

On Women Making the First Move: Has the Courting Script Changed?

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More women are now claiming their space in the public sphere and are recognised for their significant contributions in society. With the greater recognition of women's rights and agency, have dating/courting scripts also changed? Employing script theory, this paper aims to investigate Filipin@[\[1\]](#) college students' perspectives on women doing the first move in expressing their love interest in men, validate the socio-cultural-religious beliefs/conditions that shape their views, and identify new trajectories, if any. It makes use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, focusing on college students (N=119) in a Catholic university in Pampanga, Philippines. On the one hand, the response of the students shows the persistence of the belief that men should take the first move in courtship. The symbol of Maria Clara who, in the Philippines, encapsulates colonial Christianity's model of a virtuous woman continues to shape women and men's imaginations. On the other hand, the respondents acknowledge that as equals, either men or women should have the right to initiate courting. The students view women who initiate courting as courageous. From a postcolonial optic that highlights the agency of those in the margins, we have linked this courage to the interrelated virtues of fortitude, self-care, and mutuality. Lastly, the respondents neither agree nor disagree that digital technologies today facilitate women making the first move in expressing their love interest in a man. This study is significant because there is a dearth of research on courting patterns from the Philippine context.

Studies on dating patterns

The vast majority of studies on dating patterns have been done in the West and they have generally confirmed the persistence of gender scripts such as men initiating more directly than women (e.g., sending the first email)[\[2\]](#) and paying more for dating expenses even as both partners—for those dating for more than six months—contribute to the expense.[\[3\]](#) Ellen Lamont who interviewed college-educated young adults (25–40 years old) in the San Francisco Bay area, lamented that while women now claim their space in the public sphere, there seems to be a reluctance to do likewise in the expression of their intimate desires.[\[4\]](#) Dating norms and scripts remain largely unchanged. No matter how seemingly benign these rituals are, for Lamont, these presuppose basic views about the difference of women and men that are at the foundation of gender inequality. Men are regarded as the main breadwinner, initiators, power holders, while women are reactive, expressive, and ideal for home management. While these assumptions may have been destabilised by the gender revolution in the 1960s, Lamont argues that the dating scripts remained the same. Other researchers point though to a gap between actual male-dominated practice on the one hand and men's desire for sharing the labour of sexual initiation with women on the other.[\[5\]](#)

In the few studies conducted in non-western societies, while traditional scripts remain, there are relatively modest changes toward greater agency on the part of women in the courting process. In China, while both young women and men are now more active in their search for a partner by starting to date at a younger age, traditional norms persist as in women's continued preference for a male partner who is financially successful and ambitious while men's preference, to a lesser extent, is for a 'sexy' woman.[\[6\]](#) From 1970 to

2012 in India, women had become increasingly more active in choosing their own husbands, though the majority of marriages are still arranged. In many cases, instead of solely the parents choosing their husband, the woman now makes the choice together with her parents.^[7] A research by Roger Friedland, Janet Afary and Paolo Gardinali on young women from the Middle East Muslim majority countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, Tunisia, and Turkey), reveals that single women have engaged in transgressive behaviour like being alone with a member of the opposite sex (44%) and actually kissing the partner (30%), much more than single men. One religious factor—the frequency of praying—has been found to be negatively correlated with this transgressive behaviour of kissing.^[8]

The above studies do not delve into the issue of who does the first move in courtship. The more significant divide when it comes to this question seems to be between liberal/secular and conservative/religious societies. In a western and more liberal country like the Netherlands, a study conducted at University of Utrecht has revealed an absence in the students' consciousness of norms of which gender should initiate the first move in courtship. With more conservative societies, however, the research shows the prevalence of the use of indirect non-verbal tactics by women in contrast to men who employ direct verbal expressions of interest. The direct verbal approach of men was explained as possibly due to the great competition among males and the lesser risk and investment—compared to women—in an offspring ensuing from the relationship.^[9]

The male as active and the female passive

Dating scripts are deeply rooted in traditional views about the nature of women and men. Most basic is the notion that the male and female possess the active and passive principle respectively. The active principle has traditionally been linked to man and the passive to woman.^[10] In the Christian tradition, Augustine uses the metaphor of sowing where the man sows the seed while the woman is the fertile soil that receives the seed and nourishes it. Augustine appeals to the genealogies in the Bible where the mothers are not normally named, to argue that the man is the chief agent in procreation.

In his discussion on the incarnation of Christ, Thomas Aquinas draws from Aristotelian science which regards the female as a misbegotten male. For Thomas, the seed of the father as the active principle holds the power to form an embryo while the blood of the mother is the passive principle, prepared as material for the formation of the embryo.^[11] Thus it is only the male seed that is the agent of procreation and not the female seed. This active-passive binary understanding of the nature of women and men has been extended from reproduction to leadership as well in the wider society, at home, and even in benign courtship rituals.

Some contemporary authors, including theologians, continue to emphasise the supposedly passive nature of women and the assertive nature of men, and its implications on leadership both in private and public spheres. John Piper, an evangelical theologian, argues that the woman can initiate in a romantic sexual relation but this should be more of an invitation for the man to 'lead in a way as only a man can, so that she can respond to him.'^[12] These authors do not regard the expectation for men to initiate as an indication of male superiority but rather a complementarity of equally important roles. They also appeal to Biblical texts on marital relations underlining the man's headship (e.g., I Corinthians 11: 7–9, Ephesians 5) to support their arguments, that the purpose of dating is to find a marriage partner.^[13] They reject decades of scholarship of feminist theologians who have provided alternative readings of Scriptural texts, that recognise the patriarchal social context in which the Bible was written and employ historical-critical methods and other forms of exegesis.^[14] They also ignore the positive depiction of sexual initiative by women in the First Testament such as Tamar (Genesis 38), Ruth in the Book of Ruth, and the lady narrator in the Song of Songs, a love-poem communicating a positive view of sexual love from the perspective of a single woman.^[15]

Gendered construction of virtues

Dating scripts are also deeply related to the notion of what a good man and a good woman are. Theological ethicist Anne Patrick notes how the Christian paradigm of virtue has largely been shaped by the patriarchal model which is based on dualism and subordination.[16] The ideals for a good Christian are attributed greater emphasis depending on one's gender and social status. While all people are expected to be just, righteous, chaste, and humble, men are expected to excel in justice and righteousness while women are expected to be more chaste and obedient. Social class also comes in as lower-class men are exhorted to be more obedient, humble, and meek. Within the Catholic church, a shift in paradigm began with the Second Vatican Council's call to universal holiness, as well as the influence of the feminist paradigm. In what Patrick refers to as the egalitarian-feminist paradigm of virtue, the classic moral virtues remain but now the focus is on justice rather than control.[17] Chastity is reconsidered in terms of justice or right relations. The understanding of justice in this paradigm recognises the full equality of women and men,[18] whereas in the patriarchal paradigm, inequality (e.g., gender/social hierarchy) is regarded as part of the natural order.[19] Justice in the egalitarian-feminist paradigm presupposes not only equality but also mutuality.[20] By mutuality, we mean no fixed roles/stereotypes; instead, there is reciprocity or the sharing of talents and gifts toward mutual empowerment. Lisa Fullam elaborated on virtues in relation to sexuality, points out how fidelity is a virtue associated with relations to significant others and among its subsidiary virtues is the exercise of freedom and the cultivation of mutuality.[21]

Maria Clara as the model of the virtuous woman

Along a patriarchal paradigm of virtue, Maria Clara emerged in the Philippine context, as a model of a virtuous Filipina. She is a character in José Rizal's novel, *Noli me Tangere* (1887) and its sequel *El Filibusterismo* (1891).[22] Her image however contrasts with the status and agency of the indigenous woman before the Spanish colonisers arrived. In the pre-colonial era, the *babaylans* or religious leaders in the islands, were women and transgender females.[23] As such, they held an important and prestigious position in the leadership of the community. Pre-Hispanic women also enjoyed freedom of association with men. They could have sexual relations within or outside marriage. In lowland Tagalog and Visayan societies, virginity was not even valued as a virtue or a prerequisite for marriage.[24]

Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thought of the indigenous women as *desbonestos* (immodest). They condemned what they perceived as 'sexual licentiousness' and they criticised the men for their toleration of their wives' extramarital relations. To 'discipline' the indigenous woman, they discredited the *babaylans* and condemned them as evil and unchaste priestesses.[25] Aimed at moulding women for virtuous living (modesty, piety, seclusion, chastity), the Spanish missionaries established *recogimientos* in the sixteenth century and its successor, the *beaterios* in the seventeenth century, that institutionalised the Spanish norm for feminine behaviour.[26] In 1864, the bestseller *Urbana at Felisa* by Modesto De Castro became the ideological apparatus to reinscribe the ideology of women's domesticity, chastity, and inferiority.[27] It was used as a reference and teaching resource up till the middle of the twentieth century. It underlines the role of a mother to form her daughter to fear God and avoid flirtations.[28]

It was only in the late nineteenth century that Maria Clara developed as a model of the Filipina—'religious, virginal, loyal, patient, loving and elegantly graceful in manner.' Rizal, however, did not intend Maria Clara to represent the epitome of womanly virtues. Having annotated José Morga's book on Philippine history, he was fully aware of pre-Hispanic women's independence, assertiveness, and leadership.[29] His ideal woman is more clearly reflected in his 'Letter to the Women of Malolos' (1889). These women asked if they could have an evening school where they could learn the Spanish language. More than a request, this could be read as a demand for equal rights as Spanish was the language of politics at the time.[30] In his

letter, Rizal admitted that until he heard of the women of Malolos, he had encountered only very few brave women that met his ideal, as most, though possessing good manners, were characterised by excessive modesty, kindness, deference to 'their so-called "spiritual fathers"' and lack of knowledge.[31] Maria Clara is more probably, for Rizal, an allegory for the nation 'suffering patiently in her pristine innocence the loving reforms needed from her tutelary mother [Spain],[32] and/or a satirical image that Rizal used to poke fun at the Spaniards' ideal woman, that of an obedient and dutiful daughter.[33]

This image of the Filipino woman had even been enshrined in the country's jurisprudence in the Maria Clara doctrine. The doctrine presumes that 'women, especially Filipinos, would not admit that they have been abused unless that abuse had happened.' [34] Hence, the testimony of the victim herself would suffice to convict a man accused of rape. It is based on the presupposition that normally a woman would not want her honour or chastity to be blemished by such a revelation. On the other side, it also suggests that if the victim does not fit the mould of a Maria Clara, then her testimony could be discredited. Unquestioningly, this doctrine had to be reconsidered in the twenty-first century.

The model of Maria Clara has shaped how women should behave in courtship. Courting traditionally occurred in the home of the woman. The woman is expected to play 'hard to get' and to be modest, the opposite of which is to be a flirt, an undesirable trait for women.[35] A Filipino maiden was supposed to be like Maria Clara—'modest, shy, well-mannered.' She should not be very transparent in her feelings of love for her admirer. As more women joined the labour force and studied in universities, casual dating began to be held in public places, but the courting script remained the same. A study on courtship and marriage attitudes of the students attending the University of the Philippines in 1954 reveals that the majority participate in courting from ages 14–16 but the men start courting at an age of over sixteen. This aligns with the social expectation that the man is older and more experienced than the woman. The study also reveals that the majority of the males go out for a date without a chaperone while most of the women were always chaperoned, as the application of moral sanctions is stricter for women.[36] In contrast the results of a later study (1975) on courtship in an urban Visayan setting shows that the boys are now dating earlier than the girls. They do more steady dating and are more active sexually.[37] These two studies also just took it for granted that it is the man who initiated the courtship and did not subject this to further study.

Online dating

The first dating websites emerged in the 1990s. In 1995, Match.com went live, OKCupid in the beginning of 2000s, the most popular dating app Tinder in 2012,[38] and the feminist dating app Bumble in 2014. Would dating apps in the age of computer-mediated communication foster more women to take the first move in a relationship? The study of Rachel Dinh and colleagues focused on large-scale computational analysis of online dating involving 150,000 heterosexual users of the eHarmony dating site over a period of ten years in the UK, reveals that traditional gender norms prevail.[39] The result of a psychological study by researchers at the University of Rochester, albeit not specifying any gender, furthermore shows that the value and sexual desirability of a potential partner increases when perceived as hard to get.[40] This results in more efforts to see the potential partner again. Together with the view that it should be men who must do the courting, this study supports the traditional notion that women must play hard to get to catch the men.

Even the research of Ravi Bapna and colleagues manifests indirectly on how deeply ingrained is the notion that it is men and not women who should make the first move in a relationship. Women, at best, can only send 'weak signals' to show their interest in a man. Employing randomised trials in collaboration with one of the biggest dating companies, Bapna et al. studied the effect of weak signalling on gender communication and positive matching outcomes in online dating.[41] Weak signalling refers to the capacity to visit a prospective partner's profile in a way that the other party becomes aware of this visit. It is the ability to make a subtle indirect move in the relationship showing the potential mate of one's interest. Offline, this is

equivalent to a 'suggestive look or a forward stance' that can be interpreted in various ways. The results show that weak signalling helps women overcome social restrictions against women making the first move. Through weak signalling that employs a non-anonymous mode, women leave a trail to potential partners without directly messaging them. This trail is an important expression of interest that results in responses and increases the possibility of positive matching outcomes.

Statement of the problem and methodology

The study aims to investigate Filipin@ college students' perspectives on women doing the first move in expressing their love interest in men, and the underlying cultural and theological beliefs that support this. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed personally by the researchers to 119 first year college students from the different colleges of a Catholic university in Pampanga. College students were chosen as data from them is easily obtainable.

The respondents for the study are first year college students who are enrolled in the second semester for the school year 2018–19. These are the first batch of college students who are products of the K-12 Program of the Department of Education (DEPED), ever since the country shifted to a twelve-year basic education program. In this transitional period, the only other students enrolled in the college are fourth- and fifth-year students who were not available during the study. The researchers selected four sections from four colleges or departments using a purposive sampling technique. Each section has an average of forty students. A total of 119 respondents participated in the survey. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Profile of the respondents (N=119)

Variable	Category	f	%
Age	18 years old	37	31.1
	19 years old	74	62.2
	20 years old	5	4.2
	22 years old	3	2.5
	Total	119	100
Religion	Catholic	93	78.2
	Born Again	13	10.9
	Iglesia ni Kristo	3	2.5
	Baptist	4	3.4
	Did not indicate	6	5
Total	119	100	
Gender	Female	83	69.7
	Male	36	30.3
	Total	119	100
Course	Hotel and Tourism Management	29	24.4
	Business and Accountancy	38	31.9
	Engineering	23	19.3
	Education	24	20.2
	Criminology	1	8

Did not indicate	4	3.4
Total	119	100

The questionnaire is a self-made instrument composed of ten items on perceptions of students as regards women who make the first move in expressing their love interest in men. A five-point Likert scale (5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree) was used to measure their stance on the ten statements. The instrument was pilot tested before being floated to the research participants.

The quantitative data gathered was subjected to a t-test, to determine whether there is a significant difference in the responses by gender and religious affiliation. The t-test determines the correctness of the results and its applicability to the entire population. A correlation analysis was done to examine the relation between the ten statements.

Theoretical framework

The study employs script theory in its analysis of courtship ritual. Script theory understands human actions as following patterns or 'scripts' as in a play or film. The script dictates how one acts in a particular situation. John Gagnon and William Simon developed the concept of a sexual script layered by three dimensions: cultural, interpersonal, and intra-psychic scenarios. The cultural scenarios refer to the social norms or expectations at various subcultural levels including the family; these are external to the individual. The interpersonal scenario is the convergence of the social norms and the personal desires where the abstract norms are concretised in a particular situation with others. The intra-psychic scenario refers to the individual's motivation in acting as well as personality, and unlike the interpersonal scenario involves more of a dialogue with the self. Because of these three dimensions, even people within the same culture may act differently.

The construction of the questionnaire took into consideration the cultural scenarios (e.g., norms, technological affordances) that shape courtship. The analysis integrated insights from the focus group discussion and literature that touch on the cultural, interpersonal, and intra-psychic scenarios.

Significance and limitation of the study

The researchers have not encountered any study in the Philippines and even in Asia on the question of women making the first move in expressing their love interest in men. There was a study on the courtship and marriage attitudes of University of the Philippines students conducted in 1954 but it still presupposed that it is the boy who courts. It asked: 'If you are a boy, at what age did you first court a girl? If you are a girl, when were you first courted?'^[42] There are also no known local studies on how online dating apps are changing courtship.

A limitation of our study is its focus on just one university, although this is a common practice in studies on dating patterns of students. College students are well suited for this research that delves into evolving practices as they usually are more exposed to changing ideas and norms in society. On how dating apps are transforming dating scripts, the study is limited to asking the students' perceptions and does not examine their actual practice of using the apps.

Results

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the survey conducted.

Table 2. Mean scores, standard deviation and interpretation

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std deviation	Interpretation
1. Men should take the first move in expressing their love interest in women	119	1.00	5.00	3.84	1.01667	Agree
2. Women, in accord with their nature, should be passive in relationships	119	1.00	5.00	2.95	1.06082	Neither agree nor disagree
3. Maria Clara is a model of virtue for Filipino women	119	1.00	5.00	3.88	0.96705	Agree
4. Women who court men are flirts	119	1.00	5.00	2.00	0.96985	Disagree
5. Women who initiate courting are courageous or possess <i>lakas-ng-loob</i>	119	1.00	5.00	3.94	0.81609	Agree
6. Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting	119	1.00	5.00	3.93	0.97190	Agree
7. Women should have the freedom to initiate courting	119	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.92320	Agree
8. With digital technologies, it is easier for women to initiate courting	119	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.02740	Neither agree nor disagree
9. Most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting	119	1.00	5.00	3.52	1.09563	Agree
10. My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting	119	1.00	5.00	3.87	1.18289	Agree
Ave Mean				3.51		Agree

The following scale was used to interpret the mean scores on the perceptions of students as regards women who take the first move in expressing their love interest in men: Strongly Agree (4.21–5.00); Agree (3.41–4.20); Neither Agree nor Disagree (2.61–3.400); Disagree (1.81–2.60) and Strongly Disagree (1.00–1.80).[\[43\]](#)

The higher standard deviations for items 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10 means that the responses are spread apart in relation to the mean.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of the statements

		q1	q2	q3	q4	q5	q6	q7	q8	q9	q10
q1	Pearson's r	—									
	p-value	—									
q2	Pearson's r	0.135	—								
	p-value	0.143	—								
q3	Pearson's r	0.257	0.449	—							
	p-value	0.005	<.001	—							
q4	Pearson's r	0.216	0.099	0.008	—						
	p-value	0.018	0.283	0.931	—						

q5	Pearson's r	0.246	0.017	0.073	0.149	—					
	p-value	0.007	0.857	0.428	0.105	—					
q6	Pearson's r	0.311	0.060	0.090	0.0431	0.305	—				
	p-value	<.001	0.515	0.332	<.001	<.001	—				
q7	Pearson's r	0.377	0.145	0.095	0.339	0.337	0.556	—			
	p-value	<.001	0.117	0.304	<.001	<.001	<.001	—			
q8	Pearson's r	0.102	0.096	0.224	0.215	0.115	0.125	0.140	—		
	p-value	0.268	0.300	0.014	0.019	0.214	0.177	0.128	—		
q9	Pearson's r	0.267	0.165	0.171	0.147	0.183	0.181	0.335	0.039	—	
	p-value	0.003	0.073	0.063	0.110	0.047	0.049	<.001	0.647	—	
q10	Pearson's r	0.427	0.246	0.313	0.289	0.183	0.310	0.335	0.049	0.523	—
	p-value	<.001	0.007	<.001	0.001	0.046	<.001	<.001	0.600	<.001	—

The highlighted p-values indicate significant/generalisable correlations between questions. The Pearson's r values indicate the strength and direction of the correlation.

The above results show that the respondents agree ($M=3.84$) to q1 'Men should take the first move in expressing their love interest in women.' The correlation matrix shows that the following statements positively correlates with q1: q3 'Maria Clara is a model of virtue for Filipino women' ($p=.005$); q4 'Women who court men are flirts' ($p=.018$); q9 'Most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting' ($p=.003$); and more strongly q10 'My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting.' ($R=.427$, moderate correlation).^[44] The computed r squared^[45] points to the following: 6.6 per cent of the belief in q1 is due to q3; 4.67 per cent is due to q4; 7.13 per cent is due to q9, and 18.23 per cent is due to q10.

Alternatively, the following statements negatively correlate with q1: q5 'Women who initiate courting are courageous or possess *lakas ng loob*' ($p=.007$); q6 'Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting' ($p<.001$); q7 'With digital technologies, it is easier for women to initiate courting' ($p<.001$).

The respondents 'neither agreed nor disagreed' with q2 ($M=2.95$) 'Women, in accord to their nature, should be passive in relationships.' The absence of a correlation between q1 and q2 may mean that the belief that it is men who should initiate in expressing love interest does not necessarily mean that women should be passive in relationships. As we have earlier noted, some distinguish between the 'initiating' done by women and that of men, with women leading the men to take their role and responsibility.

The respondents agree with q3 ($M=3.88$) 'Maria Clara is a model of virtue for Filipino women.' This correlates not only with q1 but also q2 suggesting that the belief in Maria Clara as a model of virtue may stem from a basic conviction in the passive nature of women ($p<.001$; $R=.449$).

While the respondents agreed that it is men who must do the initiating, the respondents generally do not regard women who take the initiative as flirts. Most of them disagreed with q4 ($M=2.0$) that 'Women who court men are flirts.' The standard deviation is high intimating a degree of variation in the responses from the mean. A negative correlation between q6 and q4 ($p<.001$) implies that the belief in q4 'Women who court men are flirts' may be rooted in a rejection of q6 'Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting.' However, this interpretation needs to be nuanced. It may also be the case that what is rejected is not the equality of women and men but simply the right to initiate courting. Some see this as an issue of differentiation in roles. Similarly, q7 has a negative correlation with q4 ($p<.001$). The belief in q4 'Women who court men are flirts' may be due to the rejection of q7 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting.'

At the same time that the respondents agreed that men should do the initiating, they also affirmed q6 (M=3.93) 'Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting' and q7 (M=3.85) 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting.'

The statement with the highest computed mean is q5 (M=3.94) 'Women who initiate courting are courageous or possess *lakas-ng-loob*.' A positive correlation between q6 and q5 ($p < .001$) suggests that q5 the view that 'Women who initiate courting are courageous or possess *lakas ng loob*' may be premised on any of the following beliefs: q6 'Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting' and; q7 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting.' It negatively correlates with q9 'Most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting' and q10 ($p = .047$) 'My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting.'

The respondents neither agree nor disagree (M=3.33) with q8 'With digital technologies, it is easier for women to initiate courting.' The high standard deviation shows the variation in responses in relation to the mean. The statement negatively correlates with q3 'Maria Clara is a model of virtue for Filipino women' ($p = .014$) and q4 'Women who court men are flirts' ($p = .019$).

The respondents agree (M=3.52) that most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting. This correlates positively with q9 'My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting' ($p < .001$; $R = .523$) suggesting that the stance may be premised on their faith conviction. It negatively correlates ($p = .049$) with q6 'Women and men are equal and therefore either one has the right to initiate courting' and q7 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting.'

Lastly, the respondents agree (M=3.52) with q10 'My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting.' This correlates negatively with q7 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting' ($p < .001$).

When disaggregated by gender, the t-test reveals a significant difference in the responses of the men and the women for questions 1 ($p = .005$), 3 ($p = .043$), 7 ($p = .048$), 9 ($p < .001$), and 10 ($p < .001$). Significantly more women than men agree with the following statements: 'Men should take the first move in expressing their love interest in women' (q1: $F = 4.01$, $M = 3.44$); 'Maria Clara is a model of virtue for Filipino women' (q3: $F = 4$, $M = 3.61$); 'Most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting' (q9: $F = 3.77$, $M = 2.97$); and 'My faith teaches that women should wait for the man to do the courting' (q10: $F = 4.14$, $M = 3.25$). Significantly more men than women agree that 'Women should have the freedom to initiate courting' (q7: $F = 3.75$, $M = 4.11$).

When disaggregated by religion, (Catholics, Born Again, Iglesia ni Kristo, Baptist, and those who did not indicate any religion), the results show no significant differences in their response to each of the ten questions.

Further analysis and discussion

Based on the findings of the study, though there is wide variation in the extent of agreement/disagreement, the mean response shows that students agree that men should take the first move. This is correlated to internalised norms of what a virtuous woman is and perceptions of what men regard as acceptable behaviour for women in courting, but most especially with what their faith teaches in terms of the roles of men and women in courtship.

Making the first move and the virtues of fortitude, self-care, and mutuality

There is however acceptance of women who initiate courting. Instead of labelling women who make the

first move as 'flirts,' the survey respondents regard them as courageous. In the FGD, the respondents shared interpersonal and intrapsychic scenarios that can lead a woman to initiate the first move. Interpersonal circumstances take the situation into consideration and include the risk of losing the chance or opportunity to establish a relationship if the woman simply waits and does not initiate. Intrapsychic factors that were cited were the intensity of the feeling ('one really likes the guy'), the value for transparency ('at least you are honest'), the motivation for taking the initiative is 'not lust but love,' the action was discerned or prayed over, and personality or character traits such as courage or resilience were taken into consideration. Two FGD respondents admitted that it is not in their personality to make the first move. One respondent shared that she does not have the courage to risk expressing her feelings toward another person.

Christian courage is what is referred to as fortitude. Can the courage to initiate the first move in courtship be considered a virtue in an egalitarian feminist paradigm? For Thomas Aquinas, fortitude moderates fear ensuing from a consciousness of one's vulnerability. He recognises fortitude in its two acts: *agredi* (risk-taking; *lakas ng loob*)^[46] and *sustinere* (endurance; *tibay ng loob* or *katatagan*). Initiating the first move in courtship involves both risk-taking and endurance in case of rejection.

Aquinas further holds that a virtue should interrelate with other virtues in order to become true virtue. Fortitude as a virtue for women in the context of courtship can be interrelated with the virtues of self-care and mutuality. In our earlier discussion, we have elaborated on how virtues are historically and socially constituted, which means that what is considered a virtue in a particular context depends on historical and socio-cultural factors. James Keenan notes how chastity, within an act-oriented ethics, has been traditionally recognised as the chief virtue in sexual relations. He proposed instead a virtue-oriented sexual ethics by offering a new set of cardinal virtues that can serve to 'hinge' the ways we are relational, namely: self-care (relation to self); justice (general relations, i.e., to society); fidelity (special relations); and prudence (practical reason).^[47] In the past, the virtue of self-care was eclipsed by the tradition's focus on self-denial prescribed more intensely for women. Self-care is an important virtue in interpersonal relations and is implicit in the command to love your neighbour as you love yourself. Building on Keenan's proposal, Fullam elaborated subsidiary virtues connected to the cardinal virtues. She identified kindness to our bodies, seeking pleasure, and celebrating incarnation as subsidiary virtues to self-care, and the exercise of freedom and cultivation of mutuality as subsidiary virtues to fidelity.^[48]

In the specific context of women making the first move, fortitude (Christian courage) must be guided by self-care and mutuality. The decision by a woman to initiate is an act of self-care as she seizes the opportunity to establish a relationship that she desires. The courage to make the move must be grounded in a belief in the importance of mutuality or reciprocity, free from a priori notions of who should be active or passive in a relationship.

The virtues of mutuality and self-care in terms of seeking pleasure are clearly manifest in the Song of Songs. The mutuality between the single lovers leaves no room for gender subordination or stereotype. The woman narrator of the Song of Songs does not hesitate to take a leading role in the relationship. Trying to locate her lover, she asks, 'Tell me, where do you graze your flock, why should I be like a stranger (veiled woman) beside the flocks of your friends?' (1:7). Taking the initiative in the courtship, she expresses 'I looked for him but did not find him (5:6) ... if you find my lover, tell him I am faint with love' (5:8). Arthur Lewis also points out the equality of pleasure in the lovers: 'The bride in the Song of Songs expresses freely her delight in her lover's kisses (1:2), in his embrace (2:6), in the beauty of his body (5: 10–15), and the sweetness of his mouth' (5:16).'^[49]

There is clearly a need for alternative models of womanhood to Maria Clara, that shift perspectives not only in women's roles in the public sphere but in intimate relations as well. Feminist rereading of texts in the Bible where women make the first move in relationships such as in the Song of Songs can be foregrounded.^[50] The retrieval of the *babaylan*, of local women heroes including the women of Malolos as

models, and the appropriation of feminist ideas in schools and in the church can help destabilise colonial gender perspectives.

Men's openness to women making the first move

The significant differences in the responses of the women and the men in the survey signals a greater openness to a change in practice and beliefs among the men, and a relatively greater internalisation of traditional norms among women. It is striking to note that the men neither agree nor disagree to q9 'Most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting' (F=3.77, M=2.97), compared to the women who agreed with this statement. This contrasts with the University of Rochester study mentioned earlier which reveals that the desirability of a partner goes up when she plays hard to get, thereby implying that initiating courting will not be good for women. The men's response may not only be explained by their increasing belief in the equal rights of women and men but also in the desire to share this anxiety-filled role. When doing the first move, one is subjected to the risk of rejection. It is therefore beneficial to men if women can share as well in this endeavour.

The significance of faith/religiosity

The survey also revealed that faith plays a big role in shaping the views of the respondents, but particular religious affiliations do not make a significant difference in the responses of the interviewees. All of the faith groups mentioned (Catholics, Evangelicals, Baptists, and Iglesia ni Kristo) adhere officially (e.g., Catholics) and/or dominantly to a form of complementarianism where men and women are seen as complementary but equal, or the man is regarded as superior to the woman.^[51] This does not disregard the existence of those who adhere to an egalitarian perspective in these traditions. While there may be no explicit teachings about who initiates in courting, this is as we have seen, usually based on views regarding who takes leadership in the family and in the Church.

What seems to have a greater significant impact, more than the Christian denomination where one belongs, is non-religiosity. In a 1994 study of awareness of gender differences in courting conducted at Utrecht University in the Netherlands mentioned earlier in this paper, the findings show a lack of awareness among the respondents as to which gender should make the first move, as well as, men's preference for presenting the self to the opposite sex by highlighting female-valued characteristics (e.g., tenderness) whereas women represent themselves with male-valued traits such as holding a prestigious occupation at the same de-emphasising culinary abilities.^[52] While the study did not look into the impact of religion, it is important to note that the Netherlands has become highly secularised, with 60 percent of the population holding no religious affiliation by the late 1990s.^[53]

Role of digital technologies

Lastly, the respondents neither agree nor disagree that digital technologies today facilitate women making the first move in expressing their love interest in a man. The standard deviation is high indicating wide variations from the mean, with some strongly agreeing and others strongly disagreeing. The FGD respondents cited the following features of digital technologies that make it easier for women to initiate the first move: it is not face-to-face and one has ample time to think about what to say.

With the emergence of online dating, it may seem that the playing field now affords both women and men equal opportunity in communication initiation. However, the results of some studies show otherwise. We have mentioned the large-scale ten-year study of Dinh and colleagues, whose result showed that online dating has 'not only reflected but exacerbated male-dominated initiation.'^[54] Men initiate the writing of the

first message 30 percent more while the response rate women receive decreases by 15 percent when they write first. Women still act according to learned norms. The asymmetry between male and female courtship behaviour has not been overcome by technology.

In contrast, the feminist dating app Bumble grants 'first women privileges' or requires women to message first. The research of Sabrina Sobieraj and Lee Humpreys showed that while the design of Bumble aims to liberate women from cultural restraints against initiating, women especially those who lack confidence experience empowerment as forced, a burden, pressure-filled, and anxiety-inducing.^[55] Many of their respondents have an account on Tinder as well where there is freedom for both women and men to initiate. This same study showed that on Tinder, it is still mostly the men who do the initiating.

Conclusion

Has the courting script changed? This research shows that—despite wide variation in the extent of agreement/disagreement—students agree that men should take the first move for the following reasons: 1. women should act like Maria Clara, a model of virtue; 2. women who court men are flirts; 3. most Filipino men do not like women to initiate courting; 4. and most importantly, this is what their faith teaches.

That they 'agree' rather than 'strongly agree' with the view that men should make the first move intimates a gradual change in young adults' perspective, like the modest changes happening in other non-western societies. There is not only the acceptance of women who would do otherwise, moreover, these women are viewed as courageous. We have proposed that within an egalitarian-feminist perspective, this courageous act can be linked to the interrelated virtues of fortitude, self-care and mutuality.

There is also a significant difference in the response of women and men in five out of the ten statements suggesting a greater openness to a change in practice among the men. The symbol of Maria Clara continues to shape women and men's image of the virtuous woman, but more so for women. The results show how women have internalised more the traditional norms expected of women as this may have been impressed strongly on them by parents and society. Religious beliefs do not make a significant difference in the responses of the interviewees but this may be because the Christian denominations/religions do not radically differ in their view about the complementary roles of women and men. Highlighting alternative models of women in the Bible and in the local culture can help shift courting scripts toward becoming more egalitarian and mutual.

Finally, the respondents neither agree nor disagree that digital technologies today facilitate women making the first move in expressing their love interest in a man. Ultimately, whether the woman initiates courting online or not depends not only on changing norms nor technology but on interpersonal and intrapsychic factors (e.g., an individual's internalised norms, personality/character traits).

It is recommended that future studies in the local context focus on women and men, as well as LGBT who are actually using online dating sites such as Tinder and Bumble to probe more into the technological affordance and how this reintegrates or subverts traditional gender norms. This study could be followed by a focus group discussion on the Song of Songs or the Story of Ruth to deepen the analysis of the results in the light of the Christian faith tradition.

Notes

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- [11] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q.32, art. 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online: http://www.documenta-catholica.eu/d_1225-1274-%20Thomas%20Aquinas%20-%20Summa%20Theologiae%20-%20Prima%20Pars%20-%20EN.pdf, accessed 20 Apr. 2022.
- [12] John Piper, *What's the Difference?: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990; see also Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior: Every Man's Purpose, Every Woman's Dream, Every Child's Hope*, Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009; Scott Croft, 'Biblical dating: Men initiate, women respond,' 15 Feb. 2007, online: <https://www.boundless.org/relationships/biblical-dating-men-initiate-women-respond/>, accessed 20 Apr. 2022.
- [13] Currently, dating has assumed a recreational function, that is, more as a way to form and foster romantic ties regardless of whether this leads to marriage or not. Cheryl Harasymchuk, Deanna L. Walker, Amy Muise, and Emily A. Impett, 'Planning date nights that promote closeness: The roles of relationship goals and self-expansion,' *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38, no. 5 (2021): 1692–1709, doi: [10.1177/02654075211000436](https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211000436).
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- [17] Patrick, *Liberating Conscience*, pp. 89–90.
- [18] Patrick, *Liberating Conscience*, p. 76.
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[42] Coller, 'A sample of courtship and marriage attitudes held by U.P. Students,' p. 33.

[43] See J.L. Pimentel, 'A note on the usage of Likert scaling for research data analysis,' in *USM R&D Journal* 18, no. 2 (2010): 109–12.

[44] The following serves as guide for evaluating the relationship: .00–0.10, no or negligible correlation; 0.10–0.39, weak correlation; 0.40–0.69 moderate correlation; 0.70–0.89 strong correlation; .90–1.00 very strong correlation. See P. Schober, C. Boer, and L. Schwarte, 'Correlation coefficients: Appropriate use and interpretation,' *Anesthesia and Analgesia* 126, no. 5 (2018): 1763–68, doi: [10.1213/ANE.0000000000002864](https://doi.org/10.1213/ANE.0000000000002864).

[45] R squared shows the proportion of variation in the dependent variable (e.g., q1) can be explained by the independent variable (e.g., q3, q4, q9, and q10.)

[46] Aristotle, *Ethic* ii, 7; iii, 9, cited by Thomas, *Summa Theologiae II-II* q. 123, Art. 3.

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[49] Arthur Lewis, 'Equality of sexes in marriage: Exposition of the Song of Songs,' 30 Apr. 1997, in *Priscilla Papers*, online: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/equality-sexes-marriage-exposition-song-songs>, accessed 30 June 2022. More recent exegesis posits that the lovers are not married but single. Carr, 'Gender and the shaping of desire in the Song of Songs.'

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[54] Dinh et al., 'Computational courtship.'

[55] Sabrina Sobieraj and Lee Humpreys, 'Forced empowerment and the paradox of mobile dating apps,' in *Social Media + Society* 7, no. 4 (2021): 1–12, doi: [10.1177/20563051211068130](https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211068130).

Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

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Last modified: 3 Dec. 2022 1409