

Gay Amateur Porn on Twitter in the Philippines

Primitive Aesthetics and Affect

RUEPERT JIEL DIONISIO CAO

Introduction

Technological developments have always affected sex, including new modalities of representations that bring it closer to reality. The rise of online pornographies also spelt the diversification of bodies and identities that pornography renders visible. Different forms of porn arose, and continue to do so, which invests porn with new uses, such as subverting heteronormativity and patriarchy (Hambleton 2016), providing education on sexual pleasure (Albury 2014), and rendering the bodies of sexual minorities visible (DeGenevieve 2007). But as pornography escapes the traditional confines of porn sites and spills into social networking sites, inevitably, porn develops another set of functions and new visual aesthetics. Porn research highlights how technological, political, legal, and cultural factors influence why and how specific forms, functions, and affects of pornography emerge (Williams 1989; Paasonen 2011). The explosion of diverse forms of porn on the internet allows diverse forms of porn to circulate in different platforms and elicit different emotional and bodily responses from viewers (Jacobs 2007; Paasonen 2011). Yet, porn studies as a field has remained steadfastly focused on Western contexts and continues to ignore the booming porn production, circulation, and consumption in other geocultural and geopolitical sites (Jones 2020; Jacobs et al. 2020; Wong 2020; Baishya and Mini 2020). Similarly, the field has not yet sufficiently addressed issues of emotion and affect (Paasonen 2011).

This research responds to these gaps by considering the case of pornography in the alter community in the Philippines—a network of producers and consumers of self-made pornography on Twitter. While not exclusive to gay users, the alter community is widely popular among gay Filipino internet users (Punongbayan 2017). This study has the following aims: first, it provides a descriptive account of qualities and visual aesthetics of porn, as well as the narratives of sex and the everyday that circulate in the alter community. Second, this research analyses how the relationship between Twitter as a sociotechnical space and the aesthetics and narratives of sex in the alter community contain and circulate emotions and affect. In fulfilling these objectives, this study draws from original works in porn studies, Philippine studies, internet research, and the works of Sara Ahmed, and by using a virtual ethnographic approach to generate data. I follow Garcia (1996 [2009]) in defining Filipino gay identity as a homosexual identity that responds to, and arises from, the pervasive and heterosexual male macho culture. This means that Filipino gays usually desire straight-acting men or strive to keep their

homosexual identity in the closet (Garcia 1996 [2009]; Manalansan 2003). Like in other countries, the internet provides powerful venues where sexualities can be expressed safely and where political-legal and sociocultural forces maintain a rhetoric of conservative sexual attitudes (see Jones 2020 for the case of South Korea; Jacobs 2012 for China; and Baishya and Mini 2020 for South Asian pornographies).

To the best of my knowledge, this study represents one of the first focused on pornography, especially online gay porn, in the Philippines. After discussing the methodological framework, I begin by giving a brief overview of the concepts of sexuality, gender, and gay identity in the Philippines, as well as a sketch of pornography in the Philippines. Like Jones (2020, 304), I consider Twitter “an informal domestic porn industry” that responds to Filipino constructs of gay masculinity. Next, the paper uses a legal and technological analysis of alter community porn that draws from Linda Williams’s (1989) analysis of stag films and compares the primitive aesthetics that emerge in the alter community. The paper then discusses how porn in the alter community functions, contains, and circulates different kinds of affect and emotions and not simply feelings of sexual arousal. I then conclude by offering the key insights proposed by this paper.

Methodology

This research is part of a larger virtual ethnographic project on the alter community—a group of anonymous Filipino Twitter users that produce, distribute, and consume porn on Twitter. Virtual ethnography appropriates an ethnographic approach to examine the embeddedness and impact of digital and online technologies in our lives (Hine 2000, 2015). Virtual worlds provide new concepts of interaction, time, space, navigation, and access compared to doing ethnography in physical spaces. It can be used to examine experiences, interactions, and cultures formed solely within the virtual world. While different ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews can be conducted, implementing these methods may require some adjustments as to what can be observed and how research participants can interact.

Virtual worlds may not be conducive to conducting participant observation because everything is mediated and more traditional methods of data generation and analysis may be employed (Hine 2015, 172). In the alter community it is considerably easier to look at the interactions made on Twitter in relation to the circulation and discussion of pornography. This can be gleaned by observing the architecture of Twitter, paying close attention to the communication channels available there as well as the character limitations in the platform. However, Hine also believes that observing in virtual worlds may not be productive and must also employ autoethnography to establish the researcher’s emotional and intellectual response to the architecture of the medium and the interactions happening there (97–99).

I have been lurking in the alter community for around four years now and in those times, I made very little interaction with other participants and only watched self-made porn videos there. My own use of and visits to this alter

community have been shaped by my need to watch pornography quickly. But as I spent time there, my academic interest in it grew. Although my engagement with the community began in 2016, my ethnographic exercises began in October 2019 when I took a doctoral class on pornography. In the course of the fieldwork, I conducted interviews to serve as preliminary interviews for my PhD research. For this paper, I incorporate some of these interview data to bolster the claims of this research.

It was very difficult to recruit participants for this study. I first tried to recruit key informants directly by sending them a direct message via Twitter, explaining my interests in the alter community. Out of around ten that I invited, only two responded. I also have a friend who knows a few gay pornographers in the community, and she could recruit one for me. To gather more participants, I posted a call on my Facebook profile, and three friends responded with their own respective recommendations, and one friend used to be an active pornographer in the community. In the end, I had seven participants with whom I keep a regular (although not daily) contact. To safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of my participants, their personal information are anonymous, and names and identifying information have been removed from screenshots featured here.

Because of the difficulty in recruiting participants, I took advantage of what Hine calls the “unobtrusiveness” (2000, 160) of participant observation in the alter community by examining profiles of ten prominent pornographers whose followers range from forty thousand to around a hundred thousand. I analyzed their text and video posts. I also followed some pornographers within the community (around a hundred more profiles) and I took note of the tweets that transpired through my newsfeed. If I find tweets and videos interesting, I retweeted them or took a screenshot as a form of documentation for further analysis. I kept a diary where I wrote down some of my observations when I accessed Twitter on a particular day. Generally, I try to log in on the alter community to look at my Twitter feed or examine profiles three to four times a week.

As an observer, I classify myself as a critical outsider. As proposed by Lewis and Russell (2011), ethnographers are embedded within the communities they study to carefully observe, interact, and participate in community life. But they remind us that critical outsiders also maintain some distance from the field to rationalize, decode, and reconstruct cultural practices and social organization. In conducting this study, I follow Voros (2015) in acknowledging that the data that I analyze and my reading of the narratives the community members tell may reflect my own sexual tastes.

Pornography and Gay Sexuality in the Philippines

The Philippines is the bastion of Catholicism in Asia. With 85% of the population and nearly five centuries of Catholicism in the country, the church has a powerful influence in the discourse of sexuality there (Cornelio 2016; Cordero 2018). Scholars point to the Spanish occupation and the subsequent conversion of the indigenous populations to Catholicism as pivotal points in shaping gender and sexuality in the country as we know it (Sobritchea 1990; Garcia 1996 [2009]). Patil

(2018) argues that the adoption of (Western) gender and sexual identities and theories are part and parcel of Western imperial projects and relationships with other countries. In his brief historical account of gay culture in the Philippines, Garcia (2004; 1996 [2009]) argues that while the indigenous groups have a clear conception of sex roles in precolonial Philippines (i.e., to the first half of sixteenth century), men and women are free to adopt a sex role of their own regardless of their biological sex. With the arrival of Catholicism, sex and gender became complimentary and those who do not conform suffer from abuse and are labelled as sinners or immoral (Garcia 1996 [2009]). Even today, scholars note how *bakla* (i.e., effeminate/transvestite men who identify as women) are desexualized, overly dramatized, and are treated less respectably than the heterosexual or straight-acting men (Soriano 2014; Inton 2018). Garcia further explains that because of the complementarity of sex and gender, the *bakla* consider themselves as women. Hence, gay identity in the Philippines is predicated on performance (and even adoption) of gender roles, identities, and/or sex acts rather than simply objects of sexual desire (Manalansan 2003; Rodriguez 1996).

The early 1990s was important in changing the singular notion of homosexuality as the effeminate *bakla*. Cañete (2014) argues that the economic, technological, and sociocultural conditions in the Philippines after Marcos's dictatorship gave rise to different modalities of masculinity. Because of globalization and the proliferation of cinematic works that emphasized male bodies and male-to-male eroticism, Cañete argues that homosexual men now encompass men who have sex with men who do not necessarily identify themselves as women. The term "gay" now has become a useful handle for non-heterosexual men who have sexual relations with other men. The formal introduction of the LGBTQ framework in the country came with the first Pride March in 1994, which, since then, is held annually to celebrate diverse queer identities while advocating for legal protection and genuine acceptance of queer populations (Soriano and Cao 2016). But, following Manalansan (2003) and Garcia (1996 [2009]), this diversification of gay masculinity produced a hierarchy that closely resembles traditional heterosexual masculine order (Turgo 2014). Gay men, or those who act like straight men, sit atop this order. According to Michael Tan (1995), gay men's desire to protect themselves from discrimination, homophobia, and "economic dislocation" compels them to maintain a "straight" face or public image (88). This means that the effeminate *bakla* sits at the bottom of this gay/queer order and the straight-acting and more affluent gay men are deemed to be more desirable.

Gay men in the Philippines face immense pressure, not just because of the discrimination and lack of legal protection for non-heterosexual populations. Filipino masculinity itself carries myriad societal expectations. Men are expected to be skilled at hard labour or are expected to take up professional jobs in order to sustain the needs of their families (Sobritchea 1990; Turgo 2014). Furthermore, men are supposed to sustain their lineages by founding a family and ensuring harmonious relationships among its members (Angeles 2001). Thus, Angeles argues that men are supposed to be paragons of obedience—obedience to tradition and heading a family. Gay men are now faced with convoluted choices—

to express their sexuality at the expense of discrimination and foregoing their societal duties, or to fulfil their societal duties at the expense of denying their sexuality.

Apart from sexual identities, the country's attitude towards sex is also conservative, at least in appearance. Gumban and colleagues (2016) argue that sex remains a highly sensitive topic, even amongst family members. They argue that this pushes young people to learn about sex by talking to their friends or through other secretive methods, such as watching pornography or having pre-marital sex. With the increasingly liberal attitudes of young people towards sex, conservative religious scholars such as Cordero (2018, 46) adopt moralizing tones in their research to portray such developments as a crisis.

This sexually conservative attitude is cast into doubt by the overwhelming popularity of porn in the country. The Philippines is one of the world's major consumers of pornography, according to the research conducted by Pornhub Insights (2019). It is within the top ten in terms of time spent on Pornhub (second place) and in terms of daily traffic per country (eighth place). Pornhub (2020) claims that it has 120 million daily visitors globally. But while the Philippines is an active porn consumer, it has no established porn industry. Articles 200 and 201 of the country's Revised Penal Code bans the production, distribution, and exhibition of immoral and obscene materials, including pornography. Different localities, such as the cities of Cebu and Manila, also have limited powers of legislation and have enacted ordinances that ban the production and circulation of obscene material (Inquirer 2020). In a well-publicized legal battle, the Philippine edition of FHM Magazine lost its case in the Philippine Supreme Court when it challenged the City of Manila ordinance banning the publication of obscene materials. In the Supreme Court Decision, the Court maintains that "obscenity is not a protected speech" because "[n]o court has recognized the fundamental right to create, sell, or distribute obscene materials" (G.R. No. 184389, 15).

Despite the legal obstacles, Filipino gay men express their sexuality by constructing their sexual selves online, making pornographic videos, and writing sexual narratives. Many scholars noted how the internet gives rise amateur porn that represent diverse bodies and sexualities (Jacobs 2007; Paasonen 2010, 153). As scholars celebrate the proliferation of amateur porn outside the boundaries of porn sites (and into the more public virtual spaces), they argue that amateur porn is instrumental in how sexual minorities represent and claim their own sexual identities (Mondin 2017; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007, 1). Amateur porn presents a powerful opposition to professional pornography which promotes masculine pleasure at the cost of feminines experience of pain and humiliation (Dines 2010; Hambleton 2016; 2020). Specifically, social media sites, alongside underground sites, are instrumental in giving access to pornography in contexts where the state discourages, or even bans, access to and production of pornography (Jones 2020; Jacobs 2012).

In the Philippines, a network of gay Twitter users produces, circulates, and consumes gay porn and sexual narratives as a way of facilitating a "shared experience" of and claim to their sexuality (Jones 2020, 310; Piamonte et al. 2020,

8). Like South Korea (Jones 2020), the Philippines has no porn industry, and the society maintains a sexually conservative stance. In the following sections, I describe the alter community, which is a largely understudied phenomenon in the Philippines. I proceed to discuss the aesthetic qualities of alter community porn by comparing it with stag films, a form of porn with which alter community porn shares many similarities. This will be followed by a discussion on how the aesthetics in the alter community emphasize this form of porn's affective dimensions. I conclude by offering insights on the impact of alter community porn to gay masculinity in the Philippines.

The Alter Community and Primitive Aesthetics of Porn

Stag films are the forerunners of modern pornographic videos that were produced in the early twentieth century (e.g., 1910s to 1950s), usually portraying sexually explicit visuals and narratives, and were distributed clandestinely to generally male audiences (Schaefer 1999, 7; Waugh 2001). Because of its emergence together with silent films, stag films possess aesthetic characteristics distinct from modern forms of pornography. Williams writes that stag films are:

[of] short length, usually filling a single reel (a thousand feet, up to fifteen minutes) or less; silence and lack of color; and frequent lack of narrative coherence, thus resembling films of the actual primitive era (roughly 1896–1911). Stag films remained primitive in these ways long after the legitimate primitive films had developed into feature-length sound narratives. (Williams 1989, 60)

Williams writes that many of these stag films use title cards and discontinuous editing. In various examples provided by Williams, surviving stag films are edited like silent films wherein there may be drastic changes in narrative elements or sex positions performed by the performers. She cites the example of *Am Abend*, a stag film made in 1910, featuring “discontinuous” segments containing different sexual positions (Williams 1989, 61). In terms of narratives and settings, Williams also notes that stag films usually possess skeletal narratives occurring in nondescript locations.

These aesthetic qualities of stag films are directly influenced by film technologies available at that time, including early camera models that were static and had no audio recording functions (Williams 1989; Waugh 2001). As new technologies arrive, aesthetic and narrative qualities of films also changed. Historians, for example, unanimously point to the introduction of sound in filmmaking as one technological development that drastically affected the aesthetic and narrative qualities of films. On the one hand, Sparshott (1971, 27) notes that sound technology added another dimension to the visual elements of film which intensifies the emotional charge of the images. Schatz (1996), on the other hand, argues that sound obliterated the use of title cards, which made it possible for films to narrate in spoken dialogue. Obviously, spoken words can be controlled to show different emotional intensities compared to written words.

Many scholars have also noted how the aesthetic qualities of amateur porn directly result from the technological resources available to amateur

pornographers. The lack of industrial-grade cameras, lights, and microphones results in grainy visuals and poor sound quality (van Doorn 2010; Jacobs 2007). Like in stag films and amateur porn, the audiovisual quality of alter community porn is directly influenced by the technologies at hand. Pornographers use a single mobile phone to capture both sound and video. There is no professional lighting, and the sound captures all the noises in the room and the surrounding areas. But whereas access to professional technologies in the case of stag films were restricted by the illegality of obscene materials and the monopoly of cameras in the early days of filmmaking (Schatz 1986), the case of the alter community is different. While industrial cameras, lights, and microphones are definitely expensive, there is no actual need to purchase these pieces of equipment because mobile phones can perform the production, editing, distribution, and consumption of videos. Many phone cameras are capable of shooting in high definition with relatively clear sound. Many alter community pornographers simply rely on available lighting when shooting their videos. This corresponds roughly to stag films' lack of colour.

The length of stag films is also directly related to the quality, price, and capabilities of film reels at the time. In the alter community, the length of videos is determined by Twitter's architecture, which only allows 160 second long videos. This limits what can be shown on a single video. Many alter community members simply do not cut their videos into different shots (also because they only use one mobile phone anyway). The pornographers simply select a hundred and sixty second clip of a single sex act (e.g., just anal sex or a single position in anal sex, or just oral sex). To entice more followers or to better express their sexual narratives, community members take advantage of Twitter's limited text features which they use to express their feelings or weave narratives about the porn clip they uploaded. Most likely, pornographers simply create a series of two-minute videos and upload these successively, complete with the progression of a story or a continued narration of their feelings. Whereas stag films use title cards as an attempt to tie together non-coherent shots, alter community porn uses these textual details as a way of weaving personal(ized) narratives and expressing their feelings and emotions and not simply arousing viewers. For example, one HIV-positive participant narrates that having safe sex with other alter community members who know his status makes him feel better about himself and helps him in living a normal life. Others write captions about how they met their sexual partners—either through dating apps or in spontaneous physical encounters. Furthermore, the series of videos are uploaded in a way that follows the conventional flow of sex as seen in professional porn. This means that pornographers first upload foreplay such as kissing or nipple stimulation and end in ejaculation (the middle parts differ in sequence, but they usually go from oral sex to anal sex).

The videos, however, are not always static. This is similar to these videos' early narrative film counterparts, stag films, which largely mimic theatre aesthetics rather than establishing cinematic aesthetics, and this can be attributed to the lack of cameras and the incipency of film as an art form at the time (Allen and Gomery 1985). Because mobile phones can be handheld or placed on tables, videos

can show the point of view of the top or the bottom. Ejaculation may not always be visible and at times we can only see bodies twitching and hear loud moans as a result of ejaculation. I develop this argument in the next section, but I want to mention here that the lack of focus on the penis indicates the complex affective potentials of the alter community.

Perhaps the most interesting intersection between stag films and the alter community videos is the anonymity of the participants. In the case of stag films, moral and legal contexts are also complicit in their aesthetic development and quality (Sheaffer 2014, 368; Williams 1989, 84–91). No wonder that most of the performers and producers of stag films used pseudonyms—stag films were illegal. Thomas Waugh (2001, 275) illustrates that performers and producers adopted sexually suggestive screennames, such as in the case of the stag film *Wonders of the Unseen World* (1927) which displays, “Seduced by A. Prick / Directed by Ima Cunt / Photographed by R. U. Hard.” These pseudonyms are obviously aimed at arousing viewers, if not providing some sexually charged humour to audiences.

The anonymity in the alter community is realized by removing real-life identifiers. The users craft sexually suggestive IDs that refer to their genitals or sexual activities, such as “@lilbumhole” (slightly tweaked for privacy). Some refer to themselves in general terms such as twink, *bagets* (i.e., young guy), daddy, or bear. Others use dirty, self-deprecating words (such as using the words “cum” and “slut”) to lend erotic charge to their profiles and names (Paasonen 2011). The identifiers, on the other hand, are removed by digitally putting a sticker that tracks the face, so the participants stay unidentifiable. Following Jacobs (2007), the composition of porn in the alter community, which tends to avoid the face of the participants, speaks of a conscious effort to enforce anonymity. These deliberate attempts to erase identifiers so as to allow each person to participate in this sexual circuit.

In general, anonymity in the alter community is prompted by sociocultural attitudes towards sex and the gay identity in the Philippines. Many tweets in the community emphasize the primacy of anonymity, saying that “coming out is a personal decision” and that anonymity allows gay men to have “freedom” to express themselves. Two interviewees, Gabriel and Daniel (not their real names) believe that Twitter only becomes a safe space for sexual expression if they practice anonymity. Gabriel states that if family members and co-workers could identify him, then he could be terminated from his work, be disowned by his family, and be labelled as sinner and as a “sissy” by his friends and family. In Paul’s (not his real name) case, he allowed his face to be seen while performing (sometimes effeminate) sexually suggestive or explicit acts and this drew flak from his extended family members, who readily condemned his parents as irresponsible. Indeed, one pornographer said that anonymity is part of their identity as a community. It is not simply a stylistic decision that aims to highlight everyday, ordinary bodies (van Doorn 2010), but a visual quality that arises from a sociocultural orientation towards sex and sexuality. Community members tweeted warnings to carefully delete their own and their partner’s identifying features such as faces and names in their videos because being discovered has real-life consequences.

Given the sociocultural attitudes towards sexuality and the laws governing portrayals of sex in the Philippines, anonymity becomes a stylistic choice that is aimed at protecting one's identity, given the repressive sociocultural attitudes towards sex and sexuality. Despite the safety afforded by Twitter's architecture regarding sensitive media (Twitter only allows the circulation of sensitive media within those who gave their consent), participants and community members are aware that it is entirely possible that their identities can be exposed. Thus, anonymity not only serves as protection, but as a stylistic choice that allows participants to express their sexuality and subvert sociocultural attitudes that prevent them from expressing their sexuality. Anonymity has also been imbued with symbolic meanings and functions, such as respect to other alter community members whose exposure can lead to real-life issues. The mutual observance of anonymity, then allows the users to subvert not only potential state prohibitions on pornography, but also the sociocultural attitudes that condemn sex and gay sexuality.

Alter Community and Circulation of Emotions

Many porn scholars laid the foundations of porn studies using the lens of politics and ideology, but the shadow of emotions and feelings is always present in the discourse of porn. At its most basic and reductionist, porn is meant to *sexually arouse* its viewers (assumed as mostly male) which results to feelings of lust: the hardening of the penis, the tensing of muscles, and even the releasing of pre-ejaculate fluid, i.e., precum (Tarrant 2016; Williams 1989). Meanwhile, scholars state that masculine pleasure comes at the expense of feminine pain and humiliation (Hambleton 2016; 2020). It was Susanna Paasonen (2011) who argued that online porn can stir different emotions and bodily responses of varying intensities that are rooted in our personal encounters and experiences with porn. She proposes that viewing porn as a text to be read but not examining its materiality and emotional impact does not provide a full picture of what porn actually does. By moving away from grand ideas of patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity, Paasonen is able to disrupt the critical consideration of pornography to investigate how porn produces different emotional and physical reactions and drives us to perform other actions.

Indeed, Sara Ahmed argues that emotions move us to action. She proposes that emotions drive our social interactions—they can drive us to socialize with some but not with others. Ahmed writes that the way we are moved by emotions “connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others” (2004a, 11). The intensity of our encounters with the world (i.e., affect) leaves us in different emotional states and can affect us in different ways, including performing certain actions (Massumi 1995; Ahmed 2004b). But Ahmed does not advocate an abstract and philosophical understanding of emotions. Instead, she proposes that emotions do not float freely, but rather they attach themselves to words and images and circulate across bodies. It is through rhetoric and images that emotions circulate and therefore stimulate us to act, or to not act.

What I raise here is the entanglement of emotions with a specific environment, an idea which constantly appears in Ahmed's and Massumi's arguments, as well as in aesthetics of porn in the alter community. Following their arguments, I consider the architecture of Twitter and the aesthetics of alter community porn as important elements in the circulation of emotions among Twitter users. By following Ahmed, I propose that emotions circulate through porn videos and texts, as well as the architecture of Twitter. Papacharissi (2012, 2001–2002) explains that the storytelling and performance of the self on Twitter are emotive and affective expressions that embed fantasy in the everyday. As part of the public space, Twitter's characteristic emotive and affective storytelling changed the way its users engage in an otherwise-rational public sphere wherein emotions play an important role in the virality and "spreadability" of contents (Papacharissi 2015, 310).

Because of highly personal musings and opinionated posts on Twitter (Marwick and Boyd 2010, 110), porn has become entwined in a complex circulation of emotions and affects. Whereas porn on porn sites symbolizes excessive masculine virility, porn in the alter community is situated in a complex network of affects such as joy, shame, anger, and others. In other words, porn in the alter community becomes a nodal point where a complex web of affect and emotions are circulated. In one remarkable example, an HIV-positive pornographer states how his porn videos show that he is still desired by other gay men in the Philippines despite his condition. While his videos contain the usual erotic charge, the presence of very personal confessions charges the porn with a complex affective dimension. At once, this pornographer's entire tweet expresses hope and joy because other gay men find him sexually attractive. The presence of the confession alongside the video changes the emotions that this pornographer's videos circulate, making it sexually arousing and inspirational at the same time. In this context, the pornographer is able to overcome the hardships, limitations, and stigma of HIV. Furthermore, the anonymity in the video makes it easier for these emotions to circulate because the absence of faces means that it can be anyone's story. Indeed, many of this pornographer's followers comment that the porn videos and sexual narratives from his profile are a source of sexual arousal and an inspiration for the idea that HIV can be overcome. In yet another user's videos, the pornographer frequently engages in diatribes against other pornographers. His profiles and porn videos do not elicit the same erotic yet inspirational charge that the HIV-positive pornographer includes in his videos. Instead, these porn videos feel like they are simply aimed at getting more followers and attention. Indeed, some of this user's followers remark that they only follow him to follow his tirades or watch his porn, but I hardly encountered anyone saying that his tirades are inspirational. Some community members even discuss these kinds of behaviours as "unbecoming" of being an alter community member.

The presence of different emotional narratives together with porn renders it more than just a medium for sexual arousal. Gabriel states in our interviews that the alter community is his "lifeline" to the gay community in the country. Because he has no gay friends, and he fears his family may disown him, the alter

community became a space where he can watch porn and read stories of gay men about their sexual experiences and difficulties in their daily lives. It also became a space where he can produce porn, write stories, and make friends. Gabriel tells me that it is through the tweets and conversations in the alter community that he learns how it is to be a discreet gay man. This allows Gabriel to establish an emotional relationship with the alter community that is predicated on an experience of emotional relief. It is in the alter community that he fully expresses his sexuality and it allows him to carry on the societal expectations thrown at him, including earning a living for his family. Furthermore, to many alter community members, their emotional attachments highly vary according to the social relations they cultivate.

But to some, the anonymity represents a complete disavowal of their sexuality. Many community members emphasize that anonymity allows them to leave their sexual adventures, narratives, and feelings inside the bounds of the community. Daniel says, “Anonymity removes my accountability. I don’t get associated to what I say or do here.” Hearing this and looking at his tweets stirred different emotions in me. I wonder if it was shame that he was feeling. I also had an impression that anonymity allows participants to have their cake and eat it too—anonymity allows them to retain their masculine privilege outside the alter community by isolating their gay sexual identity (this may warrant another article altogether). To Daniel and to some members of the alter community who made it clear that anonymity allows them to disavow their gay sexuality, anonymity is supposed to circulate a feeling of security. In their social position as men, the anonymity makes them feel secure from the threat of being discovered.

Van der Nagel and Frith (2015) and Hogan (2013) suggest that anonymity facilitates open and playful interactions and more spontaneous presentation/construction of the self on the internet. Furthermore, anonymity is a powerful stylistic practice that can establish boundaries and allow users to organize their online and offline lives (Boyd 2014). In the context of the alter community, anonymity, as well as the inclusion of nondescript locations, are important in investing gay porn with affective dimensions that evoke different emotions at once. The narratives and images of sex and everyday life melding together in the alter community situate porn in a web of emotions, allowing these texts and images to contain and circulate emotions.

The primitive aesthetics of porn in the alter community highlight and evoke different emotions that give porn new uses. These primitive aesthetics present in alter community porn videos, as well as the structure of Twitter, enable what Sara Ahmed (2004a, 119) calls “affective economies.” Stories evoke different emotions like joy, pain, sadness, even anger. Porn videos, of course, arouse viewers sexually in different intensities, while the short duration of these videos elicits a sense of directness and craving for other sex acts. The anonymity of the participants and the nondescript locations make it easier for these emotions in the porn videos and sexual narratives to flow, circulate, and stick to others because anonymity signifies that these stories and sexual experiences can happen to anyone. Not only does porn make it easier for emotions to stick, it also lubricates these emotions so they

travel more easily. Moreover, the engagement features of Twitter (i.e., commenting and retweeting) are important in the circulation of these emotions throughout the community. Once an alter community member shares (or annotates) a tweet, the reach of this emotionally charged content is furthered. Thus, all these aesthetic and narrative elements of the alter community allow the circulation of emotions that bond people together. In other words, the circulation of emotions in the alter community is what makes it a collective.

Conclusion

This research proposes that the aesthetic and narrative properties of porn in the alter community emphasize the affective dimension of porn. Contrary to the commonplace debates in porn studies that align porn within the discourses of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and neoliberal capitalism, this paper draws from technological, aesthetic, and affective discourses to further investigate the question (Paasonen 2011; Williams 1989; Ahmed 2004a; 2004b): what does porn do? Furthermore, the paper shifts the discussion from the discourse of sexual arousal and presents the idea that amateur porn can be a complex text capable of containing and circulating various emotions and affects, therefore inducing different effects in the producers and consumers of gay pornography. As Ahmed (2004b, 119) proposes, emotions are productive and are able to bond people together as collectives, networks, or communities.

The aesthetics of gay porn and the sexual and everyday narratives in the alter community respond to the contexts surrounding gay sexuality in the Philippines. Apart from its function as a *de facto* porn industry where gay men express themselves sexually (Jones 2020; Mondin 2017), the aesthetics that are centred on the anonymity of participants highlight the fragility of masculinity in the Philippines. By anonymizing themselves, the participants are able to make sense of their sexuality and to experience affect and emotions arising from their sexuality and encounters with other bodies, virtual or physical. In other words, the aesthetics of the alter community of gay porn allow gay men to continue performing their roles as men while being able to make sense of their sexuality in this virtual space. Anonymity, I propose, becomes a stylistic choice aimed at protecting gay men in a society where institutions neglect granting protection to sexual minorities. At the same time, anonymity can also be taken to perpetuate the hegemony of macho men (Manalansan 2003) which has pervaded the ranks of gay men in the Philippines.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank his doctoral thesis adviser, Professor Ying Zhu (Professor of Cinema Studies, School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University), for her invaluable suggestions on this paper.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004a. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–39.
- . 2004b. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Albury, Kath. 2014. "Porn and Sex Education, Porn as Sex Education." *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 172–81.
- Allen, Robert, and Douglas Gomery. 1985. *Film History: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Angeles, Leonora. 2001. "The Filipino Male as 'Macho-Machunurin': Bringing Men and Masculinities in Gender and Development Studies." *Kasarinlan Journal of Third World Issues* 16 (1): 9–30.
- Boyd, Danah. 2010. "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications." In *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi, 47–66. London: Routledge.
- . 2014. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Cañete, Reuben Ramas. 2014. *Masculinity, Media, and Their Publics in the Philippines: Selected Essays*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Cordero, Dalmacito. 2018. "Understanding the Broader Horizon of Sexual Encounter: A Case Study on Sexual Engagement Among Filipino Teens." *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 18 (1): 46–61.
- Cornelio, Jayeel S. 2016. *Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines: Young People Reinterpreting Religion*. London: Routledge.
- DeGenevieve, Barbara. 2007. "Ssspread.com: The Hotbods of Queer Porn." In *C'Lick Me: A Netporn Studies Reader*, edited by Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, and Matteo Pasquinelli, 233–38. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Dines, Gail. 2010. *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Garcia, J. Neil. 2004. "Male Homosexuality in the Philippines: A Short History." *IIAS Newsletter* 35. Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies.
- . 2009. *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Gumban, Goldilyn, Ruth Joy Martos, Klyde Wayne Rico, Racidon Bernarte, and Ivy Tuason. 2016. "Let's Talk about Sex: Parental Communication and Sexual Behavior of Male Filipino Youth." *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, no. 2 (May): 130–39.
- Hambleton, Alexandra. 2016. "When women watch: the subversive potential of female-friendly pornography in Japan." *Porn Studies* 3 (4): 427–42.
- Hambleton, Alexandra. 2020. "Gold Fingers or Golden Opportunity? Porn Stars, Sex Education, and Masculinity in Contemporary Japan." *Porn Studies* 7 (3): 1–12.
- Hine, Christine. 2010. *Virtual Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- . 2015. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Hogan, Bernie. 2013. "Pseudonyms and the Rise of the Real-Name Web." In *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, edited by John Hartley, Jean Burgess, and Axel Bruns, 290–307. Chichester: Wiley.
- Inton, Mikee. 2018. "Exploring the Dolphy Bakla: Queerness in Philippine Cinema." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Asian Cinema*, edited by Aaron Han-Joon Magnan-Park, Gina Marchetti, and See Kam Tan, 583–605. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jacobs, Katrien, Thomas Baudinette, and Alexandra Hambleton. 2020. "Reflections on Researching Pornography across Asia: Voices from the Region." *Porn Studies* 7 (3): 250–57.
- Jacobs, Katrien. 2007. *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2012. *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.
- Jones, Shawn Suyong Yi. 2020. "Jemok Eopseum: The Repurposing of Tumblr for Gay South Korean DIY Pornography." *Porn Studies* 7 (3): 303–14.
- Lewis, Susan Jane, and Andrew J. Russell. 2011. "Being Embedded: A Way Forward for Ethnographic Research." *Ethnography* 12 (3): 398–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138110393786>.
- Manalansan, Martin F. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Marwick, Alice E., and Danah Boyd. 2010. "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience." *New Media & Society* 13 (1): 114–133.
- Massumi, Brian. 1995. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 31: 83–109.
- Mercer, John. 2017. *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Mondin, Alessandra. 2017. "'Tumblr Mostly, Great Empowering Images': Blogging, Reblogging and Scrolling Feminist, Queer and BDSM Desires." *Journal of Gender Studies* 26 (3): 282–92.
- Paasonen, Susanna, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa. 2007. "Pornification and the Education of Desire." In *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*, edited by Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa, 1–20. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Paasonen, Susanna. 2010. "Good amateurs: Erotica writing and notions of quality. In F. Attwood." In *Porn.com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*, edited by Feona Attwood, 138–54. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Paasonen, Susanna. 2011. *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.
- Papacharissi, Zizi. 2012. "Without You, I'm Nothing: Performances of the Self on Twitter." *International Journal of Communication* 6: 1989–2006.
- . 2015. "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling: Sentiment, Events and Mediality." *Information, Communication & Society* 19 (3): 307–24.
- Patil, Vrushali. 2018. "The Heterosexual Matrix as Imperial Effect." *Sociological Theory* 36 (1): 1–26.

- Piamonte, Samuel Brando, Mark Anthony Quintos, and Minami Iwayama. 2020. "Virtual Masquerade: Understanding the Role of Twitter's Alter Community in the Social and Sexual Engagements of Men Who Have Sex with Men." *Banwa* 13: 1–12.
- Pornhub. 2019. "The 2019 Year in Review." Pornhub Insights. <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>.
- . 2020. "Coronavirus Insights." Pornhub Insights. March 23, 2020. <https://www.Pornhub.com/insights/corona-virus>.
- Punongbayan, Stefan. 2017. "ROUNDTABLE: Alter Nation." Philstar.com. <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/supreme/2017/06/09/1708381/roundtable-alter-nation>.
- Rodriguez, Felix I. 1996. "Understanding Filipino Male Homosexuality." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 5 (2–3): 93–114.
- Schaefer, Eric. 1999. *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Schatz, Thomas. 1996. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
- Sheaffer, Russell. 2014. "Smut, novelty, indecency: reworking a history of the early-twentieth-century American 'stag film'." *Porn Studies* 1 (4): 346–59.
- Soriano, Cheryll Ruth, and Ruepert Jiel Cao. 2016. *Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupations of Public Space*, edited by Maria Rovisco and Jonathan C. Ong, 207–28. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Soriano, Cheryll Ruth. 2014. "Constructing Collectivity in Diversity: Online Political Mobilization of a National LGBT Political Party." *Media, Culture & Society* 36 (1): 20–36.
- Sparshott, F. E. 1971. "Basic Film Aesthetics." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 5 (2): 11–34.
- Tan, Michael. 1995. "From Bakla to Gay: Shifting Gender Identities and Sexual Behaviors in the Philippines." In *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*, edited by Richard Parker and John Gagnon, 85–96. New York and London: Routledge.
- Tarrant, Shira. 2016. *The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Turgo, Nelson Nava. 2014. "Redefining and Experiencing Masculinity in a Philippine Fishing Community." *Philippine Sociological Review* 62: 7–38.
- Van der Nagel, Emily, and Jordan Frith. 2015. "Anonymity, Pseudonymity, and the Agency of Online Identity: Examining the Online Social Practices of r/Gonewild." *First Monday* 20 (3).
- Van Doorn, Niels. 2010. "Keeping it Real." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16 (4): 411–430.
- Vörös, Florian. 2015. "Troubling Complicity: Audience Ethnography, Male Porn Viewers and Feminist Critique." *Porn Studies* 2 (2–3): 137–49.
- Waugh, Thomas. 2001. "Homosexuality in the Classical American Stag Film: Off-Screen, On-Screen." *Sexualities* 4 (3): 275–291.