



Courtship in the Philippines today

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A. Definition of Courtship in the Philippines

“Courtship is the best part of a girl’s romance and love life”. This is the reason why in the earlier courting practices there have been a lot of rituals involved. Thus, in those times, before they get married they are able to enjoy the labors of a suitor for her love even if it takes a year or more of courtship.

In the span of courtship, they are able to enjoy themselves by being treated with outmost care and be given with all kinds of presents, from which it can be observed why some young women put off marriage to some late time to enjoy the privileges of being always free to be showered with affection (Molina, 1983).

The kind of rigorous courtship practice that is well supervised by guardians is different from the west and one of these significant differences is dating.

Dating is an art developed in western countries which is not original in itself but part of the courtship system in the Philippines. Unlike in the founded practice of chaperonage, the aim of dating from the western perspective is to “provide an occasion where a man and woman can be alone”. It can be a series of meetings where it would be best for them to develop romance, learn compatibility if they choose to get married, find similarities or attracting spiritual or life values, “mutuality in sexual satisfaction and the meeting of psychological needs” (Molina, 1983).

Also traditional courtship was participated in or controlled by the parents and other kinsmen. This system was rooted in the Filipino view that marriage was a union not only of two individuals but also primarily of their families. Therefore, it was important for a son or a daughter to marry well so that the resulting union would enhances the good name of the family. However, in this generation, single dating is already a normal occurrence but the Philippines had originally developed a number of courting practices before dating came as an influence from the west. Before this modern period, almost every region had a different courting practice handed down to their families to practice (Medina, 2005).

a. Luzon

Luzon provinces or tribes had developed courting practices that were similar to each other since there is closeness of cultures formed in between the provinces. Their courting practices are formed by their life conditions, traditions and resources.

.....The Ilocanos practice “tapat” a simple serenading of one’s love. Serenading is a means by which a suitor would be able to express his feelings for the woman he is courting through singing of

romantic songs at moonlit nights with his friends in the accompaniment of a guitar. This is very similar to the balagtasan. It is the responsive song of lovers that the boy starts first then the girl answers in a song too until they arrive at an understanding. Added to this, rooster courtship is a practice wherein a rooster becomes the middleman into the prospective bride's house where it would be left in the house of the girl to crow for the mornings of the family. On the other hand, the Pangasinense used love potions/ charms or known to them as taga-amo to make the loved one slave of one's love as soon as it rubbed or drinks from it. Some also are serenading, reciting verses, making love letter, and giving gifts of symbolic objects to make courtship romantic. Palabas is the last way where the boy threatens to commit suicide then the girl saves the day by confessing that she loved the boy all along. The Apayaos practice mahal-alay (liberal courtship) wherein there would be sleeping together in the evening where the boy tests the girl's feeling if she really nurtures a reciprocal sentiment toward him by stealing beside her in bed. The Bulaceños practice naninilong wherein there is prickling of the girl beneath girl's house during the midnight by stick and they are talking in whisper. Houses in the provinces of Bulacan were made of pawid and bamboo thus it was easy for the suitor to sneak in the girl's house. The Palawanons have their own style of courtship which is in the form of riddles they call pasaguli. They use love riddles to test the parents of the prospective bridegroom and if his answer satisfies the prospective bride's parent they will undergo pabalic which is well related to the dowry system (Anima, 1975). The dowry is usually a marriage settlement consisting of land, house or other goods give by the groom's family to the new wife (Costales et al, 2007).

b. Visayas

In the Visayan part Cebuanos were the most populous locals. In courtship, the Cebuanos also use reciting of love verses which they call balak. This serenading expresses the man's love and admiration to the chosen one. Each lyric of the song comprises the appreciation to the nature and some sentimental words of admiration. Love letters which is one of the popular ways of courting wherein they express their feelings in a written way. They do not send it by mail but by someone whom they trust either it is a friend or a relative of a girl. They sent gifts not only to the girl but also to her relatives a sort of "pampalakas". And like Pangasinense they also use love potions to make woman to fall in love easily (Quisimbing, 1965). In contrast to the love charms, the people of Leyte strictly practice the courtship norm of paninilbihan. A Filipino man wishing to wed into a traditional family is expected to perform household service to the bride's family as proof of his sincerity and fortitude. This can include anything from fetching water and chopping firewood, working in the farm as well as running household errands which usually last for about one year. But such test of earnestness does not guarantee affirmative acceptance of the marriage proposal.

c. Mindanao

People in Mindanao have cultivated very daunting traditional courting practices one particularly the Tausogs. The Tausogs have different kinds courting practices such as the palabas and magpasumbahi which means reckless courtship. Magpsumbahi also known as sarakahan tupul, is a dangerous form of courtship wherein life is at stake and the prosecutor could be the prospective daughter's father if he refuses the offer. In this scenario, a man threatens to directly stab his heart in front of the lady's father bringing with him a barong and then he will ask the hand of his daughter and if the father refuses the man permits to smite him down with the barong. But after the intimidating courtship practices, the Tausogs are known to celebrate the most elaborate, full of splendor and pageantry kind of wedding ceremony. Another is the Bagobo tribe wherein they use a spear or knife in courting which they send to the house of the prospective bride after it has been inspected. For them, the acceptance of gifts means acceptance of the suitor (Anima, 1975). Alternatively, the Muslims of the south have pre-arranged marriages but has elaborate rites before marriage takes place. These rites, even as pre-arranged, are means to get a prospective husband or wife and such engagement takes place in the betrothal. After the boy informs the parents of the girl of his noble intentions a betrothal takes place. It is a formal state of engagement to be married, the

families of the girl and boy negotiate for the approval of the lady's parents and then both families discuss if their son and daughter are fit to be husband and wife. After the agreement of the girl's parents of the union and the boy then informs his parents the village headman who shall preside over the settlement of dowry which includes money, clothes, jewelry and other considerable wealth. After this engagement period, this will be followed by an actual wedding ceremony that begins and ends by a lavish celebration of feasting, dancing and music (Mojul, 1999).

To this day, the wedding practices of Ilocanos, Pangasinenses, Tagalogs, Aetas, Bataks, Muslims, and Igorots continue, handed down from their ancestors.

B. Modern Courting Practices in the Philippines

Courting from the 19th century Philippines, as we inherited well from the Spaniards, taught us the Maria Clara style of conservatism and repressiveness. In such ways, no emotion of submissiveness and affection to the wooing of a bachelor can be shown. But this repressive kind of behavior has been abandoned long ago as the reality of technological age make communication faster and closer. (Solis, 2007, para.5). Technology has become one of the major factors why the traditional type of courting drifted to the type of courtship the Philippines exhibit now.

a. Mobile Courting or Texting

It is apparent that today, old styles of courtship have been replaced by the modern lifestyle of the 20th century. The twentieth century has greatly influenced the country with the use of the cellphone since its arrival into the country for almost 10 years. The country's status in cellphone use especially in texting as GMA quotes it from Joy Weaver "texting is a way of life". It's maximization for communicating with anyone anywhere has also reached to creating a custom of courtship in the Philippines through texting (Rules of thumb, 2007)

"People want to talk to other people – not a house, or an office, or a car. Given a choice, people will demand the freedom to communicate wherever they are, unfettered by the infamous copper wire. It is that freedom we sought to vividly demonstrate in 1973," said Martin Cooper. He added, "As I walked down the street while talking on the phone, sophisticated New Yorkers gaped at the sight of someone actually moving around while making a phone call. Remember that in 1973, there weren't cordless telephones, let alone cellular phones. I made numerous calls, including one where I crossed the street while talking to a New York radio reporter – probably one of the more dangerous things I have ever done in my life." ([http://www. /Rule of Thumbs Love in the Age of Texting-washingtonpost_com.html](http://www.RuleofThumbsLove.com/html)). The invention of cellular phones apparently helped in the transition of society, from 1973 to the present. From cellphones down to analog phones and to the smallest unit of phones we have today, change is in effect.

Upon approach of the cell phone technology in the Philippine, adaptation has become very rapid. The cell phone industry in the Philippines became prolific because people realized well the convenience of communicating cheaper and wider through text messaging. Thus in the advent of the of the third generation cellphones, we have been tagged as the texting capital of the world. This is for the most reason that texting is the cheapest way to communicate to as many persons possible and most of the Philippine population using cell phones can't afford of unlimited talk time. But through text messaging, many are able to nurture intimacy by frequency of contact and express themselves more openly in a very convenient way thus helping in creating a new and more suitable doors for courtship to take place ("Mobile dating", 2007).

• Advantages

The change in society became rapid as humans maximize the use of technology. This is very obvious in the lifestyle portrayed by westerners who have well developed information technology systems and industries. Thus, the westerners, especially women, became more career focused (Reuters, 2005).

a. More convenient way to communicate

We are offered the chance to get a partner that is compatible to our preferences in the most convenient way, empower women to initiate relationship and furthermore supplement in an adapted way of communication in courtship that create real romantic relationships (Solis, 2007).

This texting custom of courtship in the modern age opened more doors to the possibility of younger age groups to participate without hindrance from parents and more experience for romance. This texting prelude is usually followed by a date, wherein the text mates would agree to meet at a certain time and place. Dating is one of the crucial stages in courtship wherein social interaction between partners will be enhanced and compatibility will be fostered. In the western orientation, this kind of courtship through text messaging is called mobile dating, only it is part of the an e-business in the United States just like online dating ("Mobile Dating", n.d, para1,3). Similar to the Philippine setup, through the capabilities of a mobile phone,

It is part of the Filipino culture to interact socially. Yet, telephone industry was monopolized by one major company, to some extent, by the powerful PLDT, thus prices and availability of telephones has always been limited to the very few. Though, after some deregulation of the telephone companies, some new companies have entered the market making telephone access to quite a few more. Still, for the average tao, an in home phone, land line, is not an option, it requires credit, steady job, and other things, a lot of especially younger Filipinos don't have. (<http://www.livinginthephilippines.com/style14.html>).

These information leads to the affirmation that texting is indeed more suitable to the Filipino society and social condition now a days.

b. Practical Reasons

These advancements due to technology make our life easy at the same time fast-phasing and due to these reasons, it seems like everyone should incline to the rush so that people should not left be behind.

Technology seems to be a great factor now a days, Mrs. G. Gosgolan indicated that "youth of today want things to be instant, the value of patience is now lost. They want to know right away the result even if they are not sure on what they are heading for and also for practical reasons. (Personal interview, February 2, 2009).

• DISADVANTAGES

Increase the numbers of Divorce cases

Traditions and customs are upgraded to a different level of approach. In the west, one of the effects of technology lifestyle is the increased number of divorce cases because commitment to an individual is being left out (Epstein, 2007). Because of the advancement offered by the technology there are cases in which due to the less knowledge one has to his partner, compatibility is now at stake and with this thing involve the relationship of the couple would be affected that often times will lead to divorce. Such dispute of custody is evidently happening in the Filipino society because of the instant and easier ways to acquire things and even relationships then end things instantly. Young adults today, who manage an instant lifestyle have a hard time to cultivate the values of hard work, sincerity and fortitude in reaching goals and most importantly, building relationships (Personal Communication, February 2, 2009)

B. Online Courting

Aside from mobile courting, online dating is a new dating approach that allows exclusive use of an internet service to get a potential mate (Reuters, 2005). Because of the very influential west to the Philippine culture, it didn't take time for the Filipinas to adapt in this kind of match making. "Up to 100,000 Pinays are listed in 200 Internet dating sites" as of 2005. USA, which is the prime market of bachelors of online matchmaking found ways to get Filipinas as potential mates because most them are divorced to less traditional and career-focused western women who find them less good looking and imperfect (Reuters, 2005, p.A1). In the Philippines, online dating is a close of concept of "women's liberation which emphasizes freedom from the traditional restrictions in sexual and social behavior which has recently manifests itself in dating patterns" (Medina, 2001, p.80). Today, patterns of initiative are no longer clear cut which is well exploited by Filipinas in online dating. It is clear that their aim in online dating is not only to get a foreign date but to the goal of courtship, which is to get married to a rich foreigner. This proves that "it is not uncommon nowadays for a woman to encourage the man or even initiate courtship" (Medina, 2001, p 80).

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