

“I Look at How They Write Their Bio and I Judge from There”: Language and Class Among Middle-Class Queer Filipino Digital Socialities in Manila

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Mobile digital media allow for multiple ways to present the digital self through linguistic and semiotic infrastructures to optimize the yield of responses from potential intimate connections. Throughout this article, I examine how queer Filipino men choose to select words and images, deploy categories, and use specific linguistic tools in the construction of their digital selves on mobile digital platforms. These digital representations generate hierarchies and categorizations used on digital sites as well as in real life. I focus on three middle-class queer Filipino men from Manila and their specific evaluative criteria when seeking potential intimate partners on various mobile digital media platforms. Their practices in and beliefs about socio-sexual app profile construction and communication demonstrate evaluative criteria that emphasize specific class and gender discrimination. Based on more than 10 months of ethnographic work in Metro Manila, my study of language registers combined with platform ideologies add to the heteroglossia of digital communicative praxis and contribute to a nuanced understanding of the vernaculars of queer digital sociality in Manila.

Keywords: gay Manila, socio-sexual apps, queer linguistics, middle class

Diego, a senior college student at an elite university, contacted me directly on Facebook messenger after seeing my recruitment post shared on a mutual acquaintance’s Facebook wall. We agreed to meet in one of Manila’s mega malls where we would have an informal conversation about his beliefs about and practices in seeking potential intimate partners through digital platforms. The 20-year-old was about to graduate with a

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degree in media and communication. He described himself as a mixed-race Chinese Filipino. He is also “an out and proud gay” at school, with friends and workmates but keeps his sexual orientation to himself when he is at home. He was very eager to share his thoughts about finding connections through digital media sites. Diego said that there are too few options for dating in Manila and that online platforms allow for more choices. “I want to have a boyfriend,” he said, “*pero* [but] I’m open to dating anyone as long as they have class. *Masyadong inoopress ang baklang kalye, pero hindi mo rin alam* [Poor, effeminate men are always oppressed, but you don’t also know] what they’ve gone through.” Diego spoke of the various apps and sites he frequently used. They ranged from socio-sexual apps like Grindr, GROWLr, Hornet, Tinder, Blued, and Moovz to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat as well as messaging platforms like Kik. He explained to me how he would use these media platforms every day and how each platform would coincide with a feeling. “*Pagkagising ko* [Right when I wake up], I check to see if I have messages. When I’m very horny, I use Grindr. When I’m depressed, I use Moovz *kasi may* [because there’s] global access. It just depends.” Diego’s evaluative practice for potential online connections was extensive. He explained,

I look at how they write their bio and I judge from there. I see if their writing and their photos are edited in a particular way. Some of the photo filters are too obvious. If they’re a trans woman, I block them right away. There’s an app for a girl looking for a guy. I block a guy who wears make-up and a hunk that looks fake.

I sensed that past experiences had shaped Diego’s perspectives about gender expression presented online and of queer Filipino men, in general. He continued to share with me that he had stopped dyeing his hair ever since he found that guys like natural looks whether you are online or at a bar. Diego also explained that he had recently created a shirtless torso profile:

I really disciplined myself with health. I’m tired of looking too *effem* [effeminate]. So many profiles want *masc* [masculine] only. I want to build my body. I want to transform my body. Being a bottom doesn’t mean you have to be a twink. I dedicated this year to change. I want to meet guys that are attractive. Online dating is a struggle.

Diego’s account is one of the many ways queer Filipino men in Manila uphold beliefs about and practices in mobile digital platforms in their pursuit of intimate connections. Each of Diego’s sentences connects online user content to multiple qualities and social classifications tied to an imagined desirable subject. Throughout this article, I examine how queer Filipino men choose to select words and images, deploy categories, and use specific linguistic tools in the construction of their digital selves on mobile digital platforms.² By mobile digital media, I refer to socio-sexual dating apps such as Grindr and Tinder (Shield, 2018), mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, and messaging platforms on mobile phones (e.g. WeChat, WhatsApp, and Viber). Image dimension, size limits, as well as text character maximums are the only shared factors that constrain platform users in constructing their digital personas. According to the queer Filipino men I spoke with during field research, some keep their information short and simple. Some choose not to include any information at all; others share that more content gives people more things to evaluate. These beliefs shape app user

² I choose to use the label “queer” for the Filipino men in this article as an umbrella term that encompasses gay, bisexual, and those who choose not to identify their sexual identity.

practices and choices in creating their digital selves. Their experiences demonstrated how iconized and recursive relationships among the semiotic qualities of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and citizenship are attached to digital platform brands, communicative skills, and aesthetics (Irvine & Gal, 2000). This article analyzes the specific evaluative criteria of seeking potential intimate connections through mobile digital media from the communicative beliefs and practices of three queer Filipino men—Diego, Gordon, and Jayvee. These evaluative criteria illuminate particular middle-class anxieties and aspirations focused on class and gender to sort and segregate idealized potential intimate connections.

Language, Media, and Queer Communication in Asia: Framing and Select Literature

I borrow from Gershon's (2010) definition of media ideologies and apply it to the beliefs queer Filipino men have about mobile media platforms. These media ideologies are comprised of innumerable sets of meanings that people generate about different app platforms. The queer men in my study confirm, challenge, and adjust their ideas and practices through various exchanges on and experiences of platform brands. These language registers amplify or diminish affective responses that range from excitement and anticipation to disappointment and disillusionment. Animated through social hierarchies based on categories like race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality communicative interactions lead to the creation of multiple, conflicting, and negotiated language registers and platform ideologies. These intersecting structures of language, meaning, and affect form the foundation of media ideologies among queer Filipino men on mobile digital media that also illustrate how these performances of self and desire are at the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality (Gershon, 2010, 2020). Yet the self and desire are not negotiated through bounded and local scales of mediation and management.

Previous scholarship on standard language ideologies and queer Asian male identities demonstrates how the particularities of language use and the context of linguistic landscapes generate intergroup hierarchies that influence interactions and qualities of attraction. Jones' (2013) analysis of the popular gay Internet forum gayhk.com found that the enforcement of a standard English language use among Chinese gay men in Hong Kong served to articulate a particular gay identity, one that negotiated a status within the community and another to the larger society (p. 76). Using Cameron's (1995) concept of "verbal hygiene," Jones (2013) presented how a critique of written forum posts in standard English language correlated with the positions of users commenting on the deteriorating quality of life in Hong Kong. Forum users also equated poor English grammar on posts as a performative tool to attract interest from foreign (White) men. The creation of distinctions among these gay men through the evaluation of "proper" English revealed the importance of a multilevel analysis that animates both local subcultural identities as well as broader systems of unequal power relations. Similar complex relations among language, identity, and space were discussed in Baudinette's (2018) ethnographic study of Tokyo's premier gay district, Shinjuku Ni-chōme. Focusing on the language used on signs throughout the area, Baudinette drew upon Piller and Takahashi's (2006) notion of language desire to tease out how certain gay identities became associated with the clientele that frequented specific spaces in the area. Baudinette's participants shared how languages hold certain forms of prestige and equated English signage with a sense of cosmopolitan worldliness in contrast to a more traditional identity with Japanese signs in the area. This project is in conversation with these concepts and seeks to expand the breadth of ethnographic studies of language ideologies among queer people in Asia.

This article exhibits how queer Filipino men take visual cues from global, regional, and local aesthetics and cultural forms, which they translate and reshape into their digital representations that become part of a larger culture of evaluation. Among these forms of scrutiny are social categorization, aesthetics, and sources of affect from interface interactions that value or demean shared media content. Furthermore, the communicative processes of content curation, sharing, revision, and exchange become routinized practices for queer Filipino men. These routines generate numerous affective responses including boredom, frustration, excitement, and despair. These feelings build on or contest various multiple media ideologies. Queer Filipino men learn how to construct themselves as desirable subjects through a process of critique and evaluation based on feedback and conversations among others on digital platforms as a process of queer digital world-making (Cannell, 1999; Garcia, 1996; Johnson, 1997; Manalansan, 2003). I aim to show how concepts of desirability shift through an analysis of communicative beliefs and practices as online and offline bodies move from place to place and change through time and can no longer be understood through organizing logics.

My work also builds on scholarship from Filipino scholars who have generated important insights into socio-sexual apps among queer men in the Philippines and the diaspora. Recent work from Solis (2020) provides a historical exploration of how cruising practices or the active seeking for sexual encounters in public spaces have become mediatized in the Philippines. He emphasizes the dialectic relationship between physical space and communication technologies in the transformation of social meanings and practices of cruising. As various queer Filipino men explained during my field research, mobile media technologies both enhanced and expanded such practices, but many also felt that it complicated the experience with added expectations of disclosure that took away from what may be considered more simple forms of consent and interaction. Labor's (2020, 2021) important studies on self-presentation on mobile apps among young men in Manila document practices and beliefs on how digital portrayals advance motives and intents for pursuing sexual and romantic connections. Labor's study participants show that mobile app users create idealized, polished, and marketable selves for immediate matches, while a limited, idealized self for targeted audiences serves for seeking romantic relationships. My study participants demonstrated such practices, and I describe how these beliefs are applied to their evaluation of profile texts, images, and communicative interactions.

Putting together theoretical work from studies of media anthropology, digital communication, and sociolinguistics, my larger project enumerates multiple language registers (Agha, 2004) among queer Filipino men on digital platforms that include the reasons and motivations behind their choice of profile images, the construction of headlines and biographies, and the strategic curation of content that encompasses their digital personas. These semiotic and technological forms are further entangled through user practices of platform switching or multimodal communication. Multimodality explores how interactions, choices, and organization generate meanings among these different modes. As Roderick (2016) explains, different modes have different materialities and affordances and so multimodal texts are best understood as meaning-materiality complexes. In this way, semiosis should be conceptualized as an emergent, heterogeneous, relational, and recombinant phenomenon" (p. 52). These platforms and their structures are spaces through which queer Filipino men curate their online personas with the resources available to them. Although these components seem fixed, the meanings and values placed on them vary. Digital platforms serve as contact points among numerous actors, serving as "sites of struggle over meanings and power, [that] can both reinforce and undermine structures of inequality" (Slack & Wise, 2005, p. 2). Yet, interactions among bodies, devices, and society allow for different forms and ordering of these connections (Roderick,

2016). Digital technologies do not predetermine meaning-making, but it is the interactions of users and their uses of digital technologies that generate new and different ways of knowing and being with the world (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). My study of language registers combined with platform ideologies adds to the heteroglossia of digital communicative praxis (Agha, 2004).

I understand my participants' subject formations through language use like works on queer linguistics that recognize the construction of categories through social discourse (Barrett, 2002; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). I agree with Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) assertion for queer linguistics where "the social meanings of sexuality are not restricted to desire. These meanings can be uncovered only regarding the ideologies, practices, and identities that produce them, phenomena that are embedded and negotiated within racialized, classed, and gendered relations of power" (p. 486). Additionally, building on Davis, Zimman, and Raclaw's (2014) assertion about binary constructions of genders and sexualities, analysts must pay attention to the gray areas between uninhabitable extremes of binary spectrums in addition to the intersections where these ideas cross with other social categories. Such linguistic crossings demonstrate how binary categorizations are deployed differently based on situated community contexts. Using my study participants' responses to informal interviews and information gathered through word of mouth and popular media, the ethnographic case studies that follow provide the multiple and overlapping digital discourses among queer Filipino men on and about mobile digital media. The entanglement of language, technology, and situated social differences inform queer digital socialities in Manila. These examples form key aspects of what Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, and Wilken (2017) consider "cultures of use" and "vernacular data science," which provide a nuanced understanding of everyday engagements between humans and digital technologies.

Methods: Ethnography and Appnography

This article draws from my broader ethnographic project based on interviews and fieldwork that I completed in Metro Manila from January to June 2017 and December 2017 to January 2018. It consists of 14 individuals. The three queer Filipino men I highlight in this article were chosen because of their frank and explicit responses tied to markers of social class in Manila. I sustained conversations with each participant for several months. This was in contrast to many of my brief, ephemeral interactions with app users. Study participants were also recruited directly through one-on-one communication on several socio-sexual app platforms. Platform-switching practices were integral for my research participants, therefore semi-structured interviews were executed both in-person and on several digital media applications. I continued remote follow-up interviews with participants while I sifted through raw data and notes. Many of the participants added me to their social media accounts and gave me permission to view and analyze their content. Being able to see what types of digital content my participants shared on various platforms informed me more about their specific beliefs on and about mobile digital media in their lives.³

I was always on my toes adjusting to particular terrains and tempos that make up the sociotechnical infrastructures (Atienza, 2023) influencing how queer Filipino men try to make intimate connections through

³ Participants allowed me to examine their socio-sexual app and social media profiles, but consent was not provided for me to circulate screen captures.

mobile digital media. Researchers must continue to refine appnographic methodological practices toward research in digital cultures as updates and new configurations become part of the increasing ubiquity of human-machine coexistence (Shield, 2019). I found the concept of appnography or appnographic methods compelling in thinking through my methodological journey. What leisure studies scholars Cousineau, Oakes, and Johnson (2019) call capacious affordances for the study of digital lives, appnography is an analysis of the many practices of connection, use, and meaning-making through mobile digital media platforms that is intensely aware of the perceived binary between the real and virtual. It flattens the digital self's intersubjective constitution with technology and space. Appnography must be reflexive and transparent in the various power relationships not just between researcher and participant but also in the unpacking of what it means to be a user, their temporalities, and their place-making. Feminist and queer theories must also serve as foundational lenses of appnography in the examination of digital cultures. This framework teases out experiences of the silenced, the othered. It provides nuanced perspectives on human interactions concerning various platform software on mobile technologies. As Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013) explain, "Qualitative, ethnographic approaches that focus on the micro-level of talk . . . represent a useful methodology for studying how participants orient locally to heteronormativity and non-heteronormativity or make certain sexual identities and desires relevant" (p. 528). This article focuses on the ways digital platform use and communication practices among queer Filipino men in Manila inform intragroup identities that set up boundaries based on various social hierarchies and dynamics animating choices to engage with others for potential intimate connections. I demonstrate through interview responses and participant stories how they develop, apply, and challenge class-infused language registers and semiotic cues on and about mobile media platforms that adhere to multiple social differences present among the citizens of Manila. Such correlations remind us of how metrics of desire and attraction often involve multiple factors of evaluative criteria. I also want to briefly acknowledge how my own perceived identities played a role (consciously or subconsciously) throughout the whole process of recruiting, obtaining, and sustaining consent for participation during this study. The middle-class sensibilities I highlight in the responses of Diego, Gordon, and Jayvee were present in my interactions with them. My access to their stories relied on multiple factors including my declared identities as queer, Filipino, and a PhD researcher based in the United States with additional affiliations with multiple Philippine universities. Perceptions among researchers and participants influenced motivations for continued engagement. With our interactions and exchanges primarily starting on socio-sexual apps and social media platforms, thoughts and feelings of curiosity were present in animating the sharing of stories.

Many of the men in my larger study identify as gay and at minimum have completed some college education or were currently enrolled in either public, private, technical, or vocational institutions. Two participants identify as bisexual and one did not want to categorize their sexual orientation. Most of my participants fall under the category of middle class. All of them are at the very least bilingual in Filipino and English, with some proficiency in Philippine regional languages as well as languages required for their specific jobs. Six were working professionals in various industries such as finance, marketing, computer information technology (IT), and government services. Three were actively taking courses in college, with one working on a graduate degree. Five were working in the service sector either in multinational call centers or fast-food services. Current studies on Philippine middle-class sensibilities explain how these social groups affirm their class standing through evaluative and boundary-making practices (Cabañes & Collantes, 2020; Lorenzana, 2014). These processes of negotiation often reify cultural symbols and practices such as language and material consumption

to justify their privileged class standing. This practice resonated with the vetting criteria, inclusion, and exclusion among the mobile digital media practices of queer Filipino men in this study.

Communicating a Queer Filipino Middle-Class Desire on Digital Platforms in Manila

I began this article with interview responses from Diego, who described prominent desirability traits on socio-sexual apps and among gay groups. Desirability, as it relates to the Filipino male body, is tied to the historical accumulation and exploitation of gendered discourses from Spanish colonialism and the imposed benevolence of U.S. imperial rule as the late Philippine Studies scholar Cañete (2014) asserts in his analysis of contemporary Philippine masculinity in visual cultures. The amalgam of universalist theocratic paternalism, racialized military machismo, and the White man's burden was made to elevate the people of the islands from their presumed primitivism under the tutelage of White love. Cañete (2014) also adds that representations of Philippine masculinity are "not only from its colonial pasts, but also from its 'globalist'/'neo-colonialist' present . . . closely parallel to those representations of masculinity in metropolitan spaces of the West" (p. xii) evident through the advertisements, films, and other media genres used to market masculinity to the Philippine consumer. The desire for masculinity often means a refusal of femininity and normative framings of gay masculinity (Manalansan, 2003). Diego starts by sharing he would block trans women from the interface and suggests there's another platform for people seeking "a girl looking for a guy," which demonstrates prominent transphobia among the general socio-sexual app population.

Although I came across a good number of profiles on Grindr from trans women, there seems to be an understanding that they participate in a separate sphere within the platform. A trans woman I exchanged messages with on Grindr mentioned to me that they have their audience and therefore do not worry too much about the discrimination many directed toward them—one of many queer digital worlds existing simultaneously. But the preferences toward the masculine influenced not only how people chose to curate their socio-sexual profiles and online personas but also led them to want to change their physical bodies to conform to these standards. Diego made the correlation between how his physical body looked and how others may assume his gender expression. In the passage above, Diego referred to looking "natural" with a healthy body as a descriptor of masculinity. Furthermore, he adds that "being a bottom doesn't mean you have to be a twink" emphasizing stereotypes of gay sexual positioning—that the recipient should have youthful, boyish physical features. In the passage below, Diego continues to make connections between platform brand, personhood, and desirability when he talks about GROWLr and overweight people.

Diego was deliberate in his choices to include specific information on his online profile:

I use "LaSalle" and my batch ID number *sa headline ko* [for my headline] *so madali yung* [so it is easier for] connection *at* [and] identification. *Sa Tinder naman* [For Tinder on the other hand], I used my real name and age, but I recently deleted it because some people who knows [sic] my family members may recognize me plus it's boring. I'm very direct with what I want, and I hope people do the same when they communicate with me. As long as *hindi sila jej or squammy* [As long as they are not *jej* or *squammy*]. I don't know what *squammy* really means but I heard it from my *conyo* friend. I've also started using

GROWLr the past month. Now, don't get me wrong. I like chubby guys, too *pero nabigla ako sa mga* [but I was surprised with the] overweight *na* [who are] unhealthy.

The evaluation of how and what people write deserves scrutiny. Among queer Filipino men in Manila, forms of communication and language proficiencies became components that mark social class. As sociologist Garrido (2019) explains, "Class identity, then, refers to shared understandings, interpretations, and propensities formed in the course of a specific type of social interaction: class interaction. It also includes dispositions activated reflexively in the form of bodily schemas" (p. 27). The work of Reyes (2017) demonstrates how colonial hierarchies of race and class were recursively reconstructed and reconfigured "through reassemblages of social figures and linguistic registers across discursively connected events over time and space" (p. 211). Her research on the language and qualities of people in Manila explains how these semiotic markers become iconized in a manner that creates distinctions among elite types of people. These qualities are not inherent in any person or behavior but are products of socialization among groups in hierarchical Majority World societies. These communicative practices cohere contrasting speech and personhood through combinations of language and symbolism. The production of a "*conyo*" elite recursively produces elite hierarchies established since the colonial period where the excessive and mixed qualities of a person are deemed improper forms of being. This is evident when Diego explained he uses the name of his elite university and his batch number for socio-sexual app headlines. The use of this information on the most prominent textual representation on the profile interface demonstrates the importance of indexical class markers for digital self-presentation. Additionally, Diego's reference to his "*conyo* friend" distances him from the use of discriminatory language against people of lower economic class. Yet his evaluative use of the descriptor makes him complicit in using this desirability metric.

If "*conyo*" differentiates various elite populations in Manila, then "*jej*" or "*jejemon*" refers to language and semiotic traits toward individuals and groups deemed low class. While "*jej*" or "*jejemon*" refers to aesthetic qualities and practices, it is a subset of the larger class category of "*masa*." As Garrido (2019) writes,

Masa, literally "the masses," connotes a vulgarity and backwardness associated with a lack of means, refinement, and "proper" knowledge. As a noun, *masa* describes "the great unwashed" or *hoi polloi*. As an adjective, the word is commonly used to denounce something as lowbrow or in bad taste . . . the poor are not just poor but *masa*. The sense that they are different is so strong that they are stigmatized or marked by social dishonor. This mark is thought to manifest in every aspect of their person . . . "Squatters" are a subcategory of the *masa*. The stigma they bear is primarily territorial and communicates, specifically, crime and the threat of encroachment. (pp. 25–26)

The iconization of these semiotic markers into class hierarchies of Manila prominently manifests in everyday social relations in Manila (Irvine & Gal, 2000).

Returning to Diego's aversion for people who are *jej* and *squammy*, he communicates his physical, linguistic, and corporeal distance from such persons. *Squammy* is just one of many words used to create this distance. My understanding of *squammy* comes from the word *iskwutater*, which refers to displaced informal settlers who may live their lives in almost abject poverty. The descriptive word iconizes various

negative meanings tied to this personhood that include but are not limited to being unkept, dirty, and desperate. Another socio-sexual app user used the word *jiraffee*, which takes the name of the animal and blends its phonetic ending with the Tagalog word *hirap* meaning hardship, difficulty, or poverty. The linguistic play demonstrates communicative skill and insensitive wit often attributed as a trait of queer Filipino social relations.

The association with *jej* with backwardness and lack of refinement came in different forms. Jayvee, a master's student from the University of the Philippines, explained to me what qualities he looked for when deciding whether or not to engage with another app user. "They must have the ability to communicate well," he said. "They cannot speak in *jej*. We have to share the same wavelength and class." I asked Jayvee how he could tell if they shared the same class. He said,

You can tell with the quality of the photo. High-definition pictures are key. Travel photos are helpful, too, especially if they're from outside the country. That tells you that they like spending quality time and that they are cultured. I used to look for gym photos, but there's too many people using those.

Jayvee continued to elaborate on class designations when filtering potential people on the apps. He said,

When they use a photo taken from their house and the roof is made of sheet metal, then I know they're not up to par with my class. I'm not class "A" but more class "B." My family doesn't have a stay-in maid.

I was not sure what these letter rankings meant so Jayvee explained to me that in public universities, the letter rankings correspond with household annual incomes that determine the amount of tuition a student would pay. It was not a classification marker I frequently heard but connected it to the individual's educational background. One of my interlocutors mentioned to me after I shared this classification schema that the economic consciousness of people in the Philippines is arbitrary. It depends on age and employment, thus many initial conversations on socio-sexual apps often begin with questions about your type of school, courses taken, and type of work. These ideologies of class correlate with conceptions of space in and around the city, connecting signifiers that generate metrics of social mobility to qualities of desirable subjectivities that include gender expression. Jayvee explained ideas of middle-class cosmopolitanism in Manila expressed through material capital and leisure.

Similar iconized equivalences to being *jej* with communication skills and image quality were shared with me by Gordon, a 23-year-old bisexual finance professional. He said,

Well, my definition of *jej* is people making weird spellings like "h0w r ü," which leads me to conclude that they are usually the type that either (1) asks for money or (2) asks for a meetup but you pay for everything. They usually offer, which is not my thing, or inconvenient to meet like *magulo kausap* [difficult to talk to or communicate].

Gordon proceeded to tell me more about his evaluative criteria on socio-sexual apps:

I screen all the *jej*, *panget* [ugly] faces, bad angles, and pictures with bad resolutions. Your presentation is important. Your image needs to be composed. If *halting* [noticeably] grabbed from *GQ* or a celebrity, it's probably too good to be true so I ask if they have other pics to share. I also don't like profiles with cartoon characters or plants. Why are you a plant? Then I review the descriptions, if it sounds dweeby like "looking for love" or "hopeless romantic," I move on. I used to think emojis are super *badoy* [uncool] but I grew to love them. I also filter by age. No one above 45 to 50 years old. I am also a regular blocker because you're limited to a number of users on the grid to view. I don't want to see the same people every day. Blocking allows you to curate what is available. If you're super *jej*, I block. Sometimes you can tell from their emojis. If they give an iPhone emoji, I feel like I have to give an iPhone emoji, too, to prove I'm not *jej*.

Gordon and Jayvee add forms of standard English language ideology to their evaluative criteria in the process of deciphering the iconized *jej* persona on socio-sexual apps. Improper spelling skills relate to intention—someone who exchanges sex for money or someone who would financially take advantage of them. Poor communication means someone is dishonest and untrustworthy. Moreover, Gordon joins the gendered term *effem* [effeminate] with the descriptive word *panget*, the Tagalog word meaning ugly, as qualities of undesirability. Bridging actions with physical features to create the lower-class subject. Jayvee mentioned to me that he would purposefully text other people on socio-sexual apps using only English for at least 10 minutes to confirm whether the other person could keep up. Any sign of poor grammar or sloppy spelling meant the person was not worth a proposition for a lengthier date.

Gordon and Jayvee shared concerns about digital images from profiles and online personas. Scrutinized qualities of images include their composition, the choice of filters, and the size and quality of their resolution. These pertain to the quality of mobile phone devices, which may refer to another form of class discrimination. Lower-resolution phone cameras demonstrate older device models, and access to newer devices would be difficult for people without the economic means. They were also astute about the content of the images being shared. For Jayvee it was travel photos, specifically outside of the Philippines, that he claimed demonstrated "having culture." Only a select few would be able to take these leisure trips abroad. These evaluations were cumulative as well: If someone was able to share a quality image but their school or job was not deemed impressive then it was reason enough to stop engaging with that person. This ideology was recursive across socioeconomic groups, and it influenced how people curated their digital lives. I got the sense that specific qualities attributed to social classes were desired differently. Iconized markers in communication style and skill that linked to aesthetic style and desirability conflicted with the iconized markers of race and skin tone that mapped onto gender expression, class, and desirability.

Reflecting on the numerous responses and stories from my fieldwork, it seemed to me that although such ideologies were shared and discussed frequently, successfully mediated connections hardly followed such strict guidelines. In a follow-up conversation months after our initial meeting, Diego mentioned how he recently ended an ongoing "mutual understanding" with someone who did not possess all the qualities he preferred. He added that he enjoyed the closeness and intimacy the person provided but the other guy

started to harbor deeper feelings. Diego was not interested in something serious: He wanted to focus on growing his brand as an aspiring social media influencer.

Summation and Possibilities of Queer Linguistics in Translingual Asias

In their remarks that were included in the special issue of *First Monday*, "A Conversation: Queer Digital Media Resources and Research," Fischer and colleagues (2018) write,

A politics of visibility is then not only the ability to be seen but a practice of queer radical refusal of a system that refuses to recognize LGBTQ people, that denies their voices, their participation, and their citizenship . . . We believe a queer Internet also has hope, in practice, form, and all of its possibilities. (paras. 6–7)

I take this charge with that of Thakor and Molldrem's (2017) articulation of situated coalitions in the formation of Queer Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholarship in creating an alliance of projects that support the queer digital Filipino diaspora. My goal for this article was to introduce prominent class-based platform ideologies and communicative practices among queer Filipinos on mobile digital platforms in producing their socio-sexual app profiles and social media personas. As queer studies scholar Race (2015) suggests in his call for "speculative pragmatism" toward studying gay life mediated through socio-sexual apps,

Online chat emerges as a material-discursive space in which sexual activities and desires are not only stated but co-constructed in conversational format, either as a prelude to—or irrespective of—a sexual encounter. While the pre-specification of identity and desires may take an element of surprise and spontaneity out of sexual encounter, forestalling the mutual construction of pleasures and desires at this scene, chat facilities also constitute a new medium of erotic exchange among relative strangers, which has considerable speculative potential . . . The digital capacity to record, store, reproduce and transmit the textual vestiges of cruising interactions is giving rise to new forms of sexual sociability. While the default mode of communication on digital devices is private messaging, the screen capture and digital storage facilities on smartphones enable the personal archiving of cruising interactions. (pp. 503–504)

Even as virtual sites allow for more ways of imagining queer worlds, digital spaces are rife with the same offline social stigmas that re/create hierarchies of difference such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. In this article, I analyzed how these hierarchies are experienced differently as people use the same platforms in different places.

Throughout this piece, I examined how queer Filipino men choose to select words and images, deploy categories, and use specific linguistic tools in the construction of their digital selves. For Diego, Gordon, and Jayvee, the potential to meet intimate partners through various mobile media platforms opens possibilities for connections in an urban social setting full of obstacles. Yet they share evaluative criteria, beliefs, and practices that further constrain chances and options for prospective matches. How they use

descriptive words to characterize lower-class people demonstrate iconized qualities that are crucial in enforcing social infrastructures of proper and desirable subjects among queer Filipino digital socialities. This initial study focused primarily on English use among the translingual population of Manila. A follow-up exploration of how language use and proficiencies other than English and Tagalog among queer men in the Philippines would add more nuance to the complex interactions of simultaneous language registers and how they influence perceptions and communicative interactions on mobile digital platforms. One such study by Yu (2022) provides an instructive model. Yu tracks Sinophone influence between Malaysia and Taiwan focused on Chinese-speaking queer activists in Kuala Lumpur, thus providing a critique of the Anglo-centricity among standard language study and rerouting globalizing influences within Asia. The project revealed how the use of Chinese in queer organizing transcends unequal racial divisions and bypasses state scrutiny, enabling the continued work of their groups. Additionally, the use of Chinese in these circles is linked to queer politics in Taiwan, contributing to the progress of queer organizing in Malaysia.

Thinking through the complex translingual combinations of Filipinos in Manila would open up additional layers of inquiry that incorporate regional language use and languages used in their professional lives. Specifically, Manila's prominent business process outsourcing (BPO) industry and its spectrum of call-center professionals might generate many sources of prestige based on the operational languages of their jobs. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Filipinos have shaped a lot of the BPO culture in the Philippines including the instrumentalization of identities to bolster productivity in the workplace (David, 2015; Fabros, 2016; Padios, 2018; Sallaz, 2019). I remembered an interaction on Grindr with a call-center worker while I was near an area of Manila with a high density of BPO offices. His profile image was the photo of a headless clothed torso wearing a white button-down shirt. His headline included the national flag of Spain and a brief description stating that he was an IT professional. In our brief conversation, he shared that he worked for a company based in Spain and that he invested in studying the language after graduating from college. The addition of non-English speaking BPO multinational corporations in Manila expanded employment opportunities for a new professional middle class.

To further expand queer perspectives on appnographic methods of the study of language and communication in digital cultures, consideration of multiple groups and conflicting sources of meaning-making would further provide a rich assessment of the animating energies and atmospheres of sociotechnical infrastructures (Atienza, 2023). A limitation of my study was that most of my research participants were college-educated professionals with stable jobs. What other genres of middle-classness are circulating in Manila? Who generates additional language ideologies, and how do they interact with each other? How are such ideologies circulated and adapted among the larger Filipino community? Additionally, researchers must continue to refine appnographic methodological practices toward research in digital cultures as updates and new configurations become part of the increasing ubiquity of human-machine coexistence (Shield, 2019). Attending to the mechanisms and conditions of platform affordances (Davis, 2020) would also elaborate on the specific actions and contexts that inform people's beliefs about and practices in specific artifacts.

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