

Research Article

Stages of Moral Development of the Major Heroines in the Selected Novels of Sidney Sheldon

Kenneth P. Sumatra ¹ , Brandon N. Obenza ^{2*} , and Mark Jason E. Cuario ² ¹ College of Arts and Sciences Education, University of Mindanao, Philippines² College of Arts and Sciences Education, University of Mindanao, Philippines

* Correspondence: bobenza@umindanao.edu.ph

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Abstract: The representation of women in literature has long been influenced by patriarchal perspectives, often neglecting their moral experiences and ethical voices. Addressing this gap, the study explores the moral development of female protagonists in selected novels of Sidney Sheldon. The primary objective is to identify the stages of moral development and the distinct voices of the major heroines, using Carol Gilligan's Feminist Care Ethics as a framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, the study uses close reading and textual analysis to examine two novels: *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and *The Best Laid Plans*. Findings reveal that the heroines progress through various stages of moral development, transitioning from self-interest to responsibility and self-sacrifice. The characters demonstrate interconnectedness, care, concern, and a strong sense of responsibility for others, ultimately embodying empowered women capable of ethical decision-making. The study highlights the complexity of female morality and contributes to broader discussions on gender and ethics in literary analysis.

Keywords: moral development; Sidney Sheldon; feminism

1. Introduction

The persistent influence of patriarchy continues to shape women's experiences across the globe, particularly in areas of social, cultural, and ethical life. In many societies, patriarchal norms still legitimize gender-based discrimination and violence, constructing systemic barriers that impede women's autonomy and moral agency (Göktepe, 2024). These norms are often embedded within traditional moral theories, many of which have historically excluded or diminished women's moral perspectives (Johri, 2023; Norlock, 2019; Pullen & Vachhani, 2021), suggesting an inherent moral immaturity in women compared to men.

In response to this marginalization, feminist ethicists such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, and Sara Ruddick have foregrounded care as a central moral concept, emphasizing relationality, empathy, and context in moral reasoning. Gilligan's landmark work, *In a Different Voice* (1982), challenged the dominant paradigms of moral development, particularly those established by Lawrence Kohlberg, by revealing that women often conceive morality through the lens of care rather than abstract justice. Building on this, Noddings (1995) advocated for a relational approach to ethics that prioritizes caring over impersonal rule-following. Held (2006) further argued that care is a foundational moral value, indispensable even to the concept of justice itself. Ruddick (1980) introduced the idea of maternal thinking as a source of ethical reflection rooted in caregiving practices. These scholars collectively demonstrate that women's moral voices are not only valid but essential for a fuller understanding of ethical life.

Globally, women face significant challenges concerning their rights and moral experiences. Rattan, Chilazi, Georgeac, and Bohnet (2019) highlight that the underrepresentation of women in media contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Moreover, Shadinova and Aknazarova (2020) highlight the challenges modern Kazakhstani women face in balancing career and family responsibilities. To combat these issues, Gupta (2020) asserts that fully developed nations must actively promote gender equality. Shang (2022) further supports this by arguing that gender equality benefits women

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and enhances societal well-being overall. Dabrowski (2020) also notes that feminism is critical in addressing inequalities within social and cultural contexts. In the literary world, Steiner (2015) examines how Jane Austen's novels illustrate the impact of private sphere constraints and marginalization on women's moral autonomy and universal rights. Similarly, Malathy (2018) finds that female protagonists in Sidney Sheldon's novels demonstrated significant character development and strategic approach in response to the society that marginalized them.

In the Philippines, the discourse surrounding the roles of Filipino women remains limited. Neri (2018) reveals the representation of women in Philippine advertising as dependent, vulnerable, and sex objects. However, Monteza and Miralles (2023) mention that women from the 19th to 21st century are viewed as homemakers, independent, and liberated. In contemporary Philippine literature, Diva (2022) and Sarip (2021) reveal in their studies that women characters are engaged and nonconventional. Jocson (2021), Callueng and Jocson (2021) also conclude that contemporary Filipino poems, written by women poets, present a feminist stance and resistance against marginality. However, Tiangson (2018) discusses diverse representations of Filipino women, including the willing victim, the obedient wife, and the selfless mother.

Locally, Uyangurin (2018) reveals in her study that female characters in Mindanao fiction are defined by their emotional traits, pursuing personal and relational goals, and facing challenges with obedience, selflessness, and courage. Kabirun (2024) also argues that Tausug women in the select Mindanao fiction are strong and vital members of their society, yet they have become victims of societal resistance to global changes. Furthermore, Sumatra (2023) analyzes Tita Lacambra-Ayala's poetry, revealing images of women as orphans, working mothers, and responsible mothers.

Past research frequently portrayed women through a patriarchal lens, emphasizing moral deficiencies rather than recognizing their full complexity. For instance, Gilligan (1982) argued that traditional moral development theories projected biased representations of women's experience. Moreover, some woman characters in the context of Nick Joaquin's selected short stories also manifest the negative archetypes such as defiant rebel and Saboteur (Sumatra et al., 2024). These portrayals reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate gender inequality (Chodorow, 1978; Noddings, 1984). Conducting new studies on women's representation is crucial for challenging these outdated narratives. In this light, there is a need to study the morality of care for women to provide a better understanding of their roles and strengths. In addition, care-oriented morality is vital for identity and personality development (Skoe, 2014).

The relevance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution – bridging literary analysis with feminist moral philosophy. It brings theoretical insights into practical engagement with literary texts, encouraging a shift from traditional moral assessments toward a more inclusive, gender-sensitive understanding of moral development. In doing so, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to democratize moral philosophy by validating diverse moral perspectives (Tong, 2009; Walker, 2007).

This study aims to examine the stages of moral development of the major heroines in selected novels by Sidney Sheldon, using Gilligan's feminist care ethics as the primary analytical framework. Sidney Sheldon's fiction often features strong, complex female protagonists who navigate morally challenging environments shaped by power, gender, and personal agency. Analyzing these characters through the lens of feminist ethics can uncover how their moral reasoning evolves, highlighting both resistance to and negotiation with patriarchal structures.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, appropriate for analyzing complex social phenomena such as moral development and ethical orientation in literature. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting meanings, perspectives, and lived experiences within their social and cultural contexts. It allows the researcher to explore how characters, particularly women, embody ethical reasoning and express moral values in fictional narratives.

The design is anchored in textual analysis, specifically through the lens of Carol Gilligan's Feminist Care Ethics. Gilligan's framework (1982) is ideal for this study as it foregrounds moral reasoning based on care, relationships, and connectedness – concepts often overlooked in traditional ethical paradigms. This theoretical lens enables a nuanced understanding of how female protagonists navigate moral dilemmas and evolve through different stages of moral

development.

2.2. Data Collection

The primary data for this research consist of two novels by Sidney Sheldon: *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and *The Best Laid Plans*. These texts were purposefully selected due to their strong female protagonists and thematic exploration of gender, power, and morality. As feminist fiction written by a widely recognized author, these novels provide fertile ground for examining women's moral voices in literature.

The data collection process was conducted in two main phases: (1) identification and classification of female characters and (2) extraction of female voices.

2.2.1. Identification and Classification of Female Characters

The researcher identified the major heroines in both novels and conducted a close reading of their actions, dialogues, and moral choices. These elements were used to classify the heroines according to the three levels and two transitional phases of moral development proposed by Gilligan (1982). This phase sought to understand each character's progression from self-interest to responsibility and care for others.

2.2.2. Extraction of Female Voices

In the second phase, the researcher analyzed how the heroines articulate moral reasoning through the themes of care, empathy, relational responsibility, and sensitivity to others. Specific passages were marked and coded to trace patterns in moral thinking that reflect Gilligan's "female voice" in moral discourse (1982).

2.3. Data Analysis

The data gathered from Sidney Sheldon's novels were analyzed using qualitative textual analysis, guided by Carol Gilligan's Feminist Care Ethics (1982). This approach allowed the researcher to examine the moral reasoning and ethical development of the heroines within the narrative structure of the selected texts. Textual analysis, as a method, involves the interpretive examination of literary elements such as dialogue, character decisions, narrative progression, and thematic content to uncover underlying moral orientations.

Gilligan's model (1982), which critiques the justice-based stages of Lawrence Kohlberg, proposes an alternative framework centered on care, relationships, and responsibility. Her theory outlines three levels of moral development – orientation to individual survival, goodness as self-sacrifice, and the morality of nonviolence – interspersed with two transitional phases that reflect shifts in moral perspective. In the analysis, each heroine's moral journey was traced through these levels and transitions to identify her ethical stance and the factors influencing her decisions.

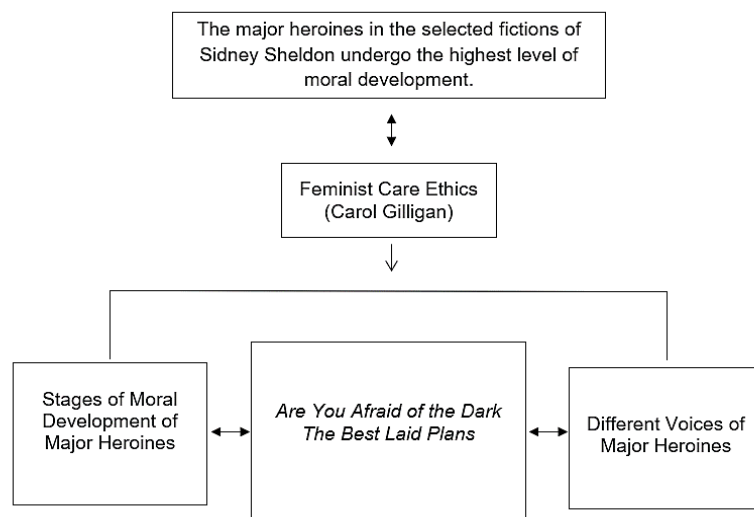


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the theoretical framework of the study.

The study also explored how the "female voice," characterized by empathy, relational awareness, and nonviolence, contrasts with the "male voice" of justice, autonomy, and rules. This dual-voice theory was used to interpret the ethical discourse within the novels, paying close attention to how the protagonists navigate personal dilemmas and relational conflicts.

Key passages were coded thematically, highlighting expressions of care, emotional sensitivity, and moral responsibility toward others. The findings were then synthesized to determine the stages of moral development reflected in each heroine's actions and decisions.

A schematic diagram (Figure 1) was created to visualize the application of Gilligan's framework (1982) in the context of the novels, illustrating how character development aligns with theoretical constructs.

Through this analytical lens, the study provides insight into how female protagonists in literature embody ethical growth, demonstrating that fictional narratives can serve as valuable spaces for exploring feminist moral theory in practice.

3. Results

3.1. Stages of Moral Development of the Major Heroines in Sidney Sheldon's Selected Novels

Gilligan (1982) argues that traditional moral theories and principles are inadequate as they often overlook or undervalue the virtues and values traditionally associated with women. In this study, the major heroines in the selected novels of Sidney Sheldon achieve different stages of moral development. Table 1 shows the stages of moral development of major heroines in Sidney Sheldon's selected novels.

Table 1. The stages of moral development of major heroines in Sidney Sheldon's selected novels.

Major Heroines	Stages of Moral Development	Textual Evidence
A. <i>Are You Afraid of the Dark?</i>		
a. Diane West Stevens	Level One She reacts selfishly to her husband's death, focusing on her grief and disregarding others' feelings.	"He was killed last night Mrs. Stevens..." "You have the wrong person, Lieutenant..." Detective Greenburg pulled out his ID card... Diane glanced it... then slapped Greenburg hard across his face. "My husband is not dead! He's at work." (p. 18).
	First Transition She becomes more empathetic and shows concern for Kelly.	"She heard the woman behind the desk speaking to someone else. What happened to the woman's husband? Diane had sudden feeling that it was important to speak to Kelly (p. 160).
	Level Two She sacrifices her safety to uncover the truth and seek justice for her husband's death.	"Richard was going to Washington to see somebody..." "Mark told me he had to go to Washington..." "We have to find out why." (p. 190)... "I will try to figure out why this is happening." "Be careful." (p. 243).
	Second Transition She accepts her husband's death and takes account for her actions	"I don't think you should testify Diane. It could be dangerous." "Richard, if I didn't do this, I couldn't live with myself" (p. 15)... "And it's my fault. I should never have gone into that courtroom..." (p. 21).
	Level Three She balances her needs with her commitment to others, as shown in her proactive and loving actions toward Richard.	Diane said, "Your place or mine?" And Richard suddenly became very still. "Diane, are you sure? I'm asking because this isn't just a one-night stand." Diane said quietly, "I know." (p. 36).
b. Kelly Hackworth Harris	Level One She is initially self-centered and distrustful because of her rape trauma.	"Mark, we could never have sex together... I was raped." (p. 292) What the monster had done to her... he made her afraid of love (p. 298).
	First Transition She shows care for her mother and builds a supportive relationship with	"I'm getting out of here." (p. 170)... I'm not going to let someone murder me because of some stupid thing you

	Diane.	did.” (p. 184)... Diane tried to make conversation with Kelly, but it was hopeless... (p. 222) “I think it would be better if we–” “There’s no ‘we,’ Mrs. Stevens. There’s you and there’s me.” (p. 227).
	Level Two She sacrifices herself to protect her mom from the perpetrator, and she prevents the potential trauma for Diane.	“She wanted to tell her mother what had happened, but she did not dare. If you ever tell your mother about this, I’ll come back and kill her...” (p. 56) “Why don’t I start with you –” Kelly interrupted. “Wait a minute, handsome. How about taking me first? I feel horny.” Diane looked at her, stunned (p. 373).
	Level Three She confronts her fears and prioritizes her marital relationship with Mark.	“Kelly looked over at Mark and suddenly wanted him desperately... She watched the look on his face as she took off her nightgown and slid into bed beside him. ‘Make love to me,’ she whispered...” (p. 298).
B. The Best Laid Plans		
a. Leslie Stewart	Level One She plots revenge against her ex-fiancé.	“I’m going to make him wish he had never been born...” (p. 32).
	First Transition She develops empathy and care for Henry.	“We’ll find a way to make it work...” (p. 15) “I’ll do anything in the world to help him, she thought...” (p. 17).
	Level Two She shows self-sacrifice by prioritizing Oliver’s happiness over her pride.	“Yes. The only thing I care about is Oliver Russell’s happiness... It would have been a mistake for us to marry. Senator Davis’s daughter was in his life first... I wish them both well.” (p. 27).
b. Dana Evans	First Transition She displays compassion for war orphans and adopts Kemal.	“They’re orphans. They have nowhere to go and no one to take care of them...” (p. 194) “You don’t care about me.” “You’re wrong. How would you like to come to Washington and live with me?” (p. 246).
	Level Two She risks her life to report on the Bosnia War and rescue orphans, showing a deep commitment to others’ well-being.	“I’ve been trying to figure out a way to get them out of the country...” Colonel Divjak turned to Dana, “You are under arrest. I warned you that the punishment for espionage is death...” (p. 193-194) She was being dragged, naked, out of her cell into a cold dark courtyard...” (p. 228).

3.1.1. Stages of Moral Development of the Major Heroines in *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*

a) Diane West Stevens. The first major heroine in this novel is Diane West Stevens. She is a famous artist from Sands Point, New York. She undergoes mental and physical anguish because of the death of her husband.

Level One: The Orientation Toward Self-Interest. Upon learning from Detective Earl Greenburg that her husband, Richard Stevens, has been found dead, Diane reacts with disbelief and anger, physically assaulting the detective by slapping him. Her reaction comes from a selfish need to reject the painful truth. Moreover, when Diane eventually accepts Richard’s death, she unwittingly harms Kelly’s feelings by failing to regard her emotions.

Kelly, who is also grieving the loss of her husband, finds Diane's recurrent demonstrations of grief incredibly upsetting. In parallel, surviving spouses commonly suffer a variety of feelings, including disbelief, rage, and despair (Knittel, 2016; Mendoza, 2018). Since Diane is grieving, she overshadows empathy for others, thus demonstrating her selfishness.

First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility. Diane remains bothered by her husband's death, seeking answers and hoping that a conversation with Kelly Harris, who also lost her husband and works for KIG, might provide clarity. This demonstrates Diane's worry about their shared predicament and her desire to express and receive sympathy. In connection to this, emotional support system enhances wellbeing and helps in coping with loss (Cacciatore et. al., 2021). In the story, Diane reaches out to Kelly to build a mutual understanding based on their shared experiences with loss.

Further, the story shows Diane's maturity and growing concern for Kelly and their situation. She tries to spearhead a plan for escape from the people who want to kill them. She thinks this is the right thing to do because they need teamwork. She must connect with her because they are both in the same situation. In this situation, Diane shows maturity and a sense of responsibility.

Level Two: Identification of Goodness with Responsibility for Others. Diane understands the danger she faces, but she is determined to discover the truth about her husband's death. She reaches a level of commitment where she sacrifices her safety for this pursuit. In line with this, Stewart (n.d.) defines sacrifice as prioritizing a partner's well-being. Diane's willingness to face danger demonstrates her bravery and distinguishes her as a level-two woman motivated by love and the pursuit of justice.

Diane also shows bravery when she deliberately risks physical danger to protect herself and Kelly. She instructs Kelly to punch her in the face, creating a façade to deceive the border guard as they attempt to escape Harry Flint and cross into France. Diane successfully focuses the guard's attention on Flint by making up a narrative about fleeing her abusive spouse, resulting in his detention. This calculated risk demonstrates Diane's heroic nature, motivated by a strong feeling of responsibility for others and a willingness to sacrifice their safety.

Second Transition: From Conformity to a New Inner Judgment. Diane transitions from denial to an acceptance of her husband's death, grappling with guilt in the process. Camacho, Pérez Nieto, and Gordillo (2020) noted that guilt naturally happens after bereavement. In Diane's case, she believes her testimony against the powerful Altieri directly led to her husband's murder, provoking her to reflect on whether her actions were selfish or aligned with her values. Finally, Diane accepts responsibility for her decisions, reinforcing her will to act on her principles despite the potential consequences.

Level Three: Dynamics Between Self and Others. The story's flashback reveals that Diane has autonomy in decision-making by proactively initiating intimacy with Richard, clearly expressing her desire. In parallel, Monteza and Miralles (2023) mention that women from the 19th to 21st century are viewed as independent and liberated. Diane's choice to engage in a sexual relationship is more than mere physical satisfaction; it symbolizes their shared love and her commitment to ensuring their emotional well-being, thereby positioning her as a level three woman who prioritizes their mutual happiness.

b) **Kelly Hackworth Harris.** Another major heroine in the story is Kelly Hackworth Harris. She works as a supermodel in Paris where she meets her husband, Mark Harris. Below are the discussions of Kelly Harris' moral development.

Level One: The Orientation Toward Self-Interest. Kelly is a rape victim when she is just eight years old. It dramatically affects her psychologically, and she becomes sensitive. Because of her traumatic experience, Kelly vows that no man shall ever touch her again. However, the story reveals that she gives herself a chance to love and to be loved by Mark, who later becomes her husband. And during their supposed honeymoon, Kelly tells her husband that they can never make love because of the trauma from her rape experience. She becomes unconsciously selfish here because she does not consider her husband's feelings and sexual needs. In line with this, some authors (Tenaw et. al., 2022) mention that rape victims often experience psychological issues like shame and fear. Kelly, on the other hand, goes through anxiety because of her rape trauma.

When Kelly learns that Diane has testified against Altieri, she feels her life is at stake. She wants to get away from her because she is anxious that Diane is the main reason why someone tries to kill her. Diane is just trying to build rapport with her, but Kelly ignores her. She becomes selfish here because she blames Diane for something not yet proven. As mentioned previously, her distrust for others and anxiety roots in her rape trauma. Similarly, Oshodi, Macharia, Lachman, and Seedat (2022) explain that rape victims go through anxiety

and post-traumatic stress disorder.

First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility. Kelly cares so much for her mother and becomes responsible at a young age. Her stepfather is a drunkard, who always beats her mother. So, Kelly vows to help her mother, and later becomes a successful supermodel. This implies that Kelly is a caring daughter.

The story also shows that Kelly is becoming more mature because of her growing concern about her trouble with Diane. Later, after realizing that Tanner Kingsley is hunting them, she tries to alleviate Diane by telling her that they need to outsmart him. In addition, the story shows Kelly's maturity in decision-making during the bombing incident at Adams Hotel. Kelly convinces Diane that they must vacate the hotel because she believes something wrong will happen after the maid leaves their room. Furthermore, the story reveals that Kelly also shifts from being rude and inconsiderate to being friendly and sensitive to Diane. She realizes she needs to build a harmonious relationship with her because they need each other's company. In connection with this, Uyangurin (2018) reveals that female characters in Mindanao fiction pursue personal and relational goals and face challenges with selflessness and courage. In the anecdote, Kelly and Diane experience the dynamics of social connectedness.

Level Two: Identification of Goodness with Responsibility for Others. Kelly has gone through a miserable life as a kid. The story reveals that she does not want to tell her mother that one of her uncles rapes her. The rapist threatens her that is why she just shuts her mouth. Instead of seeking help, Kelly fears not only for her life but also for her mother. This sacrifice could have been so hard for Kelly at a young age.

Another remarkable self-sacrifice that Kelly shows is when Harry Flint is about to rape and kill them. He is supposed to start with Diane, but Kelly insists. Although she has a traumatic rape experience, she sacrifices herself for the sake of Diane. It means that Kelly cares for her helpless friend. She does not want Diane to experience the trauma of being raped. Similarly, Tiangson (2018) reveals that a willing victim is one of the diverse representations of Filipino women. Meanwhile, the story shows Kelly's bravery and capacity for self-sacrifice.

Level Three: Dynamics Between Self and Others. The story's flashback reveals Kelly's fear of making love with her husband because of her rape trauma. Although Mark settles down that sex is not essential in the marriage and that Kelly matters more than anything else, she is still bothered about it. Here, Kelly thinks of a resolution that will not hurt their feelings. Finally, Kelly's love for Mark has won over her fears, and she decides to make love to him. Even if she is psychologically disturbed, it shows that she is committed to nonviolence because she can decide for herself without hurting both of their feelings. The act of nonviolence here means not breaking the self and others emotionally. Switching gears, Diva (2022) and Sarip (2021) reveal in their studies that women characters in the selected Philippine fiction are engaged and nonconventional. In the story, Kelly becomes an open-minded and active participant in the decision-making process.

3.1.2. Stages of Moral Development of the Major Heroines in *The Best Laid Plans*

Level One: The Orientation Toward Self-Interest. Leslie is a beautiful and intelligent woman with an IQ of 170. Leslie tells her male colleagues that women are more intelligent than men. In this event, Leslie becomes insensitive toward her male colleagues. Leslie has a high IQ but low emotional intelligence (EI). In parallel, Cherry (2024) mentions that people with low emotional intelligence are often insensitive to people's feelings. In Leslie's case, she thinks she is more intelligent than her fifteen male colleagues, disregarding their feelings.

The story also reveals that Leslie becomes selfish when she wants vengeance against Oliver. They are supposed to marry, but Oliver dumps her and marries another woman. Leslie becomes upset because Oliver leaves her without an explanation or even an apology. She also plans to use Henry Chambers, a wealthy man and owner of several newspaper companies, for her retaliation against Oliver. Later, Leslie becomes the owner of Washington Tribune Enterprises and fulfills her plan to destroy Oliver Russell. She then publishes accusations against him without verifying the facts. She is determined to print the unverified story because she is preoccupied with revenge. Some authors (DeJesús et al., 2021) explain that individuals with trust issues go through spite and shame because of betrayal. In Leslie's case, she believes revenge is a form of establishing justice.

Another selfish desire of Leslie happens when she sets up Joe Riley (leader of the union) to sabotage the equipment of The Star. Since the employees demand too much money, Leslie wants to replace them with modern technologies for faster production and a smaller

workforce.

First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility. At the beginning of the story, Leslie keeps Oliver's account for his campaign, even if he cannot afford to pay the agency fee. Leslie feels his sincerity and thinks he will make a fine governor. It means that she cares for Oliver. Another event where Leslie shows her caring nature is when Henry is physically ill. She calls the doctor to do everything for her dying husband. From the very beginning, Leslie does not love him. She uses him for revenge against Oliver. But later, she realizes that she already loves him. In line with this, Uyangurin (2018) reveals that female characters in Mindanao fiction pursue personal and relational goals and face challenges with selflessness and courage. In these events, Leslie's self-interest falls into the background because she cares for others, thus showing her sense of responsibility.

Level Two: Identification of Goodness with Responsibility for Others. Leslie remains silent when Oliver abandons her without telling her the reasons. However, the story reveals that Senator Davis persuades Oliver to marry Jan, his daughter, for political reasons. Knowing this, Leslie sacrifices her pride and her love for the sake of Oliver's happiness. Similarly, Malathy (2018) reveals that female protagonists in Sidney Sheldon's novels demonstrated significant character development and strategic approaches in response to the society that marginalized them. In the story, Leslie remains silent and does not try to win Oliver back.

b) Dana Evans. The next major heroine in the story is Dana Evans. She works as a foreign correspondent at Washington Tribune Enterprises. Below are the discussions of Dana Evans' moral development.

First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility. Dana works at Washington Tribune Enterprises as a foreign correspondent in Sarajevo. While covering the Bosnia War, she develops a growing concern for the innocent people there, especially for the children. Dana meets a twelve-year-old orphan named Kemal, who loses his right arm in a bomb incident. Dana takes care of Kemal and moves into the farmhouse where hundreds of orphans stay. She cares so much about them. Dana's overwhelming compassion and sympathy allow her to do good things. Another proof that Dana is responsible and caring is when she decides to adopt Kemal. She wants to bring Kemal to America and become her foster mother. Sumatra (2023) mentions that one of the images of women in the selected poems of Tita Lacambra-Ayala is a responsible mother. In Dana's case, she is willing to take care of Kemal because she understands his struggles in life.

Level Two: Identification of Goodness with Responsibility for Others. Covering the Bosnia War is never easy because she endangers her life. After witnessing Wally's death, she becomes more determined to stay and tell the world what is happening to the innocent people of Sarajevo. She does not mind the risks she encounters. Her overriding sense of responsibility falls into the background because she is willing to do everything to share people's stories, even if her life is at stake. This means that Dana is a brave woman because she takes the risk to help others.

Moreover, Dana realizes that she needs to rescue the orphans. So, she plots to get them out of Sarajevo. Dana believes this is the only way for them to survive their miserable lives. With the help of the Red Cross plane leaving for Paris, she saves the orphans. Because of this, Colonel Divjak arrests her for espionage. She goes to prison without a trial, and Colonel Divjak tortures her. Dana's humanitarian act is a form of self-sacrifice because it does not matter if she suffers to save other people. Shabot (2022) mentions that sacrifice is a potential tool for women empowerment by considering it positively. In the story, Dana genuinely cares for other people.

3.2. *Different Voices of the Major Heroines in Sidney Sheldon's Selected Novels*

Gilligan (1982) maintains the different female voices in human experience and judgment. These voices highlight care, sensitivity, concern, and connectedness to others. It emphasizes responsibility to human beings rather than to abstract principles and advocates avoiding hurt and violence and maintaining relationships and attachments even if self-sacrifice becomes necessary. In this study, there are different voices of major heroines in the selected novels of Sidney Sheldon.

3.2.1. *Different Voices of the Major Heroines in Are You Afraid of the Dark?*

a) Diane Stevens. The story reveals that Diane Stevens is a responsible wife, caring person, concerned individual, sacrificial woman, and maintains interpersonal relationships. Below are the discussions of the different voices of Diane Stevens.

As a wife, Diane must give Richard a decent burial. She wants an open casket for him

so that he can see his friends, and she even intends to dress him up herself.

Diane also believes that talking to Kelly Harris, whose husband also died and who is a former scientist at KIG, may enlighten her about what is going on. It shows that Diane is concerned about their situation. She also thinks that their conversation may give Kelly an idea about the possible reasons for her husband's death.

Even if Kelly ignores her, Diane still communicates with her because she cares about their situation. She believes that they need teamwork to escape from the people who are after them. She must connect with her because they are both in the same situation.

Moreover, Diane realizes that her life is at stake in unraveling the mystery of her husband's death. But she still risks her life to get justice for Richard. Even if it means her death, Diane pursues her goal of gaining truth and justice. Diane is brave because she will do anything in the name of love. Her overriding sense of responsibility leads her to self-sacrifice.

b) Kelly Harris. The story reveals that Kelly Harris is a responsible daughter, caring person, concerned individual, sacrificial woman, and she develops sensitivity to others. Below are the discussions of the different voices of Kelly Harris.

When Kelly realizes that her stepfather constantly beats her mother, she vows to help her get away from her miserable life. And later, she fulfills her role as a daughter as promised. Kelly wants her mother to have a better life because she is the only love of her life. Her mother is her inspiration, and this catapults her to become a successful supermodel. She is a responsible and caring daughter.

After realizing that Tanner Kingsley is trying to kill them, Kelly pacifies Diane by telling her they need to outsmart him. In the story's beginning, Kelly does not communicate, but later, she slowly builds her trust in Diane. Moreover, the bombing incident at Adams Hotel proves that Kelly cares for Diane. She can leave Diane behind, but she chooses not to.

At first, Kelly does not care about Diane. She doesn't mind if she hurts Diane's feelings. Sometimes, Kelly indirectly insults her. She even leaves used towels on the floor after using the bathroom. But later, Kelly becomes open-minded and shows growing sensitivity to Diane.

The story also reveals that Kelly keeps silent when one of her uncles rapes her. The rapist threatens to kill her mother, which is why she just shuts her mouth. Instead of seeking help, Kelly fears not only for her life but also for her mother. This sacrifice could have been so hard for Kelly at a young age. Another remarkable self-sacrifice that Kelly shows is when Harry Flint is about to rape and kill them. He is supposed to start with Diane, but Kelly insists. Although she has a traumatic rape experience, she sacrifices herself for the sake of Diane.

3.2.2. Different Voices of the Major Heroines in *The Best Laid Plans*

a) Leslie Stewart. It is revealed that Leslie Stewart is a sacrificial lover, has a growing concern and care for others. Below are the discussions of the different voices of Leslie Stewart.

At the beginning of the story, Leslie keeps Oliver's account for his campaign, even if he cannot afford to pay the agency fee. Leslie feels his sincerity and thinks he will make a fine governor. In this event, Leslie shows her sense of responsibility for others.

The story also reveals that Leslie does not love Henry. She uses him for her revenge against Oliver. But later, Leslie realizes that she already loves him. When Henry is physically ill, she worries so much. She even calls the doctor to do everything for her dying husband.

Furthermore, Leslie remains silent when Oliver abandons her without telling her the reasons. However, the story reveals that Senator Davis persuades Oliver to marry Jan, his daughter, for political reasons. Knowing this, Leslie sacrifices her pride and her love for the sake of Oliver's happiness.

b) Dana Evans. The story reveals that Dana Evans has an overriding sense of responsibility, concern, and care for others which make her capable of self-sacrifice. Below are the discussions of the different voices of Dana Evans.

At a young age, Dana loves helping other people. For her, the satisfaction of helping others makes her feel better. Another proof that Dana is responsible, is when she adopts Kemal. She wants to bring Kemal to America and become her foster mother. What makes her decide to adopt Kemal is not that he is an orphan but because she feels his struggles in life.

The story reveals that Dana moves into the farmhouse where hundreds of orphans stay. She cares so much about them. Dana's overwhelming compassion and sympathy allow her to do good things. She is a kind and caring person.

After witnessing Wally's death, she becomes more determined to stay and tell the world what is happening to the innocent people of Sarajevo. She doesn't mind the risks she

encounters. Her overriding sense of responsibility falls into the background because she is willing to do everything to share people's stories, even if her life is at stake. Moreover, Dana realizes that she needs to rescue the orphans. So, she plots to get them out of Sarajevo. Because of this, Dana goes to prison without a trial, and Colonel Divjak tortures her. Dana suffers for the sake of other people.

4. Discussion

The major heroines in the selected novels of Sidney Sheldon undergo different levels of moral development. In the story "*Are You Afraid of the Dark?*" Diane West Stevens begins at level one (orientation toward self-interest) when she reacts selfishly to her husband's death, focusing on her grief and disregarding others' feelings. Later, she shifts to the first transition (from selfishness to responsibility), when she becomes more empathetic and shows concern for Kelly. At level two (identification of goodness with responsibility for others), Diane sacrifices her safety to uncover the truth and seek justice for her husband's death. Then Diane moves to the second transition (from conformity to a new inner judgment) when she accepts her husband's death and takes account for her actions. Finally, at level three (dynamics between self and others), Diane balances her needs with her commitment to others, as shown in her proactive and loving actions toward Richard. Meanwhile, Kelly Hackworth Harris also starts at level one (orientation toward self-interest); when the story reveals her rape trauma, she is initially self-centered and distrustful. Through the first transition (from selfishness to responsibility), Kelly shows care for her mother and builds a supportive relationship with Diane. Kelly then moves to level two (identification of goodness with responsibility for others), where she sacrifices herself to protect Diane from further trauma. Kelly's progression to level three (dynamics between self and others) happens when she confronts her fears and prioritizes her marital relationship with Mark.

In the story "*The Best Laid Plans*," Leslie Stewart starts at level one (orientation toward self-interest), where she plots revenge against her ex-fiancé, displaying insensitivity and a desire for retribution. Her journey through the first transition (from selfishness to responsibility) begins when she develops empathy and care for others, such as her evolving relationship with Henry. Then at level two (identification of goodness with responsibility for others), Leslie shows self-sacrifice by prioritizing Oliver's happiness over her pride. Meanwhile, Dana Evans begins with the first transition (from selfishness to responsibility) when she displays compassion for war orphans and adopts Kemal. Then, Dana moves to level two (identification of goodness with responsibility for others) when she risks her life to report on the Bosnia War and rescue orphans, showing a deep commitment to others' well-being.

In addition, the major heroines in the selected novels of Sidney Sheldon reveal different voices of women. In "*Are You Afraid of the Dark?*," Diane Stevens demonstrates her deep sense of responsibility by ensuring her husband receives a proper burial. She shows concern for Kelly Harris, believing their shared experiences may solve the mystery of their husbands' deaths, and she builds mutual understanding. Diane is also capable of self-sacrifice by pursuing justice for Richard. On the other hand, Kelly Harris is a responsible daughter who fulfills her promise to help her mother. Kelly gradually builds her trust and sensitivity to Diane. The story also reveals her silent suffering to protect her mother and her willingness to sacrifice herself for Diane. In "*The Best Laid Plans*," Leslie Stewart shows her sense of responsibility by supporting Oliver's political campaign. Her feelings for Henry become genuine when he falls ill. Leslie keeps silent and endures pain for Oliver's political success. Meanwhile, Dana Evans shows a sense of responsibility and compassion by adopting an orphan named Kemal. She risks her life by reporting the truth about the war. Dana also indicates selflessness when the Colonel imprisons and tortures her for rescuing orphans.

5. Conclusions

The major heroines in Sidney Sheldon's selected novels are examined through the lens of Carol Gilligan's *Feminist Care Ethics*. Gilligan emphasizes that traditional moral theories and principles are flawed because they neglect or demean the values and virtues culturally associated with women. Her work critiques the Freudian notion, asserting that men are morally well-developed, but women are not. In this study, the first research question reveals the subtle sequence of moral development of the major heroines. Each heroine's transformation from self-centered to responsible, compassionate, and sacrificing person

demonstrates the complexities of feminine moral development. Diane, Kelly, Leslie, and Dana demonstrate moral development corresponding to Gilligan's stages, revealing the transformational effect of personal experiences and ethical concern in shaping moral identity.

Moreover, Gilligan argues that the female voice speaks of caring for others and emphasizing responsibility to human beings rather than abstract principles. This female voice also advocates avoiding violence and maintaining relationships, even if self-sacrifice becomes necessary. In this study, the second research question reveals that the major heroines in the selected novels of Sidney Sheldon embody multifaceted characters based on interpersonal network or care orientation. They emphasize responsibility to human beings and advocate avoiding hurt and violence and maintaining relationships and attachments even if self-sacrifice becomes necessary. Also, it shows that the major heroines can become level-three women. They no longer see themselves as submissive or powerless. They have become active participants in the decision-making process.

In general, Sidney Sheldon's selected novels depict heroines who evolve through Carol Gilligan's stages of moral development, transitioning from self-centeredness to embodying responsibility, empathy, and self-sacrifice. Sheldon explores a feminine ethical framework through these characters where caring for others and maintaining relationships precede abstract principles. Ultimately, these women emerge as active decision-makers, breaking free from traditional submissive roles and embodying the strength and resilience that Gilligan's theory highlights.

The study recommends that further research on women's morality be done to give more weight to women's representations, both in the literary and actual world. Society can familiarize women's voices by elucidating the themes of women's morality. Specifically, future studies could focus on the following literary research titles: moral development of working mothers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, different voices of modern Filipina heroines, understanding women's morality in a patriarchal Philippine society, other voices of female characters in the select novels of Jane Austen, and moral development woman characters in the select fictions of Edith Tiempo. Such studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of women's representation and help society recognize and appreciate women's important and positive roles across different cultures and literary traditions.

Furthermore, the study strongly recommends teaching Feminist Care Ethics to students in the General Education curriculum, such as Ethics, Psychology, and other Social Sciences subjects. Through this, students will have a reference guide for recognizing women's voices, viewpoints, and virtues. By integrating Feminist Care Ethics into the curriculum (primarily the result of this study), students can form solid arguments and critical analysis, which will help them better understand moral issues concerning women. It will foster gender equality not only in the academe but also in all sectors of society.

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