports that young people's actions and behaviors are greatly influenced by the environment they live in. Thus, they can learn to preserve morality when they are surrounded by people practicing morality. Young people surrounded by people doing immoral acts are more likely to do the same.

Based on the literature, there were limited studies conducted in the Philippines about young people's preservation of Christian moral values and possible interventions to help them preserve their morality. The foregoing evidential changes in perception and values among young people, especially among the Filipino youth, warrant study. The study aimed to explore the practices and experiences of Filipino young women in Davao del Sur, specifically, in their preservation of Christian moral values in having romantic relationships. This study would provide an opportunity for the youth, especially young women, to reflect on the important considerations in entering into romantic relationships and to reevaluate their values as Christians. This study, likewise, could be a reference for educators, guidance counselors, and other professionals in developing programs and activities to enhance their services in molding and shaping the young generation.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to generate knowledge grounded in human experience. The information was subjective and was taken from the point of view and understanding based on the informants' experiences. As pointed out by Creswell & Creswell (2018), in qualitative research, claims of knowledge were based on the constructive perspective from the social and historical meanings of individual experiences. Specifically, a phenomenological approach was utilized to describe and understand the essence of the experiences of individuals in a particular phenomenon. The experiences being lived were very carefully described and obtained using the in-depth interviews, and the data gathered were thoroughly analyzed to construct new meanings (Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley, 2017). Moreover, a phenomenological approach was employed in this study by exploring the experiences of modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" in their preservation of Christian moral values as they engage in romantic relationships amidst the changes brought by modernization.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

This phenomenological study discovered the lived experiences of ten (10) female college students in a Tertiary school in Davao del Sur. The informants were chosen based on the inclusion criteria: female college students; ages 18-21 years old; who belonged in Christian denominations (Roman Catholic, United Pentecostal Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Iglesia Ni Cristo and Life International Fellowship Evangelism); and were currently engaged in heterosexual romantic relationships for six months or longer during the conduct of the study.

On the other hand, this research excluded female college students who were currently or had experienced being in a heterosexual romantic relationship for less than six months and female college students who engaged in homosexual romantic relationships. The informants were selected through purposive sampling to saturate the information needed to execute the study. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the purposive sampling strategy is used in qualitative research because the people to be interviewed can purposely inform about the research problem. They were selected based on the inclusion criteria set for this study.

2.3 Research Instrument

This qualitative study used the Key Informant Interview (KII) as the source of data (Pollak, 2016). A semi-structured interview was utilized to build rapport and identify participants' feelings and opinions about the

research subject. With this, the researcher consulted experts to validate the questions before utilizing them in the interview. The researcher has also made sure that the informants were interviewed in a comfortable and relaxed manner, encouraging them to share their stories freely.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was crucial in understanding the phenomenon. As suggested by Creswell & Creswell (2018), the following procedure was observed and was orderly followed in the scientific conduct of the study. First, the research questions utilized to explore the lived experiences of the informants were made and written by the author. A pool of experts in the field of education and qualitative research then validated the research questions and the interview guide protocol.

Second, the researcher sought qualified informants who provided information essential to the study. Due to the current situation caused by the pandemic, the informants were selected from the nearest area where the study was conducted to follow the safety and health protocols set by the local government officers. A permission letter was submitted to the College President in a tertiary school in Davao del Sur. It was approved to have ten (10) female college students as informants for the study. Further, the researcher has coordinated with the Institute Deans, who have direct contact with the students. Informed consents were provided prior to the interview. Through signing the informed consent forms, the informants had signified their willingness and acceptance to be part of this research.

Third, the data was gathered, and the Key Informant Interview was conducted. A face-to-face interview in an open space was conducted. It was also noted that in case either the informants or the interviewer experienced symptoms associated with COVID-19, the interview would be cancelled and rescheduled for another time. All the interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and were transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the informants' statements. Finally, the gathered data were analyzed to formulate the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" in having romantic relationships.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

All the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. As cited by Morrow, Rodriguez, and King (2015), the seven-step method of Colaizzi (1978) in phenomenological data analysis was followed. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with all the data by reading through all the informants' transcripts several times. Second, significant statements that were directly relevant to the phenomenon being studied were identified and extracted. Third, meanings were formulated from the significant statements. The researcher ensured that during the data analysis, personal biases in beliefs were set aside, and meanings were generated only from the given data by the informants. Fourth, the formulated meanings were sorted and clustered into themes that were common across all accounts. Fifth, all themes produced were incorporated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was described. Finally, the findings were validated by the informants by verifying that the fundamental structure statements accurately captured their experiences.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of qualitative research, ethical consideration is one of the most important components. According to McLeod (2015), anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent shall be given serious consideration.

Anonymity

It means that informants' identities are unknown to the researcher (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). To protect the identity of the informants, their names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. The names and signatures on the consent forms were blotted out to maintain anonymity.

Confidentiality

It means that the identity of the informants must be kept confidential (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). To ensure confidentiality, the information given by the informants was protected by keeping it between the person and the researcher. The informants' privacy was protected, and the data were reported in a way that would not be associated with them. The documents and notes related to the informants were enclosed in an envelope and were placed in a locked room. The recorded interviews were deleted after the approval of the study.

Informed Consent

According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), the term consists of two essential elements, that is, 'informed' and 'consent', which must be given serious consideration. Thus, informants must be fully informed of what will be asked of them, how the data will be used, and what consequences there could be, if any. The informed consent included the purpose of the study, the time element, and the procedures of the study. It also contained an explanation of the voluntary involvement of the informants, which they signed before the interview was conducted. It was also explained to the informants that if they withdraw from their participation, their decision will be accepted. The risks and benefits, and the information about the researcher were explained to the informants as well. Further, the researcher wrote and asked permission from the school head of the college where my informants were studying.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Modern Practices of "Dalagang Filipina" in Having Romantic Relationships

In the interview conducted with the informants, the researcher gathered several information and thoughts from the interview. Probing questions were asked to discover the modern practices of "Dalagang Filipina" in having romantic relationships. Specifically, informants were asked for the following: how they met their boyfriend, their usual activities when dating, their ways of showing affection towards their boyfriend, the common issues and concerns they experience in their relationship, and how they maintain their romantic relationship. As shown in Table 1, five themes emerged as their modern practices in having romantic relationships, namely: utilization of online communication, active engagement in social activities, expression of love through words and actions, confrontation of issues and concerns in a relationship, and maintenance of a trusting and understanding relationship.

Table 1. Thematic Map on the Modern Practices of "Dalagang Filipina" in Having Romantic Relationships

First Theme: Utilization of online communication	Second Theme: Active engagement in social activities
Initiated through text messaging or social media before courting - Boyfriend known through text messaging then visited home to court - Get to know each other through texting and ask parents to court her. - Met through Facebook then personally met to ask father's permission - Known through Facebook, then told the guy to visit in their home and ask her family's permission Started as classmates and relationship progressed through constant online chatting - Classmates in college then developed feelings through constant chatting - Classmates in senior high school and continued their communication through chat - Classmates in senior high school then developed feelings through facebook and chatting - Classmates since first year college and developed feelings through chatting Build relationship through church activities and progress by constant communication - Met in church then continued communication online then courted online and in person - Get to know each other in a church organization then progressed through texting	Make use of fun and interesting conversation while staying at each party's place - Hang-out in their house together with her family members - Stay at home and have fun conversation with family - Bond through food and fun talks with her mother - Buy food and have fun talks in their house Go on a date with friends and/or siblings' company - Bond through swimming with siblings - Go out on group dates - Stroll in the beach with friends - Stroll in the mall and park and watch movies - Bond through movie marathon Bond by going on a trip together - They travel together in Kapatagan - They bond through food and road trips - They stroll and hike
Third Theme: Explicit expression of love through words and actions	Fourth Theme: Confrontation of issues and concerns in a relationship
Expression of affirmation messages - Saying 'I love you' when they are together - Saying 'take care' - Saying 'I love you' on the phone even when her parents are around - Saying sweet messages through chat and on video calls Show physical gesture of affection like holding hands, hugging, and kissing - They hold hands while walking - Hugs and kisses her boyfriend on the cheeks	Show expression of jealousy when engaged with others - She got jealous of other girls flirting with her boyfriend and his boyfriend got jealous of her male friends - Boyfriend got jealous of her being overly friendly with other guys - She admitted that she is a jealous person Conflict issues over past relationships - Boyfriend got jealous of her past relationship - She got jealous of her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend - Fought over her boyfriend's past relationship

• They kiss on the cheeks and lips with a smack • Boyfriend kisses her on her forehead Show love and care through deep and sincere conversation about their relationship • Shows affection during their deep talks • Through listening to his boyfriend's concerns • Through constantly reminding her boyfriend of important things Show affection by helping and caring for their partner • Takes care of her boyfriend when he got sick • Through praying for his boyfriend • She helps her boyfriend in doing academic requirements Express love through love letters and gifts • Writes love letters and gives small gifts • She gives gift on birthdays and monthary	• Repeatedly asked boyfriend about his ex-girlfriend leads to small fights Jealousy is often the cause of conflict • Boyfriend is jealous and strict which leads to conflicts • Jealousy and doubts often caused fights Boyfriend playing mobile legends become a source of conflict • She has issues with her boyfriend playing Mobile Legends • Fought over her boyfriend's going home late because of playing Mobile Legends Concerned with their boyfriends' smoking and occasional drinking • Fought when her boyfriend goes home late after drinking with friends • She has issues with her boyfriend's smoking and occasional drinking
Fifth Theme: Maintenance of trusting and understanding relationship Maintain relationship by understanding each other's differences • Understanding and being considerate with each other to avoid greater conflicts • Understanding each other's priorities Keep their relationship grow stronger by being loyal and trusting each other • Loyalty and trust with each other • Mutual trust with each other • Staying in each other's side in times of troubles and hardships Constantly pray to sustain their relationship • Pray to keep their relationship harmonious • Prayer helps them stay longer in their relationship • Relationship lasts when centered in God Initiate open and honest conversation with their boyfriend to avoid conflict • Open and honest conversation is important to resolve conflict • Know the facts and do not jump into conclusions • Open conversation helps when conflict arises Forgive, respect and show patience for their boyfriends' flaws and weaknesses to maintain their relationship • Mutual respect and being mindful of words when in anger • Forgive each other's lapses • Extend patience for one another	

Results showed that modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" use online communication as an aid in the development of their romantic relationships. Most of the informants have known their romantic partners in school and the church, but their relationship progressed as they continued communicating through texting and online chatting. They started as friends, and as they kept in touch through online communication, they learned to value each other more and developed feelings for each other. As pointed out by Murray and Campbell (2015), some relationships started in face-to-face settings and then progressed through the use of the internet to facilitate their communication and getting to know each other more. When the modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" engaged in romantic relationships, they used social media to keep their communication online even when they were apart and to stay updated on each other's activities. Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid (2015) noted that one of the common motivations for using social media is interacting with their romantic partners. It seems that exchanging passwords among romantic partners is a common practice among young people today to prove their trust and loyalty to their partners. Nonetheless, for other couples in relationships, they use the internet to monitor their partners' behaviors, including reading their partners' e-mails, text messages, and social media accounts (Murray & Campbell, 2015).

The modern "*Dalagang Filipina*" is also actively engaged in social activities such as hanging out with their boyfriends by having fun conversations in each other's houses, eating and strolling, going on a trip, and watching movies together with their family members or friends. These social gatherings and activities allow them to bond

and strengthen their relationship as they can show their affection and care for their romantic partners. This adds to their happiness and satisfaction in their relationships. This was shown in the study conducted by Jimenez (2017) that leisure activities among young people build social relations, generate positive emotions, and provide opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills, which lead to a better quality of life. Further, Jimenez (2017) added that the type of leisure a person engages with is affected by social trends and is promoted by mass media. As such, many young people watch foreign movies together and become acquainted with foreign cultures, which may lead to a decrease in religious values and decency (Nurhasanah & Nida, 2016).

Moreover, the modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* expresses love through words and actions explicitly by saying affirmation messages, and physical gestures such as holding hands, hugging, and kissing, as well as simple acts of caring, helping, and giving small gifts to their romantic partners. Young people today, including young women, are becoming more explicit in showing their affection for their special someone, unlike in traditional Filipino practices, where women were shy in speaking or showing their love for their partners. According to Karandashev (2015), the passionate words, kind tone of voice, smiling facial expression, and special gestures are explicit and direct ways of expressing love to a romantic partner. In contrast, actions and doing something good for a partner are implicit and indirect ways of expressing love. For young people today, this kind of expression of love makes them happier and satisfied with their relationships. Moreover, in a study conducted by Bland and McQueen (2018) using Chapman’s five love languages, it was found that couples who had more similarly aligned love languages were overall happier in their relationships. In contrast, persons whose love language is not fulfilled by their partners will experience overall dissatisfaction in their relationship.

In any relationship, conflict is inevitable. The modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* confronts issues and concerns in a romantic relationship, wherein the most common issue and cause of conflict is jealousy, issues about past relationships, doubts, excessive use of online games, and some vices. One of the adverse effects of technology and social media among young people, especially for romantic partners, is that it often leads to misunderstandings and jealousy. Social media allows its users to interact with other people anywhere, anytime. Thus, for a person in a romantic relationship, interacting or entertaining other persons on social media might lead to misunderstanding and jealousy of their romantic partners. A study conducted revealed that the leading causes of relationship issues among university students are excessive use of social media, misunderstanding, and mistrust (Tewatia & Kumar, 2019). Further, Costa et al. (2015) defined jealousy as a reaction to a perceived threat specific to a partner, an event, or a rival. Jealousy is found to be a significant source of relationship dissatisfaction, leading to conflicts or separation.

Finally, the modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* manages and resolves these issues through maintaining trusting and understanding relationships. They initiate open and honest conversations with their partners. They remain loyal and trusting, and they forgive, respect, and understand each other’s differences and weaknesses. Despite young people’s vulnerability, the modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* can find ways to sustain their romantic relationships. They believe that any conflict or issue can be resolved through proper communication by listening to their partners’ perspectives. In times of difficulty, they remain on each other’s side as a sign of support and help one another to resolve their concerns. In the same way, Tewatia and Kumar (2019) have also found that more effective ways to manage the relationship issues are honesty, effective communication, and mutual respect and support.

3.2 Experiences of Modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* in the Preservation of Christian Moral Values

The informants were also interviewed about their experiences in the preservation of Christian moral values. They were explicitly asked with the following: the moral values they are holding on to as Christians, specific values they practice in engaging in romantic relationships, the difficulties they experience in preserving these moral values, how they preserve these moral values while they are currently engaged in a romantic relationship, and their insights in preserving Christian moral values in this modern times. Shown in Table 2 are the four themes elicited from their responses: firm belief in the preservation of chastity, engagement in church activities to strengthen moral values, practice of self-discipline and consistency, conflict with moral values, and environmental pressure.

Despite the reported cases of an increasing rate of premarital sexual activity among young individuals today, the modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* firmly believes in the preservation of chastity. Contrary to what Cordero, Jr. (2018) claimed, chastity seemed to be taken for granted by Filipino youth; the modern *“Dalagang Filipina”* believes that engaging in sexual activities before marriage is an offense against God. For them, preserving their virginity is a

moral value they hold on to as Christians and is a sign of self-respect. As reported by the UNFPA (2016), many young people, particularly those with strong religious beliefs, will only engage in sexual activities when they get married. The act of preserving their virginity until marriage is a representation of their obedience to God's laws postulated in the Divine Command theory (Jung, 2020). These young individuals make the Bible their standard of living.

Table 2. *Thematic Map on the Experiences of Modern "Dalagang Filipina" in the Preservation of Christian Moral Values*

First Theme: Firm belief in the preservation of chastity	Second Theme: Engagement in church activities to strengthen moral values
Believe that sex before marriage is an offense against God's teachings - Engaging in pre-marital sex is an offense against God - Engaging in sexual activities outside marriage is a sin before God - Does not want to get pregnant before marriage - No sexual intercourse before marriage Preserve their virginity as a moral value they are holding on to as Christians - Preservation of virginity is very important because you cannot undo things - Preservation of self as a virgin is a form of self-respect as a Christian - Stand firm in the preservation of Christian moral values - She stands on her principles and she will live by it.	Prayers keep their faith and acts of preservation of purity - Always pray to God for guidance and far from temptation - Pray to God not to commit fornication - Believe in God and the power of prayer - Prayer helps in the preservation of values Read the Bible and listen to the preaching of God's words to be reminded of and abide in them - Read the Bible to be reminded that sexual activities can be done after marriage - Listening to the preaching of God's words can reach our hearts - Pastor's preaching reminds us not to engage in sexual activities Serve in the church and participate in the church activities to strengthen their principles in preserving moral values - Her mind was opened to what is right and wrong when she started serving in the church - Believe she can conquer any difficulty when she serves in the church - Bible sharing and other activities is a great help to be reminded of what is wrong - Continue to serve God despite her imperfections
Third Theme: Practice of self-discipline and consistency	Fourth Theme: Conflicting moral values and social pressures
Self-control and by setting boundaries - Control themselves to avoid getting into intimate moments - Advice from parents can help in maintaining self-control - Boundaries are set in their relationship - They do not go beyond kissing and touching Avoid exposure to media with explicit sexual content - Avoid movies and wattpads containing intimate scenes - Scandal videos circulating in the internet should be avoided - Romantic movies with bed scenes shall be avoided Restrict themselves when in the house of boyfriend - Does not enter in her boyfriend's room - Visit her boyfriend's house when his parents and siblings are around Abide in their parents' teachings, reminders and rules to keep their moral values intact - Follow her mother's restriction not to go out with her boyfriend often - Listen to her father's reminders to do what is right - Her mother's faith and principles have great influence in her preservation of Christian moral values Saying No to boyfriend's sexual request - Saying no to boyfriend's request to have sex with him since this is not a requirement for a relationship to grow - Refuse when boyfriend insists on deep kiss to avoid getting more intimate actions - By saying no to her boyfriend, she keeps herself free from regrets	Challenged regulating themselves when influenced with conflicting values - Encounter difficulty when her boyfriend insists in engaging sexual activities - Should overcome friends' suggestions to give herself to her boyfriend so that he will not leave her - Temptation is difficult to resist Knowing the peers to identify themselves with to prevent threats to morality - Avoids peers with vices to remain in the right track - Should not hang out with other youth with vices - Young people's choice of friends affects their morality

Moreover, the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” strengthens their preservation of Christian moral values through their engagement in church activities. They believe that by reading the Bible and listening to God’s preaching, they will be reminded of what is right and what is wrong. Also, they strongly believe in the importance of prayer to keep their faith and acts intact in preserving purity. Moreover, by serving in the church, their principles in preserving moral values are strengthened. According to Donahue (1995), religion acts as a source of resilience and compels people not to engage in promiscuous behavior. Many young people took part in the activity conducted by church leaders, wherein they made virginity pledges to abstain from sexual activities before marriage. However, it was found that pledging is effective only for individuals who are deeply rooted in their religious beliefs and values and is found ineffective for those who have low religious commitment (Montemayor, 2019).

Further, to preserve Christian moral values, the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” practices self-discipline and consistency. In this highly modernized era, there are many new concepts and practices introduced through social media, which have brought drastic changes to our values and are contradictory to our Christian faith and beliefs. These young women impose discipline on themselves so that they will not be persuaded to conform to these new practices. As pointed out by Gozum (2020), modernization widens a person’s knowledge, awareness, and freedom of choice, which has also led to the rise of premarital sex and single parenting among young people. Moreover, according to Coletto et al. (2016), social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, paved the way for easy access to pornography. That is why the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” avoids exposure to media with explicit sexual content and restricts themselves to doing things that might lead to sexually desirable activities.

Furthermore, the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” abides by their parents’ teachings, reminders, and rules to keep their moral values intact. Their parents’ words and actions have a substantial impact on their choices, as they believe their parents only want what is best for them. That is why they listen to their parents’ suggestions and advice when making their own decisions. According to Bandura, through positive modeling, people learn (Cherry, 2019). Their parents serve as their role models in terms of their faithfulness and service to the church. As an example, some of the informants’ parents are actively engaged in church activities and assume responsibilities in their churches. Consequently, the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” is also encouraged to join in church gatherings and activities, as well as take on responsibilities within the church.

The modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” has also experienced conflict and environmental pressure in the preservation of Christian moral values. They experienced challenges in preserving their purity when their boyfriends asked to get more intimate in their relationship, and when other people told them to give everything to their boyfriends so that they would not leave. In order to overcome these challenges, the modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” firmly declines their boyfriend’s requests and identifies with peers who uphold similar values. As stated by Ushatikova et al. (2018), young people’s spirituality is currently going through a crisis when, instead of the actual values being imposed on them, they are exposed to values that are harmful to their well-being. Consequently, one of the ten modern “*Dalagang Filipina*” who participated in this study admitted her weakness over the sexual act when she had given her virginity to her boyfriend. Despite her failure, a modern “*Dalagang Filipina*”, who firmly believed in God’s unconditional love, repented and asked God’s forgiveness, and once again, committed herself to serving the church. As pointed out by Davidson and Carlin (2019), young people in this modern-day society are increasingly active in constructing their life chances, wherein they learn to become resilient by overcoming challenging experiences that strengthen their capacity to stand firm despite the consequences of their choices.

3.3 Practices that can be Integrated into the Guidance Program in the Preservation of Christian Moral Values among Youth

The informants were also asked what interventions can be done to preserve Christian moral values among the youth. The following questions were asked of the informants: how the school and the family can strengthen the preservation of Christian moral values among young people, what specific activities they think young people of today mostly need, and what they can suggest to the parents and school administrators to assist students in preserving Christian moral values. Presented in Table 3 were the emerging themes from the informants’ responses: collaboration between home and school, and activities on spiritual and moral values formation.

In order to help young people preserve their Christian moral values, there must be collaboration between home and school wherein counselors, teachers, and parents coordinate in assisting with the students’ needs. The parents’ role is to guide and discipline their children at home continually. Teachers, on the other hand, act as second parents in school by reminding the students about moral values through their class discussions. Likewise, school

counselors work hand-in-hand with the parents in assisting and guiding students in their decision-making. Villegas (2016) firmly believed that there is no substitute for a real education in chastity, an affirmation of authentic love, imparted first and foremost by parents. Moreover, teachers serve as role models for students and as guides in their values education; they also have the task of creating a suitable environment for students' development (Ulavere & Veisson, 2015). In the same way, school counselors help identify students' problems, which is vital in counseling, and then conduct evaluations of the students' progress as a basis for follow-ups (Nurhasanah & Nida, 2016).

Table 3. *Thematic Map on the Interventions That Can be Integrated into the Guidance Program in the Preservation of Christian Moral Values Among Youth*

First Theme: Collaboration between home and school	Second Theme: Activities on spiritual and moral values formation
Parents as the first teachers of their children should not stop teaching, guiding, and disciplining them to preserve the moral values instilled to them. • Parents should not stop guiding their children especially when they are in a romantic relationship. • They are the first teachers of their children of what is right and wrong. • They are responsible in correcting their children's actions. • They should be reasonable and clear in the rules they set for their children. Parents should spend quality time with their children and encourage open and honest conversation. • Parents should initiate conversation with their children. • They should give time and attention to their children. • Parents should balance their time for work and attention for their children. • They should maintain open conversation to strengthen their relationship with their children. Parents should also lead their children closer to God • Parents should guide their children closer to God. • They should share God's words to their children. Teachers as reinforcers of moral values formation of students • Teachers as second parents should remind their students of right values and how to preserve them. • They should also discipline and teach moral values to students. Coordination among counselors, teachers, and parents to provide assistance to students • Guidance Counselors and teachers should have one-on-one talk with students. • Counselors assist young people and can call parents' attention to help their children in resolving their issues. Integration of moral values to lessons in class • Teachers should include topics on moral values during class discussions. • School should offer subjects related to moral values preservation. • Subjects taught in school must be integrated with values preservation.	Trained peer facilitators in schools are of great help for students to listen to their problems and concerns. • The school should train peer helpers to listen to students' concerns. • Trained peer facilitators can help in counseling students. • Peer counselling can help young people in their decision-making. Conduct seminars focused on moral values formation • The school should facilitate seminars and symposiums on moral values preservation. • Symposiums orient students on how to impose discipline on themselves. • Seminars on strengthening young people's preservation of Christian moral values. Initiate activities to reinforce spiritual formation of students • Bible sharing can help students preserve moral values • Prayer meetings also help students' preservation of Christian moral values The school should also facilitate team building activities where students are given time to have fun and reflect. • Youth camping can help students regain their strength and have time for spiritual development. • Youth camping where young people can reflect and realign their thoughts • Team building activities help students have fun and learn values at the same time.

Furthermore, informants suggested that schools may initiate activities on spiritual and moral values formation, such as seminars or symposiums for young people to participate in. They further suggested that schools train peer facilitators who can assist guidance counselors in listening and counseling students who have difficulty opening up to their teachers or guidance counselors. Finally, based on a Barna survey conducted in 2016, results showed that 54 percent of young people stated that reading the bible brings them closer to God. Thus, informants acknowledged the importance of student organizations that conduct bible sharing and prayer sessions in the school. According to Holdeman (2019), youth groups lead to the spiritual development of young people and may

bring men and women to become faithful servants in the church.

4.0 Conclusion

This study explored the preservation of Christian moral values among modern “Dalagang Filipina” as they engage in romantic relationships. The modern “Dalagang Filipina” has shown that young people can be responsible enough in engaging in romantic relationships without compromising their moral values and principles by setting limitations to their practices and activities. The modern “Dalagang Filipina” upholds their Christian moral values while engaging in romantic relationships, standing firm in their beliefs to preserve chastity, imposing self-discipline, and setting limitations in their relationships to avoid tempting situations. Contrary to what most people believe, that young people’s minds are already corrupted by modernization and technology, there are still young individuals who uphold their Christian faith and preserve their moral values.

Despite the effort to provide sufficient information to make my study scholarly, limitations were found in the study. Due to the pandemic, the informants were only ten female students from one Tertiary school in Davao del Sur. They were selected since they are living in the nearest area where the study was conducted due to the strict implementation of travel orders from different local government units. With the restrictions on face-to-face interaction, the researcher opted to ask permission from one tertiary school for me to conduct the study. This limits the generalizability of the results of this study. Further, this study focused only on the practices and experiences of modern “Dalagang Filipina” in their preservation of Christian moral values in having romantic relationships. This study was not able to explore the informants’ beliefs and motivations for engaging in romantic relationships, as well as their reasons for choosing their partners. Also, the researcher was not able to gather information about the school’s interventions that the informants initially received before this study began.

The results of the study would bring a significant impact to school administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, students, parents, young people, and future researchers. School administrators can reinforce the spiritual and moral value formation among young people. Since the school is considered the second home of the students, the policies and activities to be implemented are aimed at the holistic development, such as allowing students to have student organizations for peer counseling, Bible sharing, and prayer sessions. For guidance counselors, the study implies that they can help the students preserve moral values through conducting seminars or symposiums that address moral values and spiritual formation. Teachers can reinforce the value formation of the students. This implies that they can continue to instill moral values among students by integrating them into their class discussions. Students are responsible for their choices and decisions in life. This study implies that they can be more open to their parents and ask for their help before making decisions for themselves, and apply what they were taught in school about moral values in their day-to-day living. For young people who have experienced and witnessed various societal changes, the study implies that they should choose their peers and romantic partners carefully and become more reflective on their actions for their future lives. For parents, their role in the lives of their children is never-ending. The study implies that parents’ attention is vital in keeping their children on the right track. Based on the results of this study, parents can initiate open conversations with their children regularly and encourage their children to attend church activities to support their spiritual and moral development.

For future researchers who would also look into the experiences and practices of young people today, this study may offer some information about the lives of young people, particularly young women. They may also focus on the beliefs and motivations of the young women in engaging romantic relationships, as well as their reasons for choosing their partners.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis
Author 2: conceptualization, proposal writing, data analysis

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in the process of writing the research paper.

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