

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Understanding the Broader Horizon of Sexual Encounter: A Case Study on Sexual Engagement Among Filipino Teens

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**Abstract:** The sexual morality of Filipino teenagers is in great decline based on the many cases of unwanted pregnancy, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD), liberality in sexual behaviors, and many other evident consequences. This is a very important concern for many families, school administrators, church authorities, and other involved institutions. With this unfortunate situation, it is easier to judge how our teens have immersed themselves in the river of sexual immorality. But the question is, do we really understand what led them to commit such an unacceptable act in this traditional Christian-dominated culture like ours? Have we scrutinized all the possible factors beginning from their childhood up to their current age which may have contributed to their sexual engagement? This case study will present the personal testimonies of teens/participants about the crisis that they have been through which are very much connected to their sexual debut. Their experiences will be analyzed by determining the recurrent themes and finding their connections to one another in order to identify the root causes of their early sexual engagement. Based from their experiences, future researchers can formulate frameworks that can address effectively this moral issue and enable teens to make a wise and responsible sexual decision not only for themselves but also for the future generations of teens to come.

**Keywords:** sexual engagement, culture, experiences, virtues, community

Sexual engagement among Filipino teens is one of the hot topics when issues on morality is talked about. In the words of Dr. Bernardo Villegas (2011, par. 1), it is taken for granted that chastity is an old-fashioned virtue that young people can no longer practice because of the sexually permissive environment in which they live. This basically means that their culture has a big influence on their sexual decisions. This is possibly one

of the reasons why teens who are not supervised by their parents, which include those cases of belonging to broken families and those working abroad (OFWs), are more likely or prone to doing it. One notable research has identified poor parental relationship as one of the major causes of early sexual debut both by male and female teens (Price & Hyde, 2009, p. 1059) while another referred to deviant peer behavior or

popularly known as peer pressure (Hipwell, Keenan, Loeber, & Battista, 2010, p. 366) as a contributory factor. Other notable causes also point to the influence of social media, pornography, and other modern forms of avenues where teens interact. These sample causes and those other unidentified ones can simply bring us to a kind of judgment that teens are indeed facing tough challenges when it comes to their moral decisions. But in order to understand why our teens behave that way, let us set aside our judgment and look deeper and place ourselves into the most personal experience of these young adults. As what was given emphasis by de Irala et al., “in order to achieve a change among teens’ sexual behavior, an important step is to improve our knowledge about their opinions concerning relationships, love and sexuality” (2009, p. 282). Being aware of their personal stories will give us a reconstruction of their own world and will help us determine the important elements that enabled them to make that decision of engaging in sex.

## Review of Literature

Before knowing the causes of sexual engagement of the participants based on their experiences, it is but appropriate to present first selected literature that gives justification to this claim of decline in morality. These studies are associated mainly with the issue of early sexual engagement or premarital sex and its different consequences.

The Philippine government-commissioned Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS) provides a comprehensive information on the sexual perceptions of teens in the country (Demographic Research and Development Foundation & University of the Philippines Population Institute, 2014). It is a series of cross-sectional surveys on the Filipino youth aged 15–24 conducted since 1982 up to 2013 (latest). It is also the only survey of young people that covers both the national and regional level. A total sample size of 19,178 young adults and 10 survey instruments are used in this study. Findings reveal that in the whole country, one out of three teens has already engaged in pre-marital sex (PMS) by the time, that is from 17.8% in 1994 to 32.2% in 2013 (p. 12). The synthesized results of the entire study showed a significant increase

regarding the sexual activity of the youth. But in spite of the prevalent case of PMS, majority of them do not feel they have adequate knowledge about sex. Only 27.4% overall say they have enough knowledge about sex. This is the reason why many of them resort to the information available on the Internet for curiosity sake. Another study by Crisostomo and Jimenez (2009) was administered to selected students of an institution in Metro Manila. The primary objective is to determine if perception on PMS is correlated with adolescents’ concept of marriage and also to find out the opinion of young individuals on reasons about their engagement to PMS and cohabitation. The authors concluded that adolescents now consider PMS and sexual activities as normal behavior. It is also believed to be socially acceptable even if many still do not approve it. It is a fact that a significantly increasing number of youths have already experienced sex and participated in sexual activities at an early age and this trend is expected to even increase in the future (Crisostomo & Jimenez, 2009, p. 131). De Jose (2013) conducted another related study to describe the sexual attitudes and behaviors of a cohort of adolescents, ages 15–24 years old from a large state university in Manila. His total sample size of 1,412 revealed high percentages for both male and female adolescents who still value virginity. However, male masturbation, necking, and holding hands and kissing were found to be acceptable. Results likewise indicated an increase in adolescents who engaged in PMS over time, although generally low (27.7%) compared to the findings of other studies. Of those who have engaged in PMS, 80% did not use a condom, which puts the adolescents into risks of unplanned pregnancy and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

In relation to teenage pregnancy, Van der Hor (2014, par. 1) reported that the Philippines is on track toward a full-blown, national teenage pregnancy crisis. The data was gathered from the 2014 National Summit on Teen Pregnancy. This claim is supported by its reference to the data from the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA) which in turn revealed that every hour, 24 babies are delivered by teenage mothers (National Statistics Office, 2011). The summit, which is actively participated by the Filipino youth, delivered a clear message: Adolescent sexual and

reproductive health (ASRH), or the lack thereof, is fast becoming the defining issue of this generation of young Filipinos. The widespread increase in the cases of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is also associated with this moral decline. Ilas (2017, par. 1) obtained the data from the Department of Health (DOH) which reveals that in April 2017, 629 persons, most of whom are millennials, were diagnosed with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). This is more than 80% or 513 of those diagnosed with the virus belong to the 15 to 34 age group. Aang Tayo Party-list Representative Neil Abayon said that “these figures are clear proof our country needs better education of the Filipino youth on how they care for their sexual health” (Ilas, 2017, par. 7. Another interesting literature is the recent data released by *Pornhub.com* which is considered as the world’s biggest porn site. According to the report, for the fourth straight year, statistics show that Filipinos spend the most time on the site in 2017 (Gonzales, 2018). Gonzales added that Filipinos spent 13 minutes and 28 seconds on the average, representing a 43-second increase from the previous year’s results, which coincides with the 23-second increase to the global average of 9 minutes and 59 seconds. The Philippines’ average visiting time is higher by around 3 1/2 minutes than the global average. Data from the report was gathered from around 28.5 billion site visits in 2017, with the site averaging 81 million daily average visits worldwide.

The various literature supports the claim that the country is indeed in an alarming situation regarding the moral status of teens. It is proper to look for solutions for this problem to at least minimize its negative effect to society in general. The initial stage of addressing it is to look deeper into their personal stories in order to find out the root causes of how they were able to make such a decision. From this point, we can formulate ways of coming up with a framework that is rooted from their very own experiences and that will really be relevant for them.

## Methods

This research utilizes a case study methodology about the practice of premarital sex engagement among four Filipino teens who voluntarily submitted

themselves for interview sessions individually. A case study is a presentation of a story about something unique, special, or interesting—stories can be about individuals, organizations, processes, programs, neighborhoods, institutions, and even events (Yin, 2003, p. 14). It is an all-encompassing method, including design, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Case studies are appropriate when there is an interesting moral or social issue to be discussed. This approach is often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a better picture of what happened in the development of the issue and why (Neale, Thapa, & Boyce, 2006, p. 4). There are several techniques that are commonly used in a case study research that will generate information for data collection and analysis. Some of these qualitative techniques are semi-structured interviews, participant observation, diaries, and personal views regarding a topic or official documents like case notes, clinical notes, and appraisal reports.

The participants of this research were selected based on purposive sampling. The criteria for purposive sampling include: 1) ages 18 to 21 years old, 2) two males and two females, 3) Roman Catholics, 4) all must be in a romantic relationship and had sexual experience already, and 5) belonging to either poor/lower and middle-upper families with regard to their economic status. The participants were assigned with code names to keep their identity a secret and were not forced to answer questions or talk about anything that will make them feel uncomfortable. All their responses were kept confidential. The following is the list of the four participants/interviewees in their respective codes:

Participant # 1: FMC19 (Female Middle Class 19)

Participant # 2: MMC21 (Male Middle Class 21)

Participant # 3: FP20 (Female Poor 20)

Participant # 4: MP18 (Male Poor 18)

For the data gathering, the participants and their parents were asked to sign the informed consent and parents’ consent forms, respectively. I explained thoroughly the content of these forms and conducted a semi-structured in-depth interview. I had a checklist of flexible topic areas or questions and used a tool which is adapted and modified from Smith and Denton (2004,

pp. 6–19) The intention is to get the informants to talk in their own terms, hence, questions tend not to be too specific allowing for a range of possible responses. The questions are not asked in any given order, rather they are asked in a way that develops the (usually one-way) conversation. The questions are designed to get the respondent talking about specific areas that the interviewer wants to know about. Their answers were transcribed verbatim and were reconstructed right after the session so as not to possibly exclude significant data. In this process, the interviewer had ensured that the topic list is covered in a way that best suits each case (Harvey, 2012, par. 1–3). Sensitivity is also cautiously applied for the openness and protection of the participants.

The interview was done in two to three sessions. I actually interviewed eight participants but since this study is focused on those who had sexual experiences, only four were selected since the other four interviewees have testified of non-engagement in sex. The data analysis had undergone several stages. First, the initial stage involves a focused reading of the interview transcript a number of times for familiarity. Interesting phrases and distinct responses

were highlighted. I then write notes or exploratory comments about my observations and reflections about the interview experience or any other thoughts and comments that are of potential significance. In the second stage, these notes were transformed into emerging themes. Themes are basically patterns of thoughts or ideas that are regularly expressed in the text. These themes are then clustered or grouped according to their frequency and similarity with the others on the next stage. Non-related themes are then excluded. On the final stage, a narrative account is formulated to present first an overall identification of the participant. Then, it also provides a hypothetical answer to the main reasons why the sexual engagement happened and that includes its root causes.

## Results

The boxes below present the last stage of the data analysis which is the narrative account. This is actually the result of the interview process after connecting all the themes that are extracted. The table of other stages were not shown since they are very lengthy to be included in this paper.

### Box 1: Narrative Account of FMC19

FMC19 had a complicated childhood life marked with temporary joys but later on turned into frustrations and pain. After experiencing having a solid family at the age of 11, her father left them to be with another woman. This was the start of a sudden change in her behavior. She had neglected her religious obligation, flirted with homosexual and heterosexual relationships, and had developed a problematic relationship with her mother and siblings. Nevertheless, she found comfort with her friends who also manifested unconventional and non-conforming thoughts about relationships and most especially, with her boyfriend with whom she felt had shown great love and comfort. With this, PMS happened and she felt no regret for it. Connecting all these events in her life, I hypothesize therefore: PMS happened because of interrelated contributory factors: “broken family” as a place to escape from disturbing environment, shattering family values, clash among significant others, influence coming from similar-situated friends, neglected religious norms and rituals, and the apparent good brought by the overwhelming romantic and sexual love and security from the boyfriend that provided an alternative intimate space and a blanket of comfort. PMS is shown in this case as a possible reactive and compensatory kind of behavior. Parental absence results in the lack of intimacy, affection, and love, and the compensatory recompense for it is the one provided by the boyfriend. In addition, the element of “space” (condo) also played a vital role in this scenario. It encourages the partners to do it for it offers them a greater privacy, absence of elders’ supervision, disregard of socio-cultural norms, and the more unrestrained expression of intimacy. FMC19 is, thus, a “victim” of circumstances whose behavior is largely driven by the negative factors and encouraged by the misrecognized element of “love” that is of short supply in the family. As a victim, she deserves the treatment that should flow from sincere compassion and solidarity.

**Box 2: Narrative Account of MMC21**

Having no regrets in the PMS engagement, MMC21 reasoned out that love and intimacy are valid reasons to justify this act with his girlfriend. In addition to that, the length of time, which is almost four years, is more than enough to take their relationship to the next level. Putting higher the mere action of kissing and hugging to the more intimate step of sexual encounter during their first anniversary is an attached price for having kept longer the relationship. And after that, the sexual encounter became a regular part of their dating. He showed in his disclosures and behavior the progressive expressions of intimacy. Trying to analyze the different events in his life, I have come up with additional possible reasons why PMS happened in the first place. First, he belongs to a broken family. His childhood is marked with a deep longing to see again his biological father who left him at the age of 4. What is more painful for him is to have known that his mother was left with PhP50,000.00 by his father who migrated to Taiwan to be with his other family. He felt that his value as a son is simply equated to that amount. This painful experience piled up when the supposed meeting with the father in Taiwan did not materialize. I also assume that unfulfilled desires and frustrations cause wounds and heavy emotional baggage that could be soothed and unburdened in the whole process or story of an affection-gaining intimate relationship. Is it possible that the pain caused by the real father can be compensated by what the girl can offer? He may have the idea instilled in his mind and like telling his girlfriend that “I am not like my father, I am different, you can trust me and give everything to me...” In the same way, the girlfriend who was also left by the father can see in him filling in that “empty” space created by her father. Second, a big factor is his being totally immersed in the realm of pornography – a form of release for pent-up or overpowering drives, even before his relationship with his girlfriend. He even admitted doing masturbation at times. I came to the conclusion that there came a point that he is no longer satisfied using his hands to derive pleasure and so there is a need again to go to the next level and imitate the characters of his favorite pastime. In fact, no one is satisfied or fulfilled with this kind of substitute. Third, both partners are no longer attending religious rituals or fulfilling church obligations. The girlfriend is an atheist and he too does not believe anymore the moral teachings of the church. This shows non-acceptance to objective norms from external authorities like the church. This condition somehow does not prohibit them to do what they want when they are together or that their subjective perspectives have more weight than what the church prescribes. Fourth, the “unsupervised” car and house are also factors that offer privacy for them or an opportunity for a sexual encounter. Lastly, it seemed like the commitment factor is neither clear to him nor a vital part of a relationship. He admitted that he cheated on his girlfriend by having a one-night stand or having casual sex encounters. Sex for him seems something consumable. (In a consumer society, people are “programmed” to buy and consume whatever is needed or assumed to be a need. In a non-consumer society most things are grown, produced, and consumed by the individual and the group—thus, the ethos of waiting-in-patience and sacrifice are familiar; in consumer cultures, every sacrifice must be compensated and gratifying for the individual self and not necessarily for a larger group.)



**Box 3: Narrative Account of FP20**

As the eldest among the three all-girl siblings, FP20 somehow was unable to enjoy much her teenhood because of the death of her father who was very close to her. With this, the family experienced a hard life due to poverty. She needed to work after high school to help her mother support the family, most especially the education of her younger sisters. She tried all different types of work like putting up a *sari-sari* store, selling fish in the market, and also tried her luck to be a saleslady in malls but was never hired and ended up as a babysitter/housemaid. For almost three years she had to keep on enduring her work serving other people and forgetting about education (college life) in order to support her family. And so it is a life of struggle and a sacrifice for the family and being less self-centered for their sake. At the age of 19, she found favor for herself with her first romantic relationship that was also welcomed by her mother and sisters. She met her boyfriend and described him as a loving and very open-minded partner who understands her situation, her responsibility of taking care of the family first before settling for marriage. With almost a year in the relationship, she found him as her rock, a great supporter, and at the same time bringing that sense of hope who will change her life in the future for she sees in him that seriousness to establish a family someday. It is also possible that her family's financial insecurities somehow pushed her to put her trust and confidence in her boyfriend who brought bags of groceries to their house on a regular basis, which really delighted her mother. This lessened the burden of experiencing a hard life, at least financially. And so, filled with gratitude, she had offered herself to her boyfriend, her virginity (PMS), and even doing it with certain regularity. The aggressive boyfriend moves to seduce, conquer, and possess; the receptive girlfriend opens up even with gratitude and a sense of security and contentment. She claimed having no regret at all because aside from the deep love that she feels for him, she found in him the quality of being responsible as he has a permanent job already unlike those many guys from their province who just want to impregnate their girlfriends without any plan of marrying them or finding a job for a living. In short, the value of sexual norms (whether cultural or religious) has become inconsequential or irrelevant in view of the value given to that current experience of a "rescuing" boyfriend and the sense of stability and direction which he has given to her and to her own family. In turn, the boyfriend has shown some eagerness to establish his own family because he had never experienced having a complete one, having been raised only by his aunt. This is very much reflected in him that is why he manifested those senses of being responsible and serious when it comes to their relationship. They also both claimed that they never regret it at all since, at the age of 20, they think that it is a ripe age for going all the way. By the way, the couple's sense of striving also reflects their struggles in and being shaped by work and sufferings in the world of insecurities and countless deprivations of basic and subsistence needs. The other students respondents' claim to maturity can be traced to their own cognitive rationalizations rather than based on a maturity that flows from practical bread-and-butter struggles. Another factor that made this repeated sexual encounter possible is the availability of enough time and space. It is also necessary to keep in mind that during day-off from work, they spend almost the whole Saturday together and that includes an overnight stay either in a motel or at the house of the boyfriend's aunt. There was ample time for romantic and sensual moments together. The unguarded motel provides enough privacy for them to make it happen for the first time. At the same time, the absence of the boyfriend's aunt and for having his own room offer another enough privacy with no supervision for them. This enabled them to do the sexual engagement on a regular basis.

#### Box 4: Narrative Account of MP18

MP18 presented himself as a boy from the province who lived a poor life with his large family. Having 11 siblings with the father being a contractual employee in different jobs and the mother an unemployed housewife, he dreamt of finishing college in order to uplift/alleviate the condition of his family. Fortunately, a scholarship opportunity offered by UMak knocked on his door and without hesitation he grabbed it. Being an adolescent in the city and in the company of new/old friends, he was able to meet his girlfriend and was enticed by her physical beauty and kind character. I have identified several possible reasons why PMS happened in this case. First, I saw in him that sense of curiosity to experience it. Being a male from the province and then suddenly transferred to the city, his adolescent manhood was awakened by the new tempting environment coupled with the attractiveness of his girlfriend. He eagerly wanted to experience it as this is his first relationship and he considered it very special. And this was solidified by the love and intimacy that they both feel with each other. In addition, the negative peer pressure plays a major impact on this. His friends who are living with him in the boarding house are fond of narrating their sexual experiences with their respective girlfriends. And so, he may have been influenced a lot by them. In fact, he defends himself by reasoning out that he is mature enough and they are at the right age for such sexual decision. The girlfriend was also very open and “accommodating” to make it possible since it was already her third relationship and she found that sense of sincerity in him which she did not find with her past ones. Meaning, she was confident enough to give everything since she saw that there is sincerity and a “sense of direction” in him, unlike her previous partners. Trying to establish a connection with his childhood years up to present, I also determined the lovers’ non-observance or being inactive in any religious rituals or obligations. In short, they do not feel much spiritual dictates or norms which could put some control over their drives. Another significant reason has something to do with the girlfriend’s situation of having a broken family. Even if the boyfriend has an intact family, it is completely the opposite with her girlfriend. She grew up with no father guiding her because her parents are separated. And she longs to have that sense of attachment to someone who will fill her emotional needs she did not receive from her absent father. She found in her boyfriend this “warmth” which the boyfriend himself admits he possesses. He became an authority figure for her and the one whom she found safety and security, “*parang ako na nga ang tatay n’ya*,” he claimed. And lastly, they had all the opportunity to do it given the available privacy. They did it many times already in the girlfriend’s place, the unguarded boarding house, which encourages repeated intimate encounters. It is basically a city life without their elders; boarding house without relatives; lack of supervision from family members—“they are on their own.”

## Discussion

To synthesize the result of the case study analysis, I identified recurrent themes that served as the common causes of sexual engagement by the participants. These causes will be discussed briefly on this section.

1. Belonging to a broken family
2. High level of love/intimacy and trust to one’s partner
3. Peer pressure or influence of ill-mannered friends
4. Neglected religious norms/rituals
5. Detrimental effects of pornography
6. Availability of space

### *Belonging to a Broken Family*

One of the major causes of sexual engagement points out to belonging from a broken family. In the words of FMC19, she had felt that great sadness which resulted to a sudden change of behavior after her father left them to be with his mistress.

FMC19: *Super happy naman ako nung bata ako ‘coz we’re complete. We go out as a family, we attend Mass, we eat together, grocery...and everything... Nung nag-high school na ako nung umalis sya. Sumama sya dun sa kabit nya. Hanggang ngayon nga ganun pa yun eh... Nambababae pa rin.... At a loss talaga ako...*

*kahit sinsasabi ni Dad lagi na andun lang naman daw s'ya, tawagan o text ko lang daw sya darating s'ya agad... Pero Sir ibang-iba pa rin yung mararamdaman mo na buo pa talaga yung family mo... kaya kahit high school pa lang ako nung umalis s'ya, natuto nako maging pasaway...*

FMC19 experienced the lack of intimacy from her father who left them. With this, she was alienated from the sense of attachment and support from him. This parent-child gap is a factor that contributes to the vulnerability of FMC19 to affection sources as she found in her boyfriend what lifts up her spirit—addressing that lack in her, leading towards progressively genital expressions of intimacy. According to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2008), the natural family as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman, constitutes the “primary place of humanization for the person and society and a cradle of life and love” (par. 2). This so-called humanization implies the capacity to bring about an individual to its full potential most especially in terms of moral aspect. It is the primary place where values are caught, formed, and honed. These values include the ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. It follows that teens are able to establish the moral value to determine that sex before marriage is wrong. Assuming that parents themselves have values deeply embedded in them, their ability to establish these in their children matters a lot. In a study conducted by Bostrom, she concluded that:

Much of the public's critique of teens revolves around parents' perceived inability to be involved with their children and teach them the right values. It is not just the elderly who question the lack of values they see in our youth; parents of teenagers share the same concerns. Teens seem vulnerable to strong external forces: drugs, alcohol, violence, sex, and the media. Without the right values to immunize them from negative influences, teens could fall victim to these pressures. (2001, p. 2)

The values which are really essential in living morally depend so much on what the teens' respective families can offer to its members. Since children have the capacity to learn through imitation, then parents should serve as role models of chastity to their children. They have indeed a major influence on the moral development of their children because they are the ones who serve as an authority figure and therefore have the higher degree of influence on them. A father who is a womanizer can have a huge influence and negative impact on how the son sees women, sexuality, and relationships. On the other hand, the positively flourishing husband–wife relationship in the family would surely bring about a more encouraging and positively-forming story.

The family is said to be a “major social institution and a locus of much of a person's social activity” (Nam, 2004, p. 1). And as an institution, it serves as a repository of values where its members can be developed and honed as a morally upright individual. The Filipino family embodies this description for it is very rich in values that can indeed of great help to its members. Family values are indeed very crucial in developing that sense of discipline in teens in order for them to be equipped in battling the temptation of PMS. This was actually highly emphasized the study of Miller (2002) when it stated that the most consistent finding across studies of family processes or relationships is that parent–child connectedness (parental support, closeness, warmth) is related to lower adolescent pregnancy risk, primarily through delaying and reducing adolescent sexual intercourse. With this, the more values instilled to a teen by his or her own family, the more equipped in terms of resistance to temptations, and thus, the lesser possibility of engaging in premarital sex.

#### *High Level of Love/Intimacy and Trust to One's Partner*

Some adults would brand teen relationships as a kind of “puppy love” that started with having “crushes.” This kind of crush feeling, however, could be very intense. Since adolescence is a stage where emotional attachment to the opposite sex is heightened, a teen who is deeply in love can be carried away with what he or she feels. Adolescence is a period where



there is an intense need for intimacy due to the changes in physical, social cognition, and social roles (Paul & White, 1990, p. 375). Some teens are still unable to meet the demands of maturity when their parents have to leave them on their own to work and attend to the other everyday concerns of the family. It is, thus, a stage where adults expect that young ones must hurdle their “immaturity,” which is a heavy burden for the children since they are expected to behave properly despite their age. As mentioned previously, intimacy can result in the deepening of trust and dependence to one’s partner since there is already that emotional closeness which can lead to the otherwise premature consummation of the sexual act. As claimed by FP20:

*FP20: Yun Sir, nangyari na (PMS),... hindi ko naman pinagsisisihan kasi mahal na mahal ko na sya at nakita ko naman na talagang seryoso s’ya sa akin. Kaya hindi naman ako nag-alangan na tumanggi pa. Ganun pala Sir noh, ‘pag mahal mo yung tao gusto mong ibigay lahat... Natakot din ako syempre Sir, pero mahirap na kasi ‘pag nandun ka na sa sitwasyon. Ang naiisip ko na lang ‘nun ay mahal ko itong taong ito at s’ya na ang gusto kong pakasalan eh o makasama sa habangbuhay...*

FP20’s testimony is the most common reason being disclosed by teens who have experienced their sexual debut. As pointed out by Crockett, Raffaelli, and Moilanen, “romantic feelings emerge at an early age and feelings of love can affect sexual decision-making” (2003, p. 382.). The level of trust and security increases as the boyfriend shows dependability and, thus, the girlfriend develops greater emotional bond with him. This intimacy, later on, becomes loaded with powerful affection which can be equated with “true love.” And if the girlfriend is deeply in love, she can be led towards affection overload that could cloud her reason. No school rules, church’s norms, and prescriptions from the family could stop her from making an impulsive decision regarding the sexual demand of her partner. FP20 had poured out everything she has to her boyfriend believing that he will never leave her and they will end up in marriage sooner. With this, we can see that emotional intimacy

was established first before the full physical/sexual expression. Their progressive physical expression of intimacy paved the way towards sexual intercourse. At first, it was just kissing and hugging, then followed by touching/petting, until it finally turned into the actual genital intercourse. Dagmang (2014) also presented a short but artistically-formulated narration on the power of intimacy that leads to sexual intercourse. As he described:

In a sexual activity, the female’s receptive posture may really be the more traditional script; or her more exciting role to take. Her body being explored and caressed by the male may respond openly to the male’s assertiveness. An appreciative female would thus embrace this male initiative and hold on to his grip, taking the role of an active receptive participant in the intimate drama of sexual exchange. Seeking to gain affection and warmth, which is many times external to PMS, is thus lost in the most complex act of love-making or PMS which cannot always compensate for any affection deficit. It thus could be stated that search for affection is the mere jump into the ocean of intimacy where PMS lurks as a whale that swallows individuals searching for themselves in affection-seeking. Once partners are inside the PMS whale, everything gets lost and abandoned so that the experience of PMS would become possible. Reason and judgment become external to the actual PMS act which could only be regarded as a consequence of “search for affection.” (p. 8)

Intimacy indeed plays a very vital role in the sexual decision of our teens. The different sources of intimacy must be felt by them so that they will not look for it in the arms of their partners, which sometimes could be a threat to losing their virginity. It is important to note that intimacy can be provided by the people who surround them such as their families, relatives, friends, classmates, and so on. If parents are always absent in the everyday lives of their children and without leaving or inculcating in them essential values, then what do we expect? If the different institutions like the school, church, and the government make teens alienated and

sometimes discriminated, then where will they turn to? And lastly, if friends/peers are indeed present but along the way will influence and show them that intimacy can be found in vices which present an apparent good/comfort, then will they not join them on their illicit activities? Our teens are humans and as humans, they have a need for warmth and intimacy. Thus, if that is scarce or never provided by the people who are intimately linked to them, then there is a possibility of finding it from an abusive partner which might lead to unreasonable and unjustified sexual engagement.

#### *Peer Pressure or Influence of Ill-Mannered Friends*

Peer pressure is another dominant theme in the sexual engagement of our participants. Peer simply refers to someone who is of the same age, education, or social class. The key concept of peer pressure is that individuals of the same age group are actively encouraging or urging them to do something and that they are motivated to act and think in certain ways because they have been urged, encouraged, or pressured by a peer to do so (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000, p. 165). It can be traced back to how teens were able to establish that sense of intimacy with one another. The intimacy in friendship is actually secondary to the one in the family. If the family's presence is not felt, more often than not, the peers or friends take the place of primary relations. As these teens mature, the intimacy that they have found is very much integral to socioemotional adjustment (Buhrmester, 1990, p. 1101); meaning, they can be so much influenced by peers and treat them as their real family because of the regular presence, bonding, and the felt expression of empathy or *damay/malasakit*. Well, this can be good if we are talking about the positive type of peer pressure but if it is the opposite, then it can be detrimental to them. Now, what does this intimacy bring to the table? Because of the built attachment with one another, the teen feels greater security when there is also greater intimacy coming from their social partners or peers (Grabill & Kerns, 2000, p. 377). This would imply that if a teen feels secured then he or she is able to lay down great trust on them and possibly imitate their practices even if these are questionable or negative ones. Another one is that if intimacy becomes long-lasting and deeply

rooted among friends/peers, it can gradually change the behavior of the individual and imbibe the values and ways of the influencing partners. This is now a case of reconfiguration of the second nature of the individual in relation to the kind of culture being formed by friends/peers on a habitual basis. As mentioned previously, any activity done/shared habitually and recognized/lived by others, through the passing of time becomes institutionalized and, thus, results into a new part of the general culture. Recalling the testimony of FMC19, she was indeed influenced by her friends who kept on sharing to her stories about their sexual experiences with their partners. In the long run, she had somehow imbibed their respective perspective on being liberated and decided to be like them by doing it also. She felt confident in doing it since, in the first place, she trusted her friends and realized that there is no harm in doing it. It happened to her friends and so she thought it must also happen to her. In fact, they seemed to have enjoyed it many times already. As she mentioned:

*FMC19: Yung dalawa (bestfriends) nga dun sir may experience na rin... yung isa lang yung nape-pressure ngayon dahil wala pa sya, hahaha... e panu wala naman s'yang boyfriend. Sabi ko humanap na lang sya ng FUBU! (Fuck Buddy) Hahaha, ayaw naman nya... parang natural na lang sa kanila 'yun...*

Same-sex peers can influence also the perceived acceptability of sexual behavior and sexually experienced friends can be imitated and serve as role models. FMC19 treated her friends as her own role models. Her friends became a major source of information about sex through their personal experiences. This was validated by Davis and Harris (1982) on the result of their research which pointed out that friends are the most common source of sexual information (p. 471). When parents or any family members are not available for companionship or support is nowhere to be found, teens usually search for an "alternative" source which can somehow fill in the role that is usually played by their family. Many parents today can no longer challenge the influence of peers to their children because of their absence due to their full-time work's pressure and even if some of them have

time, the quality and relevance of being together are insufficient. Many of them just provide, for example, all the gadgets and other requests of their children and then let them by themselves, hoping that their children will be able to rely on their rather immature forms of moral reasoning. This is a familiar scenario: After buying the children's requests in the mall, the family ends up in watching a movie with total silence between them for almost two hours. Upon arriving home, parents feel tired and need to rest or if not, they are still preoccupied with so many things about their work as they are busy talking to their business partners for hours on the phone and without noticing the need to transform the quality of time that they spend with their children into a better one.

The presence of peers or friends holds a key in the decision-making of teens about the expression of their sexuality. That is why it is necessary that these partners should be of good influence to them. According to a study about the significance of peers in relation to their sexual expressions, both male and female 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 (DiIorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999, p. 181). There is a popular saying which says, "tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are!" It basically means that the behavior or character of a teen more likely reflects those of his or her peers because of their similar activities. And so, a teen who is able to avoid sexual engagement is possibly because of his or her peers who have the same temperance against the sexual activity.

#### *Neglected Religious Norms/Rituals*

The next evident theme in the case study points out to the participants' non-involvement or non-observance in religious norms and rituals. All the participants in this case study are Catholics and though they are official members by virtue of baptism, some of them do not really participate or actively take part in the rituals and follow the norms of the church. MP18 is an example of the so-called "nominal Christian" who is indeed a member of the church but does not participate in rituals or practice the faith. He admitted:

MP18: *Oo Sir Katoliko kami. Nung bata ako Sir, madalang lang kami magsimba kasi malayo talaga yung simbahan sa amin. Ngayon naman Sir, eh hindi rin eh. Pero nagdadasal naman ako minsan lalo na pag may mga problema sa bahay lalo na nung magkasakit si tatay.... (If attending Mass with girlfriend) Hindi Sir eh... inuubos namin yung oras sa pamamasyal at magkasama lang kami sa boarding haws pero never kami nag-uusap about relihiyon. Di rin naman religious yun eh...*

Now, the question: Is being a non-active Christian a factor in making a reasonable sexual decision? Is attending regularly church rituals an effective way to avoid premarital sex? We can offer some answers to these questions if we are able to figure out the reasons behind the participant's inactive faith expressions. First, MP18 lived in the rural provinces of Benguet and he claimed that he was not able to properly practice their religious obligations or observe rituals since the church is too far from their house. He needs to walk a long distance in order to reach the church and so it is only once in a blue moon where he is able to attend the celebrations. At home, his parents were also busy working on the farm and they do not discuss religious norms and rituals. And so, it was left to his own initiative to know more about God which unfortunately did not happen. Thus, it follows that he was not able to establish a closer relationship with God. When he moved into the city, he also did not bother to strengthen that relationship since, in the first place, it did not become a part of his lifestyle, and more so, he was already preoccupied with his studies and other everyday-life affairs.

Being inactive in the observance of religious rituals, MP18 had made the decision to engage in premarital sex. This is not to conclude that religiosity/less religiosity weighs heavily on every sexual decision but this is simply to point out that this factor is one of the possible contributory causes of sexual engagement since this is what was experienced by the participants themselves. How is this possible? If an individual has developed within himself/herself a closer communication with God, then sensitivity to some Church standards and norms may also develop.

In addition, since the individual is close to God, offending Him could be the last thing one could do. As we sometimes hear people say, “We do not hurt the one we love, do we?” Having a closer intimacy with God considerably directs our conscience to do what is good and avoid what is bad. Proverbs 22:6 exhorts: “start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” This biblical passage emphasizes the need for teens to immerse themselves starting from their childhood the observance of some religious rituals and practices. This will help them to develop in themselves that “fear of the Lord” which is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that refers to that sense of respect, wonder, awe, and submission to God. This habit will somehow contribute to the development of a sensitive conscience and a firm moral decision-making as they mature. Fagan (2006, p. 7) asserted that adolescent’s 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 reducing teen sexual activity.

The Church teaches that the sexual act is only morally acceptable within marriage, and only in ways that do not cut off the possibility of procreation. And so, it greatly involves how they exercise within themselves the virtues of faith, service, and chastity. In spite of the rise of premarital sex that involves the youth at present, it is still very essential to note their admirable practices of sexual morality. In relation to these different virtues, many teens today are still very much attuned to and intact in their strong relationship with God. This is probably because of the deep influence of their families. If a teenager was formed at a younger age with the regular sacramental involvement of their parents with the whole family, it will be more difficult for him or her to fall into premature sexual practices since the religious practices would have constraining effects on behavior. That is why there are many youth formation groups and organizations that unite and strengthen this personal, as well as communal faith development. Some examples of these popular groups in different parishes are the Youth for Christ (YFC), Youth Apostolate Groups, Apostolic Youth Ministry, choir groups, and others.

### *Detrimental Effects of Pornography*

Pornography is a common term which usually means “graphic and explicit depictions of sexual activity” (Cline, 1994, p. 229). It is greatly linked with the kind of environment that we have at present. We lived in a sex-obsessed culture. This is how Dilks (2014) described the kind of culture our teens lived with in this modern time. He further explained:

You’d have to be blind to have failed to notice how obsessed with sex the contemporary cultural landscape has become. Living in a capitalist, consumer-driven society where “sex sells,” our bodies and sexuality has become a vehicle for nothing less than the commodification of anything with a dollar sign on it. From soft drinks to cars, sex is used as the lure through which corporate interests hawk their wares. Even children are no longer immune to this all-pervasive process – from beauty pageants to their eroticized portrayal in fashion catalogues, there has been an increasingly disturbing trend in the sexualisation of childhood, stripped of its innocence and thrown headlong into the meat marketplace. (par. 1–2)

Dilks pointed out how the society at large is being influenced by the negative connotation of sexuality which is all about pleasure-seeking and physical gratification. And one medium that is responsible for this tragedy is the effect of pornography. MMC21 in our case study had admitted being hooked and possibly influenced by online pornography as the cause of his misbehavior towards the opposite sex. He said:

MMC 21: *Yun Sir, na-realize ko na, minsan talagang nakaka-addict pala ang sex... Siguro dala na rin ito ng na-expose ako sa mga napapanuod ko... Sige Sir share ko na rin ha, don't judge me ha... Bago pa kasi ako magka-GF eh nakakapanuod na ako ng mga porn videos sa net, parang naging habit ko na nga eh kaya yun... (About masturbation after watching porn) Hindi naman lagi Sir, sobra ka naman, manghihina ka rin noh, hahaha.... Pero I do that sometimes...*



In this testimony, MMC21 claimed that he started watching porn on the Internet even before his relationship with his girlfriend. It became a habit and even up to now, he still finds time to browse porn websites. It became a regular source of sexual pleasure for him up to the point of corrupting his mind and affecting the way he treated his girlfriend as well as his fling relationships. He was enculturated by this kind of habit. Enculturation is the process by which people learn the requirements of their surrounding culture and acquire values and behaviors appropriate or necessary in that culture (Grusec & Hastings, 2007, p. 547). The people that surround the individual like parents, neighbors, friends/peers, and other adults affect and shape, whether deliberately or not, the individual. Covey (1998) made an analogy about porn addiction and frogs. He said:

Like any other addiction, pornography sneaks up on you. It reminds me of a story I once read about frogs. If you put a frog in boiling water, it will immediately jump out. But if you put it in lukewarm water, the frog will get cooked before it has the sense to jump out. It's the same with pornography. What you look at today may have shocked you a year ago. But because the heat was ever so slowly turned up, you didn't even notice that your conscience was being fried. (p. 239)

Pornography has always been around and it is presented in various forms. However, the Internet has made it so accessible, most especially to the young ones who had the access to the Internet. Even children starting from 3 years old have their own gadgets that can access the web. What makes it very tempting for teens is that it offers enough privacy. Meaning, no one will know and you can easily hide/fake your identity when browsing porn sites. One can easily delete the browsing history from the gadgets' settings. The Association for Natural Psychology (2016) explained that pornography triggers certain hormones in our bodies, such as adrenaline, and stimulates the production of testosterone, oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin (par. 6). If one indulges in it, it can lead to addiction and a mixture of negative emotions. Once

or twice can never be enough until an individual longs for a deeper form of excitement and pleasure. This is what Walker (2013) termed as "changing perceived pleasure." According to her:

The repeated act of watching porn may change a teenager's perception of pleasure. This is called a "chemical bath." In this condition, the brain will be unable to process the chemicals it needs at a certain level. The constant surge to bring pleasure disrupts the normal action of the central nervous system wherein pleasure is reduced so that a simple sexual act is no longer satisfying. (par. 4)

Pornography can do many unfortunate things to the teens. Being addicted to it, they do not only suffer physically but more so, changing their perspective and way of thinking, which enable them to make unreasonable sexual decisions.

#### *Availability of Space*

The availability of space/geographies that are outside the elders' access and supervision gives more opportunity for the desire to be actualized; while the absence of available space puts constraints on teens' desire or plans. Nevertheless, even if spaces are available but if there is more elder supervision, teen desire for sexual expression could be curtailed. The desire for full physical expression of intimacy may be less incited if there are no inviting and tempting spaces that ensure anonymity and privacy. Even if they really want to do it but if there are no spatial provisions, then they could still postpone it. Sexual activity is a very private thing which should be done within confined spaces. Based on what the participants had disclosed, the available spaces include the condo, motel, either of the partner's own house, boarding house, and even inside the car. As they have pointed out:

FMC19: *Sa condo nga Sir. But of course, not everytime we are in my place eh ganun na lang gagawin nyo noh! I feel good. It was good. Very comforting... Basta it was good.*



MMC21: *So nung anniv. nga namin Sir, nag-dinner muna kami sa resto sa Makati tapos nung ihahatid ko na sya, sinimulan na namin sa car pa lang, at yung pagkakataon kasi Sir nandun na, wala tita nya, naka-out of town yata nun, tinuloy na naming sa haws nila... That was both our first time Sir...pero nauhit pa rin yun maraming beses na...*

MP18: *Hahaha, syempre sir, yun na yun, alam mo na yun... Oo naman Sir. Sya nga yung first girlfriend ko at first experience. Nung una Sir, syempre, hugs lang at kisses pero matanda naman na kami. Kaya ginagawa na namin yun... Syempre Sir sa boarding haws nya...*

FP20: *Oo may nangyari na sa amin, ayaw ko naman magpaka-plastic at magsinungaling sa 'yo Fr. Ah, saan na ba yun? Dun Sir nung una kaming nagcheck-in sa Sogo yata yun. Last year pa yun bago mag-Pasko...Parang kinabahan tuloy ako sa 'yo...*

These unsupervised spaces provide a kind of set up where plans or surprises leading to PMS are realized. Planned simply means that they have really thought of doing it as scheduled just like FP20 in which they did it in a motel as part of celebrating their first anniversary. It can also be unplanned wherein the lightning of burning passion or desire struck both of them and caught them unguarded like MMC21 in which they have started doing it inside the car. Since these spaces are available, then sex is likely to happen. In the absence of such spaces and without elders' authority in the mind of teens, the non-penetrative sexual expressions like petting or hand jobs may happen in movie houses, internet cafes, elevators, parks, and some other places. One thing very evident in relation to this space factor regarding the practice of sex is that the urge to engage in it can develop rather strongly. With this, it can even consider public places as a venue of actualizing it. In the popular *Men's Health* online magazine, Bellavance (2006) conducted a survey and asked 1,138 women about how thrilling or exciting it is to have sex in the following unusual spaces. Figure 1 represents their responses:

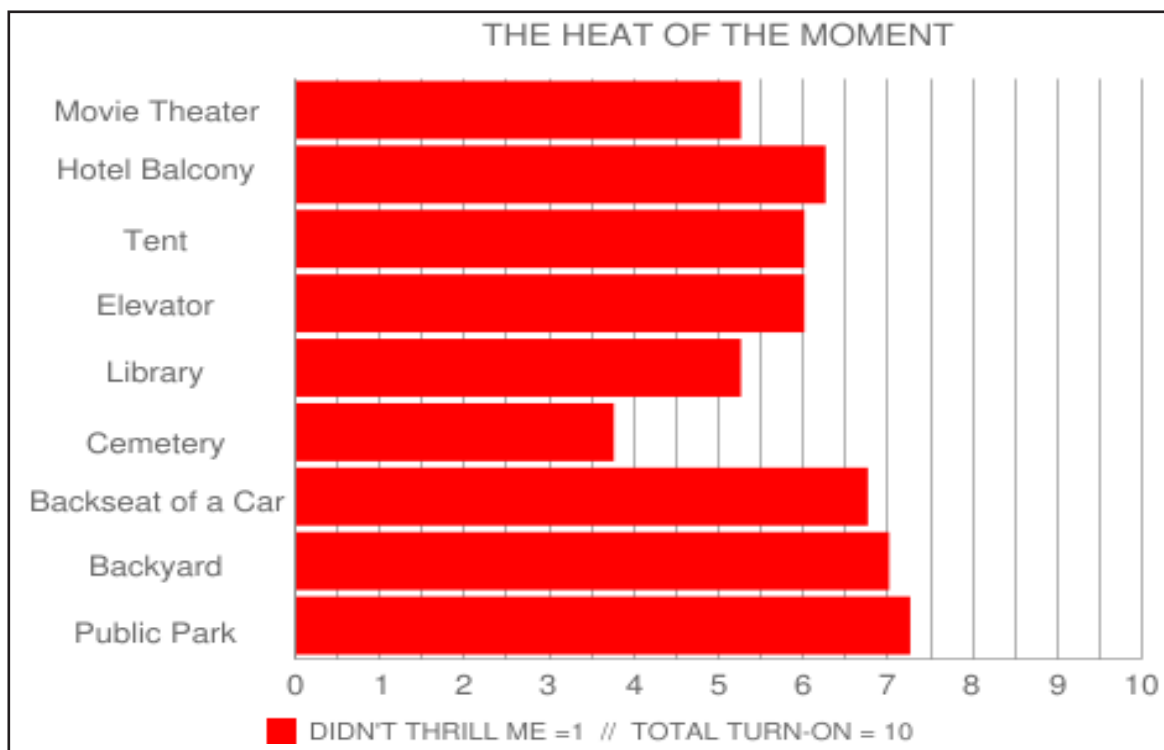


Figure 1. Unusual spaces for sexual engagement.

The interesting data gathered from the survey shows the various unfamiliar spaces where sexual intercourse can possibly happen and how thrilling it could be to do it in those areas. As mentioned previously, these are public places which are not supposed to be venues for a private encounter like sex but because of the intensity of desire that it brings, coupled with the anticipated excitement (and obviously without the elders' controlling authority), it can simply happen anytime and anywhere.

In addition, as mentioned previously, our teens' everyday routines in these geographies shaped their acquired dispositions. Teens from a traditional society and culture are not as exposed to commercialized geographies like motels, shopping malls, arcades, movie houses, and so forth; and so their dispositions are also girded by the traditional or natural geographies/spaces. On the other hand, with the availability of many modern geographies, those who lived in urban or modern societies may have different dispositions since the fangs of temptation are always there to bite them. They can either keep their traditional values or deviate from their ways leading towards the more permissive modern culture. But one has to take note also that even if there is privacy, if the traditional values were deeply embedded in them and already part of their system for a long time, chances are going to favor non-expression of premature sexual practice.

## Conclusion

The case study results to six common themes that were manifested or drawn out from the participants' testimonies about their sexual engagement, these are: belonging to a broken family, high level of love/intimacy and trust to one's partner, peer pressure, neglected religious norms/rituals, pornography, and availability of space. Having identified these different causes of unreasonable sexual engagement, it is evident that the society, culture, and geographies serve as major contributory factors in their sexual decisions. It is now the work of the different institutions in the society to work hand in hand in addressing this moral decline. Their formulation of sexual ethics, as a result of the case study, should be the promotion of a moral community that will provide nourishing activities

and lifestyles that promote purified intimacy. Teens' behavior must be seen not only from their current situation but adults must scrutinize the history and story of the teen's humanity in order to know where they are coming from. Indeed, an open mind and heart is needed for such an effective intervention.

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