

A Phenomenological Study on the Reception of Philippine LGBTQ+ Audiences Towards Queerbaiting in American Television Series

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Abstract: *Media has played an important role in shaping opinions and biases that pertain to certain issues. With regards to the LGBTQ+ community, there is a certain need to be represented correctly in the media, to stray from stereotypes that may be harmful to how people perceive them in the real world. The accuracy in the representation of these individuals are important in order for identification to take place and self-esteem to be supported. With the rise in popularity of LGBTQ+ themes, the general public encounters these characters in the media, and in some cases may conjure up opinions that would not be based on truth but on stereotypes. Substituting actual representation for the sake of entertainment, mixing themes of untruths to reality to appeal more to their target audience. One case of misrepresentation is queerbaiting. In this study, the researchers aim to look into the perception of the Philippine LGBTQ+ community towards queerbaiting in American series. The method of gathering data is through three focus group discussions, and the response is analyzed using interpersonal deception theory and audience reception theory. The results of the study were that the community finds it tolerable and sees it as a limited kind of representation. They also see it as a marketing strategy to garner more views, but it being intentional or unintentional raised different insights. And lastly, although the community consider it as a representation, they still would've appreciated a sincerer and multidimensional character representation.*

Keywords: LGBTQ+ Community, Queerbaiting, American Television Series, Queer Representation

1. Introduction

In talking about how the media helped change the public view about people of the LGBTQ+ community, there is a truth in saying that the media played a transitional role in forming political opinions and even shifting attitudes towards sexual minorities, especially when it comes to the demographic that is easiest to influence, that being the younger generation. Ayoub (2018) discusses that in the rise of different forms of media, there is also a rise in communication. And with this communication, interpersonal contact is established. According to Gordon Allport, an influential psychologist, under the right circumstances (as cited by Ayoub 2018), this 'interpersonal contact' is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between people of different classes, may it be within the minority or the majority. There is a connection that most people in the older generation would not understand. There is new insight that comes through and being that younger people understand that these are people, that they

are talking to those with excessive experiences in fields that they do not know of, they are opening themselves up to new ideas and new understandings.

But with this phenomenon of the LGBTQ+ community having a large following, it was only a matter of time before it was used in an unseemly manner. In an article written by Holly Honderich in 2019 under BBC news, they effectively asked the question of whether or not Queerbaiting was a sign of exploitation or progress. In this regard, it is only right to look at the claim made by Himberg (2017). Stating that “Queerbaiting isn’t new, but its implications are as powerful as ever” With most people in this generation trying so desperately to cling to an identity, representation matters more than ever. Prof Himberg continues on to say that these identities have been used time and again in pop culture to establish an ‘edgy’ identity. It can come off as disrespectful and insensitive to those in the community when it appears that the media seems to be playing with this identity. The dictionary defines *queerbaiting* as referring to the practice of implying a non-heterosexual attraction or relationship but never following through with such ideas explicitly.

In this study, the researchers will conduct a phenomenological study in order to discern the disagreeability of Philippine LGBTQ+ Audiences toward queerbaiting in the American Series. The primary aim of this study is to ascertain whether or not queerbaiting may possibly be considered as a form of misrepresentation of the LGBTQ+ community in the media and how this may be viewed by LGBTQ+ Philippine audiences.

Queer Representations in Media

There has been an acknowledged effort and aiming for the LGBTQ+ community to be known as a movement, one focusing on acceptance and equality, since the beginning. In Marche (2019), he urged people to recount their memories in order to add personal details to the known history. The underlying militancy that appears to emerge as people begin to consider themselves as citizens with equal rights to life in search of truth and happiness, rather than as second-class citizens. Marche's book looks at how mobilizing the entire community to practice LGBTQ advocacy and activism has been successful. The demand for the community to be represented on television got stronger in the aim of communicating their message to an audience that is believed to be the 'norm' of society, the 'mainstream demographic.'

Media reflects how society is, or could be, as well as how audiences might wish society to be. The things we see, hear, and experience all play an important role in the formation of the self (Halenárová, 2018). According to Tobiasz's dissertation (as referenced by Halenárová, 2018), media has an impact on viewers' perceptions of the world, others, and themselves. Cultural indicators research reveals that the more individuals watch television, the more their perspectives are influenced by television, according to another dissertation (as quoted by Halenárová, 2018) by Elias. People get their preconceptions about gays and lesbians from television, according to Elias. The programming on television teaches and assists viewers in creating their own realities.

Hart (as cited by Halenárová, 2018) stated that television show producers then have to bear the responsibility to present plausible depictions of the different social groups like the minority groups found in society. The power to represent reality and having mass viewership, television then holds the power to dictate, to represent, or to reflect which people, ideas, and behaviors are ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ (Gray, n.d. as cited in Halenárová, 2018). If there are misinterpretations, it can influence the opinion of the audiences that do not belong or have

connections with these groups. It is then often difficult to distinguish between information that is based on reality and information that is fiction, as television has creative inputs provided to depict the characters seen on television. Producers of television take real events and combine fiction into them to make it more appealing towards the audiences (Halenárová, 2018). The representation of the reality has mixed culture from both reality and fiction which makes it more interesting and engaging for the audiences' entertainment.

Despite a significant growth in heterosexual support for LGBT equality, which is characterized as a multidimensional construct consisting of supportive views toward many social and legal challenges confronting gay men and women in recent media contents, prejudicial portrayal still existed (Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2000 as cited by Bond & Compton, 2015). Whenever a homosexual character is portrayed on shows, they are usually the subject of jokes and stereotypes. An example of a typical representation of homosexuality on the screen is through a gay male character that is very flamboyant, sexually aggressive, and funny mainly because they feeds into all the stereotypes that people have about homosexuality. There are instances wherein these gay characters are not portrayed in a stereotyped manner, but these characters have no visible sex life on screen (e.g. Matt Fielding on *Melrose Place*), or attempts are made to censor it if writers attempt to challenge this norm (as on *Ellen*).

A media research critique by De Ridder, Dhaenens, and Van Bauwel (2011) focuses on the politics of representation and empowerment which do not engage in questioning society or its established norms and values. An example given was the representation of homophobia in popular television culture, which Battles and Hilton Morrow (2002), as cited by De Ridder, Dhaenens, and Van Bauwel, (2011), concluded in their research on the sitcom *Will & Grace*, that represented the problem that is of a 'marginalized individual', but never societal. They further states that homosexual relationships and identities are mostly presented in relation to heterosexuality, making the heterosexual lifestyle the constantly celebrated and more 'authentic' (Avila-Saavedra, 2009 as cited by De Ridder, et al. 2011). In media and popular culture, heterosexuality is then considered as the default performance that is made normal in these numerous representations of homosexual identities.

Media has developed and there have been changes in terms of these representations. Even though the media has been showing these negative images of the LGBTQ+ community it has also been the medium in propelling the changing perception of gay and lesbian identities (Streitmatter, 2009 as cited by De Ridder, et al. 2011). It is important to take note of not only the quantity of representation but the quality as well because of how the representations of these groups will be perpetuated (Akita, et al. 2013). There are still cases wherein the popular culture with strong heteronormative assumptions are being proliferated and reiterated by numerous media representations. A way in which the LGBTQ+ community are being represented with still having the ideals of the heteronormative lifestyle is through queerbaiting which presents suggestive connotations of a queer trait but is then concluded as a normal heterosexual.

With strides in acceptance in the younger generation through the normalization of LGBT characters in sitcoms and other shows that they are exposed to, they are prone to exploring their sexuality now more than ever. With the growing number of labels that were practically unknown to those of the older generation, the results of the study conducted by Goldberg (et al 2019) prove that there are more people that identify as 'queer' individuals than most would think to imagine, 6% of the broader sexual minority population fall into this specific category.

According to Drake (2020), the notion that the world is more accepting of people from the LGBTQ+ community can be seen even outside of the media perspective.

Queerbaiting

In the Urban Dictionary, it is similar to how Goldyn and Hubb usage, “When a politician, pundit, or other public figure brings up the completely irrelevant detail about a person’s sexuality, true or untrue, as a way of subtly channeling homophobia to attack them” (2008). This definition indicates negative behaviors toward the LGBT+. Another definition written in the Urban Dictionary is that, “When a series, book or movie statements on there being LGBT+ representation for views, when ‘canon-logically,’ there is none or less then they hinted at ” (2020). The word ‘queer’ as defined by the Oxford Dictionary as an adjective, a noun, and a verb. As an adjective it is stated to mean strange or odd, slightly ill, or (often used offensively) homosexual. It describes strangeness or oddness compared to what most people consider as normal, in other words, abnormal. It is also often used as an offensive term towards homosexuals. As a noun, it is identified as homosexual man, while as a verb it means to spoil or ruin.

In 1981, Lawrence Goldyn uses the word queerbaiting in his article "Gratuitous Language in Appellate Cases Involving Gay People" which discusses how homosexuals individuals were being addressed in US courts. In 2009, (as cited by Nordin, 2015) Nadine Hubbs also used the term in their article "Bernstein, Homophobia, Historiography," in which it was compared to red-baiting as to describe the attempt to expose and purge homosexual individuals in the 1950s and 1960s. The word queerbaiting has different meanings in different contexts in history and also has negative connotations. It describes what is often considered as negative behavior against homosexuals such as homophobic slurs and persecution. So when the term queerbaiting comes up, it is often associated with negative unwanted behaviors.

Queerbaiting in Media Productions

In the context of entertainment, queerbaiting is about an audience that claims to know the producer's preferred meaning and accuses these producers of lying or not standing up for it (Nordin, 2015). The issue is that the audiences suggest that even if the producers were not the only ones who created this queer context or meaning, they seem to have the power to deny or correct these wrong or false context or meanings. An example given by Nordin (2015) is that there are several fans discussing a promo for Vikings on Tumblr of quick editing between characters and clips of what will happen during the season. The reactions vary between hope, that it means something for the two characters, and humor, for those who take it as a joke, and suggestions, that King Ecbert will not ask Athelstan to be his mistress. Some fans took it as a promise of what would happen. Some saw it as a promise that would turn out not to be fulfilled then came the case of being ‘queerbaited’.

In McDermott (2020), the author identifies the word queerbaiting as a 'fan-coined' term to refer to the strategy of subtly hinting queer representation in the media to entice people of the LGBTQ+ community without actually following through or under-delivering on the promise. In McDermott (2020), the author identifies the word 'queerbaiting' as a 'fan-coined' term to refer to the strategy of subtly hinting queer representation in the media to entice people of the LGBTQ+ community without actually following through or under-delivering on the promise. There have been studies that have focused on the debate surrounding queerbaiting that fans have engaged in with writers or producers of a particular show, going as far as to accuse and criticize them for such practices. According To Brennan (2019), the author identified queerbaiting as a tactic where "those officially associated with media text our viewers

interested in the LGBT narratives... without the text ever definitely confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters" 'Queerbaiting' is a term that arose in the 2010s and has since then been appropriated by fans of LGBT characters. Some see it as exploitive, but to others it may be seen as marketing in a "form of queer activism". Gay marketing is seen all around with brands, such as Airbnb and Redbull that have pledged their support for marriage equality. 'Gay Vague' as some may call it, is a term that started in the late '90s, one that is especially evocative of queerbaiting strategies. This was a term coined by Michael Wilke, a journalist who had a personal collection of advertisements that had underlying homoerotic themes.

History of LGBTQ+ Portrayals in Philippine Media

Payuyo (2012) evaluated how 'gays are portrayed in popular gay-themed Filipino films from 2000 to 2010' the author included titles such as " ms: "Markova: Comfort Gay" (2000); "Aishite Imasu1941: Mahal Kita"(2004); "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" (2005); "In My Life" (2009); and, "Petrang Kabayo" (2010). Identifying two distinct stereotypes in the process, the effeminate gay (or beauty parlor gays) and the masculine gay (loosely coined as Brokeback mountain, in reference to the famous western film). Payuyo cites a study by Soler (1988) where the author talks about a character stereotype called '*Palengkera-mujera*' that can be comparable to the modern '*parloristang bakla*'; this trope includes portraying characters in the most feminine way possible, having them perform 'women's work' such as household chores, entertaining guests and the likes. The characters also take on a different vocal pitch, as the study claims that voices 'instantly reveal one's true gender', explaining that gay characters go through all the trouble in altering their voices. Most lead characters would use the '*parloristang bakla*' stereotype and are almost always desiring heterosexual men. In a study cited by Payuyo conducted by Rupp and Taylor (2003), an ethnographic study of drag queens said that they are not attracted to one another; gay men are not attracted to drag queens, and they desire normatively masculine men (Valoocci, 2005). The second is the manly gay as shown in 'Brokeback Mountain.' The phrase "Brokeback Mountain" comes from filmmaker Ang Lee's critically acclaimed film about two homosexual cowboys and their illicit love affair in the American West. Gay characters who reflected this stereotype appeared like straight guys in terms of personality features and demeanor. Because they only want homosexual males who are similar to them, it is their sexuality that makes them homosexual.

LGBTQ+ Themes in Philippine media

There are plenty of examples from western contents of queerbaiting, but in the Philippine setting there is a lack of queerbaiting to be found in mainstream media. In the year 2020, there was an obvious influx of Boys Love (BL) and gay-themed media in the Philippine entertainment (Smith, 2021), but before this increase of queerness in media previous research has shown some out-of-the-box texts that indicates queerness in traditional Philippine culture (David, 2012).

According to David (2012), the queerness in traditional Philippine media is not always linked to a need for religious liberation. Tradition, or at least certain key components of it, ensured that native civilization would provide a safe refuge for tolerance. This creates a paradox of a conservative but tolerant culture towards queerness. An example given by David (2012) of the queerness in Philippine media in the past is a movie from 1975 that is directed by Lino Brocka, titled "Manila in the Claws of Light (*Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*)". Instead of Maynila's class-based dualist presentation, Manila by night featured powerful homosexual and (anti-)heroic lesbian characters, casually polysexual men and women, and persistently ambiguous dramatis personae. They weren't condemned or hurt because of their sexual preferences but

they just existed as a result of some aesthetic connotations generated through attempts to periodize the city's history.

An article by Payuyo (2012) also evaluated Filipino Films from 2000 to 2010. Payuyo has noticed that there are two main stereotypes to identify queer portrayals: the parloristang bakla (beauty parlor gay) for the effeminate gay, and 'Brokeback Mountain' (in reference to a well known gay 'western' movie) for the masculine gay. Mainstream Philippine cinema in the past decade has favored the parloristang bakla that tends to appear more heterosexual than homosexual and in recent media the masculine gay stereotypes. Now despite the recent change in queer portrayals, Payuyo states that institutions that sponsor heteronormativity will continue and prevent homosexuality from being seen as a naturally occurring form of sexuality.

With the portrayals of queerness in the Philippines leaning more towards heteronormativity and the conservative yet tolerant culture towards queerness, this questions what the LGBTQ+ Filipino community thinks of queer misrepresentations in media. With this, the study will evaluate the opinions of the LGBTQ+ Filipino community towards queerbaiting in western, specifically American, media.

In recent history, the portrayals of gay people in Filipino media, there has been a noticeable shift. In a study done by PEW Research Center, it revealed that around 73% of Filipinos think that homosexuality should be accepted in society (Poushter, 2020). It is also said that among Asian countries that participated in said study, the Philippines had the highest number of respondents that said they were accepting of homosexuals (Abad, 2020). It is easy to see why instead of sensationalizing these themes, there are those that would rather normalize its existence. In an interview with Juan Miguel Severo on a show called "Gaya sa Pelikula" or "Just like the movies", wherein the plot revolves around college love between two male protagonists, Severo claims that the show is nothing more than to "situate" gay couples in well-known movie tropes, to express to the public that it is similar to heterosexual experiences as well (Beltran, 2020).

The occurrence of queerbaiting in the Philippines is still over the horizon, but with these themes that the media has been portraying, and the further wave of acceptance of the new generation of audiences, it can only be a matter of time before there is an uproar of parallels with other countries that have this trope as a 'norm'.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study incorporates two studies: Interpersonal Deception Theory and Audience Reception theory. David Buller and Judee Burgoon (2020) developed Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT) to predict and explain the process of encoding and decoding false messages in interpersonal encounters. Deception, as defined by IDT, refers to communications or signals that are deliberately and intentionally sent to cause another person to believe or come to a false conclusion. The emphasis on messages does not rule out the possibility that humans and other species deceive conspecifics through a variety of noncommunicative actions, nor does it rule out the possibility that noncommunicative actions and nonhuman signals can provide insight into the causal mechanisms underlying interpersonal deception.

On the other hand, British sociologist Stuart Hall proposed a new model of mass communication that emphasized the importance of active interpretation within relevant codes. Hall's communication model shifted away from the idea that the media might directly influence

a specific behavior in an individual while maintaining the media's position as an ag model are: (1) the same event can be encoded in more than one form; (2) the message has more than one possible reading; and (3) interpreting the message can be a difficult process, no matter how natural it appears.

With the apparent similarities of the communication process in the study, the researchers made it a linear way of communication focusing on the process of decoding information and opinion-forming within the audiences. This framework has incorporated the IDT in assessing credibility within what is stated as an example of deceptive media and the audience reception theory that states there can be different interpretations or understandings within the message.

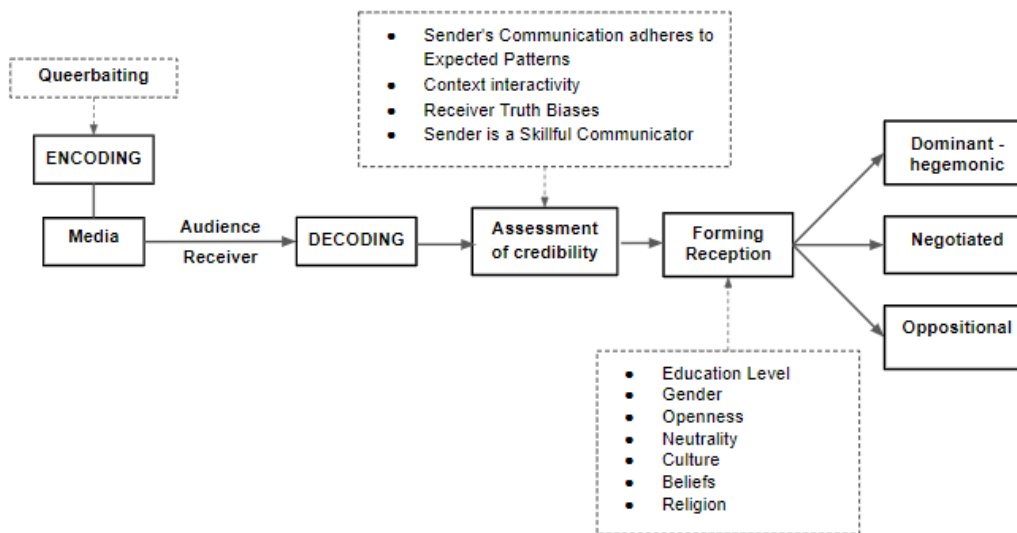


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In figure 1, it starts off with encoding messages to be sent through a medium. With the context of the study, 'queerbaiting' will be encoded in the created content and disseminated and spread through media. Queerbaiting information can include queer interactions, identity, behaviors, personality, and many more. After it has been spread to the media, audiences will then receive the information being spread. And that is where the decoding of the information and formation of the perception will begin.

The first process that the information will go through would be assessing its credibility according to the receiver's views. According to the IDT propositions by Burgoon and Buller (2020), in proposition eight assessing the credibility of the sender's message the receiver perceives the message as credible when (1) the context is interactive, (2) the sender is a skillful communicator, (3) the receiver is truth biased, and (3) lastly the sender's communication adheres to expected patterns. In this part, the audience will assess whether the information is in accordance with what they know to be queer and is it a credible representation of the LGBTQ+ community. The way it is portrayed properly and predictably to reality can be also used to perceive it as a truthful queer interaction representation. According to the proposition, If the sender is also sending messages in predictable ways, the receivers that are truth-based will also perceive the message as truthful. So with this they have either processed the information given as something related to queerness.

The second is that the formation of reception will begin after the assessment of credibility. In this process, the theory of audience reception is applied. There can be different views to be formed with a single content or information given. These opinions are based on certain factors like education level, gender, openness, neutrality, culture, beliefs, religion, and other factors that form the ideology. It can then stem into three positions according to Stuart Hall, and these are dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions as explained above. Audiences can either see it as queerbaiting because of the queer characteristics they have seen or because most of the people declared it as queerbaiting, or they can oppose saying it isn't queerbaiting because they have a different view on queer characteristics or relationships.

3. Methodology

This study adopted an interpretive phenomenological methodology. Neubauer (et al., 2019, p. 92 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021) employs the philosophical premise that "lived experience is an interpretation process situated in an individual's lifeworld." This permits persons who have firsthand knowledge of a phenomenon to give their own, sometimes neglected, perspectives on the world (Creswell & Poth, 2016 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021), which is critical when investigating a phenomenon that may affect minority groups (Crockett et al., 2018 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021). The focus of this study are the opinions or perspectives of the Philippine LGBTQ+ community towards the phenomenon of queerbaiting.

In an article by Hogan Heather (2019), where they list out 25 acts of queerbaiting, these three series are mentioned with the characters: Janeway and Seven from "Star Trek: Voyager" (1995), Jane and Maura from "Rizzoli & Isles" (2010), and lastly Tegan and Michaela, from "How to Get Away With Murder" (2014). The participants are to react to some selected suggestive scenes or subtle queer interactions between two same-sex characters from the American Television series. The series chosen spans a variety of years because was selected throughout the decade since 1990 because of the American television series "Ellen" (1997), which featured the first queer character.

The results will be drawn from the Philippine LGBTQ+ community in a focus group discussion. All three groups would consist of 10 people, all self-identified as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and the age would range from 18 - 25. The participants will be drawn from the university as it would be the most accessible, thus Convenience sampling is used to have greater access to the participants. Although the participants would only be a select few, 30 participants were divided into 3 groups in line with the classification they fit. The three groups that have been decided for the study would vary in the category. The first group would be students of media studies. Those that are familiar with its inner workings and have been taught to analyze shows or media in general in a more objective manner. The second group would be those who are part of a student organization in the university. The organization is an advocate of Anti-VAW, Mental Health, Gender Equity, and Cultural Diversity all for the creation of Safe Spaces using the lens of Intersectional Feminism.

The first two groups were formulated as such an approach would provide insider perspectives that an outsider may not consider (McDonald, 2013; Wigginton & Setchell, 2016 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021). And finally, the last group would consist of students that are indifferent to both topics, those that may be familiar with media and LGBTQ+ rights but do not engage in either any deeper than the average audience, this group may propose new

perspectives that people from the first two groups may have deemed logical or unimportant (McDonald, 2013 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021).

As for the analysis and interpretation of the discussion, this study employed thematic analysis in data processing and analysis, following the six phases of analysis established by Braun and Clarke (2006 as cited Woods & Hardman, 2021). While transcribing the interviews, the initial phase of familiarization with the data began. The next step is to create preliminary codes, which are then developed into themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes are then examined and refined to ensure that they fit together well. After that, each theme and sub-theme is polished and defined. Although other techniques, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, might be utilized within a phenomenological framework, thematic analysis is chosen because of its epistemological freedom and practice-based approach (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017 as cited by Woods & Hardman, 2021). The researchers are then free to affirm any of the many contradicting assertions in order to gain a basic understanding of the Filipino LGBTQ+ community's viewpoint on queerbaiting.

4. Summary of Results

The participants of this study have been divided into three groups and will be referred to accordingly. The first group, known as FGD 1 consists of media students. The second group, known as FGD 2 consists of the general audiences or consumers of media that do not have affiliation with media or with advocacy groups. The third group, known as FGD 3 consists of members of a certain student organization of advocates, specifically for gender equality. All of the participants are self-identified to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The researchers also interviewed two (2) experts whose knowledge would greatly supplement the study. The first is Venus Aves, who is a graduating student from the University of the Philippines. The outgoing President of UP Babaylan, a student organization that advocates that all persons should be equal regardless of race, nationality, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. She is also a project officer in TLF Share, a non-governmental organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ health, rights, and empowerment. The second is Richard Kenneth Rivera, a Multimedia Producer at iWant TFC, ABS-CBN's digital streaming platform that has been running for more than 10 years, he has been with the organization for five (5) years. He mostly focuses on content and promotional materials, iWant TFC also explores pride themes and women's month, they have been annually creating Pride campaigns for 3 years now.

Initial Reactions to the American Television Series

In the reactions of the participants towards the clips, the researchers opted to present their answers by going through each TV show chronologically. Please refer to table 1. The first one was Janeway and Seven from Star Trek: Voyager, a show that ran for 7 seasons starting in 1995. In this instance, the participants from FGD1 mostly saw them as having a hierarchical relationship and that a romantic relationship may not have been possible due to this fact, they also noted that it may have only been a form of affection from a superior to their subordinate adding that they care deeply about each other after having gone through life and death situations. FGD2 had the same observation about the characters having a hierarchical relationship, adding that they may have a deeply rooted platonic relationship as comrades, as they show a great deal of care and concern for each other, though they do not reject the fact that these scenes are implying something. FGD3 explained that since it was in the 1990s there was vagueness in portraying queerness, there was a lot of tension in the scene, especially with the lighting and how it was depicted.

Table 1: Summary of Focus Groups Discussion Participants’ Reactions to the Selected Scenes of American Television Series.

	<i>FGD 1</i>	<i>FGD 2</i>	<i>FGD 3</i>
<i>Star Trek: Voyager (1995)</i>	Is seen as having a hierarchical relationship therefore a romantic relationship is not possible, but affections from the superior for the subordinate is explicit. They are seen most as comrades that experienced life and death situations.	As the same as the first group observations, they are seen to have a hierarchical relationship. They’re acquaintances or close friends. They show care and concern for each other as friends or workmates. It is implying something	Coworkers/friends, they can have intimate conversation as women and as friends, with the intense and dark lighting it’s hard to tell, there was immediate tension there
<i>Rizzoli and Isles (2010)</i>	They are seen as very close and open friends. Relationship is seen as platonic and some even stated that it was how they have fun with their friends Participants wish for their relationship to blossom as well	Lesbian married couple that are close and has a great relationship. Participants see it as either romantic or/and platonic. There is some tension Some express that they are really close friends and have no romantic relationship.	It felt more representative of what queer relationships are, Like they didn’t have to show an intense level of intimacy for you to get na those two people were in a relationship
<i>How to Get Away with Murder (2014)</i>	Some who haven’t watched the clips say that they had a relationship before they eventually broke up. Is assumed that they can be part of the LGBTQ+ community because of the reactions toward having past LGBT relationships.	The participants said that it was a forced relationship between a boss and an assistant. There was an attraction and an understanding. For the people who’ve watched it was professional at first then grew personal and cared for each other like family. Did not grow to have romantic relationships.	For the second one it was more direct, they stated that there were bisexual characters and they said that directly, but then again you didn’t exactly feel the connection between the characters Friends, boss, and employee, can easily pass it off as admiration from one woman to another.

The next clip is from Rizolli and Isles, a show that followed Jane Rizolli and Dr. Maura Isles, which ran for 7 seasons starting from 2010. Participants from FGD1 saw their characters as being very close and very open as friends, that they are platonic in nature, some of the participants even noting that what they saw in the clips were how they treated their real-life friends. Most participants from FGD1 wished for their relationship to blossom into something more than just platonic. On the other hand, though there were a few from FGD2 that mirrored what the previous group stated, there were others that saw their relationship in a very different way, explicitly stating that they were a married lesbian couple that has a great relationship with

each other. FGD3 stated that it felt more like it was representative of queer relationships, that there did not need to be an intense level of intimacy for them to say that these two people were in a relationship.

The last clip that was shown came from 'How to Get Away With Murder' specifically the later seasons, wherein there were scenes involving Tegan Price and Michaela Pratt, the show ran from 2014 and had 6 seasons. As this was a pretty popular show, there were those that stated that they actually watched it before, the researchers then opted to get the answers from those that have not seen it previously. With FGD1, there are those that from what they saw, they assumed that these two characters were in a romantic relationship before having to end it at some point, they also assumed that these characters may be part of the LGBTQ+ community with how they reacted to the other implying that they had a prior experience towards having past LGBTQ+ relationships, though it was not explicitly stated. As per FGD2, most of them said that it was a forced relationship between a boss and an assistant, that there was an attraction and an understanding, eventually one hurt the other leading to the end of a relationship that these participants assumed these two characters had. FGD3 stated that they saw the show as being more direct in what they wanted the audience to know, though there was barely any intimacy between the two characters at all. For those that have watched the show, they stated that it was professional that grew personal, caring for each other like family, and it did not lead to a romantic relationship.

Queerbaiting

In defining queerbaiting, there was an array of answers that came from all three focus group discussions. Most of them define queerbaiting as something that takes a theme, particularly one that has something to do with homoeroticism and its many subtexts, and creating suggestive scenes in a show between two characters of the same sex, but never following through with a confirmed relationship. Though a few of the participants mentioned that they went with their 'gut feeling' in their perception of the clips shown, a few did not want to assume the characters' genders if it was not explicitly confirmed. There were also others that went in depth into saying that this trope may be part of a marketing strategy to garner fan attention, with communities creating 'fanfiction' or 'fan art' with these characters as their main subjects, it basically creates a monopoly of free promotion, with its online interaction and social media's apparent obsession with finding 'evidence' in these seemingly innocent shows that is in a cycle of releasing false hope. This supports McDermott's (2020) study, as the author identifies the concept as 'fan-coined' used to refer in strategically enticing members of the LGBTQ+ community by quietly hinting at queer representation in the media. In addition, Nordin (2015) also states that queerbaiting is when an audience pretends to understand the producer's intended meaning and accuses them of lying or failing to stand up for it.

In instances like as seen in table 1, where there is a specific demographic in each group, it was expected that their views on each of the clips and the way that they would answer the questions would be different. In a few cases, there was a mention of representation. One participant is quoted to have said that "it may be something that a few people in the LGBTQ+ community experienced, that they think that they're going to fall in love with someone then have that be taken away, and they end up in a heteronormative relationship" and though that may be possible, there were others that chose to counter that fact completely. A participant in FGD3 stated that "though that may be the case for some, it is doing more damage than good" explaining that since there are people that rely on representation for them to validate their sexuality, a character making a 180-degree turn and resorting to heteronormative relationships

may only lead to great confusion, lessening the value in queer relationships by blatantly implying that it's *Just a phase*.

When asked what their perception of queerbaiting is, most people from all groups found it to be disagreeable, though others saw that it might be interesting, the common notion was that it was still negative in the eyes of the participants. Interest was in learning more about the topic, what its implications were and how they understood it. But in the matter of general opinions, it still stands that the audience's perception on queerbaiting mostly came down to a feeling of deception and false hope. With a show's promise of creating characters that would have been representative of the queer experience, it adds onto the stereotypes, namely those that imply that most queer relationships end up badly. Some participants cited examples of characters dying before they find out the truth or before having anything remotely close to a confirmed relationship between characters, or them mainly ending up in heterosexual relationships. In instances such as this, it adds onto the notion that queer relationships are destined to end in one way or another, the idea that being miserable is a norm within the community.

A participant in FGD3 also stated that portrayals such as this create a cycle of confusion. When a character is portrayed on a show, and there is an evident subtext that they may be part of the LGBTQ+ community, an audience member may very well be attached to that idea and that particular character, they might see this portrayal as some form of representation of their identity in mainstream media. Nordin (2015) mentioned, queerbaiting is a method in which writers or networks use clues, jokes, gestures, and symbolism to draw the attention of the LGBTQ+ community or queer viewers, then adamantly deny and laugh off the notion. So when that portrayal falls through and the character suffers an unfortunate fate, or they end up in a heteronormative relationship. Not only does it prosper false hope and foster confusion in the audience in terms of their own identities, it also gives a distorted view of what it might have meant to be homosexual.

Capitalism

Brennan (2019) identified queerbaiting as a tactic where those in the media who are officially affiliated with LGBT storylines text our readers... without the text ever definitively proving the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters. Many of the participants in the focus group discussions expressed that queerbaiting is indeed intentional to garner more audiences because there is excitement in seeing a representation of themselves through the screens like what most of the participants stated. It is a validation of themselves and an opportunity to make the queer visible in possible popular tv series. There are also oppositions to the thought of it being intentional baiting for the LGBTQ+ community. For the FGD 2, they expressed that it might've been an error or lack of research within the production in portraying these characters and these can perhaps also be another representation of a relationship that just didn't work out well.

Although FGD 1 focused more on the audiences stating that it is a trend that viewers deemed content as queerbaiting and the majority of fans will bandwagon on the sentiments. Rivera also added that there are fan-made theories that form queerbait communities, based upon the film's suggestiveness in it itself. According to Aves, it is because viewers don't blame the actors themselves but the writers, producers, and directors themselves. Aves then asked a question in accordance with this view, "*do people who perform queer practices, queer behaviors, queer experiences in roles have to assume a queer identity?*"

"*Should actors on the screen that showcases queerness should assume a queer identity to show a sincere representation of the LGBTQ+ community on the screens?*" asked Aves. What Aves

and most of the FGD 3 participants want is a sincere representation of the LGBTQ+ community, but as raised it is hard to tell whether the representation is intended baiting or sincere because they are included in a capitalistic framework. Collier (2015) outlines how queerbaiting fundamentally derives real visibility and representation of real queer persons.

An interesting view on it would have some of the participants from both FGD 1 and 3 stating that it is a balancing act of business and production in creating content that caters to the most general viewers. In accordance with what students have mentioned, according to Rivera who is a media practitioner for almost 5 years, there are also many queer people in the industry for there to be a malicious intent to actually queerbait people.

“It is mainly a business decision, not the repressing of expression of sexualities that are available in the collective rainbow” stated Rivera. It is mostly based on balancing the business, especially for conservative advertisers. Rivera added that balancing the business, includes protecting loyal viewers by giving them what they are used to. If there were instances of queerbaiting, it might’ve been on the side of scripting or editings like suggestive close-up shots, or dialogues that imply romantic affections or other suggestive vocabularies.

Western and Philippine media Counterparts

Most of the participants from focus groups have mentioned content they have found queer to be from different kinds of media from different countries. As this research focuses primarily on American media, we have asked Rivera and Aves to confirm whether American culture is influencing the Philippine media. Aves has confirmed that there are certain influences, and Rivera was able to dive in much deeper with the subject as a media practitioner themselves. Rivera stated that it is unsure whether there are direct influences from the western counterpart, but it is evident that most pitches that come through for new shows have undertones of western culture and themes.

In American cinema, the censorship that puts a limitation on queer representation is queer coding in 1930. Coding is to put queerness to a character shown in cinema because there was a code on what to show and what not to show back then. So queer coding is a method used by creators to put in queer characters without breaking the code set. These codes occurred for a while especially within villains like Ursula, Scar, and Jafar.

Contrarily to the censorship of representation, the most problems that the young Philippine media creative industry faces were that of political censorship and propaganda. This was in the time of Martial Law, the media censorship before was not directed at sexual perversion but at masking the reality of hardship the Philippines faces. Though such regulations are in effect in televised programs, now we have digital platforms that allow for more overt examples of queer themes.

In the Philippines queer representation started as a form of comedy, *“Where the comedy back then is ‘to make straight men feel good about themselves by showing other men being effeminate’* as Rivera stated. This has been the dogma that studies of this subject follow for the longest time here in the Philippines.

There are still traces of queerbaiting in Hollywood because it is a business and it's not a bad practice to profit in the entertainment business. The argument still stands that if it's portraying real queer characters, do it properly and directly with no subtext. Though here in the Philippines, it's a different stance because of the tolerance toward queerness.

Queer representation in media

With how most people see queer people in roles, it is easy to understand why there has been a distorted view or perspective about gay people for the longest time. Their purpose is to solely be comic relief, as one of the participants stated, to the main protagonist of the show; the trope of them becoming the side character adds another level of inequality to what was already established by history. With the trope of 'Parloristang bakla' being the norm of the gay portrayal in the Philippine context of shows and cinema, an expert [sir richard] noted that this was because it was meant to make the men of that time feel more masculine by showing effeminate characters on screen. Though it may not be as bad of a trope in itself, as a few participants and a couple of experts have pointed out that gay people being hairdressers and being effeminate is a reality on its own, it is the deeply rooted stereotype that creates additional damage to what it means to be homosexual.

Though it is safe to assume that the direction that the Philippine media scene is in line with progressive thinking, there are still lapses in judgement when it comes to the actual portrayal of these LGBTQ+ scenes. An indefinite line between representation and misrepresentation. Most people from the FGDs, especially those in FGD 3 found these portrayals insufficient in painting a picture of the queer experiences, a few of which may even count as the fetishized versions of real-life events according to Rivera. In Aves' view of portrayals, most characters are shown based on their SOGIE, it is identity-based, meaning that it may border on stereotypes. When in the reality of the world, gender is fluid, as Aves continued. That sexual practices or preferences do not necessarily affect certain identities and vice versa, some of them even generating different mixes and matches when it comes to one's SOGIE, and with this, the accurate representation may be a little far-fetched if the audience is expecting realism. Though it can be reached in its shallowest forms.

Importance of Queer Media

Visibility in the media can be attributed to being seen as part of the community. Most of the participants have expressed that there is a need to be seen in the media, most especially mentioned by FGD1 and FGD3. Experiences seen on the screens can help shape and understand the LGBTQ+ community as either the viewers themselves belong to the community or simply understand that such people exist and it is a possible normal behavior or practice with the LGBTQ+ community. In an ideal world, according to Aves, there will be no discrimination or labels like queerness because queer means different or eccentric which the LGBTQ+ community continues to express that they are not. There is still discrimination no matter how much we create theories or studies about it because we don't live in that ideal world.

Aves says that *"We have to depict queer people, queer identities, queer practices on the screen to increase visibility"* because there is a need to show different spectrums that are not part of the stereotypical queer as seen in media. Rivera further supports this by telling how it's important to show realism in shows they will be showing because that is what is accepted by the majority of the viewers. Both Aves and Rivera agree that queerbaiting is something that is good and bad. Good because it increases the visibility of the LGBTQ+ community towards viewers, but also bad because there is a huge spectrum of different experiences from the LGBTQ+ community alone.

An example would be if a child that has no idea about the LGBTQ+ community sees content with hints of queerness like queerbaiting, there could be different effects. One is them relating to the experience and feelings of the character or they could see it as something bad because it

isn't normal and a normal relationship is that of a heteronormative relationship. The effect whether good or bad is a case-by-case basis for every viewer.

Although with the technology progressing and digital platforms available for expression there are new avenues to express themes without restrictions. With the progression of media contents created, there is a change of queer representation from two-dimensional characters to multi-dimensional characters that actually mirror how complex humans and experiences can be as stated by almost all of the participants.

5. Conclusion

In the perception of the Philippine LGBTQ+ community towards queerbaiting, much like most Filipinos' reactions towards these themes. It is a societal norm to tolerate these contents. Although generally, the participants don't see queerbaiting as a great and sincere representation of the community, they still consider it as a representation of a queer experience. Most participants have mentioned that there is especially good representation in the independent film industry of the Philippines. Rarely are there any more stereotypical representations of the LGBTQ+ community which are multidimensional and almost realistically portrayed.

Most of the participants have agreed that queerbaiting is a marketing strategy but their opinions about it being intentional or not are divided. FGD 1 thinks of the sensitivity of all viewers in consuming the media so censorship is done to protect the viewers thereby causing queerbaiting content, whereas FGD 3 thinks that it is intentional because there is something to gain, such as trust and revenue from the community, from this strategy. Contrastingly, there are views from FGD 2 of it being unintentional because it is another type of representation of a queer relationship. Additionally, with FGD 1, there are also opinions that viewing a show as queerbaiting can be misleading as this may not be the actual intention of the show, but merely fan speculation. And lastly, FGD 3 adds that it is difficult to know whether it is intentional or unintentional because it is in the capitalistic framework where their goal is to garner as much revenue as possible.

Participants consider queerbaiting as a form of representation, but viewing it as misrepresentation may be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the background and content itself. It's a kind of stereotype of one side of queerness, but the community would've wanted it if there are more sincere, specific, yet multidimensional representations.

Implications

In the decoding process of the participants of their own views towards queerbaiting it was evident that they first analyze the credibility of the "queer" representation they are given with. The participants were shown parts of the series wherein two characters may be perceived as being in a romantic relationship, but have no concrete confirmation of this. They have to first identify whether the content they are presented with is indeed queerbaiting before forming each perception. In the formation of perception, the factors stated are the reason for most of their opinions. From FGD 1, they have formed their reception through thinking about the production of the series, from the writing to its possible audience perception. FGD 2 was formed with mostly their own biases, experiences, and neutrality over the content they are presented with. FGD 3 was formed through their personal research about social issues regarding the LGBTQ+ community. With those factors, they mostly have the same opinions with varying oppositional thoughts and while the discussion was occurring there were debating, adding on, and changing their opinions adhering to the three possible stances that these participants make. Therefore,

though the participants had varying viewpoints depending on their backgrounds, it all constitutes the fact that most of them view queerbaiting as having negative implications for the LGBTQ+ community and their representation in the media. In the topic of being queerbaited, it is concluded in this study that with the ‘expectation’ of the audience that the characters presented to them would end up together, and that not being the outcome, it would be safe to assume that that particular phenomenon occurred in gathering data for this study.

Recommendations

To further this study, the researchers recommend exploring the Asian, or more specifically the Southeast Asian content with regard to the Philippines Audiences. From the focus group discussion, the Southeast Asian content was usually mentioned what media they encounter queerbaiting. Although their encounters of queerbaiting aren’t firmly solely on the series but also in the idol pop music industry, animation industry, and many more.

Another point of exploring this study is towards the production team behind the creation of the media content like the producers, writers, directors, art directors, cinematographers, editors, production managers, and other roles. This can give insights into the capitalist framework that the participants have mentioned and whether it is intentional or unintentional queerbaiting. Additionally, adding in inputs from the heterosexual community, or persons non identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, could also give insights into the general public’s opinion towards queerbaiting whether they know it or not, and what their perception towards queerbaiting as people uninfluenced by it.

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