

The Lore of Consent in the Philippines

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The paper explores the dynamics of the concept and experience of consent in the Philippines through the analysis of both folklore and narratives. Employing Levi Strauss' structuralist perspective, it delves into selected Filipino folklore and narratives derived from sexual harassment cases filed at the Office of Anti-Sexual Harassment at the University of the Philippines. Despite differences in form, both folklore and contemporary narratives reflect societal norms and cultural practices related to consent. While both recognize the negative consequences of consent, a significant distinction lies in their resolutions. Modern narratives introduce a layer where victims report cases, offering the potential for equitable outcomes. These stories also underscore patriarchy's role in generating and ingraining gender biases and power imbalances, contributing significantly to the consent issue. The paper concludes by framing modern stories as iterations of folklores transmitted through generations, portraying evolving perspectives on consent. Guided by structuralist analysis, recurring binary oppositions highlight societal norms dictating power dynamics. The collective themes within folklore and contemporary narratives, addressing good manners, caution against relying on beauty, valuing humility, and associating vanity—especially for women—with potential drawbacks, reveal the pervasive influence of a patriarchal society. This emphasizes that societal norms take precedence over individual empowerment, shedding light on intricate challenges within societal dynamics and individual choices. The persistence of these issues signals a need for societal transformation, emphasizing storytelling as a catalyst for reshaping perceptions of consent. The paper aims to scrutinize the conceptualization of consent in Philippine folklore and its relevance in contemporary narratives, advocating for gender-sensitive transformations through storytelling initiatives.

Keywords: *consent, folklore, narratives, gender bias, patriarchy*



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Inside her apartment, Anna warned David to be quiet because her landlady requires tenants to observe silence after midnight. David agreed and started rummaging his backpack. From his bag he took out some alcoholic drinks. He started drinking while Anna was getting ready to call it a night. It was in this moment when suddenly David grabbed and kissed her. She laughed and pushed him away and told him he was already drunk and should just sleep. David agreed and said “okay”. After a few minutes he called her name in a very loud voice. Worried that they might wake the neighbors, Anna shushed David putting her hand over his mouth. David again tried to “make out” with her while muttering what kind of a friend is she and doesn’t she care about him at all as a friend?

At this point Anna was already afraid that any minute her landlady would knock on her door. She is even more scared of what her landlady will think of her if she discovers that a boy is in her room.

Against her wishes, she yielded to David. (De Luna, 2021)

This is an excerpt of a story I wrote for a module on consent that shows how the protagonist Anna chose to give in to sexual harassment (SH) because she was more afraid of how people around her would react to the situation she was caught in and conclude that she is a “loose” woman thereby ruining her reputation than having to endure a sexual assault. This scenario reflects the hierarchy and precedence of our society’s norms seen in the protagonist’s eyes—that it is more important to maintain a semblance of harmony in the community and that it is more important to protect the semblance of chastity and purity than the safety and security of oneself.

This story was written and set in the 2020s. One would think that during these contemporary times women have become more empowered and confident, enough to decide what to do with their lives, especially if it involves their bodies, without fear of being criticized or condemned by the society. One might think that we have already evolved towards rationality, liberation, and equality; yet as imitated by the above story this supposition remains an illusion. The circumstances presented in the story are based on real life happenings and are not unique to one narrative. This is the resulting state of affairs when our society conditions us to think, act and react

in manners that produce inequality, in particular for this paper, gender inequality. We follow and acquiesce even if we do not welcome, want, and invite such requests or commands. The short story “When Anna Met David” highlights the problem with the understanding, experience, and performance of consent in our society.

Consent is socially constructed and conditioned. In colloquial speech, sexual consent is commonly defined as granting permission or expressing a “yes” to participate in an activity. We can also interpret consent as a mutual agreement between individuals to engage in a specific action. This conditioning transpires via generations, through various forms of cultural traditions and practices. One such form is the folklore—widely understood as stories generated by a community transmitted through generations (Baldwin, 2020). Folklores may be in the form of, or a combination of fiction and nonfiction narratives. These are comprised of cultural norms or rules where community members can copy, imitate, and learn from, to ensure cooperation, peace, order, and harmony in the community. Folklores are typically performed by means of oral tradition, where variations of characters, settings and plot through the years come about. Anthropologically, folklores are explained as part of culture but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance. (Bascom, 1953) Folklores help in making sense of human actions, i.e., if the society looks upon these actions with approval or disapproval or with encouragement or discouragement.

In this article, folklore is explored as a myth—a distinct form of folklore—that is traditionally defined as a narrative passed down through generations within a specific community, transcending the boundaries of time. This enduring myth continues to resonate as it is recounted to individuals across different generations, maintaining its relevance through the ages. It mainly tackles principles, beliefs, and truths as negotiated and agreed upon by community members. Hence, it is important to emphasize that the kind of myth that I refer to is not connected or related to the notion of widely known falsities. Instead, I think about it as one that not necessarily relay real life events, but often talks about “*culture heroes, semidivine persons whose experiences and lives serve as a teaching tool, allowing those within the culture to identify with them and learn from their challenges*” (Hasty, Lewis & Snipes, n.d.). In other words, myths talk about fictional characters doing non-fiction real-life actions or events. Characteristically, through myths we can make sense of a society’s origins, worldview, dogmas, basically their culture. (Hasty et.al) Given its

reproduction, iteration and reification in various narratives, the lore of consent can be contemplated as a myth.

I attempt to examine the myths that relate to consent, ascertained in two categories of stories: folklores and contemporary narratives. By employing Levi-Strauss' (1978) paradigm on myths within his structuralist perspective I hope to unfold and reveal meanings and connections of the concept of consent in our various ways of being. It is therefore this paper's aim to understand the notion of consent from folklores to modern-day stories. Once examined and comprehended, perhaps there will be a higher likelihood in finding ways to strategize solving problems due to breach or violation of consent.

Understanding Consent in Contemporary Philippines

Typically, consent is a word that is instantly understood by any person well-versed in the ongoinings of modern life. Yet, in the same breath, it is a term that is most often misunderstood and contested. Certainly, it is a label that can be defined and described; however, it is most importantly an experience and a performance that is always negotiated. The broad understanding of consent relates to human actions such as agreeing or giving permission for something to occur or transpire. Consent is part of our mundane and extraordinary existence. As humans, we ideally and generally expect that we can exercise consent as we go through the many and different facets and settings of our lives. This paper appraises consent in the context of sexual acts. Consent in this situation is an extremely sensitive subject matter loaded with misperceptions, uncertainties, and disorientations.

Distinctly, consent in this context is understood as “*voluntary acquiescence to the proposal of another; the act or result of reaching an accord; a concurrence of minds; actual willingness that an act or an infringement of an interest shall occur.*” Consent is an “*act of reason and deliberation. A person who possesses and exercises sufficient mental capacity to make intelligent decision and demonstrates consent by performing and act recommended by another*” (People's Law Dictionary, 1981-2005). It assumes a physical power to act and a reflective, determined and unencumbered exertion of these powers. It is an act unaffected by fraud, duress, or sometimes even mistake when these factors are not the reason for the consent. It is implied in every agreement (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019).

In the context of rape, submission due to apprehension or terror is not real consent. There must be a choice between resistance and acquiescence. If a woman resists to the point where additional resistance would be futile or until her resistance is forcibly overcome, submission thereafter is not consent (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008).

Consent is therefore a basic human right to be able to decide what you want or do not want to do or participate in. In the Philippines, the issue of consent is often associated with rape, sexual assault, and SH. These are very serious crimes, which happen often to women compared to men. Certainly, these can happen to other genders, too; however, it is still women who often experience such criminalities. To demonstrate how the Philippine government is cognizant with the problem, lawmakers and officials put in place laws to deter and punish such crimes. Some of these laws in the Philippine Penal Code are Republic Act (RA) 8353 (Anti-Rape Law), RA 9262 (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children), RA 7877 (Anti-Sexual Harassment) and RA 11313 (Safe Spaces Act). Yet, given the many regulations and directives, breach of consent or its violation remains to be a grave problem in our country. It can be deduced as well just by considering the nature and content of these laws that the offended party is almost always women.

SH often arises from a lack of consent. UN Women's data reveals the high prevalence of violence against women in the country, with particular focus on lifetime/physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, as a significant concern. Reports from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) support these findings. The Philippines ranks 101st in Gender Inequality and 19th in the Global Gender Gap Index, indicating a troubling situation that is, in part related to issues of consent (UN Women, n.d., Global Database on Violence Against Women).

The concern about SH is shared by private individuals, the government, and non-government organizations. In 2016, UN Women partnered with the Quezon City Government's Safe Cities Metro Manila Programme to combat SH in public spaces. Their data revealed that three in five women had experienced street harassment or sexual violence in public spaces at least once in their life, with one in seven reporting such experiences at least once a week in the past year alone. This prevalence increases to 88% among women aged 18-24 (UN Women, 2016).

Additionally, the Safe Cities Metro Manila Programme collaborated with De La Salle University in 2018 to organize a band competition centered around the theme “Break the Silence”. This campaign encouraged people, especially women, to speak up about their experiences of SH (UN Women, 2018).

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) consistently advocates for women’s rights and against SH. In 2019, the organization welcomed the positive changes in the attitudes of many Filipinos towards sexism. They applauded netizens who openly criticized sexual violence depicted in the television show “Ang Probinsyano” (Philippine Commission on Women, n.d.). The PCW reiterates this advocacy in their statement calling for an end to sexism, in thought, language, and actions, and an end to the perpetuation of gender-based violence (Philippine Commission on Women, n.d.).

However, a recent study on gender inequality and violence conducted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) revealed that a significant number of Filipino women still hold biases against their own gender in terms of sexism. Prof. Nathalie Verceles, a women’s rights expert and former Director of the UP Center for Women’s and Gender Studies, explained in an interview with Rappler that some women believe these biases are inevitable. She emphasized the need for continued efforts to transform and shift social norms around gender (Enriquez, 2023).

It is revealed in an article published by the Diliman Gender Review that in the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) campus during the past 17 years, 89% of the sexual harassment complainants are female while 11% are male. Further, it also showed that 95% percent of the offenders are male, while the remaining 5% are female. It is important to note that the UPD is not just an education-related environment; rather, it is a community which is likened to a microcosm of the Philippine society. Its community members include the students, teaching, non-teaching personnel and other campus residents. It is also assumed that since UPD represents what ought to be or how our society should “behave”, it is alarming that incidents of SH increase over the years. (De Luna & Narvaez, 2019).

Offenses related to consent, gender and sex are intertwined. Gender typically refers to the socially constructed or determined differences between men and

women such as roles, attitudes, behaviors and values. The term “gender” is not interchangeable with the term “sex”, which refers exclusively to the biological differences between men and women. They are learned through the socialization process. These differences determine what is considered appropriate for members of each sex. They are context-specific and can be modified. Other variables, such as ethnicity, class, age and ability, intersect with gender differences. (UP Gender Guidelines, 2017). The issue of consent relates to the concept and related concepts of gender since gender types or stereotypes influence how we think and act including how we think and act about consent.

We must understand that consent is NEVER not present in any and all offenses that are sexual in nature. It must be clear to everyone that if our actions are sexual in nature and relate to a person’s sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics are unwanted, uninvited and unwelcome, consent is not given. Sexual offenses are always gender issues because they are not just about our opinions, beliefs, and principles (i.e., ideologies), but how we perform these. The manifestations and expressions of our ideologies demonstrate and illustrate our views of our gender and of others. Gender is a performance and if the way we perform our gender harasses or oppresses people of other genders then consent becomes a gender issue.

Given the relatively understandable explication of what is consent and what it is not in the Philippine setting, its experience for both the giver and the receiver remains indistinct.

Why is there an issue with consent? The answer lies in our history and culture, which have shaped our attitudes and behaviors regarding sex and related activities. Since topics related to consent are often not openly discussed, they frequently find their way into stories passed down through generations such as folklore. The problem of consent is embedded in and portrayed through our folklore.

By examining folklore and contemporary narratives that address consent, we can gain insight into why our society is conflicted about and struggles with it. Myths and narratives exert a deep influence on our current behaviors and societal norms. They mold our values and ideologies, present role models, reflect significant social issues, and most importantly, perpetuate stereotypes and biases. Both folklores and contemporary narratives are considered as stories that possess the power to reinforce

prejudices that can discriminate and harm people, as seen in the context of consent. They serve as mirrors of society, reflecting its values, ideals, and challenges. Moreover, they have the capacity to both uphold and challenge existing behaviors, attitudes, and norms, making them powerful tools in the pursuit of a society free from SH and safe for all.

Framing and Methodology

Chief in Levi-Strauss' (1978) principles in structuralist approach in locating meanings in myths are the following:

- the belief that underlying structures shape human behavior and culture,
- the focus on binary oppositions as a fundamental aspect of human thought,
- the use of language and signs to create meaning, and
- the importance of context in shaping meaning.(Cassar, 2022)

Broadly employing Levi-Strauss' (1978) structuralist perspective I analyzed both the folklores and modern-day narratives that exhibited issues on consent. To do this I examined the artifacts focusing on three major components: binary oppositions, which are two contrasting concepts; mythemes, which are the stripped-down minimal units, or story components, that form the structure of the myth; and primary messages of the myth, which are universal (Hasty, Lewis & Snipes, n.d.).

Levi-Strauss' (1978) structural framework has significantly shaped the field of anthropology by emphasizing the identification of underlying structures and patterns of meaning inherent to diverse cultures. Anthropologists have adeptly applied his methodologies to dissect various facets of societies, including kinship systems, mythologies, rituals, and social organization. This approach provides us with a means to delve into the profound structures that govern our cultural practices, yielding invaluable insights into the functioning of human societies such as how we perceive, perform and experience consent.

Central to Levi-Strauss' approach lies the concept of binary oppositions, an essential element in comprehending meanings in communities. This notion involves discerning pairs of opposing ideas or concepts, such as nature versus culture or male versus female, and scrutinizing their intricate interrelationships.

This framework is employed on this concept to delve into how societies categorize and make sense of their surroundings, shedding light on the fundamental cognitive processes at play (Levi-Strauss, 1963).

Moreover, Levi-Strauss' structuralist methodology has made a lasting impact on the realm of mythology. Scholars have effectively utilized his techniques to analyze myths from diverse cultures, unveiling the underlying structures and recurring themes that transcend specific societies. This myth analysis not only reveals patterns within myths but also provides reflective insights into the universal aspects of human thought and symbolism (Levi-Strauss, 1978).

I purposely curated the artifacts examined in this paper, specifically focusing on folklores and contemporary narratives that revolve around the concept and issue of consent. Levi-Strauss' perspective serves as an ideal analytical framework for dissecting narratives like these. It guides us towards unveiling the intrinsic structures that mold cultural practices, ultimately enabling a more profound understanding of human societies and the common cognitive foundations that connect them. By bringing these underlying structures to light, we can potentially embark on a journey to transform aspects that require change, such as the cultural norms surrounding consent.

Finding Consent in Philippine Folklore

Here are two Philippine folklores that we grew up listening to and learning about that navigate the concept of gender, especially the issue of consent within a heterosexual worldview.

The first lore is that of Maria Makiling. The plots of myths where Maria Makiling is a protagonist is diverse. In this story, Maria Makiling (Three Suitors) is portrayed as a woman who is in the process of selecting a husband. Initially, it shows how empowered a woman (Maria) is to be able to choose from three suitors. However, the story ended in a tragedy because of what transpired when the other two suitors who were not chosen cannot accept Maria's decision.

“The Three Suitors” is set during the Spanish occupation (1521-1898) in the Philippines. There were three men who fell in love with Maria. They all tried their hardest to win her heart to make her

their wife. The first suitor is Captain Lara, a charming Spanish soldier. The second suitor is Joselito was a mestizo (half-Spanish, half-Filipino) student. The last suitor is Juan a diligent Filipino farmer. Despite Lara's and Joselito's efforts, impressive and impeccable credentials, Maria chose Juan. She preferred Juan especially because she admired his devotion to his work. After the rejected suitors learned about Maria's decision, Lara and Joselito conspired to punish Juan. One day, a fire broke out in the Spanish camp. Juan was among those captured who were suspected to be the culprits of the fire. Eventually because of Lara and Joselito's machinations, Juan was declared guilty and ultimately executed. He called out Maria's name with his last breath, but no magic could stop his death. Maria cursed Lara and Joselito for their bitterness, fleeing back to the mountain. Maria was never seen again. (Lanuza, n.d.)

The second lore titled “The Girl who Turned into a Fish” shows society’s expectations of women, that if they do not conform to these, they will be admonished.

The central character is described to be beauty incarnate. It has been told that the girl's loveliness and exquisiteness is unmatched that everyone around her wants to preserve her splendor. People say that even her parents keep her from doing any work around the house lest it spoil her beauty. Because of how she is treated, she turned out to be vain. Her narcissism went so far that some would say that she incessantly admires her reflection on the river. One day, the King of Crabs noticed the beauty, approached her from the water and tried to interact with her. Instead of conversing with the King of Crabs, the beauty instantly rejected the King of Crabs' attempt to establish friendship. As a result, the King of Crabs got very angry, lashed out, and scratched the girl's pretty face. He went so far as cursed her to transform as a fish for the rest of her life. (Paterno, 1997)

Below is a summary of the structural analysis of the folklores that tackle consent:

Maria Makiling

Binary oppositions	Mythemes	Primary messages
Maria vs. Suitors Power vs. Without power Maria present vs. Maria absent Male vs. Female	Once upon a time Maria Makiling decided to choose a Filipino husband over a foreigner and a mestizo. Her decision resulted to the death of her husband. This led her to cursing her rejected suitors. No one had a happy ending. Retaliation of rejected suitors. Retaliation of the protagonist. Transformation from a woman looking forward to a beautiful future with her chosen husband to a bitter angry one.	No matter how powerful or empowered one is as an individual, (patriarchal), society is still more powerful.
Joselito vs. Rejected suitors Filipino vs. Foreign With high credentials vs. With low credentials		
Agreeing vs. Not agreeing (foreign suitors) to marry		

Mythemes found within the myth of Maria Makiling emphasize themes of choice, conflict, and consequence, as exemplified by Maria's decision leading to her husband's demise and her subsequent cursing of her suitors. The narrative also delves into the notion of revenge, evident through retaliatory actions taken by both Maria and her rejected suitors. A supernatural theme is also presented. Furthermore, the narrative underscores the theme of character transformation, notably when Maria transitions from a content individual to a bitter and resentful one. This folklore serves as an illustration of power struggles between genders, where despite perceived empowerment, men's dominance prevails. Consequently, the primary mytheme in this folklore is retaliation leading to transformation, conveying the overarching message that, in a patriarchal society, regardless of personal power, societal forces hold greater influence. Folkloric narratives as seen in this story, often unveil a pervasive sense of injustice and the futility of seeking retribution through a justice system rooted in patriarchal norms, as it often fails to deliver fair and equitable judgments. In the case of Maria, her act of cursing the suitors who rejected her can be seen as her way of reclaiming a form of justice.

The narrative of Maria Makiling is structured around several binary oppositions that shape its central conflicts and themes. The dichotomy of Maria versus her suitors stands out as the primary conflict, with Maria representing the protagonist and her suitors taking on the role of antagonists. This binary embodies the tension between desire and resistance, spotlighting the struggle between Maria's choices and her suitors' desires. Another pivotal binary is the interplay between power and powerlessness. Initially, Maria wields the power to select her husband, while her suitors find themselves in a position of relative powerlessness. This binary unveils the narrative's underlying theme of agency and control, shedding light on the characters' struggles within the story. The duality of Maria, both present and absent in different forms, underscores the theme of transformation. This binary stresses the narrative's exploration of change and duality as core elements of its structure. Joselito's acceptance by Maria versus the rejection faced by other suitors creates another significant binary. Through this, the consequences of Maria's choice and the divergent fates of her suitors are highlighted, emphasizing the narrative's central theme of choice and its ramifications.

Cultural and national identity are juxtaposed through the Filipino versus foreign binary. This contrast serves to accentuate the impact of Maria's choices on

cultural relationships and identities, adding depth to the narrative. Furthermore, the differentiation between suitors with high and low credentials mirrors societal expectations and values associated with marriage. This binary reveals the consequences of Maria's choices on the perceived worth of her suitors, reinforcing the narrative's exploration of societal norms. The binary concept of gender, distinguishing between male and female, serves as a foundational element that underlines the narrative's traditional gender roles and societal expectations. This binary lens is critical in illuminating the complex power dynamics woven throughout the story, particularly those that revolve around Maria, a female character, and her male suitors. Within the context of the Spanish period, where this folklore is situated, it becomes evident that men generally held superior social positions compared to women. The influence of the Spaniards and Mestizos further elevated their social and cultural status above that of pure-blood Filipinos.

Lastly, the binary of agreeing versus not agreeing to marry accentuates the significance of consent within the narrative. It serves as a lens through which to explore the consequences faced by suitors who deviate from Maria's choices. These binary oppositions collectively structure the narrative, revealing themes and conflicts that provide insight into the complex dynamics of the Maria Makiling myth.

The Girl Who became a fish

The myth features themes of transformation, with the central mytheme being the transformation of the beautiful girl into a fish, signifying an overwhelming change- a recurring element in myths that reflects the consequences of one's actions or decisions. Additionally, it delves into themes of vanity and punishment, conveying the idea that negative (as presented in the lore) character traits or actions result in punitive measures or transformations. The storyline also centers around themes of conflict and retaliation, following a common pattern observed in myths, where conflicts arise and are eventually resolved. Furthermore, just like in the lore of Maria Makiling, the narrative incorporates supernatural elements introducing a mystical or magical dimension to the tale, as is customary to many myths. These mythemes uncover the dynamics of societal values, particularly on the engagement of power and consent, highlighting the role of men in this context. The folklore sends a primary message that when a woman dares to deviate from the established societal norms in her choices, the narrative often takes a tragic turn, calling

attention to the complexities of social expectations and their potential consequences.

Binary oppositions	Mythemes	Primary messages
Beautiful vs. Ugly	Once upon a time a beautiful girl was turned into a fish because of vanity.	Reminder to be good-mannered.
	A perceived offense experienced by the antagonist, hence he retaliated.	Being beautiful cannot stop a curse.
	Use of supernatural power (King of Crabs).	One must be humble.
	Transformation from a beautiful human to a Fish.	Being vain leads to demise. When a woman makes a decision that does not conform with societal norms, it will lead to a tragic ending.
<hr/> Human vs. Fish Male vs. Female Power (curse) vs. Without power		
<hr/> Like vs. Dislike Agreeing vs. Not agreeing (to chat with the fish) Vain vs. Not vain Good-mannered vs. Ill-mannered		

The binary opposition of "Beautiful vs. Ugly" is fundamental to the narrative, drawing attention to the aesthetic qualities of characters and objects. Beauty is often aligned with positive attributes, whereas ugliness may signal negative traits or consequences. The "Human vs. Fish" dichotomy emphasizes the narrative's core theme of metamorphosis and the transition between two distinct forms. In the "Male vs. Female" gender binary, traditional gender roles and societal expectations come to the fore within the story potentially shedding light on power dynamics and choices made by male and female characters, thereby stressing prevailing societal norms. The binary of "Power vs. Powerlessness," especially in the context of a curse, illustrates the struggle for control and agency within the narrative, effectively showcasing the outcomes associated with possessing or lacking power. The contrast between "Liking vs. Disliking" reveals personal preferences and emotional responses, offering insights into character motivations and interactions that underscore alliances and conflicts. The binary of "Agreeing vs. Not Agreeing" reflects the choices and consent dynamics within the narrative; agreeing to chat with the fish may denote compliance or a willingness to engage with the supernatural, while not agreeing may signify resistance or outright refusal. The recurring theme of "Vanity vs. Humility" is a prevalent motif in myths, illustrating the consequences of character traits, where vanity often leads to negative outcomes, while humility may pave the way for more positive ones. Finally, the contrast between "Good and Ill Manners" mirrors characters' behavior and adherence to social norms, underscoring the significance of etiquette and civility in the narrative and demonstrating how these elements can profoundly shape interactions and influence outcomes.

At first reading, consent as a concept and issue is not distinctly reflected in both stories. However, after perusing the narratives further, we can see indications and echoes of socio-cultural principles, attitudes, and norms that pertain to gender issues and consent. Certainly, there are other gender issues that we can discern from the folklores, such as women projected as the male gaze's objects of desires, and presented as beings who are valued mainly for their outward attributes. This paper, however, primarily inquires into and about consent—a byproduct of gender inequality. The two folklores generally describe the status of women in the Philippines, particularly the privileged ones, in other words those who are perceived to already possess power and those who do not. Maria Makiling is a powerful "*Diwata*" or divine being, while we can surmise from the second lore that the Girl

belongs to a wealthy family. Given the advantaged status of the women characters in their stories, they still experience disadvantages mainly due to their gender. Both folklores project binaries such as male vs. female, local vs. foreign or human vs. animal, advantaged vs. disadvantaged, but the most glaring binary is consent vs. without consent.

In the first lore, the binary on consent is observed during Maria's approval and acceptance of Joselito to become her partner vs. the rejected suitors' violating that consent. For the second lore, the binary on consent is exhibited when the Girl did not consent to socialize with the King of Crabs vs. the King of Crabs' breaching that consent in the form of physically hurting and cursing the Girl and turning her into a fish. To put it plainly, the stories project that when women make choices for themselves whether for "good" or "bad" (as perceived and projected by the society) reasons and motivations, something can still go wrong if and when the males (projected as the gender that possesses more power over females in the stories) do not agree with or sanction such decisions. Maria Makiling did not get her happy ending because the other men who she did not choose as her husband were successful in plotting against her chosen husband. On the other hand, given that and even if the Girl is vain, it does not justify the King of Crabs to curse her and turn her into a fish just because she decided to not interact and be friends with him. To put plainly what transpired in the stories, the women made decisions and they exercised the giving and not giving of consent. However, their choices and judgements were not only ignored, but they also received "punishments" for not submitting to the societal norms and values. In the case of these Philippine folklores, it is for not conforming to the patriarchal system. (Rodriguez, 1990)

Markedly, the concept and issue of consent is found in Philippine Folklore where women are portrayed to have no power over their giving and not giving of consent. The presentation and manifestation of consent in the stories are usually not explicit; nonetheless, a closer examination yields a confirmation that it is there. This strongly suggests that even in the past, our society had tendencies to engage in various happenings in life where women's decisions of and for their own persons or selves are not recognized and respected. These stories may not be entirely real, but they reflect genuine realities. One of the realities exhibited is that of consent.

Locating Consent in Contemporary Narratives

How does consent figure in our present stories? Our country is known to typically adhere and gravitate to a patriarchal structure and system (Rodriguez, 1990) of “doing things”. The nature of this structure and system predisposes to the gender divide, which manifests to the community’s encounter of divisions and differences of gender types, norms, and expectations. When individuals engage in situations involving consent, these gender expectancies are set in motion, which most often than not lead to its breach or violation. (De Luna, 2021)

Here are three tales on the issue of consent adapted from sexual harassment cases filed at the University of the Philippines Office of Anti-Sexual Harassment. (OASH Narratives, 2021)

The first narrative titled *When Anna Met David* (De Luna, 2021) is an account based on several complaints and reports filed at the OASH involving peer relations, e.g., student-to-student, in an educational environment. This story represents several stories of students who underwent sexual harassment involving consent. In this specific story, we can see the framing and perception of consent of two heterosexual individuals who are in a quasi-friendship/romantic relationship. Because of the incessant “requesting” of David for a sexual favor coupled with Anna’s fear of being branded as a woman with loose morals, she reluctantly gave in.

The second narrative *It Started with a Loan* revolves around employees, specifically a complaint filed by a janitress against an administrative officer (OASH Narratives, 2021). This is a sexual harassment case involving verbal and non-verbal abuse between individuals with a distinct difference in their positions in the University; the janitress is a contractual employee while the administrative officer is tenured. Because the administrative officer had more power over his subordinate, he thought that he could just hurl sexual innuendos at the janitress.

Online Breach is the third narrative (OASH Narratives, 2021). This story is common especially during the pandemic. Certainly, SH occur even without physical contact or interaction. Covid-19 lockdowns and the resulting shift to online interaction did not prove to be a deterrent to problems dealing with consent. In this story, a woman’s privacy was violated when her compromised private photos and videos were leaked online. It turned out that the perpetrators were just joking and were just having fun when they carried out the act.

Below is a summary of the structural analysis of the present-day stories that tackle consent:

When Anna Met David

Binary oppositions	Mythemes	Primary messages
Anna vs. David Male vs. Female Power vs. Without power (Anna's power was diluted/blocked by social conditioning)	Anna and David went out to have a friendly hang out but ended up with David sexually assaulting Anna. Anna trusted David since they are friends. David assaulted Anna thinking he was able to convince Anna of his proposition. Anna is afraid that her neighbors will judge her as a loose woman. Anna reported the SH.	Do not go out to have drinks with male friends. Male friends may take advantage of you.
Agree vs. Not agree (to engage in sexual acts)		Social norms are more important than personal decisions.
Anna's decision vs. Social norms Drunk vs. Not drunk		

The narrative explores prominent mythemes that revolve around an established relationship between a male and a female, encompassing both sexual and non-sexual interactions. The theme of trust emerges as a central element, underscoring its pivotal role in intimate relationships. However, this trust is shattered when the antagonist coerces the protagonist into an act she did not consent to, revealing that trust is not just a theme but a theme with far-reaching consequences when betrayed. The interplay between the themes of trust and its consequences conveys a primary message: the cautionary notion that complete trust in male friends may come with the risk of exploitation. Additionally, a theme of fear of societal judgment emerges as the protagonist's apprehension about being negatively evaluated by society compels her to reluctantly yield to the antagonist's demands. A recurring theme related to the pattern of action and its consequences is observed. This is exemplified by the protagonist's response within this action-consequence framework, as she reports the sexual assault she endured to the authorities.

The narrative prominently underscores the prevalence of the gender binary, a dominant dichotomy commonly found in stories originating from patriarchal societies. This binary extends to the division of those who hold power and those who do not. Within the story, due to the myriad expectations and limitations placed on her as a girl, the protagonist found herself unable to freely and unequivocally reject the sexual advances of the antagonist. These expectations, embedded in a patriarchal society, include prohibitions against girls consuming too much alcohol or returning home intoxicated and allowing boys into their rooms. The sexual assault that results from these restrictions serves as a glaring reminder that, in the context of sexual consent, societal norms often take precedence over individual agency and choice.

It Started With a Loan

The mythemes that emerge within the narrative revolve around power dynamics, notably illustrated by a lower-ranking employee borrowing money from a higher-ranking colleague. This situation underscores the disparity in financial resources between individuals in different positions, often leaving those in lower ranks in perpetual need of financial assistance. In the story, the superior is portrayed as male, and the subordinate is female, a common arrangement within a patriarchal society. The significant theme is the perceived entitlement of individuals in

Binary oppositions	Mythemes	Primary messages
Janitress vs. Administrative Officer High position vs. Low position Power vs. Without Power Money vs. Without money	The janitress borrowed money from the administrative officer. Because of the administrative officer's authority over the janitress, he felt he can harass the janitress. He thought that the janitress will be too afraid to report the SH since she could not afford to lose her job.	SH happens when a person who has power (administrative officer) decides he can do what he wants to those who do not possess any or has less.
	There is a previous “relationship” between the janitress and the administrative officer (Lessor and Lessee).	
	The administrative officer thought he could make advances because the janitress owes him money.	
	Administrative officer assaults the janitress.	
	Janitress reported the SH.	
Agreeing vs. Not agreeing (verbal sexual abuse)		
Male vs. female		

positions of power over their subordinates. This entitlement becomes evident when an administrative officer believes he can harass a janitress with impunity, assuming that she would be too apprehensive to report the misconduct due to her reliance on the job. However, the theme of power takes a different turn when the janitress seizes the opportunity to report her case to the authorities, thereby asserting her agency and challenging the status quo.

Once again, the narrative sheds light on the entrenched gender binary, a recurring theme throughout the stories examined in this paper. This division becomes more evident when considering the social positions occupied by the characters, distinguishing between those in high-ranking roles and those in lower positions. Consequently, this hierarchical binary within the workplace extends to the economic divide, distinguishing between those with financial means and those without. In society, it is often those who possess financial resources who exploit the vulnerabilities of those in need, as they tend to be the ones sought out for financial assistance. Within the context of these binaries, the protagonist manages to assert her agency, despite initially yielding to a sexual advance (it's essential to note that consent should always be enthusiastic and voluntary, never coerced). She exercises her power by ultimately reporting the incident to the authorities, challenging the prevailing power dynamics and seeking justice.

Online Breach

The narrative delves into various mythemes centered around the dynamics of an intimate relationship between two individuals. One prominently featured theme explores contemporary expressions of affection within intimate relationships, particularly the exchange of intimate photos. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this practice, conflicts arise when such exchanges are disseminated to others or made public without consent. This theme underscores the recurring idea of action and consequence frequently found in stories. The act of willingly sharing private photos can lead to their unauthorized distribution, resulting in shame or, in more sinister scenarios, potential blackmail. This narrative serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us of the importance of exercising caution when sharing personal and sensitive photos or information, as they can potentially harm us in the future. Another noteworthy theme that emerges in the narrative is the ever-evolving and increasingly sophisticated landscape of internet technologies, which has a significant impact on the issue of consent. These technologies can be wielded as tools in committing crimes such as online sexual harassment,

highlighting the intersection of technology and consent within contemporary society.

Binary oppositions	Mythemes	Primary messages
Male vs. Female		
Agree vs. Disagree (distribute nude photos online)	There was a couple who used to exchange nude photos of each other as part of their romantic show of affection. After they broke up, her compromising photos were posted online. The couple was in a past intimate/sexual relationship. The boyfriend thought and decided to post compromising photos of former girlfriend without asking permission. The girl reported the SH.	Do not trust a (male) partner enough to send compromising photos to, otherwise this could show up online in the future.
Power vs. Without power (those who possess the file) Victim vs. Perpetrator and the public		

The binary distinction between male and female genders is emphasized in the narrative, shedding light on the persistent dominance of males over females, even within the virtual landscape. This power dynamic mirrors a recurrent subject prevalent in tales originating from patriarchal societies, underscoring the stark disparity between individuals wielding power and those in positions of vulnerability. Within this dichotomy, authority is vested in those who control content and information. More often than not, it is males who assume the role of sharing sensitive content illicitly, largely due to the societal conditioning that compels females to dread public scrutiny, particularly with regard to moral judgements.

Binary opposites that are revealed in the three tales are: male vs female, power vs. without power, agreeing vs. disagreeing. There are other binaries present in the narratives; however, I highlight those that probe the messaging and experience of consent. These binaries involving consent are present in all the stories in this modern-day category. Given different subject matters, what is distinct in all the three stories is the unequal power relations rooted from socio historical views on gender stereotypes such as Anna's shame of being found out that she let a man inside her apartment. She fears the people's judgement and brand her as immoral. Similarly, in the narrative "Online Breach", the woman's experience of having her compromised photos posted and distributed online brought much distress and humiliation to her because of the soiled reputation she acquired due to the incident. Society dictates that women should maintain an image of decency and virtuousness. On the other hand, in the second story "It Started with a Loan", the janitress is powerless in defending herself from the administrative assistant because the social position sexual harasser holds more power. The unequal power relations cultivated and performed through generations led to the mindset of accepting such oppressive status quo in our society.

We can discern similarities in the narrative structures of folklore and contemporary stories as they delve into themes of consent within the backdrop of a patriarchal society. This patriarchal framework not only generates but also engrains and perpetuates gender biases and power imbalances between males and females, factors that significantly contribute to the pervasive issue of consent.

The "new" narratives seem to reverberate and reiterate past convictions regarding the adverse consequences of consent, as evident in the selected folklores.

However, we can observe a noteworthy distinction between the two lies in the resolutions of contemporary stories. These modern narratives provide a glimmer of hope for equitable outcomes, introducing an additional narrative layer—the victims of consent violations who bravely report and file cases, enabling them to share their stories.

The folklores subtly address the matter of consent towards their conclusions, revealing the intricate facets of consent through the subsequent outcomes or consequences when the protagonist withholds their agreement. In both folklores, the repercussions of refusing consent are portrayed as more severe than if one were to grant it. These narratives shed light on how a patriarchal society exerts pressure on women to acquiesce, even when they genuinely do not desire to do so. In contrast, contemporary stories spotlight the responses of victims of consent violations as they engage with various components of the Philippine legal system and institutions such as OASH (an educational institution), CEDAW, PCW, among others. These institutions and policies are markedly absent in the settings depicted in the folklores. Consequently, the sense of redemption or vindication presented in the contemporary narratives is conspicuously absent in the older tales.

At present, despite the existence of various laws and law enforcement agencies addressing consent-related issues, it is evident that problems persist. The choices made by characters like Maria Makiling, who opted to marry for love, often resulted in tragic outcomes. Similarly, the Girl's decision to abstain from socializing with the King of Crabs led to her transformation into a fish. In the story "When Anna Met David," the protagonist, fearing the label of promiscuity, reluctantly succumbed to pressure, while the janitress complied with her superior's wishes due to her lack of power. In the last contemporary narrative, the ex-girlfriend was deprived of the opportunity to prevent her humiliation. Whether in folklore or in contemporary narratives, resolutions should ideally favor the victims of consent violations. Unlike the protagonists in folklore, those in contemporary stories have the potential for a hopeful, happy ending. This progress and development must not remain theoretical but must be actively implemented, practiced, and upheld to ensure genuine transformation is experienced by every citizen in the country.

Certainly, orientations of folklores and current narratives are different, nevertheless, they both reflect and reveal social norms and cultural practices performed and engaged in by community members. Both sets of stories convey and relate to consent.

Conclusion

The modern-day stories “When Anna Met David”, “It Started with a Loan” and “Online Breach” may be considered as variations of folklores like “Maria Makiling and her Three Suitors” and “The Girl Who was Turned into a Fish”. They are myths transmitted through generations in the form of our oral traditions. The modern tales are products of stories told and retold that bring up matters that concern gender and sexuality and how our society deem actions, reactions and performances related to these matters acceptable or unacceptable, agreeable, or unagreeable or worth tolerating or deserves punishment. Folklores conveyed through ages, may not overtly mention the term and concept of consent, but its notion and contemplation are observed. Through the myths we can see how the experience, comprehension and negotiation of the concept developed into the current stories of how consent is understood and performed.

Guided by Levi-Strauss’ (1978) structuralist perspective in uncovering the meanings within myths, we can discern recurring binary oppositions in both past and present narratives concerning consent: Power vs. Powerless, Agreement vs. Disagreement, Male vs. Female. These narratives convey a fundamental message that societal norms dictate who wields power and who lacks it. In patriarchal societies, men often hold more power than women. Consequently, when a woman makes a decision regarding consent, it is typically the man’s agreement or disagreement that ultimately prevails (Rodriguez, 1990). These underlying assumptions are consistently reflected in the examined narratives, each featuring distinct plots, settings, and contexts. While language, signs, and symbols may evolve over time, the issue of consent endures. This persistence is concerning as it suggests that our socio-cultural system may inadvertently enable breaches and violations of consent across various situations. These myths thus reinforce a mindset that conformity to established social constructs is preferable, as diverging from them is seen as inviting further difficulties and challenges.

This examination and consideration of consent is framed and contextualized within the domain of gender, acknowledging it as a condition and determinant that leads to the manifestation of gender equality or inequality. Furthermore, these enduring folklores also unveil our community’s perception of what constitutes equality and inequality, as well as what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable.

This paper aims to scrutinize the concept of consent as performed and reflected in Philippine folklore, exploring its connection and relevance in contemporary narratives that emphasize the issue of consent. If we aspire to alter society's perception of consent to one that is more gender-sensitive, we must endeavor to reshape, reframe, and "re-perform" it. Initiating such transformations through our stories could be a promising starting point.

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