

## *Dyosa or Dusa? (Goddess of Beauty or Suffering?): An Intersectional Positioning Analysis of Bakla, Gay Men, and Transwomen in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna*

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### *Abstract*

Following an essentialist perspective, available research has largely equated lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people with discrimination. However, other studies have documented that in some spaces, LGBT people are able to obtain recognition. Extant literature nevertheless continues to be silent on the discursive production by which LGBT people experience discrimination or secure recognition. This study explored how discrimination or recognition among LGBT people is discursively produced in social interactions. I argue that LGBT identities do not always inherently evoke discrimination. Rather, these identities are ascribed personal and moral attributes to produce discrimination or recognition. In locating how these social categories are assigned attributes, I looked at two popular segments in *Eat Bulaga!*, a popular noontime television show in the Philippines. Using intersectional positioning as lens, I specifically explored how personal and moral attributes are ascribed to the bakla, gay men, and transgender women candidates in *Suffer Sireyna* and *Super Sireyna* pageants. Implications of the results of the study are discussed in terms of how the duty to accept ridicule and the right to gain respect are ascribed among the candidates as well as their corresponding material consequences.

**Keywords:** positioning theory, discourse, LGBT persons, pageants, discrimination, recognition.

### **Introduction**

Extant literature has largely focused on the experiences of discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people (Vaughan and Rodriguez, 2014). The bulk of empirical studies carry an essentialist perspective, suggesting that possessing the LGBT identity automatically invokes discrimination (e.g., Meyer, 1995; Smalley

et al., 2016). However, other studies have noted that in some spaces, LGBT people are able to secure recognition (e.g., Cunningham, 2015; Lloren and Parini, 2016; Santos, 2013). Recognition is evident in spaces where LGBT identities and relationships are legally recognized such as in same-sex marriages (Santos, 2013). Recognition is also manifested by showing respect or providing a more inclusive working environment for LGBT people (Cunningham, 2015; Lloren and Parini, 2016). Available knowledge nevertheless continues to be silent on the discursive production by which LGBT people experience discrimination or secure recognition. In the present study, I argue that discrimination or recognition among LGBT people is discursively produced in social interactions through positioning. I argue that LGBT identities do not always automatically evoke discrimination. Instead, these identities or social categories are ascribed personal and moral attributes to create discrimination or recognition. In locating how attributes are assigned to social categories, I looked at two popular segments in *Eat Bulaga!*, a popular noontime television (TV) show in the Philippines. Specifically, I explored how personal and moral attributes are ascribed to *bakla*, gay men, and transgender women (transwomen) candidates in *Super Sireyna* and *Suffer Sireyna* to produce discrimination or recognition.

### Literature Review

#### Locating the Discrimination of LGBT People in Social Structures

The long-standing discrimination towards LGBT people may be located in social structures. Winker and Degele (2011) have identified gender, class, and body as sites of power relations where inequalities are created, leading to heteronormativisms, classisms, and bodyisms. In the Philippines, the Church through its *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* constructs LGBT people as moral evils (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1997). Moreover, middle-class gay men would rarely associate themselves with the *bakla* (a local construction) who is labeled as lower-class and ugly (Canoy, 2015; Macdonald, 2007).

Meanwhile, Ceperiano et al. (2016) identified *baklaisms* as a unique form of discrimination situated in the Philippine cultural context. While in the west, sexuality and gender are discrete as in the case of LGBT identities, in the Philippines however the local construction of these identities is intersectional. The term *bakla* merges the words *babae* (female/woman) and *lalaki* (male/man; Ceperiano et al., 2016; Tan, 1995a). Accordingly, sexuality is melded in the language of gender where male homosexuality is tied to femininity (Ofreneo, 2003; Tan, 1995b). Hence, *baklaisms* refers to the unique experience of discrimination among *bakla* owing to their combined sexualized, gendered, and classed identities (Ceperiano et al., 2016).

The *bakla* identity also intersects with other sexualities and gender expressions. In one study, some participants who identify as *bakla* also

identify as gay and transwomen (Health Action Information Network [HAIN], 2013). In highly urbanized areas such as Manila however, transgender women, particularly *transsexuals* (transgender women who underwent sex reassignment surgery), assert that they are women and distinct from gay men and bakla as the latter two acknowledge their biological maleness (HAIN, 2013). The same study likewise noted that in contrast to the bakla, the *trans* (shorthand for transwomen) and gay identities are largely seen as a middle-class status. Thus, in the local construction of gay and transgender identities, sexuality likewise intersects with gender and class.

Studies have likewise implicated moral attributes (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) as linked to the *bakla* identity such as being immoral, dirty as a pig, and sexually voracious (Ceperiano et. al., 2016; Thoreson, 2009). Thus, the various studies suggest that personal and moral attributes are ascribed to the bakla identity to discursively produce discrimination (e.g., to be ridiculed for being ugly or immoral). In the present study, we argue that identities or social categories such as bakla, as well as gay men and transwomen, are ascribed with personal and moral attributes to evoke discrimination or recognition. A form of discrimination is ridicule whereas an example of recognition is respect.

#### Ridicule or Respect among LGBT Persons

To ridicule someone means to poke fun at some attributes of that person and typically involves laughter and degradation which are carried out via teasing, sarcasm, and insult (Ducharme, 1994; Shapiro et al., 1991; Wooten, 2006). These attributes may be personal, in terms of embodiment such as age, attractiveness, and physical state (e.g., to be ridiculed for being old or ugly). They may also be in terms of socioeconomic class (e.g., to be ridiculed for being poor).

Meanwhile, from a social psychological perspective, respect means recognition based on equality principle (Simon and Grabow, 2014). In the case of LGBT people, this means regarding them as equal as any other heterosexual citizen (Simon and Grabow, 2014). Respect can also be extended to LGBT persons through gestures of approval, appreciation, and support, such as by way of applause (Gilbert, 2001; Mann et al., 2013; Moridis and Economides, 2012). For example, acknowledging a pageant contestant's skills in the talent portion by applauding is a manifestation of respect. Along this line, pageants provide a unique space where ridicule or respect is discursively produced.

#### Beauty Pageants among Bakla, Gay Men, and Transwomen

Beauty pageants for bakla, gay men, and transwomen have long been popular in the Philippines (Garcia, 2008; Johnson, 1995). These beauty pageants are organized at various levels, namely the *barangay* (village), municipal, and provincial levels (Johnson, 1996). Beauty pageants serve

as a rite of passage and play an important sub-culture for bakla, gay men, and transwomen (Monteverde et al., 2016).

Pageants have progressed to a point where they are now employed to counter hegemonic sexualities and identities (Cohen, 2015). In these venues, sexual and gender minorities exploit pageants to gain respect such as being accepted as transgender persons (Johnson, 1995). Thus, beauty pageants provide a unique socio-cultural context where discursive constructions of sexuality and gender identity can be studied and analyzed. Likewise, pageants provide the *stage* where the discursive production of ridicule or respect is played out. When these pageants are transported to a bigger platform such as TV, the discursive productions are even more amplified.

#### Television and the Construction of Social Identities

Television is a powerful medium by which ideologies are transmitted for the consumption of the viewing public (Manuel, 2009). Television creates and perpetuates values and stereotypes of a society to its citizens such as heterosexism and sexual othering, thus the persistent ridicule of gay men and transwomen (Manuel, 2009; Raley and Lucas, 2006). At the same time, TV can be used as a tool to normalize gay and transwomen identities, including the bakla identity, and secure respect for them in the process. Such is the case of a homegrown TV program called *Eat Bulaga!*, the locale for the present study.

#### Background of the Study: Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna

In 1995, *Eat Bulaga!*, the longest running noontime show in the Philippines, launched its segment dubbed as *Super Sireyna*, the first gay and transgender beauty pageant on national TV (Requesto, 2015; Santos, 2016). Beautiful candidates compete in long gown, talent, and question and answer portions. In stark contradiction, another segment, named *Suffer Sireyna*, launched in 2014, features ugly gay contestants in tasteless outfits and smiling without dentures (Requesto, 2015; Santos, 2016). The contestants are then made to suffer by hurdling the *obstacle curse* (Santos, 2016). This obstacle curse consists of going through a tire obstacle, carrying a sack of rice, riding a bicycle while crisscrossing traffic cones, doing a military crawl to pass through a horizontal garter obstacle, and eating raw *ampalaya* (bitter melon) or drinking vinegar in a shot glass (Santos, 2016).

Recent studies have explored the media representation of bakla and gay men in *Super Sireyna* and *Suffer Sireyna*. Santos (2016) lumped the bakla, gay, and transgender contestants and employed the term bakla to refer to all the candidates in *Super Sireyna* and *Suffer Sireyna*. Meanwhile, Requesto (2015) used the term gay men to refer to the candidates in *Suffer Sireyna*. Both studies noted how *Eat Bulaga!*, via the two segments, breeds discrimination towards gay men and bakla. In these TV portions, *Super Sireyna* and *Suffer Sireyna* construct two types

gay men or bakla: one that is respected, and another who is ridiculed. To be respected, a bakla would have to be attractive, intelligent, and talented (Santos, 2016). In contrast, a gay person or bakla who is unattractive commands ridicule and needs to suffer physically and psychologically (Requesto, 2015; Santos, 2016).

In contrast, I argue that bakla, gay, and transwoman identities are discursively produced rather than just imposed by the researcher (e.g., Santos, 2016; Requesto, 2015). I argue that these identities or social categories are invoked or claimed by the hosts and the candidates. Both studies likewise suggest that attributes (e.g., unattractive, attractive) are linked to the bakla and gay identities. In the present study, I argue these social categories are discursively produced and ascribed personal and moral attributes to evoke ridicule or respect.

#### Theoretical and Empirical Gap in Research

A review of available knowledge indicates that the bulk of empirical studies have largely equated LGBT people with discrimination (e.g., United Nations, 2012). Typically invoking social structures (Winker and Degele, 2011), the majority of studies carry an essentialist perspective, suggesting that to be born an LGBT person means to live a life of discrimination. In contrast, I argue that LGBT identities do not automatically evoke discrimination. In some spaces, they may be able to secure recognition. In the present study, I argue that discrimination or recognition is discursively produced through positioning. Specifically, I argue that bakla, gay men, and transwomen identities are ascribed personal and moral attributes to produce a duty to accept ridicule or a right to gain respect.

#### Positioning Theory as Frame

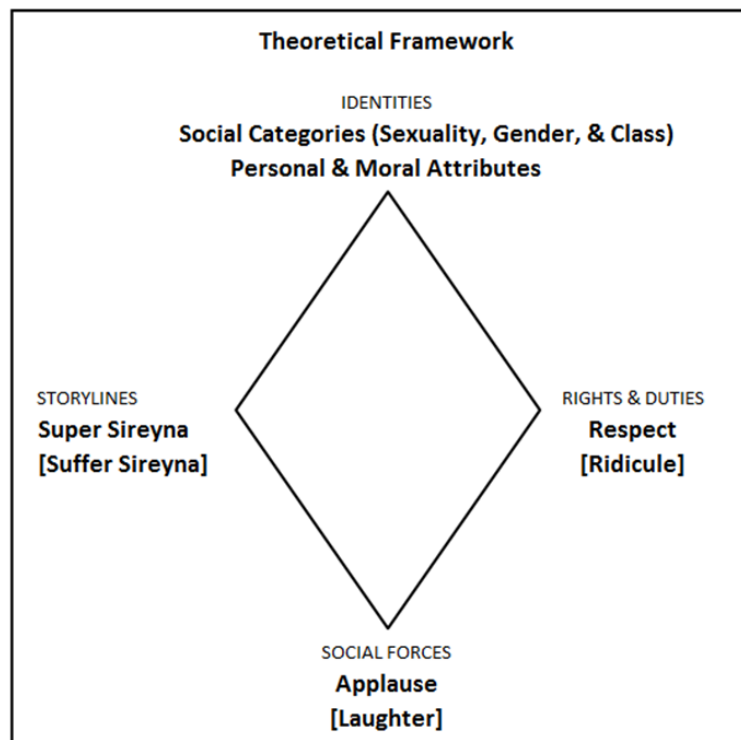
Following a social constructivist paradigm, positioning theory is both a conceptual and methodological frame that can be employed to understand how psychological phenomena are produced in social interactions (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999). Being discursive, positioning theory focuses on *conversation* and *talk* as sites where social phenomena are produced (Parker, 1992). The theory argues that language is action-oriented, that *talk is action* (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003; Ofreneo and Montiel, 2010).

As applied in the present study, positioning occurs when we invoke identities for ourselves or other people, and in the process ascribe rights or duties for ourselves or other people. These identities may be social categories or personal and moral attributes (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). For instance, a candidate in Super Sireyna who is positioned as *magandang bakla* (beautiful bakla) by the hosts is accorded the right to gain respect whereas a candidate in Suffer Sireyna who is positioned as *pangit na bakla* (ugly bakla) is given the duty to accept ridicule. In the process, a social force of applause (a manifestation of respect; Super Sireyna) or

laughter (a form of ridicule; Suffer Sireyna) is produced from the audience.

For the current study, i specifically employed Slocum-Bradley's (2009) *positioning diamond* as theoretical lens. The frame has the following elements: *identities, storylines, rights and duties*, and *social forces of discursive acts*. The decision to use positioning diamond is explained by the saliency of the multiple and intersecting identities among the Super Sireyna and the Suffer Sireyna candidates. Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework for the present study.

**Figure 1**



*Figure 1.* The theoretical frame for the present study, arguing for an intersectional approach to identities. I refer to this conceptualization as *intersectional positioning*. Social categories are ascribed personal and moral attributes to produce ridicule (e.g., laughter) or respect (e.g., applause).

Slocum-Bradley (2009) has argued that categories (nouns) and attributes (adjectives) are aspects of identity. Thus, in the example above, social categories such as *bakla* and personal attributes such as *pangit* (ugly) shall be treated as identities. Social categories (e.g., sexuality, gender, class), and personal and moral attributes (e.g., ugly, immoral) restrict what a person can do or say in a social interaction (Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999).

In Slocum-Bradley's (2009) positioning diamond, when either a social category, a personal attribute, or a moral attribute is invoked, a corresponding social force is automatically produced. Such conceptualization suggests that social categories carry the same weight as personal and moral attributes. However, in the case of Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna candidates, the invoking of bakla or gay identities do not immediately produce the social force of ridicule (e.g., laughter). In the case of Super Sireyna, respect (e.g., applause) is produced for the bakla candidates (as labeled by Santos, 2016). Depending on which personal and moral attributes (e.g., beautiful, ugly) are ascribed to the candidates, respect or ridicule is produced. Thus, I argue that social categories, such as the bakla, on their own, do not always immediately evoke ridicule. These categories are ascribed personal and moral attributes to produce respect or ridicule. Correspondingly, I argue that personal and moral attributes at times would have to intersect (conceptualized as equivalent to ascription or ascribe) with the social categories of bakla or gay to produce a right to obtain respect or a duty to accept ridicule. Accordingly, I argue for the extension of Slocum-Bradley's (2009) conceptualization of identities by incorporating an intersectional approach to positioning. I term such an approach as *intersectional positioning*.

#### Research Question

Using an intersectional positioning frame, this study attempted to understand how candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna are being positioned according to their identities. Specifically, I asked the following:

- (a) What social categories (e.g., sexuality, gender, class) are evoked among the candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna?
- (i) What social categories are evoked singly or in combination among the candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna?
- (ii) What personal and moral attributes are ascribed to these social categories?
- (iii) How do these positionings evoke respect or ridicule?

#### Methods

##### Participants

Employing a qualitative research design, I used quotes from the TV hosts and the candidates during the Super Sireyna and the Suffer Sireyna episodes in Eat Bulaga!. Pseudonyms were used in place of the real names of the hosts and the candidates. Relevant discursive productions from the studio and *barangay* audience, such as applause and laughter, were also treated as data. Also, for this study, an exemption from ethics review was secured from a university research ethics committee.

## Materials

In the present study, I used available videos from the official Eat Bulaga! Youtube channel featuring the Super Sireyna and the Suffer Sireyna segments for the year 2018. Specifically, for the Super Sireyna, a total of 44 episodes were included, covering episodes from February 6 to April 21, 2018. Meanwhile, for the Suffer Sireyna, a total of 44 episodes were included, comprising of episodes from February 22 to May 12, 2018.

## Procedure

I watched multiple times (a minimum of ten times) the Super Sireyna and the Suffer Sireyna episodes. While watching, I looked for utterances made by the hosts and the candidates that were relevant to the research questions. I also paid attention to related discursive productions made by the studio and barangay audience. I then encoded and transcribed the relevant utterances and discursive productions (all anonymized) using Microsoft Excel. Non-literal translation of the utterances using colloquial English was also carried out.

Formal data analyses followed the positioning diamond frame by Slocum-Bradley (2009). Transcribed utterances in the two segments were analyzed based on how the identities of the candidates are made salient in the talk of the hosts and the candidates themselves. I explored how social categories (e.g., sexuality, gender, and class) were ascribed personal and moral attributes. I likewise probed on how the patterns of positioning produce a constellation of intersectional identities, creating a unique set of rights and duties for these candidates. Moreover, I examined how the social forces of laughter (ridicule) and applause (respect) were discursively produced by the hosts, studio audience, and barangay audience.

## Validity

Checking for validity entailed constant returning to the video sources and the data extracts from the TV hosts, candidates, studio and barangay audience to ensure consonance with the interpretation. I likewise engaged in constant reflexivity as I carried out the data analysis and interpretation.

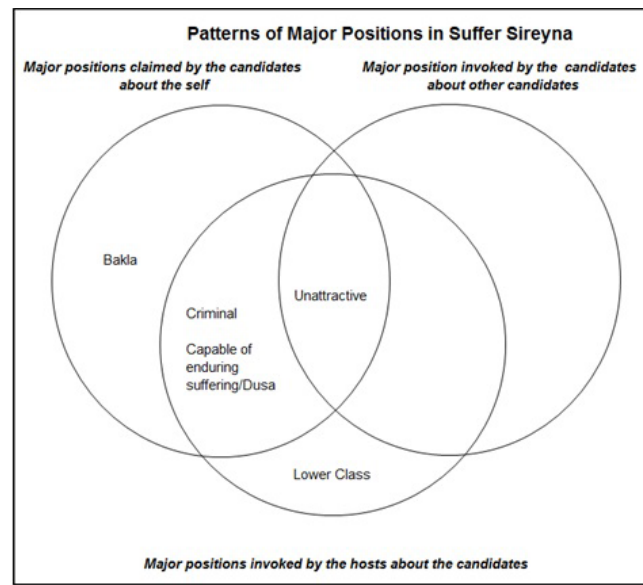
## Results

### Major Positions in Suffer Sireyna

With regard to Suffer Sireyna, six major positions about the candidates emerged from the analysis of data. These positions follow two patterns – according to (a) the utterer of the position, and (b) how a position is shared. In the first pattern, the positions cluster into three, namely, (a) positions invoked by the candidates about themselves, (b) positions invoked by the candidates about other candidates, and (c) positions invoked by the hosts about the candidates. Meanwhile, in the second

pattern, the positions likewise configure into three, namely, (a) positions shared between the candidates and the hosts, (b) positions invoked only by the candidates, or (c) positions invoked only by the hosts. Using a Venn diagram (Berek, 2017), these patterns of major positions in Suffer Sireyna are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Patterns of major positions among Suffer Sireyna candidates.**



In presenting the results of this study, I shall follow the second pattern of positions. Consequently, I shall commence by presenting the positions that are shared by the candidates and the hosts, followed by the positions invoked only by the candidates, and lastly, the positions that are invoked only by the hosts.

One major position about Suffer Sireyna candidates emerged and shared by the candidates and the hosts. Within this positioning, candidates are regarded as *unattractive*

*Unattractive.* Candidates in Suffer Sireyna are positioned as unattractive by making reference to their facial features. Thus, they are considered as ugly. In the following sample utterance, the claiming of a stage name positions the self as ugly,

Magandang magandang tanghali mga dabarkads! (A very pleasant noon friends!) Ako nga po pala si (By the way, I am) Ian Asuncion, ang inyong (your) Chucky, Chucky Rice [in reference to local actress Jackie Rice]...

The use of the name *Chucky* has reference to the local gay slang term *chaka* which means ugly. Notably, candidates were also observed to position fellow candidates as ugly, as illustrated in the succeeding sample extract,

pangit man ako sa inyong paningin, hintayin niyo ang susunod sa akin (I may be ugly by your standard, but wait till you see the next candidate). [hosts laugh]

Meanwhile, the hosts likewise position Suffer Sireyna candidates as ugly, as evoked in the following sample text,

Ang ganda ng mukha, pwede itago (What a pretty face, it's worth hiding) hahaha! – Josh

Meanwhile some positions cluster according to positions invoked by the candidates about the self and positions invoked by the hosts about the candidates. These positions are not invoked by the candidates about other candidates. Within these positionings, the candidates are considered as *criminal* and *capable of enduring suffering*.

*Criminal*. Suffer Sireyna candidates position the self as a criminal. This is invoked in the following sample text,

My name is Kenneth Galang, AKA Nadine Sakote [in reference to local actress Nadine Samonte; hosts laugh] na naniniwala sa isang kasabihan, ang taong matuling tumakbo ay (who believes in the saying that someone who runs fast is a) snatcher.

In the utterance above, criminal is evoked in the use of the surname *Sakote* (a local term which means apprehended or arrested). In like manner, the hosts position the candidates as criminal, as produced in the conversation below,

Hahahaha! – Jon

Kinapkapan. (He's being body searched.) [security guard conducts body search on a candidate; hosts laugh] – Wok

Para safe lang. (Just to be safe.) [hosts laugh] – Jon

*Capable of enduring suffering*. Notably, Suffer Sireyna candidates are positioned as capable by the hosts, as demonstrated in the succeeding sample conversation,

Okay, kaya ba? (Okay, can you do it?) [asking a candidate if he can carry the sack of rice as he struggles through the obstacle course] – Mayete

Kayang kaya yan, mga Suffer Sireyna natin yan eh. (They can manage, because they are our Suffer Sireyna.) – Peter

However, the positioning as capable bears reference not to a distinctive physical or mental ability but rather to the capacity to endure suffering and overcome the obstacle course. Consequently, the Suffer Sireyna

candidate is given the title *Dusa* (Suffering), as exemplified in the following conversation,

Peter, Peter. – Jon

Po, sandali lang. (Yes, just a minute.) – Peter

Hindi ba ano to (Isn't this), ahh Suffer Sireyna? – Jon

Yes. – Peter

So hindi sila dyosa? (So, they're not goddesses?) – Jon

Hindi! (No!) – Peter

Dusa (Suffering). – Jon

Dusa (Suffering). – Peter

Dusa yan oo. Suffer eh. (Suffering, yes. Because it's Suffer [Sireyna].) – Jon

This positioning as capable of suffering is likewise claimed by the candidates themselves (e.g., Nadengue Samonte; in reference to local actress Nadine Samonte). Interestingly, in prevailing over sufferings, Suffer Sireyna candidates are able to secure happiness, as exemplified in the following sample text,

Ang saya ko po sa feelings kasi minsan lang po ito sa buhay natin, napapakita ko din po dito kung ano ang kakayahan ko tapos kung ano pa po mapapakita ko. (I am just so happy because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I am able showcase here my capability as well as other things that I can show.) – Yassi Pressman Shepherd

This sense of happiness appears to be problematic. While on one hand, the capability to endure is recognized, on the other hand, the suffering is valorized and at the same time trivialized. In the end, when shown on TV and in an online platform, the image of an unattractive sireyna who suffers, ridiculed, and laughed at is reproduced.

Meanwhile, there is one position that is claimed only by candidates about the self. This position is bakla.

Bakla. For Suffer Sireyna candidates, the self is positioned as bakla, as demonstrated in the subsequent sample text,

Ngayong tanghali, mararanasan nyo na ang paghihinagpis ng mga baklang pangit! (This noon, you will bear witness to the suffering of ugly bakla candidates!) Regine! Wooo! [hosts and studio audience laugh]

Notable in the utterance mentioned above, attached in the claiming of the bakla identity is the acceptance of suffering. Meanwhile, there are also positions that are invoked only by the hosts. These positions include constructing Suffer Sireyna candidates as *lower class* and *object of physical violence*.

*Lower class.* In the succeeding sample utterance, socio-economic class, particularly lower class, is discursively produced by the host among the candidates,

Suffer Sireyna is wearing a kulambo (mosquito net). – Peter

The use of the description *kulambo* to refer to a gown evokes a lack of material resource on the part of the candidate.

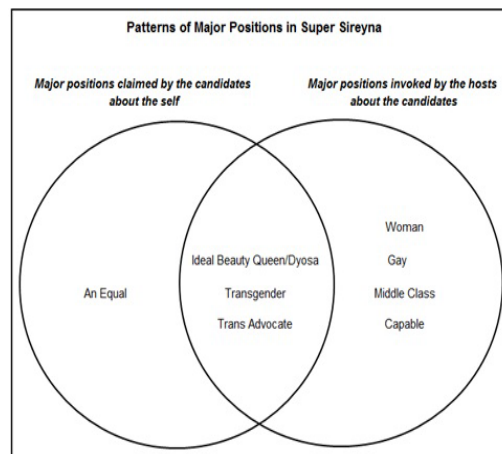
*Object of physical violence.* Notably also, Suffer Sireyna candidates are deemed as worthy recipients of physical violence from the hosts, as illustrated in the sample texts below,

Kailangan makuha natin ang mga sireyna na yan. Para pagpapapapatayin. (We need to have those sireyna. So we can kill them.) [hosts laugh] – Josh

#### Major Positions in Super Sireyna

Meanwhile, in the case of the Super Sireyna, eight major positions emerged. These positions likewise follow two patterns, according to (a) the utterer of the position, and (b) how a position is shared. In the first pattern, the positions configure into two, namely, positions invoked by the candidates about themselves, and positions invoked by the hosts about the candidates. Interestingly, Super Sireyna candidates do not position fellow candidates, unlike among Suffer Sireyna candidates. Meanwhile, in the second pattern, the positions assemble also into three, similar to Suffer Sireyna. Using a Venn diagram (Berek, 2017), these patterns of positions in Super Sireyna are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Patterns of major positions among Super Sireyna candidates.**



In presenting the major positions in Super Sireyna, I shall likewise use the second pattern, i.e., how the positions are shared and invoked. I begin by presenting the positions that are shared by the candidates and the hosts, to be followed by the positions that are claimed only by the candidates, and lastly, the positions invoked only by the hosts.

Three major positions about Super Sireyna candidates emerged which are both invoked by the candidates and the hosts. Among these positions, Super Sireyna candidates are constructed as *ideal beauty queen*, *transgender* and *trans advocate*.

*Ideal beauty queen.* Candidates position the self as the ideal beauty queen. A Super Sireyna is not only beautiful, witty, and talented. She also possesses a kind heart. This positioning is exemplified in the subsequent sample extract,

A Sireyna has an exceptional beauty, wit, and talent. But today I wanna share something exceptional. It's about having a good character with a kind heart. – Solenn Heussaff

Being the ideal beauty queen, she asserts a claim to being a *Dyosa* (Goddess),

Sabay-sabay nyo po akong palakpakan at hiyawan! (Altogether, please applaud me!) Ang nag-iisang Dyosa ng Kagandahan...na si (The one and only Goddess of Beauty) Ms. Bianca Umali [studio audience applauds]...

The hosts likewise construct Super Sireyna candidates as *Dyosa*,

At sya ay Dyosa ng Unibersidad (And she is the Goddess of the University)... – Alvin

*Transgender.* In Super Sireyna, candidates position themselves as bakla. In contrast, Super Sireyna candidates position themselves as transgender people. This positioning is exemplified in the succeeding sample utterance,

I want to be the first transgender icon... – KC Concepcion

Similarly, the hosts position the candidates as transgender, as illustrated in the following sample texts,

nanalo kang (you won) Miss Trans Hongkong 2017... – Alvin

*Trans advocate.* Candidates also position the self as an advocate for the LGBT community. This line of positioning is conveyed in the succeeding sample text,

I work for a non-government organization in the Philippines as... a membership coordinator, which is the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines... mostly we only aahm caters [sic] like aah Filipino transwomen. – Solenn Heussaff

In similar fashion, the hosts position the candidates as trans advocates, as expressed in the sample utterance below,

At sya ay (And she is an) ambassadress Luisa ng (of the) LGBT Region 3. – Alvin

Meanwhile, one position emerged that is exclusively claimed by Super Sireyna candidates, namely, being an *equal in God's image*.

*Equal in God's image*. Referencing with heterosexual people, Super Sireyna candidates position the self as equal in God's eyes. The sample text below depicts this positioning,

Well, I believe ladies and gentlemen, that here on this world we are all created by God in His own image and likeness and therefore we all deserve love and respect, even though we are different from one another, still we are the same inside. – KC Concepcion

On the other hand, four positions emerged which are exclusively evoked by the hosts. These positions claim that a Super Sireyna candidate is *woman*, *gay*, *middle class*, and *capable*.

*Woman*. In the subsequent sample extract, the host positions the candidates as women,

Hello girl. Ang tangkad mong babae (You're such a tall woman)! – Alvin

In the texts cited above, womanhood is evoked by the hosts in the use of the terms girl, and *babae* (woman).

*Gay*. The hosts also position the candidates as gay. This positioning is produced in the following utterance,

sya nanalo (she won) Miss Gay Camiguin 2017. – Alvin

*Middle class*. Similar to the Suffer Sireyna segment, class is also discursively produced in Super Sireyna. In the subsequent utterance, middle class status is evoked by the hosts among Super Sireyna candidates,

Ang gastos ng gown, ang daming (The gown looks expensive, with so many) beads. Ang daming (So many) rhinestones! – Alvin

*Capable*. Candidates are also positioned as capable by the hosts. This is demonstrated in the following sample utterances,

marami nga sa kanila (many of them) have gone on to compete and win sa ating mga (in) international pageants, and they've become artists and business people. Dyan talaga nakikita yung pagiging (That's how you'd really see the) 'super' ng mga (among the) sireyna. – Rayshir

nanawagan po kame sa lahat ng (we're calling the attention of all) airlines, ba't hindi nyo nga po i-try, oo kasi mukha namang babae tapos mas malakas siguro magbitbit ng mga (why don't you just try, because they look like women anyway, and they may be even stronger in carrying) luggages. Ang bilis siguro ipatong yun sa (And quicker perhaps in putting the luggages in the) overhead bin! Di ba noh (Isn't it)? – Alvin

#### Emergent Intersectional Identities

A look at the patterns of major positions in Suffer Sireyna suggests that shared among the candidates and the hosts, the Suffer Sireyna candidate is positioned based on his embodiment – according to his physical attributes. Suffer Sireyna candidates are constructed as unattractive.

Also shared among the candidates and the hosts, the Suffer Sireyna is positioned based on morality – referencing on the crimes that he can bring to others. They are immoral who deserve to suffer. Thus, they carry the title Dusa (Suffering). Nonetheless, in bearing with the suffering, Suffer Sireyna candidates find happiness.

Meanwhile, unique among the candidates is the claim that the self is bakla. Thus, Suffer Sireyna candidates distinctly position themselves based on their sexuality, gender, and class. To the Suffer Sireyna candidate, he embodies the localized intersectional gay identity. Likewise, distinctive among the hosts is the positioning of the candidates as lower class and deserving of physical violence.

Consequently, five major positions emerged, creating the intersectional identities of a Suffer Sireyna candidate. Thus, a Suffer Sireyna is unattractive, lower class, bakla, criminal, and Dusa.

Meanwhile, in the case of Super Sireyna, an examination of the clusters of major positions suggests that for both the candidates and the hosts, the Super Sireyna is positioned based on her embodiment, gender, and advocacy. Salient in this positioning is the claim that the Super Sireyna is the ideal beauty queen. A Super Sireyna is a Dyosa (Goddess). Beyond beauty, wit, and talent, a Super Sireyna is a transgender woman who has advocacies for her community.

Meanwhile, exclusive to the claim of Super Sireyna candidates is the positioning of the self based on morality, particularly religious belief. To

a Super Sireyna, in relation to heterosexual people, she is an equal in God's eyes, deserving of the same love and respect.

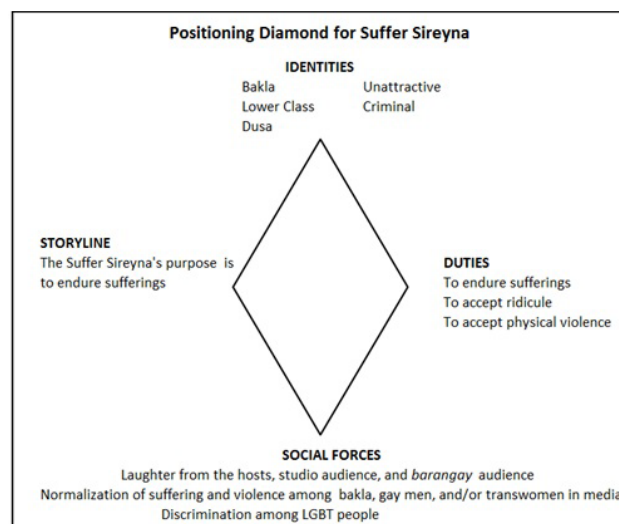
Uniquely salient among the hosts however is the positioning of a Super Sireyna based on gender, sexuality, class, and capability. For the hosts, a Super Sireyna is a woman. However, at other times she is not. Thus, she is still gay. Moreover, she is positioned as middle class who is capable.

Subsequently, eight major positions converge to form the intersectional identities of the Super Sireyna. Thus, a Super Sireyna is the ideal beauty queen/Dyosa, transgender, woman, gay, middle class, advocate, capable, and an equal.

#### The Duty to Suffer Versus the Right to be Respected

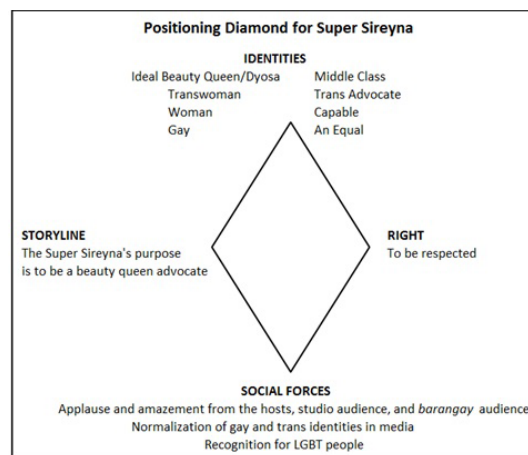
Based from the patterns of intersecting identities presented, the emergent storylines, rights and duties, and social forces for both Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna can now be determined. In the case of Super Sireyna, the storyline is, *the Suffer Sireyna's purpose is to endure sufferings*. By virtue of being unattractive, criminal, and lower class, the bakla has no end goal but the duty to suffer. Ironically though, he finds happiness amidst the sufferings. Moreover, he also bears the duty of accepting ridicule, and perhaps even physical violence – thus a Dusa. Correspondingly, at the level of the Suffer Sireyna segment, the social force that is generated is laughter from the hosts, the studio audience and barangay audience. At the level of media, by making suffering and violence funny, the social force to the viewing public is the normalization of suffering and violence among bakla, trans, and gay identities. At the larger societal level, the general social force is the continued discrimination of LGBT people. Figure 4 presents the positioning diamond for Suffer Sireyna.

**Figure 4. Positioning Diamond for Suffer Sireyna.**



Meanwhile, in the case of Super Sireyna, the emergent storyline is, *the Super Sireyna's purpose is to be a beauty queen advocate*. By being a Dyosa, the ideal beauty queen with an advocacy to improve the current plight of her community, she earns the right to be respected. Consequently, at the Super Sireyna level, the social forces created are applause and amazement from the hosts, the studio audience, and barangay audience. At the media level, the emergent social force to the viewing public is the normalization of gay and/or trans identities. At the macro societal level, the general social force is recognition for the LGBT people. Figure 5 presents the positioning diamond for Super Sireyna.

**Figure 5. Positioning diamond for Super Sireyna**



## Discussion

### The Great Divide

While extant literature has recognized the conflation of bakla, gay men, and transwomen identities in the Philippine cultural context (HAIN, 2013), this study revealed the great divide between the bakla versus gay and trans identities. The results showed that while gay sometimes conflates with transwoman and woman as in the case of Super Sireyna, this is not true for the bakla. For the Suffer Sireyna candidates, they are exclusively bakla. Demarcating the bakla from the gay and trans are body and class. For the hosts and the candidates themselves, the bakla identity is claimed when the candidate is unattractive and lower class whereas the gay and/or trans identity is invoked when the candidate is attractive and middle class. This demarcation lends duty for the bakla to suffer whereas the gay/trans bears no other duty but to be an advocate for his/her community. This leaves a challenge for the bakla. To obtain respect, he must raise his socio-economic status and transform his body. It is only when he is middle class and attractive that he can claim to be on equal footing with the gay and trans. Otherwise, a box is waiting for him, labeled Dusa/Suffer whereas gay men and transwomen occupy another box tagged as Dyosa/Super.

### Pageants, from the Periphery of Barangays to Mainstream TV

Situated historically in the context of marginalization, pageants featuring bakla, gay men, and transwomen have largely been limited to the peripheries of barangays (villages). In these confined spaces, distinctive expressions of femininity are put on display to counter hegemonic sexualities and identities (Cohen, 2015; Johnson, 1995). However, at the same time, these counter identities are trivialized as they are laughed at. When transported to a wider platform such as TV and online media, the recognition or the discrimination is further amplified. In the case of Yassi Pressman Shepherd, to be seen on TV is a once in a lifetime experience. Television gives him wider visibility and space to showcase his capability – that is to endure the obstacle course. Ultimately, the image of a suffering sireyna who is ridiculed and laughed at is reinforced and reproduced for the viewing public. Suffering is then trivialized in the context of entertainment and commoditized through material architecture. On the other hand, for the Super Sireyna candidate, such as Solenn Heussaff, TV gives her a bigger space to showcase her beauty, talent, wit, and advocacy. Amidst these contrasting images, I ask the following: how do these varying images shape the subjectivities of a viewer who identifies as bakla, gay, trans, or heterosexual?; how do these images shape the way the viewer constructs and treat the bakla, gay, or trans in his/her own community? Is it just about embodiment and class?; and more importantly, for the Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna candidates themselves, how do these positionings and their corresponding social forces shape their very own subjectivities?

### Utility of Identifying the Utterer in Positioning Analysis

In positioning analysis, the utterances are the focal point of analysis (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Parker, 1992). However, in the present study, my employment of a Venn diagram (Berek, 2017) to illustrate the patterns of positionings allowed me also to identify the utterers. This additional feature of the analysis provided a more *nuanced* understanding of the identity claims. For instance, in the case of Suffer Sireyna, while the candidates stake a claim to the *bakla* identity, the same identity is never invoked by the hosts. Meanwhile, in relation to Super Sireyna, while both the hosts and the candidates invoke the trans identity, only the hosts make references to gay and woman identities. Likewise, it is only in Suffer Sireyna where the candidates position other candidates, further reinforcing the social force of ridicule among themselves. Identifying the utterer also has implications in the invisibilization of identities and the normalization of violence among bakla, gay men, and transwomen in media, as discussed in the immediate sections.

### Normalizing Physical and Symbolic Violence among Bakla, Gay Men, and Transwomen in Media

A troubling finding in the present study is the positioning of Suffer Sireyna candidates by the hosts as object of physical and symbolic violence. This construction further strengthens the essentialist perspective that the bakla, gay men, and transwomen automatically evoke discrimination. When violence is made funny in media by utterances from persons of power, such as prominent and influential TV hosts, it creates a culture of acceptability among the viewing public (Manuel, 2009; Raley and Lucas, 2006). Over time, it reinforces the continued persecution of the bakla, gay men, and transwomen in particular, and LGBT people in general.

### Intersectional Positioning, an Alternative Frame Linking Structures, the Discursive, and LGBT Identity Construction

The present study demonstrated that while social structures (Winker and Degele, 2011) typically carry an essentialist perspective, they can be challenged by way of language – through the discursive. By re-positioning LGBT persons and accounting for their multiple and intersecting identities (e.g., personal and moral attributes; gay and/or transwomen positioned as talented, capable, and advocates), they can be accorded the right to gain respect. The current study showed that intersectional positioning can be a useful frame in linking social structures, the discursive, and LGBT identity construction.

### Limitations of Present Study and Implications for Future Research

While I acknowledge the limitations of my study in terms of sampling and inclusivity as well as my employment of interpretative and situated analysis, I hope to have provided a nuanced understanding of the discursive production of discrimination and recognition among bakla, gay men, and transwomen.

In this light, the present study can be extended by engaging the actual voices of the candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna. Considering that the present study is limited to the interpretation of the utterances as situated within the contests, it would also be insightful to hear out the candidates' story – their own meaning-making of the experience in joining these pageants. Likewise, participants who watch these TV segments and identify as LGBT or heterosexual persons may be recruited to explore how they construct and position the candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna. Meanwhile, at a theoretical level, the current study can be extended by interrogating how the bakla, gay men, and transwomen construct the sireyna identity. For these people, does the label carry a negative or a positive identity? Likewise, is sireyna a social category, a personal attribute, or a moral attribute? Moreover, online comments can also be examined as to how the viewing public position the candidates in Super Sireyna and Suffer Sireyna. The same can also be

explored about the candidates in *Miss Q and A*, a new TV segment in another noontime show called *It's Showtime*. The following questions may be asked: how do the online public position the candidates in these TV segments?; do these positions support the continued discrimination of LGBT persons?; or, do the positions help fashion a more inclusive and respectful world for LGBT people?

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