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NIÑO MEL HAYNO TRINIDAD

**DRAG AS CREATIVE EXPRESSION: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
FILIPINO DRAG QUEENS IN REALITY SHOWS**

Thesis Adviser:

BENJAMINA PAULA GONZALEZ-FLOR, Ph.D.
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

30 January 2025

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Acceptance Page

This paper prepared by **NIÑO MEL HAYNO TRINIDAD** with the title:” **DRAG AS CREATIVE EXPRESSION: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO DRAG QUEENS IN REALITY SHOWS**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Development Communication.

BENJAMINA PAULA GONZALEZ-FLOR, Ph.D.

Chair, Thesis Committee

(Date)

ALEXANDER G. FLOR, Ph.D.

Member, Thesis Committee

(Date)

GRACE JAVIER ALFONSO, Ph.D.

Member, Thesis Committee

(Date)

ROBERTO B. FIGUEROA, JR., Ph.D.

Dean

Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

(Date)

Biographical Sketch

“A rainbow of possibilities”

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad, born on December 29, 1996, is a media practitioner, public servant, youth volunteer, educator, and development worker. As the youngest child of Emelie Hayno Trinidad and Angelito Buenviaje Trinidad+, both from San Mateo, Rizal, Niño Mel firmly believes that every individual holds limitless potential. Being a gay man, he embodies the identity of “a rainbow of possibilities”, which is a testament to his diverse experiences, dynamic capabilities, and dedication to driving positive social transformation.

At the time of publication, Niño Mel serves as a Project Development Officer at the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), where he plays a crucial role in communication, publicity, advocacy, and program implementation, to help bridge information gaps, amplify marginalized voices, and contribute to the welfare of underserved communities. Prior to joining public service, he gained extensive experience in media production as a Program Researcher and Segment Producer at GMA Network, Inc., honing his skills in storytelling and content creation.

Guided by the belief that communication is a powerful tool for social change, Niño Mel pursues a Master of Development Communication at the University of the Philippines Open University.

Niño Mel's pastimes are playing volleyball, riding a motorcycle, and nature tripping.

Acknowledgment

“Everything happens when you think it will.”

My mantra in life is that: everything happens when I think it will happen. #Manifesting! Taking a graduate program is but a journey that needs perseverance and unwavering support from the people around me. For that, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have stood by me, believed in me, and inspired me to pursue graduate studies.

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Dedication

To God be the Glory! This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God for His grace, for blessing me with knowledge and skills to pursue His will, and for guiding me in fulfilling my purpose in life.

To myself, for holding on, and for not giving up on life's struggles and challenges.

To my late *Papa Tolits+*, Sasablay man ako nang wala ka, I know you are the proudest person for this achievement! And to my *Mama Emz*, ginapang mo ang undergraduate school expenses ko. This time #Ako Naman Muna.

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Growing up as a gay man in the Philippines, and having been bullied because of my gender identity, this document is a testament that we are valid and that our voices matter!

Rainbow pride!

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens in local drag reality shows, Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den with Manila Luzon, and how these shape their creative expression. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews with four participants reveal drag as a powerful and evolving art form that challenges heteronormative norms and promotes LGBTQ+ visibility in a society where queer identities are often marginalized. The research highlights how drag is not only a mode of artistic expression but also a form of resistance that reshapes cultural narratives and identity.

While reality shows provide a valuable platform for visibility and social transformation, they also introduce challenges such as media commodification and the reinforcement of stereotypes. Participants shared how their creative autonomy was affected by the narratives constructed by television, limiting the authenticity of their drag personas. Despite these constraints, Filipino drag performers continue to use their art to inspire change, confront stigma, and redefine gender and sexual norms. This study contributes to the broader discourse on media representation and LGBTQ+ visibility in the Philippines, offering insights for media practitioners, policymakers, and advocates seeking more inclusive and respectful portrayals of the drag community.

Keywords: Drag culture, Filipino drag queens, reality television, media representation, LGBTQ+ visibility, creative expression.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Background of the Study

When I was a child, I witnessed gay and transgender people perform on stage—dancing, singing, catwalking, impersonating, and lip-syncing while wearing female clothing—during barrio fiestas, which I found to be pure entertainment. As I grew up, I realized that events like Miss Gay in various barangays have become platforms for gay and queer people to gain visibility and raise awareness about issues related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Other Gender Identities (LGBTQ+). Moreover, I observed that gay-themed pop culture is now being recognized in the country, from stage performances to cinema and television reality shows, particularly within the Filipino drag scene.

Globally, the practice of drag can be traced back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries when Shakespearean theater required some male cast members to wear the attire of the opposite sex due to restrictions on women participating in theatrical performances or other public gatherings (Schact & Underwood, 2009, as cited by Luten, 2023). This practice ensured the seamless progression of storylines (The History of Drag and Historical Drag Queens - BBC Bitesize, 2019). Similarly, Kabuki, a traditional Japanese performing art with origins over 400 years ago, features male actors

portraying all characters, including female roles, since women were barred from public performances (Japan National Tourism Organization, n.d.). The male actors' transformation into female personas involved elaborate costumes, intricate makeup, and exaggerated movements—all designed to captivate the audience. In the Philippine context, the concept of drag dates back to the pre-colonial era, when babaylans—men who dressed in women's clothing and adopted feminine behavior—were highly regarded by Filipinos, not only because they challenged conventional gender boundaries but also because of their roles within their communities (Garcia, 2004). Known to serve as religious or spiritual leaders, babaylans, who are believed to have practiced drag in the early years of the Philippines' history, were deeply respected and demonstrated the fluidity of gender roles in Filipino society before colonial influences imposed binaries.

Today, drag queens are characterized as individuals who dress up and perform in highly stylized or extravagant ways, often challenging traditional gender norms (Understanding Drag, 2017). Levitt et al. (2017) also describe drag as a unique space for political expression, noting that it allows drag performers to address sensitive topics more effectively than if they presented them as their non-drag selves. Through their performances, drag artists aim to raise awareness about issues such as sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and safe sex practices (Levitt et al., 2017). Drag queens use these spaces to challenge prejudices and transform perceptions, as their performances inspire both audiences and communities.

As someone familiar with the drag scene and with extensive experience as a television segment producer, I recognize the growing influence of drag culture in the Philippines through the rise of drag reality shows, which provide drag queens with a platform to showcase their talents and stories. Consequently, Filipino drag queens have been “having a moment” with the airing of two drag reality shows, along with various “drag venues popping up left and right” (Lago, 2023). These shows include Drag Race Philippines, the country’s franchise of the well-known RuPaul’s Drag Race from America, and Drag Den, a drag reality show conceptualized and produced by Filipinos.

Baştürk (2016) posited that drag queens and transgender people, when they gain visibility in popular culture by maximizing the role of mass media in representing other feminine bodies, may appear “for the possibility of overcoming long-established and enforced inequalities.” This increased visibility and cultural representation, as explained by Hennessy (1994), can also pave the way for gay civil rights and result in the empowerment of the LGBTQ+ community, which has long been marginalized.

Growing up as a gay man in the Philippines, I am fortunate to have a supportive family who raised me in an enabling, nurturing, and inclusive environment. However, this is not the case for some, if not most, Filipino gay children, as acceptance levels differ due to societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+, which are influenced by and marked by strong heteronormative views (Custodio, 2019). According to Custodio (2019), this negative attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community makes them more vulnerable to becoming victims of human rights violations, violence, and discrimination.

Taking the Master of Development Communication program has greatly deepened my understanding of the need to reduce inequalities and ensure no one is left behind, which is an integral part of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Goal #10 of the UN-SDGs aims to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and actions in this regard. However, the United Nations (UN) noted in its 2020 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report that most democratic countries, including the Philippines, still struggle to combat racism, homophobia, transphobia, and religious intolerance.

Luten (2023) argued that the experiences of drag queens have ignited the need for advocacy and made them effective at using their platform to uphold LGBTQ+ rights. With their visibility in constructing their social image and brand, drag queens are given social power and serve not only as “looks or faces” but also as champions of gender inclusion (Luten, 2023). Thus, drag, with its rich history and vibrant expressions, has evolved from being defined as mere men wearing female wardrobes to a more meaningful form of art, entertainment, and pop culture. In the Philippine scene, drag queens have redefined drag, shifting from traditional comedic female impersonation to more inclusive and diverse portrayals (Lago, 2023). Likewise, drag has become increasingly visible in mainstream media, particularly through drag reality shows. Baron (2022), however, stated that “while [LGBTQ+] representation in entertainment media is gradually improving, progress is sometimes sluggish.”

Exploring the representation of diverse LGBTQ+ groups in reality competitions, specifically in the case of RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR)—America's longest-running drag reality show—Workman (2020) argued that despite its claim of championing inclusion, there are contradictions in its approach to marginalized and gender non-conforming performers. The author revealed that RPDR, while outwardly championing inclusion, is, in reality, cultivating and investing in the economic and celebrity potential of homonormative gay male contestants, rather than transgender and other gender identities. Hennessy (1994) also pointed out that while there is a growing acceptance of homosexuality in mainstream culture, much of this visibility is aimed at creating new markets and is driven by financial motives rather than a genuine commitment to liberation. This mirrors the belief about power dynamics in society, highlighting the shift of mass media toward a capitalist orientation. As argued by Workman (2020), modern media, especially in the case of RPDR, has become so commercialized that it limits the creative freedom of individuals and the expression of their authentic drag persona. Moreover, issues like typecasting by sexuality and stigmatization persist despite the mainstream success of drag in British culture, according to McCormack and Wignall (2022). This indicates that not all performers benefit equally from the mainstreaming of drag, which limits opportunities for gender minorities in mainstream cultural sectors (McCormack & Wignall, 2022). The authors suggested that research or inquiry on drag performers who are gender-diverse and people of color—given that they are “more likely to experience discrimination”—is essential to provide a deeper understanding of these inequalities.

Thus, the drag scene's entry into mainstream media through reality shows has not only popularized drag but also sparked conversations about LGBTQ+ issues and concerns. It provides marginalized voices a platform to challenge societal norms, celebrate identity, and champion equality. However, while these shows have contributed significantly to the visibility of drag culture, the ways in which drag queens are portrayed deserve critical examination, as these portrayals can shape not only their creative expressions but also broader societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines.

As a television segment producer and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I have a personal stake in how our stories are told, especially in mainstream media. These perspectives drive my interest in exploring how Filipino drag queens are portrayed in reality shows and what these portrayals mean for their roles within the LGBTQ+ community. This study is grounded in the belief that representation matters: how Filipino drag queens are depicted in media can have profound implications for their identities, creative expressions, and the LGBTQ+ community at large. Representations of drag in modern media, or in this case reality television shows – which historically performed in community events like fiestas – have demonstrated how media extend the reach of drag, allowing queens to share their stories, struggles, and triumphs with a bigger audience. This shift in medium or platform also reflects the constructionist perspective on representation, as discussed by Hall (1997). Meaning is negotiated through language, symbols, and media, making the portrayals of drag in reality shows a critical

aspect of how society views LGBTQ+ communities. While these shows provide visibility, they also shape narratives that influence both acceptance and resistance within audiences.

As recommended by Workman (2020), exploring how drag reality shows portray contestants, what narratives are highlighted, and the cultural conversations they spark is essential and could provide valuable insights into LGBTQ+ studies. Given this, my inquiry delved into the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens who joined drag reality shows, exploring the deeper meanings behind these portrayals and their implications for their creative expression. Moreover, with minimal drag-related studies in the Philippine context, it is high time to explore the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, focusing on their views of their portrayals in drag reality shows.

Statement of the Problem

Levitt et al. (2017) described drag as a unique platform for political expression that allows drag performers to address and raise awareness about sensitive topics and issues like sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and safe sex practices through their performances. Using mainstream media, specifically reality shows—in which drag queens can gain visibility and share their talents, stories, and narratives—could be a useful communication platform and advocacy tool to spark conversations about LGBTQ+ issues and concerns. Thus, drag queens, with their visibility in joining reality

shows, can amplify their social image and brand, serve as “looks or faces,” and champion gender and sexual inclusion (Luten, 2023).

However, as drag queens gain popularity and visibility through the rise of drag reality shows, issues such as marginalization, commercialization, and stigmatization persist. McCormack and Wignall (2022) even noted that not all performers benefit equally from the mainstreaming of drag, which limits opportunities for gender minorities in mainstream cultural sectors. Hence, modern media, such as drag reality shows, particularly RuPaul’s Drag Race, have become more commercialized and limit the creative freedom of individuals and the expression of their authentic drag persona (Workman, 2020).

Grounded in Hall’s constructionist view of representation, this study explained the dynamic and negotiated process of creating meaning within a culture. How mainstream media provides a platform for drag queens is essential in shaping social acceptance and resistance toward the LGBTQ+ community.

Therefore, this study aimed to answer the question: How are Filipino drag queens portrayed in drag reality shows, and how do these portrayals shape their creative expressions?

Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do Filipino drag queens view their portrayals in drag reality shows;

2. In what ways do these portrayals of Filipino drag queens shape their creative expressions and define their performances; and
3. How are drag queens constructed by the media?

Objectives of the Study

In general, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, focusing on their views of their portrayals in reality shows and how these portrayals shape their creative expressions.

Specifically, this inquiry aimed to:

1. Describe the views of Filipino drag queens on their portrayals in drag reality shows;
2. Examine how these portrayals of Filipino drag queens shape their creative expression and define their drag performances; and
3. Analyze how drag queens are constructed by the media.

Significance of the Study

In the Philippines, individuals who wear female clothes and perform femininely are often labeled as impersonators or cross-dressers. However, in the 21st century, those dressing up and performing in highly stylized or extravagant ways, often challenging traditional gender norms, are called drag queens (Understanding Drag, 2017). Drag, as

an emerging art form in the country, is evolving from simply being entertainment to a form of creative expression, paving the way for queens to gain more visibility. This study aimed to spark discourse that highlights drag not just as a form of comedy or entertainment but as a platform for creative expression.

Through this study, my primary goal was to enrich the body of knowledge, particularly in LGBTQ+ studies in the country, as there is minimal to very little literature about or featuring the Filipino drag scene. This research is particularly timely as it addressed a gap in current literature on drag culture, media representation, and LGBTQ+ studies, especially within the Philippine context. The study offered insights into how Filipino drag queens are represented in popular media and contributed to the broader field of media studies by exploring how minority groups are depicted and the relevance of such portrayals for the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

By examining the lived experiences of drag queens, I also aimed to provide valuable insights for LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, both in the private and public sectors, to address specific issues faced by drag queens and other community members. By highlighting the experiences and challenges faced by Filipino drag queens, the findings could be used by LGBTQ+ organizations to advocate for more respectful and nuanced portrayals of LGBTQ+ individuals in media, helping to combat discrimination and promote equality.

The results of this study benefit policymakers and decision-makers by helping them make informed policies that promote inclusivity, anti-discrimination efforts, and the rights

of drag queens and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. In aid of legislation, the results of this study may serve as a basis for lobbying for the need for specific legal measures to address challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, such as, but not limited to, protection against discrimination in the workplace, schools, or public spaces.

Television producers may also gain insights into the importance of diverse and authentic representation of gender, specifically within the LGBTQ+ community, in media. They could use the findings of this study to create content that accurately reflects the experiences of drag queens, contributing to a more inclusive media landscape. By investigating the portrayals of drag queens in reality shows, the study aimed to reveal the complexities of media representation and its impact on marginalized communities, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural diversity, media ethics, and LGBTQ+ rights.

In the Development Communication field, the results of my inquiry could also provide insights into how TV reality shows may be used as a medium in development communication, alongside other types of video production and television programs, such as films and documentaries. Moreover, the study provided new insights and perspectives that contribute to academic discourse within development communication, as it discussed areas that may be underexplored, particularly in the context of Filipino media and drag studies.

More than anything else, this inquiry served as validation and acknowledgment that the narratives of LGBTQ+ people, particularly of drag queens, are an important academic resource and can provide significant insights into development communication as a field of study.

The study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, focusing on their views of their portrayals in drag reality shows. The insights gained from this study can contribute to more inclusive and accurate media representations, support advocacy efforts for LGBTQ+ rights, and enhance the understanding of drag culture in the Philippines.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

My inquiry specifically focused on the experiences and portrayals of Filipino drag queens as featured in drag reality shows in the country. This study exclusively centered on drag queens who performed in drag reality shows. Exploring the experiences of local queens who did not participate in reality shows would deviate from the study's objectives. The aim was to examine the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, focusing on their views of their portrayals in reality shows and how these portrayals influence their creative expressions. The research also sought to understand how drag queens employ creative expression—whether visual, auditory, verbal, or non-verbal—in their performances.

Moreover, the study was limited to examining media portrayals in drag reality shows, potentially overlooking other forms of media or public platforms where Filipino drag queens might be represented, such as social media, films, or live performances. This study also did not address the audience's reception of drag shows.

As mentioned, there are two drag reality shows in the country today. Therefore, the queens who competed in Drag Den and Drag Race Philippines were the intended participants of this study. I observed that these drag reality shows provide airtime for queens to express themselves and share their experiences, especially through challenges that incorporate social issues concerning the LGBTQ+ community. Lago (2023) noted that Drag Den has been actively embracing the opportunity to leverage drag's ability to initiate discussions on significant social issues. Meanwhile, Gonzales and Cavazos (2016) highlighted that RuPaul's Drag Race promotes awareness, education, and understanding of important issues within the LGBTQ+ community, such as HIV/AIDS. It incorporates episodes and challenges centered around themes like gay pride and education on historically significant gay and drag-related issues. Through these types of episodes, queens share personal narratives and experiences that humanize the contestants and add authenticity to their portrayals (Gonzales & Cavazos, 2016).

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This part of the study provided a brief discussion on the origins of the drag scene both globally and locally in the Philippines, tracing its roots and development. It also explored how drag has evolved from being a form of cross-dressing and performing the opposite sex to becoming a significant medium of creative expression, allowing drag performers to share their personal stories and narratives.

The literature review included studies highlighting how drag shows serve as platforms for queens to communicate important messages related to the struggles and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. This section also examined the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in the media, focusing on how these portrayals can either challenge or reinforce issues such as discrimination, stigma, and stereotypes.

Additionally, the review presented an overview of the current situations faced by the LGBTQ+ community, including concrete data on gender-based discrimination and violence. This foundation helped explain how these challenges shape the actions and performances of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially drag queens, as they navigate the broader societal landscape and advocate for their rights and recognition.

Drag 'herstory'

Drag originated in theater, describing men who portrayed female characters by wearing women's clothes (Luten, 2023). As a form of entertainment, it has a rich history rooted in British theater slang, involving individuals dressing in highly stylized or extravagant ways, often challenging traditional gender norms (Understanding Drag, 2017). Globally, the practice of men wearing women's clothes and performing female roles dates back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries. In Shakespearean theater, male actors were required to wear female attire due to the prohibition of women participating in theatrical performances and public gatherings (Schact & Underwood, 2009, as cited by Luten, 2023). Similarly, Kabuki, a traditional Japanese performing art with origins over 400 years ago, features male actors exclusively portraying all characters, including female roles since women were barred from public performances (Japan National Tourism Organization, n.d.). Known for its distinctive performance style, 'onnagata' or the Kabuki male actors' transformation into female personas involved elaborate costumes, intricate makeup, and exaggerated movements—all designed to captivate the audience.

Originally used to describe men dressed as women, drag has, indeed, evolved into a diverse and inclusive art form with various expressions. In America, drag gained significant historical relevance during the Stonewall Riots of 1969, when drag queens, including Marsha P. Johnson – a self-identified drag queen and prominent gay liberation activist – resisted police raids on a New York City gay bar, leading to the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (The History of Drag and Historical Drag Queens - BBC

Bitesize, 2019). Today, drag is no longer simply about men wearing female clothing, but is recognized as an important form of art, entertainment, and pop culture, particularly with the rise of the American drag reality show RuPaul's Drag Race, described by Abraham (2019) as "the sports for gay people."

In the Philippines, the concept of drag can be traced back to the pre-colonial era, when babaylans – men who dressed in women's clothes and adopted feminine behaviors – were highly regarded not only for challenging conventional gender boundaries but also for their roles as spiritual or religious leaders in their communities (Garcia, 2004). During this time, gender was seen as a reflection of one's behavior, social status, and functions.

However, during Spanish colonization, the status of homosexuality and cross-dressing in the Philippines was suppressed by the patriarchal structures of Spanish rule, and the practice of drag was largely erased due to the dominance of Spanish machismo (Losa, 2020). Despite this, the resilience of the Filipino LGBTQ+ community remained evident over the years. During the American colonial period, Crispulo "Pulong" Luna, a Filipino crossdresser, was photographed in the country's traditional baro't saya attire (Losa, 2020). In the 1920s, during the Japanese occupation, Walter Dempster Jr. – later known as Walterina Markova – became a prominent drag queen and burlesque performer, enduring hardship as a "comfort gay" during the Japanese regime (Klein, 2006).

In the post-colonial era, the documentation of LGBTQ+ activities became more visible, with the emergence of gay beauty pageants in Tondo and Visayan gays

engaging in cross-dressing during fiesta dances (Foe, 2013). Furthermore, between 1960 and 1975, national gay pageants such as Miss Gay Philippines were established, and the concept of drag became mainstream, especially with films like *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay Ko*, which featured the iconic Philippine Comedy King Dolphy Quizon.

In contemporary times, the art of drag in the Philippines has become closely associated with entertainment and bar cultures, evolving into a form of comedy (Losa, 2020). Drag artists often perform on the stages of gay clubs in Metro Manila, where they are celebrated for their creativity and humor. However, drag queens are no longer confined to live performances or portraying female characters in films. They are now featured in two prominent drag reality shows: *Drag Race Philippines* and *Drag Den*, which are broadcast on paid television and online streaming platforms (Lago, 2023). These shows have broadened the visibility of Filipino drag queens, and with more eyes and ears on them, they have continued to expand their audience and influence, thereby redefining the drag scene in the country (Lago, 2022).

Drag as creative expression

A distinctive aspect of drag performance is the creation of a separate persona for the stage, which often differs significantly from an individual's everyday self. This persona includes a unique name and preferred gender pronouns, providing a distinct identity for performers (Understanding Drag, 2017). According to Vasquez (2024), the drag persona serves as both a form of art and a movement that challenges “fixed

gender roles,” with queens of diverse gender identities showcasing their looks. In the Philippine drag scene, drag queens have redefined the art form by moving away from traditional comedic female impersonation to embrace a more inclusive and diverse portrayal (Lago, 2023). For example, *Drag Den*, the Filipino-produced drag reality show, has introduced various drag personalities, including trans queens, a drag queen with a beard, and even a female drag queen, reflecting the evolving and inclusive nature of the scene (Lago, 2023).

According to Paolo Ballesteros, a Filipino comedian and artist known as the "Philippine queen of transformation" and the host of *Drag Race Philippines*, the drag persona is a multifaceted representation of one's identity, including race, background, lived experiences, and true self (Suralta, 2022). In an interview with Suralta (2022), Ballesteros explained, "I like the confusion and mystery it brings—you never know what a drag performance is going to give you. On a normal day, I go for soft masculinity, so when I'm in drag, it's the complete opposite."

While drag is seen as both an art form and entertainment, drag performers, with their vibrant and unique appearances, also intentionally or unintentionally convey powerful messages in their performances, often serving as a voice for the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community (Luten, 2023). The role of drag queens as a force for LGBTQ+ activism was emphasized by Szymańska (2020), who noted their historical significance, particularly during the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969. Drag queens have used their prominent status within the community to advocate for equality,

contributing both historically and in the present to the fight for LGBTQ+ rights (Szymańska, 2020).

Furthermore, Feldman and Hakim (2020) analyzed queen-generated content on social media platforms and argued that drag serves as a medium through which individuals can critique and question dominant power structures and social norms. They suggested that drag can destabilize societal norms and power hierarchies in a confrontational manner, acting as a tool for social change.

In the study "Drag Gender: Experiences of Gender for Gay and Queer Men who Perform Drag," Levitt et al. (2017) explored the experiences and understanding of gender among gay and queer men who perform drag, contributing to a broader 20-year research program on LGBTQ gender identities. According to the study, drag performers described drag as a unique space for political expression, noting that it allows them to address sensitive topics more effectively than if they presented them as their non-drag selves. Through their performances, drag performers aim to raise awareness about issues such as sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and safe sex practices.

Moreover, drag performers also viewed drag as a form of protest and communication—a way to confront societal and cultural issues directly (Levitt et al., 2017). However, the study also pointed out that drag performances can perpetuate sexism and misogyny. Levitt et al. (2017) revealed that many drag queens focus primarily on being "bitchy," which they felt detracts from the potential of drag to promote positive social change.

Drag shows as a communication platform

Contextualizing his research analysis within the 2017 Women's March, Workman (2020) highlighted how RuPaul's Drag Race—as a platform for drag queens—became part of protest culture, with catchphrases like "sashay away" being used to voice political opposition (Rudolph, 2020, as cited in Workman). Luten (2023) also agreed that drag can serve as advocacy, providing queens a platform to speak out on social issues. With their visibility in constructing their social image and brand, drag queens gain social power, serving not only as performers but also as champions of gender and sexual inclusion (Luten, 2023). Additionally, drag performances, beyond their entertainment value, portray stories of struggle and triumph, reflecting the hardships drag queens have faced to reach their current position (Vasquez, 2024). These lived experiences have ignited the need for advocacy, making drag queens effective in using their platform to uphold LGBTQ+ rights (Luten, 2023).

Given that drag queens have different experiences that inspire their personas, they may also adopt varied advocacy strategies aligned with their brand and image to promote social change (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Kiselica and Robinson (2001) noted that some use their drag persona to highlight social issues and drive positive change by sharing personal narratives. This form of storytelling can be an effective way to connect with audiences and raise awareness about specific challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. In their study "Performing Protest: Drag Shows as Tactical Repertoire of the Gay and Lesbian Movement," Taylor et al. (2015) integrated a social

constructionist perspective on gender, sexuality, and social movements, examining how drag shows serve as collective, contentious acts that challenge and subvert traditional gender and sex norms. The authors concluded that drag performances are a unique form of protest historically used by the gay and lesbian movement to express political ideas, challenge conventional notions of gender and sexuality, create new collective identities, and disrupt established identity boundaries (Taylor et al., 2015).

Schact and Underwood (as cited in Luten, 2023) emphasized that drag performers—particularly those who have successfully established themselves as pillars of the community—craft larger-than-life personas that are difficult for others to challenge, despite the discrimination and stereotypes they face. For instance, Middlemost (2019) explored the career of Sasha Velour, the winner of RuPaul’s Drag Race Season 9, showing how drag queens utilize personal narratives to connect with audiences and encourage them to champion causes. Anchored on the uniqueness and charisma principles of RPDR, Velour’s persona became a conduit for social critique and activism across multiple platforms, bringing her art and activism to a growing mainstream audience (Middlemost, 2019).

Furthermore, technological advancements have greatly impacted the visibility and influence of drag queens. Television and other media platforms now provide drag queens with global reach and a platform for advocacy that was previously less accessible (Szymańska, 2020). In their exploration of gender equity representations on RuPaul’s Drag Race, Gonzales and Cavazos (2016) noted that the reality show serves as a means of promoting awareness and education about LGBTQ+ issues, such as

HIV/AIDS. By incorporating episodes and challenges focused on themes like gay pride and the history of gay and drag-related issues, the show allows queens to share personal narratives, adding authenticity and humanizing the contestants (Gonzales & Cavazos, 2016).

Media representation of LGBTQ+ members and drag queens

Communication media play a crucial role in shaping both individual and collective perceptions of empowerment. By presenting alternative narratives, especially those of marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community, the media helps dismantle oppressive ideologies and empower individuals to defy societal expectations (Happer & Philo, 2013). Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of "gender being," Cayabyab (2022) observed that gender norms are established, circulated, and reinforced through repeated performances. The film industry, particularly Philippine popular cinema, has the power to challenge gender stereotypes related to gay, macho, lesbian, or heterosexual individuals by expanding its portrayal of gender identities (Cayabyab, 2022).

Additionally, there has been a rise in the representation of feminine bodies—beyond the heterosexual assignment—in popular culture. Research by Baştürk (2016) highlighted the role of mass media in showcasing diverse "feminine" bodies, suggesting that the increased visibility of drag queens and transgender people in popular culture could help overcome long-established and enforced inequalities.

However, Baron (2022) noted that while representation in entertainment media is gradually improving, progress remains slow, as some television shows and films continue to use repetitive templates when portraying LGBTQ+ characters. As Delante (2013) argued, media can also contribute to disempowerment when it reinforces negative stereotypes, devalues marginalized identities, and discriminates against minority groups.

Workman (2020), in his study titled "Drag Incorporated: The Homonormative Brand Culture of RuPaul's Drag Race," explored how RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR)—a popular drag reality show originating in the U.S. and hosted by RuPaul Charles—shapes the identity, community, and political sensibilities of its viewers. Workman noted that the show's framing of LGBTQ+ history, representation, and activism is from a privileged homonormative perspective, which raises questions about its actual inclusivity. In his analysis of LGBTQ+ representation in reality competition shows, Workman (2020) argued that despite RPDR's claim to champion inclusion, the show reveals contradictions in its approach to marginalized and gender non-conforming performers. While outwardly promoting inclusion, RPDR invests in the celebrity potential of homonormative gay male contestants, sidelining transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Workman (2020) recommends further analysis of how digital technologies, particularly RPDR's strong digital presence, either collapse or exacerbate racial separations among drag queens.

In the case of RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR), drag culture is shaped by the judges and the show's standards, which can potentially limit diverse perspectives and stifle

dissenting voices, particularly those of local drag queens (Workman, 2020). This mirrors the broader power dynamics in society, reflecting a shift toward a capitalist media orientation. Modern media, such as RPDR, as argued by Workman (2020), has become more commercialized, limiting individuals' creative freedom and the expression of their authentic drag personas.

Hennessey (1994) noted that while there is growing acceptance of homosexuality in mainstream culture, much of this visibility is driven by financial motives and the creation of new markets, rather than a genuine commitment to liberation. In the context of RPDR, marginalized individuals may achieve a form of equality or empowerment by participating in these commercialized spaces—such as the entertainment industry—and capitalizing on their unique qualities. This process is described as a marketized equality framework by neoliberal scholar Julie A. Wilson (Workman, 2020). The show serves as a platform for individuals from marginalized groups to gain access to normative power relations, where “normative” refers to societal norms or mainstream culture. Through their participation in RPDR, drag contestants can gain visibility and influence within mainstream society.

In the research titled “Memoirs of a GAY! Sha: Race and Gender Performance on RuPaul’s Drag Race,” Zhang (2016) explored how Asian-American drag artists navigate hegemonic narratives about nationhood, race, gender, and sexuality through the theoretical framework of José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification. Disidentification, according to Muñoz (1999), is a survival strategy employed by minority individuals to navigate a society that is often hostile toward those who do not conform to

the majority's expectations. Muñoz (1999) suggested that minority performers use disidentification to reinterpret cultural expressions, revealing how such messages often exclude or generalize certain groups. For example, Asian drag queens like Manila Luzon use disidentification to reshape cultural messages in ways that better represent and empower minority identities. This process challenges cultural norms and aims to create a more inclusive and empowering space for minorities.

Inton (2017), in his analysis of the representations of bakla (a Filipino colloquial term for gay) in Philippine cinema from the 1950s to the 20th century, suggested that Kabaklaan (gayness/queerness) was portrayed as a legitimate feminine identity, though often on the margins. This representation allowed for empowerment through self-acceptance, fostering broader social and familial acceptance. Kabaklaan in Philippine cinema was presented as a valid identity, one that could influence acceptance in various aspects of life (Inton, 2017). Cayabyab (2022), in her review of the film *This Guy's in Love with U Mare!*, emphasized that gender representations in popular culture could spark a political movement for gender equality, challenging societal norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Meanwhile, Lingel and Golub (2015) examined the advantages and drawbacks of social media platforms in the communication habits of drag performers in Brooklyn. The presence of drag queens on platforms like Facebook and Instagram allowed for self-promotion, improved performances, and community solidarity among drag queens. These platforms became crucial tools for promoting drag culture, enhancing individual and collective performances, and fostering connections within the drag community.

LGBTQ+ visibility

Visibility, as explained by Rosemary Hennessy (1994) in her essay *Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture*, can pave the way for gay civil rights, noting that the empowerment of the LGBTQ+ community – long marginalized – is one of the positive effects of increased cultural representation of homosexual concerns. Hennessy (1994) observed the growing presence of LGBTQ+ individuals in mainstream media, fashion, and entertainment, with gay-themed pop culture gaining recognition. Zaslow (2024) examined the shifting visibility of drag performance, noting that drag, once considered a niche subculture, has gained public visibility with the rise of RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR). However, Zaslow (2024) argued that the mainstream exposure of drag through reality television has not only elevated drag queens to international celebrity status but also transformed the art form. This shift has established new norms and expectations for drag performance, impacting both local and mainstream drag expressions. Zaslow (2024) highlighted that RPDR's success has leveraged queens performing on its main stage while devaluing smaller, local queens. She suggested that future research should explore how and when drag serves as a site of protest, challenging heteronormativity.

Amado et al. (2017) noted that LGBTQ+ visibility has expanded in daily conversation, with heterosexual individuals becoming familiar with 'gay language' due to its exposure in various settings. In studies on gay culture, Garcia (2008) and Manalansan (2006) emphasized that gay language serves as a form of resistance, emancipation, and coping mechanism against conservative and oppressive societal ideologies. Casabal (2008) observed the transformation of gay language, from being

exclusive to the gay subculture to becoming more widely used in mainstream society. This shift, partly attributed to the 'faggotization' of television, has reintegrated gay individuals into mainstream cultural discourse (Amado et al., 2017). For example, openly gay personalities like Vice Ganda, who freely use gay language in their speech and expression, have contributed to the increased visibility and broader acceptance of Filipino gay language, also known as gay lingo. Television has played a crucial role in this process, helping to normalize and integrate gay language into the mainstream cultural landscape.

Moreover, not only have famous LGBTQ+ personalities helped the community gain visibility, but also same-sex couples who have taken their relationships to the next level through unrecognized wedding ceremonies that have received substantial press coverage in the national Philippine media (Cardozo, 2014). These include the notable weddings, as cited by Cardozo (2014), between two gay cadres in the New People's Army (NPA) in February 2005, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and the marriages of lesbian and gay couples at the Metropolitan Community Church of Baguio City in June 2011. These events marked significant milestones for the LGBTQ+ community, challenging societal norms and fostering a more inclusive dialogue on their rights in the Philippines in pursuit of equality and acceptance.

Meanwhile, Manalastas and Torre (2016) described efforts by Filipino LGBT psychologists to address and incorporate LGBTQ+ issues into the media, highlighting that engagement with the media is a means for these psychologists to contribute to broader societal discussions on LGBTQ-related matters. One specific example cited

was the publication of articles on the online news platform Portal Interaksyon.com, discussing topics such as lesbian and gay parents, written by Rosales Parr in 2013. This engagement with media is significant as it allowed for the dissemination of accurate information that counteracted and challenged heteronormative perspectives or stereotypes, offered alternative viewpoints, and fostered a more informed public discourse on LGBT issues rooted in psychological understanding and research (Manalastas & Torre, 2016).

Today, Filipino drag queens have become more visible with the airing of two drag reality shows in the Philippines (Lago, 2023). Elevating the drag scenes in the country are Drag Race Philippines, the country's franchise of the well-known RuPaul's Drag Race from America, and Drag Den, the drag reality show 'made by Filipinos and for Filipinos.'

LGBTQ+ issues and concerns

Gender-based violence, discrimination, and stereotypes are still prevalent and pervasive across the globe, affecting the growth and potential of LGBTQ+ community members (Medina & Mahowald, 2023). In the Philippine context, no comprehensive national law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIE-SC), according to Mr. Bryan Balco, Project Manager of the International Labour Office (ILO) EU Trade for Decent Work, ILO Country Office for the Philippines.

Due to heteronormative views among many Filipinos, children perceived to be or identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or other identities are more vulnerable to human rights violations, violence, and discrimination (Custodio, 2019). Additionally, students within the LGBTQ+ community often face bullying, discrimination, a lack of information about LGBTQ+ issues, and, in certain instances, incidents of physical or sexual violence (“Just Let Us Be,” 2017).

In the study titled “From the Bathroom to a National Discussion of LGBTQ+ Rights: A Case of Discrimination in the Philippines,” Abesamis and Alibudbud (2024) explored the discussion surrounding the SOGIE Equality Bill, prompted by the restroom discrimination faced by Gretchen Diez, a Filipino transgender woman, in 2019 at a mall in Quezon City. The authors noted that Gretchen’s case highlighted how LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines still face restrictions on their rights to express their sexuality, define themselves, and be publicly recognized.

Meanwhile, according to a United Nations study (2018), 30 percent of LGBTQ+ community members reported being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against by their workmates due to their SOGIE-SC. Further, the same study found that 21 percent of respondents in the Philippines said they were not accepted for work due to their gender preference (Report Details Workplace Discrimination Faced by LGBTI People in China, the Philippines, and Thailand, 2018).

The secondary analysis conducted by Manalastas and Del Pilar (2005) on national surveys by the Social Weather Station (SWS) in 1996 and 2001 revealed that around 28 percent of Filipinos believed being gay/lesbian "can never be justified," while

only 4 percent thought it could "always be justified." Additionally, 1 out of 4 Filipinos stated they did not want gay men or lesbians as neighbors. These views and attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, irrespective of socioeconomic status, gender preference, educational attainment, or religion, have not significantly changed over the years and, in fact, have become more prevalent (Manalastas & Del Pilar, 2005).

Meanwhile, Reyes, Davis, and Salonga et al. (2021) examined the perceptions of straight Filipinos toward gay men and lesbians. In comparing the results of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale and the Modern Homonegativity Scale across age, civil status, gender, and religious groups, the researchers found that Filipinos hold negative views on homosexuality. It was observed that straight men, adults, and religious groups such as Muslims and Born-Again Christians were less accepting of lesbians and gay men (Reyes, Davis, & Salonga et al., 2021).

Moreover, then-Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino IV cited data from the Philippine LGBT Hate Crime Watch, revealing that "there were 164 cases of murdered LGBTs in the country from 1996 to June 2012" (Press Release - Heavier Penalties for Hate Crimes Vs LGBT - Sen. Bam, 2014). In a more recent incident, Taylor Sheesh, a drag queen and Filipino impersonator of singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, said she was traumatized after being attacked by the audience during her performance at the Kalutan concert in Bayambang, Pangasinan (Mallorca, 2024).

On the other hand, some local government units (LGUs) across the country have undertaken efforts to address these issues. Various LGUs have been ahead of the national government in implementing SOGIE-based anti-discrimination legislation

(Custodio, 2019). According to Pagulayan (2022), about 30 municipal and provincial governments have passed local Anti-Discrimination Ordinances, provided protection and promotion of LGBT rights while trying to combat gender-based violence and abuse in their respective areas. However, these ordinances only protect around 25 percent of the total LGBTQ+ population in the entire country (Pagulayan, 2022). In previous years, school administrators and lawmakers have also recognized discrimination among LGBTQ+ youth as a major concern, leading to interventions designed to address this issue (“Just Let Us Be,” 2017). This includes the Department of Education’s (DepEd) Child Protection Policy and the Anti-Bullying Law of 2013.

The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Report in 2021 revealed that the Philippines ranked 17th among 156 nations in closing gender inequality, making it the top-performing country in Asia in addressing the gender gap (Gita-Carlos, 2022). While there are initial efforts and initiatives from various localities and government agencies, no specific and comprehensive national policy has yet been passed to protect and promote the rights of LGBTQ+ people (Custodio, 2019).

In the global context, Luten (2023) noted that discrimination also occurs within the LGBTQ+ community. People of color can be considered a minority within this community, often being excluded from community events or establishments, or, in some cases, having their concerns minimized in favor of prioritizing the social advocacy needs of white LGBTQ+ individuals (Balsam, et al., 2011; as cited in Luten). Meyer (2003) also explained that prejudice, homophobia, and expectations of rejection have caused

sexual and gender minorities to conceal their true identities, contributing to a more stressful environment for LGBTQ+ people.

Moreover, critical queer perspectives, as explained by Cardozo (2014), have highlighted the persistent structural oppressions faced by queer individuals of color, transgender individuals, and economically disadvantaged members of the LGBTQ+ community, which are often overlooked by more mainstream gay and lesbian rights groups in the United States. Despite the mainstream success of drag in British culture, issues such as typecasting by sexuality and stigmatization persist, showing that not all performers benefit equally from the mainstreaming of drag. This limitation hinders opportunities for sexual minorities in mainstream cultural sectors (McCormack & Wignall, 2022). The same study by McCormack and Wignall suggested that research or inquiry into drag performers who are gender-diverse and people of color—who are “more likely to experience discrimination”—is essential to provide a deeper understanding of these inequalities.

Reducing inequality based on gender

According to the United Nations (UN), one of the integral parts of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind. The member countries of the UN aim to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status by 2030. Likewise, Goal #10 of the

UN-SDGs targets ensuring equal opportunities and reducing inequalities of outcome by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, while promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and actions in this regard (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>).

This goal is anchored in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind” (cited in Custodio, 2019). However, inequalities based on sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, income, race or ethnicity, and religion remain ongoing issues that need to be addressed within and among countries (Chen, 2022). According to the most recent data from the UN, one in five people has experienced discrimination on at least one of the grounds prohibited under international human rights law. Furthermore, many democratic countries, including the Philippines, continue to struggle with combating racism, homophobia, transphobia, and religious intolerance (unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/).

Literature Review Synthesis

In the Philippines, many people may still perceive drag as merely a comedic act or cross-dressing, where men perform in female attire. However, in today’s context, drag extends far beyond that. With its rich history, drag has evolved from being just entertainment into a creative expression that allows drag queens to explore and articulate their gender, identity, and creativity.

Moreover, drag serves as a powerful representation of the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community. Through their vibrant and unique drag personas, drag queens can challenge established power structures and social norms. By incorporating messages into their performances, they contribute to increasing the visibility and acceptance of diverse identities. Crucial to this growing visibility are drag reality shows, where queens are given platforms to communicate their stories, share their narratives, and advocate for their causes.

Globally, studies have shown that media exposure of drag queens, especially through their participation in the television reality show RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR), has brought drag culture into the spotlight in the Western world. These drag reality shows provide a platform for queens to express their stances on societal issues and push for their advocacies. Consequently, drag reality shows have become powerful tools for social transformation, enabling LGBTQ+ individuals and communities to challenge oppressive power structures. However, it is also noted that the commercialization of media limits the creative freedom of individuals and the expression of their authentic drag personas.

This phenomenon requires further exploration, particularly within the Philippine context, where the visibility of drag queens in reality shows has only recently gained popularity. Specifically, exploring the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens who participate in drag reality shows, and how they view their portrayals, is timely, relevant, and significant. While studies about the American drag scene are widely available, there

remains a gap in understanding Filipino drag culture and how portrayals in drag reality shows shape queens' creative expressions.

With the rise of the Filipino drag scene, understanding how Filipino drag queens perceive their portrayals in drag reality shows is crucial to understanding the ongoing challenges they face, which have broader implications for the LGBTQ+ community. Thus, this study aims to explore the views of drag queens on their portrayals in reality shows and how these portrayals shape their creative expressions.

THEORETICAL LENS

In achieving the objectives of my study, I grounded it in the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. According to Cleland (2017), phenomenology emphasizes the significance of the "personal perspective and interpretation" of individuals when investigating particular phenomena. She described it as an effective way to understand "subjective experiences" and gain "insights into people's motivations and actions" (Cleland, 2017). Likewise, Tenny et al. (2022) noted that the phenomenological approach focuses on the "lived experiences" of subjects to explore how they "behave a certain way" based on their perspectives. In this study, exploring the experiences of Filipino drag queens was crucial to understanding their portrayals in drag reality shows and the broader implications for the LGBTQ+ community.

Moreover, phenomenological studies often describe the essence of certain phenomena and the meaning of the lived experiences of those who have experienced them (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Therefore, the goal of phenomenological research is to gain insight into the subjective experiences of participants and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. By exploring the participants' experiences, specifically Filipino drag queens, I was able to uncover and make sense of the essence of their experiences in joining drag reality shows, their views of their portrayals in mainstream media, and how these portrayals shape their drag craft as a creative expression.

Phenomenology and its branches: Transcendental and Hermeneutic

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach and method rooted in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and his student, Martin Heidegger, both of whom emphasized the importance of subjective experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In conducting phenomenological research, the focus is on capturing the depth and richness of human experiences by engaging directly with participants through methods such as in-depth interviews, observations, immersion, and reflective journals. The goal is to gather and make sense of the common experiences shared by participants, rather than focusing on individual differences, and to explore the essence of these experiences.

Within this philosophical method for studying the structures of experience and consciousness, there are two distinct traditions: transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology

Founded by Edmund Husserl, transcendental phenomenology aims to uncover the essential structures of consciousness through a process called 'epoché' or 'bracketing,' where researchers suspend or set aside their preconceived beliefs about the world to focus solely on the subjective experiences of individuals (Husserl, 1970). This approach seeks to identify the universal essences of phenomena as they appear to consciousness, emphasizing a first-person perspective that is free from external influences.

According to Moustakas (1994), 'epoché', or phenomenological 'bracketing,' is the process of suspending judgment about the natural world to focus purely on the experience itself. Cresswell and Poth (2018) further explained that researchers bracket their own preconceptions and biases to allow participants' voices and experiences to emerge authentically. This approach is particularly valuable in exploring phenomena that are not easily quantifiable, providing insights into the human condition that are deeply contextual and personal.

In other words, studies that aim to describe certain phenomena are considered transcendental or descriptive phenomenology in approach, where the goal is to capture and describe the experiences being observed. This tradition was used in this study.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology, rooted in the work of Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, diverges from his teacher's concept of bracketing biases. Instead, Heidegger

focuses on interpreting and understanding the meaning of lived experiences within their specific historical and cultural contexts. He posits that understanding is always situated and influenced by the interpreter's background and preconceptions, as one cannot detach from being in the world, or "Dasein" (Heidegger, 1962). This approach emphasizes the dialogical process between the researcher and the subject, aiming to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in human experiences.

Researchers employing this methodology seek to uncover the essence of experiences through interpretative analysis, often involving in-depth interviews, personal narratives, and reflective discussions. Hermeneutic phenomenology contrasts with purely descriptive phenomenology by incorporating the researcher's interpretative role, acknowledging that their preconceptions and insights shape the research process (Van Manen, 2016).

Moreover, hermeneutic phenomenology involves a cyclical process of interpretation, known as the 'hermeneutic circle,' where understanding develops through an iterative process of moving between parts of the text or experience and the whole context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This method enables researchers to delve into the deeper meanings and contexts of participants' experiences, providing rich, detailed insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

Constructionist representation of reality

The constructionist view of representation, as discussed by Hall (1997), emphasizes how reality is socially constructed through language and meaning. In this perspective, meaning is not inherent in objects, people, or events themselves but is created and reconstructed through language, symbols, and discourse. Language thus becomes the primary medium by which people create, share, and negotiate meanings within a culture. This view suggests that individuals and groups interpret the world based on their experiences, beliefs, and societal norms.

In the constructionist approach, Hall identifies two important methods for studying representation: the semiotic approach and the discourse approach. The semiotic approach examines how signs and symbols communicate meaning, following the model of encoding, where meaning is produced by the sender, and decoding, where the receiver or audience interprets the meaning (Storey, 2006). This reflects Hall's media studies work, where the encoding and decoding process shapes how messages are understood. The discourse approach, on the other hand, explores how broader systems of knowledge and power influence how meanings are constructed through language (Storey, 2006).

Additionally, Hall (1997) introduces the politics of representation, which focuses on how groups, particularly marginalized ones, negotiate their visibility and meaning in society through language. The four stages of representation politics, as outlined by Hall, show how meaning is contested and reshaped: reducing internal conflicts to promote group solidarity, creating a shared representation or image of the group for the public,

engaging in public discourse to assert this identity, and evaluating these processes for future action. These stages illustrate that cultural meanings are not fixed but are continuously negotiated and reshaped through language and interaction.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

“If you can’t love yourself, how in the hell are you going to love somebody else?”

- RuPaul Charles

This message has always been the spiel of RuPaul Charles, the host of RuPaul’s Drag Race, the longest-running drag reality TV show in America, at the end of each episode. The phrase “If you can’t love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?” encourages self-love and acceptance, resonating with both fans and contestants alike (Hickson, 2023). This catchphrase has personally inspired me to love myself and my queer community. Moreover, it sparked my curiosity to explore whether the reality show truly applies this mantra, especially in the context of embracing one’s queerness and loving oneself as a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

However, despite the message of self-love, reality shows may also amplify the inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in how drag queens are commodified or portrayed in mainstream media. This raised questions for me, prompting an exploration into the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens and how they make sense of their exposure to drag reality shows: How are Filipino drag queens portrayed in reality shows? In what ways do these portrayals shape their creative expressions? What challenges do they encounter?

Research Design

Guided by a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, I sought to uncover the essence of the experiences and views of Filipino drag queens in joining drag reality shows. By exploring their 'lived experiences' as they navigate the drag scene in a reality show, I aimed to understand how Filipino drag queens perceive their portrayals in these shows and how these portrayals shape their creative expressions and performances. Additionally, I sought to surface the challenges faced by Filipino drag queens as they make sense of their experiences.

Phenomenology, as the theoretical grounding of this inquiry, served as my guide throughout the research process. Peoples (2021), in her video presentation, recommended that researchers use phenomenology as both a theoretical framework and methodology. She advised against using other theories to prevent preconceptions from influencing how the researcher conducts or interprets interviews. Employing this approach, as Peoples suggested, ensured that I captured the true essence of the Filipino drag queens' experiences without being biased by theoretical assumptions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are two phenomenological traditions: transcendental (descriptive) and hermeneutic (interpretative). For this study, I employed the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl as the research design since I wanted to avoid having my preconceived ideas about the Filipino drag scene affect the results or allowing any other theoretical framework to influence the discussion of the findings.

Thus, I suspended my beliefs and perceptions about drag reality shows to focus solely on the essence of the experiences shared by Filipino drag queens. As Peoples (2021) noted, all types of biases should be suspended in transcendental tradition. My goal in conducting this study was to extract and describe the experiences of drag queens without any interventions from my personal views.

While phenomenology is central to my data collection and initial analysis—allowing me to bracket preconceived notions and delve deeply into the essence of their experiences—Hall’s constructionist representation of reality provided a secondary, complementary framework for interpreting the broader context of these experiences, particularly regarding the portrayal of drag queens in media. After uncovering the essence of the experiences, based purely on the drag queens’ perspectives, I engaged Hall’s constructionist representation of reality to interpret how these experiences are presented and mediated within the larger cultural and media context. This dual approach respected the phenomenological commitment to minimizing preconceptions during data collection and initial analysis while enabling a richer interpretation of the findings in light of the media’s role in shaping social realities.

Bracketing

As a media practitioner who has produced content for television programs, and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, my interest in this topic stems from a personal

passion for content production and familiarity with the drag culture and scenes in the country.

In conducting transcendental phenomenology, Peoples (2021) emphasized the importance of setting aside personal judgments and biases to capture and process the experiences of the participants based on their perspectives.

With this in mind, I bracketed the following personal experiences and concepts:

- My personal ideas of drag and what it represents: Bracketing this helped me to understand how Filipino drag queens themselves define and experience drag, rather than imposing my own interpretations.
- My belief about the power of media: As a media producer, I set aside this belief to fully explore how Filipino drag queens view the impact of reality shows on their roles within the LGBTQ+ community.

By bracketing, I did not aim to eliminate these biases but rather acknowledge and manage them, as Moustakas (1994) suggests.

Selection of Participants

In this study, I selected participants who have experience in the Filipino drag scene and have been featured in drag reality shows in the Philippines. This approach aimed to identify participants who could provide "rich and diverse data" that would enhance the research findings (SooleenAbbas, 2023).

The primary inclusion criteria for identifying participants were Filipino drag queens who have been featured in and have participated in drag reality television shows in the country. With these criteria, I was able to achieve the main objective of my inquiry: to explore the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens as they join drag reality shows.

Data Gathering Procedures

To achieve the objectives of this study, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted to gather rich and detailed information from Filipino drag queens. All interviews were conducted through an online video conferencing application, Zoom, from October 23 to 31, 2024. Each interview lasted between 30 to 70 minutes and was recorded for documentation and transcription. Initial questions posed to the participants included: How do you perceive your portrayals in drag reality shows, and how do these portrayals shape your creative expressions?

From there, participants freely shared their thoughts, allowing for exploration of various aspects of their involvement and experiences in the drag scene, their views of their portrayals, and their perspectives on the influence of these portrayals on their creative expressions.

The chosen participants were interviewed in their language of preference to encourage a more detailed and thoughtful response. The interviews were audio-recorded with the

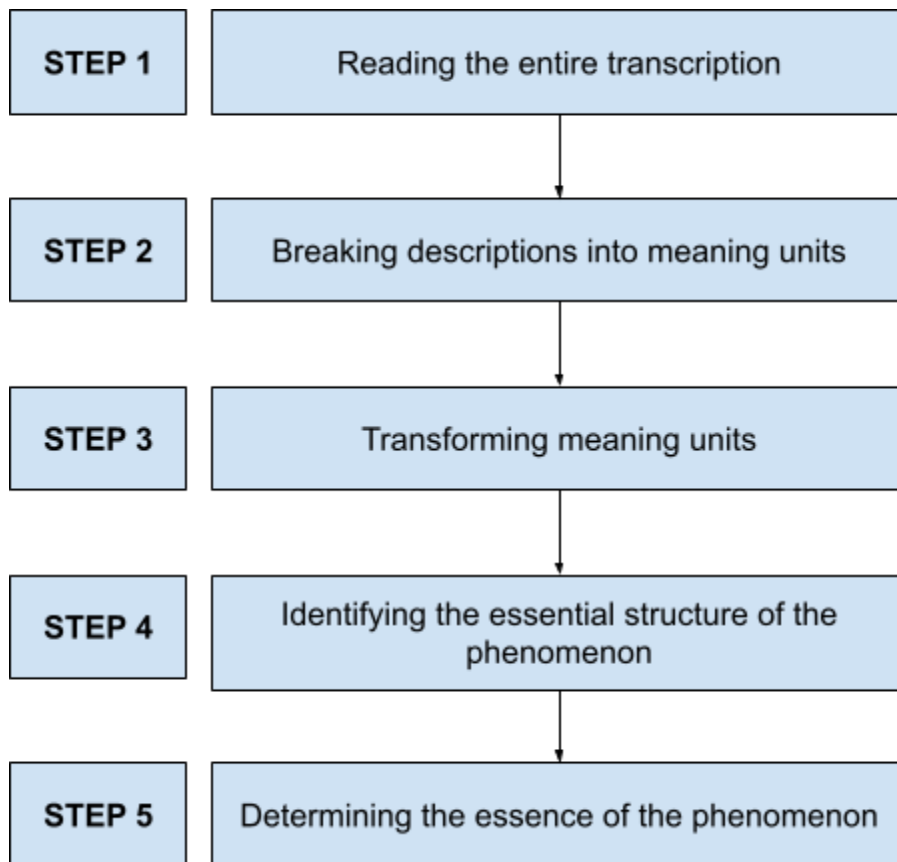
consent of the participants. I ensured confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for participants' autonomy throughout the process.

The responses from the one-on-one in-depth interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview and analyzed to identify patterns in the responses. My study focused on obtaining a thorough understanding, continuing to gather data until no new insights were found (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, data collection stopped once patterns in the responses had been established. After the data collection, the final responses were processed qualitatively using phenomenological tradition in communication as the framework for this study. This lens allowed me to understand the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens as they participate in reality shows and gain insights into the influence of media portrayals on drag as creative expression.

Data Analysis

This study employed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to analyze the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens and their views of their portrayals in reality shows. Giorgi's (2012) phenomenological data analysis is a structured approach to qualitative data, focusing on preserving the essence of participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The method followed five key steps: (1) reading the entire transcription, (2) dividing the text into meaning units, (3) transforming meaning units into descriptive expressions, (4) synthesizing descriptive expressions into a consistent description, and (5) formulating the structure of the experience.

Figure 1. Giorgi's steps to phenomenological data analysis



According to Giorgi (2012), the first step involves reading the entire interview transcripts multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. This immersion process allowed me to familiarize myself with the data and develop an initial sense of the key themes and patterns emerging from the Filipino drag queens' narratives.

After reading the transcripts, the text was divided into meaning units, each of which conveyed a single idea or concept relevant to the research questions. This step involved identifying and marking sections of the text that represented different aspects

of the drag queens' experiences. In transforming the meaning units into descriptive expressions, I rephrased the drag queens' words while preserving their original meaning. Careful interpretation was required to ensure that the essence of the experience was maintained.

I then synthesized the descriptive expressions to form a coherent and consistent description of the phenomenon. This involved integrating the transformed meaning units into a narrative that captured the essence of the drag queens' lived experiences.

Finally, I formulated the structure of the experience. This step involved identifying the essential components of the experience and describing how these components were interrelated. The structure represented the core meaning of the phenomenon as experienced by Filipino drag queen participants, particularly focusing on their portrayals in media and the implications for their creative expression.

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method provided a systematic approach to analyzing the qualitative data of my study. By capturing the essence of the drag queens' lived experiences, the analysis offered deep insights into their views on their portrayals in drag reality shows.

As mentioned, I also integrated Hall's constructionist view of representation in the later stages of analysis. This theory allowed me to position the individual lived experiences of the participants within the broader social, cultural, and media landscapes. Hall's

framework served as a tool for understanding how drag queens are mediated and represented in drag reality shows, without altering the phenomenological essence of their narratives. It helped contextualize the findings and explain how media constructs certain realities about drag culture, influencing or reflecting public perceptions without affecting the lived experiences themselves.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to moral principles and applied ethical research principles throughout all stages, including data collection and participant selection. Given the unique and often marginalized status of drag queens within the broader Filipino LGBTQ+ community, several key ethical considerations were carefully followed to ensure the rights, dignity, and well-being of the participants were upheld.

Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, which was conducted either face-to-face or through an online video conferencing platform. Each participant was fully briefed on the nature and purpose of the research, their role in it, and how the findings would be used. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing consequences. A signed consent form was obtained to document their voluntary participation, reflecting their understanding of the study and their willingness to be involved. The consent form clearly stated that the interview would be audio/video recorded for documentation purposes.

Since drag queens who participated in drag reality shows are considered public figures, their drag names were used in the study and the presentation of results, subject to the participant's permission and consent. However, any specific details that revealed sensitive aspects of their lives were either omitted or carefully modified to protect their privacy. This approach ensured that while the public persona of the drag queens was central to the study, their private identities and personal details remained protected.

As Filipino drag queens often navigate multiple layers of societal prejudice and discrimination, both as members of the LGBTQ+ community and as performers challenging traditional gender norms, interview questions were thoughtfully crafted to avoid any language or topics that could be considered intrusive or distressing.

All consent forms, audio/video recordings, and interview transcriptions were securely stored on a password-protected device, accessible only to the researcher, ensuring confidentiality and protection of participants' personal information.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After each interview, I carefully transcribed and thoroughly reviewed the conversations with the participants. This process allowed me to immerse myself in the data and identify emerging patterns in the drag queens' responses. Once these initial patterns became clear, I concluded the data collection phase. The participants' responses were analyzed qualitatively. By closely reading the transcripts, I segmented the text into meaning units, each representing a single idea tied to the research questions. Using Giorgi's method for analyzing phenomenological data, I distilled these insights into themes and sub-themes that reflected the participants' experiences, focusing on their views of their portrayals in drag reality shows, how these portrayals shaped their creative expression, and the broader social and cultural relevance of how drag queens are constructed in the media.

Four Filipino drag queens participated in the study and served as the primary sources of the information. They were chosen based on the criteria set to achieve the objectives of this study. All participants have joined drag reality shows and have at least two to seven years of experience doing drag. Three of them participated in Drag Den, the Filipino-produced drag reality show, while the remaining one was cast in Drag Race Philippines, the country's franchise of the well-known RuPaul's Drag Race. The participants allowed me to use their drag names to present this study's results. The profiles of the participants are as follows:



Pura Luka Vega Pura Luka Vega is a Filipino drag performer known for their distinctive bearded drag and participation in the first season of “Drag Den Philippines.” Pura Luka Vega mentioned during my interview that she has been active in the drag scene since 2017 and started as a cosplayer. Pura Luka Vega has a full-time job and is only doing drag every weekend. Pura Luka Vega’s

craft can be seen by going through her Instagram account [@puralukavega](#) (Photo from Instagram).

Margaux Bertrand, known simply as Margaux, is a Filipino drag artist and professional wig stylist from Manila. She has been active in the drag scene for approximately two years and gained prominence as a contestant on the second season of “Drag Den Philippines.” Margaux shared during the interview that beyond her performances, she is also known for her work as a professional wig stylist, and owns the brand



“Wigs by Margaux”. Margaux can be reached through [@margauxbertrand](#) Instagram account (Photo from Instagram).



Elvira or Elver, is a Filipino drag performer from Quezon City. Elvira highlighted that she competed in the second season of “Drag Den Philippines, along with Margaux. Elvira has five years of experience in the drag scene and is currently working in O-Bar, a popular LGBTQ+ bar in the country. Her performance can also be watched or viewed in her official Instagram handle, @the_elvirab (Photo from Instagram).

Nicole Pardaux is a Filipino drag performer from Cebu City, and is known as “The Face of Cebu Drag”. According to her, she began her drag career during the pandemic, rooted in her passion to perform and now has approximately three years of experience in the art form. Nicole Pardaux competed in the second season of “Drag Race Philippines,” and was the first contestant to be eliminated in the premiere episode. Nicole Pardaux’s journey can be witnessed through @nicolepardaux (Photo from Instagram).



With my background in television production, I approached this study using transcendental phenomenology, which helped me put my own preconceptions aside.

This method created space for the participants' voices and experiences to come through authentically. I aimed to gain an understanding and highlight the shared experiences among the drag queens I interviewed, focusing on experiences common to them rather than those of differences.

For this phenomenological study of portrayals of drag queens in drag reality shows, I sought to describe how drag queens view their portrayals. All of them shared their experiences during their time on Drag Den and Drag Race Philippines. How do these views of their portrayals shape their creative expressions and define their performances? In order to understand “subjective experiences” and gain “insights into people’s motivations and actions” (Cleland, 2017), I first delved into why they started doing drag and how they define drag.

Defining drag.

This phenomenological study delved into how Filipino drag queens view their portrayals in drag reality shows and how these views shape their creative expressions and performances. Central to understanding their perspectives was analyzing how they define drag and why they pursue this art form. Through a series of readings and re-readings of the interview transcripts from the four drag queens, I extracted descriptions of how they define drag. The participants stated that drag is an art form, but they also expressed the deeper meaning of drag and why they do it. Some of the keywords that emerged from the participants to describe what it means for them to do

drag were “escape reality,” “interpretation of the art,” “transforming yourself,” and “boost of self-esteem.”

*“I use drag as a way to **kind of escape reality**. That's initially how I would describe my **intent for doing drag**, but at the same time, it's also **a way for me to tell stories** that you don't normally able to tell in other means or in other spaces. So yeah, that's how valuable drag is for me and I've been doing it ever since.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“Well, drag **literally** is an **art form**. It is one's **interpretation of the art**. So, it's so hard to really define drag because of the **diversity of it**. But mainly it's an art form **talaga**.” – Nicole Pardaux*

*“...for me ang meaning ng drag is kung paano mo **mai-translate 'yung sarili mo in an art form**... the fact na you are **transforming yourself into another character**, you are doing drag.” – Margaux*

*“Drag for me is **making people happy**. It's really a **form of entertainment** and a **boost of self-esteem** to other people.” – Elvira*

From these statements, it can be argued that drag is deeply personal and subjective, rooted in how each queen defines the art form. These queens have established that biological men wearing female clothes are far from merely impersonating or comedic art, but have a deeper meaning in every look they make on the stage. As noted by Lago (2023), drag queens have redefined drag shifting from traditional comedic female impersonation to a more inclusive and diverse portrayal.

For instance, Pura Luka Vega's description of drag as a means to “escape reality” and tell untold stories suggested that drag is a platform for subverting cultural norms and creating new narratives, especially in the Philippine society where issues of gender and sexuality remain marginalized due to its heteronormative views (Custodio,

2019). As described by Levitt et al. (2017) drag allows performers to address sensitive topics more effectively than if they presented them as their non-drag selves.

Why is it important to reveal how these queens provide meaning to their drag? For me, understanding their view of drag is crucial because it shapes their expectations for how they should be portrayed. Hence, their meanings of drag shape the way they view their portrayals, whether aligned with their vision of drag—providing empowerment and validation—or not, which may lead to feelings of misrepresentation.

Beginning of doing drag.

After learning how the queens define drag, I also extracted descriptions that narrate how they began doing drag. RuPaul Charles, the host of Drag Race America, is always saying, “Start your engines, and may the best drag queen win!” But the question is, how do Filipino drag queens really start doing drag? From my interviews, it became clear that their journeys into drag were shaped by personal hobbies and skills, exposure to drag culture, and encouragement from others. What is interesting to note is that many participants had not planned to pursue drag seriously, but opportunities like competitions or personal challenges pushed them to explore it further. Some lines that revealed doing drag was not planned but rooted in the hobbies and skills of the participants were:

*“I think it **wasn’t like how I planned** to do kind of, you know, engage in but it was more of an opportunity to do drag presented itself. I **used to be a cosplayer** back then.” - Pura Luka Vega*

*“...so, I just realized that I've **actually been doing drag** even before pa. I started as a performer, as a dancer since like when I was still young.” - Nicole Pardaax*

*“Nag-start ako sa pagda-drag, **influence kasi siya ng friend ko** nung bata pa ako lagi akong nanonood ng RupPauls Drag race so **meron na akong background**. Ah ganito pala ‘yung drag, alam ko na siya before.” – Margaux*

*“Actually, I was a **makeup artist** way before pandemic pa. Tapos, **performer** na rin ako na sumasayaw-sayaw lang, ganyan. Tapos, hindi ko din naman in-expect na magiging drag queen ako and I never, **I never knew** na ganito ‘yung magiging ano ‘yung mag-end up ako dito sa position na to...” – Elvira*

The narratives from the four drag queens reflected that their starting points were a mix of personal interests and external motivations that brought them into the world of drag. For instance, Nicole Pardaax is a performer while Pura Luka Vega is a cosplayer before entering the world of drag. Margaux has a wig rental business while Elvira is a make-up artist. Hence, most of their beginnings often demonstrated personal, cultural, and societal influences that continue to shape their art. Filipino comedian/artist Paolo Ballesteros, who is also the Philippine queen of transformation and the host of Drag Race Philippines, said that the drag persona has diverse forms of representing oneself, one's race, background, lived experience, and expressing one's true self (Suralta, 2022).

Thus, the beginnings of their drag journey, as well as their definition of drag, are vital for exploring their views of their portrayals in reality shows. From there, I gained a

richer understanding of how these portrayals shape their creative expression and define their drag personas.

Reasons for doing drag.

Knowing “what” drag means for the participants and “how” they started doing drag is important to achieving my research objectives. Furthermore, understanding the motivations behind drag as an art form and their established drag personas provided deeper insights into how Filipino drag queens view their portrayals in drag reality shows. As I made sense of their experiences, it revealed that most drag queens do drag to introduce themselves to a bigger audience, show their existence, and share their talents or stories.

*“...for me it’s really our job to do that as a human being na **ma-ishare namin ‘yung talent namin, mai-share namin yung experiences namin through performances, ganyan.**” – Elvira*

*“I think part of it is also, you know, **showing people what I can do and that I do exist...** Parang it, it’s a way for me to **introduce that I’m part of the LGBT community** and I’m here performing in front of you, not being afraid of who I am and showcasing the talents that I have.” – Nicole Pardaux*

*“You just **tell people your existence.** I see you; you can do something about it. I think that’s a beautiful thing na you just try to **empower people** and make them feel special. On the surface, it’s like, oh we’re having fun, yes. But, if lalaliman mo, it’s really just to celebrate your existence na **bakla ka, may silbi ka sa lipunan, yeah, all of these things.**” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“The thing is, **kapag ikaw nag-drag ka na, that alone means something, ibig-sabihin may pinaglalaman ka na. Una mong ipaglalaman siyempre ang sarili mo. Why are you doing this? Bakit mo ginagawa ito? Para kanino mo***

*ba ginagawa ito?... For me, I'm **already doing it for the community.***" –
Margaux

Based on these narratives, the participants substantiated that drag, which was initially perceived as a form of art and entertainment, could also intentionally or unintentionally send messages through performance and serve as a powerful representation of the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community with its vibrant and unique appearance (Luten, 2023). Nicole Pardaux and Pura Luka Vega echoed this by saying that drag aids in showing people that the LGBTQ+ community exists. It became a platform for the queens to express the individuality and complexity of their identities. Something that many LGBTQ+ individuals have not experienced in the past such as Gretchen Diez's case which highlighted how LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines still face restrictions on their rights to express their sexuality, define themselves, and be publicly recognized (Abesamis & Alibudbud, 2024).

Each queen's personal motivation for doing drag provided a lens through which they interpreted or viewed portrayals of drag queens in the media. As explained by Hall (1997), individuals and groups create meanings and interpretations of the world, in this case, of their portrayals in the media, based on their experiences, beliefs, and societal norms. Hence, by understanding their "why," I better grasped how these portrayals resonate with them—or fail to. This, in turn, revealed how they responded through their drag, making their voices a vital part of understanding media portrayals of drag in a broader sense.

How do drag queens view their portrayals in reality shows?

After carefully analyzing the transcriptions by identifying and marking sections of the text, descriptive expressions from the drag queens' experiences emerged. These expressions were then transformed into a narrative statement that captured the essence of their lived experiences.

Guided by their statements on how they define drag, why they do it, and how they started, I sought to understand how their portrayals in reality shows resonate with their personal and artistic journeys. By exploring their perspectives, I uncovered their views on the way they are represented and portrayed by drag reality shows. I organized these detailed direct quotations from drag queens into a table during the analysis phase (*Annex Table A*). Four common patterns in drag queens' views of their portrayals in reality shows emerged: visibility, empowerment, promotion, and authenticity.

For **visibility**—this conveys their shared experiences of how media platforms, such as reality shows, provided them with visibility that helps amplify the voices and struggles of drag queens. Beyond entertainment, media exposure helps normalize queer identities, challenge prejudices, and foster understanding within and beyond the LGBTQ+ community.

For **empowerment**—this reflects the statements from drag queens describing how drag reality shows gave them visibility or exposure, allowing them to represent their identities and communities. They see these reality shows as important in sparking

conversations about drag and helping audiences understand the artistry, effort, and struggles behind it.

For **promotion**—this includes narratives that emphasize how reality shows also act as platforms for self-promotion, helping drag queens showcase their unique talents and build personal brands. Through reality shows, the queens see opportunities to promote drag as a craft while connecting with audiences emotionally and artistically.

For **authenticity**—this captures personal accounts of drag queens expressing how drag reality shows provide valuable visibility for the Filipino drag scene. They can also frame contestants in ways that simplify or amplify specific traits, leading to both opportunities and challenges for performers.

As I reflect on their statements, I can say that the narratives of the drag queens reflect a balance between gratitude for the affordances brought about by their exposure to reality shows and a desire for greater authenticity in the portrayals of these shows. Filipino drag queens view reality shows as powerful tools for visibility and personal branding. They appreciated the platform these shows offer to tell their stories, represent marginalized identities, and inspire audiences. However, they also recognized the challenges of condensing the diversity of drag into the confines of reality television.

Visibility brought by the media. Beyond entertainment, drag queens also felt that drag reality shows, as a medium of communication, helped amplify their voices and stories. For them, reality shows provided opportunities to reach both queer and

non-queer audiences and communicate with them about various issues and topics concerning the LGBTQ+ community.

*“The role in the community is really **visibility**. So, it starts there and then when **people get to see you**, there's a chance that **they will listen to you**. And when they listen to you, there's a chance that you can also **highlight our struggles**, therefore also **highlighting what we need to have**.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“Mas maraming kaming natatamaang tao. Mas maraming kaming **nata-touch na tao**. Mas maraming pamilya sana ang mas makapanood nun para mas **matanggap nila yung anak nila**, yung kamag-anak nila, yung ibang tao pang nakapaligid sa kanila, mga kaibigan nila na na-accept natin ‘yung gano’ng thing.” – Elvira*

*“...in such a way that, you know, I was **not afraid to be who I am on TV**. Although for the length of time that I was in the Drag Race Philippines, I was able to **show everyone like who Nicole Pardaux was so iyon**.” – Nicole Pardaux*

As highlighted earlier, the “why” behind doing drag supports the views of drag queens regarding reality shows as a medium that helps normalize queer identities and foster understanding within and beyond the LGBTQ+ community. Drag queens mostly do drag to gain bigger audiences to whom they can introduce themselves, their existences, and their stories. By doing so, drag queens aim to inspire meaningful change, proving that visibility is a powerful tool for both personal and social transformation. As Luten (2023) agrees, drag queens use their visibility to construct social images and brands, which give them social power and serve not only as “looks or faces” but also as champions of gender inclusion.

For instance, Elvira emphasized the potential of drag in challenging stigmas and fostering familial acceptance. In a country where the mindset of most people is heavily influenced by heteronormativity, the visibility brought by reality shows provides relational healing and acceptance, particularly in conservative or traditional Filipino households which are less accepting of LGBTQ+ (Reyes, Davis, & Salonga et al., 2021). Like how 'gay language' has become more widely used by both LGBTQ+ people and heterosexuals in mainstream society due to its exposure in various settings (Amado, et. al., 2017), the increased and continuous rise in the visibility of drag queens in the reality shows could amplify the voices of the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community and can serve as a powerful form of resistance against the oppressive societal concept of gender and identity.

Through performances broadcast to mainstream audiences, drag queens communicate key messages about acceptance, resilience, and diversity. Occupying new spaces, such as reality shows, helps create a more inclusive Filipino cultural narrative, one where queer identities are acknowledged, celebrated, and given the respect they deserve.

Empowerment through representation. Listening to their stories, I noticed that the participants recognized the opportunities reality shows offered as a platform to showcase their identities and individuality. They conveyed a sense of pride in how drag reality shows highlighted their talents and personal narratives while drawing attention to their art.

*“It's a start, you know? I mean, people, when they get to watch it, **there's a conversation around it...** So yeah, it's like I guess on one hand, it does **provide an exposure**, you know, because you and **people get to hear your story.**” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“For me, it's a different kind of **introduction to the world of what drag queens are.** Especially kapag nakilala na ninyo ang **individuality** namin, iyong **identitiy** namin, iba-iba kasi s'ya eh.” – Margaux*

*“Before, when Drag Race Philippines aired the first season, that's when I realized that, oh my God, **bakit walang representation ng Cebu?** So I thought to myself, okay, let's try to audition. Pero hindi ko naman ine-expect. And then, lo and behold, **I'm the very first Cebuana Ru girl!**” – Nicole Pardaux*

*“...Kasi during my Drag Den na experience, ang **daming lumalapit sa akin na, thank you for inspiring me, ganyan, ganyan, ganyan.** Thank you for **being so true of yourself sa show, ganyan, ganyan.**” – Elvira*

Based on their statements, drag queens found reality shows to be a stepping stone toward a greater understanding of drag culture, shedding light on the effort, creativity, and challenges involved in being a drag artist.

When Elvira recounted fan's gratitude for her authenticity on Drag Den, and said the phrase, “Thank you for inspiring me,” it captured how visibility on reality shows not only affirms the queens' individuality but also empowers viewers—both queer and non-queer—to celebrate diversity and challenge societal norms. Such visibility, according to Pura Luka Vega, can “highlight our struggles” and amplify the LGBTQ+ community's fight for inclusivity and acceptance. Filipino drag's progression is further strengthened by its adaptation to global and digital platforms, where reality shows play a pivotal role in transforming local perceptions of drag. As Lago (2023) also noted, Filipino

drag queens, with “more eyes and ears on them,” have expanded their audience and influence, which could redefine the drag scene in the country. The experiences of these drag queens highlighted how representation can create powerful personal and community empowerment.

Promotion of brand and craft. One of the notable experiences shared by the drag queens during the interviews is how reality shows helped shape their labels and brands. This aspect of their experiences caught my attention as it revealed how reality shows intervened in the craft and art of drag queens. The question is, how do drag queens react to this? Their narratives highlighted how being part of these shows allowed them to develop distinct identities that not only showcased their craft but also made them relatable and recognizable to viewers.

*“They have **an idea of what I do** as a drag artist and then they used it in how to **package me or us** in general and how the **public should perceive**. Kumbaga the branding side of drag is usually highlighted in the reality show.”* – Pura Luka Vega

*“Tinulungan nila akong **i-promote ang brand ko**. Pero nakuha naman nila iyong side ko na parang sometimes hindi ako palaging matapang and may pinanggagalingan iyong tapang ko... And **naikwento ng Drag Den iyon nang maganda** na to the point pati ako humahagulgol nung napanood ko.”* – Margaux

*“It actually, parang, tells you just like, or it **gives you a hint of like who Nicole was** because it’s super short nga ‘yong stay ko sa Drag Race Philippines, but very thankful ako because still even if like very short yung stay ko sa Drag Race, there’s, you know, **getting that affirmation and validation from people** that, sinasabi nila that I represented Cebu super well.”* – Nicole Pardaux

From a constructionist perspective, Hall (1997) explained that reshaping meaning involves creating a shared representation or image of a group for the public. Given the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and motivations for doing drag, as previously discussed, drag reality shows play a pivotal role in crafting the brand or image of drag queens. This shared representation enhances their visibility and amplifies their impact on audiences.

A part of the statement from Nicole Pardaux saying “getting that affirmation and validation from people” reflected drag reality shows as a platform for recognition and acceptance. For many drag queens, particularly within the Filipino cultural context where societal acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals has historically been challenging (Manalastas & Del Pilar, 2005), this affirmation functions as more than applause. It serves as a powerful validation of their identities, artistry, and worth as human beings. It also emphasized the broader cultural shift facilitated by these shows, as they foster understanding, normalize drag culture, and challenge societal stigmas surrounding queerness or *'kabaklaan'*. As argued by Happer & Philo (2013) media help dismantle oppressive ideologies and empower individuals to defy societal expectations by presenting alternative narratives, especially those of marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community.

Authenticity of framing the drag queens. After repeatedly going through the passages of drag queens, it became evident to me that the way they are framed in reality shows often varies and, at times, does not fully resonate with their personal experiences and identities. Sharing their experiences in the reality shows, some queens

expressed satisfaction with how the show remained true to their narrative without distorting or exaggerating it.

*“Yeah, super **happy** ko na they were able to tell my they were **able to edit my story** na ikunwento ko na **hindi nila iniba**, wala silang dinagdag...” – Margaux*

*“I would say, wala naman, misrepresentation because... who or like what **you see on what you saw on TV are actually us**. Like it's not scripted. It's not anything.” – Nicole Pardeaux*

*“...pero so far from what the production has done, wala naman, it was good. I think it was mindful. They were very mindful, mindful of **not to kind of sensationalize** whatever the drag artist has been going through.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“...actually, **napakita naman** din dun sa loob na I'm one of the bitches there inside. Pero ako din naman yung pinaka-soft-hearted dahil pinapahiram ko sila ng gamit.” – Elvira*

However, the queens also shared that reality shows often present only a small part of their stories due to limited airtime and heavily edited episodes. Reflecting on their experiences, the drag queens noted that:

*“Well, when I did Drag Den naman, I was **very aware** of how sometimes these reality shows can catch you being vulnerable or **they might take out of context**.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“Although, yes, it is, part of it is really, **blame it on the edit**, I would say.” – Nicole Pardeaux*

*“As Elvira, parang nagkaroon lang ako ng **outlet na mas maging masama** pa. Parang ganun ‘yung naging eksena.” – Elvira*

These statements showed that drag queens recognized the tendency of reality shows to edit the episodes in order to show the queen's vulnerabilities yet take moments out of context to create "TV drama" or to enhance its appeal to the audience. This recognition speaks to the constructed nature of reality TV, where producers tailor narratives to fit with marketable norms. As a former television producer myself, I acknowledge how media may sometimes intervene in storytelling to gain viewership and following. In the Filipino media market, audiences tend to gravitate toward emotionally charged narratives that evoke a sense of shared struggle and resilience.

For instance, Elvira expressed awareness of how she was edited to emphasize the "bitchy" aspect of her persona while downplaying her softer, more generous traits. This selective focus frames individuals that may obscure the multi-dimensionality of the queens while entertaining the audience. Thus, the selective framing of vulnerability or conflict often mirrors broader cultural preferences among Filipino audiences for dramatic storytelling that taps into the *masa's* (mass people) enthusiasm for vulnerability and perseverance. For drag queens in the Philippines, such portrayals may risk oversimplifying their narratives but also allow for deeper emotional connections with audiences.

Media construction of drag queens: from the lens of the participants

I have organized the participants' expressed feelings and thoughts to grasp a sense of how they view their portrayals in drag reality shows. With these insights, I

shifted my focus to exploring how they believe drag queens are constructed by the media, particularly through drag reality shows.

In the context of my study, reality shows like Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den serve as a platform for Filipino drag queens to express and shape their identities, or as described by Luten (2023) a space to speak out. This identity construction, however, is mediated through editing, branding, and storytelling, all of which are heavily influenced by the media. Now, the question is: to what extent do drag reality shows, as a medium, shape or intervene in crafting the narratives of the drag queens who participate in them?

Through the lens of how drag queens view their portrayals, the question of how they believe the media shapes their identities, brands, and roles could be answered. Hence, I collected excerpts from the interview transcripts that described how the participants see the media construction of drag queens (*Annex Table 2*). From these, three (3) common patterns were identified: stereotypes, standards, and commercialization.

Stereotyping drags. While drag queens acknowledge the visibility and empowerment brought by these drag reality shows – as discussed earlier – for them, the way drag queens are presented is sometimes limited to narrow portrayals. Looking back at their journey in reality shows, the participants observed that these shows often confine drag queens to specific stereotypes, such as emphasizing glamour, big hair, and high-budget looks, which do not encompass the entirety of drag as an art.

*“So sometimes there would be **expectations of drag queens to only be a certain type** wherein you know, its glamor, big hair. it's not always like that.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“I think **there's a lot** of in the drag scene that **was not showcased or highlighted** much because these are like not so well heard of in the world of drag.” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“I would say that it really showcased like the diversity of drag. Siguro **not too very in-depth** pa. I'm looking forward na **mas marami pang representations** pa ang maipakita ng drag race.” – Nicole Pardaux*

In essence, these drag reality shows, albeit featuring drag queens, still lack the introduction of other non-conventional types, lesser-known or underrepresented forms of drag. Drag queens felt empowered by the visibility these shows provide, yet constrained by the narrow parameters within which they are expected to perform. By focusing primarily on conventional drag, these reality shows contribute to marginalization due to their representation that reinforces stereotypes, and devalues other forms of drag (Delante, 2023).

In the Filipino drag scene, these stereotypes are even more significant. Historically, drag in the Philippines' pre-colonial era has drawn from the emergence of gay beauty pageants in Tondo and Visayan gays engaging in cross-dressing during fiesta dances and community events (Foe, 2013). These forms of drag often embraced humor, parody, and socio-political commentary as part of the performance. However, drag reality shows adhere to Westernized ideals of glamour and competition which may overshadow the cultural nuances and locally-rooted artistry of Filipino drag.

Interestingly, I found that these feelings of confinement have inspired drag queens to challenge and break free from these stereotypes.

*“I’m aware of how **drag queens** are **stereotypically portrayed** in reality shows. Me, because I tend to go against the grain, I don’t really like, I try to **challenge these stereotypes**.”* – Pura Luka Vega

*“Pero kasi **you have to clear cards right**. Kapag nakita ng mga producers, writers, na “ah this queen, this queen is really good. This queen is really friendly.” Alam mo iyon, ibibigay nila iyon sa iyo eh.”* – Margaux

I found out that the participants, after seeing how reality shows can stereotype drag, have acknowledged that they must navigate these dynamics carefully, and taught them to present themselves in ways that align with the show’s demands while maintaining their integrity. As a result, Filipino drag queens use the platform to showcase their individuality in ways that subtly challenge competition templates while adhering to the show’s formula for success. Through careful negotiation of these portrayals, drag queens in the Philippines not only work to dismantle stereotypes but also highlight the evolving nature of drag culture.

Setting standards for drag. After repeatedly reviewing the interview transcripts, I noticed that while drag queens consistently recognized the visibility and opportunities provided by reality shows, they also acknowledged that these shows can unintentionally impose standards that may marginalize certain performers. Given that drag is seen by the queens as a free and diverse form of art, this raises an important question: how might mainstream media and audiences constrain the art of drag by imposing such

standards? The experiences of Filipino drag queens answered this question, providing in-depth insights into how setting standards for drag is relevant to their art and craft.

*“Well, iyong sa ano, iyong sinabi lang ni Kalad Karen sa Drag Race, iyong sa mga **provincial queens dapat kasing galing o mas magaling kayo kay Khianna**. Alam mo kumbaga bakit kasi natin, inaano, like, may tawag dito eh. **Pine-pressure** iyong mga provincial queens. **Pare-pareho lang naman kaming drag queens, nagkakatalo-talo lang kami sa resources.**”*
– Margaux

*“...Kaya ang nangayayari, when they consume it, or when they're looking in the public spaces, wherein they see **queens that don't necessarily have a TV show**, madali nilang sabihin na, ay **hindi naman drag 'yan...**”*– Pura Luka Vega

*“...because of iyong pagsikat nila Marina Summers, parang it also shed some light to us na rin. But in a way, **naging standard siya ng mga tao sa what they think drag is.**”* – Nicole Pardaux

As viewed by drag queens, setting standards for drag conveys a narrow idea of what drag should be, which fails to capture the full diversity of the art form, especially those who come from provinces. One of the recurring concerns raised by the participants is how mainstream drag platforms unintentionally create a hierarchy within the drag community. Margaux articulated this issue when discussing how Drag Race Philippines framed provincial queens, reflecting an implicit bias favoring Manila-based or more well-resourced drag queens. Given the geographical and economic disparities in the Philippines, drag queens outside major urban areas often struggle with accessibility to high-cost materials, makeup, and performance spaces. Despite their skill and creativity, they may be perceived as “lesser” simply because they do not meet the polished aesthetic frequently showcased in reality shows. Workman (2020) also

observed that drag reality shows have potentially limited diverse perspectives and stifled dissenting voices, especially of local drag queens.

Pura Luka Vega also highlighted that imposed standards lead to a shift in how audiences perceive and validate drag. Drag queens who fit mainstream standards—often influenced by polished, Western-style glamour—are more likely to be recognized as “authentic,” while those who practice other forms of drag are at risk of being dismissed. Given the evolving landscape of Filipino drag, where comedic, camp, and protest-based drag have long coexisted with pageantry-style performances, this narrow definition limits public appreciation of the full drag artistry in the country. Historically, Filipino drag evolved in small community spaces such as local bars, comedy clubs, and LGBTQ+ gatherings, where creativity was boundless, and performances reflected deeply embedded socio-political themes.

Commercializing drags. One important thing that was highlighted by the drag queens during the interview is how drag reality shows serve as a form of cultural capital that improves the socioeconomic status and mobility of some queens, while also excluding others. As explained by Hennessy (1994) the visibility of homosexuality in mainstream culture, through media like reality shows, is often aimed at creating new markets and is driven by financial motives rather than a genuine commitment to liberation. On one hand, drag queens noted that reality shows open doors for financial growth, particularly for drag queens with limited means and resources.

*“...kapag nagkaroon ng **media presence** ang mga bakla tataas ang budget nila. Magkakaroon sila nang **mas malaking pera** para makapag **invest** sa sarili nila, sa drag nila.” – Margaux*

*“Let's just leave it at that na **magkaroon ng media presence** kasi mas **maraming opportunities at mas yayaman ang drag queens** kapag nangyari iyon. Mas tataas ang **TF**.” – Elvira*

As pointed out by Margaux, drag queens have acknowledged that the inclusion of drag in mainstream media has created tangible financial benefits, particularly for those who had previously struggled with access to resources. Elvira also emphasized the potential of elevating the queen's earnings through media exposure. These statements reinforced how reality shows transform drag into a viable and sustainable career option, especially in the Philippines where employment opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals can still be limited and where employers do not accept them for work due to their gender preference (Report Details Workplace Discrimination Faced by LGBTI People in China, the Philippines, and Thailand, 2018). With reality shows amplifying their reach, drag is now viewed as a legitimate form of professional entertainment, comparable to celebrity status in the mainstream industry. Their appearance helps drag queens gain sponsorship deals, brand endorsements, increased talent fees (*TF*), and access to a broader audience willing to invest in their artistry.

Drag, which was once primarily a subversive and underground form of queer expression, is now positioned within an entertainment industry where profitability shapes artistic and personal trajectories. Within this framework, drag is simultaneously uplifted and commodified, opening doors for some while closing them for others. In fact,

drag queens have also shared that commercialization introduces exploitative structures, and pay inequalities.

*“We want the queens who don't necessarily have a show to have a bigger pay because it's hard to do drag. Pero ang ending tuloy, **it's kinda exploitative siya**. Bakit kita babayaran ng mahal wala ka naman show. Ganun ang dating.”* – Pura Luka Vega

*“The mainstreaming of something as drag, as free as drag, has an effect to **how people would consume it now**. And you know, **there will be standards**, there should be no standards, **magkakaroon ng differences in the pay**, na dapat wala naman talagang differences in the pay.”* – Pura Luka Vega

As learned from these excerpts, drag queens recognized that gaining popularity and exposure through reality shows provided them opportunities to earn money which can also be used for improving further their craft. From this popularity and visibility, drag queens also felt the inequalities and differences in how drag queens are compensated for their performance. While the drag queens emphasized that making drag a regular job was not their primary motivation – as discussed above – the increased visibility has led to new norms and expectations for drag performance. As a result, queens featured on mainstream platforms like reality shows are elevated, while smaller, local drag performers can unintentionally be devalued. This is also explained by McCormack and Wignall (2022) that not all performers benefit equally from the mainstreaming of drag, which, in fact, can limit opportunities for other drag queens.

Finding connections between drag queens' view of their portrayals and creative expression

In the earlier phase of the analysis of the interview transcripts, and in the beginning part of this chapter, I explicitly discussed the way participants define drag, their reasons for doing drag, and their views of their portrayals. From there, I shifted to understanding the meaning behind their actions and how their views of their portrayals shape their creative expressions and define their performances. From the constructionist perspective (Hall, 1997), drag queens have an important role in creating, sharing, and negotiating meanings within a culture through language. This exploration allowed me to connect their views of media representation with the way they express their creativity and craft performances that reflect, or challenge, these constructions. From the statements of the participants (Annex Table 3), three (3) similar thoughts provided answers to this question: constraints in the format, skills development, and sense of purpose.

Constraints of competition format. The presence of rules imposed by reality shows which is a competition in nature, shapes how participants, in this case, drag queens, are required to perform, behave, and present themselves. Based on my immersion in the participants' statements, it is determined that the format shapes not only what queens do but also how both viewers and fellow competitors perceive them.

*"I felt like I was **pressured** because of like iyong inner saboteur ko na I had to be like perfect, ganito ganito. So parang hindi ko talaga. I think what I missed there was just to have fun with it. I **became super serious in the competition**. I sort of forgot to have fun with the competition."* – Nicole Pardaux

*“...after watching myself on TV, na-feel ko na **I was so tense**. Grabe ‘yon tense ko na na-feel ko na kailangan ko mag-relax. Siguro **nadala lang because of the competition**.”* – Nicole Pardaux

*“My realization is you know, **there's a pressure in reality shows to make it more about the competition**. Which is very appealing, I guess... it's very appealing for viewers to see **drag queens competing for the crown or whatever**.”* – Pura Luka Vega

The participants event noted that competition-driven narratives can constrain self-expression, and have pushed them to act in ways that may not align with their authentic selves, just to make it more appealing for the audiences. Participants noted that their experiences in drag reality shows placed them under extreme pressure to perform within the constraints of the format. This pressure altered not only their mindset but also the way they delivered their performances.

*“Parang na-feel ko doon na masyado kong, **masyado nila kong inipit**. Parang gano'n na parang I was really **caught off guard** sa mga sinasabi nila sa akin... parang that's not really my brand.”* – Elvira

*“Ang tendency kasi kapag **reality shows with a competition type of format**, parang, it would say na ah mas magaling ito kasi mas nanalo na siya. No, not necessarily. We have good days and bad days, but it's not our entire track record, kumabaga, our portfolio.”* – Pura Luka Vega

*“I think iyon ang mga na-realize ko, it's just a show. It's **not supposed to dictate how you do your drag**.”* – Pura Luka Vega

The experiences shared by drag queens who participated in reality shows highlight the challenges created by the constraints of competition formats. Based on what they have felt after the competition, these constraints often force them into roles or situations that may not align with their personal values or the true essence of their craft.

Pura Luka Vega expressed that reality competitions create an illusion that defines what good or high-level drag is, whereas drag in practice remains fluid, and adaptable.

These reflections highlighted the contrast between drag as a liberating, expressive art form and drag within a controlled environment, such as reality shows. Filipino drag, rooted in performance art, satire, and community engagement, becomes structured in ways that limit organic artistic exploration when adapted into a reality competition. Additionally, participants pointed out that the format of these shows, designed to appeal to audiences, is closely linked to the commercialization of reality television shows. This shift, as noted by Workman (2020), reflects a broader movement of media toward a capitalist orientation resulting in limiting the creative freedom of contestants and restricting the authentic expression of their drag personas.

Moreover, it is important to note that the competition format of these reality shows reflects financial and resource disparities among drag queens. Based on the participant's stories, these disparities directly impact their ability to perform and compete in the reality show. Going through their narratives, I found the necessity of financial resources to participate in reality shows is emphasized, describing it as an upfront "pahunan" or investment. Due to these limitations, drag queens were being "smart" and "strategic" to innovate or compromise, possibly impacting the quality or range of their performances.

*"Let's be honest, sometimes **when you attend these reality shows, dapat may puhunan ka. And at the time, kahit ngayon naman, hindi naman ganoon kalaki ang puhunan ko. So, I have to be strategic, I have to be smart about it.**" – Pura Luka Vega*

*“Kasi parang feeling ko its also a **reflection of your status, economic or social**, in making it in the, what do you call this, in the drag reality show. Like if you **wanted to fare well**, hindi mo talaga maiiwasan to consider all of these other factors like, **mayaman ka ba? Marami ka bang magagandang costume?**” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“...the Manila queens have more exposure than us outside of Manila. Because technically, **they have more resources** than we do in terms of like let's say media, in terms of venues where they can have shown because here in Cebu, **we don't have a drag bar.**” – Nicole Pardaux*

The participants' stories revealed a deeper issue: while these shows claim to celebrate raw talent, success within the competition often requires significant financial investments. Unlike grassroots drag performances where creativity can often compensate for limited resources, reality television showcases are visually driven and require contestants to present highly polished, extravagant looks. Queens who come from well-off backgrounds or major urban areas have better access to costumes, designers, and beauty resources, which translates to a competitive advantage. Thus, these shows do not just test creative talent but also tend to favor contestants with more money and better resources, especially those from big cities.

Drag skills development and personal growth. Hearing their stories, I found that while drag queens have experienced constraints during their stay in the competition, or reality shows, they were also given the opportunity to refine their craft, gain new skills, and grow both as artists and individuals. Reflecting on what changes them over time, it can be said that these shows, albeit having constraints due to their format, act as both platforms for self-improvement and learning environments that elevate drag queen's artistry.

*“Iyong experience ko sa show, para siyang habang nangyayari siya, **natutulungan ko ang sarili ko, kung ano ang mga dapat kong i-improve, mga dapat kong i-adjust sa drag ko.**” – Margaux*

*“I think that’s why parang may special soft spot ang Drag Den for me, because after the show, I **got better in doing my craft.**” – Pura Luka Vega*

*“What I’m truly thankful for is really the experience and at the same time, lahat ng mga **learnings ko sa loob ng Drag Race. Actually, naging bootcamp for me. Grabe ang catapult ko from Baby Drag Queen into a full-blown RuGirl.**” – Nicole Pardaux*

These reflections suggested that drag reality shows function as a transformative space for growth. For many Filipino drag queens, whose drag careers began in comedy bars, pageants, or club performances, the highly competitive and televised nature of reality shows pushes them toward professionalization. The environment challenges them to refine their skills from makeup and costuming to performance techniques and brand identity. As described by Amado, et. al. (2027) shift from gay subculture to becoming widely known to mainstream society can be attributed to ‘faggotization’ of television. These upgraded versions of drag, in turn, position drag queens or the LGBTQ+ community into mainstream cultural discourse.

According to the drag queens, these skill enhancements were achieved by themselves through self-reflection. Reflecting on their experiences, the drag queens shared that joining reality shows also encouraged them to evaluate and enhance their craft, personas, and even personal values.

*“So, it’s a great competition. Magandang competition siya. And **internal competition** siya... Parang magandang **motivation** siya eh. Pero, tama*

*yun. It's a great competition for yourself. Na maging bongga ka. **Maging bongga ka to achieve greater pa.*** – Elvira

*“Actually, the show really grounded me. It **grounded me** in a way na, napanood ko kasi sarili ko, so iyon, oh my God, ganoon ako kawalang hiya. Sorry. Alam mo after that, **na-realize ko na i dont wanna be this.**”*
– Margaux

*“So yeah, iyon after Drag Den, **may growth** akong na-feel talaga sa ano ko, sa drag ko, even sa sarili ko. Iyong mga **hindi ko dapat gawin, mga di ko dapat sabihin naiwasan ko na siya.**”* – Margaux

Through exposure and feedback, queens are motivated to grow both creatively and personally, leading to enhanced skills and refined self-expression. For them, drag reality shows are platforms that serve as a competitive arena and a space for transformation that challenges drag queens to evaluate their identities and refine their skills. While these shows are competitive in nature, it is also an opportunity for self-improvement and has the grounding effect of seeing oneself on screen.

By appearing on television, they are not only transforming themselves but also changing how audiences interact with and relate to drag culture. As drag queens refine their craft under the pressure of reality competitions, viewers also undergo a transformation—challenging their biases, broadening their perceptions of gender performance, and increasing their appreciation for drag as a legitimate art form. This phenomenon aligns with Stuart Hall's (1997) notion of representation as an active process—wherein media portrayals do not just reflect reality but shape how people understand identities, social roles, and cultural expressions. Filipino drag queens, once

limited to underground entertainment spaces, are now part of a mediated discourse that redefines queerness, performance, and artistry in the national consciousness.

Sense of purpose. Getting into the experiences of drag queens, I observed that drag reality shows go beyond entertainment as these also serve as platforms to foster empowerment for and within the drag community. Through the art of drag, participants and performers tell stories that inspire self-acceptance, celebrate their existence, and encourage others to embrace their identities. Drag reality shows, while structured as entertainment space, serve as critical platforms for visibility, representation, and empowerment. Beyond performance and competition, drag queens utilize their artistry to convey stories of struggle, survival, resilience, and triumph effectively turning drag into a powerful socio-political tool. A big part of this fulfillment is that aside from its performance value, drag performance, according to Vasquez (2024), comprises stories – both struggles and victories – of how drag queens have suffered to “get to where they are now”.

*“I think we **were able to do it collectively**. I mean, we shared a lot of... I mean there were a lot of vulnerable moments there in the show. And that's just a part of it. It already **touched on a lot of issues**, I think, which is one of the reasons why I kind of like the first season because it was tackling a lot of very real issues in the queer community.... If you review the show, all of these **issues were translated into performance**.”* – Pura Luka Vega

*“Minsan kasi, hindi natin, hindi ko na, hindi ko na re-realize sa akin na: Ay shit, ayun na pala siya. Ano na pala? Parang, **I'm doing something for the community and I'm doing something for other people**.”* – Elvira

*“Well, there's more to it actually than just the RuPaul's Drag Race. I think part of it is also, you know, **showing people what I can do and that I do exist.**”* – Nicole Pardeaux

*“The thing is, kapag ikaw nag-drag ka na, **that alone means something, ibig-sabihin may pinaglalaman ka na. Una mong ipaglalaman siyempre ang sarili mo. Why are you doing this? Bakit mo ginagawa ito? Para kanino mo ba ginagawa ito?**”* – Margaux

In the Filipino context, where LGBTQ+ representation has historically been marginalized, drag reality shows provide a mainstream stage for these narratives, fostering both self-affirmation within the drag community and transformation among audiences. As Luten (2023) posited, drag performances with vibrant and unique stage appearances, albeit perceived as art and entertainment, also intentionally or unintentionally send messages and serve as a powerful representation of the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community. By telling or sharing their own life at the show, drag queens served their purpose to inspire others and touch the lives of their audiences.

This sense of purpose is heightened within the Filipino cultural and historical context, where LGBTQ+ visibility has traditionally been marginalized. While queer identities have always existed in the Philippines—seen in figures such as the babaylans, who often occupied non-binary roles in pre-colonial times—the impact of colonization and Western religious influence led to their erasure and stigmatization. The rise of drag reality shows has helped reaffirm and reintroduce queer identities into mainstream media, reshaping Filipino perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals. In this sense, the queens' participation in these shows represents a continuation of historical struggles

for queer recognition and a reassertion of gender fluidity in the Filipino cultural imagination.

Drawing from Judith Butler's concept of "gender being", I observed that drag queens challenge traditional notions of gender and showcase diverse queer identities through repeated behaviors, gestures, and appearances in reality shows. Likewise, based on their narratives, participants have also recognized their role in shaping queer narratives, giving visibility to issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community. This is evident in how their performances carry deeper meanings, often addressing discrimination, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ rights, whether explicitly stated or symbolically expressed through their portrayals. When asked about what are the issues and concerns that they want to convey, the drag queens revealed the following:

*"I think, iyong mga stories that I'd like to tell would usually **surround around queer issues**. Mostly to give people hope and to keep on just being who they are to not feel like they should be ashamed. These are queer narratives. So when a queer person gets to see these queer narratives in drag, I hope that they become more comfortable with who they are and probably also to **value themselves enough to do something in the society that prohibits certain things**. So ganun lang naman yon." – Pura Luka Vega "*

*"For me, I'm already **doing it for the community**. Because I've been an advocate of... First of all, gay rights, trans rights. All for SOGIE, yes. Yes for abortion, yes. So minsan kasi sa performance ng isang drag queens makikita mo iyang mga yan eh, pero **hindi nila sasabihin sayo na pinerform ko ito kasi ito ang gusto ko**. Sometimes, makikita mo sa drag queens iyon eh, na minsan baka may mas malalim pang ibig sabihin eh." – Margaux*

These testimonies emphasized a core function of Filipino drag to validate LGBTQ+ identities and empower others to embrace their truths. When audiences see the vulnerability, struggles, and victories of drag queens, they are encouraged to reflect on their own journeys. These performances are even more significant in social transformation looking forward. As I mentioned, not every little gay man or lesbian is fortunate to have a safe space within their households and schools since, even up to these days, there are children who are perceived to be or identified as LGBTQ+ who are becoming victims and vulnerable to human rights violations, violence, and discrimination (Custodio, 2019). As exposure to drag culture increases, so too does its influence on mainstream Filipino audiences. The more drag is visible in media, particularly in reality shows, the more people begin to associate with it, understand it, and eventually, accept it as a legitimate and meaningful cultural expression. This progression is critical in fostering acceptance toward LGBTQ+ people and reshaping societal perceptions of gender and sexuality.

Making sense of the Filipino drag queens' experiences in reality shows

As mentioned, my inquiry explored the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens who joined drag reality shows. Their narratives are analyzed using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, extracting meaning units from the interview transcripts and making sense of those without changing their perspective. My aim is to identify and interpret the themes that encapsulated the essence of their shared experiences, both through their words and the meanings I derive from them. These experiences not only

highlight the reality of drag performance in the competitive media space but also offer insight into how portrayals shape creative expression, identity, and personal growth.

From the given discussion, what are the critical insights from the narratives of Filipino drag queens who have participated in reality shows? In my analysis of the participants' accounts, three major themes and 10 sub-themes emerged:

Table 1. Major themes and sub-themes

Major themes	Sub-themes
Drag queens' views of their portrayals in drag reality shows	Empowerment through representation Promotion of drag queen's brand and craft Authenticity of framing the drag queens Visibility brought by the media
Media construction of drag queens	Stereotypes with narrow portrayals Setting standards for drag Commercialization of drag
Shaping creative expression with media portrayals	Constraints of competition format Drag skills development and personal growth Sense of purpose through storytelling

Ending with these themes, I found that queens recognized the role of media in providing visibility and empowering them through platforms that reach a broader

audience. Reality shows gave them opportunities to share their identities and showcase their talent, inspiring others in the LGBTQ+ community. However, alongside empowerment, the queens shared that media portrayal comes with constraints. Competition formats often prioritize drama or specific narratives over authenticity, reinforcing stereotypes and rigid standards.

Moreover, drag reality shows often commercialize drag, presenting it as entertainment for broader audiences. This process created financial opportunities but also widened disparities among queens. Local performers with limited resources felt at a disadvantage compared to those from wealthier regions or those with access to drag venues and costumes.

Despite these inequalities, many queens found creative ways to rise to the challenge and stand out, even within a competitive format. The most striking shared experience was the sense of growth and transformation many queens felt after participating in these shows. For some, the journey was a reflective process where they confronted personal flaws and learned to refine their craft and professionalism. Others described the competition as a source of internal motivation to exceed expectations and elevate their artistry.

The emergent themes highlighted that while media, in this case, drag reality shows, provide visibility and opportunities, they also constrain the queens' creativity and perpetuate inequalities. Lastly, their experiences underlined drag's potential, where personal stories and artistic expression can challenge societal norms, inspire change, and create lasting cultural impact.

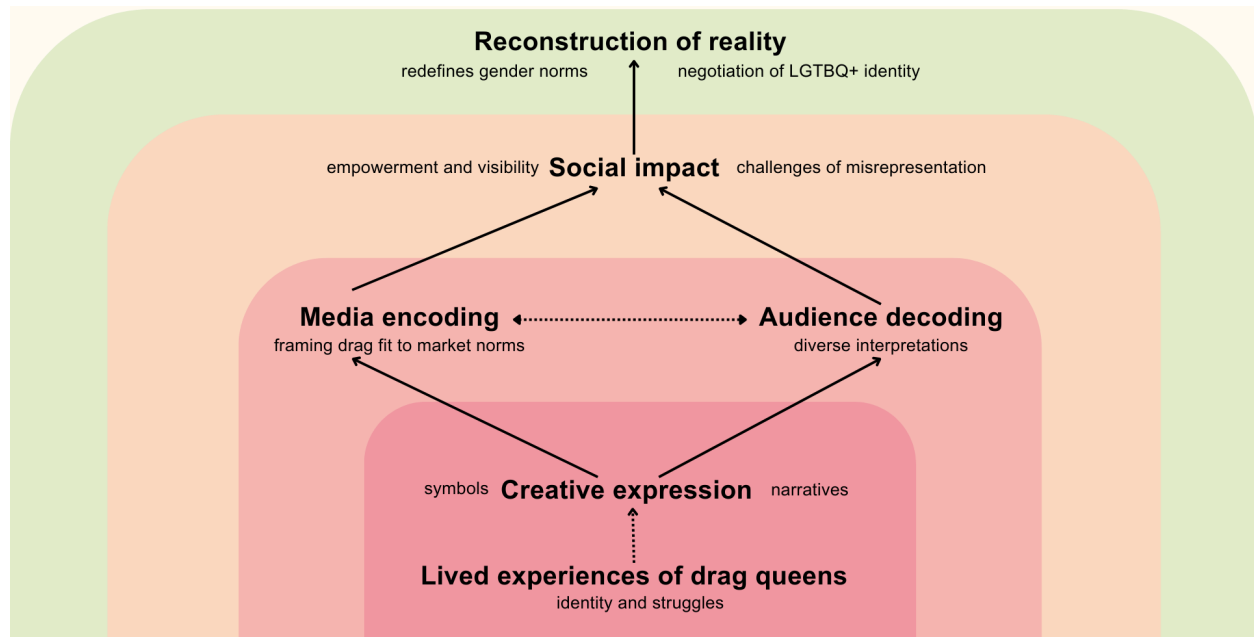
Representation of Filipino drag queens in reality shows through Hall's constructionist lens

To further explain the results of the interview, I also engaged Hall's constructionist representation of reality, which offers a complementary framework to interpret the deeper and larger context of their experiences, particularly in discussing the portrayal of drag queens in media.

Hall's constructionist perspective on representation explains that meaning is not inherent in objects or individuals but is constructed through language, symbols, and discourse. Reality shows like *Drag Race Philippines* and *Drag Den* provide a platform for Filipino drag queens to craft and communicate their identities. These portrayals are mediated through editing, branding, and storytelling, which reveal the relationship between representation, cultural norms, and societal values.

From their narratives and stories, I developed an illustration that structures how Filipino drag queens are represented in media through the lens of Hall's constructionist representation of reality. The figure explains the result of this study, which is anchored on the constructionist representation of reality as laid out by Hall. It integrates the lived experiences of drag queens, the role of media producers in shaping these narratives, audience interpretations, and the resulting societal impact, which ultimately contributes to the reconstruction of cultural norms surrounding drag and LGBTQ+ communities.

Figure 2. Constructionist view of representation of Filipino drag queens in reality show



At the root are the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, which form the foundation of their media representation. These experiences include their struggles and identity expression. Drag queens use their performances to challenge societal norms and express their authentic selves. However, their narratives are also shaped by challenges such as stereotyping, marginalization, and commercialization, which influence how they are represented in reality shows and other media. To navigate these societal pressures, they use drag as a form of resistance, creativity, and self-improvement.

In media encoding, producers play a pivotal role in framing these narratives to align with market demands and audience expectations. This involves selectively emphasizing aspects of drag that cater to mainstream appeal, such as glamor, drama,

and humor, often at the expense of authenticity and diversity. This framing can marginalize non-conforming drag styles and identities, such as transgender and nonbinary performers, reducing drag's multifaceted socio-political essence to mere entertainment and commercialization.

On the opposite side of the process is audience decoding, where viewers interpret these media portrayals based on their own cultural and social contexts. For LGBTQ+ audiences, these representations may serve as a source of empowerment and validation, fostering a sense of pride and solidarity. Conversely, mainstream audiences may perceive drag through a lens of stereotypes, associating it with flamboyance or comedy, which risks reinforcing reductive notions about drag culture and the LGBTQ+ community.

The intersection of encoding and decoding leads to the societal impact of media representations. On one hand, increased visibility in media provides a platform for drag queens to express themselves, spark conversations about LGBTQ+ issues, and challenge traditional gender norms, promoting inclusivity and visibility. On the other hand, the commodification of drag and the exclusion of marginalized voices within the community can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, limiting the broader understanding of drag as an art form and a creative expression.

Finally, the framework emphasized the reconstruction of cultural norms through media representations. Drag performances in reality shows act as cultural spaces where traditional notions of gender and identity are contested and reshaped. This process aligns with Hall's view that representation is not a passive reflection of reality

but an active site of negotiation and meaning-making. Through this ongoing cycle, drag queens contribute to transforming societal perceptions, advocating for greater acceptance and inclusivity of diverse identities.

Moreover, this cyclical process highlighted both the opportunities and challenges inherent in the media portrayal of drag queens. While media has the power to empower and elevate marginalized voices, it also bears the responsibility to represent these communities authentically and inclusively.

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In this inquiry, I explored the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, particularly focusing on their portrayals in reality shows and the profound ways these representations shape their creative expressions. Guided by a phenomenological approach, my study delved into how these portrayals shape their artistry, amplify their voices within the LGBTQ+ community, and reflect broader societal attitudes toward gender and identity.

Through in-depth interviews with four Filipino drag queens—each with distinct experiences in reality shows like *Drag Den Philippines* and *Drag Race Philippines*—I uncovered rich narratives that shed light on the drag queen's view of their portrayals in drag reality shows and how these shape their creative expression. The insights gained were categorized into key themes, following Giorgi's steps to analyzing phenomenological data: empowerment through representation, constraints of the competitive format, authenticity concerns on framing drag queens, media's role in constructing narratives, and the broader social inequalities present within the drag scene and the LGBTQ+ community, in a broader sense.

Immersing myself in the stories of Filipino drag queens who participated in Drag Den Philippines and Drag Race Philippines, I came to understand that drag is far more than an art form or a mere performance. It is deeply personal, political, and transformative. The queens I interviewed emphasized that drag is not about men dressing as women for entertainment. Instead, it is a deliberate act of identity construction, a medium for self-expression, and a means of reclaiming space in a society where gender and sexuality remain largely constrained by heteronormative views. For these performers, drag is a form of storytelling, a way to communicate unspoken narratives, those that are not usually told out of drag, that challenge traditional views on gender and empower both performers and audiences alike.

Through my interviews, I discovered that the motivations behind doing drag vary greatly among these artists. Some found drag as a natural extension of their existing talents—cosplay, makeup artistry, or dance—while others turned to drag as a way of making sense of their own identities. Yet, no matter their starting points, each queen eventually realized that their performances carried significance far beyond personal passion. Drag, as they described, becomes a declaration of existence, a way to assert visibility for the LGBTQ+ community in a society that still struggles with fully accepting gender diversity. For many, it is an assertion of defiance, a means of combating the same prejudices that have historically silenced queer voices. Drag is not just about wearing extravagant outfits and makeup, it is about telling stories, embodying different personas, and sharing the struggles and joys of being queer in the Philippines.

One of the most significant themes that emerged in this study is the role of visibility in shaping how drag is understood by mainstream audiences. As I listened to the queens' narratives, it became clear that drag queens actively seek bigger platforms not just for personal recognition, but to amplify the existence and struggles of the LGBTQ+ community. Reality television, especially in the form of drag competitions, has been an important means of making drag more widely accepted, if not, tolerated or adapted in our society.

Yet, as a former television producer myself, I am aware that media representation may sometimes be intervened by the producers. While exposure and visibility in reality shows increase opportunities and create space for discourse, they also subject drag queens to selective portrayals that may not always reflect the entirety of who they are. Some queens recounted how their participation in these shows led to a deeper sense of validation, with fans and audiences thanking them for inspiring self-acceptance and challenging gender norms. Others, however, expressed how they became aware of the limitations of media representation, recognizing that reality television often crafts dramatic narratives that highlight certain aspects of their personalities while downplaying others.

As I examined how the queens viewed their portrayals, I saw media exposure functions as both a source of empowerment and a tool that reinforces social expectations. Some queens felt grateful for how the shows framed their stories, appreciating the way their struggles and identities were given a platform. Others, however, spoke about the commercial orientation of reality television especially on how

producers structure episodes to fit specific entertainment formulas, sometimes exaggerating conflicts and dramatic moments for the audience or “TV appeal.” In some instances, contestants were framed as larger-than-life personas that did not necessarily align with how they saw themselves. Elvira, for example, reflected on how the show highlighted her more confrontational traits, making her appear colder and less compassionate than she is in reality. This tendency to emphasize “drama” mirrors the larger patterns in Filipino media consumption, where emotional narratives resonate most with mainstream audiences. This made me realize how reality shows, while providing significant visibility, also impose certain expectations on how drag queens should be seen and understood by the public.

A striking pattern I encountered was how drag reality shows create standards that influence not only audience perceptions of drag but also the way drag is practiced within the community itself. As I examined the queens’ experiences, I saw the influence of reality television in shaping public expectations of what drag “should” be. With the rise of these competitions, there has been an increasing emphasis on glamour, polished aesthetics, and high-budget productions—elements that are not always accessible to every drag performer, especially those unprivileged. The queens from outside major cities, particularly those from provincial areas, shared the challenges of meeting these expectations, often feeling the pressure to conform to Manila standards of drag that favor elaborate costumes, expensive wigs, and well-financed performances. Pura Luka Vega spoke about how economic disparities play a huge role in these competitions, explaining that participation often requires financial investments that not all queens can

afford. This reality revealed another layer of complexity within the industry—while reality TV has elevated the status of drag, it has also created economic barriers that exclude those who do not have the same level of access to resources.

Despite these challenges, the queens acknowledged that their participation in drag competitions led to significant personal and artistic growth. Through reality television, they gained greater confidence, refined their creative processes, and expanded their abilities as performers. Watching themselves on screen, they reflected on how they wanted to present themselves moving forward. Some described the experience as a form of mentorship, a “boot camp” that forced them to push the limits of their artistry. Seeing themselves through the lens of reality TV also made them aware of the broader impact they had on audiences. While the competition aspect introduced pressures that sometimes detracted from pure self-expression, it also provided a structured platform for honing their craft, experimenting with different aesthetics, and proving their versatility. Even though some found the format restrictive at times, they still saw it as a meaningful opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves.

I also came to understand how the media’s growing interest in drag has led to its commercialization. Many of the queens expressed appreciation for the way reality television has legitimized drag as a professional career, providing them with more opportunities than before. They acknowledged that media exposure allowed them to increase their booking or talent fees (TF), and gain a stronger position in the entertainment industry. However, with this visibility came the recognition that drag, which is described as an underground act of political expression and queerness, is now

a commodity—something that is packaged, branded, and marketed for mainstream consumption. While commercialization has expanded the reach of drag, it has also reinforced pay gaps, resource inequalities, and a hierarchy where only the most “marketable” queens reap the greatest benefits.

From the lens of the drag queens I interviewed, drag reality shows have played a significant role in constructing the public image of drag queens. Based on their experiences in joining Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den, the participants highlighted these shows are pivotal platforms that amplify drag visibility and empower drag queens to showcase their artistry while addressing LGBTQ+ issues. The emergence of these programs has facilitated critical conversations about gender and sexuality in Filipino society, challenging traditional heteronormative views that have long marginalized the LGBTQ+ community. Beyond entertainment, reality shows provided avenues for drag queens to communicate messages of representation, self-acceptance, and resilience, demonstrating that visibility in media can be a transformative force in expanding cultural narratives.

As I reflected on these findings, it became clear that drag is not simply about performance, nor is it just a career or a form of entertainment. It is a site of negotiation between artistry and marketability; authenticity and visibility; and personal identity and public perception. Filipino drag queens find themselves constantly navigating these tensions, pushing back against the constraints imposed by commercialized reality television while also embracing the opportunities it provides. Their journeys reflect the larger evolution of drag within Filipino culture, moving from underground gay bars and

community fiestas to digital screens and mainstream platforms. However, one thing remains constant that is, drag, at its core, is about representation. It is about the power of performance to disrupt norms, inspire transformation, and provide a voice for those who have long been marginalized.

Through this research, I have come to appreciate, through the lens of development communication, that drag is not just an art form but a force of social change. The stories of these queens revealed how the act of performance is inherently tied to resistance, how visibility is both empowering and limiting, and how the stage is not just a platform for entertainment but a space where identities are celebrated, contested, and redefined.

Through Stuart Hall's constructionist lens of representation, the findings of this study underscored the active role of media in shaping cultural perceptions of drag. Reality shows do not merely document drag queens' experiences but actively mediate and transform them through selective storytelling, audience engagement, and commercial imperatives. This dynamic process revealed both the empowering and limiting aspects of media visibility: while representation grants drag queens an influential platform, it also constrains their identities within the mainstream entertainment industry. As drag continues to evolve within the shifting landscape of digital and televised media, it remains crucial to examine whose stories are being told, how they are framed, and to what extent they influence social change.

Conclusion

My inquiry delved into the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, with a focus on how they view their portrayals in reality shows and how these representations shape their creative expression and societal visibility. Using a phenomenological approach, it revealed that drag reality shows, like Drag Den Philippines and Drag Race Philippines have been powerful platforms that give drag queens a chance to showcase their art, tell their stories, and represent the LGBTQ+ community in a bigger space or mainstream culture. This heightened visibility brought by the reality shows was utilized by drag queens to find deeper meaning in their craft, introduce themselves as LGBTQ+ people, and promote acceptance towards the community they belong. This is done by sharing by the struggles and issues faced by them and by the LGBTQ+ community as a whole.

Reflecting on the lived experiences of drag queens from a development communication perspective, it can be reasonably inferred that these shows offer valuable opportunities to amplify the voices of drag queens and promote broader acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community through media presence. By showcasing drag as an art form and as creative expression, these platforms have enabled queens to express themselves in an artistic way while also unintentionally and intentionally sending messages across audiences.

My exploration of the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens has also revealed the complex, transformative nature of drag, not just as an art form, but as a powerful platform for LGBTQ+ empowerment and social change. I have observed how drag, for many of the queens I interviewed, is deeply personal and ever-evolving. It is not simply

about performance or comedic impersonation, but a means of challenging societal norms and telling untold stories, especially in a country where LGBTQ+ identities often go unacknowledged in mainstream culture. I discovered that, for these queens, drag is a way to redefine gender and sexuality and address the marginalization of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in a heteronormative society like the Philippines.

Through the narratives of drag queens like Pura Luka Vega, Elvira, Nicole Pardaux, and Margaux, I learned that their engagement with drag transcends entertainment. It is a form of resistance and visibility that serves as a catalyst for personal and social transformation. Drag becomes a means through which LGBTQ+ individuals, in all their diversity, can find empowerment. They shared with me that being visible on a public stage offers not only the opportunity to express individuality and showcase talent but also to challenge the stigmas and stereotypes that continue to surround queer identities. I learned how through their performances, they communicate messages of resilience, acceptance, and the importance of creating space for others to be authentic. Reality shows, as much as they are platforms for visibility, become opportunities for these queens to educate audiences—particularly in Filipino households where LGBTQ+ identities are not always embraced—with the power to shape social change, both within and beyond the LGBTQ+ community.

However, as a development communication practitioner and a scholar observing these developments, I also recognized the constraints placed on drag queens within reality shows. While these platforms provide the visibility and validation that many queens long for, they also come with limitations. Reality shows tend to frame queens

within narratives that emphasize conflict and vulnerability for the sake of entertainment. It also often focuses on drama and competition, which can limit the full expression of their individuality and creativity. By editing and branding the contestants for television value or purposes, these shows sometimes reinforce stereotypes and set standards about what drag should look like. This limited scope, I noted, reinforces stereotypes about what is “acceptable” or “legitimate” within the drag community and risks marginalizing non-mainstream drag forms, such as camp, goth, or cunty, which hold significant meaning within Filipino cultural contexts.

This narrow portrayal of drag as an aesthetic competition, however, is met with a certain recognition of its commercial potential. While visibility through reality shows has allowed these drag queens to broaden their reach, I have found that this increased exposure often leads to financial benefits, opening up new opportunities for brand deals, and larger talent fees. This form of visibility not only establishes drag as a sustainable career but also reflects the evolving mainstream entertainment landscape, where profitability increasingly shapes the visibility and opportunities for LGBTQ+ performers. At the same time, I also noted concerns among the queens about how commercialization can create exploitative structures and unequal distribution of rewards, creating a competitive hierarchy that undermines some drag queens in favor of those who meet the show’s polished standards.

As a practitioner in development communication, the tension between these commercial constraints and artistic freedom stood out as an important finding. I observed that the drag queens I interviewed had an understanding of how reality shows

could restrict the organic creativity inherent in drag. They noted that the competition formats of these shows might force queens into roles or portrayals that do not entirely align with their authentic selves. Yet, despite these limitations, I also recognized how these spaces, however it is structured, serve as arenas for growth. Drag queens use these experiences to reflect on and refine their craft, adjust their personas, hone performance skills, and strategically navigate the pressures of competition.

In reflecting on the broader context, the contributions these drag queens are making to Filipino society by participating in mainstream media cannot be overstated. As these queens sharpen their skills and share their authentic selves with the public, they are simultaneously influencing public perceptions of gender performance, identity, and queer culture. This dynamic aligns with Stuart Hall's (1997) concept of representation as an active process: the queens I studied are not merely reflecting realities through their performances, but actively shaping how the public understands gender and identity.

Thus, drag is no longer simply an underground subculture but a public, mediated discourse that holds the power to shift societal attitudes and foster a more inclusive narrative about LGBTQ+ individuals. As Filipino drag queens reclaim visibility in the media, especially through reality shows, they are changing the national conversation. These performances are not only forms of personal expression but profound statements about the legitimacy of queerness, addressing deeply rooted cultural stigmas surrounding gender and sexual diversity. It is my hope that these queens' voices, amplified through reality shows, will continue to inspire reflection and push the

boundaries of what is considered acceptable in Filipino society, ultimately fostering greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ+ identities. As part of the LGBTQ+ community, I hope to be transcended further through the exposure and presence of Filipino drag queens in digital media and platforms, which are free from mediated narratives and the influence of capitalism.

Recommendations

My inquiry into the lived experiences and portrayals of Filipino drag queens in reality shows revealed both opportunities and challenges in terms of media representation, creative expression, and assertion of rights. Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

For media producers:

Media is a powerful tool for shaping societal perceptions, and drag reality shows have opened the door to conversations about gender, identity, and artistry. To align with the goals of development communication, media producers must prioritize authentic and diverse portrayals of drag queens.

- Producers should go beyond the spectacle and competition, showcasing the full range of drag artistry, including alternative forms like drag kings and non-glamorous styles, to foster a deeper understanding of drag culture.

- By avoiding over-dramatization and focusing on genuine storytelling, media can contribute to more inclusive and empowering narratives that respect the individuality of each drag artist.
- Special attention must be given to representing provincial queens and underprivileged performers, highlighting their struggles and successes to challenge the urban-centric view of drag.

For LGBTQ+ advocacy groups

This study's findings highlight the need for advocacy groups to leverage the visibility provided by drag reality shows to advance LGBTQ+ rights.

- Advocacy groups should collaborate with media producers to ensure fair and respectful portrayals of drag queens, using these platforms to address issues like discrimination and resource disparities.
- These groups can also create support systems for drag queens from marginalized communities by providing financial assistance, training, and platforms to showcase their talents.
- By focusing on community-based initiatives, advocacy organizations can use drag performances as tools for raising awareness about LGBTQ+ issues and promoting inclusivity in society.

For policymakers

Policymakers play a crucial role in shaping an environment that values and protects diverse creative expressions, including drag.

- The findings of my study emphasize the importance of anti-discrimination laws that protect drag queens and other LGBTQ+ individuals from unfair treatment in workplaces, media, and public spaces.
- Policymakers must also invest in regional arts and cultural programs to support drag as a legitimate art form, ensuring equal opportunities for artists from provincial areas.
- By recognizing the social and cultural contributions of drag, legislators can help shift public perceptions and foster a more inclusive society.

For the drag community

For drag queens, my study offers insights into how reality shows can be both empowering and limiting. The drag community should continue to advocate for authentic representation and support each other in overcoming challenges related to resource disparities and stereotyping.

- By building networks and partnerships, drag artists can share resources and mentor one another, particularly for those from less privileged backgrounds.
- Additionally, queens should explore alternative platforms, such as social media and independent productions, to tell their stories without the constraints of mainstream reality shows.

For the Development Communication field

The field of development communication stands to gain valuable insights from my study, particularly in understanding how media, in the format of drag reality shows, can be used to challenge social norms and empower marginalized groups.

- Development communication practitioners should recognize drag as a unique and powerful medium for advocacy. By collaborating with drag queens and LGBTQ+ organizations, they can design campaigns that address issues such as gender inclusivity, discrimination, and social justice.
- Participatory approaches should be prioritized, allowing drag queens to play active roles in shaping how their stories are told, ensuring that media content aligns with their lived realities.

For future research direction

This study highlights the need for further research in the intersection of drag, media, and development communication, particularly in understanding how alternative forms of drag and drag reality shows, as a medium, can contribute to cultural and social transformation.

- Examine audience perceptions to understand how audiences interpret and respond to the portrayals of drag queens in reality shows. This includes analyzing whether such portrayals reinforce stereotypes,

challenge societal norms, or inspire greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. Focus on the impact of these representations on viewers from different demographics, such as rural versus urban communities, to assess how context shapes reception and understanding.

- Explore how the visibility and exposure of drag queens in digital platforms shape public perception of drag, and gender, noting that it is free from the influence of capitalism.

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Annexes

ANNEX A

Request Letter for Interview



20 October 2024

Dear _____,

Rainbow pride!

I hope this message finds you well. I am Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad, a Master of Development Communication student at the University of the Philippines - Open University, currently working on my thesis titled *"Drag as Creative Expression: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Filipino Drag Queens and their Portrayals in Drag Reality Shows."*

The primary objective of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens, focusing on how they perceive their portrayal in drag reality shows and how these portrayals may influence their creative expressions.

To achieve this, I am writing to invite you to participate in this study as one of my key participants. The target participants of this inquiry are Filipino drag queens who joined drag reality shows such as Drag Den and Drag Race Philippines.

Your participation would involve a one-on-one interview, where you would have the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Your insights will be valuable in shaping the understanding of drag as a creative form of expression, and I would be honored to have you as part of this thesis.

Please be assured that your participation is entirely voluntary, and all information shared will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. With your consent, our conversation will be audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time should you feel uncomfortable.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, kindly reach out to me via email at nhtrinidad@up.edu.ph or phone at 09190945273. I would be more than happy to provide additional information or clarify any details regarding the study. Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to the possibility of discussing your experiences and insights.

Sincerely,

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad
Master of Development Communication
University of the Philippines - Open University

ANNEX B

Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

(Title of the Study)

Drag as Creative Expression: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Filipino Drag Queens and their Portrayals in Drag Reality Shows

Researcher:

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad

Master's Student

Master of Development Communication

University of the Philippines Open University

nhtrinidad@up.edu.ph

You are invited to participate in the research study titled, "***Drag as Creative Expression: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Filipino Drag Queens and their Portrayals in Drag Reality Shows***". Before agreeing to participate, you must understand the purpose of the study, what your involvement will entail, and how your personal information will be protected.

Please take your time to read through this consent form. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me before proceeding.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Filipino drag queens who have participated in drag reality shows. The research focuses on understanding their views on their portrayals in these shows and how these portrayals influence their creative expression.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will focus on your experiences as a drag queen, your participation in drag reality shows, and how media portrayals have influenced your performances and identity as a drag performer.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data collection. Recordings will be transcribed, and only the researcher will have access to the raw data. You

are free to skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality:

All the information you provide will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your real name to protect your identity, and all personally identifiable information will be removed from the transcripts and final thesis report. Should you wish to allow the researcher to use your drag name/persona, you may signify your permission. The data collected will be securely stored and will only be accessed by the researcher. Recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question, request clarification, or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or explanation.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. However, discussing personal experiences may evoke emotional responses. You may stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

The benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to share your unique experiences and contribute to academic knowledge regarding Filipino drag culture and representation in media.

Contact Information for Questions or Concerns:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation, please feel free to contact me at nhtrindad@up.edu.ph.

Consent:

I have read and understood the purpose and procedures of this study. I agree to participate and give my consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time. Further, I agree that the researcher may process my personal information and narratives in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. These may be used for research/academic/educational purposes only.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

ANNEX C

Digitally Signed Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

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Please take the time to read through this consent form. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me before proceeding.

Email *

nicolepardaux@gmail.com

Researcher:

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad

Master of Development Communication

University of the Philippines Open University

nhtrinidad@up.edu.ph

Consent Form

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Consent:

I have read and understood the purpose and procedures of this study. I agree to participate and give my consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time. Further, I agree that the researcher may process my personal information and narratives in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. These may be used for research/academic/educational purposes only.

Name you want to reflect in this study:*

Drag name

Real name

No name

Other: _____

If you agree, please signify your consent by typing your full name:*

Nicole Pardaux

Date: *

MM DD YYYY

10 / 28 / 2024

This form was created inside of University of the Philippines.

Google Forms

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Email *

nicolepardaux@gmail.com

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Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad

Master of Development Communication

University of the Philippines Open University

nhtrinidad@up.edu.ph

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Name you want to reflect in this study:*

Drag name

Real name

No name

Other: _____

If you agree, please signify your consent by typing your full name:*

Elver Klyne Phillip Molina Despa

Date: *

MM DD YYYY

10 / 31 / 2024

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Google Forms

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Email *

nicolepardaux@gmail.com

Researcher:

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad

Master of Development Communication

University of the Philippines Open University

nhtrinidad@up.edu.ph

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Name you want to reflect in this study:*

Drag name

Real name

No name

Other: _____

If you agree, please signify your consent by typing your full name:*

Emerson ralph b pascua

Date: *

MM DD YYYY

10 / 23 / 2024

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Google Forms

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Email *

nicolepardaux@gmail.com

Researcher:

Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad

Master of Development Communication

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Name you want to reflect in this study:*

Drag name

Real name

No name

Other: _____

If you agree, please signify your consent by typing your full name:*

Amadeus Fernando M. Pagente

Date: *

MM DD YYYY

10 / 23 / 2024

This form was created inside of University of the Philippines.

Google Forms

ANNEX D

Interview Transcripts

PARTICIPANT 1: PURA LUKA VEGA
Date of interview: October 23, 2024

R: So first of all, I would like you to briefly introduce yourself and your drag persona as Pura Luka Vega.

P: Okay. Hi. So my name is Pura Lucavega. I've been a drag artist since 2017. What else? I use drag as a way to kind of escape reality. That's initially how I would describe my intent for doing drag, but at the same time, it's also a way for me to tell stories that you don't normally able to tell in other means or in other spaces. So yeah, that's how valuable drag is for me and I've been doing it ever since.

R: What inspired you to start a drag since 2017?

P: Well, I think it wasn't like how I planned to do kind of, you know, engage in but it was more of an opportunity to do drag presented itself. I used to be a cosplayer back then. And then would usually have male characters to cosplay. but then in the cosplay world you kind of are allowed to gender bend, that's what they say. So some characters that are originally female can be portrayed as male and vice versa.

So there was a Halloween contest back in 2017 that na napanalunan ko because the previous year before there was a female cosplayer that won the male category. So I thought to myself na parang wait, if there's a female cosplayer that can win the male category, I should win the female category. But I just to challenge myself and then, and then Halloween of 2017, I also was joining drag cartel, which is a contest for amateur drag artists to just, you know, perform. And then it was such a good break from the normal life that I had, which wasn't giving me the exact freedom that I was hoping for.

Yeah, because you know, you realize when you're queer, there are certain things that you can't do, or there are certain limitations to how you can express yourself. So yeah, I was like, great. So I just kept on doing it and here I am.

R: So sa tingin ninyo po paano nakatulong itong pagda-drag ninyo para atleast ma-achieve iyong mga bagay na sabi nga ninyo kanina, hindi ninyo nagagawa.

P: Well, drag is a free-form type of art. So the way I see it, it's able to really just... you know, wala kasing judgement talaga eh when you're doing drag. And also very safe spaces. So it's living out a fantasy. So there are certain things that we can only fantasize now because it's not accessible in our reality. I've said this in a lot of interviews before, drag is a fantasy. So for example, we don't have SOGIE bill or we don't even have same-sex marriage. So ang tendency ko what if I was a bride or what the what ifs in my mind I'm able to explore in doing drag.

See what I mean? What if I was this or I was that? What if I was a cartoon character? What if I was a celebrity? What if I was a pop star? What if I was a fruit? So all these what ifs is something that is reality. It becomes reality or you get to access it or fulfill that fantasy in that short amount of time in a very specific surrounding. So that is powerful. That's really powerful because it's, you know, you're able to access it even if it's like just in a made-up world, you know. And I would rather have that than just continue on and accept the reality that I'm in. A reality that does not allow me to be fully expressed.

R: Noting that, you said iyong drag nakakatulong to live your fantasy become reality. Nung dumating ang mga reality show paano naman ito nakatulong sayo bilang drag queen?

P: Well, first and foremost, the drag reality shows is really just to somewhat erase into the consciousness of the people who watch it what drag is all about. Parang in a way, it's just exposure for people to also know that ito pala ang drag. But then again, reality shows have a tendency to, depending on who is watching, they might paint a picture that drag is limited to only this, which is not what we want to. But then again, I mean, may limitations naman talaga ang reality shows, so baka hindi naman maipapakita talaga ang kabuoan what drag is all about. But it's a start, you know? I mean, people, when they get to watch it, there's a conversation around it. People would at least know the amount of time and effort it goes into doing drag. So and the drama and all of these really very real issues that drag artists would face. So yeah, it's like I guess on one hand, it does provide an exposure, you know, because you and people get to hear your story. So that's how, yeah.

R: So what was your experience like in participating in the drag reality shows. Is this more empowering or are there problems that you encountered during your time in the show?

P: Well, when I did drag den naman, I was very aware of how sometimes these reality shows can catch you being vulnerable or they might take out of context, pero so far from what the production has done, wala naman, it was good. I think it was mindful. They were very mindful, mindful of not to kind of sensationalize whatever the drag artist has been going through. Cause sometime they do that for the sake of good TV. So I don't think it was in that anonaman, but yeah, I mean, I'm aware of sometimes, and I can't blame the edits if that would be the case, but I don't think that it was exploitative in any way. I certainly didn't think it was that way. So it was an opportunity for us to just be there to interact with other queens and to probably learn from each other and that's it.

R: So how do you think overall, based on your experience, how did Drag Den portrayed you as a drag queen? Did you show the people what you really want to express or what during your stay in Drag den?

P: Well, most of the things that I was able to showcase is a reflection of what I had. So I was very grateful for the format wherein we get to stay for the entire season. And I think,

why do I think that the format plays a crucial role? Because the format for the first season of Drag den allows everyone the same exposure. Because we get to stay even if we're at the bottom. So we get to stay, we get to tell our story and continue telling our story. That also includes showcasing some of the outfits that we have already prepared. Para di naman sayang. All of these designers that we're doing, you know, because the designers also help greatly in making the look so if we don't get to show it, parang nakakahiya naman. So the format is crucial. Hence for me, I was really grateful for being in drag den because I was able to show all of the looks. Pasala,at ko na lang to the people who were helping me through the competition.

Another... sorry, going back. What was the exact question again? Sorry. I got highly get lost.

R: Paano ninyo nakikita ang portrayal sa inyo ng drag reality show as drag queen?

P: Paano ba ako prinortray ng Drag den? Well, they have an idea of what I do as a drag artist and then they used it in how to package me or us in general and how the public should perceive. Kumbaga the branding side of drag is usually highlighted in the reality show. Of course we can do a lot of other things. But for example, para sa akin, ang description nila sa akin ay the, ano ba 'yon, heir description is the lady, sacred lady of Manila, something like that.

R: Is that something na ikaw nag-isip.

P: No its not from my end, it was them describing what I do as a drag performer. Which I don't mind.

R: Yeah, okay, so you don't mind that.

P: I don't mind that they have an idea of what I do and they have a branding or they put me in some sort of a category. Because that's just part of how probably to sell the show. You have to give, oh, itong yong ano, ito yong ganyan, ganyan. I mean, in any reality show. So this description that they had is, I guess, one way for people to remember who you are on TV. Yeah. But of course, the description is also has a tendency to be limiting because as drag artists, hindi lang naman iyon ang ginagawa namin.

R: In your case, paano mo tinanggap yong ganoong branding? Is it empowering for you or is it limiting you to do something that you think you would do?

P: I don't mind because that's how people would initially identify you as.... But I also am aware that as an artist, you're free to change it up. I mean, kung si Taylor Swift may era era, eh di may era ka rin. Walang pakialamanan, mag-era ka din. Baguhin mo kung gusto mong baguhin. Its kind of like that.

R: So during yong time ninyo sa drag drn mayroon bang mga stereotypes na napansin mo doon sa show na ginagawa sa mga drag queens

P: Not me in particular, but I'm aware of how drag queens are stereotypically portrayed in reality shows. Me, because I tend to go against the grain, I don't really like, I try to challenge these stereotypes. So sometimes there would be expectations of drag queens to only be a certain type wherein you know, its galmour, big hair. it's not always like that. I think there's a lot of in the drag scene that was not showcased or highlighted much because these are like not so well heard of in the world of drag. Like for example, we have drag kings in the world of drag. We also have alternative, they call it alternative drag because this is not your typical glamour drag. There's scary drag, there's stupid nonsensical drag, which is still drag. So ang tendency kasi, may power din kasi ang reality shows to kind of paint some sort of a standard, but there really isn't a standard in doing drag. So when people watch it, the tendency is, hala iyan pala ang drag. Pero hindi nila na-rerealize na someone does it differently. They'll probably say, that's not drag, that's not what I saw on TV. And yeah, so there has to be some sort of like an educating part. You know, there's an education somewhere that you need to get when you watch reality shows on drag.

Again, you can be fan of a reality show but not necessarily a fan of the art form. Kaya nga minsan there would be drag race fan lang 'yan, o dfrag den fan lang yan, but not a fan of drag, as an art. Kaya ang nangayayari, when they consume it, or when they're looking in the public spaces, wherein they see queens that don't necessarily have a TV show, madali nilang sabihin na, ay hindi naman drag 'yan, na parang, ano ba yon sino ba siya... Na naisip ko na mali naman. So, there's a tendency it might do that. And that's probably just an after effect of reality shows.

R: In your case, do you think you were able to showcase your true self during the show? Sa reality show na sinalihan ninyo?

P: Oo naman. I was given liberty of what I am going to present liberty and extent based rin on my capacity. Kasi, let's be honest, sometimes when you attend these reality shows, dapat may puhunan ka. And at the time, kahit ngayon naman, hindi naman ganoon kalaki ang puhunan ko. So I have to be strategic, I have to be smart about it. Kasi parang feeling ko its also a reflection of your status, economic or social, in making it in the, what do you call this, in the drag reality show. Like if you wanted to fare well, hindi mo talaga maiiwasan to consider all of these other factors like, mayaman ka ba? Marami ka bang magagandang costume? Aware naman ako na may ganoong factor. But then again, you really have to at least try, you know. So yeah, so I tried. I mean, I was the, I was the loser of the bunch, but I had fun, I had so much fun.

R: Itong mga portrayals, iyong sinasabi po ninyo paano pinportrayl ang mga draf queen, sa tingin ninyo paano naman nito shinape ang creative expression ninyo as a drag queen? May epekto ba siya? May implications ba siya kung paano ka nagpe-perform?

P: Yes, I think that's why parang may special soft spot ang darg den for me, because after the show, I got better in doing my craft. I get to, you know, some of my drag colleagues, colleagues, would help me in the design or the styling and the makeup, because my makeup was really not that good. It's still not very good in comparison to some of the queens, but it got better. And then you're also able to... I honestly would safely say that I think I got better after the show. So I would sometimes bleach my beard, na parang nagma-match ang hair sa beard. Kasi I realized when I was doing the show, hindi masyado ganoon kastricking ang beard color, which I still color naman, but there are certain colors because I feel... anyway this is more of the technicalities of doing drag so I got better after I did the show.

And it also opened up other opportunities or through areas wherein I can improve in terms of being or doing my art

R: You mentioned earlier that you started to drag to express yourself. Now that you're on a drag reality show and there are opportunities to perform, do you still apply the way you express yourself during performances? Or is it just part of the job, as a drag queen?

P: I think drag has... Drag is not the most high paying job out there. So it's important to realize, ako, honestly, this is how I see it. Hindi naman ako super yumaman dahil sa drag. I still have my daytime work. And I do. So I work at the Department of Health. Mondays to, Fridays, this is like a 9 to 5 type of job. So 8 to 5.

And then I only do drag on weekends. Sometimes on weekdays, but very rare. So I'm balancing two jobs because I know that when doing drag alone will not help me pay the bills. And to be honest, if you look at the salary of or kinikita ng drag queen, hind naman siya malaki. And in fact, mas marami pa nga kaming utang... costumes, make-up, so there's so much investment. But the return of investment isn't as big as what people think. We still very much rely on the tips. So why do we do it? I think I would still do it because passion is there. There's a deeper meaning into doing things. Hence, the intent of doing drag before has still remained to me. And even it got deeper because, even with the controversies that was in, sabi ko talaga, okay, so it is powerful. And you know that the people would hear you out, should hear you out. So basically, malalim siya sa akin. Hindi lang siya a means to make ends meet. But it's the reason why I kind of still do it is because you know the value, there's a deeper meaning in doing it despite it being not the most, what do you call this, the most glamorous or the most high earning type of job. No, not really. But you do it anyway, because it helps you. It helps the community. Well, you encourage the community to tell their stories. Ganoon lang naman iyong eh when you're doing drag, eh. We want people to be comfortable enough to tell their own story and to relate to the story that we're telling, even if the story is not necessarily theirs. But when they see someone do it, you know, sana we can encourage people to be like, kuwento ko iyan, mayroon kuwento rin akong parang ganyan. Or mayroon akong kwentong puwedeng ikuwento sa mga tao. Parang ganun, parang ganun lang naman ang nakikita kong purpose of doing drag.

R: For you, the purpose of doing drag. So in your case bilang si Pura Luka Vega ano ang sotry na gusto mong i-teel sa iyong mga audience or mga fans.

P: Well, marami. Taray. Sa mga fans ko, char!, no, but I think, iyong mga stories that I'd like to tell would usually surround around queer issues. Mostly to give people hope and to keep on just being who they are to not feel like they should be ashamed. These are queer narratives. So when a queer person gets to see these queer narratives in drag, I hope that they become more comfortable to who they are and probably also to value themselves enough to do something in the society that prohibits certain things. So ganun lang naman yon. You just tell poeopl your existence. I see you, you can do something about it. I think that's a beautiful thing na you just try to empower people and make them feel special. On the surface, it's like, oh we're having fun, yes. But, if lalaliman mo, it's really just to celebrate your existence na bakla ka, may silbi ka sa lipunan, yeah, all of these things.

R: So, were... Are these things ay na-share ninyo during your time in Drag Den? Kumabag those queer stories, were you able to tell that using the platform of Drag Den?

P: I think we were able to do it collectively. I mean, we shared a lot of... I mean there were a lot of vulnerable moments there in the show. And that's just a part of it. It already touched on a lot of issues, I think, which is one of the reasons why I kind of like the first season because it was tackling a lot of very real issues in the queer community. May it be financial or healthcare or discrimination and all of these things. Nandon naman iyon eh. If you review the show, all of these issues were translated in performance. When kunwari BBQ would say transphobia is a real thing. Or when Shewarma would say stop killing farmers... I was like, Ate, okay. But, iyon.

R.: What are your realizations in joining drag reality show?

P: My realization is you know, there's a pressure in reality shows to make it more about the competition. Which is very appealing, I guess. But I'd like to argue, it's very appealing for viewers to see drag queens competing for the crown or whatever. Pero im more, I'm leaning towards...it being supposedly just a platform for you telling your story. You know, kaya nga supposedly kaya nga siya reality show kasi it's supposed to give people a glimpse of your reality. So parang feeling ko my realization is sometimes it's TV. There's a tendency for it to be a little, how do I say it, glossy. It might not capture the entirety of your reality, but at least it would give people an idea of what your reality is all about. Not much on the competition, because all of these queens who have joined reality shows, I think are really just great. But ang tendency kasi kapag reality shows with a competition type of format, parang, it would say na ah mas magaling ito kasi mas nanalo na siya. No, not necessarily. We have good days and bad days, but it's not our entire track record, kumabaga, our portfolio. And I would also think na sometimes the real race is after the show. Or the real competition is the real life. That's life is the competition, girl. It's not a show. So yeah, I think iyon ang mga na-realize ko, it's just a show. It's not supposed to dictate how you do your drag. And also, I've told MC in the show, Isabi ko, ate you're

bigger than the show. It iyong nag-walked out siya. Sabi ko, I'm sorry if I've heard that. But whatever stress that you're... the most stressed among all of us is probably MC. But I was like telling her, girl it's just a show. Like calm your tits. Ayun siguro may ano lang kasi ako, may parang, I already have in my mind an idea na they'd like to see something, a version of you. So you have to be very aware of how it would translate. But yeah, so far I'm happy with how the show is.

R: So you were mentioning earlier that drag helps you express your stories. Tapos na-amplify ito ng show. How do you think these shows could help us as a community? The LGBT itself?

P: Well, I think representation, it does matter. So when drag is represented well, and it also gets to capture the different drag and different people who do drag, you know, so I'm happy when they get to cast quirky queens or trans queens, you know, like something that is not the ordinary so people would be more comfortable with the, you know, even within the queer community na, iba-iba pala. Parang importante iyon eh. Hindi naman pwedeng gantiong klasend drag lang or something. So you have to showcase different drags because people are also very different. I hope that in the future of these reality shows they get to do that.

What else? The role in the community is really visibility. So it starts there and then when people get to see you, there's a chance that they will listen to you. And when they listen to you, there's a chance that you can also highlight our struggles, therefore also highlighting what we need to have. You know, kaya nga SOGIE Bill, hanggang ngayon, my God. People fail to realize that we are, how we are as drag artists because we want to have ano, we're fighting for something. It's not just fantasy or something. The fantasy that we have is actually also resonates with other people. Anyway, ang point ko lang naman is, it plays a huge part within the queer community, but more importantly, it educates people who are not necessarily queer on queer struggles, queer narratives. And for them to think that our struggles is something worth watching para ma-realize nila why we're actually fighting for the things we fight for, right.

R: Last na lang po, itong mga messages na ito, paano ninyo tinatranslate into performance? Paano siya nagre-resonate? Paano ninyo sinesend ang message?

P: Well, it's more of... it has to be personal. So that's how effective a performance can be if it's personal. And then another thing is, how would you want the performance to be translated? So of course, it's not always polished all the time. But, if you have an idea, you write it down. And then you also have to think of your audience. What type of audience do you have? How would they consume? Whatever you bring out there. So I think that's what makes, you know, I think you just need to be very aware of how you present your performance and how it will be received. And just do it. If you feel so strongly about it, just do it. You're also allowed to have leg room for some errors. And that's just part of who you are as an artist or as human. Okay lang naman magkamali sa mga performances. Kaya nga eh, actually I encourage people to make mistakes in their

performance so they can learn that, okay, that works. Okay, that doesn't work. So be experimental, more bold, all of these things.

R: Okay. Pura, sorry, mag-end lang yung meeting natin.

R: So going back po. last question ko na rin ito. what is your advice for future drag queens?

P: Taray. I'd like to, you know, make people, Sorry lets me just organize my thoughts. I'd like the future drag queens or the baby queens to be more courageous, to be hopeful, to not underestimate the power that they can harness in doing drag. Because you want them to be comfortable in just telling their stories because we have a lot of stories that we need to tell people. Paulit-ulit ko sa storytelling because it's really, you know, for, we don't, some of we don't necessarily have the voice because kasi, so if you have an opportunity to take charge of your narrative, do so. So I'd like the drag community in the future to be more ballsy, be more courageous. Just, just, just do it. Yeah and have fun. You can't do drag if you're not having fun so please have fun. It's not always super like serious. I mean we're serious about you know entertainment but it's also it's supposed to also be fun for you. It's supposed to be a good experience for you and for the people who are watching it. So yeah, patuloy lang ang sining, ang pagbibigay saya, and patuloy lang ang paglikha at pagpakita sa tao kung sino ang tunay na ikaw. Char! Ganun! Ganun tayol!

Imagine if you were the... So imagine if you were this drag queen that performs in a really small space. And then you see queens in the TV and then you might have feelings of inadequacy. Like, why is there a show? Am I okay? Can I do this? And how will it be consumed? It also has an effect on the consumption because people who watch you, you will be compared to what they see on TV. Kaya minsan pa naman ang drag queens naiirita n kapag sinasabihan na parang kamukha mo na si Plastique. Ako naman hindivnaman ako magrereklamo, maganda naman si Plastique eh. The mainstreaming of something as drag, as free as drag, has an effect to how people would consume it now. And you know, there will be standards, there should be no standards, magkakaroon ng differences in the pay, na dapat wala naman talagang differences in the pay. The aim supposedly is to lift. We want the queens who don't necessarily have a show to have a bigger pay because it's hard to do drag. Pero ang ending tuloy, its kinda exploitative siya. Bakit kita babayaran ng mahal wala ka naman show. Ganun ang dating. So parang felling ko, ate mali iyon. Maliit na nga ang kinikita ng drag queens tapos i-aano mo pa, babaratin mo pa o ie-exploit mo pa sya. Though hindi naman talaga siya kasalanan ng show, but it might also exacerbate the problem with the discrepancies and all of these things. Like, wala naman talagang standard like There's no standard to... I think that's also another topic to also... on itself, how do you price a performance? Magkano ba talaga. So, ayun.

R: you mentioned exacerbating this issue. So, in your opinion, how does the portrayal of you as a drag den challenge or contribute to the societal perceptions that LGBT community or drag queens receive?

P: It's a loaded question. How does the portrayal of me as a drag den and how I was perceived? Is that it?

Well, for starters, because it was always in context when they portrayed me. I think they had a better idea of what I do as a drag performer. In fact, I didn't think they... I think people got to understand why I do these things when they get to watch the show because they have a better context to it. I think the show was able to capture kung ano ang pinagdadaanan ng mga performers, ng mga drag queens. Kaya naman feeling ko, they understand us better, I feel. But, ewan ko, mahirap din kasi. Hindi naman lahat ng tao ay willing to open thei minds or you know. And that's just how it is. Sometimes when there's a television show and they don't like it, they're free not to watch it. They can just shift to another channel. But if they do get to watch it and they get the point, great. I cant speak for the viewers of what We're trying to put out there but so far from the reviews that I've heard from people who reached out to me, ano naman eh, it was on a positive note. They were able to get something really good out of it and it's great.

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PARTICIPANT 2: MARGAUX
Date of interview: October 23, 2024

R: My name is Emerson D Pascua and my drag name is margaux nag-start ako sa pada-drag, influence kasi siya ng friend ko nung bata pa ako lagi akong nanonood ng rupauls drag race so meron na akong background, ah ganito pala yung dragalam ko na siya before, pero yung pinakanag-push talaga saakin ios yung friends ko influence talaga siya, so ayan siya dun ako nag-start, nag-start ako sa drag turtle nagtuloy-tuloy tapos Dragden ayun.

P: Influence po ni sorry...

P: Influence ng friends sila shawarma, minti yeahh.

R: So how long na po kayo nagda-drag?

P: Actually, hindi ko na nga matandaan eh pero I think it's more or less two years.

R: Two years ago. Pwede niyo pong ipakilala o introduce yung Drag persona niyo as Margaux?

P: as Margaux?

R: yeah opo.

P: ah okay, Hi! Everyone my name is Margaux, and I'm 25 years old and I'm a professional Vix Stylist and ahh also "heiress to the throne" charot..

R: First, paano niyo po dine-describe yung drag niniyo as margaux and paano niyo siya pine-present sa mga tao?

P: Si Margaux kasi hindi na niya kailangan gumawa ng bagong persona eh kasi way before ko ma-develop yung personality ko ngayon kung ano si margaux ganun siya dati

eh, I mean ganun ako dati eh, gets ba so parang natutunan ko nalang din kumalma around people kasi minsan yung personality ko nga as a drag queen hindi nata-translate ng maayos sa ibang tao eh sometimes come up as mayabang, maldita but the thing is it's all a character yun yung hindi kasi nage-gets ng tao eh it all about character, kumbaga parang may mga drag queen na ahh tawag dito yung personality wise, hindi naman talaga lahat kami mabait diba, hindi pwedeng lahat mabait, so yeah ayun siya.

R: Para sa'yo how do you define drag? Paano niyo po siya biniobigyang kahulugan yung drag?

P: Ah yung drag kasi ah uhm ano to malawak to, okay uhm for me ang meaning ng drag is kung paano mo mai-translate yung sarili mo in an art form na pagnakita ay bago to ay maganda yung ginagawa niya hindi, minsan nga hindi ganun yung translation eh parang ano ba 'to parang gago naman to, but the thing is the fact na you are transforming yourself into an another character you are doing drag as long as uhm kahit nga walang wigs eh you can still do drag, ano siya, may tawag dito ehh subjective. Ang drag yan subjective. Kung paano mo siya i-portray iyon ang drag para sayo. For me ang dag ko, kailangan plaging maganda ang buhok for the branding, of course, wigs by margaux, polished look, makeup siyempre, perfect sizing, perfect proportion, iyong ang drag ko. Pero sa ibang tao, ang drag nila, sa iba kong mga friend, ay alternative drag queens, drag artists. Ano sila mostly ang mga drag nila ay ayaw nila ng malinis, ayaw talaga nila ng pulido, kailangan may gulo. And sometimes, hindi iyon nagtatranslate sa akin iyon eh. Pero at the end of the day, that's out of my control and I still have to support them because they love doing that. Right? That's how it is.

R: Pero aside from those looks, those make-ups, that face, may deeper meaning ba ito kapag nagpe-perform ka ng drag?

P: Ako, for me, the thing is... kapag nga nagsuot ka na ng wig, kapag nag-drag ka, you are already representing something. Kapag ba nag-drag ka kailangan may nirerepresenta ka, kapag nag-drag ba kailangan may involved ang politics, kailangan may pinaglalaban ka. Hindi naman sa lahat ng pagkakataon may pinaglalaban ka. Minsan puwede ka namang, alam mo yon, gusto mo maglaro lang ng ganda-gandahan, that's fine too. Pero alam mo kasi sometimes we ask from queens too much... na kumbaga bakit wala kang ganito, bakit ganyan ka lang. Meron na tayong mga queens for that, mayroon na tayong mga political queens, mayroon na tayong comedy queen. Ang pagiging drag queen ay isang malaking spectrum ng iba't ibang klase ng performance, iba-iba talaga siya. For me, when I do drag, pine-perform ko lang ang mga piyesa na gusto ko, iyong mga napi-feel ko. Halimbawa broken ako ngayon, oh di ba magper-perform tayo ng pang-broken. Kapag masaya eh di pang-masaya. Kapag meron tayong guest na pumunta sa club na artista, minsan iper-perform natin ang mga song nila, para ma-feel nila na 'ay welcome ako rito'. Iyong mga ganun kasing klase, hindi naman kailangan sa lahat ng pagkakataon ay may pinaglalaban ka. The thing is, kapag ikaw nag-drag ka na, that alone means something, ibig-sabihin may pinaglalaban ka na. Una mong ipaglalaban siyempre ang sarili mo. Why are you doing this? Bakit mo

ginagawa ito? Para kanino mo ba ginagawa ito? And by that alone, I think that's okay. Okay na iyon. Hindi naman tayo kailangan laging political.

R: Right. On your side, kanina sinabi mo na kapag nag-drag ka na, ibig sabihin you are representing something, and you're doing it for something. Ano iyong something na iyon?

P: For me, I'm already doing it for the community. Because I've been an advocate of... Wait, sorry. Nakalimutan na. First of all, gay rights, trans rights. All for SOGIE, yes. Yes for abortion, yes. So minsan kasi sa performance ng isang drag queens makikita mo iyang mga yan eh, pero hindi nila sasabihin sayo na pinerform ko ito kasi ito ang gusto ko. Sometiems, makikita mo sa drag queens iyon eh, na minsan baka may mas malalim pang ibig sabihin eh. Kasi pwedeng nag-perform ang drag queen ng malungkot na kanta, tapos hindi mo makita iyong hugot, hindi siya nag-tatranslate sa iyo. Alam mo kapag ganun ini-stalk ko ang mga drag queen, ano kayang nangyari sa buhay nito, bakit nalulungkot siya. Ah ayun na-gets ko na. Kaya minsan, minsan ganun siya. I dont knwo if nage-gets mo ko. Pero iyon siya.

R: Pero sayo sa part mo paano mo tinatranslate iyong ganun. Like for example kanina nabanggit mo iyong pagdadrag mo minsan it translate your emotion. Ngayon paano mo iyon inincorporate sa performance mo para maiparamdam sa mga nanonood iyong emosyon.

P: Kailangan talaga may hugot eh, hindi pwedeng wala kasi makikita mo iyon sa performance kung may hugot siya o wala eh. Kapag alam mo iyon, kapasg pinanood mo isya tapos parang hindi ka nya nahawakan hindi ka nya na-touch, may ganun eh. So kailangan talaga may hugot. Number one ang hugot. Puso. Kahit pa napakasayang kanta niyan kailangan may hugot ka pa rin, hidni pwedeng wala talga. Kasi kailangan bawat lyrics bawat beat, iyong musicality mo i-develop mo siya. You grow as you get old. Ang kapag may experience ka na kumabaga parang you culvitate that, ang i-ano mo siya pagyamanin mo, pakiramdam mo. Saka kapag nagpe-perform ka, huwag iyong kung ano-ano ginagawa sa stage. Kahit nga nagpapatawa eh may hugot iyon. Alam mo sila Elsa, nage-gets ko iyong hugot niya. Hindi naman kailangan emosyonal ang hugot. Yong hugot niya, iyong perfromance niya na asaya, ganun iyong environment na meron siya sa kanila.. KUmbaga dinadala niya iyon sa stage na "ah ganito sila kakuwela saliugar nila, ang saya naman. Kaya kumabaga minsan kailangan talaga hugot, hugot talaga.

R: Which you always do in your performance, kailangan everytime na mag-per-perform ka sa stage o sa drag reality show kailangan ma hugot lagi?

P: Hindi. Hindi kasi minsan. Sa first set, go, hugot tayo, Kasi minsan, alam niyo naman. Though hindi ko naman naranasan to pero naranasan ko siya minsan kasi kapag pagod ka na, alam mo may ibang mga queens na nakaka-handle nito nang maayos eh, such as sila Precious, sila Marina, Imagine-in mo, ito na lang, sila nagper-perform sila almost

every day. And that is so draining. And for them to do another show the day after... ako nga isang show lang pagod na ako. So minsan talga nasa sa iyo rin iyong eh kung paano mo siya ihahandle. Ako kasi, Im gonna be real honest, hindi ako, like, kapag wala ako sa mood, wala ako sa mood. Sorry, Im the type of queen na talagang magmamaoy, hindi ako magsho-show, ayoko na. May ganun ako before. Pero ngayon naiwasan ko na iyon siya. Pero iyon lang, like I said kanina kailangan may hugot pa rin, pero hindi naman kasi, minsan kasi may mga factors na kailangan ka i-consider, iyong pagod, iyong stress. Eh paano kugn wag naman sana, may mangyaring hindi maganda, makakapag-perform ka ba. I hope you get where I am coming from. Kasi ito yong sagot nang hindi takot mawalan ng career. Charot!

Hindi na sa pagpapakplastik. Kasi I think some of the girls would say na kumabaga dapat very passionate ka. Girl, no, its 20204 you have to acknowldege na kapag pagod ka pagod ka, At hindi lahat ng tao kapag pagod na kaya pang lumaban, minsan kailangan ng pahinga.

R: Ngayon lets discuss naman what was your experience like participating in drag reality show?

P: Actually ito. Sobrang saya niya.. [confidential]

Ill break it to you in a way na hindi masyadong harsh.

R: If this includes people, or certain producer pwede naman natin hindi isama.

P: Ah no naman. Sige go.

Ang masasabi ko lang. First number one, masaya kasi nakita ko, na-meet ko actually ang mga sisters ko na hindi ko inaasahang makikita ko. And number two, the experience is really fun, kasi nandoon si manila luzon. Hindi naman lahat may opportunity makita si Manila Luzon almost everyday kami nagshu-shoot. We shot Drag Den season 2 for 2 weeks lang. 2 weeks lagn or more. But not everyday nagba-bonding kami, because pagod nga kami, iyong iba nasa hotel na lang. Iyong ibang na-disqualify umuuwe na lang. Pero yeah, nasan na ba tayo? Ano ang question natin, how's my experience?

P: Overall masaya siya, but I didn't really expect that that's how the industry works. Hindi ko ba... alam mo, kumbaga parang minsan, ano siya eh, may ano talaga, may mga luto eksena talaga. Im not saying na nagyari ito sa drag den pero iyong ibagn show, hindi ko rin sinasabi sa drag race. Pero sa ibagn show talaga, may ibang lutuan na nagaganap. Kumbaga parang in your face, in your face talaga?! Ganito ninyo kami lalaruin? So, yeah, nakakapagod siya. Kaya nga ako nag-self eliminate. If you know what I am saying. Nakakapagod siya kasi a lot of the cast, at that time, tey were sayingbakit ganun, bakit ganyan. [confidential]

P: Happy naman talaga ako, I swear, happy ako, only because of those people na nakasama ako sa set. Pero on how they played with us, during the show? I dont like. Iyon lang

R: So feeling mo ba paano ka pinortray ng drag realty show?

P: I have no complaint. Walang halong echos. Kasi looking back, ah okay, that time, parang kerri naman, na siya ang mag-win.

Na-portray nila ako.. Hidni ako makapagsabi na sinira nila image ko, wala, walang ganun, wala talagang ganun sya. Ang pinaka ano ko lang is okay ako, tama lang kung anong naipakita sa akin. In all honesty we were given two months to prepare, matagal iyon, matagal iyong two months na iyon. Pero kasi iyong time na iyon, Im not making excuses pero nagkaroon kami ng problem with the production of the things. Kumbaga, parang... ako kasi im a firm believer na na if the thing is for you everything will align, alam mo iyon. So iyong time na iyon feeling ko drag den is not for me. I mean going in the competition wala talaga akogn expectation na mananalo ako dito, ako ang mananalo dito, walang ganun. Wala talaga, alam ko talaga kasi kumabaga its all a game. Pero hidni ko talaga ine-expect na ganoon pala ang industry pa-showbiz. Pero iyon, yon lang naman.

R: How would you describe iyong pag-portray sa iyo as a Filipino drag queen ng drag reality show na sinalihan mo? Is it the way you wanted, or is is something na limiting

P: Tinulungan nila akong i-promote ang brand ko. Pero nakuha naman nila iyong side ko na parang sometimes hindi ako palaging matapang and may pinanggagalingan iyong tapang ko. Hindi ako matapang dahil matapang lang ako, matapang ako kasi nangyari sa akin itong mga ito. At kinailangan kong matapang para malagpasan ko. And naikwento ng drag den iyon nang maganda na to the point pati ako humahagulgol nung napanood ko. Ang ganda kasi ng background music.

Pero yeah super happy ko na they were able to tell my they were able to edit my story na ikunwento ko na hindi nila iniba, wala silang dinagdag, hindi nila ako hinayaan na maging sobrang kawawa, hindi rin nila ako hinayaan na magmukhang sobrang matapang. Nage-gets mo ba? So, iyong vulnerability ko, nakita pa rin siya ng mga tao... na ah hindi naman pala siya palaging maldita, hindi naman pala siya palaging masama ugali. Pero yeah, aside from that, siguro isa sa mga na-portray din sa akin ng drag den is yong elimination ko, nahuli nila iyon. My God. Alama mo ba ang akala ko mabilis lang aklaa ko hindi na nila iasasama sa edit. Kasi nung pinifilm namin yong 30 minutes ata kasama ang pause, I was yapping for 10 minutes. Imagine mo iyon, na-cut out nila, shortened. Pero sa 10 minutes na iyon I was just thinking, my sisters, parang ganon.

But yeah, na-edit out nila iyon, nang alam mo iyon, kasi at firsdt iisipin ng tao ay villain ako eh, which I am, nagpaka-villain naman talaga ako eh. Hindi ako nag-hold back sa mga emotions ko, eh. Pero at the end of my journey in drag then, they were able to turn the table around and make the people see na oh, hindi lang siya maldita. And kasama na doon ang paghandle nila sa show, kasi nila nila kami masyado prinessure eh. So iyong sama nang ugali ko level 5 pa lang siya, sa show. Hindi nila, kumabaga inaano rin nila ako na parang “uy kumalma ka na” Ginaguide nila kami na parang kami pa rin ang in control.

R: So feeling mo naman na-portray ka nila the way you wanted to.

P: yeah, oh fair naman.

R: Pero sa tingin mo mayroon bang certain stereotypes na nakita mo within the show?

P: wala. Well, iyong sa ano, iyong sinabi lang ni Kalad Karen sa Drag Race, iyong sa mga provincial queens dapat kasing galing o mas magaling kayo kay Khianna. Alam mo kumbaga bakit kasi natin, inaano, like, may tawag dito eh. Pinepressure iyong mga provincial queens. Pare-pareho lang naman kaming drag queens, nagkakatalo-talo lang kami sa resources. Everything is here in the main city which is Manila. So kumabag, inaano nila na parang ang chaka ng drag ninyo kasi wala kayong designer diyan na magagaling, hindi. Alam ninyo if you are going to put people on certain standards such as Khiana, dapat lahatin mo 'di ba. Kumbaga, hindi lang si Khianna. Kasi sa totoo lang si Khianna, ang dami-daming magagaling dito sa Manila, na mas magaling si Khianna kaysa sa kanila. I mean iyong talent, iyong rawness, kahit hindi na nga sa experience, eh. But the way Kiana presented herself, too much. Masyadong mataas. And maybe that's the reason why nasabi ni KaladKaren. But I know she means well. I think si apologized naman na. Pero iyon ang hindi ko bet, bakit parang inaano natin ang mga provincial queens. Dami-dami rin dito sa Manila na hindi magagaling, ang papangit ng damit, ang papangit ng make up. Bakit mga probinsyana at probinsyano lang?

R: Kumbaga ang pagtingin sa drag hindi naman ito kung saan ka nanggaling. Kumbaga, iyong mga drag queens are all equal in their performance, whether galing kang probinsya or sa manila.

P: Unles you're Marina Summer. Ayun.

R: Pero sa tingin mo iyong pag-portray sa iyon, dito sa experience mo sa drag den, mayroon ba siyang impuwensya sa kung paano ka nagda-drag ngayon? Or during the show itself, may pagbabago ginawa ka para atleast makagpag-adjust ka sa kung paaano ka nila gusto ipakita.

P: Ito sa iyo ko lang gusto i-chichika to ha. You know what, nagpa-fillers ako. Other girls would say, dapat kapag nakita ako sa TV dapat maganda ako. No. I am promoting something which is

cabaret aesthetics. Kaya ko siya ginawa. I really wanted to look like namamaga ako sa show, tho, not so much. Hindi ganun iyong maga na ineexpect ko, sobrang namaga ang panga ko nun, which is nagkaroon din ng effect iyon sa akin...

Actually, wala eh, wala silang naitulong. However, iyong experience ko sa show, para siyang habang nangyayari siya, natutulungan ko ang sarili ko, kung ano ang mga dapat kong iimprove, mga dapat kong i-adjust sa drag ko. Iyong gma sister ko tinulungan din nila ako sa iyong sa makeup ko nga wag masayado maputi, nagrefer sila sa akin ng

brand. So yeah, iyon after drag den, may growth akong na-feel talaga sa ano ko, sa drag ko, even sa sarili ko. Iyong mga hindi ko dapat gawin, mga di ko dapat sabihin naiiwasan ko na siya.

Actually the show really grounded me. It grounded me in a way na, napanood ko kasi sarili ko, so iyon, oh my God, ganoon ako kawalang hiya. Sorry. Alam mo after that, na-realize ko na i dont wanna be this. Add ko lang din na I'm really, really thankful na napakita ko ang namamaga kong panga kasi hindi na ako nakikilala ng tao sa labas. Nag-work siya actually, ito yong sinasabi ko sayo kanina, nag-work siya kasi plano ko iyon. Kasi alam ko talagang may lalabas sa aking hindi maganda, may masasabi akong hindi maganda. Might as well give myself a make over. Kasi ang fillers pwede naman siyang ipatanggal eh. So wherever I go, iyong mga friends ko sila nakikilala ako hindi. I love that. Kasi Im the type of person na hindi ko talaga kaya na may lalapit sa akin bigla tapos papa-picture. Kapag nga nakikila ako minsan hindi ako warm. Ako talaga iyong type of queen na hindi ako warm. Kasi whenever im outside lagi lang ako naka-earphone, i I'm thinking about all of these clients I have on my board and kung ano gagawin ko sa mga wigs nila. Doon kasi ako nakafocus. Then minsan kasi hinjdi ko nabibigay iyong warm, welcome for them. Kaya ganun siya.

R: Sa iyong palagay how does media, media as in drag den, construct your image as drag queen?

P: Actually, kung anong makita ninyo sa show just enjoy it. Ang tunay na laban ay pagkatapos ng palabas, iyon ang totoo. Ano pa ba?

For me, it's a different kind of introduction to the world of what drag queens are. Especially kapag nakilala na ninyo ang individuality namin, iyong identity namin, iba iba kasi sya eh. Sometimes people will love you, sometimes people will not. But at the end of the day, you just have to give it, that they're just queens. This is their world and we're just living in it. Parang ganun siya eh, Kumbaga parang hindi naman lahat ng queens mabebet-an ng tao lalo na pagdating sa TV kasi na-eedit eh. Hindi natin lahat kung ano iyong mga nasabi niyang totoo, dahil may na-cut out eh. But the thing is... Drag reality TV shows portray us in an image na nakadepende sa script ng show. Kung ano ang maigigng story line ng cast. Pero kasi you have to clear cards right. Kapag nakita ng mga producers, writers, na "ah this queen, this queen is really good. This queen is really friendly." Alam mo iyon, ibibigay nila iyon sa iyo eh. Kasi minsan may mga queens na kapag bukas ng camera ang babait. Pero kapag off cam na kung ano ano pinagsasabi. Pero yeah, iyon lang naman din, I just think that... the way Drag Reality TV shows portrays drag queens in the local scene. Nakadepende talaga siya sa storyline, and you just have to play your cards right if you're going to join a reality TV show, lalo na kapag sa drag, kasi ang Drag Reality TV show, kailangan natin ng drama. So hindi naman pwede lahat kayo mabait, so may mga queens talaga na hindi ka mabebet-an, may mga queens na mabebet-an ka, pero iyon nga ang bottom line, depende siya sa stryline.

R: But the storyline that you're talking about, the way the producers are making it, sa tingin mo paano siya nakatulong sa perception ng mga audience sayo bilang drag queen? Nakatulong ba siya o mas lalo siyang nagbigay ng challenge for you.

P: Hindi siya nakatulong. Ano siya more of like, hindi rin naman sya nakasira. Pero ano siya eh. Ako kasi I played my cards right. Yung lang yung sabihin ko. Kaya ginive talaga nila sa akin. Kaya kahit na ano na yung mga tao, mga namamalditaan sa akin, nakita naman nila yung side ko na ay di naman talaga siya maldita, love niya naman pala mga sisters. So ayun.

R: For you nalang, how do you define drag?

P: Drag. Just do whatever you want. That's the gist. Do whatever you want. Ito ang pinakamabigat na lesson na napulot ko kay vinas, noong di pa siya nagda-drag race. This is way back 2017. Huwag na huwag kang matatakot. Dont be afraid to put on so much makeup. Because it's... it's still drag kugn kaunti, pero alam mo iyon, the more you play with colors, doon ka matututo eh. so for me drag is unlimited options kung anong pwede mong gawin. Actually ang dami, nagi-spiral ako ang daming pumapasok sa isip ko. Pero sige, if iaano natin ang drag sa isang word. Its bizaar,It's always going to be bizarre because you don't see that everyday. Hindi ka naman palagi nakakakita ng drag queens. So whenever you see one, you'll question yourself, ay ano ba siya? Drag queen ba sya? Sometimes you get confused but it is what it is. Nage-gets mo ba?

R: Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience in Drag Reality Show? And how did it shape or shape your identity as a drag queen? Making sense of all the experiences you had during your time sa drag den.

P: Well, lahat naman ginawwa ko sa show, hindi ko naman na siya ginagawa. So let's leave it at that. Hidni ko na gianagawa iyong makeup, yong damit, iyong the aesthetic. Hindi ko na iyong ginagawa. Siguro shinape nila ako into thinking na this brand is not for you. You should try other things. Because I stick with the book. That's what I did before. I always stick with the book. So kumabaga if they're asking for a fashion category, I'm gonna give them fashion. Pero hindi siya nagtatranslate. So maybe you need a different approach on your drag, you do that. And that's what I did. So na-ano na siya. After ko mapanood lahat, that reality TV show shaped me into becoming a better version of my drag person.

R: Last question, in the future how do you want media or drag reality shows to portray Filipino drua queens? Paano mo gusto i-represent ng mga drag reality shows ang mga drag queen?

P: Sana ipakulong na silang lahat. Sabay sabay tayong mag-ama namin remix. Charot lang.

Actually i want bigger things for drag queens. Like, number one, na-achieve na nga eh. Number one ay magkaroon ng TV commercial, which is called Marina. That's such a big step. Hindi siya step, It's a leap. Napakalaking hakbang for the drag industry. And I hope na mas marami pang merecognize for that. May mga drag queens na makasama sa mga pelikula, ano pa ba? Kasi actually ang mga drag queens, ang daming talent, Ewan ko. Sobrang daming. So for me, gusto ko lang magkaroon ng media presence pa.

Mas magkaroon lang ng media presence ang mga drag queen, Hindi ninyo lang kami dapat nakikita sa mga drag reality shows. So of us can act, some of us can sing, there's Tiny Deluxe, there's Maxi, there's a lot more, Winter, there's so much more. I think the world deserves to see that raw talent. Alam mo iyon kahit naka-drag sila, hindi sa drag reality tv show ang setting. Alam mo iyon. I really want that for the drag community. Bakit? Una sa lahat, kapag nagkaroon ng media presence ang mga bakla tataas ang budget nila. Magkakaroon sila nang mas malaking pera para makapag invest sa sarili nila, sa drag nila. And at the same time, alam mo iyon, mas magkakaroon ng pag-asa ba ang mga queens na walang resources, na ah pwede pala itong mangyari sa akin. Pwede ko palang gawin ito, pweede pala akong mag-artista kahit naka-out of drag ako. Alam mo iyon, may ganun kasi. Magkaroon sila ng ano pa, daming pumapasok sa isip ko. Um, yeah. Let's just leave it at that na magakaroon ng media rpesence kasi mas maraming opportunities at mas yayaman ang drag queens kapag nangyari iyon. Mas tataas ang TF.

R: Iyong exposure mo sa reality show paano naman nakatulong sa iyo as a drag queen.

P: Wala. We flop. Kaya ko talagang sabihin sayo inang totoo. We flop. Wala gaanong sumuporta kaya focus na lang tayo sa wig. And its not that sad, pero its heartbreaking na there are people out there who still think that we're just... a knock-off cast of Drag Race. Or just a knock-off, parang rival of Drag Race.

Pero hidndi na, wala na kasi kami doon, hindi na namin iniisip ng mga sisters ko. Especially me, I have muses, I have clients from the RuPaul's Drag Race franchise.

R: Kanina tinanong ko bilang drag queen ngayon naman bilang drag queen na part ng lgbtq community, paano po nakatulong ang drag reality show? Or it's just a show?

P: Ang hirap kasi sabihin na yeah it helped me, it helped everyone of us in the community. Perto hindi talaga, there are still homophobia. Nandyan pa rin siya. Even though you have supporters, you still have haters, hindi sila mawawala taalaga.

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PARTICIPANT 3: Nicole Pardaux
Date of interview: October 28, 2024

R: So first of all, I would like you to share lang po overall iyong naging experience ninyo sa pag-jpoin sa drag reality show?

P: Uh, honestly, it was one of, well, the most nerve wracking thing that I've done in my entire life. But one of the most fulfilling talaga. Before I've been dreaming of, or like I've been asking for a big break and I feel that joining, being part of the cast of Drag Race Philippines was my biggest break or the biggest opportunity that I got. So it was fun. It's a lot. Ang daming kong natutunan sa Drag Race Philippines and it totally changed my life talaga.

R: Kanina binabanggit ninyo na for you its a big break to be part of the Drag Race Philippine. Pero kelan pio kayo nag-drag, paano kayo ang-start at bakit kayo nag-drag?

P: Okay, so I just realized that I've actually been doing check even before pa. I started as a performer, as a dancer since like when I was still young. And then when I was in college, I also went through a certain phase of cross dressing. Para siyang naging social experiment for me. If transitioning was for me or not, but I decided that it's not for me. But I like the fact, i like the feeling of dressing up during a performance. And then, in college din, when we performed, I do my own makeup at the same time I also do the makeup of our girls. So and then it continued to like when I was working already because I also ventured into photography. So aside from you know taking pictures and editing, I also do the makeup for my female and some male models as well.

So, when I got introduced to drag, parang it encapsulates everything that I've actually been doing before. So it's like the... parang, pinaghalo na lahat ng mga skills ko. And I started doing drag noong 2021 during pandemic. So yes, I am a pandemic queen, super new and very, you can call, actually call me a baby queen eh in terms of tenurity. So, iyon.

R: So you started 2021. Sorry, you're based in Manila po ba or other area in the Philippines?

P: I am in Cebu.

R: Cebu, okay. Yeah. And then, how do you define drag? For you, what is drag? Is it an art? Is it an... Well. Yeah.

P: Well, drag literally is an art form. It is one's interpretation of the art. So it's so hard to really define drag because of the diversity of it. But mainly it's an art form talaga.

R: So what inspired you to do drag? If you think that drag is an art form. Ano po iyong nagsisilbin ninyong inspirasyon sa pagda-drag? Mayroon po ba itong piannghuhugutan.

P: Uh, well, one of the inspirations talaga was, was when I got introduced to, uh, to drag race, um, to Rupaul's drag race, actually. So, um, by, by watching, um, Rupaul's drag

race, parang it, um, paano ba, it ignited that fire na parang, oh my god, I can actually do this. I'm doing that. I'm performing. I also do makeup. I also like to dress up. So it ignited that fire from within. And yeah, that's how actually it all started. And then, well, there's more to it actually than just the Rupaul's Drag Race. I think part of it is also, you know, showing people what I can do and that I do exist.

R: So when you say I do exist in doing performance, is there anything that you would like to introduce to your audience? That's why you're doing drag or whatever. Or do you want to say something?

P: Parang its, it's a way for me to introduce that I'm part of the LGBT community and I'm here performing in front of you, not being afraid of who I am and showcasing the talents that I have.

R: So Nicole, when you entered the Drag Race Philippines, were you able to showcase that? You were saying na kumbaga, in doing drag, it's your way to express yourself, to introduce yourself, that you are gay, sorry, that you are part of the LGBTQ community and that you are existing. So were you able to express that during your stay in Drag Race Philippines?

P: I would say yes. Most, well, for the most part of it, I would say yes, in such a way that, you know, I was not afraid to be who I am on TV. And although for the length of time that I was in the Drag Race Philippines, I was able to show everyone like who Nicole Pardeaux was so iyon.

R: So during your, basing on your experience sa Drag Race, as a media platform, how do you think Drag Race portrayed you as a drag queen and as part of the LGBT community?

P: You know, I'm very thankful sa Drag Race Philippines and mainly the editors because hindi nila ako binigyan ng villain role. I don't know, like very happy ako sa Drag Race Philippines. Although very short lang siya. Because of it, there are a lot of people reaching out to me and saying that they're saying that "Idol daw nila ako" or that they look up to me and they're so proud of me. Well, some people say that they're so proud of me and thanking me for representing Cebu.

R: Yeah. Being that, siyempre di ba parang, ako napanood ko rin both, iyong dfranchise ng Drag Race, and Drag den, minsan nabibuild up din dito ang provincial queens. How do you feel about that? And being compared with other queens living in Manila or living in other areas. How do you feel about that?

P: Well, honestly, ako talaga, I'm the type of person that, I don't want to be considered as a provincial queen because technically, lahat naman tayo nasa province talaga. But yes, I think it just boils down to the amount of experience because honestly, the Manila queens have more exposure than us outside of Manila. Because technically, they have

more resources than we do in terms of like let's say media, in terms of venues where they can have shows because here in Cebu we don't have a drag bar. Like literally we don't have a drag bar. Usually we just perform sa mga bars where we are invited to a certain event. So iyon.

In terms of media, I don't know that we... I'm not really sure. As far as I know, we don't have media here in Cebu. Well, aside from you know, the news, I would say. But outside of that one like I mean, like TV media, I mean. Before we had, but I think I'm not sure right now if we still have, but yeah, mas marami silang opportunities sa Manila versus us.

R: Okay, so during your stay in Drag Queen, what are your thoughts on the accuracy of the portrayal of Filipino drag queens? Are there any experiences that you think are misrepresentation or stereotyping?

P: I would say, wala naman, misrepresentation because... who or like what you see on what you saw on TV are actually us. Like it's not scripted. It's not anything. Although, yes, it is part of it is really blame it on the edit, I would say. But I wouldn't say that there is really any bias or any what do you call this? Or any portrayal of something different from who we are.

R: Okay, so do you think you were able to express yourself truly during your stay in Drag Race? Like, if you want to show who you are, you did without any constraints or any limitations brought about by the reality show.

P: Ah, okay. Well, I would say partly no to that one because I felt like I was pressured because of like iyong inner saboteur ko na I had to be like perfect, ganito ganito. So parang hindi ko talaga. I think what I missed there was just to have fun with it. I became super serious in the competition. I sort of forgot to have fun with the competition. But lahat naman ng nakita ng mga tao, even me, that's who I really am. When I compete, I compete talaga. But I felt like after watching myself on TV, na-feel ko na I was so tense. Grabe yon tense ko na na-feel ko na kailangan ko mag-relax. Siguro nadala lang because of the competition. And then everything was so new to me, like, being in front of the camera was so new to me. It was my very first time to fly to Manila alone for a competition, for a show. And being surrounded by, you know, most veteran, mostly mga veteran na drag queens na talaga. So it's in a way, it's intimidating, especially for me knowing that I just started fairly new. So grabe iyong intimidation talaga. Pero hindi naman like they were intentionally doing it. Iyong feeling ko kasi ay for myself lang. So I think everything nay, it all piled up. But regardless of that one, it was actually fun.

R: Do you think itong pressure, feeling the competition has to do with how the show is?

Going back, do you think the pressure you felt during the show and the competition, do you think this has to do with the format of the show itself? That this is competition, that you have to fight for the crown or whatever? Do you think mayroon ba itong connection?

P: Yes, definitely. Because I think we know coming into the competition, we know that it's really a competition. And hindi namain maiwasan sooner or later, may mga matatanggal talaga na queen. And sadly, I was the very first one. But honestly. Aside from that one, I'm very happy with my experience in Drag Race. I now have a new family. Or like I'm part of a new family. I've met new sisters there. What I'm truly thankful for is really the experience. And at the same time, lahat ng mga learnings ko sa loob ng Drag Race. Actually, naging bootcamp for me. Grabe ang catapult ko from Baby Drag Queen into a full blown RuGirl.

R: So kumabaga parang nag-improve ang drag mo as an art. Dumako naman tayo sa.. sinasabi nila that drag is a way to express, do you think iyong competition nakaapekto ba sa creative or expression ninyo as a drag queen?

P: I would say yes, because alam naman natin ang format ng Drag Race Philippines. But it's not a bad thing. It challenges our creativity talaga. Beforehand, before kami pumasok sa Drag race philippine alam na namin ang mga category talaga, although, hindi siya the same words that Mama Pau actually uttered, pero dala-dala na namin ang mga clothes namin based on those categories. So, I think ang mahirap lang doon is the amount of time that we had to prepare for the show. It was super, super short as in, it wouldn't be drag race for, if you know, it's literally a drag race as in. Yeah.

R: Kumbaga parang pressured sa time, sa preparation. But in terms of airing time, were you able to, kumabaga to maximize the given, parang one hour lang halos umeere ito, KUmabga you were given much exposure that you would like during the show.

P: I would say yes, yes, okay naman. Siguro yun nga yung sabi nila na compared to like season one, we were given... enough time to be exposed to the TV because we were divided into two. So yeah, I would say yes. I would say yes to that.

R: Yeah. So that exposure, how do you think that helps you in, in whatever ways? Did it help you in what ways?

P: Um, I would say yes, because, um, it actually, parang, tells you just like, or it gives you a hint of like who Nicole was because it's super short ngayong stay ko sa Drag Race Philippines, but very thankful ako because still even if like very short yung stay ko sa Drag Race, there's, you know, getting that affirmation and validation from people that, sinasabi nila taht I represented Cebu super well. Just the appreciation that from them, sa mga ginawa ko doon sa Drag Race is more than enough actually.

R: Okay. How about on what is this exposure? Does this affect or help you in expressing yourself and you being part of the LGBT? Kasi kanina na-mention po ang pagdadrag for you ay parang to express how proud you are as part of the LGBT.

P: Yes, I would say yes. Because it's like, wala siyang, in terms of, well, outside of drag naman like, hindi naman ako, I never felt that pressure to be someone else. I was actually, that was, what you saw was, was really me, minus the nose.

R: May modification na ba>?

P: Yeah So it's weird looking at myself, looking at myself, it's a somewhat different person now because of the modification.

R: So ginawa mo ito right after the show>

P: Right after the show, yes.

R: But I also noticed that drag queens like Marina Summers, they really have changes in terms of facial... Is it required. Why do drag queens do this?

P: It's not required. It's just... Well, I cannot speak for the others. Yeah, but for me, even prior to the drag race, it has been like, this is really one of my insecurities, ay iyong nose ko talaga. So, maybe it was a way for me to like, you know, give back to myself, especially after what happened as amin. Kasi ito ang lagi namin sinasabi, like people dont know like how iyong pinagdaan namin sa Drag Race, iyong hirap namin within competition. Parang deserve naman namin to give back to our selves naman. In a way, this is my reward to myself having gone through that.

R: So right after your time in drag race, how's life as a drag queen?

P: It's... well... I can say it's really fruitful because after that one, a lot of people know me na. Parang masha-shock na lang ako, even if I'm just walking in a mall, people recognize me even if I'm not in drag. Very thankful talaga ako sa experience ko. Sa Drag naman, well, again, like what I said earlier, wala pa kaming drag bar dito sa Cebu, althooug ang mga shows, compared before mas dumami talaga siya.

R: Here, in terms of media again, since this is part of the study, the representation in media, does it have a certain... Nakitaan ninyo po ba, did you see based on your experience that there are certain stereotypes or challenges that its constructing?

P: I would say no, no, because all of them are very diverse because, well, for even for Drag Race, like let's say we have my sister, Ovy Cunt, who is like a good representation of alternative drag. So I would say that it really showcased like the diversity of drag. Siguro not too very in-depth pa. I'm looking forward na mas marami pang representations pa ang maipakita ng drag race. Like let's say someone who is straight or probably an AFAB queen na sumali ng drag race. You know, something different. I think it's time for us to really show that the different kinds of drag. Because I think wang nagyayari lang ngayon is that people are... Let's just call it that just because sumikat si

Marina Summers nako-compare na ang maraming quees sa kanya. But really, there's more to drag than... you know, than that.

R: So do you think this has an effect on setting standards or whatever? Do you feel like something like that, tnagkakaroon ng standards in terms of drg because of the popularity of some queens in the mainstream media?

P: I would say yes because, well, we are thankful to Marina Summers and also Eva Laqueen because binigyan naganila, they also molded how people perceive drag. Because alam naman namin na that Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den Philippines is not enough for people to watch us. But because of iyong pagsikat nila Marina Summers, parang it also shed some light to us na rin. But in a way, naging standard siya ng mga tao sa what they think drag is. But I'm very thankful because at least now, ngayong nasheshed-an na ng light talaga. I think right now is the right time for us to educate everyone that there's different types of drag out there.

R: How do you like to see Filipino drag queens represented in the future in the media? In the media landscape, especially in television or drag reality shows.

P: Well, right now, even here in Cebu, nakikita ko dumarami na ang alternative drags. So I'm looking forward talaga sa maipakita pa ng iyong mga different kinds of drag talaga especially on media. It actually showcases the different skills that us Filipinos have. We're not just all glam, we can also show a different side as well.

R: Okay, last question. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience in joining Dragden and how it has shaped your identity and your creative expression as a Drag Queen?

P: Honestly, I'm very grateful for the experience. I'm very thankful for the opportunity that Drag Race Philippines gave me. I never honestly, hindi ko talaga ine-expect iyon. What I expected for myself was really just to audition for Drag Race Philippines and never kong inexpect na ako ang magiingng first representation ng Cebu. Before, when Drag Race Philippines aired the first season, that's when I realized that, oh my god, bakit walang representation ng Cebu? So I thought to myself, okay, let's try to audition. Pero hindi ko naman ine-expect. And then, lo and behold, I'm the very first Cebuana Ru girl.

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PARTICIPANT 4: ELVIRA
Date of interview: October 31, 2024

R: So, ayun po, again, this research po will explore yung live experiences ng ating mga Filipino drag queens who joined the drag reality show that includes Drag Race and Drag Den. Both Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den po, both reality shows po ay included

dito sa study ko po. So, it aims to explore yung mga karanasan po ninyo bilang drag queens sa pagsali ninyo and kung paano kayo pinortray or paano kayo pinakita ng drug reality shows?

Okay po, first question po is, how did you start po in doing your, doing dram? And, what inspired you po to do drag?

P: Actually, I was a makeup artist way before pandemic pa. Tapos, performer na rin ako na sumasayaw sayaw lang, ganyan. Tapos, hindi ko din naman in-expect na magiging drag queen ako and I never, I never knew na ganito yung magiging ano yung mag-end up ako dito sa position na to na ayan dyan ako sa O-bar so and I never really had thought na makakasali ako sa isang drag competition here in the Philippines kasi parang ako nagme-make up ako sa masaya so I started lang doing live shows nung ano nung pandemic pero hindi talaga ako performer before. Ay, hindi talaga ako drag queen before pa.

Tapos doon lang siya nag-start na parang ah, okay, ganito pala. This is Drag. So, hanggang sa na-absorb ako dito sa O-Bar, nag-audition. Tapos this is my first bar ever.

Anong year po ito? Like 2020? 2020. 2020. Nung nalift na yung mga quarantine ng pandemic. Yung mga restrictions, yes.

R: Pero for you, do you drag? What do you think drag means for you? Ano pong ibig sabihin sa iyo ng drama?

P: Drag for me is making people happy. It's really a form of entertainment and a boost of self steem to other poeple. And parang, for me its really our job to do that as a human being

na ma-oshare namin yung talent namin, mai-share namin yung experiences namin through performances, ganyan. Kasi ano eh, ako, growing up, I didn't have anyone na to look up to. So, as drag queens, we don't know kung everyday or every time na nakikita kami ng tao na may impact pala kami sa kanila. Kasi dung my drag den na experience, ang daming lumalapit sa akin na, thank you for inspiring me, ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. Thank you for being so true of yourself sa show, ganyan, ganyan. Sabi ko, eh kasi yun yung buhay. Eh yun tayo, yun tayo everyday. Na ganun yung mga na-experience natin in everyday lives. Na hindi lang lahat masaya, hindi lahat malungkot 'di ba. May ganun talaga. Kaya sabi ko, thank you then for telling it sa akin. Kasi syempre, hindi ko alam na may natatamaan tala akong mga tao. May mga ano pala ako, may mga nai-inspire pala ako.

R: But is that something that you, I mean, that you aim as a Drag queen? Kumbaga parang tinatarget mo ba na magkaroon ka ng impact to other person or to other people or to your audience? Or is just something na bigla na lang nari-realize o lumalabas?

P: Actually, wala. Bigla na lang talaga siyang lumalabas. Hindi ko na lang siya nari-realize na, ah, ganoon na pala yung impact ko sa tao.

R: So as a drag queen, kumbaga parang wala ka naman gustong i-convey sa kanila ba or meron or it's just the result? Kumbaga yung sinasabi ninyong impact.

P: It's just the result. Kasi parang ano na lang siya eh. Na parang, hindi na na, ako ah, personally, hindi ko na siya alam. Kumbaga nasa taon na siya. Kumbaga. Minsan kasi, hindi natin, hindi ko na, hindi ko na re-realize sa akin na: Ay shit, ayun na pala siya. Ano na pala? Parang, I'm doing something for the community and I'm doing something for the community and I'm doing something for other people. I mean, I'm not everyone's cup of tea pero ano siya, tawag dito, yun na siya. Kumbaga, may mga tao pa rin akong nata-touch even though hindi ako gusto ng lahat. Kanya-kanyang taste lang din talaga ng drag. Yeah.

R: Sabi mo kanina kanya-kanyang taste lang yan ng drag queen Sa'yo po as drag queen, ano yung, can you describe your drag persona? Si Elvira?

P: Si Elvira ay ano, ang atake niya talaga, kontrabida. Kontrabida everyday talaga. Nandun ako sa era na gusto ko lang talagang good vibes good vibes yung mga tao. Gusto ko pa nagpa-perform ako. Inuman, harutan. Nothing really formal, nothing really conceptual. It's more on, would just wanna make, I just want people to smile when I'm performing. I just want to, I just want people na nagsisigawan sila na, yay, party party! Ganyan. Kasi yun yung kulang sa atin ngayon eh. I mean, we're overly, we're overly surrounded with stress and everything. So ngayon, parang ako kung pupunta ko ng bar, gusto ko magsaya lang, magparty party lang, diba? So yun yung?

R: At this point po, I would like you to share your experience joining Dragden. Ano po yung experience po ninyo? Paki-explain.

P: Actually, mahirap yung experience ko nung Dragden kasi I'm still performing sa O-bar nung time na yun. At hindi lang pagpa-perform yung ginagawa ko. Nag-asikaso ko ng pride namin noon. Committee kasi ako ng pride namin. So, I'm, I'm basically having meetings all over around para lang matapos ko yung journey ko. Actually, parang I only had three weeks to prepare, two to three weeks to prepare lang sa show ko. Ay, sa mga outfits ko for drag den. So, haggard talaga ako nun kasi, actually, after show, didiretso ko sa mga designers. So, isipin mo na, tapos ako ng 6am, tapos, dadiretso ko ng designers to check my outfits, tapos, didiretso ako ng designers to check my outfits, tapos, uwi ako, maliigo lang ako, pumunta ulit ako ng bagong designer, tapos, didiretso na ulit ako ng bar.

So, iniisip, actually ngayon, iniisip ko kung saan ako natutulog, kung paano ako natutulog pala nung panahon na yun. Hindi ko na alam. Parang, naging magic na lang siya na, ay, tapos ko na siya, ay na siya, na nakarating na ako doon sa finish line na makapasok na nga sa Drag den.

But, hindi ko rin, actually, I didn't audition. Hindi ako nag-reach out for audition. I was called for an audition.

R: So, may ganun pala na parang.

P: Yes, may mga ganung eksena na, actually, hindi lang naman sa Den, sa ibang show din may ganun na tawagan ka for you to audition, ganyan. I was stopped out by Director Rod herself. So, actually, ako naman, nag-try lang naman ako mag-audition kasi I was in La Union nung time na pinag-audition ako. pumaparty ako sa La Union. Ang ginagawa nila sa akin gusto nulana mag-audition ako. Kasi pinag-audition ako the day after of auditions na. Ah, okay. So, wala na talaga. Wala na siya. Sabi ko, ayoko pang sumali. Even drag race, ayoko pa. Ganyan, I'm not ready. Ganyan.

R: Why do you think you're not ready during that time?

P: Parang hindi pa ako ready sumali sa mga reality show kasi parang for me, it's too early for people to know who I am. And it's too early for me to do that kasi ilang years pa lang naman ako nagda-drag. I mean, right now, I'm going to five years of doing drag. So kung last year yun, for 3 to 4 years pa lang ako nagda-drag. And hindi pa naman ako ganun ka-establish as a drag queen. I mean, dito sa O-Bar, yeah, matagal na ako. Pero sa labas ng O-Bar, hindi pa talaga.

R: Is that something na, kumbaga yung drag then being a reality show, it pressures you ba? Kaya, naiisip mo yung mga ganun bagay during that time?

P: Oo, isipin mo siya kasi honestly, hindi lang naman yung pangalan ko yung dalako. Dalako yung pangalan ko yung dala ko. Dala ko yung pangalan ng bar. And syempre from Precious being the winner of Drag Race na galing o bar. Tapos Nia being the first drag supreme na na galing din O-bar. Parang ang hirap naman nun na galing yung magiging eksena ko.

R: So kumbaga parang nag-set sila ng standard kasi. So andun yung pressure na dapat mapantayan o nahigitan pa yung ganong bagay.

P: Oo. Mahirap. Actually, mahirap talagang.

R: Pero ano, sa tingin mo, paano pa niya represent ng drag reality show, ng drag den specifically?

P: Ayaw nila sa magaling. Ayaw nila sa magaling. Yung nanalo naman, not. So, yun yung eksena na parang na-feel ko doon na masyado kong masyado nila kong inipit. Parang gano'n na parang I was really caught off guard sa mga sinasabi nila sa akin. Na parang medyo personal. I mean yung give ko magiging personal siya. Pero not that

personal na matadama yung mga ibang bars na gusto nilang pagawa sa akin. I mean I know I'm the villain of the season. I am the villain. Kaya parang nalungkot ako ng time na parang kailangan kong basagin lahat ng bakla for kung saan sila galing, parang that's not really my brand. Ako, I'm gonna clock you from head to toe if I'm seeing you, na pangit ka. Pero I'm not gonna clock where you came from. Kasi magkakaiba kami ng ano, kung sa pagpapalaki ng magulang, magkakaiba kami ng upbringing. Iba yung pagpapalaki sa kanila ng O-bar, iba yung pagpapalaki sa kanila ng iba't-ibang bars nila, ng nectar, ng ano-ano pang bar. So, ganun yung eksena. Parang, ah, okay. So ganoon yung magiging atake nila.

R: Pero sino po ito? Yung show or yung mga tao or mga queens na kasama ninyo doon sa show?

P: The production behind ha, ganoon talaga. I mean, kakalkalin talaga nila lahat ng masama sa'yo at palalabasin nila sa TV. And I did it so perfectly, na give ko naman sa kanila yun.

R: So, do you think that affects your ah, kumabaga yung drag mo? Kung paano mo isi-showcase sana yung sarili mo sa drag reality show?

P: Honestly, hindi. Kasi there's nothing hindi naman siya gano'ng kalayo sa personality ko talaga. I mean, I'm approachable na queen.

So, yun. Parang hindi naman kasi siya malayo sa ugali ko. As Elver and Elvira. Parang nagkaroon lang ako ng outlet na mas maging masama pa. Parang ganun yung naging eksena So parang ako lang, ako kasi okay lang naman sa akin na ma-pin as someone na mas sama ugali, ganyan-ganyan. Pero once you get to know me, actually napakita naman din dun sa loob na I'm one of the bitches there inside. Pero ako din naman yung pinaka-soft-hearted dahil pinapahiram ko sila ng gamit. Kung nung nawala ako, lahat ng gamit ko, go lang, sige, paggamit ko sa inyong lahat. I mean, wala kasing masama sa akin yun. I mean, at least, I'm helping. Aleast, naman na parang kasi nung time na yun, ayokong lumalabas sila ng pangit. So, everything, pag nakikita ko, magpalit ka nga ng earrings, magpalit ka nga ng shoes, ang pangit yan. Ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. So, may ganoon ako sa kanila, super sister ako sa kanila.

R: Pero do you think those characteristics of yours, yung bad side and yung good side, yung pag-help mo sa mga other queens, were able to be showcased dun sa lumabas na episodes, sa mga series of episodes?

P: Actually, hindi masyado. Kasi hindi ako masyado nagkaroon ng chance para mag-explain din sa tao ng eksena ko. Pero ako kasi, for me, parang okay lang ako na, okay lang sa akin na gano'n yun nangyari. Kasi at least, at least alam nila. At least nakita nila. Nakita nila kung ano talaga yung, yung ugali ko. Para matakot na sila pag nakita nila ako sa susunod.

R: How do you feel about that? Na parang feeling mo may mga hindi sila naipakita sa'yo yung show.

P: Lagi ko sinasabi sa kanila yun its their loss. Sabi ko, nung pumasok ako sa, nung naging, ay nung na-eliminate ako, wala nang kwento yung drag den. Kasi I was the one who's pitching sa kanila kung ano yung mga dapat nangyayari sa loob. Na kung ano yung mga eksena. Yung mga eksena, yun yung ano ko. Yun yung mga ginagawa ko kasi. Yun yung mga ginagawa ko doon na parang, oh, girls, ganito naman atake natin ngayon. O, eto naman tayo ngayon. Ganun yung eksena ko doon na parang ako naglalaro. I was being playful talaga. Kasi in-enjoy ko lang siya. Kasi nga, in the first place, hindi ko naman talaga gustong kumontes.

R: Yeah, yeah. So, you and the other queens are trying to, yung story na gusto nyong ipalabas?

P: Oo, kasi ang pinaka-ayoko sa lahat is yung kukontrolin kami ng producers to do something we don't like. And may background kasi ako ng movie and TV dahil yung parents ko ay sa ABS nagwo-work. So, alam ko kung ano yung mga eksena nila. Kaya parang nilalaro nyo kami, go. Makikipaglaro din ako sa inyo. Pero, not to the point na gano'n nga, may matatapakan akong imang tao. And if that's what they want, I'm gonna give it to them. Pero, hindi ko kasi siya ibibigay dahil ako yung maba-bash. Hindi naman nila ako ipagtatanggol eh. Diba? Na parang, the issue with me and Jean with Jean, ngayon, okay na kami. Nakikita na tao na okay kami on social media, na nagbabardaan kami minsan. Kasi that's how we play each other. Ganon talaga kami.

R: So do you think there were certain stereotypes na binubuo sa show?

P: Oo naman.

R: And how do you feel about that? A drag queen. Basing on your experience sa drag den.

P: This is the exact question they asked me. O-diva ka, bakit ka laging nasa bottom? So, from that context ng question na yun, na parang, saan kayo nang gagaling? Hindi naman ako pumasok dito as a group, Hindi naman ako pumasok. Dito as an O-BAR queen. Pumasok ako dito as Elvira. So, from that moment on, ang ginawa ko is, ano tawag dito?

Parang, hindi ko na in-establish yung sarili ko as an O-BAR queen. Inano ko na na talaga siya. Parang, okay, I have to step back kasi parang ginagamit, they're using that against me already. So, mahirap, mahirap yung nagging eksena dahil may naka-away, yung mga naka-away akong story producers just because of that. Kasi ayoko talaga. Parang, sige, itouch nyo na lahat personal life ko, wag lang yun. Kasi, kapag nasira ako sa trabaho ko, sin oba sasalo sa akin. Kasi it's like, parang gusto nyong sirain yung pangalan ko sa O-bar eh. Eh yung mga customer dito, hindi naman nila iniisip na hindi

ako magaling. People here are rooting for me. So why would I think myself something na hindi ko gusto din ng tao?

Diba? And people here know who I am. I am a performer and as a drag queen, as a real person na alam nilang masama yung ugali ko dito. So alam kong hindi na sila magugulat na pag nakita nila ako sa TV tapos ganoon yung inarte ko. Alam mo yun? Parang, okay, valid. Ganoon yung magiging eksena nila sa akin. Valid yung ugali niya. Valid yan kasi O-diva siya. Valid yan kasi magaling talaga sila magperform. Pero yung ipipin ako ng ganoon ng story producers and everything na girl, that's not me.

R: Paano naka-affect to yun? Paano naka-affect to yun yung pag-pin sa'yo ng mga story producers sa'yo as drag queen and sa expression mo as drag queen?

P: Actually, inasar ko lang sila lalo. As me na hindi naman ako napikon doon sa sinabi nila parang naaano lang alo nanggigil lang ako ng slight. So, pinikon ko lang sila lalo na parang ako, mas tinapangan ko lang. Parang story producers lang kayo. Ako yung artista dito. Ako dapat ang pakikingan. Kayo pakikingan nyo rin ako. Hindi lahat nang sasabihin... Kasi pinagbigyan ko na sila ng ilang episodes eh. Tapos, dun sa episode na natanggal ako, dun talaga ako pumitik eh. So, parang, okay, deadma ako sa inyo. Din-deadma ko na lang din sila. Saka, actually, that was during and after. Pinikon ko lang talaga sila. Na kapag may kailangan sila sa akin, ngayon may kailangan kayo. Ganun ako, matapag ako sa kanila, ano, ngayon, ngayon magtatanong kayo sa akin. Ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. Nung na-eliminate ako. Ganun yung ginawa nyo sa akin. Ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. Nung na-eliminate ako, ganun yung ginagawa nila sa akin, parang they were asking me to, parang, paano namin pa iikutin yung kwento dito. Sabi ko, tinanggal nyo ako eh. Wala kayong makukuha sa akin. Kasi totoo naman eh. If you want story, if you want a story to happen, saan pinasok nyo ako? Saan din nyo ko in-eliminate? Diba? Parang one mishap lang nang nangyari sa akin yun. Saka, from the first episode na ginawa nila akong bottom, na, Hoy girl, I'm eating dance practices for breakfast. Tapos gagawin niyo akong bottom sa girl group. Na nakita naman nila sa lip sync na ako ang unang nanalo ng lip sync. So hindi ko deserve ma-bottom ng group performance na yun.

R: So yung mga ganong challenges sa mga producers, paano ito naka-apekto sa expression mo, sa drag persona mo kay Elvira? Sa performance mo?

P: Wala kasi dinedma ko na sila after kasi alam ko hindi rin naman magkakaroon ng magandang exposure yung drag den. So ang ginawa ko talaga dito ko na lang sa bar inano yung sarili ko. Parang mas ginalingan ko na lang, na mas pinakita ko sa kanilang who you. Mas ginanon ko sila Honestly., feeling ko ako lang naman may kayang sabihin ngayon sa'yo na walang kwenta talaga yung naging experience namin, nagsayang lang kami ng pera. So, for me, ikaw kung gusto mo mag-draga at mag-audition ka, sa drag race ka na mag-audition. Doon ka na agad, ganun. Ganun ka brutal na kaya ko yung sabihin sa harap nila.

R: Sa tingin mo si Drag Den, paano niya kinoconstruct? O paano niya binubuo yung image ng mga drag queens?

P: Na masyadong Pinoy. Binubuo niya yung drag queens na masyadong Pinoy. Na kanal hard.

R: do you think ay?

P: Hindi. I think it's nice na maging ganun siya para magkaroon ng personality yung show. But, nagawa siya ng drag race eh, ng season 3. Ginawa siya ng season 3 ng drag race Na kanal yung mga bakla. It works, diba? It works. Pero hindi nagawa ng drag den na nagano'ng kaiingay.

R: Yes, I get it. So, you were saying kanina that you're doing drag dance at the same time doing Pride. Is that Pride March, right?

P: No, Pride event here at O-BAR.

R: Ah, okay. Pero, that's for March ba yun? Parang ganon?

P: No, June.

R: Ay, ano yun? June, ayayay. Kasabay ng mga Pride March events, tama ba?

P: Ang ginawa ko, flinayin ko dito si Moy and si Deja para makapag-perform sila dito sa O-bar.

R: Okay, gets.

P: Pero yung... Nandamay lang ako, nandamay lang ako ng ano, na para, ah, galgal kayo, galgal ako, dapat galgal din kayo. Oo. So, nag-invite ako ng mga kasama sa Dragden.

R: Okay, gets, gets. Pero yun, yung mga ganong, advocacy mo ba yon?

P: no, ano na talaga. Performance. I'm an employee and I'm just gonna do my job. Ganun lang siya. Yes.

R: Siguro ito ay last question na. If you were given a chance, paano sa tingin mo or paano gusto mong i-represent ng media, drag race or whatever reality show would that be? Yung mga Filipino drag queens kagaya mo.

P: Sana mas ma-showcase tayong talent ng mga bakla. Kasi, sayang siya. I mean, ru girls from all over the franchise are going here sa O-Bar and are going sa iba't-ibang bars here na lagi nilang sinasabi na you guys are so awesome. Ang gagaling Ninyo Na

parang I've never seen a drag queen do that before. So parang sana mas ma-showcase pa siya nang mas elaborate pa. Kumbaga parang there are things na sana na-experience pa siya ng ano, na na-experience pa siya ng mas maraming maraming tao na hindi lang kami pang TV. Di ba? Na pang international din, pang dito sa mga kanya-kanya naming bars and sa kanya-kanya naming mga performances na sana, mas tangkilin pa rin nila yung local drag. Kasi parang established na yung mga sa US eh. Established na sila, kahit tumayo na lang sila, papalakpakan sila ng tao. Pero dito kailangan magpakamatay ka lang, sila papalakpakan sila ng tao. Pero dito, kailangan magpakamatay ka pa rin para mapalakpakan. Lahat ng, may mga drag queens pa rin na wala sa TV, na mas nagpa-perform pa lang, mas bongga pa sa mga nag-TV. So parang, diba, parang ang nangyayari kasi is, yung mga nag-TV, mga may hierarchy na tuloy. Nagkaroon na tuloy ng hierarchy na new girl, drag den, and some other girls.

R: So do you think because of the drag reality show, lalo na yung pagsikat ng mga shows sa Philippines, nagkakaroon ng ito yung standards, ganito yung dapat yung mas mataas. And how do you feel about that? O ano yung sa tingin mong tama ba yun?

P: Actually tama din naman. So it's a great competition. Magandang competition siya. An internal competition siya. Na parang, kailangan mas maging ganito ako para makasali ako ng drag race or ng drag den or ng something. Di ba? Parang magandang motivation siya eh. Pero kasi, ako sa journey ko, dedma kasi ako sa mga tao. I'm that kind of person na dedma ako sa'yo. Sa nagtatrabaho ako dito, maayos ako nag-work. That's, mas importante sa akin yun, nakakapagtrabaho ako na maayos. So, dedma lang talaga ako.

Pero, tama yun. It's a great competition for yourself. Na maging bongga ka. Maging bongga ka to achieve greater pa. Pero in the drag scene or in the drag community sa Philippines, paano sa tingin mo kung drag reality shows na ito ay nakaka-challenge or nakakatulong sa mga perception ng drag sa Philippines, ng mga audience ninyo?

P: Kasi we're just like other performers. Yeah. Kasi we're just like other performers. Para din kaming mga singer na nirepresent yung mundo kapag kumu- contest. Na sana we get the same response. Like how Marina did versus the world. Na para tayo may Miss Universe na dala. Sana ganun siya lagi. Not just in international competition. Sana makita kami.

Actually, reality shows are there for us to be seen. And it really helps us kung maraming tao ang tumitingin, nanonood, magmamahal pa sa amin. Kasi we're here to be seen, not to be judged. Yeah.

R: How do you think yung sinasabi mo na itong drag reality show ay helps you to be seen, to be visible. Paano ito nakakatulong sa'yo as drag queen or as part of the LGBT community?

P: Kasi mas maraming kaming natatama ang tao. Mas maraming kaming natatouch na tao. Mas maraming mas maraming pamilya sana ang mas makapanood nun para mas matanggap nila yung anak nila, yung kamag-anak nila, yung ibang tao pang nakapaligid sa kanila, mga kaibigan nila na na-accept natin yung ganong thing. And drag is not just... I think that helps you to boost yourself. Ano rin siya eh. Trabaho din siya. So, if mas maraming trabaho para sa mga bakla, mas maraming lalaki ang magkakaroon ng pera. Di ba?

R: So, do you think drag helps you become visible and helps you na mas mapaintindi sa mas maraming tao na tanggapin yung mga part of the LGBT, tama?

P: Yes.

R: And aside from that, Drag helps you financially.

P: Exactly.

ANNEX E

Thematic Analysis (Following Giorgi's steps to phenomenological data analysis)

Theme	Drag queens' view of their portrayals in reality shows
Sub-themes	Direct statements
Visibility brought by the media	<p>“The role in the community is really visibility. So, it starts there and then when people get to see you, there's a chance that they will listen to you. And when they listen to you, there's a chance that you can also highlight our struggles, therefore also highlighting what we need to have. You know, kaya nga SOGIE Bill, hanggang ngayon, my God. People fail to realize that we are, how we are as drag artists because we want to have ano, we're fighting for something. It's not just fantasy or something. The fantasy that we have is actually also resonates with other people. Anyway, ang point ko lang naman is, it plays a huge part within the queer community, but more importantly, it educates people who are not necessarily queer on queer struggles, queer narratives. And for them to think that our struggles is something worth watching para ma-realize nila why we're actually fighting for the things we fight for.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Actually, reality shows are there for us to be seen. And it really helps us kung maraming tao ang tumitingin, nanonood, magmamahal pa sa amin. Kasi we're here to be seen, not to be judged. Yeah.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Parang its, it's a way for me to introduce that I'm part of the LGBT community and I'm here performing in front of you, not being afraid of who I am and showcasing the talents that I have... in such a way that, you know, I was not afraid to be who I am on TV. And although for the length of time that I was in the Drag Race Philippines, I was able to show everyone like who Nicole Pardeaux was so iyon.” – Nicole Pardeaux</p> <p>“Mas maraming kaming natatamaang tao. Mas maraming kaming nata-touch na tao. Mas maraming mas maraming pamilya sana ang mas makapanood nun para mas matanggap nila yung anak nila, yung kamag-anak nila, yung ibang tao pang nakapaligid sa kanila, mga kaibigan nila na na-accept natin ‘yung gano’ng thing.” – Elvira</p>

<p>Empowering queens through representation</p>	<p>“The drag reality shows is really just to somewhat erase into the consciousness of the people who watch it what drag is all about. Parang in a way, it's just exposure for people to also know that ito pala ang drag.” – Pura</p> <p>““For me, it's a different kind of introduction to the world of what drag queens are... Sometimes people will love you, sometimes people will not. But at the end of the day, you just have to give it, that they're just queens. This is their world and we're just living in it.” – Margaux</p> <p>“Ako, growing up, I didn't have anyone na to look up to. So, as drag queens, we don't know kung every day or every time na nakikita kami ng tao na may impact pala kami sa kanila. Kasi during my Drag Den na experience, ang daming lumalapit sa akin na, thank you for inspiring me, ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. Thank you for being so true of yourself sa show, ganyan, ganyan.” – Elvira</p> <p>“Honestly, I'm very grateful for the experience. I'm very thankful for the opportunity that Drag Race Philippines gave me. I never honestly, hindi ko talaga ine-expect iyon. What I expected for myself was really just to audition for Drag Race Philippines and never kong inexpect na ako ang magiging first representation ng Cebu. Before, when Drag Race Philippines aired the first season, that's when I realized that, oh my God, bakit walang representation ng Cebu? So, I thought to myself, okay, let's try to audition. Pero hindi ko naman ine-expect. And then, lo and behold, I'm the very first Cebuana Ru girl.” – Nicole Pardaux</p>
<p>Promotion of brand and craft</p>	<p>“They have an idea of what I do as a drag artist and then they used it in how to package me or us in general and how the public should perceive. Kumbaga the branding side of drag is usually highlighted in the reality show. Of course, we can do a lot of other things. But for example, para sa akin, ang description nila sa akin ay the, ano ba 'yon, their description is the lady, sacred lady of Manila, something like that.”</p> <p>“I don't mind that they have an idea of what I do and they have a branding or they put me in some sort of a category. Because that's just part of how probably to sell the show. You have to give, oh, itong yong ano, ito yong ganyan, ganyan. I mean, in any reality show. So, this description that they had is, I guess, one way for people to remember who you are on TV. Yeah.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Tinulungan nila akong i-promote ang brand ko. Pero nakuha naman nila iyong side ko na parang sometimes hindi ako palaging matapang and may pinanggagalingan iyong tapang ko. Hindi ako matapang dahil</p>

	<p>matapang lang ako, matapang ako kasi nangyari sa akin itong mga ito. At kinailangan kong matapang para malagpasan ko. And naikwento ng drag den iyon nang maganda na to the point pati ako humahagulgol nung napanood ko. Ang ganda kasi ng background music.” – Margaux</p> <p>“It actually, parang, tells you just like, or it gives you a hint of like who Nicole was because it's super short ngayong stay ko sa Drag Race Philippines, but very thankful ako because still even if like very short yung stay ko sa Drag Race, there's, you know, getting that affirmation and validation from people that, sinasabi nila that I represented Cebu super well. Just the appreciation that from them, sa mga ginawa ko doon sa Drag Race is more than enough actually.” – Nicole Pardaux</p>
	<p>“Yeah, super happy ko na they were able to tell my they were able to edit my story na ikunwento ko na hindi nila iniba, wala silang dinagdag, hindi nila ako hinayaan na maging sobrang kawawa, hindi rin nila ako hinayaan na magmukhang sobrang matapang. Nage-gets mo ba? So, iyong vulnerability ko, nakita pa rin siya ng mga tao... na ah hindi naman pala siya palaging maldita, hindi naman pala siya palaging masama ugali.” – Margaux</p> <p>“I would say, wala naman, misrepresentation because... who or like what you see on what you saw on TV are actually us. Like it's not scripted. It's not anything. Although, yes, it is part of it is really blame it on the edit, I would say. But I wouldn't say that there is really any bias or any what do you call this? Or any portrayal of something different from who we are.” – Nicole Pardaux</p> <p>“Well, when I did drag den naman, I was very aware of how sometimes these reality shows can catch you being vulnerable or they might take out of context, pero so far from what the production has done, wala naman, it was good. I think it was mindful. They were very mindful, mindful of not to kind of sensationalize whatever the drag artist has been going through. ‘Cause sometimes they do that for the sake of good TV. So, I don't think it was in that ano naman, but yeah, I mean, I'm aware of sometimes, and I can't blame the edits if that would be the case, but I don't think that it was exploitative in any way. I certainly didn't think it was that way. So, it was an opportunity for us to just be there to interact with other queens and to probably learn from each other and that's it.” – Pura Luka Vega</p>
Authenticity of framing the drag queens	<p>“Yeah, super happy ko na they were able to tell my they were able to edit my story na ikunwento ko na hindi nila iniba, wala silang dinagdag, hindi nila ako hinayaan na maging sobrang kawawa, hindi rin nila ako hinayaan na magmukhang sobrang matapang. Nage-gets mo ba? So,</p>

	<p>iyong vulnerability ko, nakita pa rin siya ng mga tao... na ah hindi naman pala siya palaging maldita, hindi naman pala siya palaging masama ugali.” – Margaux</p> <p>“I would say, wala naman, misrepresentation because... who or like what you see on what you saw on TV are actually us. Like it's not scripted. It's not anything. Although, yes, it is part of it is really blame it on the edit, I would say. But I wouldn't say that there is really any bias or any what do you call this? Or any portrayal of something different from who we are.” – Nicole Pardaux</p> <p>“Well, when I did drag den naman, I was very aware of how sometimes these reality shows can catch you being vulnerable or they might take out of context, pero so far from what the production has done, wala naman, it was good. I think it was mindful. They were very mindful, mindful of not to kind of sensationalize whatever the drag artist has been going through. ‘Cause sometimes they do that for the sake of good TV. So, I don't think it was in that ano naman, but yeah, I mean, I'm aware of sometimes, and I can't blame the edits if that would be the case, but I don't think that it was exploitative in any way. I certainly didn't think it was that way. So, it was an opportunity for us to just be there to interact with other queens and to probably learn from each other and that's it.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“As Elvira, parang nagkaroon lang ako ng outlet na mas maging masama pa. Parang ganun ‘yung naging eksena. So parang ako lang, ako kasi okay lang naman sa akin na ma-pin as someone na mas sama ugali, ganyan-ganyan. Pero once you get to know me, actually napakita naman din dun sa loob na I'm one of the bitches there inside. Pero ako din naman yung pinaka-soft-hearted dahil pinapahiram ko sila ng gamit. Kung nung nawala ako, lahat ng gamit ko, go lang, sige, paggamit ko sa inyong lahat. I mean, wala kasing masama sa akin yun. I mean, at least, I'm helping. At least, naman na parang kasi nung time na yun, ayokong lumalabas sila ng pangit. So, everything, ‘pag nakikita ko, magpalit ka nga ng earrings, magpalit ka nga ng shoes, ang pangit niyan. Ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. So, may ganoon ako sa kanila, super sister ako sa kanila.” – Elvira</p>
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Annex Table 1. Drag queen’s view of their portrayals in reality shows

Theme	Media construction of drag queens
Sub-themes	Direct statements
Stereotyping drag queens with narrow portrayals	<p>“I’m aware of how drag queens are stereotypically portrayed in reality shows. Me, because I tend to go against the grain, I don’t really like, I try to challenge these stereotypes. So sometimes there would be expectations of drag queens to only be a certain type wherein you know, its glamor, big hair. it’s not always like that. I think there’s a lot of in the drag scene that was not showcased or highlighted much because these are like not so well heard of in the world of drag. Like for example, we have drag kings in the world of drag. We also have alternative; they call it alternative drag because this is not your typical glamour drag. There’s scary drag, there’s stupid nonsensical drag, which is still drag.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“I would say that it really showcased like the diversity of drag. Siguro not too very in-depth pa. I’m looking forward na mas marami pang representations pa ang maipakita ng drag race. Like let’s say someone who is straight or probably an AFAB [Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)] queen na sumali ng drag race. You know, something different. I think it’s time for us to really show that the different kinds of drag.” – Nicole Pardaux</p> <p>“Drag reality TV shows portray us in an image na nakadepende sa script ng show. Kung ano ang magiging story line ng cast. Pero kasi you have to clear cards right. Kapag nakita ng mga producers, writers, na “ah this queen, this queen is really good. This queen is really friendly.” Alam mo iyon, ibibigay nila iyon sa iyo eh. – Margaux</p>
Setting standards for drag.	<p>“Again, you can be fan of a reality show but not necessarily a fan of the art form. Kaya nga minsan there would be drag race fan lang ‘yan, o drags den fan lang yan, but not a fan of drag, as an art. Kaya ang nangayayari, when they consume it, or when they’re looking in the public spaces, wherein they see queens that don’t necessarily have a TV show, madali nilang sabihin na, ay hindi naman drag ‘yan, na parang, ano ba yon sino ba siya... Na naisip ko na mali naman. So, there’s a tendency it might do that. And that’s probably just an after effect of reality shows. – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Well, iyong sa ano, iyong sinabi lang ni Kalad Karen sa Drag Race, iyong sa mga provincial queens dapat kasing galing o mas magaling kayo kay Khianna. ALam mo kumbaga bakit kasi natin, inaano, like,</p>

	<p>may tawag dito eh. Pinepressure iyong mga provincial queens. Pare-pareho lang naman kaming drag queens, nagkakatalo-talo lang kami sa resources. Everything is here in the main city which is Manila. So kumabag, inaano nila na parang ang chaka ng drag ninyo kasi wala kayong designer diyan na magagaling, hindi. Alam ninyo if you are going to put people on certain standards such as Khiana, dapat lahatin mo 'di ba. Kumbaga, hindi lang si Khianna. Kasi sa totoo lang si Khianna, ang dami-daming magagaling dito sa Manila, na mas magaling si Khianna kaysa sa kanila. I mean iyong talent, iyong rawness, kahit hindi na nga sa experience, eh. But the way Kiana presented herself, too much.” – Margaux</p> <p>“We are thankful to Marina Summers and also Eva La Queen because binigyan nga nila, they also molded how people perceive drag. Because alam naman namin na that Drag Race Philippines and Drag Den Philippines is not enough for people to watch us. But because of iyong pagsikat nila Marina Summers, parang it also shed some light to us na rin. But in a way, naging standard siya ng mga tao sa what they think drag is. But I'm very thankful because at least now, ngayong nasheshed-an na ng light talaga. I think right now is the right time for us to educate everyone that there's different types of drag out there.” – Nicole Pardaux</p>
<p>Commercialization of drag</p>	<p>“The mainstreaming of something as drag, as free as drag, has an effect to how people would consume it now. And you know, there will be standards, there should be no standards, magkakaroon ng differences in the pay, na dapat wala naman talagang differences in the pay. The aim supposedly is to lift.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“We want the queens who don't necessarily have a show to have a bigger pay because it's hard to do drag. Pero ang ending tuloy, its kinda exploitative siya. Bakit kita babayaran ng mahal wala ka naman show. Ganun ang dating.” – Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Una sa lahat, kapag nagkaroon ng media presence ang mga bakla tataas ang budget nila. Magkakaroon sila nang mas malaking pera para makapag invest sa sarili nila, sa drag nila. And at the same time, alam mo iyon, mas magkakaroon ng pag-asa ba ang mga queens na walang resources, na ah pwede pala itong mangyari sa akin. Pwede ko palang gawin ito, pwede pala akong mag-artista kahit naka-out of drag ako. Alam mo iyon, may ganun kasi.” – Margaux</p> <p>“Let's just leave it at that na magkaroon ng media presence kasi mas maraming opportunities at mas yayaman ang drag queens kapag</p>

nangyari iyon. Mas tataas ang TF.” – Elvira

Annex Table 2. Media construction of drag queens

Theme	Shaping creative expression with media portrayals of drag queens
Sub-themes	Direct statements
Constraints of competition format	<p>“I felt like I was pressured because of like iyong inner saboteur ko na I had to be like perfect, ganito ganito. So parang hindi ko talaga. I think what I missed there was just to have fun with it. I became super serious in the competition. I sort of forgot to have fun with the competition.”</p> <p>“But lahat naman ng nakita ng mga tao, even me, that's who I really am. When I compete, I compete talaga. But I felt like after watching myself on TV, na-feel ko na I was so tense. Grabe ‘yon tense ko na na-feel ko na kailangan ko mag-relax. Siguro nadala lang because of the competition.”</p> <p>“And then everything was so new to me, like, being in front of the camera was so new to me. It was my very first time to fly to Manila alone for a competition, for a show. And being surrounded by, you know, most veteran, mostly mga veteran na drag queens na talaga. So, it's in a way, it's intimidating, especially for me knowing that I just started fairly new. So grabe iyong intimidation talaga. Pero hindi naman like they were intentionally doing it. Iyong feeling ko kasi ay for myself lang. So, I think everything ay, it all piled up. But regardless of that one, it was actually fun.”</p> <p>“I think it just boils down to the amount of experience because honestly, the Manila queens have more exposure than us outside of Manila. Because technically, they have more resources than we do in terms of like let's say media, in terms of venues where they can have shown because here in Cebu, we don't have a drag bar. Like literally we don't have a drag bar. Usually, we just perform sa mga bars where we are invited to a certain event.”</p> <p>– Nicole Pardaux</p> <p>“My realization is you know, there's a pressure in reality shows to make it more about the competition. Which is very appealing, I guess. But I'd like to argue, it's very appealing for viewers to see drag queens competing for the crown or whatever. Pero im more, I'm leaning towards...it being supposedly just a platform for you telling your story. You know, kaya nga</p>

supposedly kaya nga siya reality show kasi it's supposed to give people a glimpse of your reality. So parang feeling ko my realization is sometimes it's TV. There's a tendency for it to be a little, how do I say it, glossy. It might not capture the entirety of your reality, but at least it would give people an idea of what your reality is all about. Not much on the competition, because all of these queens who have joined reality shows, I think are really just great.”

“But ang tendency kasi kapag reality shows with a competition type of format, parang, it would say na ah mas magaling ito kasi mas nanalo na siya. No, not necessarily. We have good days and bad days, but it's not our entire track record, kumabaga, our portfolio.”

“And I would also think na sometimes the real race is after the show. Or the real competition is the real life. That's life is the competition, girl. It's not a show. So yeah, I think iyon ang mga na-realize ko, it's just a show. It's not supposed to dictate how you do your drag.”

“Let's be honest, sometimes when you attend these reality shows, dapat may puhunan ka. And at the time, kahit ngayon naman, hindi naman ganoon kalaki ang puhunan ko. So, I have to be strategic, I have to be smart about it.”

“Kasi parang feeling ko it's also a reflection of your status, economic or social, in making it in the, what do you call this, in the drag reality show. Like if you wanted to fare well, hindi mo talaga maiiwasan to consider all of these other factors like, mayaman ka ba? Marami ka bang magagandang costume?”

– Pura Luka Vega

“Parang na-feel ko doon na masyado kong masyado nila kong inipit. Parang gano'n na parang I was really caught off guard sa mga sinasabi nila sa akin. Na parang medyo personal. I mean yung give ko magiging personal siya. Pero not that personal na madadamay yung mga ibang bars na gusto nilang pagawa sa akin. I mean I know I'm the villain of the season. I am the villain. Kaya parang nalungkot ako ng time na parang kailangan kong basagin lahat ng bakla for kung saan sila galing, parang that's not really my brand.”

“Ako, I'm gonna clock you from head to toe if I'm seeing you, na pangit ka. Pero I'm not gonna clock where you came from. Kasi magkakaiba kami ng ano, kung sa pagpapalaki ng magulang, magkakaiba kami ng upbringing. Iba yung pagpapalaki sa akin ng O-bar, iba yung pagpapalaki

	<p>sa kanila ng iba't ibang bars nila, ng nectar, ng ano-ano pang bar.”</p> <p>– Elvira</p>
<p>Drag skills development and personal growth</p>	<p>“I think that’s why parang may special soft spot ang drag den for me, because after the show, I got better in doing my craft. I get to, you know, some of my drag colleagues, colleagues, would help me in the design or the styling and the makeup, because my makeup was really not that good. It’s still not very good in comparison to some of the queens, but it got better. And then you’re also able to... I honestly would safely say that I think I got better after the show. So, I would sometimes bleach my beard, na parang nagma-match ang hair sa beard. Kasi I realized when I was doing the show, hindi masyado ganoon kastricking ang beard color, which I still color naman, but there are certain colors because I feel... anyway this is more of the technicalities of doing drag so I got better after I did the show.”</p> <p>“And it also opened up other opportunities or through areas wherein I can improve in terms of being or doing my art.”</p> <p>– Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“Iyong experience ko sa show, para siyang habang nangyayari siya, natutulungan ko ang sarili ko, kung ano ang mga dapat kong iimprove, mga dapat kong i-adjust sa drag ko. Iyong mga sister ko tinulungan din nila ako sa iyong sa makeup ko nga ‘wag masayado maputi, nagre-refer sila sa akin ng brand.”</p> <p>Well, lahat naman nang ginawa ko sa show, hindi ko naman na siya ginagawa. So, let’s leave it at that. Hindi ko na gianagawa iyong makeup, yong damit, iyong the aesthetic. Hindi ko na iyong ginagawa. Siguro shinape nila ako into thinking na this brand is not for you. You should try other things. Because I stick with the book. That’s what I did before. I always stick with the book. So kumbaga if they’re asking for a fashion category, I’m gonna give them fashion. Pero hindi siya nagta-translate. So maybe you need a different approach on your drag, you do that. And that’s what I did. So na-ano na siya. After ko mapanood lahat, that reality TV show shaped me into becoming a better version of my drag person.</p> <p>“Actually, the show really grounded me. It grounded me in a way na, napanood ko kasi sarili ko, so iyon, oh my God, ganoon ako kawalang hiya. Sorry. Alam mo after that, na-realize ko na i dont wanna be this.”</p> <p>“So yeah, iyon after Drag Den, may growth akong na-feel talaga sa ano</p>

	<p>ko, sa drag ko, even sa sarili ko. Iyong mga hindi ko dapat gawin, mga di ko dapat sabihin naiwasan ko na siya.”</p> <p>– Margaux</p> <p>“I'm very happy with my experience in Drag Race. I now have a new family. Or like I'm part of a new family. I've met new sisters there. What I'm truly thankful for is really the experience. And at the same time, lahat ng mga learnings ko sa loob ng Drag Race. Actually, naging bootcamp for me. Grabe ang catapult ko from Baby Drag Queen into a full-blown RuGirl.</p> <p>– Nicole Pardaux</p> <p>“So, it's a great competition. Magandang competition siya. And internal competition siya. Na parang, kailangan mas maging ganito ako para makasali ako ng drag race or ng drag den or ng something. ‘Di ba? Parang magandang motivation siya eh. Pero, tama yun. It's a great competition for yourself. Na maging bongga ka. Maging bongga ka to achieve greater pa.”</p> <p>– Elvira</p>
Sense of purpose	<p>“Minsan kasi, hindi natin, hindi ko na, hindi ko na re-realize sa akin na: Ay shit, ayun na pala siya. Ano na pala? Parang, I'm doing something for the community and I'm doing something for the community and I'm doing something for other people. I mean, I'm not everyone's cup of tea pero ano siya, tawag dito, ‘yun na siya. Kumbaga, may mga tao pa rin akong nata-touch even though hindi ako gusto ng lahat. Kanya-kanyang taste lang din talaga ng drag. Yeah.”</p> <p>— Elvira</p> <p>“It helps the community. Well, you encourage the community to tell their stories. Ganoon lang naman iyong eh when you're doing drag, eh. We want people to be comfortable enough to tell their own story and to relate to the story that we're telling, even if the story is not necessarily theirs.”</p> <p>“I think, iyong mga stories that I'd like to tell would usually surround around queer issues. Mostly to give people hope and to keep on just being who they are to not feel like they should be ashamed. These are queer narratives. So, when a queer person gets to see these queer narratives in drag, I hope that they become more comfortable with who they are and probably also to value themselves enough to do something</p>

	<p>in the society that prohibits certain things. So ganun lang naman yon.”</p> <p>“I think we were able to do it collectively. I mean, we shared a lot of... I mean there were a lot of vulnerable moments there in the show. And that's just a part of it. It already touched on a lot of issues, I think, which is one of the reasons why I kind of like the first season because it was tackling a lot of very real issues in the queer community. May it be financial or healthcare or discrimination and all of these things. Nandon naman iyon eh. If you review the show, all of these issues were translated into performance.”</p> <p>— Pura Luka Vega</p> <p>“The thing is, kapag ikaw nag-drag ka na, that alone means something, ibig-sabihin may pinaglalaman ka na. Una mong ipaglalaman siyempre ang sarili mo. Why are you doing this? Bakit mo ginagawa ito? Para kanino mo ba ginagawa ito? And by that alone, I think that's okay. Okay na iyon.”</p> <p>“For me, I'm already doing it for the community. Because I've been an advocate of... First of all, gay rights, trans rights. All for SOGIE, yes. Yes, for abortion, yes. So minsan kasi sa performance ng isang drag queens makikita mo iyang mga yan eh, pero hindi nila sasabihin sayo na pinerform ko ito kasi ito ang gusto ko. Sometimes, makikita mo sa drag queens iyon eh, na minsan baka may mas malalim pang ibig sabihin eh.”</p> <p>— Margaux</p> <p>“Well, there's more to it actually than just the Rupaul's Drag Race. I think part of it is also, you know, showing people what I can do and that I do exist... Parang it, it's a way for me to introduce that I'm part of the LGBT community and I'm here performing in front of you, not being afraid of who I am and showcasing the talents that I have.”</p> <p>— Nicole Pardaux</p>
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Annex Table 3. Media portrayals and creative expression

ANNEX F

Certificate Form for Language Editing

CERTIFICATION FORM FOR LANGUAGE EDITING

This is to certify that the undersigned has viewed and gone through all the pages of the Research titled **“Drag as Creative Expression: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Filipino Drag Queens and their Portrayals in Drag Reality Shows”** written by **Niño Mel Hayno Trinidad** with the set of structural rules that govern the composition of sentences, phrases, and words in the English Language. The undersigned found it complete and satisfactory with respect to grammar, organization, and APA format and style as prescribed by the **UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY**.

Certified by:

DENNIS A. DE JESUS, MA.Ed., LPT
Grammarians
dennisdejesus035@gmail.com