

Coming Out from The Closet and Into the Limelight: The Lived Experiences of Trans Women Beauty Queens; Reasons, Challenges, and Self- Fulfilment

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ABSTRACT

Transwoman beauty pageants are one of the most popular events in the Philippines, whether they be large, televised events on the national or international stage or the smaller local events arranged between barangays. This study seeks to find out the contestants' reasons, challenges, & self-fulfillment for entering them, using a sample of seven (7) transwomen who have been participating for at least 3 years, aged (X-Y), all college-educated, and are well-off financially. Open-ended interviews were conducted over VoIP programs like Facebook Messenger and Zoom, transcripts were produced with audio recordings, after which themes were analyzed and validated by audit trial and investigator triangulation. The results found that transwoman beauty pageants played key roles in the participants' lives since early childhood to the present, helping them discover and validate their gender identities as women; their social networks intersect with the events as their friends are fellow competitors in their "clans" and "camps" and their other friends are also their stylists, gownmakers, and the like; and they primarily compete for the sake of their advocacy as a platform to be heard outside the LGBT community and also for personal growth and development than for monetary benefits. They face uniquely LGBT challenges such as rejection by their families, invalidation of their gender identity by others including other LGBT individuals, and discrimination and exploitation with how their beauty pageants are portrayed as events to ridicule and make fun of the competitors. The research has numerous implications in the study of young LGBT individuals' lives and development in the conservative Philippines, the importance of LGBT beauty pageants and transgender beauty queens as role models to the community, and their use of media and entertainment to advocate for their rights and better treatment in society.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Equality, LGBT, Beauty, Transpageantry, Diversity, Culture, Discrimination