

The Portrayal of Solo Parents in Sibling Conflict Resolution in Selected Filipino Movies

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Abstract: Filipinos are known to have close family ties, but the family dynamic is different in families with solo parents. Solo parents are always at the receiving end of discriminatory remarks from their family members and their neighbors. They face the struggle of managing sibling conflicts when they carry the burden of managing their household alone. Further studies have shown that dealing with sibling conflicts in a solo-parent household is challenging. Interestingly, some Filipino movies are depicting solo-parent households featuring sibling conflicts, such as *Four Sisters and a Wedding* and *Seven Sundays*, which will be the focus of the paper. This research aims to answer these questions: what are the roles and personalities of solo parents in the movies?; and how does the personality of solo parents in the movies help in solving sibling conflicts in their respective households? The researcher will be using thematic analysis by analyzing the behaviors and dialogues of Grace and Manuel throughout the movie. This paper recommends further studies investigating other Filipino movies related to solo parents and how this setup affected the rearing of their sons and daughters, comparing *Four Sisters and a Wedding* and *Seven Sundays* to other Filipino movies on solo parenting produced at least 20 years ago, and comparing Filipino movies to other Asian movies related to solo parenting.

Keywords: Filipino family; Solo parents; Thematic analysis; Sibling conflict; Representation; Filipino movie

Introduction

Filipinos are known to have close family ties. It is one of the defining characteristics of Filipino culture because Filipinos consider their family as the “center of the universe” (Medina, 2001; Jocano, 1998). According to Alampay (2014), Filipino parents are persons in authority whom children are expected to respect. They also personify strictness in the household because they have the responsibility of rearing the child with necessary values. In the parenting style, it can be argued that Filipino parents are authoritative, meaning they exercise “high [on] warmth, moderate on discipline, high in communication, and moderate in [the] expression of maturity” (Niaraki & Rahimi, 2012, p.3)

Sociologist Belen Medina (2001) identified in her book, *The Filipino Family*, how members of

the family interact with each other. In the parent-sibling relation, it was said that parents and their children have a strong filial bond. Parents provide everything to sustain the needs of their children. At the same time, they have the moral obligation to teach them values for their future. In return, children must love, obey, and respect their parents. For sibling relations, mutual respect must be exercised for each one of them.

Solo Parents in the Philippines and their Experiences in their Households

The dynamics of a family may have changed from the point of view of the solo parents, which has a significant number in the country. In the report of Lopez and San Juan (2019) on the economic status and livelihood prospects of solo parents in Catanduanes, as of 2017, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) recorded 14

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million solo parents out of 94 million population. Out of 15.1 million households that the DSWD reached, they reported that there are 1.8 million households that have solo parent members.

Medina (2001) also enumerated the following points that she believes for one to be considered a solo parent:

- widow or widower and their child/children;
- single man or woman and their child/children;
- separated parents and their child/children;
- unwed woman and her child/children; and
- mistress and his/her child/children by a married man.

Nevertheless, they are protected by the Republic Act 8972, or the Solo Parent's Welfare Act of 2000. This law enshrines the protection of solo parents and their child/children by giving them benefits (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2008). Since solo parents assume the responsibility of taking care of the family on their child or children, this law will help them lessen their burden.

Unfortunately, solo parents are at the receiving end of stereotypes. Senator Tito Sotto once described former Social Welfare and Development Secretary Judy Taguiwalo, who is also a solo parent, during a meeting, as "in the street language, when you have children and you are single, *ang tawag doon ay na-ano lang*." (Valencia, 2017). In addition, the study of Garcia et al (2021) on the lived experience of solo parents during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal that the challenges solo parents brought are the following: providing for the needs of their child, receiving discriminatory remarks, and rearing their child alone. The said study revealed that rumors about the family, especially when the couple had broken up, were the common gossip in their neighborhoods.

It is also interesting to observe how solo parents deal with sibling conflict. Soriano & Castronuevo (2015) examined the experiences of solo mothers on how those solo mothers deal with this concern alone. It was floated that they still fulfill the role of being a parent by solving the said conflict through negotiation, but one respondent said that she was in pain seeing them in conflict, considering that she alone works for her family. However, some authors argue that the relationship of siblings in a solo-parent setup is much tighter than that of a two-parent household. Peverley (2021) and Overlock

(2017) reported that less sibling rivalry is recorded in a solo-parent household primarily due to their added responsibility of taking care of themselves without depending much on their parent. I argue that this condition applies much to the families living in the upper classes of society, as those solo parent households who are in the lower classes of society often face financial struggles in their families.

Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) also floated in their study that the role of single mothers, in particular, is much more difficult because of the additional burden of managing her family alone. Compared with the study by Lopez and San Juan (2019), the common problems solo parents experience is usually financial, followed by difficulty in managing the time for their child or baby. Because of these concerns, solo parents experience emotional tension, as they reported that they felt lonely, hopeless, and helpless primarily due to financial constraints (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009).

Representation of Solo Parents in Media

Tawil (2019) provided the basic definition of representation in media (such as in movies) as "simply how media, such as television, film, and books, portray certain types of people or communities". Representation is important for marginalized sectors because it depicts their situation and their struggles. According to May (2018), that representation is important so that their story is told to a greater population. Accurate representation of their struggle in the media is essential because it is a powerful tool to bring their message to the larger people, hoping to stop perpetuating stereotypes attributed to them. In this context, solo parents, being part of the marginalized sector of the society, must be represented and portrayed accurately in the media so that the message of their struggles will come across clearly to the audience.

There are several movies in the Philippines that feature the struggles of solo parents. Among the list is the film series featuring Ina Montecillo (Ai-ai Delas Alas) entitled *Ang Tanging Ina* (2003), *Ang Tanging Ina Niyong Lahat* (2008), and *Ang Tanging Ina Mo, Last Na Ito* (2010). These three movies by Wenn Deramas generally depict Ina who tries her best to make the ends meet for her 12 children while raising them alone. Included also is the movie by Rory Quintos entitled *Anak* (2000). It narrates the experiences of a solo parent named Josie (Vilma

Santos) who works as a domestic helper overseas in mending her relationship with Carla (Claudine Baretto), who saw her work overseas as an act of abandonment to her family. These two movies show the everyday struggle of raising a family on their own.

Method

This paper hopes to describe how solo parents solve sibling conflict in a typical Filipino household and how it is portrayed in selected Filipino movies. Hence, the researcher utilized a qualitative approach to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the roles and personalities of solo parents in the movies?; and (2) how does the personality of solo parents in the movies help in solving sibling conflicts in their respective household?

The researcher watched two movies on YouTube, namely *Four Sisters and a Wedding* (2013) and *Seven Sundays* (2017). These two movies are available on the Star Cinema's Official YouTube channel, so no additional money was spent. In addition, those two movies are mainstream films that revolve around sibling conflict in a solo-parent household. Moreover, they also became box office hits when they were shown in cinemas nationwide. *Four Sisters* garnered a total of ₱145 million, while *Seven Sundays* got ₱271 million.

Four Sisters and a Wedding tackles how the four Salazar daughters Teddie (Toni Gonzaga), Bobbie (Bea Alonzo), Alex (Angel Locsin), and Gabbie (Shaina Magdayao) plan to cancel the wedding of their youngest sibling, CJ/Rebreb (Enchong Dee) because of their disapproval to be paired with his girlfriend named Princess (Angeline Quinto). Meanwhile, *Seven Sundays* revolves around how the siblings, namely Allan (Aga Muhlach), Bryan (Dingdong Dantes), Cha (Cristine Reyes), and Dexter (Enrique Gil) spend their last seven weeks with their father who was mistakenly diagnosed with lung cancer.

The paper will focus on the dialogue and behavior of a solo mother named Grace Salazar (Coney Reyes) and a solo father named Manuel Bonifacio (Ronaldo Valdez) in *Four Sisters and a Wedding* and *Seven Sundays*, respectively. Their acting and words uttered in different scenes will be compared and interpreted using available pieces of literature. Hence, the paper will be qualitative, and the mode of analysis will be thematic. This tool is

used to identify patterns in certain qualitative data such as interviews (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In this case, the overarching ideas derived from selected scenes in these two movies will be the point of discussion throughout the paper.

Results and Discussion

Roles and Personalities of Solo Parents in the Movies

The roles of the solo parents revealed in the two movies are the following: protector of the family; communicator/channel among their children; and counselor of their sons and daughters. Apart from sibling conflict, there are some scenes where Grace and Manuel defended their respective family against mean remarks from other people to their sons and daughters. In *Four Sisters and a Wedding*, Grace had to remain a poised figure when Jeanette (Carmi Martin), Princess' mother, gave discriminatory remarks against Teddie, who labeled her as a maid in Spain and black sheep of the family. While Jeanette is still inside the Salazar's residence, Grace defended Teddie by: "*wala kang karapatan na pagtawanan o insultuhin ang kahit sinuman sa mga anak ko.*" (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2022). On the other hand, Manuel defended his family when Mr. Kim (Ryan Bang) attempted to steal the scene during the relaunch program of the ABCD Store owned by the Bonifacio family. Mr. Kim attempted to buy the store lot to build his business named KSP. However, he failed to do so because ABCD Store was made better due to the help of the Bonifacio siblings. These proved that the solo parents need to be strong for their family, or else their family might break apart.

Meanwhile, the involvements and realizations made by Grace Salazar and Manuel Bonifacio in settling sibling conflicts also revealed the differences in their personality.

In *Four Sisters and a Wedding*, Grace guided the daughters on how they should solve their problems on their own. In a dinner scene with the whole family, the Salazar siblings discussed how the wedding of CJ/Rebreb and Princess will go. Because of the personal attacks of the siblings on each other, CJ left the scene and Grace intercepted and said: "*Si CJ pa ba ang pinag-uusapan? Lahat kayo may punto pero yung dapat makarinig, nag-walk out na. Ayusin niyo iyan.*" (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2022).

As the movie progresses, the insecurities among the daughters were slowly being shown to the point that these insecurities became the point of contention during a family gathering with Princess' family. This particular instance revealed the reason behind the personality of the Salazar siblings in the movie: why Teddie and CJ are the "favorite siblings", Gabbie has maternal instinct, Alex is wise, and Bobbie has effective communication skills. In this part, Grace assured the siblings of her undying love for them by telling them that she loved them all the same way. It can be inferred that it would be difficult for Grace to see them in conflict, especially since he has no partner to lean on in these trying times. It is also worth noting that Grace remained tough and strong for her family, similar to the experiences of other solo parents.

On the other hand, the situation is somehow different in *Seven Sundays*, when Manuel's vulnerability was very evident. There was a moment when Bry and Allan fought during the basketball match. It was simply a friendly game, but it turned out to be an exchange of personal attacks on each other. Manuel meddled during the confrontation, telling them to simply "kill each other" (*magpatayan na lang kayo*). After that, he expressed his sadness to his caretaker and nephew, Jun, saying that given he only had seven weeks left before he dies, he could not accept leaving them in conflict. To quote,

[D]i naman ako nagagalit eh. Nag-aalala ako. Iwanan ko ba mga anak ko nang ganyan? Isipin mo, ngayon pa lang, 'di na sila magkasundo-sundo, paano 'pag wala na ako? Oh Marie (his wife), sana ikaw na lang nandito. Sigurado ako, mas alam niya [Marie] ang gagawin. (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2021)

Given their old age, Grace and Manuel did not stop helping and guiding their sons and daughters in deciding what is best for them. They still let the siblings talk with each other by not imposing their beliefs on them. In the study of Garcia et al (2021) in his survey on solo parents in Bulacan, it was revealed that parents are non-restrictive (meaning they remain neutral and open) by communicating with them about what was wrong with their actions because they believe children will understand it.

This is aligned with the changes in family dynamics described by Medina (2001). She mentioned that the Filipino family and society

shifted from traditional kinship to a modernized one. In a traditional sense, the needs of society define one's personality while the modernized one is its opposite, where one's personality is personal. Hence, during the confrontation of Grace's and Manuel's children in the movies, it was shown that their children's personalities become dominant while their respective parents did not impose their behavior in terms of decision-making.

Solo Parents' Realizations in the Movies

The two solo parents under investigation in the movies manifested one thing: someone who has *pusong mamon* (soft heart). They always want the best for their family. At the same time, because they carry the burden of being a father and a mother at the same time, the responsibility of being a father and a mother becomes blurry. The supposedly strict father showed his vulnerability in front of his children. The mother, who is supposedly caring and nurturing, showed his strictness upon reprimanding the behavior of her children. This shift in the character of the father and the mother reflects the reality that gender roles may have transformed into a modernized one. This is also related to the data gathered by Arbiol and Labial (2019) that among the parents they surveyed, it turned out that solo fathers tend to be more authoritative than authoritarian, unlike before when they are authoritarian (high control with low warmth). In the case of solo mothers, they remain to be authoritative. Similarly, in an interview conducted by Soriano and Castronuevo (2015) about solo mothers, it appeared that because of their caring nature, giving them parental advice is the best way of conflict resolution among siblings.

In addition, in the movie, though it was not explicitly mentioned, after the confrontation of their sons and daughters, Grace and Manuel admitted that their shortcomings as parents may be the cause of the conflicts among the siblings. Grace's treatment of her children becomes a contention among themselves for saying that she has favorites. With that, Grace apologized to them and echoed his role as a mother. Grace said while crying: "I'm sorry *kung may pagkukulang man ako sa inyo*. ... I am not perfect, but I am your mother. And I will always love you the best way I know how [sic]." (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2022). After uttering these words, the siblings finally hugged their mother and apologized to each other.

On the other hand, Manuel's admission to his bereaved wife about his lack of parenting skills may be the reason why his children fight with each other. To quote him:

Kasalanan ko eh. Kasi, nagsinungaling ako sa kanila. Actually, alam mo, andami kong pagkukulang sa kanila. Ikaw naman kasi, iniwan mo agad eh. Ang aga-aga. Tapos di mo man lang ako tinuruan kung paano maging nanay sa kanila kaya ayan ang nangyari, palpak tuloy ako! (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2021)

Their children are willing to forgive their parents despite having so many shortcomings on the part of their parents. Because at the end of the day, those parents consider their children as their treasure. In *Seven Sundays*, Manuel even added these lines when his sons and daughters approached him after talking to the grave of his deceased wife: "Sa lahat ng pagkakamali ko, Kayo ang tamang nangyari sa buhay ko. Kaya aalis ako, masaya ako. Alam ko kasi kaya niyo na." (ABS-CBN Star Cinema, 2021).

Because of these scenes, the siblings had finally forgiven each other, ending the conflict between them. In the scenes that followed, it was seen that the siblings had finally supported each other. This time, in *Four Sisters and a Wedding*, the Salazars siblings came to the rescue when Alex discovered that his husband, Chad (Bernard Palanca) was cheating on her. While in *Seven Sundays*, Bry helped Allan in managing the store, Allan, Bry, and Dex helped fix Cha's damaged sink after she drove his husband, Jerry (Kean Cipriano) out of their house after discovering he was also cheating on her, and Allan, Dex, and Cha accompanied Bry while meeting with his broken family

These scenes proved Medina's (2001) claims that one's loyalty is through their family than other institutions in the society. At the end of the day, they identify themselves as members of the family first than anyone else, making the family the "center of the universe".

Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, *Four Sisters and a Wedding* and *Seven Sundays* highlighted two different households with solo parents. These two movies reflect that, given they do not have fathers or mothers, close

family ties still exist in Filipino homes. The portrayal of a family in a solo-parent household is seen in the two movies, especially in how the characters were able to handle one family problems – which is sibling conflict – on their own.

In line with this, the paper recommends further studies involving other Filipino movies related to solo parenting, especially how this setup affected the rearing of their sons and daughters. They may also compare *Four Sisters and a Wedding* and *Seven Sundays* to past movies released at least 20 years ago to see whether the depiction of solo parents is different from the past years. Lastly, future research may shed light on solo parents in the Philippines and other Asian countries by comparing movies related to solo parenting and seeing how family dynamics are different in the Philippines and other Asian countries.

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