

Positioning Pacquiao for Calling LGBT People “Worse Than Animals”: Calling Out and Defending Hate Speech

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This study used positioning theory as a discursive approach to understand how hate speech targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people is called out and defended in public. Positioning theory argues that every utterance is a speech act that ascribes either a right or a duty to the utterer—in this case, the right to utter hate speech or the duty to desist. Using the case of a public utterance made by national icon and boxing champion Manny Pacquiao, we looked at how positioning LGBT people as “masahol pa sa hayop” (worse than animals) was subsequently positioned by actors in public as spreading hate toward LGBT people, or as hate speech. From 62 news articles and opinion pieces that appeared in an online media outlet covering the naturally-occurring public talk about Pacquiao’s hate speech, we identified storylines and positions that called out and defended hate speech. Four storylines called out hate speech: discrimination, scientific falsehood, religious condemnation, and bigoted politician. Whereas five storylines defended hate speech: national icon, scientific fact, religious belief, freedom of speech, and apology. Results are discussed in light of implications for LGBT advocacy and producing empowering storylines and positions to counter hate speech.

Keywords: LGBT, hate speech, positioning theory, discrimination, freedom of speech

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In February 2016, then senatorial candidate Manny Pacquiao was asked in a televised interview on his opinion on the legalization of same-sex marriage in the Philippines (Cayabyab, 2016). The boxing champion and national icon answered with the following utterance:

Common sense lang. Makakakita ka ba ng any animals na lalaki sa lalaki, babae sa babae? Mas mabuti pa yung hayop. Marunong kumilala kung lalaki, lalaki, o babae, babae. Kung lalaki sa lalaki, babae sa babae, eh mas masahol pa sa hayop ang tao. (It's only common sense. Would you see any species of animals who engage in male to male, female to female [sexual] relations? Animals, then, are better than humans [in that sense]. They know how to distinguish males from females. If people then engage in male to male, female to female relations, then they are worse than animals.)

Pacquiao's utterance immediately sparked public outrage as private citizens and public personalities reacted, calling out his utterance as discriminatory toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people—that is, hate speech. Others, however, responded in Pacquiao's defense and justified his utterance. On social media, the interview video quickly went viral, and many publicly expressed either their agreement or disgust with the utterance (Macaranas, 2016; "Pacquiao downed by", 2016). The controversy was widely covered by local and international news. For weeks, it headlined several news reports and opinion pieces that were heavily commented on and shared online. Our interest in this paper is how an utterance that described a group of people as sub-human (worse than animals) is called out as unacceptable behavior, while concurrently defended as acceptable and even right.

While much of the literature has focused on discrimination against LGBT people as rooted in individual internal or attitudinal attributes, such as homophobia or sexual prejudice (Herek, 2000), or in social structures or systems, such as heterosexism (Kitzinger, 1996), we take the position that gender and sexual biases are produced and reproduced in language (Clarke et al., 2010). Using positioning theory as a discursive lens (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), we aim

to contribute to the literature on how discrimination is legitimized or supported in talk, and how it can likewise be challenged or subverted in talk. In a sociopolitical context like the Philippines, which remains ambivalent to LGBT people (Yarcia et al., 2019), where national legislation to protect LGBT people from discrimination remains unpassed for the last 23 years (Bordey, 2023), the utility of unpacking how hate and discrimination can be countered in talk is made even more significant.

Hate Speech Targeting LGBT People

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (n.d.) describes hate speech as “covering many forms of expressions which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons” (para. 1). It is said to be the symbolic and linguistic regeneration of alienating and discriminating acts (Aslan, 2017). The use of hate speech therefore makes discrimination a discursive phenomenon (Özarslan, 2014; Shepherd et al., 2015). Past research has shown that minority groups have been subjected to hate speech and hate crimes the most; among these groups are LGBT people (Breen & Nel, 2011; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). The short- and long-term consequences of hate speech have been documented as similar to those experienced by survivors of trauma (Leets, 2002). Recent studies continue to highlight the negative impact of hate speech on LGBT people and how hate speech has become widespread on social media (e.g., Mathew et al., 2018; Ștefăniță & Buf, 2021), making online hate speech a real social problem with serious consequences.

Very few studies, however, have looked into how hate speech itself is produced in language—and fewer still on how it is called out (or made unacceptable) and how it is defended (or made acceptable). One study looked at how Brazilian media has been systematically enabling public figures to utilize hate speech in order to enhance their media prominence (Sponholz & Christofolletti, 2018). They looked at how discriminatory utterances are justified and legitimized and how these utterances are protected by legal inefficiencies and ethical ambivalence. The present study contributes to this body of

literature by looking at how hate speech is discursively legitimized and simultaneously delegitimized through talk. In particular, we look at how Pacquiao's utterance that referred to LGBT people as "worse than animals" is positioned by various actors in the public sphere as concurrently acceptable and unacceptable. We further argue that describing a group of people as sub-human is a symbolic and linguistic form of dehumanization, a discriminatory act, and hence, a form of hate speech. While we reflexively position ourselves as advocates of LGBT human rights, our interest in this paper is to follow the fluidity of positioning that took place and how the same utterance was repositioned as not hate speech but rather a valid, legitimate, and respectable point of view.

The Power of Words: A Discursive Approach

There are broadly two ways of viewing speech that is negative toward LGBT identities in the psychological literature. The first stance sees language as expressive of reality, while the second stance sees language as constitutive of reality (Sampson, 1993). The first body of literature sees hate speech as predicated on preexisting internal states, such as prejudice, which is understood as an intrapsychic attitude (Herek, 2000), and stereotypes, which are understood as a form of cognition (Dovidio et al., 2010). A limitation of this approach, which individualizes heterosexism (i.e., the institutional privileging of heterosexual identities taken as the social norm), is that the analysis and resulting interventions miss out on the ways that it might be a reflection of the social and cultural fabric of society (Kitzinger, 1996). This body of work has since grown to recognize that prejudice and stereotyping are also systemic or structural (Herek, 2004; Kitzinger, 1996; Pettigrew, 2010).

The second stance that the literature has taken is that language is constitutive of reality; that is, heterosexism is produced in language. Following the work of J. L. Austin, language is said to be a "form of action" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 28) or is "performing actions" (pp. 14–15). With this formulation, gender and sexuality are then constructed as produced and reproduced in talk (Speer & Potter, 2002), and so are gender and sexual bias (Clarke et al., 2010). Therefore,

social phenomena like sexual prejudice and heterosexism are no longer represented as existing within a person, but as created by the very language used by people (Burman & Parker, 1993). The present study anchors itself on this discursive approach to reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Sampson, 1993). More specifically, we argue that hate speech is best understood in the very talk that produces it, and consequently, is potentially countered in talk itself.

Sociopolitical Context of LGBT Rights in the Philippines

Yarcia and colleagues (2019) characterize Philippine society as a paradox of visibility, tolerance, and seeming acceptance vis-à-vis harassment and violence toward LGBT people. Similarly, Cornelio and Dagle (2019) point to this cultural ambivalence by referring to contrasting survey results conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013: with one survey reporting that 73 percent of Filipinos agree that homosexuality should be accepted, while another reported that 65 percent of Filipinos believe that homosexuality is morally unacceptable. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s (2014) country report on the state of being LGBT in the Philippines, public acceptance of LGBT people remains an issue, with experiences of stigma, discrimination, and violence reported by LGBT Filipinos across all spheres of life.

Philippine politics also mirrors the country's ambivalence toward LGBT people and same-sex marriage. Although a number of legislators have filed bills to protect the rights of LGBT people and to recognize same-sex marriage (Dizon, 2016), an anti-discrimination bill has remained unpassed for 23 years (Bordey, 2023). The strongest opposition to granting legal rights and protection to LGBT people has been the Catholic Church hierarchy along with conservative religious groups that have weaponized religion against LGBT people (Cornelio & Dagle, 2019; Yarcia et al., 2019). Despite the country's reputation as the "second most gay-friendly country in the Asia-Pacific region" (Tan, 2018; Tubeza, 2013), it remains ironically ambivalent toward LGBT people (Cornelio & Dagle, 2019; Yarcia et al., 2019). Hence, the issue of how Pacquiao's utterance was constructed as hate speech and not

hate speech is situated in this local context.

Positioning Theory

This study uses positioning theory as a discursive approach to understand how Pacquiao's utterance, positioned in this paper as hate speech, is concurrently called out and defended in the public sphere. Positioning theory is the "study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). It focuses on the normative frameworks that shape how people think, feel, and behave according to standards of correctness (i.e., what a person may or may not do) (Harré et al., 2009). How these rights and duties are individually and collectively ascribed, negotiated, accepted, and contested is an outcome of a discursive process situated within a specific context (Harré, 2015). As such, whether an utterance of hate speech is called out or defended is subject to how norms around hate speech are discursively negotiated and contested.

Furthermore, positioning theory argues that every utterance is a speech act that ascribes persons with either a right or a duty (Davies & Harré, 1999); in this case, it ascribes the right to utter hate speech or the duty to desist. Speech acts are defined as socially significant actions, intended actions, or speech that is interpreted as socially meaningful (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). To understand utterances as speech acts, we look at the structure of conversation or talk, consisting of (a) storylines, (b) positions, and (c) social force.

Storylines

The social act of positioning brings forth meaning in the form of cultural narratives or what are called as storylines (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). A storyline is the unfolding of the dynamics of a social episode, which tends to follow an already-established pattern and is expressed as a "loose cluster of narrative conventions" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 6). Storylines provide coherence and a basis for understanding the actions performed by people. In this study, we identify the storylines that called out Pacquiao's utterance as hate speech, as well as those that defended it.

Positions

A 'position' is a "loose set of rights and duties that limit the possibilities of action" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). It is a reference made to a person's moral and personal attributes that limits what one can say or do (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). In a more technical sense, a position is a "complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup, and even intrapersonal action through some assignment of such rights and duties" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). In this paper, we look at how Pacquiao's utterance, and by extension how Pacquiao as the utterer, was positioned in terms of attributes that either granted him the right to utter hate speech or ascribed him the duty to desist.

Social Force

Social force, also referred to as the illocutionary force, is how language or words are used to "accomplish social tasks" (Slocum-Bradley, 2009, p. 82). That is, actors in a conversation often seek to understand what the conversation itself is "doing" or "accomplishing" as they interpret a word, phrase, or locution in a significant way. Utterances here are taken as intentional social actions and are therefore interpreted as meaningful. In this paper, we anchor our interpretation of how Pacquiao's utterance was positioned on the ways people accomplished the social task of either calling out or defending hate speech, thereby rendering it unacceptable or acceptable.

Our particular interest is in examining how an utterance of hate speech is positioned as a right, giving insight as to how hate speech is tolerated, justified, and even made acceptable and right. Conversely, we also argue for the utility of examining how an utterance of hate speech is positioned as wrong, as well as how the duty to not utter hate speech can be invoked to counter hate and consequently demand respect for the human dignity of LGBT people.

Statement of the Problem

Using positioning theory as a discursive lens to understand how hate speech is justified and potentially countered, we look at

the storylines, positions, and consequent social force of each act of positioning. We ask:

1. What are the patterns of positioning that call out and defend hate speech?
2. What patterns of positioning do not grant a person the right to utter hate speech, thereby calling it out?
3. What patterns of positioning do grant a person the right to utter hate speech, thereby defending it?

Method

This paper is part of a larger research project examining the public discourse that ensued after Pacquiao's interview on February 16, 2016. The final data set was sourced from news reports and opinion pieces found in a national newspaper that made reference to Pacquiao's utterance. Only direct quotes or utterances from actors identified in the articles were used in the analysis. Actors here included politicians and electoral candidates; public personalities and celebrities from entertainment, TV, music, and sports; journalists and columnists, including priests with opinion columns; LGBT-identifying celebrities and LGBT-identifying publics, including LGBT-identifying students; and the general public, with some identifying as students and teachers, whereas others had no identifiers. Whereas actors were identified from direct quotes reported in news reports, columnists were identified as the actors for opinion pieces. After conducting line-by-line coding to identify the positions, rights, and duties of each utterance, the positions were clustered by storyline. The storylines were then organized in terms of their consequent social force of either calling out or defending hate speech.

Data Collection

An online search of newspaper articles (i.e., news reports and opinion pieces) published within 6 weeks of Pacquiao's statement (February 16 – March 22, 2016) was first conducted. This six-week marker covered the period when public discourse was at its peak;

by the end of the six weeks, media coverage of the talk had begun to taper off. Preliminary inclusion of an article in the data corpus was dependent on whether the article made reference to (a) the statement, (b) Pacquiao, (c) LGBT identities, and (d) Philippine society or the general public. A total of 124 articles matched this criterion. Each article was then reviewed to assess if it met the following inclusion criteria: the article assigned positions, rights, or duties to Pacquiao, LGBT people, or Philippine society in connection with the issue. Those that did not meet this inclusion criteria were excluded from the final data set, and those that did were entered into a master list and coded accordingly. After reading all of the articles, the team found that some content was repeated across newspapers (e.g., the same person was quoted by different newspapers). To minimize content duplication, the team decided to include only articles from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the top newspaper in the country with the widest readership and with the most number of eligible articles at 62. The articles were accessed through their website, *Inquirer.net*, and a copy of each article was downloaded. After removing any remaining duplicates, the final data set totaled 52 articles.

Data Analysis

All articles were read for direct quotations. For news report articles, only the reported quotes of actors were included. For opinion pieces, the whole article was treated as a direct quotation. The quotes were then coded line-by-line based on the way the statement, Pacquiao, LGBT identities, and Philippine society or the general public were positioned. Each line was coded according to the object being positioned. The position (description or reference to an attribute), right, or duty was then identified. An initial analysis of 15 articles was performed to develop a coding frame composed of positions, rights, and duties. Using this coding frame, the remaining articles were coded separately. Each team member individually coded a subset of the data set. Upon completion, the coding was sent to a different team member for validation. Codes that were questioned or challenged by the second coder were presented for discussion by the entire team. All individual notes and group discussions were documented. The summary of the

coded data set was then presented to the first author (who was not part of the team that performed line-by-line coding) for further validation. The positions, rights, and duties were finalized and then organized into clusters and overarching storylines. This step was done in a series of group discussions following several iterations to determine whether the resulting themes represented the data. For this paper, only the second author engaged in further analysis and interpretation of the positionings of the statement and Pacquiao. This analysis was validated by the first author across several iterations.

Applying van Langenhove and Harré's (1999) positioning triangle as the conceptual and analytical framework, the results were synthesized and presented following the framework's tri-polar structure: storylines, positions (including rights and duties), and social force. The interpretation was anchored on the eventual or consequent social force of the utterance (i.e., whether the act of positioning called out or defended hate speech). Analysis followed the use of the term "positioning," explained as "(a) naming or indexing a category; (b) invoking categorical membership; (c) invoking attributes" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003, pp. 174–175); and (d) assigning rights and duties (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). We chose to use the gerund form instead of its noun form, in order to emphasize and demonstrate that positioning is an act and is used by persons to accomplish a social task. Furthermore, positionings are not limited to evoked identities or ascribed rights and duties (Harré et al., 2009); they may also center on perceived consequences or events after a specific utterance.

The direct quotes included in this paper are in their original language, which was primarily English and a mix of Tagalog and English (i.e., Taglish). The original language was retained to preserve the meaning intended by the actor. An English translation directly follows the original Tagalog quotes. The code that appears at the end of each quote represents a data source and the line in the data source.

Results

We found two patterns of positioning hate speech—calling it out and defending it. Four storylines called out hate speech: discrimination; scientific falsehood; religious condemnation; and

bigoted politician. While each storyline had a unique basis for calling out hate speech, all storylines positioned a person as having no right to utter hate speech, consequently making hate speech unacceptable. Five storylines defended hate speech: national icon; scientific fact; religious belief; freedom of speech; and apology. While these storylines gave the utterer (i.e., Pacquiao) the right to utter hate speech, each defended this right to hate differently, from excusing to defending to forgiving. The consequent social force varied in terms of how hate speech was made acceptable, to the point of making it right.

Calling Out Hate Speech

Table 1 summarizes the patterns of positioning that were identified as calling out hate speech, highlighting the unique positioning of each storyline, position, and social force.

Table 1. *Summary of Calling Out Hate Speech Storylines, Positions, and Social Force*

Storyline	Position	Social Force
Discrimination storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utterer was discriminatory, disrespectful, and perpetuating abuse 	A person has no right to utter hate speech	Calls out hate speech as discrimination; makes hate speech an act of disrespect and unacceptable
Scientific falsehood storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utterer was ignorant, uninformed, and uneducated 	A person has no right to utter hate speech	Calls out hate speech as borne of ignorance; makes hate speech incorrect and unacceptable
Religious condemnation storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utterer was condemning, demonizing, and un-Christian 	A religious person has no right to utter hate speech	Calls out hate speech as un-Christian; makes hate speech morally wrong and unacceptable
Bigoted politician storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utterer was a close-minded, conservative, bigoted politician 	A politician has no right to utter hate speech	Calls out hate speech as bigotry; makes hate speech a prejudiced opinion and unacceptable

Discrimination Storyline

Pacquiao describing LGBT people as “worse than animals” was called “insensitive” (FCDO12) and “offensive” (FCDO12) by some, with the consequent social force of devaluing and disrespecting LGBT people:

To make a statement so spectacularly inaccurate and so offensively wrong on so many levels is to devalue the human essence of those who choose not to identify as straight, and to disrespect their right to love and marry and sleep with whomever they want. (FBD003)

The utterance was also positioned as “horrific” (FAD004), “damaging” (FAD004), and “discriminatory” (FAD003) by others. Comments pointed to the statement’s possible consequences, such as spreading hate and perpetuating abuse targeting LGBT people:

Lawyer . . . called Pacquiao’s statement “discriminatory” of LGBTs and warned that this could perpetuate abuses against homosexuals. (FAD008)

It was further positioned as “deplorable” (FCDO12) or deserving condemnation for its “blatant disregard” and “clear disrespect” of LGBT rights:

Manny’s statement is a blatant disregard for LGBT [rights] and a clear disrespect for their guaranteed human right. (FAD005)

As the utterer of hate speech, Pacquiao was positioned as not having the right to disrespect and devalue LGBT people. In the following comment, he was called out for “[demonizing]” and “[denigrating]” gay people:

What?! Why do people have to compare homosexuality to animals?! Why?? Look, if your religious beliefs prevent you from accepting same-sex marriage, that’s on you. That’s YOUR idea of propriety. But there’s absolutely no call to demonize and denigrate

gay people by comparing them to animals just because their love is something you're unable to accept. (FAD004)

Pacquiao was further positioned as not having the right to demean LGBT people or to treat them like pigs or animals, a literal translation for "*babuyin*":

Obviously, Pacquiao bears the brunt of social media people because of his very discriminatory statement. *Para bang walang halaga ang pink communities sa kanya. It was as if krimen ang magpakasal ang dalawang babae or dalawang lalaki. Sabi nga ng ilang LGBT members, wala siyang karapatang babuyin ang mga bading at tomboy.* (As if pink communities have no value to him. It was as if it was a crime for two women or two men to get married. As some LGBT members have said, he has no right to treat gays and lesbians like pigs.) (FAD003)

By positioning the utterance as "discriminatory," Pacquiao was called out for committing a discriminatory act. Considered as ethically wrong, it was seen as an act of devaluing, disrespecting, demonizing, denigrating, and dehumanizing LGBT people. Moreover, the utterer was positioned as having no right to discriminate against LGBT people, who have the same human right to respect and dignity.

Scientific Falsehood Storyline

Alongside positioning the utterance as discrimination, the utterance was also positioned as scientifically untrue. In the quote below, Pacquiao was characterized as lacking the education or scientific understanding to know that homosexuality also occurs in nature. Hence, it positioned the utterance as borne of ignorance:

Basically, it shows his lack of education and his lack of understanding of the natural course of history. Homosexuality is present in plants, animals, and human beings. (MAD002)

Pacquiao was then positioned as needing to be educated or corrected:

Newsflash: Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and queers are humans too and homosexuality does occur among animals, even among our closest zoological relatives, the chimpanzees. (FBD003)

Unlike calling out the utterance as discrimination and demanding respect for LGBT people, calling it out as false had the social force of demanding correction. Rather than its hateful or discriminatory consequence on LGBT people, it was the correctness of the utterance that was challenged. Pacquiao was still positioned as having no right to make such an utterance, but on the basis of the utterance being scientifically incorrect, rather than ethically wrong.

Religious Condemnation Storyline

After calling LGBT people “worse than animals,” Pacquiao explained that he was simply being true to the Bible and to his religious beliefs as a Christian. However, his positioning as Christian was subsequently questioned for having made an utterance that “condemned” LGBT people. On one hand, Pacquiao was positioned as misusing or misquoting the Bible:

In his remarks, Pacquiao said his opposition to gay union is grounded on what the Bible says—i.e., “same-sex marriage is a sin against God.” I am not sure if this is a direct quote from the Bible. (MAD004)

On the other hand, his utterance was positioned as an act of religious condemnation, which ironically made it un-Christian:

I don’t think his condemnation of nonheteronormative relationships is qualified. First, obsession with rules and dogmas lead Christians to condemnation, which ironically Christ himself condemned. Jesus’ message is of mercy, compassion, and love, not of throwing stones to others because of their sinfulness. (FAD016)

Pacquiao was then positioned as judging or condemning people:

Some people think they can judge people, like God, just because they've attended a prayer meeting and read the Bible. (FAD013)

Within a religious condemnation storyline, Pacquiao's utterance was positioned as morally wrong. But unlike a discrimination storyline that called out Pacquiao for the hateful consequence of his statement on LGBT people, a religious condemnation storyline called out Pacquiao for not being Christ-like. He was then positioned as having the duty to be merciful, compassionate, and loving, as all Christians are called to do. While both storylines had the same social force of making an utterer stop uttering hate speech, a discrimination storyline called out the act for disrespecting the rights and dignity of LGBT people, whereas a religious condemnation storyline called out the act for being un-Christian.

Bigoted Politician Storyline

The last storyline that called out hate speech positioned Pacquiao as a bigoted politician. In this storyline, the utterance was positioned as bigotry (i.e. intolerance and prejudice toward others), and the utterer as a bigot (i.e., a person who is intolerant and prejudiced toward others). In the quote below, Pacquiao was positioned as an "ignorant, bigoted hypocrite" who deserved to lose the public's respect and consequently the votes of the people:

I am mad I don't know what to say. You might've done our country proud but with your statement, you just showed the whole country why we shouldn't vote for you. And yes, I think you are an ignorant, bigoted hypocrite. You made me lose all respect that I had for you. (FAD004)

He was further positioned as undeserving to hold political office:

... dismissed Pacquiao as "bigoted." He tweeted: "Bigoted people like you (& yes you are one) should never hold an office in politics. (FAD013)

Positioned as having “narrow-minded” beliefs that condemn LGBT people, Pacquiao was positioned as a bad politician who should not run for higher office in the Senate:

For the sake of giving this country a chance to move forward, please, let somebody else really qualified take your place in the senatorial slate. . . . You’re great as a boxer, but a good politician you are not! Your strong belief in condemning the LGBTs . . . only shows how narrow-minded you are, and how arrogant you can be. (FAD017)

He was then positioned as having the duty to change his beliefs and “adapt” his ways:

“[Pacquiao] should take steps to adapt to the fast-changing actualities outside both his religious upbringing and the boxing ring,” [Group] said of the boxing champion, Christian pastor, actor, basketball coach, product endorser and lawmaker notorious for his frequent absences in Congress. (FAD008)

In addition to being a bigot, Pacquiao was positioned as a dismal or poor-performing politician, questioning further his right to give political opinions:

As a political figure *ay wala namang na-achieve si Pacman*. All that he was famous for in Congress is his “most absent” legislator title. *Meron na ba siyang naipasang bill?* (As a political figure, Pacman has achieved nothing. . . . Has he passed any bill?) (FAD003)

Positioned as losing the right to speak on matters of political significance, Pacquiao was urged to stop giving his political opinion. With the utterance attributed to the utterer’s intolerance and prejudice toward LGBT people, the storyline had the social force of positioning Pacquiao himself. Linked to his politician identity, the social force of the storyline was to make him desist not only from uttering hate

speech, but also from engaging in politics altogether.

The four storylines, while presented separately, can even come together, as shown in the sample quote below:

. . . a lack of discernment and enlightenment and a blind reliance on biblical texts that in themselves are laden with contradictions, not to mention a complete disregard for scientific facts and human rights . . . (FBD003)

Here, Pacquiao was simultaneously positioned as “[lacking] discernment and enlightenment” (bigoted politician storyline), “[blindly relying] on [the Bible]” (religious condemnation storyline), “[disregarding] scientific facts” (scientific falsehood storyline), and “[disregarding] human rights” (discrimination storyline). While all four storylines had the social force of making an utterer desist from making discriminatory or hate speech, it was only the discrimination storyline that clearly positioned the utterance for its hateful consequences on LGBT people. As such, the other three storylines could also have the social force of “invisibilizing” discrimination toward LGBT people, despite calling out the utterance.

Defending Hate Speech

Table 2 summarizes the patterns of positioning that were identified as defending hate speech, highlighting the unique positioning of each storyline, position, and social force.

National Icon Storyline

The first storyline that defended Pacquiao alluded to his national and international status as a boxing champion. Referred to as a “boxing great” (FCD005), a “boxing champion” (FAD007), and the “pambansang kamao” (FAD002) (literally, the national fist; metaphorically, a national treasure), he was constructed as a “national hero in the Philippines” (FBD006). For having brought the country pride and honor as an international boxing champion, he was accorded the right to be excused for uttering hate speech:

Table 2. *Summary of Defending Hate Speech Storylines, Positions, and Social Force*

Storyline	Position	Social Force
National icon storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utterer was a boxing champion who was the pride of the nation 	A person of status has the right to utter hate speech	Excuses hate speech if the person speaking has status; makes hate speech excusable, forgettable, and a non-issue
Scientific fact storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utterer was stating a fact 	A person has the right to utter hate speech if stated as a scientific fact	Defends hate speech as a fact; makes hate speech incontestable, correct, and acceptable
Religious belief storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utterer was a devout Christian expressing his religious beliefs 	A religious person has the right to utter hate speech if stated as a religious belief	Defends hate speech as religious belief; makes hate speech morally right and acceptable
Free speech storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utterer has the right to free speech 	A citizen has the right to utter hate speech as part of freedom of speech	Defends hate speech as freedom of speech; makes hate speech a human right and acceptable
Apology storyline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utterer had apologized for his mistake 	A human being has no right to utter hate speech but has the right to be forgiven for it	Recognizes hate speech as wrong; makes hate speech forgivable if there is remorse

Tandaan din natin ang nagawa ni Manny Pacquiao [para] sa buong Pilipinas. Pinasikat niya ang Pilipino. We should not forget that. Siguro naman, with that, i-rest na natin ang issue. Patayin na natin ang issue. (Let us remember what Manny Pacquiao has done for the entire Philippines. He made Filipinos renowned. We should not forget that. Given all of that, we should put the issue to rest. Let us put an end to the issue.) (FBD012)

In this storyline, a person's social status becomes the basis for excusing discriminatory behavior. An utterer of national standing, such as Pacquiao, was afforded the right to be excused. Such a right, by extension, granted the utterer the right to utter hate speech. In the sample quote above, the public were positioned as having the duty to not only excuse Pacquiao, but to also put the issue to rest. The social

force of this positioning was to make discrimination against LGBT people a non-issue, or at least not worth the trouble of calling out a person of status.

Scientific Fact Storyline

Another storyline positioned Pacquiao as simply stating a scientific “fact” and positioned LGBT relationships as “not natural.” In this storyline, the utterance that same-sex relationships are “worse than animals” was positioned as scientific truth. Therefore, the utterer had every right to state the truth as shown in the quote below:

LGBT relationships are not natural as Pacquiao implied, and that’s a fact. But in this age, that has become a norm, and if Pacquiao, who is running for public office, denounces LGBT relationships by stating a fact, it is now the people who will judge whether or not they will be offended by a fact. (FAD016)

In this quote, the public was positioned as having the duty to accept the utterance as fact. LGBT people were also subtly positioned as taking offense at a mere fact, implying that they have no right to be offended by a factual statement. It therefore positioned them as to blame for getting offended in the first place.

Pacquiao was further defended as simply explaining evolution, that homosexuality is unnatural because it does not produce offspring:

I think what he just wanted to say was that homosexuality is not productive because there cannot be a natural family--that is, if you look at the "biological evolution"--that can spring from same-sex unions. (FAD018)

The social force of a factual positioning was that an utterance deemed as “offensive” and “discriminatory” by one party was made incontestable by another. Therefore, no one has the right to refute or call it out. Positioned as the truth, the utterance was not only made acceptable; it was made correct.

Religious Belief Storyline

Shortly after making the hateful utterance, Pacquiao quoted the Bible and explained that he was merely expressing his religious beliefs:

Sinabi ni Pacquiao na inihahayag lamang niya ang kanyang paniniwala sa isyu base sa isinasaad ng Bibliya. (Pacquiao said that he was simply expressing his beliefs on the issue as stated in the Bible.) (FAD005)

In this storyline, the utterance was positioned as Bible truth and the utterer as speaking from the Bible. Here, the utterer was absolved of any responsibility for the utterance on the basis that it was from a religious text. Positioning the utterer as a religious person granted him the right to express his religious beliefs as a “devout Christian”:

A devout Christian, Pacquiao has issued a public apology while also defending his comments, saying he was merely quoting the Bible. (FBD006)

The utterance was further positioned as not prejudiced, or in the sample quote below, “[not] bigotry.” On the contrary, it was positioned as “adhering to morals” and therefore morally right. The utterer was afforded the right to make a hateful utterance because:

Adhering to morals, Christian tenets or God’s standards isn’t bigotry; loving sin and condemning Pacquiao for his convictions on same-sex marriage is. (MBD006)

In this storyline, the utterer was positioned as a Christian who had the right to express his moral convictions, and, consequently, the right to utter hate speech. Conversely, the public was positioned as having the duty to accept these moral convictions and as not having the right to question them, as doing so would be considered morally wrong. The social force of this storyline was to make a hateful utterance not only acceptable, but the moral thing to do. In effect, LGBT people were stripped of the right to call out an offensive utterance once it was

positioned as a religious belief. Not only that, it was ascribed their duty to accept hate.

Free Speech Storyline

Within the freedom of speech storyline, every person, including the utterer, was granted the right to express their opinion or belief:

I respect that he stays true to his religious beliefs; we are all entitled to our own opinion about every issue. (FAD016)

This right to an opinion extended to a right to a religious belief that was hateful toward LGBT people. Regardless of its consequence to LGBT people, the utterance, positioned as an opinion, became protected as a freedom granted to every citizen:

I agree fully . . . it is Manny Pacquiao's right to freely express his opinion. (FAD018)

In this storyline, a hateful utterance was defended as part of freedom of speech. Once positioned as a human right, the public could not contest the utterance and were ascribed the duty to accept it. The public was further positioned as having the duty to respect the utterer's opinion, even if it was deemed offensive and discriminatory toward a group of people. Hence, freedom of speech served as a defense of hate speech.

Apology Storyline

Pacquiao eventually apologized for comparing LGBT people to “animals” and asked for forgiveness from LGBT people:

I'm sorry for hurting people by comparing homosexuals to animals. To those I've hurt, please forgive me. I still stand by my belief that I'm against same-sex marriage because of what the Bible says, but I'm not condemning the LGBT. I love you all with the love of the Lord. God bless you all and I'm praying for you. (FAD008)

In his apology, Pacquiao positioned himself as having hurt LGBT people, and for this, he was sorry. However, he continued to state that he stood by his beliefs and did not correct nor take responsibility for his original statement. He further explained that he was not “condemning” LGBT people and that he “[loves]” them. Altogether, this statement positioned him as wrong for hurting LGBT people, hence the apology, but as right for stating a belief positioned as Bible truth. LGBT people were then ascribed the duty to forgive him for comparing them to “animals”:

I accept Manny’s apology and recognize his humility. We all make mistakes. No exception. (FBDO05)

With LGBT people assigned the duty to accept the apology, their right to call out hate speech and to be aggrieved was taken away:

The reaction to Pacquiao’s ill-conceived metaphor is exaggerated; he has sincerely apologized for it. But why do people still nail him down? Will anyone have to be bothered by criticisms if he’s on solid ground? (MBD006)

Putting the five storylines together, their consequent social force was to excuse Pacquiao from uttering hate speech because of his status as a national icon; to justify hate speech as merely stating a scientific fact, a religious belief, or an opinion; and to defend hate speech as a human right and freedom. By apologizing, the utterer was also absolved of any responsibility or duty to make amends for having offended a major community. While momentarily dropping in the survey polls, Pacquiao would eventually win a seat in the Senate. He continued to rise in his political career alongside his boxing career and maintained strong public support. However, while the utterance may have been excused, justified, defended, and forgiven, the utterance remains part of public discourse. The utterer may have moved on, unscathed, suffering only a momentary loss of support, but the group of people positioned by that utterance continue to be positioned today. Public discourse has forever shifted with the national icon’s reference to LGBT people as “worse than animals.”

Countering the Defense of Hate Speech

Attempts to counter the defense of hate speech acknowledged the right to freedom of speech, belief, and opinion, but positioned the limits of these rights:

I could have respected his viewpoint on same-sex marriage, but he chose to use such hurtful words to express his opinion. That's what made it unacceptable. (FAD016)

In the sample quote above, the public was positioned as having the duty to respect an utterer's opinion, as long as the expression of this opinion remained respectful of others. Here, the right to an opinion was positioned as having necessary limits. Once an opinion was deemed "hurtful," or in this case, deemed offensive and hateful to a group of people, that right was lost. An offensive or hurtful opinion was therefore positioned as unacceptable, consequently giving the public the right to call it out. Hence, this storyline recognized the right to freedom of speech, but not the right to utter hate speech.

Similarly, the quote below granted the utterer the right to an opinion, but not the right to pass judgment:

You are entitled to your opinion. But you have propagated judgment of a community too complex for anyone like you to understand. (FCDO04)

Here, a distinction was made between an opinion and a judgment. While the right to an opinion was granted, the right to negatively judge a group of people was not. This storyline recognized everyone's right to an opinion, but not the right to prejudice. Consequently, the utterer was assigned the duty to respect LGBT people and to not pass judgment.

Discussion

Overall findings showed the complexity of positionings that called out Pacquiao's utterance as hate speech and those that defended it.

Calling out positionings followed storylines of discrimination (anchored on human rights); falsehood (anchored on science); condemnation (anchored on religion); and bigotry (anchored on political opinion). While all shared the social force of putting an end to hate speech, only a discrimination storyline made visible the hateful consequence of the utterance on LGBT people. A unique insight coming from the results is how acts of positioning can either direct the attention on the utterer (e.g., bigot) or on the material consequence of talk (e.g., discrimination). This is further discussed in relation to how call outs can demand accountability and seek reparation.

On the other hand, defensive positionings followed storylines that excused the utterer (on the basis of status); justified it as correct (on the basis of science), as morally right (on the basis of religion), and as a human right (on the basis of freedom of speech); and made forgivable (with the utterer's apology). A similar insight can be drawn from the pattern of talk as the defense focused on the utterer and their right to utter the statement, consequently invisibilizing how the utterance disrespected, devalued, and dehumanized LGBT people. We discuss this in relation to literature that show how people react defensively to being positioned as discriminatory and how an utterer can be repositioned as not discriminatory. We also further unpack how hate speech is constructed as not hate speech, but as "just fact," a belief, an opinion, and free speech, in relation to wider literature on the social construction of prejudice and the contestation of norms surrounding prejudice. We end with a reflection on how we can rise above the country's ambivalence and create *counterspeech* to hate.

The Denial of Prejudice

Calling out a speech act as hate speech, as reflected in the results, can be taken as an accusation that the utterer is prejudiced (Durrheim et al., 2016). This argument is rooted in the perspective that prejudice is a personal trait or quality, an attitudinal attribute (Herek, 2000), rather than constituted by language (Sampson, 1993) or as systemic in society (Kitzinger, 1996). Likewise, defensive positionings, which defend the utterer and their rights, can be taken as a denial of societal homophobia, since an act of prejudice is not typically recognized as

something embedded in everyday social behavior or norms (Clarke, 2018). Instead, the act is judged as reflective of the person, that one is prejudiced and therefore not a good person. However, this perspective obscures systemic inequality and society's entrenchment in heteronormative discourse—preventing one from recognizing acts of prejudice and our role in it (Clarke, 2018).

As people fail to see how their speech acts are part of the culture that perpetuates heterosexism, they defend themselves from accusations of homophobia in order to be positioned as good. Durrheim and colleagues (2016) explain this by pointing to how prejudice and the denial of prejudice are acts of identity performance. The denial of prejudice preserves one's social identity, defends one's in-group, and maintains social order. As calling out hate speech focuses attention on the utterer rather than its impact on the people subjected to it, the discrimination and prejudice of the original utterance is consequently hidden. Taking inspiration from Clarke (2018), the challenge then is how to redirect talk away from personal accusations to a conversation about social practices and a reconstruction of norms. How do we shift the focus onto the social practices that produce and reproduce hate?

Contesting Norms of Prejudice

Collective understandings of what counts (and does not count) as prejudice take place in social interactions (Durrheim et al., 2016). What is defined as prejudice is subject to negotiation and contestation, as people accept or reject ideas and beliefs about how specific groups of people should be treated (Durrheim et al., 2016). In this particular case, how LGBT people should be treated is defined and redefined by people positioning and counter-positioning in public talk. How hate speech toward LGBT people becomes tolerated, justified, and even made acceptable is the outcome of the social construction of a norm of tolerance for prejudice. Naturally, alongside a norm against prejudice is a norm tolerating prejudice. This reflects the seeming paradox or ambivalence of Filipinos toward LGBT rights and how they simultaneously accept and reject LGBT people (Cornelio & Dagle, 2019; Yarcia et al., 2019)—resulting in a country like the Philippines that can be “gay-friendly,” “gay-tolerant,” and “gay-averse” all at the same time.

A Society's Ambivalence

The opposing positionings that came out of this study reflect how discrimination against LGBT people is not an acknowledged reality for particular groups, if not majority, of Filipinos. Discrimination in the form of hate speech is even defended and justified. This shows how a country's collective ambivalence has the power to produce social and political realities that threaten and perpetuate prejudice toward the LGBT community (Cornelio & Dagle, 2019; Yarcia et al., 2019). On one hand, this reiterates the importance of granting legal rights for LGBT people, including the urgent passing of the Anti-Discrimination Bill (now the SOGIE Equality Bill). On the other hand, passing a national policy for LGBT protection is dependent on the power of talk to position and advocate for LGBT rights. With the lack of institutional protection from hate speech, LGBT people suffer from the harmful consequences of hate speech without legal recourse.

The Free Speech Basis

Scholars have asserted that hate speech is harmful to both individual victims and society at large (Cortese, 2006). Here we look at the discursive elements that enable hate speech and how we may attempt to resist them.

The Right to Religious Beliefs

Defending an utterer's right to hold and express religious beliefs has been shown to consequently defend the right to utter hate speech. Furthermore, the dominant pattern of positioning that was seen is that the right to utter hate speech is granted when an utterance is positioned as based on a religious view or sacred text. By extension, the human right to religion becomes a right to disrespect. One counter to this defense is to set an ethical limitation to freedom of religion or religious expression; in other words, "yes, but not if it disrespects a group of people." Further research on how religion justifies hate speech, and how a social ethic of respect may converse with the moral ethic of religion, may be worth looking into.

The Right to an Opinion

Another insight from this study is how granting an utterer the right to an opinion can perpetuate discrimination against LGBT

people. This illustrates the ongoing debate on freedom of speech and hate speech where one side claims that there should be no limits to freedom of speech and the other side claims exceptions to this freedom such as hate speech (Aslan, 2017). As shown in this paper, positionings that assigned Pacquiao the right to an opinion burdened the public with accepting hateful speech toward LGBT people. While the calling out positionings eventually ascribed Pacquiao the duty to apologize for his hateful utterance, these did not make him accountable. In the end, he was forgiven and was not held accountable for speaking and spreading hate. Pacquiao did not (and was not asked to) retract his hateful statement nor did he undo the hate he incited by saying that it was, in the first place, wrong to utter it. Further investigation as to how calling out positionings can demand accountability can redirect the conversation to the need to redress the wrongdoing toward the aggrieved people. Setting limits to free speech, or again, a “yes, but not if it disrespects a group of people,” can focus attention on the impact of hate speech. Strengthening a storyline that “freedom comes with responsibility,” as well as alternative storylines that demand accountability, may be worth exploring.

Countering Hate

What this paper aims to highlight at this point is less about Pacquiao’s utterance and more about facing the realities created in and through hate speech, and alleviating the harm it produces. Gelber (2002) shares a framework for a policy of “speaking back” (p. 117), wherein she underscores the need for avenues with institutional, material, and educational support to counter the impact of hate speech. Strossen (2018) sheds light on problems within existing “hate speech” laws in the West, as they lead to broad censorship that undermine free speech and equality and eventually target minority speakers. As a solution, she offers a non-censorial method: counterspeech, defined as “a potentially broad range of expression, including speech that directly refutes the ideas that ‘hate speech’ conveys; broader, proactive educational initiatives; and expressions of remorse by discriminatory speakers” (Strossen, 2018, p. 315). She affirms that this strategy helps promote “the dignity and empowerment of the individuals and groups the [counter]speech targets” (Strossen, 2018, p. 97). The solution toward eliminating hate speech, therefore, lies in talking back and talking more.

Counterspeech strategies, including education and empowerment through advocacy, research, and language, reflect the concept of counter-positioning (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Through the power of talk, we have the ability to always position and re-position, and to create and re-create, environments or spaces that do not perpetuate hate. For just as discrimination and hate are created through language, social realities grounded in fairness and equality are likewise produced through language. Echoing J. L. Austin's work on the illocutionary force of speech acts (Gelber, 2002), an act is performed and accomplished precisely in the saying of an utterance. Therefore, language is never simply describing or speaking about things, but is always doing things. While language and talk can shape conditions of hate, we can choose to reclaim their power instead and reconstruct realities to counter hate, without hate speaking in turn.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the range of discursive positionings of an utterer of hate speech as constructed in public discourse. We do not claim that the list of positionings uncovered is exhaustive. The results were limited to the confines of public discourse as reported in news articles and opinion pieces of a national newspaper published in English. In addition, the talk captured may have been limited to what was framed by media as newsworthy. The scope is further limited to an English-speaking and Tagalog-speaking public. Nonetheless, within the confines of this scope and limitations, the results reflect the public discourse that was in the spotlight of media attention for a particular period and is now part of the continuing public discourse on LGBT identities in the Philippines.

While we offer some initial thoughts on how to push LGBT advocacy forward, we hope that the findings of this study will stimulate ideas on how hate speech can be constructively countered. Apart from its advocacy, the study also provides theoretical and methodological contributions. We have demonstrated that social realities, such as hate and discrimination, are discursively produced and perpetuated. We have also shown the utility of positioning theory as a conceptual and analytical tool for understanding these discursive realities. Finally, we

have identified localized practices of and possible counter-practices to hate speech, which may be extended to the issues of homonegativity and homo/transphobia.

Discourses create ways of seeing the world and being in the world (Willig, 2008). We hope to have shared insights on how positionings of Pacquiao's infamous statement, as a whole, formed a compelling picture of the social reality of hate speech against LGBT people in the Philippines, and how we must strive to create and strengthen counter-positionings that can render our reality anew.

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