

# Spirituality and the development of positive character among Filipino adolescents

Roseann Mansukhani  
Ron Resurreccion  
*De La Salle University*

*This study delved into the views, perceptions, and experiences of spirituality of Filipino adolescents to describe their conceptions of spirituality and spiritual development. Results from qualitative analysis of four focused group discussions revealed that Filipino adolescents define spirituality in terms of faith, personal relationship with God, and positive character, and describe spiritual persons as having faith in God, morality, positive personal qualities, a positive sense of self, spiritual connectedness, transcendent and relational sources of happiness, an ability to solve problems, and a sense of well-being. Themes of adolescents' spiritual development involved influences of socialization agents, religious roles in a religious community, challenging personal experiences, and blocks to spirituality. Adolescents' own spiritual experiences had themes of spiritual transformation, spiritual coping, and altruism. Findings were discussed in relation to the development of positive character and overall positive youth development.*

*Keywords: Adolescents, positive youth development, spirituality, socialization, well-being*

Young people begin to wonder about God in childhood. Despite their level of cognitive development, children do have a capacity for spiritual abstractions as clearly depicted in Coles' (1990) groundbreaking study of the spiritual lives of children. The currently growing interest in the study of spirituality has focused on children and adolescents (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006) because spirituality is a major source of influence on a developing person as it affects their identity development (Compton, 2005). During adolescence, the youth seek to form relationships not only with others but also with one's self, and the transcendent (Roehlkepartain, Benson, Scales, Kimball, & King, 2008).

## Defining Spirituality

The construct of spirituality is complex and multidimensional; hence, there are numerous definitions of spirituality that do not generate agreement among spirituality researchers. This paper makes use of a general definition of spirituality as well as a more delineated conceptualization of spirituality in relation to religion (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 2008).

A broad definition of spirituality touches on the "meaning and purpose in life, a search for wholeness, and a relationship with a transcendent being" (Hage, 2006, p. 303). Similarly, spirituality is frequently defined as a connection or relationship with and faith in a Higher Power, and an integration of values and beliefs with behavior in everyday life; the emphasis is on the personal qualities of relationship with a Higher Power, and less on organizational or institutional beliefs and practices associated with religiousness (Zinnbauer, et al., 1997).

In defining spirituality, there is a need to consider the relation between spirituality and religion. Some people identify themselves as "spiritual and religious" whereas others describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In a similar vein, William James (1902/1994) equates religion with spirituality, that is, in relation to the divine, but disregards institutional religion; furthermore, he relates spirituality to the character or personality of an individual. Religion can also be conceptualized on the level of the individual in terms of "religiosity;" a person can be described as being religious, that is, adhering to beliefs, rituals, practices, and precepts of religion (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Some variables that are related to spirituality are spiritual well-being, spiritual maturity, existential concerns, and these tend to encompass a range of concepts, such as meaning, wholeness, transcendence, connection, joy, and peace. On the other hand, some variables related to religion are religious belief, religious affiliations, religious attendance, and perceived religiousness and these typically refer to an individual's participation in organized religious institutions and adherence to established for belief and behavior (Mytko & Knight, 1999).

One way of delineating spirituality is to emphasize its difference from religion or religiosity. Constantine, Lewis, Conner, and Sanchez (2000) define spirituality as the notion that the universe and everything in it symbolize the efforts of a greater creational force or Supreme Being while religion is the practical manifestation of spirituality (e.g., religious beliefs, rituals, and traditions). Religion is usually associated with specific beliefs about life after death and rules about conduct that guide life within a social group while spirituality is more personal and something people define for themselves

that is largely free from rules, regulations, and responsibilities associated with religion (Koenig, 2009). Religion is differentiated by "particular beliefs and practices, requirements of membership, and modes of social organization" (Miller & Thoresen, 2003, p. 27) and characterized by both spiritual and material concerns and goals. As a contrast, religion is viewed as "institutional, dogmatic, restrictive whereas spirituality is personal, subjective, and life-enhancing" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002, p. 647). However, the empirical reality does not seem to support this polarizing distinction, as people can experience spirituality within an organized religious context (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In doing research, it can be beneficial not to separate the two concepts. Koenig (2009), in his study on spirituality and mental health, defines spirituality synonymously with religion because defining them distinctively may cause methodological problem. According to him, some researchers define spirituality as good mental health and positive psychological or social traits but using this definition will assure correlation between spirituality and aspects of mental health because it is not methodologically sound to correlate a variable to other variables that are components of the first variable.

Another way of defining spirituality is to see the points where it overlaps with religion. For instance, both religion and spirituality can be expressed individually (e.g., prayer, meditation) and socially (e.g., church attendance, spiritual retreat), and both have the capacity to nurture or harm the individual (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002). A common ground between religion and spirituality can be found in defining spirituality as "the search for the sacred," where spirituality can be understood as "a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives" (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p. 65). The "sacred" are special objects or events set apart from the ordinary and deserve veneration; it includes concepts of God, the divine, the transcendent, and Ultimate Reality. Diverse spiritual pathways by which to discover and conserve the sacred involve social involvements (traditional religious institutions and nontraditional spiritual groups), belief systems (e.g., organized religion, new spiritual movements, individualized worldviews), traditional religious practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, Bible reading, rites of passage), and human expressions of the sacred such as yoga, music, art, social action (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002). Both spirituality and religion are related also to coping. People resort to spirituality and religion in times of stress and other negative life events (Gall, 2003; Mytko & Knight, 1999). According to Tix and Frazier (1998), religion and spirituality are integral components in the lives of many people since they use religious coping,

which they define as the use of cognitive or behavioral techniques in the face of stressful life events that arise out of one's spirituality or religion. Examples of these coping activities are prayer, confession of sins, and seeking strength and comfort from God.

Though spirituality is defined differently by several authors, the common conception is that spirituality is the connection to God or a higher being, to other people and to oneself, and finding one's purpose in life. Several researchers claim that spirituality and religion are associated with each other but they are different from each other. However, some researchers argue that these concepts can be used interchangeably since they spirituality is commonly manifested in religion. Having common elements among these various definitions of spirituality makes it more possible for researchers to empirically investigate this concept with other variables.

### Adolescent Spirituality in Different Cultures

Spirituality is a concept that is shared by the youth across different cultures. It plays a vital role in their lives as seen in their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about the divine. A study of adolescent spirituality spanning 17 countries (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008) report that majority of adolescents from different cultures acknowledge the spiritual dimension of life, and consider themselves to be spiritual. They define spirituality as belief in God, belief in life's inherent meaning and purpose, integrity of the inner self, morality, and peace and happiness.

In a study (Lippman & Keith, 2006) analyzing the responses to questions on the importance of religion, belief in God, and the importance of God based on the 1999-2001 World Values Survey of youth in 41 countries, higher proportions of youth in less economically developed countries report a belief in God, and that they consider religion and God to be very important in their lives.

A study on the mental health of adolescents receiving foster care (White, Havalchack, Jackson, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2007) likewise bring up the role of spirituality in their lives, and show that most of these potentially at-risk adolescents believe in God. They consider spirituality as a belief in God or a higher power, worship in a supportive community, prayer, poetry or spoken words, inspiration, and belief in the spiritual connectedness of human beings.

The Filipino youth share many similar notions and beliefs about spirituality with those from different cultures. The Filipino youth's definition of spirituality is also highly associated with the belief in God (Philippine

Social Science Council, 2003) but they do not necessarily express it through their religion (Sta. Maria, 2007). In surveys conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in 1996 (as cited in Philippine Social Science Council, 2003), majority of Filipino adolescents (99.6%) believe in God, consider themselves (81.64%) to be "religious persons," pray at least once a day (66.7%), and claim to attend religious services once a week (67.8%). Consistent findings are found in Lippman and Keith's (2006) analysis of the 1999-2001 World Values Survey of 41 countries, wherein a high proportion of Filipino youth report a belief in God (99.5%), importance of God (86.6%), and religion (86.9%) in their lives.

*Adolescents' spiritual development.* There are varied influences and experiences that shape adolescents' spiritual development. Roehlkepartain and associates (2008) find that parents are the primary source of spiritual socialization for young people; their spiritual behavior or activity serves as a model for the youth (e.g., being joyful because of religious faith, praying or meditating alone, talking about religious beliefs, praying with their children). Apart from the influence of parents on their spiritual development, friends, religious organizations, school, and youth organizations play a minor role in the socialization and support of their spirituality.

Adolescent spirituality may be facilitated by everyday experiences or spiritual activities or practices. Being with nature, listening to music, serving others, and solitude are ordinary experiences that facilitate spirituality; reading books, praying or meditating alone, expressing love, or compassion are common practices performed by adolescents to nurture their spirituality (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008). They express their spirituality through participation in spiritual activities, such as spending time with people with similar beliefs, attending spiritual classes, workshops or retreats, engaging in civic activities, and helping friends with problems (White et al., 2007).

Although there are significant figures, institutions, experiences, and practices that nurture spirituality, adolescents have reported blocks that deter their spiritual development, such as hardships, and the absence of a socialization agent that will expose, model, and guide adolescents in their spiritual development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008). Nonetheless, instead of viewing challenges as an impediment to being spiritual, some adolescents perceive experiencing hardships in life as growth-affirming because spirituality is a resource for dealing with hardships. In fact, in White and associates' study (2007), adolescents resort to prayer as a coping mechanism when they encounter problems, and aim for spiritual goals involving a deeper relationship with God, self-development, and purpose in life.

The influences on Filipino adolescents' spiritual development bear some similarities with those in other countries. In general, the family is the source of religious instruction, which may be supported secondarily within the school context (Philippine Social Science Council, 2003). Two-thirds of Filipino adolescents report that they sometimes pray together with their family (Cruz, Laguna, & Raymundo, 2002). Although the Filipino youth are predominantly Roman Catholic, shifts between religions among the youth are occurring, and affiliation to the Evangelical faiths has risen (Xenos & Raymundo, 1999); and a tenfold increase in youth participation in prayer meetings and Bible study groups has been reported in the McCann-Erickson findings (1993, as cited in Sta. Maria, 2007).

Unlike the growing literature on youth spirituality amassed in the West (e.g., Roehlkepartain et al, 2006 ), there seems to be a paucity of research being done on this topic locally. Moreover, there is an inconsistency between the value that the youth ascribe to religion and their commitment to religious practices; thus, the adolescents' spirituality does not seem to find expression in their religion (Punzalan, 1981, as cited in Sta. Maria, 2007). To portray their spirituality in greater detail, this study delves into the views, perceptions, and experiences of spirituality of Filipino adolescents to describe their conceptions of spirituality and spiritual development.

## METHOD

Using a qualitative approach, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted to engage the adolescents in identifying and describing their definition of spirituality, perceived characteristics of a spiritual person, spiritual experiences, and the development of spirituality of Filipino adolescents.

### Participants

A total of 32 adolescents, aged 15-17 years old, participated in four FGDs, two of which were composed of adolescents from the rural setting, and the other two from the urban setting. Each FGD group was composed of eight adolescents (four males and four females). Most of the respondents were Roman Catholics, with a small percentage of other religions (Born Again Christians, Iglesia ni Kristo, Mormons, and Aglipayans,).

## Instrument

The FGD guide, which was constructed by the researchers, contained questions about the participants' definitions of spirituality and religiosity, descriptions of a spiritual person, spiritual development, and spiritual experiences. The questions asked were: a) What is spirituality for you? b) What is religiosity for you? c) How does a spiritual person differ from a non-spiritual person? d) Can you describe an experience that you would consider spiritual? e) How does a person become spiritual? During the FGD sessions, the facilitator also provided a Filipino translation for all the questions. Each session lasted 45 minutes to one hour.

## Procedure

The researchers contacted the principal of each school to ask permission to conduct the study in their school and to schedule the FGD sessions. The objectives of the study and their possible contribution were explained to them. The head teachers selected high school students from different year levels to participate in the study. The facilitator started the FGD by obtaining an informed consent from the participants, explaining the objectives of the study, and asking for their consent to audiotape the session. During the FGD, probes were done to deepen responses and to clarify varied viewpoints. Toward the end of the discussion, a summary was provided by the documentor to give the participants the opportunity to think about the salient points raised during the FGD, and to comment on any concerns they might have about the process. Finally, the researchers thanked the participants for their participation and distributed simple tokens of appreciation.

## Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used in this study. Verbatim transcriptions from audio-taped discussions were coded independently by three members of the research team (the authors and a graduate student research assistant). Recurring themes from data strands were identified, and were later formed into categories. After doing independent coding, the coding was refined through a discussion among the researchers in order to arrive at a consensus. A senior researcher validated the results by reviewing the identified themes and categories in terms of their correspondence to the essence of the data strands as well as to the research objectives.

## RESULTS

### Defining Spirituality

Three themes emerged from the definitions given by the participants from the FGD. Spirituality was defined as faith in God, personal relationship with God, and positive character. Faith in God included trusting God during hard times, and religious adherence. One Catholic participant said, "*Ito 'yung paniniwala sa Diyos lalo na sa oras ng paghihirap*" [This is the belief in God especially in times of difficulties].

Having a personal relationship with God was another aspect of the respondents' definition of spirituality. They considered God as a friend and claim a special connection with Him through the Holy Spirit. A male participant elaborated, "*Para ko siyang bestfriend. Sinasabi ko mga problema ko sa kanya*" [He is like my bestfriend. I tell him my problems].

Another way of defining spirituality involved positive character. Spirituality was about developing a good character, which, for the respondents, meant being moral, optimistic and steadfast in times of difficulties. One participant said, "*Ito ay ang pagiging mabuting tao. Gumagawa ng tama at naaalala ang Diyos*" [This is what it means to be a good person. Doing what is right and thinking of God]. Another one added, "*Kailangan natin sa buhay natin ang spirituality para madevelop ang sarili*" [We need spirituality in our life to develop ourselves].

### Defining Religiosity

Devotion to God, participation in religious activities, and morality were the themes identified in the respondents' definition of religiosity. Devotion to God involved obeying God's commandments, reading and following the Bible, and surrendering to God's will. A participant explained, "*Pagsunod sa utos ng Diyos ... hayaang gamitin ka Niya sa Kanyang kagustuhan*" [Obeying God's will...allowing yourself to be His instrument]. Many respondents associated religiosity with participation in religious activities, such as going to Mass and confessions, praying the Rosary and Novena, and attending religious processions. A sample response was, "*Ito 'yung pagsisimba kapag linggo*" [This is going to church every Sunday]. Religiosity was equated with morality, in the sense of knowing what is right and wrong, and avoiding commission of sins.

## Description of a Spiritual Person

The adolescent respondents described a spiritual person as someone who has: faith in God, a strong sense of morality, positive personal qualities, a positive sense of self, well-being, spiritual connectedness, transcendent and relational sources of happiness, and an ability to solve problems. Some respondents qualified that a spiritual person is both "spiritual and religious" ("*Meron siyang ispiritwalidad. Meron din siyang koneksyon sa pagiging relihiyoso kasi parehong paniniwala sa Diyos... ispiritwalidad ay lumalabas na may koneksyon sa pagiging relihiyoso*") [He or she is both spiritual and religious. The belief in God connects spirituality with religiosity.].

A spiritual person had faith in God, and was steadfast in his/her faith as revealed by the FGD. As a respondent emphatically put it, "*Unang una, dapat naniniwala siya sa Diyos. Tapos nagdadasal araw-araw at nagsisimba bawat Linggo*" [First of all, he or she must believe in God. Then he or she prays everyday and goes to church every Sunday]. He or she is faithful regardless of having answered prayers. As another respondent asserted, "*Kahit na hindi natutupad yung ipinagdarasal niya, hindi pa rin siya nagsasawang magdasal. Alam niya andyan pa rin si God para gabayan (siya)*" [Even if his or her prayers are not answered, he or she is not discouraged from praying. He/she knows that God is still there for him/her].

The respondents portrayed a spiritual person as possessing many positive personal qualities, such as "*mabait* (kind)," "*may respeto* (respectful)," "*mapapagkatiwalaan* (trustworthy)," "*matulungin* (helpful)," "*matiisin* (patient)," "*hindi mapaghiganti* (not vengeful)," "*malakas ang loob* (courageous)," and "*hindi materyalistik* (not materialistic)." Apart from positive characteristics, a spiritual person had a strong moral fiber as shown by moral behavior, such as "*lagi siyang gumagawa ng tama*" [always doing the right thing] and abstinence from "vices" (e.g., "gambling, drinking, drugs"). A positive sense of self was ascribed to a spiritual person: "*Siya yung may respeto sa sarili . . . may dignidad*" [He/she has self-respect. . . and dignity]. Having a positive sense of self included a capacity for self-awareness, self-insight, and personal change.

Having a spiritual connectedness to human beings and nature was part of the depiction of a spiritual person. As a respondent put it, "*Malapit siya sa Diyos at sa iba pa Niyang nilikha*" [He or she is close to God and to God's creations]. Another respondent added, "*Dala niya ang Diyos kahit saan siya magpunta*" [God is with him or her wherever he or she goes]. A spiritual person was regarded by the respondents as having transcendent and relational

sources of happiness, which are one's faith in God, relationships (family and friends), and altruistic behavior ("*ginagamit niya ang mga kakayahan para sa kapakanan ng iba*"...."*hindi siya nag-aabang ng kapalit.*" [He/she uses his abilities to help others...he/she does not expect anything in return]).

Based on the description given by the respondents, a spiritual person had the ability to solve one's problems, and did not merely wait passively for divine intervention. A participant elaborated, "*Nagdadasal pero hindi lahat inaasa sa Diyos. Ginagawa niya ang dapat gawin para malutas ang problema niya*" [Prays but is not totally dependent on God. He/she does what has to be done to solve his/her problem]. A spiritual person also experienced a sense of well-being ("*maluwag ang puso* [contentment]," "*masaya kahit di mayaman* [happy even if not rich]"). A respondent stated, "*Masaya siya kahit anong ibigay ng Diyos sa kanya*" [He/she is happy with whatever God gives him/her].

### Development of Spirituality among Filipino Adolescents

The responses on how adolescents develop their spirituality revolved around the themes of influence of socialization agents, religious roles in a religious community, challenging personal experiences, and blocks to spirituality. Majority of the respondents mentioned the influence of family on their spirituality in terms of exposure to religious beliefs and practices. Sample responses were: "*Dahil sa mga magulang ko, lalo na sa nanay ko, siya ang nagpapaalala sa akin magdasal*" [Because of my parents, especially my mother-she reminds me to pray]. Another agreed, "*Sa akin, magulang, nagpapaniwala sa atin at nagtuturo ng tama tungkol kay God*" [For me, parents...they encourage us to believe and teach us about God]. Other socialization agents were friends, relatives, and teachers who provide support and opportunities to adolescents to participate in religious activities. The influence of friends was in terms of participation in religious activities, and as a model. For instance, a male rural respondent mentioned, "*mag-invite kami ng mga youth...yung gustong makilala si God...(sa)Parish Renewal Experience*" [We invite other youth...those who want to know God...through the Parish Renewal Experience]. Some respondents considered their friends as a model when they chose to narrate about their friends' spiritual experiences.

Another influence came from the community when it nurtures the youth by organizing spiritual activities (e.g., spiritual retreats) as these facilitate discovery or renewal of faith among the young members of the community. Two male respondents in the rural setting shared the renewal of their faith

by joining a few days of retreat (e.g., "Lakbayan sa Wawa [Journey into the Lake]," "Parish Renewal Experience"), which later, made them active in their religious community ("*pagse-serve kay* [serving] God through church attendance...church choir singing").

Having a religious role in a religious community (e.g., church) allowed young persons to participate in a special way in the community to which they belong, and imbued their lives with meaning. Two Catholic male respondents were sacristans in their respective churches, and they shared similar meanings in the religious service they perform in the church and their relationship to God, as stated: "*Sakristan po ako ... sa palagay ko, malapit na ako kay Jesus kasi humihingi ako ng tawad...pagbigay samin ng pagkain araw-araw at yung pamilya ko inaalagaan Niya at sa pag-aaral namin nandiyang Siya sa tabi namin, ginagabayan Niya kami*" [I am a sacristan... I believe I am close to Jesus because I ask for forgiveness... He provides food for us every day and takes care of my family and He is always at our side to guide us in our studies]. Another one said, "*Ginagamit ko ang talents ko sa mga gawain sa simbahan*" [I use my talents to help in church activities].

Two kinds of challenging personal experiences of the respondents facilitated their spirituality in terms of renewal: overcoming difficult life experiences, and remorse for recalcitrance. Overcoming difficult life experiences made the adolescents more spiritual through having their faith tested and strengthened. As one participant expressed it, "*Sa mga ganitong pagkakataon nasusubukan ang faith mo kay God. Kapag may matinding problema, tumatatag ang faith mo*" [In these kinds of situation, your faith in God is tested. During times of great difficulties, your faith in God becomes stronger]. The other kind of experience that leads to a renewed spirituality came from experiencing remorse for recalcitrant behavior in terms of willfulness and indulging in vices such as drinking and drugs. A respondent elaborated, "*Naging matigas ang ulo noon, pasaway. Di ako sumusunod sa parents ko, laging nasa barkada. Pero ngayon nagsisi ako. Nagbalik-loob na ako*" [I rebelled against my parents before, I disobeyed them and frequently hung out with my friends. But now I regret having done that. I decided to restore my faith with God]. Another respondent added, "*Hinarap ko ang mga pagkakamali ko at natuto ako doon*" [I faced my mistakes and learned from them].

The participants identified some blocks to spirituality, which were: weak faith in God, materialistic concerns, influence of negative models, and preoccupation with personal problems. A weak faith in God happened when they doubt God's mercy and kindness in the face of problems. A sample

response was, "*Minsan nawawalan ako ng faith. Feeling ko parang pinababayaan na kami ni God. Ayun, di ako nagdadasal*" [Once I lost my faith. I felt God abandoned us so I stopped praying]. The respondents, whose faith became weak, also became materialistic as they considered material possessions as sources of happiness, such as mobile phones, clothes, and other possessions that their classmates, neighbors and friends have. One expressed, "*Nakalimutan ko na ang pagiging Kristiyano ko. Puro ako materyal. Marami akong gusto...di ako kontento*" [I turned my back on my Christianity. I became too materialistic. I desired a lot of things...I was not contented].

Another block was the influence of negative models. Some respondents were influenced by peer and adult modeling of socially proscribed behaviors such as gambling, drug and alcohol abuse, cutting classes, and fighting. A male participant explained, "*Naging pasaway kami kasi napapagaya kami sa mga tao na umiinom*" [We became delinquent because we were influenced by people who were into alcohol].

Some respondents neglected their spirituality because of their preoccupation with their personal problems. A female participant shared, "*Sa bigat ng problema, nauunahan ka ng takot. Masyado mong iniisip kung paano i-sosolve ang problem. Nakakalimutan mo na may Panginoon pala na tutulong sa iyo*" [Because you're so problematic, you tend to become so fearful that you become preoccupied with looking for a solution and you lose sight of God's capacity to help you.]. Even the preoccupation with everyday concerns (e.g., "busy with school"), detracted some respondents from their spirituality in terms of some spiritual practices.

### Spiritual Experiences of Adolescents

It must be mentioned that the respondents of this study were not specifically chosen because they were spiritual exemplars; yet, in every FGD, several participants shared personal experiences about their own spirituality. Most of the spiritual experiences narrated by the respondents were their personal experience of the divine. However, a few respondents shared spiritual experiences by other people close to them, such friends and relatives; the themes of other people's spiritual experiences involved spiritual transformation, and altruism, which were similar to two of the themes in the respondents' own spiritual experiences. The themes that emerged from the personal spiritual experiences were spiritual transformation, spiritual coping, and altruism. Only the personal spiritual experiences will be presented in detail.

Two male rural respondents narrated similar experiences of spiritual transformation but through different spiritual pathways. They both started out as not being spiritual because of other concerns in their lives; however, an experience served as a catalyst to change each of them into a more spiritual person. One respondent's spiritually transforming experience involved his participation in an organized spiritual retreat by his community ("*Lakbayan sa Wawa* [Journey into the Lake])" which led him to understand the personal significance of nurturing his faith through active religious service (e.g., regular church attendance, choir singing), and spiritual role modeling to his peers (i.e., he is admired and emulated by his peers for his spiritual involvement).

The other respondent's spiritual experience involved a spontaneous experience of the transcendent through the witness of and unplanned participation in a spiritual ritual of pilgrims in the mountain. He recounted, "*Mahal na araw pala iyon, gusto ko lang makakita ng magandang tanawin.... Nakita ko yung mga tao pumapasok sila sa kweba, nagdadasal... Pagpasok ko, wala akong nakita kung di may cross, ilaw at walang tao... napakatahimik, parang nasa ilalim po ng lupa.... Doon ko na-realize na kahit ako minsan lang magsimba,... meron talagang Diyos. Naging mas madasalin ako*" [It was Holy Week, I wanted to see nature ... I saw people going inside a cave, praying... when I entered the cave, I did not see anyone or anything but a cross and a light... it was very silent and still, like being underneath the earth... there, I realized that even if I rarely went to church... there is a God. Since then I became more prayerful].

The theme of spiritual coping showed a number of female respondents dealing with their problems and challenges through prayer, going to church, or spiritual reframing. A respondent, who did not have anyone to confide her problems to, felt emotional relief ("*magaan sa loob*" [inner peace]) from intense praying (e.g., novena) for help and guidance with her personal problems. Another respondent used prayer to ask for help with her academic difficulties, and interpreted her passing her exams as a reward from God ("*biyaya sa mga ginagawa kong kabutihan*" [blessings for my good deeds]).

Another form of spiritual coping was done through reframing a painful event to derive meaning and strength. A female respondent, whose father died when she was in Grade 5, narrated, "*Problemadong problemado kami. Tinatanong namin ang Diyos bakit po ginawa sa amin yon. Nasa church na kami, ililibing na yung tatay ko, doon ako nagsabi sa Diyos na, 'Ah, pagsubok lang ito ng Diyos, kakayanin naming ... Kayo na po ang bahala samin.' Buti hanggang ngayon nakakayanan na namin. Nananalig na lang kami sa Diyos na kung ano yung kasunod na mangyayari sa buhay namin,*

*Siya na ang bahala*" [We were so worried about our problem. We questioned God why He did that to us. We were already in the church, my father was about to be buried when I said to God, 'Ah, this is just a test from You and we will survive this... We will trust that You will take care of us.' We were able to overcome that challenge. We just continue to have faith in God that whatever happens next in our lives, He will always take care of us].

Altruism was another theme of the respondents' personal spiritual experiences. One male respondent recounted how he was moved to compassion at the sight of a destitute old man lying down on the pavement, and gave the old man some of his money. This altruistic act gave him a deep feeling of satisfaction for helping someone in need. Another respondent added, "*pagbigay ng tulong kahit ikaw mismo kailangan ng tulong*" [giving help to others even if you are also in need].

## DISCUSSION

The narratives of spiritual experiences that portrayed a picture of adolescent spiritual development that was facilitated by multiple socialization agents and contexts, personal agency in enhancing one's spirituality, and the emphasis on positive character provided us an idea on how Filipino adolescents conceive spirituality.

### Filipino Adolescents' Concept of Spirituality

The Filipino adolescents' definition of spirituality as faith in God, personal relationship with God, and positive character was generally similar to the conceptions of spirituality of the youth in different countries (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008; White et al., 2007). The Filipino youth's concept of spirituality was presented further in their description of a spiritual person, to which they added the capacities and outcomes engendered by spirituality, such as positive regard for the self, personal agency with regard to problems, and the relational aspect of spirituality (in terms of their sources of happiness, and spiritual connectedness with sentient beings).

The Filipino adolescents saw spirituality as connected to religion or religiosity, that a spiritual person was both "spiritual and religious." This lack of polarization in their conceptualization as well as experience of spirituality lent support to the argument that in empirical reality people do not focus on the distinction between spirituality and religion (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In fact, organized religious

traditions even helped the youth to contain or put order and meaning to their personal spiritual experiences (Verma & Sta. Maria, 2006).

### Filipino Adolescents' Spiritual Development

In discussing the spiritual development of Filipino adolescents, three aspects will be emphasized: the influences on their spirituality, their personal experiences as resources, and the blocks to spiritual development.

*Influences on spiritual development.* The finding that the family, particularly the parents, was a major socialization agent for the spiritual development of Filipino adolescents was not surprising as the family is the primary context for fostering spiritual development (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Philippine Social Science Council, 2003; Roehlkepartain et al., 2008; Verma & Sta. Maria, 2006). Friends were also seen as an influence in promoting adolescents' spiritual development. Similar to the modeling given and received by the respondents in this study, Schwartz (2005, cited in Schwartz, Bukowski, & Aoki, 2006) found that friends' modeling and verbal sharing about their spirituality was associated with higher spiritual beliefs and commitments.

The influence of the community in nurturing the youth's development of spirituality was noteworthy in the responses of the adolescents from the rural setting. The community in the rural area provided opportunities for the youth to experience the sacred; joining a spiritual retreat offered by the community acted as a catalyst to a respondent's process of holding on or transforming into what is spiritual. Pargament (2008) recognized the sacred in the community as a larger supportive context in shaping the spirituality of its members and supporting their spiritual transformation. The community also provided opportunity for adolescents to be active in their own spiritual development, as shown in assuming religious roles in the church that provide them with meaning and purpose. The goal to serve God through religious service may be construed as the adolescents' spiritual strivings (Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998, cited in Pargament, 2008) as part of their efforts at striving for meaning and purpose in life.

The finding that parents, peers, and the community influenced the spiritual development of the youth suggests that there is a communal nature to the formation of religiosity and spirituality of the youth, and that this development may be fostered by various contexts in an interactive manner. Thus, the adolescent, who has been raised by parents in religious or spiritual ways, may find support and encouragement from spiritual peers to engage

in spiritual activities as well as connect to the community for an experience of deepening their religious or spiritual beliefs.

*Spiritual experiences as a resource.* The thematic content of the adolescents' experiences, which were spiritual transformation, spiritual coping, and altruism, presented a picture of youth with a capacity for growth and adaptation. Clearly, spirituality was an adaptive resource for Filipino adolescents as spiritual coping was commonly used to deal with personal problems and loss. Although spiritual coping was not the focus of the present investigation, it was a salient aspect of Filipino spirituality that is expressed spontaneously in relation to challenges and problems. This finding found support for the idea that spiritual coping is a process that adolescents experience as they try to search for meaning in challenging situations (Pargament, 1997, cited in Mahoney, Pendleton, & Ihrke, 2006). The adaptive quality of spirituality was likewise acknowledged by Puyat (2005) when he identified spirituality as a source of strength for the Filipino youth.

*Blocks to spirituality.* Some of the facilitators of spiritual development of adolescents (i.e., socialization agents, challenging personal experiences) could also potentially become inhibitors of their spirituality (i.e., influence of negative models, preoccupation with problems, materialistic concerns, weak faith). In this way, blocks to spirituality represented a challenge to conserving the sacred in the young person's life. As shown by the respondents who deal with these blocks in their spirituality, these were temporary hindrances, which were part of the process of spiritual development.

### Spirituality and the Development of Positive Character

Apart from elements of the sacred (faith in God and a personal relationship with the divine), the understanding of spirituality of the Filipino youth was grounded firmly on the idea of positive personal qualities. The list includes "*mabait* [good]," "*may respeto* [has respect]," "*mapapagkatiwalaan* [trustworthy]," "*matulungin* [kind]," "*matiisin* [patient]," "*malakas ang loob* [courageous]," "*may pag-asa* [hopeful]," and "*moral*." Although these were aspects of positive character, some, if not all, represented values in the Filipino culture. In a study done by Porio, Lynch, and Hollnsteiner (1975), the Filipino youth mentioned having learned these important values from the family: trust in God, obedience to parents, desire to succeed in life, honesty and justice, and getting along well with others. All of the above values, except for the desire for success, were included in one form or another in the adolescents' concept of spirituality that a spiritual person expresses in a concrete way. The connection of values to

spirituality and religion in the culture guaranteed through socialization that the development of positive character in an individual was closely tied to the development of spirituality.

The above findings found some explanation from Jocano's (1997) proposed framework of the traditional Filipino value system in which values, character, and spirit are intertwined. Character or *asal*, as a cultural concept, had three major components or standards, which were relational (*kapwa*), emotional (*damdamin*), and moral (*dangal*); people used these standards as measures of the quality of behavior, and as sources of imperatives of values in the Filipino social system. Thus, the centrality of a spiritual person's positive character reflected the cultural context in that the Filipino youth understand and experience spirituality based on what is considered good and valued in the culture. To be spiritual, or religious, in one sense, was part of the development of positive character that they learned from the family, school, community, and cultural contexts.

The findings pertaining to the adolescents' spiritual experiences and development seemed to suggest that spirituality played a role in identity development. That they were forming a spiritual identity was not far-fetched. A spiritual identity involved a "personal identity that mirrors the individual's personal reflection about the role of spirituality in her or his life" and it was "grounded in one's personal beliefs, behaviors, and values concerning the transcendent" (Templeton & Eccles, 2006, p. 254). In the elaboration of their spiritual experiences and process of spiritual development, the Filipino adolescents showed an inclination towards a spiritual identity.

### Implications on Positive Youth Development

Spirituality plays a significant part in positive youth development because it is believed to promote an integrated moral and civic identity that leads the young person to develop into an adult, who engages in and contributes positively to the self, family and community (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson & Dowling, 2006). A belief in the transcendent and the requisite positive character can shape an individual's perception of relationships and the material world, and can promote civic attitudes and behavior. The spiritual adolescent can make civic commitments and get involved in civic engagement (e.g., community service); conversely speaking, civic engagement can lead to spirituality because of the awareness and connection to others (Donnelly, Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2006).

Spirituality has been found to be associated with adolescent "thriving," which involves the capacity to contribute to the common good. A thriving

young person, then, is "involved across time in healthy, positive relations with his community, and on the path to an ideal adulthood" (Lerner et al, 2006, p. 62). Potentially, the Filipino adolescent development can be facilitated by spirituality, and supported by environmental contexts to thrive and be a potent force for social change (Verma & Sta. Maria, 2006).

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### AUTHOR NOTES

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Correspondence should be addressed to Roseann Mansukhani at the Department of Psychology, De La Salle University, 2401 Taft Avenue, 1004 Manila (e-mail: roseann.tan-mansukhani@dlsu.edu.ph).