

# The Gender Trap: Performing Gender and Queerness as Reflected in Pink Peso Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, there has been a rise in interests regarding gender and queer studies.

Numerous scholars, from Michel Foucault to Judith Butler, have long posited questions that examine heteronormative and hegemonic assumptions. Most gender theorists lay their theoretical foundations based on the premise that gender is fluid, and that gender is not something one possesses (like a physiological or genetic makeup). Rather, gender is dependent upon what one does, a continuous repetition of stylized acts that is attributed to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity that is evident within society.

Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study focused on the manifestations of gender ideals and identities found within seven pink peso advertisements (advertisements with queer elements and representations that are produced to tap into the LGBTQ+ community and its allies). To examine the societal constructions and collective ascriptions of Filipinos when it comes to gender, this study utilized cluster criticism as its critical approach to delve into the conscious and unconscious norms and expectations of society to non-heteronormative folk.

This study discusses the continued use of traditional binaries in the performance of gender, conforming to gender stereotypes in asserting the gender identity and sexual orientation being performed. Gender typecasting, consistently performed and reflected in Philippine advertisements, is further critiqued as it reinforces norms and expectations based primarily on a heteronormative standard, despite being a very fluid concept.

**Keywords:** gender performativity, queerness, heteronormative binaries, advertising

Do we truly need a true sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern (Western) societies have answered in the affirmative. They have obstinately brought into play this question of "true sex" in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body... (Foucault vii)

Gender as a construct has long been a source of discourse among scholars and academics worldwide. Some scholars, like Spencer and Capuzza (x-xii), believe that labeling genders is needed to understand specific gendered identities. They argue that gender identity types are points in a continuum that can be seen as categories to represent gender fluidity across systems of gender complexity. On the other hand, scholars such as Anne Enke (2-3) are opposed to the use of labels, arguing that the use of terms such as transgenderism is biased towards cisnormativity. Through the use of such collective terms, othering takes place, with cisgenders deemed as the majority and other identities as the minority. With this hegemonic ideology, non-heteronormative individuals are often seen as deviant, which creates a considerable divide between and among gender and sexual identities.

The longstanding dominance of cisgendered, heteronormative individuals in society creates and reinforces the notion that they are privileged and normalized. Subconsciously, this presumes the collective idea that fitting in the ideals of heterosexuality is desired while all other gender and sexual identities are

considered abnormal or deviant (Allen and Mendez 6). This causes social pressures for all individuals to conform to specific gender roles and fulfill heterosexual expectations (Habarth 2). People are compelled to act and feel in accordance with their biological sex and the social conventions ascribed to it (Allen and Mendez 1-13), which negatively influences the personality constructs and mental health of people with different gender identities and sexual orientations (Habarth 21).

Ironically, it is important to remember that these gendered roles and expectations are not solely reliant on what is actually enacted and embodied. Rather, it is mixed with idealized forms of femininity and masculinity brought about by society, which creates notions and stereotypes of the "ideal" man and woman. However, one must always bear in mind that these are only idealized characterizations that give a sense of a "false consciousness" (Bennett 19) and may not even be realistic forms at all (Wetherell and Edley 337).

Society continuously perpetuates and maintains gendered norms and expectations through everyday interactions within schools, churches, and even families. Marriage, for example, is seen as a sacred bond between a man and a woman, with many people opposed to same-sex marriage contending that married couples should be able to produce an offspring. This idea remains as one of their main arguments, citing the fact that people of the same sex cannot procreate and have an heir/heirress (Schechner 260). Examples like these illustrate specific gendered expectations that society produces and reproduces from one generation to the next.

One of the ways in which society continuously reproduces and replicates societal values and beliefs is through media (Gans 11; Roberts 832). The potential of media, specifically advertisements, as tools that reinforce or challenge gendered expectations and stereotypes have long been argued by scholars like Edward Timke and William O'Barr (7). The continued depictions of gender norms and stereotypes can further validate and amplify certain performances that queer individuals might end up mimicking or imitating. An in-depth examination of these representations can help critique the cycle — a cycle that gender studies scholar Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*, 141) challenges us to break free from.

This is the "gender trap" that this study wishes to explore, as individuals' gendered performances are trapped within the binaries ascribed by society. These heteronormative expectations of gender display are hugely based on one's biological sex. Through socialization, individuals learn to "act like a man" or "cry like a girl", and it seems like autonomy and self-determination is diminished in favor of societal norms and beliefs. Through this study, the researcher aims to further understand non-heteronormative portrayals and be critical of the ideologies being promulgated as it has the capacity to influence the audience that it reaches.

Specifically, this study investigated how non-heteronormative gender identities were performed and represented in pink peso advertisements and how these representations mirror (or challenge) the dominant conventions of gender at the time of the commercials' release. At this point, it is crucial to point out the dual nature of these pink advertisements. For one, the representations found in the advertisements have the potential to amplify societal discussions that can challenge traditional gender ideals. In contrast, these portrayals can also lead to the normalization of certain gender ideals and behaviors that shape public perception. The persistent repetition of narratives and images surrounding masculinity and femininity plays a significant role in shaping the gendered social consciousness of Filipinos, underscoring the need for thorough examination. The continued repetition and replication of these gendered acts

and symbols can perpetuate existing norms and stereotypes that can influence the performance and embodiment of individual gender and sexual identities.

However, this study only limits itself to the examination of media as it is influenced by existing gendered norms and ideologies as construed by the creators of the artifacts. Therefore, it mainly focused on the former argument (media influenced by society), with the latter (society influenced by media) better suited for a study focused on consumer culture and audience analysis. As such, it utilized the term “reflection” to establish how the media (more specifically, advertising) mirrors and represents prevailing gendered performances in the Philippines.

### **Gender Construction and Reinforcement through Media**

To fully understand the current position of the LGBTQ+ community in society, one must recognize the growing power of media in shaping the social consciousness of the general public. With the mediatization of society and our growing dependence on media technologies and institutions (Willig et al. 7), media's role in the promulgation of gendered norms and stereotypes is at its most pivotal. At present, changes in our consumption of media have paved the way for new types of socialities, new possibilities of "togetherness", and new forms of practices that grow out of older media practices. In the present age of millennial capitalism (Lewis and Hames 4), the intersectionality of the market economy, the digital world, and the consumers' everyday lives have drastically collided. For the producers of these goods, the circulation of products is no longer as expensive as it once was, considering that they can reach their audience through online platforms (Klinenberg and Benzecry 10). Companies have started to utilize targeted marketing strategies to specifically tap into a niche, such as single mothers, gamers, or the LGBTQ+ community. Advertisements are released online to promote or sell a product, service, or idea (Stanton 5). As businesses have the power to control their advertising contents, they, too, can influence the dissemination of ideologies and articulate cultural change (Cronin 349-369). Meanwhile, for the consumers, casually scrolling through social media feeds and video-sharing websites present them with numerous advertisements targeted for each individual based on algorithms and digital footprints.

In light of this, it is important to acknowledge that one of the benefits of the digital age is the internet becoming an avenue for new voices to be heard (Klinenberg and Benzecry 11), which has led to the emergence of increased non-heteronormative representations. However, it is also paramount to remember that through the media, even the values and beliefs that are deemed questionable and paradoxical are also propagated, as long as they fit the general ideologies of society (Gans 11-12). Thus, the need to be more aware of the media's influence on our social consciousness and the diverse representations found within it is as pervasive as ever (Roberts 826, 829). People are called to scrutinize how gendered ascriptions in society are further reinforced by media, and specifically in this study, advertising. Through media and advertising, conventions in gender and sexuality are learned and acquired by its viewers (Prieler and Centeno 26). Gendered representations and stereotypes seen by consumers reinforce the viewer's gendered schemas, in turn influencing how they perceive and perform their own gender and sexual identities.

### **Pink Peso Advertisements Is/As Performance**

Unfortunately, it has been observed that studies on gender and consumer culture, specifically related to LGBTQ+, are geared towards more exploitative reasons. Previous studies have focused on the community's representations' profitability in mass media (Ginder and Sang-Eun

829). It has only been recently that researchers paid attention to studies that deepen our understanding of the very nature of gay/lesbian media, most especially because of criticisms of a marketing trend called pinkwashing.

Pinkwashing refers to the use of gay-friendly marketing strategies purely for profit (Spary). This practice became popular in recent years as companies and advertisers seek to join the bandwagon, with recent developments in business digitalization and social media opening its doors to pink capitalism. Companies worldwide have started to realize the viability of a new target market that can spend more on high-end products (Sison), especially those that are called DINKs (Dual Income, No Kids). In the Philippines, 70% of openly gay and transgender participants in a survey conducted by the Philippine Survey Research Center (PSRC) are breadwinners of their families (Cigaryl). This gives them power in the consumption and decision-making of the family (Sison). With the potential of the community's buying power (Morris 22-23), pink capitalism emerged as a subgenre of the society's capitalistic economy (Yeh 22), despite gender being a sensitive topic for an audience with opposing views. One manifestation of the pink economy is the utilization of so-called pink advertisements, also known as "out of the closet" advertisements.

Advertisements that are "pink" in nature typically have three patterns, namely: 1) the blatant incorporation of LGBTQ+ signs and symbols (e.g., the use of rainbow colors, and words such as "freedom," "equality," and "love") to create marketing campaigns specifically for the non-heteronormative market; 2) the redirection of a general campaign or advertisement to LGBTQ+-friendly media, and; 3) the modification of marketing campaigns to showcase LGBTQ+-related elements (Gyemant 6; Yeh 3-5).

The rise of pink money advertisements around the world, distinguished by the monetary units of the country's currency such as pink dollar, pink euro, and in this study, pink peso, reflects the undeniable potential of a target niche market. The emergence of pink advertisements in the Philippines highlights the recognition of the community's economic power, with the commercials becoming an avenue to raise awareness and representation. As such, specifically investigating advertising practices targeted towards Filipino nonheteronormative individuals and their allies has become pertinent and relevant. With the world becoming more and more globalized due to digitalization, pink peso advertisements are a good way to analyze how society integrates itself with the global trends while creating unique narratives and representations distinct to the Filipino LGBTQ+ community. This is the reason why the researcher chose to focus on scrutinizing the representations found in the artifacts. This study is an answer to the critique that a handful of previous studies focused mostly on consumer viability and effectiveness. To be critical of these artifacts is to be attuned to the current norms and views of the LGBTQ+ community and to be critical of what is reflected and reinforced in society.

Despite the growing depictions of non-heteronormative individuals in artifacts and commodities for mass consumption, especially in the digital sphere (Selvick 179; Yeh 7), advocates are critical of the phenomenon, questioning its authenticity and genuine support (Spary). Simply dubbed "capitalism with a pink hue" (Tatchell), the motivations, representations, and symbolisms behind the marketing campaigns should be scrutinized as these materials can shape the consumption patterns and gendered ideologies of the LGBTQ+ community (Yeh 12, 22).

Thus, this study was developed with the perspective that advertisements construct realities that the audience can interpret based on the cultural frameworks of the society

they belong to. Advertisements are filled with symbols (visual, auditory, and the like) and actions (interactions and personas) that create a narrative, which the researcher aimed to dissect to analyze the ideologies being performed and perpetuated. The constant usage and repetition of these acts and symbols reinforce certain ideologies that solidifies a social consciousness, in this case the promulgation of gendered performances. These gendered performances influence the construction (and reinforcement) of the audience's values and beliefs, thereby influencing their individual identity formation.

Specifically, pink peso advertisements are a good starting point to assess the gendered narratives created by the companies and advertisers. Through these artifacts, the researcher directed the study to look into the pre-existing norms (through visual, auditory, and narrative elements) that are present in Philippine society. It is the researcher's firm belief that the analysis of these artifacts would give a glimpse into how inclusivity was performed. An in-depth analysis of these advertisements through the lens of performance studies, particularly through gender performativity, further examined the interplay between representation and reality. Did the performances reflect and manifest true equality and visibility? Did they truly reflect and authentically perform the community's experiences? What narratives were being performed? More importantly, whose experiences were being performed? These questions are what drove the researcher to conduct such a study in the context of the Philippine advertising industry. Furthermore, with the gradual decline of hegemonic dichotomies and the growing awareness of varying gender and sexual identities, it is important to examine the current position of non-heteronormative individuals within the heteronormative framework of Philippine society. Are they still constrained to embodied acts and practices that are biased towards the gender binary? Have they truly broken free from the confines of heterosexuality? All these questions are vital to deepen our knowledge and move forward towards a more gender-neutral and inclusive society.

### **Gender (Contradictions) in the Philippines**

Before moving on to the study of pink peso advertisements and gender performance, one must first locate gender ideals in the Filipino context. The topic of gender is quite contradictory in the Philippines (Anonuevo 1), with the country being ranked as one of the most gender equal countries in Asia yet having strong stereotypical notions of gender and sexual identities (Prieler and Centeno 4-5). In 2023, the Philippines ranked sixteenth out of 146 countries worldwide in the Global Gender Gap Index ("PH Ranks 16th"). Despite this, a paradox could be observed, which was also mentioned by renowned social psychologist Geert Hofstede et al., stating the common occurrence of having female managers in the Filipino workplace yet the country garnering a high masculinity score in his popular cultural dimensions (137, 141).

The country's contradictions between practices of gender neutrality and manifestations of patriarchal ideologies (Parreñas 22) are often associated with the precolonial practices of gender (Nadal 161; Nono 68, 96-98) combined with strong influences of the Catholic faith and an extensive colonial history on its people (Prieler and Centeno 5). The denigration of a woman's social ranking in the modern, post-colonial Philippines has been greatly influenced by colonial gender ideologies (Nono 67). Spanish colonial reports at the beginning of their conquest have cited the high status of women in pre-Hispanic times. Women were believed to have an equal, if not superior, social position compared to men. They engaged in trade, medicine, and economics. They were entitled to property, could divorce, and held valuable positions in society, such as a village chief or a babayan (shaman).

It can also be noted that the Filipino language, like most Austronesian languages, also contain gender-neutral pronouns, with the gendered English pronoun he or she simply pertained to as *siya* without ascribing a gender to it. The neutrality of the language, however, cannot directly be attributed to an egalitarian culture, as these ancestral predecessors also follow certain gender roles such as men being hunters and warriors while women being gatherers and caregivers. Nonetheless, the precolonial culture of the Philippines seems to reflect a culture built on mutual respect for individuals to do their tasks and functions without prejudice based on biological differences.

With the subsequent arrival of Spain, America, and Japan, the complex colonial history of the Philippines shaped a new set of ideologies rooted in patriarchy and the gender binary. The Spanish conquistadores brought to the country a new religion that became a crucial part of everyday life. Until the present, Christian ideologies influence society's gender roles and expectations (Prieler and Centeno 5; Nono 96). A woman should be meek, humble, patient, and tolerant (Camagay 2), while men should be strong, confident, and assertive.

Meanwhile, the entry of Americans into the Philippines highlighted a new gender binary shaped by their distinct image of Filipinas (Santos 3-6). Despite giving significance to education, it was criticized at that time for being a privilege of children from wealthy classes (Parreñas 51; Santos 11). Women were seen as mere romantic and sexual beings, creating orientalized images that reinforced notions of patriarchy, possession, submission, and an exotic fantasy. The United States was seen as rich, powerful protectors, while the Philippines was a weak country dependent on their support.

During the Japanese occupation, the Philippines experienced a complex paradox of empowerment and trauma. With many women facing victimization, such as with comfort women, others took on active roles in the fight for freedom (Lanzona 5). These women navigated their activism alongside familial duties as wives and daughters, negotiating existing gender and class limitations, which facilitated the complexities of expanded gender identities.

At present, this unique socio-historical context has influenced the country in shaping a culture filled with binaries and dissonances when it comes to gender. The domesticity of Filipina women has even become the backbone of the Philippine economy, with Filipina migrant workers flying to other countries for opportunities related to household help, nursing, and even marriage (Parreñas 2, 8). This is in contrast to male migrant workers who are in demand in construction, seafaring, and oil industries.

Given this multifaceted historical background, some researchers have observed a conundrum: despite the country's relatively high ranking in gender equality relative to other countries, there is still a continued prevalence of gender stereotyping (Java and Parcon 46; Prieler and Centeno 26). This can be observed in grade school textbooks that represent heteronormative roles where female images dominated reproductive roles and male images dominated productive and community roles (Java and Parcon 40). Another example is the proliferation of advertising images that depict women in more suggestive clothing and how they are more often seen in the household setting than men (Prieler and Centeno 17).

Queer individuals in present-day Philippine society also fall prey to gender stereotyping. Due to lack of information and their religion's continued influence on their belief

systems, contradictions on LGBTQ+ perceptions are apparent (De Guzman, "Philippine Laws"). According to the 2021 Global Index, the country ranked highest in Southeast Asia for LGBT acceptance (De Guzman, "Southeast Asia's"). Despite this, gender binaries ingrained in the consciousness of the Filipino people can still be observed. Failure to adhere to certain heteronormative standards would instantly cause conflict and start tsismis (gossip) among one's social peers (Nadal 161). Parents, teachers, and other guardians force children who are too effeminate (for boys) and too masculine (for girls) to conform to traditional expectations ascribed to them, oftentimes using physical and mental abuse to "reform" the child. The Filipinos' long-standing collective ideology of gender can be summarized in the popular rhyme, "girl, boy, bakla, tomboy," which represents two heteronormative identities and two non-heteronormative identities (Garcia 14). This belief puts an individual who does not fall under the stereotypical notions of a cisgendered boy or girl into the confines of the non-heteronormative bakla (effeminate man) or tomboy (masculine woman). As such, varied gender and sexual identities are often oversimplified to instantly equate either of the two.

Presently, it is noteworthy to cite that changes in perceptions were observed in a recent survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS), wherein a more positive response towards gays and lesbians in 2023 was recorded comparable to that of results in 2013 (Cu). The results showed more sympathetic attitudes towards non-heteronormative individuals, with 79% of Filipinos agreeing that gays and lesbians are just as trustworthy as any other Filipino. This is in contrast with only 67% of respondents agreeing with the statement in 2013. The country's political climate mirrors this rise in positive attitudes, with the election of the first transgender woman in Congress (Sawatzky) and several urban areas implementing anti-discrimination ordinances (Galupo; Mateo).

Despite this, there is still much to improve on, as shown by the survey revealing that 26% of Filipinos still believe that being gay or lesbian is contagious and 43% believe that AIDS is considered a sickness attributed to gays and lesbians. Moreover, 40% of respondents still indicated that if they have a family member who is gay or lesbian, they would like them to change or "return to being straight." Beliefs like these create adversaries, as evidenced by the continued impediment of the Anti-Discrimination Bill or the SOGIE Equality Bill (De Guzman, "Southeast Asia's"). It is this contradiction that further strengthens the need to discuss and delve deeper into the complexities of the Filipinos' gender ideologies and perceptions.

### **Gender Performativity**

Nevertheless, the most basic questions should be asked: What does it mean to be a man? What is being a woman? The answers to these questions are traditionally linked to biological differences between boys and girls, wherein gendered expectations are tied to a biological sex assigned at birth. During pregnancy, most parents nowadays are excited to plan their gender reveal parties. They shop for baby clothes based on a color scheme. Pink is for girls, while blue is for boys. Their friends and family buy toys for the child, which are mostly influenced by the child's ascribed societal roles in the future. Cooking toys are for girls, while race cars are for boys. Eventually, these become heteronormative gender expectations that are constantly followed to maintain the social structure. Sadly, these expectations consciously and unconsciously force individuals to conform and somewhat "impersonate" the roles we are expected to play. It leads to a suffocating ideology of being trapped in the gender ideals ascribed to an individual (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 227-228), with those who cannot conform to their gender roles seen as deviant

(Allen and Mendez 6). The repetition of these gendered acts across generations lead to a cycle of establishing and maintaining gender norms and expectations within society.

Interestingly, by the turn of the century, numerous scholars have started to move away from the biological, functionalist perspective. Instead, they switched their focus towards the underlying cultural expressions and interpretations in gendered interactions (Malpas and Wake 8). Gender theorists like Butler, Berlant, and Warner lay their theoretical foundations based on the assumption that gender is fluid (Jagose 83, 85), wherein individuals construct their gender identities based on personal narratives, actions, and their interactions with peers. Among these, one of the most popular is Butler, who incorporated the study of gender and sexuality to performance studies.

The field of performance studies is no longer limited to artistic performances such as theatrical plays, dance choreographies, or singing. It is also marked by the argument that everyday life is a performance in itself (Schechner 3). Also referred to as “cultural performances,” these are a series of embodied performances that are also linked to a social practice or phenomena. Performative inquiries are focused on scrutinizing the intersectionality between individual identity and social reality, as well as its construction and imposition. Examining performative acts is crucial in understanding further the unheard voices of society, the marginalized, the poor, etc.

In the case of performing one's gender, Butler discusses how gender is constructed and formed by one's repetitive acts of gendered performances. Examples of these gendered acts are mannerisms, language use, and fashion/clothing (*Gender Trouble* 145). The ritualized repetition of these performances in day-to-day life gives the impression of stability, naturalizing ideologies built on current social norms and gendered binaries. With this perspective, one can argue that our gender identities are not determined by one's biological sex, but rather built and enforced through performance (Schechner 259). She further argues that gender is “real only to the extent that it is performed, which greatly depends on the cultural framework within which it is performed and continually performed (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 278). The construction of one's gender identity is codified based on everyday practices of individuals about masculinity and femininity (Phibbs 14). Much like other scholars, Butler also believes that humans can be trapped in the gendered norms and expectations that have been in place for generations. Individuals learn gendered roles through school, religion, and their respective families, who have also learned these gendered roles from preceding generations (*Gender Trouble* 152). Through the continued cycle of repeating these gendered acts, individuals end up imitating or miming the dominant conventions of gender in order to fit in.

### **Pink Peso Advertisements as Artifacts**

This study examined pink peso advertisements using Kenneth Burke's cluster criticism, as adapted by Sonja Foss (63-66). The advertisements in this study were selected based on the following criteria: first, the advertisement was released within the past five years (2015-2019) prior to data gathering. Because of the changing practices, representations, and gender display through time, it was best to limit the timeframe to have a clearer and more in-depth picture of the gendered acts and embodied performances depicted in the artifacts. Second, the advertisement used an explicit approach with LGBTQ+-related elements in a generic commercial. This criterion was crucial as it was cited as one of the defining characteristics of pink peso advertisements (Gyemant 6; Yeh 3-7). Third, the advertisement was posted online through the video-sharing website, YouTube, and



never released on mainstream television. Researchers observed that most brands choose to tailor their commercials on mainstream media, such as television, based on the current ideologies of the general public (Yeh 8-12). By doing so, the brands avoid dissent from their audience when they choose not to include socially sensitive topics such as gender and race.

Meanwhile, the internet as a social space became an avenue for the representation of gender fluid identities and sexual expressions (Selvick 173-174). With the algorithmic control of social media platforms, individualized content is curated for each user and what they see in their “feeds.” Thus, this social space can create a specific community for non-heteronormative individuals to express themselves freely and foster a sense of belongingness. Therefore, it has long been argued that pink money advertisements that were never released for mainstream media portrayed a more genuine and authentic depiction of the LGBTQ+ community.

Seven pink peso advertisements met the criteria and were selected for this study. With the recent emergence of the trend, only a limited number of available commercials met the criteria, but this did not hinder the research based on Sonja Foss’s argument that in cluster criticism, it is not about the quantity of data, but the critical and in-depth analysis that would open discourses on case-like studies like this one (65).

The first artifact analyzed in this study was from a telecommunications company, which revolved around a cisgendered homosexual male and his dissonance in accepting his father’s Facebook friend request. He was open about his relationship in his social media posts, but he was not open to his father about his sexuality. The second artifact was released right after the success of the first, which was created by a competitor telecommunications company. This advertisement’s narrative centered around a cisgendered Filipino tourist traveling in Thailand with his girl friends. The tourist was exploring the streets alone when he met a cute Thai, just as his friends called him through Viber to ask where he was. When his friends heard the Thai’s deep voice, they shrieked with excitement, yelling, “kilig!”

Meanwhile, the third artifact was from a local brand of coconut cooking oil, and it showcased a cisgendered male walking around the streets of Metro Manila. The advertisement concluded when he got home, revealing that his partner was a man, too. His partner, wearing an apron, presented him with a feast for dinner. Following this was the fourth artifact, released by a transportation mobile app, which they claimed was a story from a series of real-life tweets from the micro-blogging site, Twitter (renamed to X). The cisgendered male’s experience with their ride-sharing option was reenacted, in which the other customer he shared the ride with was his crush. It was later revealed that the crush was also a cisgendered man.

The fifth artifact was an advertisement released by a popular Filipino clothing brand that revolved around a seemingly cisgendered male and his father. The son, who was a college student, switched into a more effeminate persona when in school. The cycle of wardrobe changes and mannerism changes when at home and in school were evident throughout the advertisement. On the other hand, the sixth artifact focused on a real-life transgender woman for a shampoo commercial. She was joined by three other transgender women, each representing a certain stage of a transgender’s life. The advertisement narrated the struggles they encountered followed by messages of hope and inspiration to be strong and confident with who you are.

The seventh artifact was a toothpaste commercial set in a milk tea shop. A cisgendered male frequented the shop where he saw his crush every day. They sent and received mixed signals, confusing the protagonist if his crush, a cisgendered male, was also gay and into him. The advertisement ended with the crush finally making a move and the two of them smiling at each other.

### **Cluster Criticism**

Cluster criticism was the method utilized to chart out the gendered performances reflected in the artifacts. It is important to describe how these artifacts represented various gender and sexual identities, as this highlights the conscious and unconscious worldview of the creators. Burke's methodological approach has been popular in analyzing the creators' underlying belief systems and ideologies, emphasizing their instinctive choices of key terms and visuals, along with the associations and contradictions that arise from them. Thus, the units of analysis in this study were centered on the identified key terms and visuals and the terms/visuals that clustered around them.

The terms and visuals were selected based on its frequency (how often it was used) and intensity (the strength, depth, and strong feelings conveyed) within the artifact. Following Foss's recommendation (65), the researcher limited the choices to six terms/visuals for each artifact to make it less complex and more insightful. This study also utilized her recommendation of categorizing the key elements into four, namely: word, color, image, and placement. After which, recurring terms and visuals among the artifacts were identified to describe and examine the key elements and ascribed performances associated with the represented identities.

Bold marks indicate that the term or visual was a key element in the individual advertisement. In contrast, artifacts that are marked but not bold suggest that, while the term or visual is present as a recurring element in the advertisement, it was not considered a major key term or visual of the specific artifact.

After identifying the key terms and visuals, each element was individually examined in relation to other terms and visuals that 'cluster' around them. Charting out the clusters helped the researcher understand the associations and contradictions attributed to the terms and visuals. This aided the researcher in discovering the conscious and unconscious worldview of the creators of the advertisements, which was examined scrutinize how these gendered performances are shaped by societal constructions. The identified key terms, visuals, and clusters were further examined to probe how the performances reinforce or challenge gender norms.

For organizational purposes, key elements with numerous words and associations were further grouped together based on their interconnections, with a colon used to identify the core concept. Italicized words signify an opposing connection with the identified key element. The clusters were charted out based on the key elements' close proximity to the term or visual, based on how it was used or how it appeared through frame-by-frame monitoring.

### **Performing Gender as Reflected in Pink Peso Advertisements**

Through the identified key terms, visuals, and clusters, the artifacts reflected the active presence of hegemonic struggles based on existing gender binaries, particularly in

**Table 1**  
Summary of Recurring Key Terms and Visuals

Artifacts		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Word	Kilig		X		x	x		x
Color	Pink/Blue; White/Gray	x	x	x	x	x	X	x
Image	Biological Male	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Collared Polo	x	x	x	x		x	X
	Nonverbals	x	x	x	x	X		x
Placement	Surprise		X	X				

**Table 2**  
Summary of Recurring Key Elements and Its Clusters

Key Term / Visual		Identified Clusters
Word	Kilig	Associations: Happy, friends, bango, crush, gay, yakap, femininity Contradictions: sad, anxiety, controlling emotions, masculinity
Color	Pink / Blue ; White / Gray	Loud/Printed (blue, yellow, pink): femininity, free, love, happiness, smell (amoy / bango), outfits Neutral/Plain (gray and blue): masculinity, collared polo (outfits) White: positivity, love, happiness, free Black: negativity
Image	Biological Male	Masculinity: nonverbals, family, crush (chicks) Femininity: hide, friends, nonverbals, kilig, crush (cisgendered man), anxiety, confusion, surprise
	Collared Polo	Colors, cisgender male, work (breaktime, going to / from), outfit change
	Nonverbals	Pagmamano, smell (amoy), hug (yakap) Femininity: beso, high-pitched voice, kilig Masculinity: fistbumping, punching, low voice, controlled emotions
Placement	Surprise	Focus, backside, wonder, confusion, kilig, happy, ending

how individuals embody and perform their gender. Similar to the criticism of Lewis and Hames (3-5) in a previous study, images of stereotypical femininity and masculinity are continuously and repetitively displayed through the advertisements in the present study. Unfortunately, these images and representations further shape and foster heteronormative struggles.

The constant repetition of these gendered acts within the media creates a cycle wherein the audience unconsciously internalizes these representations as the true and only reality instead of being a myriad reality. In the Philippines, the cycle of constructing and reinforcing the stereotype that gayness is associated to heightened femininity establishes the foundation for depicting a unidimensional non-heteronormative image.



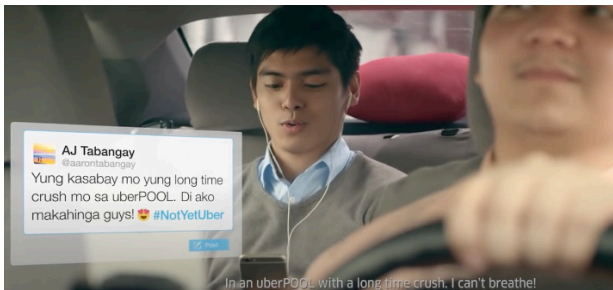
**Figure 1**

*Still from P.S. I Love You, Bro, characters wearing contrasting colors depicting feminine and masculine traits, CloseUp Philippines, August 30, 2019.*



**Figure 2**

*Still from How long can you keep a secret?, a father and son showing affection through a fistbump, Bench/, February 19, 2018.*



**Figure 3**

*Still from Kilig #Uberstories, a passenger fawning over sharing a carpool ride with his crush. Uber, April 22, 2017.*



**Figure 4**

*Still from **Gusto**, a same-sex couple displaying a boy-girl persona through domestic roles and colors of their outfits. Minola Premium Coconut Oil, February 3 2017.*



**Figure 5**

*Still from **Kilig #ThisIsWhyIRoam in Bangkok**, a Filipino wearing a collared polo and has the financial capacity to travel to Thailand, GlobePH, December 15, 2016.*



**Figure 6**

*Still from **Kilig #Uberstories**, a passenger fawning over sharing a carpool ride with his crush. Uber, April 22, 2017.*

## *Gender-Specific Associations and Ascriptions*

A specific manifestation of gendered association in the advertisements was the unconscious ascription of colors to distinguish genders. Embodied gender performances are closely associated with how one dresses, and the artifacts have reflected gender display through the character's outfits and color choices. All artifacts adhered to gender-specific colors associated with masculinity and femininity. Calm and neutral colors (blue and gray) were used for characters with more masculine traits, while loud and vibrant colors (yellow and pink) were used for more effeminate characters. This simple act of instantly associating one's gender and sexual identity with an innocuous color unconsciously creates and heightens gender differences and expectations.

In the artifacts, associations to one's femininity and masculinity were also closely tied to gender-specific actions. Gayness was closely associated to greeting each other with a beso (kiss on the cheek), while manliness was asserted through fist bumps and a punch on an arm or a shoulder. However, one should remember that these gendered expectations work within a cultural framework that may also differ depending on the social norms within the group. Beso, in the Philippines, is closely associated with femininity, whereas European and hispanic practices consider this act as an ungendered social etiquette with both males and females greeting each other that way.

Other gender-specific behaviors that were utilized in the advertisements were the use of high-pitched voices and expressing kilig for feminine characters, while speaking in a low timbre and controlling emotions were associated with masculinity.

*Kilig*, a recurring element in the artifacts, is a Filipino term that refers to feelings of excitement and thrill in romantic situations. The artifacts associated this feeling with happiness, a feeling that is shared with friends (who are usually female or more effeminate in nature). As such, it is also associated with femininity, something that opposes controlled emotions and masculinity.

It was evident that the artifacts reflected stereotypical depictions of gay men liking the color pink, having more girl friends instead of guy friends, and being less brusko (muscular or rowdy). The embodiment of these traditional stereotypes in the advertisements depicted the internalization of a social order within the human body, that is, gayness being associated with heightened femininity.

### *The Continued Use of Traditional Binaries: From Lalaki to Bakla*

Upon analysis of the pink peso advertisements, it was observed that the continued use of traditional binaries in the performance of non-heteronormative identities were still evident. Majority of the artifacts still conformed to certain gender stereotypes to assert the gender identity and sexual orientation being performed. These stereotypical depictions are congruent with western literature (Allen and Mendez 4; Butler, *Gender Trouble* 152; Habarth 82; Malpas and Wake 53, 99; Phibbs 90, 192) wherein the gender binary causes an unconscious collective idea of gender and sexuality. The discussion of Neil Garcia on the stereotypical binary ascriptions of simply either a man or a bakla, a woman or a tomboy, in Filipino society (xvi) was still subtly evident in the gendered representations found in the artifacts.

Five out of the seven commercials were characterized by male characters who were

more effeminate than their heteronormative counterparts. It was reflected in these artifacts that the homosexual men's acts and mannerisms were closely ascribed to a more effeminate personality, as if sexual identity is also congruent with gender identity. While it can be accurate that there are effeminate gays in reality, it is important to note that there are different levels of masculinity and femininity for varying individuals that could also be portrayed. This observation was also similar to that of previous authors such as Lewis and Hames (3-5), and Tsai (1-26).

The protagonists of four out of the five artifacts depicted different effeminate personalities, with a shy and meek tourist (second telecommunications commercial), a giddy and kilig passenger (transportation app commercial), a playful classmate (clothing brand commercial), and a sensitive patron (toothpaste commercial). One of the artifacts utilized a storyline that made use of a seemingly masculine man (cooking oil commercial), but his partner who was introduced by the end of the commercial was represented with a more effeminate personality, a homemaker doing domestic work. This reinforces the notion that even non-heteronormative relationships are expected to have a "boy and girl" persona within the relationship. This was also similar to the romantic interests depicted in other artifacts, wherein one character was depicted as more effeminate and the other as more masculine. Only the first artifact (telecommunications commercial) was seen to have an ambiguous couple, in which the couple are both more masculine in representation. The sixth artifact (shampoo commercial) did not have any romantic interests portrayed.

The effeminate personalities and gendered domestic expectations echoed in the advertisements demonstrated the unconscious amalgamation of colonial influences in present-day Philippines. Images of meek women from Christianity and the Spanish colonial period, combined with the loving girlfriend ideals shaped by America's exotic fetishes, along with the domestic ideologies emphasized during the Japanese occupation, all influenced romantic expectations that permeated to non-heteronormative relationships.

#### *The Probability of Symbolic Annihilation*

A major observation across all artifacts is the overabundance of queer representations who were biological males. Six artifacts overwhelmingly focused on cisgendered gay men, while one artifact focused on a transwoman. This observation should not be taken lightly as there can be a possibility of symbolic annihilation. This is a term utilized by cultural studies researchers (Tsai 1-26; Yeh 12), which describes the pattern of popular culture artifacts focusing on limited gender identities, resulting in insufficient representations from other parts of the spectrum.

Nonetheless, it is still a breath of fresh air for the usual "gay best friend" in movies and television to finally be seen as the main protagonist in advertisements. However, the continued practice of selective representation might only empower certain queer individuals (those that are represented), which can also lead to the further marginalization of other identities. Unrepresented gender and sexual identities are kept silent, normalizing gender inequalities. The absence of other gender and sexual identities like lesbians, bisexuals, intersex, and transmen in pink peso advertisements coincides with the global trend of patriarchal capitalism. According to previous literature (Tsai 1-26), this type of capitalism describes how a capitalist society focuses on biological males despite wanting to gear away from androcentrism.

## *Gender as an Element of Surprise*

It is important to note that two artifacts utilized the characters' sexual identities as a key component to give an element of surprise by the end of the commercial. A strong emphasis was given at the start of the advertisements to portray the protagonists as individuals who can "pass off" being a cisgendered heteronormative man. In the artifacts, gendered acts such as speaking with a lower timbre, engaging in sports, and limiting emotions were all emphasized at the beginning of the commercial to associate the protagonist with stereotypical masculine traits. As such, the revelation of these characters being attracted to the same sex was utilized to engage the emotions of the viewers. Playing with this element affirms the general preconceptions of the Filipino audience that lead them to initially identify the characters as only one of two identities, a boy (masculine man) or a bakla (effeminate man). A masculine man was portrayed in a way that the audience would initially associate his gendered performances as that of a boy, and the sudden declaration of his sexual identity would befuddle the viewers as it is inconsistent with their predetermined gender expectations.

The utilization of the element of surprise in the artifacts of the present study affirmed the argument of Allen and Mendez that society has preconceived notions of gendered categories being similar to opposite poles instead of a spectrum, which require individuals to choose between the two (1). This is despite the fact that these dualistic categories of gendered norms, stereotypes, and expectations may even be non-existent in the first place (Wetherell and Edley 345). Nonetheless, this study acknowledges that the advertisements' use of the element of surprise could also be an avenue for the viewers to contemplate on their own gendered expectations and why it was surprising for them to see a cisgendered man interested in another man. This dissonance could create increased introspection that could lead to possibilities of subversions and open discourse relating to taboo topics such as gender.

## *Representation based on Economic Worth*

In addition, it was observed that the characters being represented in the advertisements were from the middle to upper classes. The protagonists with observable occupations were all white collar workers, such as the characters frequenting a milk tea shop during their mid-shift break from corporate work (toothpaste commercial) and characters wearing business casual wear (first telecommunications commercial and cooking oil commercial). Meanwhile, other protagonists without a distinct occupation were seen to be engaged in activities that require a higher financial capacity, such as traveling (second telecommunications commercial) and utilizing transportation apps that are more expensive than hailing traditional public transportation such as jeepneys and the train (transportation app commercial).

This affirmed the criticism of patriarchal capitalist practices, in which researchers Lewis and Hames (2-6) argue that representations found in produced artifacts focus on those who stereotypically have the higher buying power (Firat 383; Roberts 827-828). This is one of the negative aspects of the digital age, where "digital inequality" can take place as technologies are utilized and accessed differently by consumers from different socio-economic backgrounds (Ignatow and Robinson 5). In the case of the Philippines, access to digital technologies is highly privileged, in favor of those from urban areas and an individual's financial capacity. In a country where a few islands still have no access to electricity, the consumption of digital media is considered a luxury.



Economic factors could greatly influence the negotiation of who deserves to be portrayed (Yeh 12), promoting another layer of hegemonic struggles for the underrepresented queer's social class. Unequal representations based on socio-economic status might lead society to misrecognize the gender inequalities experienced by the actual LGBTQ+ community, especially the narratives of those from the lower classes. Images of successful and wealthy gays could undermine the real problems faced by the community. For example, the Philippine Survey Research Center's survey results that LGBTQ+ members are often the breadwinners of the family. This responsibility might assign them a certain amount of power and authority over the family, but it can also limit their individual economic conditions. Their role in the family combined with their gender and sexual identities can create narratives unique to their situation.

Clearly, this is reflective of postmodern culture that blurs the line between culture and commercialism (Storey 194). This study demonstrates how economic disparities, hegemonic masculinities, and the embodied performances of gender norms are intertwined in the production and consumption of such artifacts.

### **Contextualizing the Gender Trouble in the Philippines**

The repetitive use of gendered stereotypes and depictions in produced goods for mass consumption reinforce the cycle of ascribing a gender binary to a very fluid concept. Despite the portrayal of non-heteronormative characters, the gendered performances reflected in the artifacts were still trapped within the confines of a heteronormative standard. This is what Butler calls "gender trouble," wherein the exclusion in one gendered category is dependent upon inclusion of the opposite, and vice versa (*Bodies That Matter* 230, 238). Identities are still construed based on society's binary ascriptions and stereotypes on masculinity and femininity (Phibbs 34). Subconsciously internalizing these gendered performances (i.e., how we think and act, as well as our expectations) emphasize the community's confinement within the ideologies present in a heteronormative society. In the context of present-day Philippines, the continued use of traditional stereotypes as well as the utilization of the characters' sexuality as an element of surprise somehow reflect the status of the community. The conundrum of the country being more open to the LGBTQ+ than neighboring countries while several Filipinos still upholding outdated beliefs (such as gayness being contagious or the want to change a gay family member) is highly evident. For one, the country embraces the globalized trend of advocating for gender equality and visibility. Ergo, following suit with nonheteronormative representations. Even so, the way they are presented is not yet fully cultivated, as the majority are still trapped in the confines of existing norms and beliefs influenced by traditional values and stereotypes.

Given this, the researcher is in agreement with Butler as she desires for the eventual autonomy of performing one's gender (*Gender Trouble* 121-124; 140), free from the stereotypes and expectations of society. These ascriptions only limit our gender ideals and influence our perceptions of how to 'perform' one's gender. True empowerment is when individuals are given autonomy to define their own identities outside societal constraints. Truly, the researcher is also hopeful for a gender equal future where individuals are free to express themselves — free from the constraints of heteronormative binaries.

The researcher believes that recognizing and challenging stereotypical gender displays in media and popular culture can be the first step toward developing a collective resistance against social structures that uphold gender-based oppression. The continued

criticism and evaluation of gender representations can facilitate the attainment of a more inclusive and diverse society.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study highlights the role of media in the creation, reinforcement, and manipulation of gendered performances. Through the narratives (using key visual and auditory symbols) found in the artifacts, one can observe the existing gendered ideologies of the companies and advertisers. Understanding these connections through recurring key terms and visuals across all the artifacts is crucial to recognize society's cycle of creation and recreation of gendered expectations and stereotypes. Specifically, this study examined the manifestations of existing heteronormative values and hegemonic beliefs in the gendered performances found in the selected pink peso advertisements.

This study concludes that gender typecasting is evident in the creation of these advertisements, utilizing stereotypical gender display that is hugely based on traditional gender binaries. The continued duplication of these performative acts and functions further reinforces and proliferates gendered norms and stereotypes. Furthermore, the continued use of traditional forms of gender performativity still puts individuals within the confines of heteronormative expectations.

While Filipinos' perceptions about the LGBTQ+ community have gradually improved (as evidenced by the survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations), there is still much progress to be made. As such, the corporations and advertisers center on representations based on conventional gender norms to please the majority (heteronormative) audience. In turn, the persistent representations utilized in the advertisements become integral in the continued cycle of developing a false social consciousness of what it means to be queer in Filipino society. It is this set of heteronormative beliefs and expectations that shape the Filipino's performance of gender in everyday life, as well as their expectations of embodied practices among their peers. The continued misrepresentations (and the lack thereof) of non-heteronormative individuals can habitually conceal the subordination of the LGBTQ+ community, encouraging a problematic gendered habitus of the producers and consumers of these advertisements.

Indeed, these artifacts reflect how advertising can be a site of struggle for gender-based hegemony. Examining these types of consumer-based artifacts is imperative to understand and critique how gendered binaries and heteronormative ideologies are manifested, represented, and challenged or reinforced.

On a positive note, the researcher remains optimistic about the potential of pink peso advertisements becoming a site that challenges and breaks down gender stereotypes. While at present, the continued proliferation of traditional gender display is evident, one artifact (shampoo advertisement) focused on representing a transgender woman and her experiences. The advertisement was utilized to empower transgender women and to acknowledge their struggles. By highlighting the narratives of transwomen, the advertisement was successful in driving a positive influence on prevailing ideologies. Thus, there is hope for pink peso advertisements as tools for broader acceptance and increased visibility of diverse gender identities and expressions. Ultimately, the presence of non-heteronormative performances in advertisements can foster a more inclusive society - as long as it is continuously critiqued and approached thoughtfully.

## Recommendations

It is recommended for this study to conduct another research that would focus on the proceeding five year span (2020-2024) since the time of the study's implementation. A comparative analysis of the findings might bring to light practices and representations that might have changed (or have not changed) through the years, especially that this marketing strategy is a relatively new advertising approach. Scholars, academics, practitioners, and the viewers, themselves, are called on to constantly examine these marketing practices to move the trend forward towards increased awareness and representation.

The researcher remains hopeful for the potential advantages of this trend, particularly because it has already started conversations regarding the inclusion of the queer community into what was once a dominantly heteronormative domain. With proof of one artifact showing genuine support, which represented an authentic depiction of a transgender woman's narrative, this emerging marketing strategy shows the probability of prioritizing true and diverse representation more than motivations for economic gain. This proves that there is promise in the emergence of pink money, as it has the capacity to become a medium that can liberate ourselves from society's current gendered binaries and hegemonic ideologies.

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