

***Snatched Credibility, Dragged Reputation: The Negative Impacts of Testimonial Injustice
Among Drag Artists to the Public Perception of SOGIE***

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Abstract

Within the realm of drag, especially in the Philippines, drag artists fall victim to a certain type of epistemic injustice known as testimonial injustice (TI). Drawing from Miranda Fricker's framework (2007), TI is defined broadly as the unfair attribution of credibility to individuals. Jeremy Wanderer (2017) identifies two varieties of TI: (1) transactional TI which takes place within an obvious testimonial exchange, and (2) structural TI which figures as the unjust distribution of epistemic goods in a system or institution. In this paper, I analyze how TI manifests in the controversial arrest of Pura Luka Vega who performed a rock version of "Ama Namin" while dressed as the Black Nazarene, among other similar cases. From this, I argue that TI, as experienced by drag performers, not only discredits and undermines the artists' knowledge and experiences, but also distorts the public's perception of SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression) and its crucial role in building a just and equitable society. I then identify key factors perpetuating the injustice, including rigid gender norms, societal double standards, and colonial influences. In the end, I underscore that despite efforts to counter the implications of TI, it remains a pressing issue that requires a systematic and epistemic approach to address its root causes, hence, my brief introduction to epistemic activism.

Keywords: drag, testimonial injustice, SOGIE, epistemic

Introduction

“If a drag queen wants to read you a story at a library, listen to her because knowledge is power. And if someone tries to restrict your access to power, they are trying to scare you. So listen to a drag queen.” ~ RuPaul at the 2024 Emmy Awards.

From mere artistic expression characterized by adopting exaggerated gender characteristics, wearing extravagant costumes and make-up, and performing grandeur numbers, drag has evolved into a powerful and progressive platform for social commentary and activism. However, within this realm of vibrant expression, drag artists, especially in the Philippines, face a certain type of epistemic injustice which extends from the unfair distribution of epistemic goods to the downright undermining of one’s credibility because of stereotypes, biases, or prejudices. Consequently, this negatively impacts the public’s perception and understanding of what SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression) means as we shall see, and the crucial role it plays in creating a just and equitable society not only for our drag performers or the LGBTQIA+ community but for everybody regardless of their SOGIE.

This form of epistemic injustice is known as testimonial injustice (TI), and is evident in the case of Filipino drag artist, Pura Luka Vega (PLV) whom I addressed in this paper using the pronouns they/them. On October 04, 2023, PLV was arrested for their portrayal reminiscent of the Black Nazarene while performing a rock version of the “Ama Namin” song (INQUIRER.net, 2023). The now-deleted post on X has gained widespread attention from many people and institutions, most of which are complaints from various Catholic groups in the Philippines. The 33-year-old artist was accused of religious blasphemy and was declared *persona non grata* by several cities including Manila and Cebu (Rappler, 2023), causing numerous clubs to cancel the artist’s scheduled performances. Looking closely at the criticisms and repercussions faced by

PLV, it is profound how prejudiced stereotypes rooted in their gender identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community figured in these condemnations. This was evidenced by the unfair treatment they received from ordinary individuals and those with authority, and the exception of cisgender men and women who committed almost similar acts as PLV. As a result of this injustice, PLV's credibility, not only as an artist but as a speaker who engages in an epistemic activity such as sharing experiences and knowledge, has been tarnished. This also implies a systemic problem that sees gender identity as a basis for how people should treat others, leading to a distorted perception of SOGIE and its significance.

But before going further into the negative impacts of TI to SOGIE, we should first understand what TI is as introduced by Miranda Fricker, and its varieties which are explained by Jeremy Wanderer (2017) in his paper "Varieties of Testimonial Injustice." Likewise, it is imperative to know how such a type of injustice actually figures in the drag realm as shown in the PLV controversy and other related or similar cases.

Snatched Credibility, Dragged Reputation: On Testimonial Injustice

In her book "Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing," Miranda Fricker (2007) presented TI as the unfair association of credibility or respect to individuals during testimonial exchanges where societal biases are deemed determinative of how one should be treated. Fricker introduced two primary ways how TI manifests. On the one hand, TI happens when one is given more credibility than what is warranted to them, often due to shared social identity or power dynamics. This is called a *credibility excess* which leads to the uncritical or unwise acceptance of a person's testimony. On the other hand, there is a *credibility deficit* where an individual is considered less credible and deserving of acknowledgment, thus resulting in the undermining or devaluation of their testimonies and knowledge. Overall, Fricker's framework of

TI underscores the profound impact of power dynamics and identity in evaluating one's credibility during testimonial interactions or any epistemic activities in general.

To explain further the concept of TI, Fricker, in her book, used one defining moment in Anthony Minghella's screenplay "The Talented Mr. Ripley," which featured the dialogue between characters Herbert Greenleaf and Marge Sherwood. During the scene, Marge expressed her suspicion that Tom Ripley might be involved in the disappearance of Greenleaf's son, Dickie. However, Greenleaf responded condescendingly and said "Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts." Here, an instance of TI took place after Marge received a form of credibility deficit from Greenleaf—one which was rooted in prejudice towards the gender group to which the former belongs. It is also noteworthy how power dynamics were at play in the dialogue, and how it reflects the bigger picture of the societal tendency to view and treat women unfairly.

The aforementioned situation circles us back to the case of PLV and how TI manifested in it. The criticisms they faced were significantly influenced by discriminatory gender stereotypes that give less credit to their statements and testimonies, similar to how Marge's statement was dismissed by a cisgender man. To illustrate, ABS-CBN (2023) once posted an article about PLV where the artist explained that nothing is wrong with what they did (referring to the drag portrayal of the Black Nazarene) as it is their way of celebrating and worshiping God. Eventually, the post received massive backlash from a lot of people, who are mostly cisgender, adult males, throwing disparaging comments to PLV's statement. "*Nagpaliwanag ang bakla, 'wag kami, kayo na lang,*" one netizen said. Some even called Pura "*tanga,*" "*baliw,*" "*bobo,*" and other offensive names and words. These dismissive remarks are reflective of TI characterized by the active discrediting of PLV's perspectives with a poignant emphasis on their

gender. Moreover, it also speaks volumes about how drag artists are often relegated to a category deemed less valid, credible, or deserving of serious consideration and acknowledgment, consequently, obstructing their agency to participate in an epistemic activity without worrying about established societal boundaries.

Transactional Testimonial Injustice

Aside from the two manifestations of TI mentioned above, this injustice also takes the form of what is known as *transactional testimonial injustice* (TTI).

In his paper “Varieties of Testimonial Injustice,” Jeremy Wanderer (2017) defined ‘transaction’ as a ‘special kind of social act’ that involves individuals who are in a particular relation to each other and are both self-consciously aware that there exists such an act. This transaction, in this case, pertains to a testimony or the act of telling someone something. Wanderer argues that for a transaction to be successful, both parties (the informer and the inquirer) should appropriately respond to one another so they can create an order of justice between them. However, when one party responds inappropriately, let us say, by giving condescending remarks or intentionally ignoring the message given by a speaker, an injustice within a transaction occurs.

An example of this variety of TI took place during a live TikTok discussion about the issue of PLV, which I witnessed myself. During the talk, a defender of PLV, who was also a drag artist, was cut in the middle of their speech when another speaker brusquely said “*Sana kasi kung sayaw lang, sayaw lang, para walang gulo. Pinaglalaban niyo pa eh.*” This interruption and dismissal of the speaker exemplifies TTI, as illustrated by the mere act of heckling an individual and suggesting that they should just stick to mere performing. At this particular moment, the defending drag artist’s testimony was devalued or rejected, while their credibility and the validity

of their perspectives were undermined and dismissed. This speaks of a broader issue about how certain voices and narratives were easily marginalized or silenced, especially in the context of testimonial exchanges.

Structural Testimonial Injustice

Contrary to TTI which includes an obvious testimonial exchange between or among individuals, there exists a second variety of TI that occurs when epistemic goods such as information, educational opportunities, freedom of speech, and expression, and the like, are unfairly distributed within society, which gives birth to more cases of injustice in opportunities for exercising full epistemic agency, as per Elizabeth Anderson (2012) in her research titled “Epistemic Injustice as a Virtue of Social Institutions.” Wanderer termed this *structural testimonial injustice* (STI).

However, Fricker seemed uncertain regarding this aforementioned position about STI because she believes that there is ‘nothing distinctively epistemic’ about such a way of thinking. To further explain her stance, she gave a ‘more substantive reading’ that rejects the idea of this variety of testimonial injustice (Wanderer, 2017). As noted by Wanderer in his paper, Fricker argued that injustices like the unfair distribution of goods (e.g. education opportunities and information resources) are not necessarily categorically connected to the social practice of testimony. Here, she suggested that even if such injustices exist, they may not be inherently attributed to issues within the specific dynamics of testimonial exchanges (i.e., failures or problems within the communication and credibility aspects of one’s testimony) and may have multiple causes.

An Apology: Fricker's Position Reconsidered

Interestingly, Aidan McGlynn (2020), in his philosophical research about the primary harm of testimonial injustice, offered a sympathetic defense of Fricker's position on structural testimonial injustice. In the paper, he argued that Fricker neither dismissed nor did she fail to recognize the structural aspect of testimonial injustice. Instead, it has been implied in her discussion of 'identity power' wherein power is distributed based on a shared imaginative conception of social identity (Fricker, 2007). According to her, as cited by McGlynn, there will always be structural factors in an individual's exercise of power, which she further explained by acknowledging that such exercises play a significant role in her account of epistemic injustice.

Agreeing with McGlynn's position, Wanderer, on the other hand, gave a qualified defense of Fricker's 'less substantive reading' which concedes that there is indeed a structural form of testimonial injustice, only that it is dismissible. His defense appears to emphasize that injustices are not always individualistic and isolated but are hardwired in bigger contexts—be it social, cultural, or institutional. Additionally, Wanderer's paper stressed that transactional testimonial injustice is neither more pervasive nor more important than its counterpart. It affirmed that it is crucial to not take lightly or trivialize the possibility of structural testimonial injustice since institutional structures can lead to or exacerbate injustices that transcend mere transactions between individuals.

Building on the defense of Fricker's position by McGlynn and Wanderer, STI is indeed an epistemic, testimonial injustice.

Under this structural variety of TI, among others, is the absence of adequate legal protections for drag performers in the country. For context, the Philippines initially filed legislation that recognizes and criminalizes discrimination, 23 years ago. In 2019, a new bill was

crafted, that is, the SOGIE Equality Bill. However, despite these initiatives and legislations, the Philippine Congress has repeatedly rejected its passage, subjecting it to a lot of delays (Amnesty International, 2023). This rejection of the recommendations to expedite the law's passage, as indicated by the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, underscores the ongoing struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights. Even worse, it is indicative of the prevalence of STI which not only subjects drag performers to systemic discrimination but also diminishes the credibility and validity of their experiences, statements, and knowledge.

Distorted Perception: On the Distortion of Public Perception of SOGIE

After gaining a clear understanding of essential terms, I shall now discuss how TI experienced by drag artists in the country contributes to the distortion of public perception regarding Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE).

I. Society's Rigid Gender Norms and Double Standards

In investigating how society's set of rigid gender norms and double standards influence the perpetuation of TI and a skewed understanding of SOGIE, it would be helpful to look at some historical facts.

In her paper titled "The Drag Phenomenon and Its Cultural Effects on Filipino Drag Subculture," Madrangca (2021) discussed how drag has always been part of Filipino culture. Citing Garcia (2004), she explained that in the pre-colonial Philippines, not only were crossdressing *indios* tolerated but were also recognized officially as women, with some even hailed as *Babaylans* who assumed the role of community spiritual leaders. Garcia described these individuals as "gender crossers." David Govey (2016), on the other hand, examined the prominent Panay epic, Sugidanon, from which he observed that the traditional portrayal of transmasculine characters may be reflective of ancient gender ideologies. Drawing on Brewer's

(1999) discussion of Indonesian ‘Bissu’ priests, Govey recorded that male shamans often identify with the feminine—be it as a form of temporary transvestism or as a more permanent lifestyle—because they believe that femininity is a conduit to the spiritual world. This simply suggests that, historically, one’s gender identity transcends their biological sex, which I would say, also entails that gender fluidity is accepted in ancient Filipino societies. Aside from local stories, there are also foreign historical accounts that explain the history of drag. For instance, McMillan in 2022 wrote in his article that drag, rooted in theatricality and art, was done out of a necessity for men to play female roles in Shakespearean theaters, often connoting drag as an acronym for “dress as a girl.” Over time, drag has progressed into a form of artistic (and sociopolitical) expression among the LGBTQIA+ community, and embodied dissent toward heteronormative gender standards (Madrangca, 2021).

The intertwining influences of Spanish colonization, Catholicism, and machismo in the Philippines contributed significantly to a cultural shift that led to the erosion of these historical practices and values. This transformation was marked by the derogatory reinterpretation of the terms ‘bakla’ or ‘bayot’ that associated them with negative and cowardly connotations. Consequently, a set of rigid and conservative gender norms has been imposed on us, and these norms—all of which qualify as STI because of their systemic nature, their resultant marginalization and discrimination against drag artists, and the thwarted public perception of SOGIE especially in the drag realm.

We can see this in another article posted by the Philippine Star (2023) about PLV, where the said performer was addressed using the pronouns she and her. Following the post, PLV was bombarded with numerous hateful and mocking comments such as “*Laban lang, brad,*” “She? Her? *May keypyas ba ‘yang mokong na ‘yan?’*” “*Bading and the Beast*” and a lot more. Some even

questioned the credibility of the editor who wrote the said article. A few of these remarks include: “Philippine Star, *anyare?*” “She?! *Ang shunga naman ng editor nito.*” An almost similar incident happened to the latest winner of the second season of Drag Race Philippines, Captivating Katkat. In her Facebook post on September 13, 2023, Katkat expressed her disappointment after a waiter at a restaurant called her “sir” when asking for her order. She also stressed in her statement the importance of normalizing asking someone their pronouns, especially when you are not sure of the gender of that person. “It is better to ask than to misgender someone,” she said. However, in a shared post of the Drag Race winner’s statement on a Publiko page (and disappointingly, in many more media outlets including ABS-CBN, PhilStar, INQUIRER.net, Rappler, etc.), netizens flooded the comment section with remarks using the word “sir,” seemingly mocking her and her dismay. Some of which were “Noted, sir.” “OK po, sir.” “Sir, yes, sir!” Others also left comments like “*Ay si kuya!*” “*Anong mali doon, bro?*” “Noted, *junjun,*” and the like.

These heteronormative standards also manifest in the coming-out of TikTok content creator, Andrei Trazona, as gay and as a drag performer to his mother, former SexBomb member Izzy Trazona-Aragon. In her statement posted by INQUIRER.net (2023), following the confession that her son is doing drag, Izzy, a Born-Again Christian, expressed her disapproval of Andrei’s craft, because, for her, it is against the teachings of God.

“All I want is for your best. I’m holding on [to] the TRUTH that is written in the bible, the word of God. The One who created us. *Nando’n kasi ako sa ending ng lahat ng iyo*, Heaven [and] earth will pass but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:35)” Izzy said. “So if my children, the 4 of them, will do something that is against the faith that I have in Christ, that I will

disagree [with]. I point them to Jesus because, with that, I will be secure with their future. The best I know I can give to my children, more than richness, fame, and all” she added.

The former SexBomb member also said that she ‘put hope on Jesus’ for her son and that she intends nothing but to protect her children from the most painful experiences, which is only possible if they live a life with Christ. Considering that we live in a Christian-dominated society, it is not surprising that a lot of people, mostly elderly ones, expressed their support and praises for Izzy. Many of them commended her for doing what they believed was the ‘right thing’ and hoped that everything would be alright for both of them in ‘God’s perfect timing.’

These cases—from PLV, Katkat, to Andrei—all highlight how society’s rigid gender norms, which qualify as examples of STI, resulted in more instances of injustice among drag queens. In the cases of PLV and Katkat, the derogatory comments they received demonstrated the prevalence of societal biases against individuals, like them, who challenge traditional, established gender norms. Specifically, the use of mocking, inappropriate, and intentional misgendering is indicative of a hostile environment where drag queens and their gender identity and expression are snatched of their validity and appreciation, and their voices, experiences, and reputations are dragged, marginalized, and discredited. As for Andrei’s case, there existed clear instances of STI and TTI that are highly influenced by religious beliefs. Izzy’s disapproval of her son’s drag career, grounded in her Christian faith, reflects a structural form of TI that deems gender non-conformity as incompatible with religious teachings. Eventually, this has led to an instance of the transactional variety of TI as exemplified by the downright dismissal of the statement and expression of Andrei by his mother which was, again, rooted in preconceived notions about the perceived conflict between religious beliefs and gender-non-conforming

performances like drag. The support shown for Izzy also reinforced TI by subtly validating discriminatory beliefs about gender expressions and parenting.

Arising from, or possibly alongside, the pervasive rigid gender norms that hold sway in our nation, are the profound double standards that infest our society in different contexts.

The case of PLV is relevant here as it illustrates how such a duality within society exacerbates TI among drag queens. PLV received disproportionate backlash and legal repercussions for their allegedly ‘blasphemous’ performance, and this unfair treatment became even more particularly pertinent when we compare PLV’s case to other individuals, specifically cisgender men and women, who engaged in similar acts but did not face similar consequences (PressReader, 2023).

The man behind the remixed version of Ama Namin song performed by PLV, Marlon TapaLord who is notorious for utilizing Jesus iconography for memes, Gold Dagal who used the Iglesia ni Cristo religion for his comedic skits, the female church server who performed a TikTok dance to the song “Papuri Sa Diyos,” and a lot more all engaged in activities parallel to PLV’s performance (PressReader, 2023). This raises questions about fairness and equal treatment towards LGBTQIA+ members, much less drag performers. Why only condemn PLV? Why not arrest or, at least, reprimand the other individuals? This is where society’s double standards and selectiveness figure, with gender identity and expression acting as an obvious factor, worsening the injustice faced by the artists by unfairly discrediting their artistic expression and subjecting them to legal consequences while sparing the others. Such unjust and inconsistent treatment underscores how societal biases, especially from people with authority, intersect with society’s rigid gender norms, thereby creating a climate of hate and contempt for those who go against it. Not only did the public perception of SOGIE get distorted because of these incidents, but the

drag artists were also obstructed from freely expressing themselves and engaging in epistemic activities without having to be afraid of disproportionate repercussions, hence, an unfair distribution of opportunity for a full epistemic agency (Anderson, 2012).

This was seconded by Reyna Valmores (2023) of the LGBTQIA+ alliance, Bahaghari. “We see that this is very much a form of abuse specifically against members of the LGBTQ-plus community. We are no strangers to this,” Valmores said.

Attorney and LGBTQIA+ rights advocate Jesus Falcis (2023) had an interesting take on these double standards in society. In his tweet on X following PLV’s arrest, he expressed his disappointment with the duality and selectiveness that lurk in people’s actions and behavior toward drag and the artists. According to him, people only acknowledge the political nature of drag when it involves performances directed at certain politicians or laws, but it becomes offensive or contentious when the target or subject is religion. This glaring hypocrisy proves no different from the prior cases of double standards for it infringes upon one’s freedom of speech and expression, and results in the eventual dismissal and discrediting of statements and performances of drag artists.

II. Questioning of One’s SOGIE

Following what has been discussed thus far, it is clear that the phenomenon of testimonial injustice has far-reaching implications for our drag artists and the drag realm as a whole. In discussing such, it is crucial to reiterate that drag has always been (and forever will be) political. It is a powerful avenue for sociopolitical commentary and activism, with most of their performances focusing on relevant issues like equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community and the reduction and dismantling of gender stereotypes against queer individuals, not to mention, drag performers.

However, in this time and age, because of the prevalence of TI among our drag artists, people were often diverted from engaging with, appreciating, or acknowledging the message and significance of their performances. Their focus, instead, tends to be redirected toward the unwarranted scrutiny, bashing, and mocking of the artists' SOGIE, as touched upon previously in our initial case discussions.

Let us use, once again, PLV as our example. Pura Luka Vega is the first bearded contestant in Drag Den with Manila Luzon (Drag Race Wiki, n.d.). This image of PLV is a way of redefining conventional notions of drag being almost synonymous with a beauty pageant. PLV's drag sparks so much opulence and a touch of rebellion, which makes them a real stand-out. The same is true of their controversial Ama Namin performance, as it holds significant layers of artistic expression that incorporate a powerful social commentary. One netizen said that such a portrayal reflects the 'transgressive nature' of drag, and could signify the artist's joyful, celebratory, and optimistic depiction of Christ which is 'vastly different' from the usual suffering, silent, unmoving image that we were accustomed to (ABS-CBN, 2023). Unfortunately (but not surprisingly though), this was received differently by others, calling the performance blasphemous and disrespectful. Geraldine Roman, the Philippines' first openly transgender lawmaker, called out PLV for their 'provocative' performance and told them to 'not use the gay card', whereas, Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri urged authorities to press criminal charges (CNN Philippines, 2023). This becomes even more disturbing because of the resultant distortion of the public's understanding of SOGIE as a consequence of society's rigid gender norms. The backlash PLV received for their performance and the usage of she/her pronouns, as written by INQUIRER.net's Boiser (2023), unearths the deep-rooted conservative views and the climate of unwarranted questioning and prejudice of an individual's authentic and trailblazing gender

identity and expression. Above all that, the widespread mockery and criticisms reflect how resistant our society is to embracing non-normative gender expressions, distorting how people perceive SOGIE by perpetuating a set of narrow and binary gender standards.

The form of questioning is also experienced by Captivating Katkat who is the first transgender winner of Drag Race Philippines. Part of her advocacy as a transwoman drag artist is to uphold trans rights and visibility. However, despite her being open about her gender identity, people still call her names like ‘sir,’ ‘junjun,’ ‘bro,’ and ‘brad.’ The instances of intentional misgendering not only undermine Katkat’s gender identity and expression but also lead to a societal challenge characterized by a twisted perception of SOGIE that denies the recognition and appreciation of the gender drag artists like Katkat and PLV prefer to identify as.

If you think this questioning and distortion of public perception of SOGIE only takes place in broader society, I hate to say otherwise. Surprisingly, it also figures within the drag realm itself, as proven by drag artists ØV CÜNT and Tita Baby in Madrangca’s (2021) paper which I cited previously. Both artists opened up about the lack of diversity in drag styles that they feature on Drag Race, with a predominant focus on feminine glamour and pageant beauty. ØV also disclosed that some organizers of the shows she performed at told them to “tone down” their performances, while Tita Baby often received unsolicited comments and critiques. According to Milenka Bermanova (2019), the deliberate act of molding drag as solely palatable and inoffensive to the general public inadvertently snatches drag from its inherently political and subversive roots. This emphasis on a monolith, i.e., polished and mainstream, style of drag consequently perpetuates a harmful and restrictive perception of what drag ‘should’ be. As a result, people may have a distorted way of thinking about and interpreting how drag artists should express and exhibit their gender identities.

Opposing Views

Furthermore, here are some opposing views that may challenge the arguments I raised.

I. Growing Societal Inclusivity and Acceptance

While I stand firm in my position that TI faced by drag artists distorts public perception of SOGIE, I acknowledge that some may say otherwise, and argue that the society we have today has now become more accepting, inclusive, and appreciative of the diverse gender spectrum that we currently have.

Recent studies like the UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute's report in 2021 revealed that the Philippines has a comparatively inclusive environment for the LGBTQIA+ community, positioning the country at a staggering 36th spot out of 175 nations surveyed (Hernaiz, 2023). Furthermore, according to the 2022 study of the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), as shared by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), we were 1st among 34 Asian countries when it comes to acceptance of members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Ong Ki, 2023). We also hold the 17th spot out of 156 countries and 2nd in East Asia and the Pacific Region, in the latest survey by the World Economic Forum about global gender disparities and advancements, recording a "high gender equality index."

However, despite these very promising facts and figures that show significant changes to the country's level of societal acceptance and inclusivity, TI still prevails in our society, especially its structural variety. For instance, Solas wrote in 2022 that GLSEN recorded an average of 26 anti-gay slurs uttered every day, a third of which came from members of school staff. The Philippines, in terms of living conditions and legal safeguards for the LGBTQIA+ community, ranked 117th out of 202 countries analyzed as per the 2021 SPARTACUS Gay Travel Index. Alongside this is a cumulative rating of negative seven (-7) attributed to the

absence of civil partnerships, limited transgender and intersex rights, and instances of violence against queer individuals. Similar concerns were raised by the Third Philippine National LGBT Community Dialogue facilitated by the UNDP and USAID; specifically, members of the said community face persistent challenges in terms of, among others, education, health, employment, and politics because of their SOGIE. Finally, the delays faced by the passage of the SOGIE Equality Bill, which was initially filed in 2019, also exacerbate the existence of TI in the country.

Considering that most drag artists are members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the issues touched upon by these studies are mirrored in the drag realm as well. And all of these are determining factors that further exacerbate TI among drag artists.

II. Growing Media Literacy Efforts

In the perpetuation of TI, media representation and information dissemination also play significant roles; but while I believe this is true, we cannot disregard the possibility that the public's developing capacity to critically assess information, propelled by advancements in media literacy efforts, could potentially mitigate their adverse effects on the perception of SOGIE especially in the drag realm.

The Presidential Communication Office (PCO) (2023), spearheaded by President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., kicked off, in August, the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Project to combat misinformation and provide citizens, especially the youth, with critical thinking skills to navigate media effectively. But prior to this initiative by the president, there already exists a course for senior high schools with the same name (MIL) which also adheres to the same objectives as those of the MIL Project of PCO. Rappler's civic engagement arm MovePH also organized a comprehensive five-week media and information literacy series through the

#FactsFirstPH initiative, to unite teachers, students, and leaders from various sectors by fostering learning sessions on the importance of being critical and discerning media citizens (Lao, 2023).

Initiatives like these are pivotal in fighting testimonial injustice among drag queens and mitigating the distortion of public perception of SOGIE. There is one serious problem though. While these media literacy efforts are helpful, we should not sleep on the persistent challenges that unequal access to educational opportunities and resources and digital disparities pose. In reality, as concluded by Zamora and Dorado (2020) in their paper about rural-urban education inequality in the Philippines, not all members of society have equal opportunities to benefit from these programs which could potentially reinforce more existing inequalities. Unless there is no longer a digital divide and systemic disparities in society, testimonial injustice, specifically structural testimonial injustice, remains a relevant and jeopardizing concern that hinders us from empowering marginalized groups and achieving a just and equitable society where one can freely express oneself and engage in epistemic activities. Nonetheless, what this problem underscores is the imperative to not just address the symptoms of TI but most importantly, to solve the root causes like systemic injustices from which it originated.

Conclusion

In the end, I have concluded that TI manifests not only through direct transactional exchanges but significantly through structural dimensions, which often intensify and entrench the former. This is exacerbated by the entanglement of TI with the issues surrounding SOGIE such as dominant colonial influences, drastic cultural shifts, and hardwired belief systems, revealing the problem to be more than a gender issue but a religio-cultural one. Therefore, addressing TI requires confronting deep-rooted structural epistemic injustices that permeate social institutions and norms. The persistence and pervasiveness of its structural variety is what renders eradication

an arduous, if not near impossible, task despite commendable efforts. As such, epistemic activism emerges as a vital force—a deliberate and collective effort to challenge and reform unjust knowledge structures (Medina, 2023)—yet it too faces risks; without careful navigation, such activism can inadvertently reinforce existing or spark new hegemonies that may further perpetuate structural inequities. Hence, the struggle against TI demands, at the very least, both critical awareness and a strategic and holistic action to dismantle oppressive epistemic frameworks.

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