Dapat, kita: Representations of the schema of heteronormativity and the visibility of abuse in domestic violence

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ABSTRACT

Barangay Violence Against Women (VAW) Desk officers are the frontliners in the provision of services to a victim/survivor of domestic violence. They are the first persons that a woman encounters, and they determine whether her truth claim identifies her as domestic violence case, thereby enabling her to access State-provided services and interventions. Thus, it is important to inquire into the Desk officers' worldviews and beliefs, also called schemas, and how these influence the ways they communicate and interact with the victim/survivors they encounter daily in their work.

Guided by gender schema theory, this study examines the drawings of the VAW Desk officers—and the ecology of images that accompany these drawings—to delve into their cognitive constructions of the gendered nature of domestic violence.

Two dominant schemas emerge from this examination: the schema of heteronormativity (*dapat*), and the schema of the necessary visibility of domestic violence (*kita*). These schemas govern the Desk officers' everyday judgments and decision making, and inform the ways they communicate with domestic violence victim/survivors.

Keywords: Violence against women, domestic violence, barangay VAWC Desk officers, schema, gender schema

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Domestic violence, used synonymously with the terms intimate partner violence, spousal abuse, relationship abuse, dating abuse, gender violence, wife abuse, or battery, is a global problem that affects all women regardless of age, race, or economic status (Miranda & Lange, 2020; Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2011; Flury et al., 2010; Horton, 2008; Williams et al., 2008). Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes (2000) define domestic violence as "acts of violence that occur between current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. It also includes violence between persons who have a current or former marital, dating, or cohabiting relationship" (p. 6). Domestic violence is perpetrated by, and on, both men and women. However, most commonly, the victims are women (Simic, 2020; Birdsall et al., 2016; Loke et al., 2012; Kaur & Garg, 2008). As a pattern of behaviors used by one partner, usually a man, to maintain power over another partner, usually a woman, in an intimate relationship with the intent of inflicting harm, violence can manifest in severe, subtle, and overt forms of male control (Stout, 2013), rooted in patriarchal practices of male dominance in heterosexual relationships (Carlson & Jones, 2010). What makes domestic violence especially painful is that there is, or there used to be, an intimate relationship between the victim/survivor and the perpetrator: a shared history, possibly a child or children, mutual possessions, but definitely a great deal of emotional investment on the part of the woman, and maybe even a hope that the abuser will "change" his violent behavior. This heightens a woman's sense of personal betrayal.

Domestic violence occurs at home, behind closed doors, often with few witnesses, and therefore has been relegated to the realm of the "private." As Catherine MacKinnon (1989) puts it, popular discourse treats the private sphere as "a sphere of personal freedom. For men, it is. For women, the private is the distinctive sphere of intimate violation and abuse, neither free nor particularly personal. Men's realm of private freedom is women's realm of collective subordination" (p. 168). However, Shahana Rasool Bassadien and Tessa Hochfeld (2011) blur the discursive distinction between the "open" public and the "secret" private by proposing that in many cases of domestic violence, "various people at the microlevel are either aware of the abuse a woman is experiencing, have been told about it, or have actually witnessed it" (p. 13).

Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, sexual, and economic in nature (Malik et al., 2021) with abused women experiencing physical assaults, verbal insults, neglect, and coercive sex (Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2011). But rather than distinct episodes of one form of violence, abuse more often occurs along a continuum involving physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional maltreatment (Leidig, 2010). As Marianne Flury and her

colleagues (2010) characterize it, "domestic violence does not describe a single violent event, but rather a complex system of abuse" (p. 2).

One in four women will experience domestic violence during their adult lives (Black et al., 2011; Flury et al., 2010; Walby, 2004). In the United States, an average of 24 people become victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner every minute. This means 12 million women and men over the course of a single year (Black et al., 2011). In the Philippines, preliminary results of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reveal that one in four women aged 15-49 has experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their husband or partner; one in five has experienced emotional violence; 14 percent has experienced physical violence, and 5 percent has experienced sexual violence by their current or most recent husband or partner ("One In Four Women Have Ever Experienced Spousal Violence," 2018).

Cultural traditions and social norms are woven into the ways in which domestic violence is socially constructed, justified, and even named (Childress, 2017). Traditional Asian and Filipino values of close family ties, harmony, and order support the minimization of domestic abuse (Ho, 1990), while male control of wealth and decision making, also termed as the "macho culture," are strong predictors of violence (Bernarte et al., 2018). There is a "culture of silence" (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2013, para. 7) surrounding VAW, making it a "hidden problem" (PCW, n.d., para. 11) which results in women's reluctance to report domestic violence to the authorities, because "many of the victims are ashamed to relate their experiences" (PCW, 2013, para. 7). As the Philippine Commission on Women's Barangay to the Rescue explains,

> It is because we consider acts of domestic violence shameful, and a private matter that is kept within the family. Filipino families usually rely on *kamag-anak* (relatives) for support. But in most cases, relatives would not want to get involved in domestic violence because it is perceived as "meddling" in internal family affairs or "*usapang mag-asawa.*" It is this very attitude that discourages reporting of incidences (sic) of domestic violence to proper authorities, hesitation among authorities to take appropriate action and recognition of domestic violence as a social problem of immense medical, social and emotional cost. (p. 5)

The Filipino belief that domestic violence is "usapang mag-asawa" (matter between husband and wife) an attitude that treats VAWC as a private, family problem "prompts neighbors, police officers and the courts

to dismiss wife-beating as a 'private affair'" (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women & Women's Feature Service, 2004, p. 1) even an acceptable way of disciplining one's partner. Other women look at wife-beating as part of the risks of getting married. But most battered women stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together. Being unemployed, "most of the women doubt if they can support the children by themselves" (National Commission on Role of Filipino Women, 2005).

Domestic violence represents one of the most extreme manifestations of gender inequality (Miranda & Lange, 2020), a severe violation of women's human rights (Manjoo, 2012), a public health issue (Malik, 2021; Black et al., 2011) and a major obstacle to development (Mitchell, 2013; Black et al., 2011; Alhabib et al., 2010; Ellsberg, 2001). But despite the number and frequency of domestic violence cases worldwide, most crimes against women are never reported (Miranda & Lange, 2020; Peterson & Bialo-Padin, 2012) because of the shame, guilt, and stigma that accompany victimization (Miranda & Lange, 2020; Flury et al., 2010). The PCW reports that only about 8.2 percent of domestic violence cases are reported (PCW, n.d.); Ermi Amore Yap (1998) claims that "the percentage of men who admitted to regularly beating up their wives is higher than the number of women who admit to having been victims" (p. 4).

The Philippines is a signatory to international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in recognition of the dictum that women's rights and gender equality are human rights, as stated in Social Development Goals (SDG) No. 5. There are national laws and local ordinances that provide interventions for domestic violence. Yet, despite the presence of these laws, policies, programs and protective mechanisms, a woman victim/survivor of domestic violence often hesitates to, or does not, communicate her experience of abuse to local authorities or even to family and friends. She and/or her children may be economically dependent, or be under pressure from the abuser, the abuser's family, friends, and even the community, to stay in the relationship (Peterson & Bialo-Padin, 2012). She may want the violence to stop but not necessarily want her batterer arrested (Peterson & Bialo-Padin, 2012). The abuser may have intimate knowledge of her private life and daily routines, making her feel that he is still a danger to her and her loved ones. This makes the official statistics on domestic violence severely underreported, and the actual extent and severity of domestic violence can only be assumed.

A number of risk factors have been associated with domestic violence. Among these are poverty, unemployment, alcohol and illegal drug use,

younger age, lower education (Flury et al., 2010), and exposure to family and community violence (Williams et al., 2008).

There is general agreement that domestic violence is preventable (D'Enbeau & Kunkel, 2013; Mitchell, 2013) but that comprehensive and effective strategies must be informed by understanding the unique social and situational contexts in which domestic violence occurs in households and communities. Women's groups agree that no single solution can stop domestic violence and have focused on developing effective prevention and intervention programs. School-based campaigns have concentrated on dating violence. Some community-based projects have combined microfinance with gender equality training. Other initiatives have engaged in financing health projects to assist female victim/survivors of violence, and capacity-building programs for women's legal rights. Advocates have set up 24-hour help lines, crisis shelters and refuges, counselling services, community watches, access to emergency accommodations and transport, information services, legal services, community organizing, and information campaigns.

With VAW as a silent and lethal crime happening all over the world, it is imperative that actions to prevent it from occurring be global in nature and yet local in implementation, to better assist the women victim/survivors, and to change the social environment that breeds the violence.

RA 9262, RA 9710, and the Barangay Anti-VAWC Desk

The signing into law of Republic Act 9262, "An Act Defining Violence Against Women and Their Children, Providing for Protective Measures for Victims, Prescribing Penalties Therefore, and for Other Purposes," also known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children (VAWC) Act of 2004, was heralded as a major step in ensuring the protections of women against violence, and domestic violence in particular. Section 3 (a) of the law defines violence against women as "any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, with or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, 2004). The following constitutes violent acts: physical violence, or physical harm; sexual violence, committed against a woman or her child; psychological violence, or acts or omissions that cause or are likely to cause mental or emotional suffering of the victim; and economic

abuse, or attempts to make a woman financially dependent (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, 2004).

Among the provisions of RA 9262 was the establishment of an Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children, mandating State agencies to formulate programs to eliminate VAWC and offer services to victim/survivors. Thus, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the local government units (LGU) are tasked to provide the victim/survivors with temporary shelters, counselling, psychosocial services and/or recovery, rehabilitation programs and livelihood assistance; the Health Department with providing medical assistance to victims/survivors; the Justice Department and the courts with giving legal support and access to justice; and the police and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) with safety and security (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, 2004). This multidisciplinary approach is intended to ensure smooth coordination and collaboration between the State agencies responsible for protecting women against violence.

RA 9262 is a policy framework that locates a very central role for LGUs in understanding, preventing, and addressing domestic violence, since they are the ones working directly with the people in the community. This gender-responsive local governance framework is intended to make VAW mechanisms work for women in their constituent barangays.

Further strengthening the policy framework against VAW, Republic Act 9710, also known as the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), was signed into law in 2009 to recognize, protect, and uphold women's human rights. One of its provisions is the creation of a VAW Desk at the level of the barangay, the Philippines' smallest political and administrative unit, so that domestic violence victim/survivors can seek assistance and escape from their abusive partners. The departments of Interior Local Government (DILG), Social Welfare and Development, Education, Health, and the PCW issued Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2010-2, which defined the Barangay VAW Desk as

> a facility that would address VAW cases in a gender-responsive manner, managed by a person designated by the *punong barangay*. It is situated within the premises of the *barangay* hall. In the absence of a *barangay* hall, the VAW Desk shall be established within the premises where the *punong barangay* holds office. (p. 2)

The *punong barangay* or barangay Chief is tasked with the set-up and operation of a confidential, private, and safe area within the barangay hall, and the assignment of a VAW Desk person trained in gender-sensitive

handling of cases, preferably a woman barangay *kagawad* or woman barangay *tanod* (barangay police officer). In cases where there are no trained personnel, the punong barangay shall also ensure that the person assigned undergo basic gender sensitivity training and orientation on anti-VAW laws (Joint Memorandum Circular 2010-2, 2010). As of December 2018, the DILG reports that a total of 37,723 barangays have established a VAW Desk, with the following regional breakdown (DILG, 2019):

Table 1. Regional breakdown of VAW Desk compliance (DILG, 2019).

Region	Total number of barangays	Barangays with established VAW Desk	%
I	3,267	3,265	99.94
II	2,311	2,311	100.00
III	3,102	2,315	74.63
IV-A	4,018	4,011	99.83
IV-B	1,460	1,427	97.74
V	3,471	3,326	95.82
VI	4,051	4,034	99.58
VII	3,003	3,003	100.00
VIII	4,390	4,390	100.00
IX	1,904	1,266	66.49
X	2,022	1,883	93.13
XI	1,162	919	79.09
XII	1,195	1,166	97.57
XIII	1,311	1,311	100.00
CAR	1,177	943	80.12
NCR	1,710	1,493	87.31
ARMM	2,490	660	26.51
Total	42,044	37,723	89.72

The Barangay VAWC Desk officers are frontliners, the first points of contact of women victim/survivors of violence, and are the ones who can, or decide not to, set the entire bureaucratic process of VAW interventions in motion. The Desk officer thus plays a pivotal role in the initial identification of VAW, and the subsequent activation of existing State services. Her personal worldviews and frames of meaning, especially of women and of the nature of violence, are crucial schemas that determine the nature of her official response to reports of VAW.

The purpose of this study is therefore to look at how Barangay VAW Desk officers operate within their frames of meaning, or schema, as they assist and serve victims/survivors on a daily basis. Specifically, it examines their worldviews on the nature of violence.

Theoretical orientation: Gender Schema

To look more closely into the deeply-held belief and worldviews that the Barangay VAWC Desk officers, the author utilized Schema Theory, and specifically at the Gender Schema Theory.

Schema are dynamic mental models composed of knowledge units that the mind connects with other knowledge units to form a coherent understanding about a particular concept (Hinton, 1993), give form and meaning to experience, and contain general knowledge about a domain. These mental models, or cognitive structures (Harris, 1994), become conceptual bridges that aid people in making sense of past knowledge, experiences, and stimulus events (Hinton, 1993); retaining and organizing them (Harris, 1994); and eventually producing templates where future thoughts are made to fit and guide our behaviour (Hinton, 1993). Schema are the knowledge, expectations, or recollections about the self and society, an organizing structure that helps people simplify and categorize new information (Martin & Dinella, 2002); and a collection of related ideas and specific examples about a knowledge domain, a chief function of which is to help a person identify incoming stimuli (Adamowicz, 2019). In addition to being knowledge repositories, schemas also direct information acquisition and processing (Harris, 1994). The assumption underlying schema theory is that people's knowledge is organized (Axelrod, 1973); when they know something about a given domain, that knowledge does not consist of a list of unconnected facts, but coheres in specific ways. Schemas provide hypotheses about incoming stimuli and plans for interpreting the stimuli and gathering further schema-related information (Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Gioia & Poole, 1984). They also provide a basis for the anticipation or initiation of sequential action in social situations.

Gender schema are cognitive structures that influence the extent to which people perceive the world in gender-related terms, and how they process gender-relevant information (Heilbrun, Jr., Wydra, & Friedberg, 1989). Thus, they serve as cognitive filters through which people categorize personal characteristics into masculine and feminine categories (van den Hende & Mugge, 2014), making it easier to sort information into gender categories. Gender schema are developed from socialization in childhood, and thereafter are constantly maintained, reinforced, and challenged (Bem, 1981; Colaner & Rittenour, 2015).

This study uses the Gender Schema Theory to identify the Desk officers' specific beliefs about what constituted domestic violence, as manifested in their drawings of the women who sought their assistance. Identifying how the Desk officers organize those beliefs, understanding how those beliefs were formed, maintained, communicated, and applied in their everyday practice and interactions with women victim/survivors, will advance existing theorizing on the nature of violence against women, and the individual's dynamic interactions with their dominant and deeply-held personal worldviews. The study also seeks to position Gender Schema Theory as a lens that can provide explanations into how individuals' existing cognitive processes, and the ways in which they organize information, impact the provision of interventions to victim/survivors. This will enable policymakers and anti-VAW advocates to better understand individual sense-making, and how personal perspectives inform practice, thereby improving victim/survivors' access to available services.

Methodology

This paper explores the use of visual art as part of a multi-method study of barangay VAW Desk officers as a means of "giving voice" to these frontline service workers. The study pays particular attention not just to the images produced, but also to the interaction between participants during the process of creation. Despite some differences in the context, the analysis highlights the major resonances among the Desk officers' depictions of the nature of domestic violence.

This study uses data from a larger project that examined the VAW Desk officers' gender schema and their communication with victim/survivors. Using a mix of qualitative approaches, 18 Desk officers from 12 barangays in Metro Manila, Philippines, representing four of its major cities, form the core of the study. All participants have (1) worked in their barangay for three or more years; (2) worked as VAWC Desk officers for at least one year; and (3) undergone training in VAW.

Challenged by the need to probe complex internal cognitive processes, which include perception, information processing, communication and behavior, the author designed a set of Participatory Elicitation Methods (PEM) to determine the operant gender schemas of the Desk officers. This was composed of (1) intensive conversations with the VAW Desk officers, utilizing the *kwentong buhay* (life story) approach; (2) the walking method and a participant-led tour of the organization and the community; (3) supporting interviews with peers and supervisors in the barangay, and with community members; (4) document and artifact study and analysis; and 5) participant engagements through creative activities. The PEM was

conceptualized and developed through literature reviews, and consultations with feminist researchers and development workers from grassroots organizations.

The author organized a participatory workshop and seminar on February 17, 2020, which involved all the VAWC Desk officers in the study. The workshop had two major components: creative elicitation activities, specifically drawing and dramatizations; interspersed with input sessions, the content of which was culled from the training requests of the Desk officers during the conversations. One of the creative art activities was called, "the women who come to me," modified from art activities previously used in Gender Sensitivity Trainings (GSTs), aimed at eliciting schemas on violence and victimology. The Desk officers were asked to draw the typical woman who sought their assistance in the barangay, but during the activity, the Desk officers posed follow-up and clarificatory questions, looked at each other's work, and swapped stories while drawing, which meant that the activity acquired a meaning and dynamism of its own which led to the Desk officers not only drawing the women, but creating and swapping stories about their experiences.

In small groups of threes or fours, the Desk officers were provided with paper, pen, pencils, and crayons. The drawing activity sought to find out how the women visualized the types of violence, and characterize the women they usually encountered in the course of their work. The session also included the participants' sharing of their drawings to the members of their small group. A Research Assistant (RA) assigned to each group took notes of the sharing and the dynamic discussions elicited from the participants. The results of that activity form the crux of this paper.

Analysis and thematization of gender schemas focused on the drawings themselves, but also included the other texts that imbued them with meaning and agency. Following Sunil Manghani's (2013) concept of an "ecology of images," which posits that "an image always exists in a set of contexts" as part of an "image community" which are framed, communicated, and comprehended through language (p. 17), the author looked at the captions and naming frames used by the Desk officers, the text of their verbal sharing, and the conversations which followed the sharing sessions, all of which constructed the Desk officers' meaning-making systems.

The research participants were all women. Informed consent was requested from the Desk officers, and granted, on February 17, 2020, for the use of the drawings for academic purposes, after a thorough briefing on the study. Their names and identifying characteristics have been anonymized in this paper. During the art workshop, the participants were informed that debriefing and counselling services (from counselors of Kanlungan Centre

Foundation, Inc., and the Women's Studies Department of St. Scholastica's College–Manila) were available should they request for it.

Study limitations

The use of visual methods to "give voice" to the barangay Desk officers as frontliners in VAW interventions is not intended to be presented as unproblematic and universalizing. This paper suggests that the understandings derived though visual methods came with the Desk officers' unfamiliarity with using drawings as self-expression, and thus relied on the verbal narratives accompanying the images produced, which in turn are shaped by their particular social, economic, and cultural contexts.

As part of the participatory nature of the project, the author organized a three-day intensive workshop/seminar that aimed to share the study's findings and obtain insights from the Desk officers themselves, as well as to outline a possible training program for barangay Desk officers nationwide. This was originally scheduled for April 10–12, 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent Luzon-wide lockdown, this had to be postponed.

Study context

The participants in the study were all long-time residents in their barangays, with 12 being born and raised there, and the other six becoming community members though marriage with a resident. They all have close ties to their barangays, through familial roots (*mga kamag-anak*), connections through the educational system (*mga kaklase*), and the informal neighborhood networks (*kapitbahay*). Eight participants were married, one was separated from her husband, three were single, five were single mothers, and one was a widow. Fifteen of the Desk officers had children, usually four, with one having seven children. The youngest Desk officer was 30 years old; the oldest was 62. Only one of them graduated from college; others were high school graduates, did not complete college, or had enrolled in a vocational course. Only three were VAWC Desk officers from the beginning; the others worked in different capacities—barangay clerks, cleaners, messengers, barangay health workers—before being assigned to the Desk.

As mandated by the law, the VAW Desk has to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Joint Memorandum Circular 2010-2, 2010). The participants thus work on 12-hour shift rotations, given that there are only two Desk officers in the barangay. However, because they have no place in the Philippine government's civil service structure, they are designated as "volunteers" with tenures co-termed with the barangay captain, and salaries determined by the barangay's budget. They are not entitled to overtime

pay, paid leaves, or 13th month pay. Thus, the average monthly pay of the participants was P5,000—the lowest was P2,500 a month, while the highest was at P14,000.

Depending on the barangay, the Desk officers handled around 10 VAW cases a month. The most number of reports came at 100 cases each month, with increases during holidays and weekends, while one barangay had only around two VAW cases each month.

## The Desk officers' ecology of images

Although most discussions of violence against women in the Philippines center on physical and sexual abuse, the new definitions of VAW suggest a broader representation of the experiences of victims and survivors (Ramnarain, 2020; Pandey, 2016; Manjoo & McRaith, 2011; Green & Ward, 2009; Johnson, 2005; Gill, 2004, Kelly, 2000). Many women now say that they find verbal and psychological abuse almost as harmful as physical abuse (Bjarnegard et al., 2015; UNODC, 2013; WHO, 2013). In the Philippines, economic violence, or non-support, is also being increasingly reported (Antai et al.,2014; Antai et al., 2014). This is validated by the Desk officers in my study, who all reported physical and economic abuse as the most commonly reported crimes in the barangay VAWC Desk.

So what is the predominant schema that VAWC Desk officers hold about the nature of violence? In other words, how do they think violence manifests in the victim/survivors? What does abuse look like?

The VAWC Desk officers are tasked to provide initial evaluations of the women complainants, and this is where they are called upon to make judgments on the validity of women's truth claims. Because of the trainings they attended, and their everyday encounters with women at the Desk, they have the vocabulary to identify the types of violence.

The art activity called "the women who come to me," one of the small group sessions in the participatory workshop session, asked the VAWC Desk officers to draw the typical woman who sought their assistance in the barangay. The drawing activity sought to find out how the women visualized the types of violence and generalize the women they usually encountered in the course of their work. It was notable that, although it was suggested that they provide fictional representations, the Desk officers provided detailed drawings, accompanied by descriptive texts, and even gave names, ages, and descriptions of the women they illustrated, which implied that they were inspired by actual cases. Most of them also drew two figures. For example, this is how Anna imagines two typical clients of domestic violence.

Figure 1. Anna's drawing.
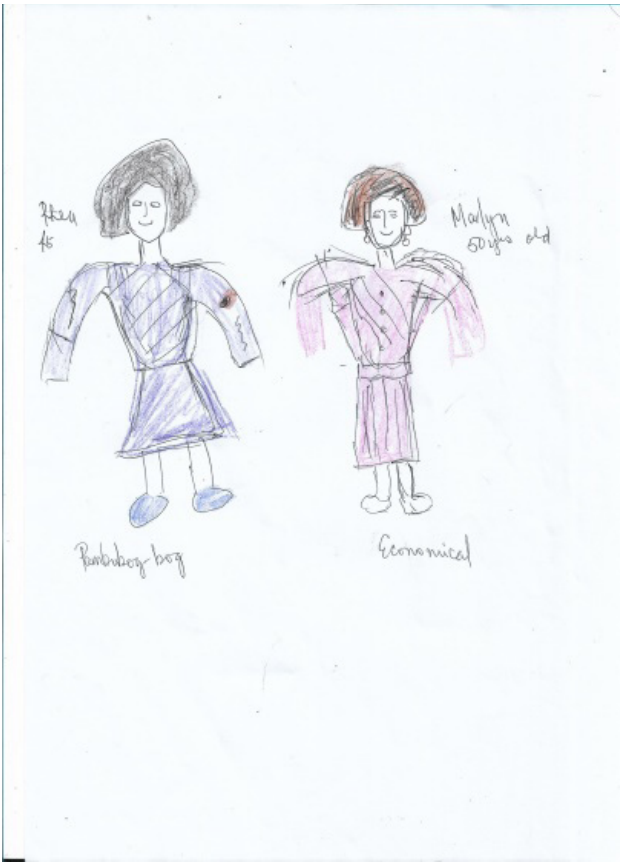
The drawing depicts two women, named Rhea, 45, with "Pambubugbog (battery)" beneath the figure, and Marlyn, 50 years old, with "Economical" underneath, to explain the nature of the cases.

From Anna's detailed sharing, she found the first case of physical violence to be more convincing, with the woman passive and helpless, while the case of economic abuse was doubtful for her, because the woman did not manifest any form of poverty, and actively sought redress.

> Rhea, 45 years old. She has bruises on her arms and scratches in different parts of her body. Physical abuse, beaten by her husband. She caught her husband with a mistress. She did not push through with her husband's inquest because he asked her forgiveness, and there's nobody to earn a living for them if he goes to jail.

Marlyn, 50 years old. Wears a dress and earrings. She says her husband has not given her financial support for the past three months. She really found ways to address her complaints, even went to the municipal Women's Desk. Doesn't work, but accessorizes and dresses well.

Barbara's drawing of the typical VAWC victim/survivor is almost similar to Anna's, detailing physical and economic abuse.

Figure 2. Barbara's drawing

The drawing depicts two women, captioned "Maricar, 23 years old, binugbog ng asawa (beaten by husband)" and "Jennifer, 30 years old, sustento (economic support)."

Barbara added the following details during her group sharing:

Maricar, 23 years old. She has bruises on her face and a black eye. Physical abuse. Beaten by her husband, blood leaking from her eyes, and swelling eyes when she came to their office. She has gone to the Desk many times. The first time she came, the bruises on her face and body were not as severe. But this is the worst yet, with blood coming out of her eyes. She did not push through with the inquest, because of the lengthy process. She just asked for a medical check-up, and then went home.

Jennifer, 30 years old. Economic abuse. Did not receive financial support from her husband. Separated from him, but continued to ask for support.

Figure 3. Carla's drawings

Carla's drawing of two women, one named Anabelle, captioned as "weak, stress, physically abused," and an unnamed woman captioned "independent woman, strong."

Carla drew two women, Annabelle and an unnamed woman, to which she assigned contrasting characteristics, weak and strong. One escaped the abuse by running away, the other by separating from her husband.

Annabelle. Partner was on drugs. Physically abused. Jumped out of a window to escape.

Unnamed, but unforgettable case. Strong and independent. Was psychologically abused but never once cried. Separated from her husband.

Figure 4. Dolores' drawing

Dolores drew two women, representing a physically battered woman with the caption "Maria, bayolente ang asawa" [Maria, with a violent husband] and Juana, captioned "nagmahal pero madalas niloloko" [she loved, but was frequently betrayed].

During the group presentation, Dolores added details to her drawing. Included are the side conversations between Dolores and the other Desk officers in her group, to describe the conversations and rapport among them, and the schema of women and violence they bring into the discussion. Notable is how they shift perspective from an imaginary case, to an actual incident, and then to their personal experiences.

> Maria. Has five children. Husband is violent, would hit her head against the wall. Just wants us to talk to her husband, not to file a case against him. This is common among women especially when they have many children. She went back and talked to her husband, settled with him, and they got back together.

[Barbara interjects: Those women are not empowered and cannot stand on their own, so they cannot leave their husbands.]

Juana. Her case was reported to us by a concerned citizen. Her husband was beating her while she was pregnant, so they took her from their home. Wanted her husband jailed, the case reached the inquest stage, but eventually forgave him and they got back together.

[Exchange between Dolores, Emy, and Barbara]

Dolores: They usually settle.

Emy: I agree.

Barbara (surprised): But just this January we had four men jailed in [redacted name of barangay].

Emy: When the women see their husbands being beaten up in jail or crying, they frequently forgive them.

Dolores: That will not work with me. I gave my husband an ultimatum: cheat on me again, you will have no family to come home to. I left my husband, I did not seek support.

Emy: My mother had my father's mistress hexed.

Barbara: Sometimes they do withdraw from filing a case. I have trouble with that, when a woman has gone through a lot, but cannot seek justice for what has been done to her, especially when she has children.

Emy: Because women are expected to be loving and forgiving.

Farrah's first illustration is of a voluptuous woman in a sleeveless dress and with well-styled hair, whom she called Mary/Marie (aged 18-30), represented in the following caption: Mga makabagong babae. Mga kababaihang na may pagpapahalaga sa sarili, sa anak at may matatag na disposisyon sa buhay. Kadalasan di interesado magpakulong, matigil lang ang pang-aabuso, makahiwalay ay sapat na. Suporta. (Modern women. Women who valued themselves, their children, and have strong dispositions. Often not interested in putting their partners in jail, just want a separation to stop the abuse. Seek financial support.).
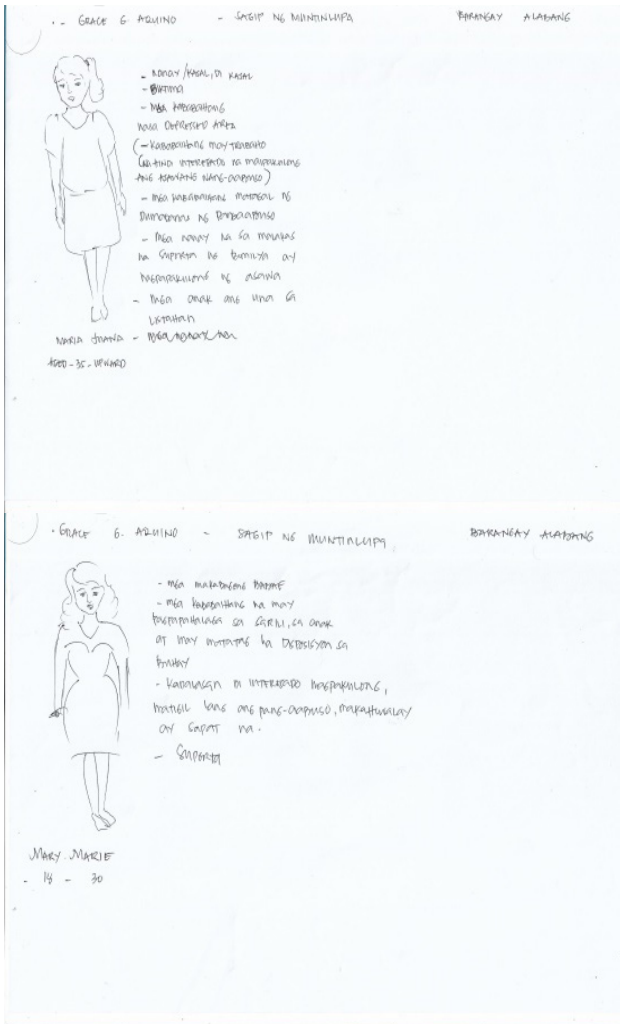
The other illustration, named Maria Juana, aged 35-upward, was shown conservatively dressed and with her hair up. The caption read: "Nanay, kasal / di kasal. Biktima. Mga kababaihang nasa depressed area. Mga kababaihang matagal ng dumadanas ng pang-aabuso. Mga nanay na sa malakas na suporta ng pamilya ay nagpakulong ng asawa. Mga anak ang una sa listahan" [Mothers, married / unmarried. Victims. Women living in poor areas. Women who have endured violence for a long time. Mothers who, with the strong support of their families, have jailed their husbands. Their children are the priority].

Farrah showed the divide between the modern, empowered woman, and what she depicted as the traditional wife. In her presentation before her

groupmates, Farrah gave further details of her illustrations, in which she labeled her drawings as *makabago* (modern) and *makaluma* (traditional).

> Modern – Mary/Marie. Employed. Usually young, 35 years old and below. Reported a case of abuse. Would separate from the man immediately. Will seek financial support for her children. Brave enough to have the man jailed because she has family support for her legal case and for her children afterwards. The type who will immediately leave after one instance of violence. This woman is empowered, because she knows her rights and the law.

> Traditional – Maria. Sometimes employed, but usually jobless. Around 35 years and older. Usually has been abused for a long time, but has just recently reported it, when she already has a battered face or head, or a fatal injury. Embarrassed at the physical abuse she suffers. The type who would report, but would withdraw the case or refuse jail time for her husband. Confined, or does not know much about her rights or the law.

To the Desk officers, the most common types of VAWC are physical and economic abuse, which to them are easy to detect because of the visible manifestations, such as bruising, wounds, blood, swelling, or, in the case of financial non-support, signs of economic need. As Gloria describes it in the sharing session, *"Obvious naman kasi talagang may mark"* [It's obvious because there are marks]. Helen says, "Pag nakita namin na namamaga na ang mukha, at may mga marka ng pananakit, hindi na namin inaayos. Kinakausap na namin yung babae. Humihingi naman ng patawad yung lalaki" '[Once we see that the face is swollen and we see evidence of physical violence, we don't settle it anymore. We talk to the woman. The man usually apologizes]. Barbara concurs: "Yes! As in bugbog. Lalo na kapag sobra na talaga 'yung nangyari sa babae. Malaki na 'yung pasa niya na ganoon" [Yes! We have many battery cases. Especially extreme cases. When she has huge bruises]. Emy even stated that the visibility of abuse can be considered as an advantage: "Ang medical (exam) ay naayon lang sa nakikita ng mata. Kapag iyang bukol mo ay lumiit ay pangit na ang medical mo. Wala na" [The medical exam can only detect what is visible to the eye. If your bump gets smaller, then you have a useless medical exam result. It is useless as evidence].

This is Irma's graphic depiction of a typical VAWC case. According to her, the fictional Virgie is "Buntis na binubugbog nung asawa. Muntikan mamatay yung bata, pero ayaw mag sampa ng kaso" [Pregnant when her husband beat her. The baby almost died, but she did not file a case].

Figure 6. Irma's drawing

Jane in turn drew the two figures of Toti and Susan, both in their 40s. Toti was represented as an economically and emotionally abused wife with three children, captioned with "no support, sent divorce papers", while Susan is a physically and emotionally abused woman, with a husband depicted as the devil, and the words "Husband – womanizing" and "Wife-martyr."
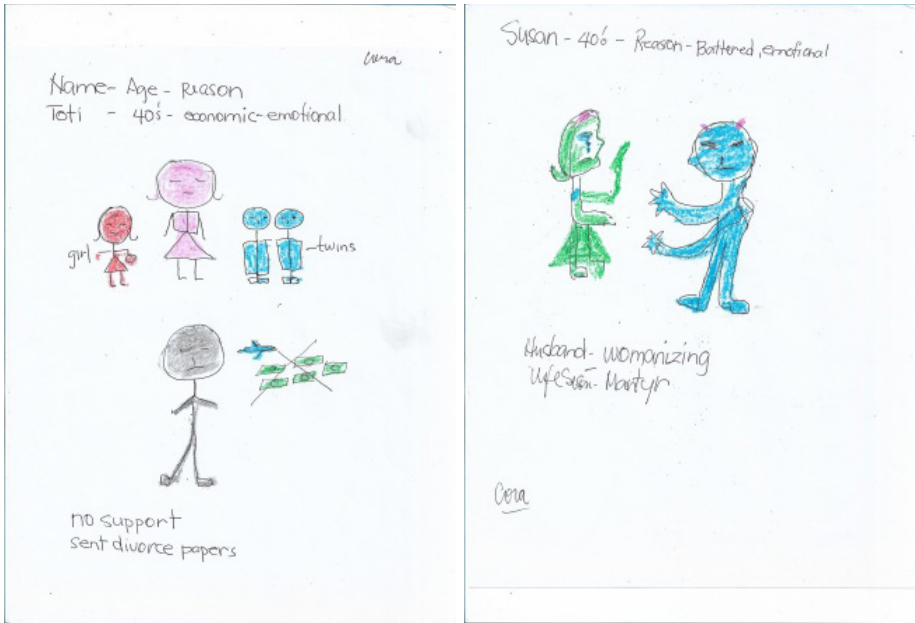
Figure 7. Jane's drawings

Jane was one of only two Desk officers to illustrate the abuser. She elucidated on her work:

> Toti (40 years old). Economic and emotional abuse. Has three children, husband is an overseas worker. Sent financial support in the beginning, but later stopped. Sent her divorce papers. Was taken to the Women's Desk with her concern, but no settlement yet. Receives economic support from her relatives. Tall, looks Chinese. Not battered.

> Susan (40 years old). Beaten every day. Cannot leave her husband.

Karen drew two figures. One showed a woman, drawn with two balls at her feet, to depict her as young. The captions say "Shena Mae. 14 years old. Takot, sensitive, galit. Ayaw magsalita, nagwawala, nandidiri sa sarili, nahihiya, tumigil sa pag-aaral" [Afraid, sensitive, angry. Does not talk, becomes unmanageable, hates herself, stopped going to school]. The second figure is visibly beaten up, with bruising in the face and body. The captions say, "42 year old Lorena. Takot, galit, mapagpatawad, dumudugo ilong, may pasa, umiiyak, mahina, malungkot, may trabaho, mayaman" [Scared, angry, forgiving, has a bloody nose, has bruises, crying, weak, sad, employed, well-off].

Figure 8. Karen's drawing
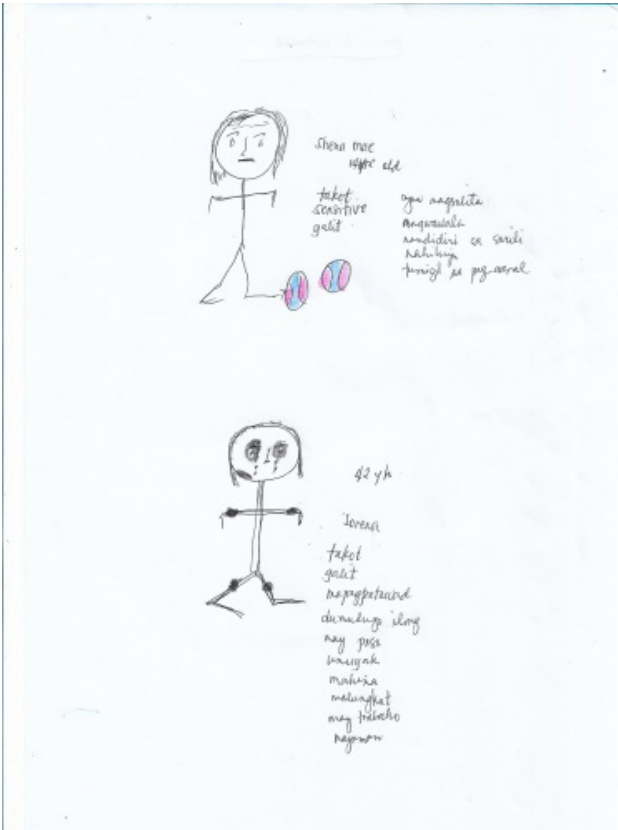
In her account to her groupmates, Karen reported that Shena May is a minor who was raped by a relative, while Lorena is a battered wife.

> Shena Mae (14 years old). Scared and angry. Can't talk, very disgusted with herself. Afraid to be judged by others. Easily has outbursts. Eventually stopped schooling. Boyish. Whenever she sees men, she gets angry.

> Lorena (42 years old). Nose is bleeding. Has bruises on her face. Bare-footed; shaking. From the middle class; has business. Forgives her husband because of their children.

Lala's drawings showed a 24 year old named Miss Daniella Romina, whom she described as "sinasaktan ng asawa" [beaten by her husband] with the bruises and tears to show for it. The other drawing was of weeping, 28-year-old Maria, with her two children, six-year-old Nene and four-year-old Tutoy, captioned "iniwan ng kanilang padre de pamilya" [abandoned by their father].

Figure 9. Lala's drawings

Lala is one of only two Desk officers to include children in her drawing. To these details, Lala added that "Si Daniella, sinasaktan ng asawa. Si Maria iniwan ng asawa. May mga anak na kailangang mag-aral" [Daniella is physically abused by her husband. Maria was abandoned by her husband. She has children who have to go to school].

Myrna drew Sophie, with a tiny figure name Rodjan (PWD) beside it. The woman is visibly bruised and crying. The text below reads, "Ma'am, tulungan niyo po ako! Pinagsusuntok po ako ng kasama ko, dahil nagseselos po siya sa nakita niyang messages sa cellphone ko" [Ma'am, help me! My partner beat me up, he got jealous when he read the messages on my cellphone]

From the beginning of the exercise, Myrna has claimed that her drawings are based on true cases. During her sharing session, she added to the story:

> Sophia. The barangay reported that someone was being beaten. Her partner is from another barangay, but the assault happened in our barangay. They fought because the woman was messaging another. She was battered by her partner who is a person with disability (PWD), but they both have spouses. Her eyes were bloody, her teeth were knocked out, she was black and blue. She had been battered multiple times, we previously issued a BPO, but
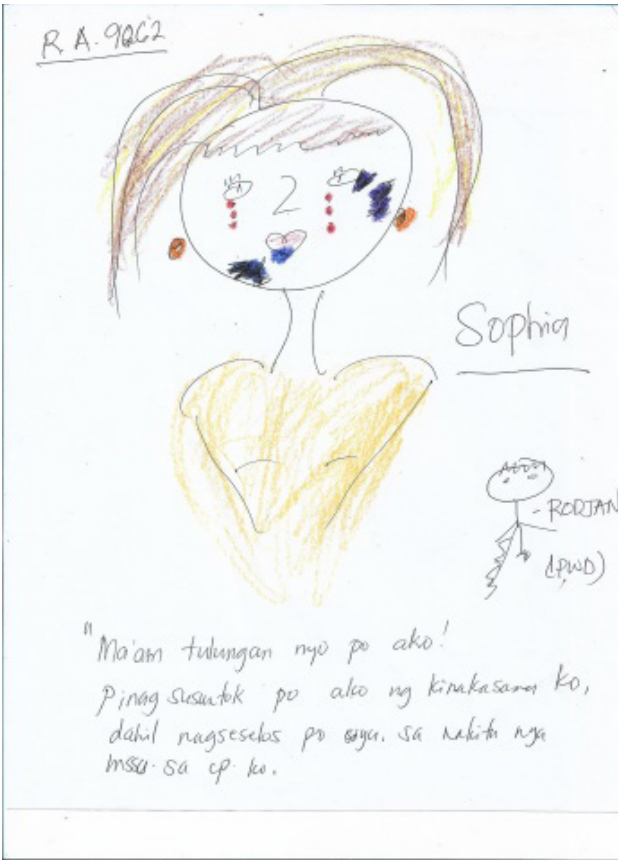
they reconciled. She did not push through with the report
because he cozied up to her. That's why we should never put
them together in the same place, she always gives in when
he tries to win her over. She told the victim, "Did you catch
all his punches with your face? Why didn't you run away
when he's lame?"

At this point the other Desk officers in the group asked why women like
this cannot escape from their violent relationships. Myrna explained that in
this case, the man was handsome and a foreigner.

Emy's two drawings of her usual clients show Leeza, "nagmahal ng
sobra" [loved too much] and Emily, "no choice."

The ordinariness of repeat violence is manifested in the Desk officers'
illustrations.

Both show physically abused women who have opted to return to their
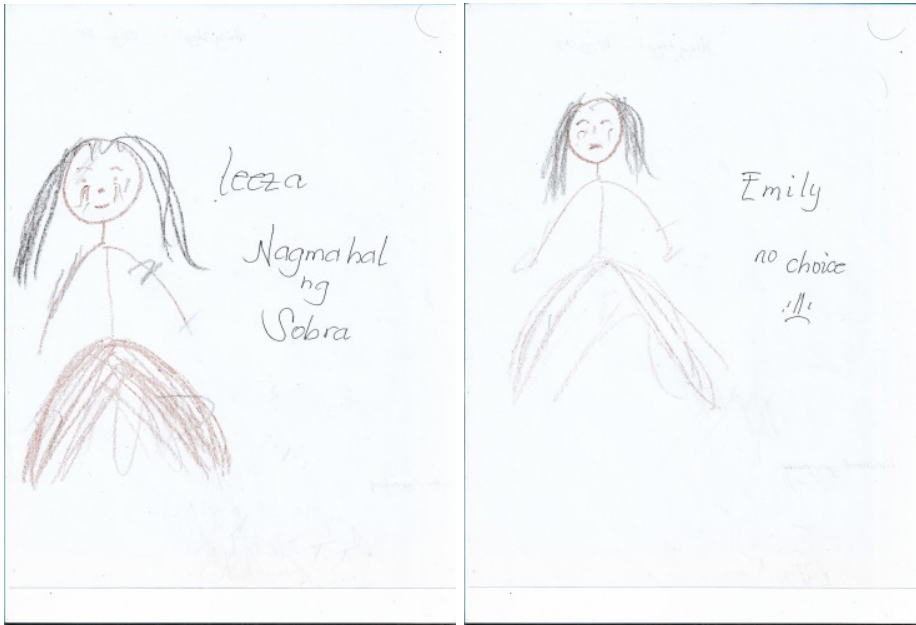violent husbands. As Emy explained,

Figure 11. Emy's drawings

Figure 12. Opal's drawings

> Leeza. Loved too much. Abused by her husband. Child was also abused. We recommended counselling. They got back together.

> Emily. No choice. Born to violence. Was not able to study. Born poor, and married a poor man. Husband is a womanizer. We enrolled her in a livelihood program. Got back together with him.

Opal has served as a Desk officer for ten years. Her drawing depicts Linda, 40 years old, captioned as "sustento para sa anak na nag-aaral" [support for child who is studying] and Ella, 29 years old, "humingi ng tulong para ipakulong ang asawa at humingi ng proteksyon para sa sarili niya" [asked for help to jail her husband and seek protection for herself].

Opal's narrative adds to her drawing.

> Linda, 40 years old. Unemployed. Wanted her husband jailed. Beaten black and blue by husband. Forgave her husband despite the abuse. Afraid to separate or jail her husband because she is thinking of her children's welfare.

> Ella, 29 years old. Employed. Has lost weight because of the abuse. Wanted immediate jail time for her husband, but then changed her mind because she cannot support her children by herself.

Opal also analyzed the women's inability to escape from their violent households, despite repeated abuse.

> Economic support plays a big role in a woman's decision to file a case or put her husband in jail. Most of the time, the women who report VAWC withdraw their cases, because then they worry about who will feed their children and support the family's needs.

In both drawings, she insists that "support" is the determining factor that can convince a woman to see her case through.

Analysis of the Desk officers' gender schema

Barangay VAWC Desk officers enter their everyday worlds of interaction with women victim / survivors of VAW with a set of operant schemas on their work, and on the nature, types, and manifestations of violence. From the Desk officers' drawings and way they framed their stories, two dominant

schemas have been identified. These schemas, formed through socialization since childhood, and continually negotiated through a multiplicity of social, structural, and gendered factors, guide their beliefs about, attitude toward, communication with, and behavior toward, the women victim/survivors of VAW they relate with on a daily basis. They also negotiate these schemas on an everyday basis through interactions with the other members of the barangay.

The first dominant gender schema manifested in the Desk officers' drawings and in the accompanying narratives is that of heteronormativity, which places women and men within predetermined roles and power positions. This schema, which the author terms as *dapat* (required, normative), makes a generalized assumption about one of the most fundamental identities that define people's place in the world, perpetuates inequalities in power and status, and supports heterosexuality (attraction to individuals of the opposite sex) as the norm (Herz & Johansson, 2015), or what Kitzinger describes as "the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon" (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 477).

Heteronormativity upholds as natural that (1) sex is a biological characteristic that produces only two options, male or female; (2) gender is a social or psychological characteristic that expresses itself in only two ways, masculine or feminine, and (3) that all individuals are heterosexual (Herz & Johansson, 2015; McNeill, 2013). This schema is deeply imbibed and unquestioned.

The heteronormativity schema results in judgments on the truthtelling of the victim/survivors; thus, Anna's expressed suspicion of Marlyn in her drawing (fig. 1), who actively fought for financial support from her partner, even up to the municipal level. After all, heteronormativity assigns the woman the subservient role, which the other drawing, Rhea, embodied.

That heteronormativity results in social pressures to fulfill and conform to heterosexual roles (Kitzinger, 2005) is also apparent in depictions of the weak/strong woman binary in figure 3, and in the conversations between Dolores, Emy, and Barbara, which suggest gendered characteristics of *hindi umiiyak* (not crying), *iiwanan ang asawa* (would leave husband), *hindi hihingi ng sustento* (will not ask for financial support) as evidence of strength, while a woman who is moved by her husband's entreaties, who cannot leave him, or who returns to him even after abuse, is considered weak or, as in figure 7, a martyr.

Other words used to describe the women in the drawings are "betrayed" (fig. 4), "walang alam sa mga karapatan at batas" [knows nothing about her rights or the law] (fig. 5), "takot makipaghiwalay" [afraid to separate from

her husband] (fig. 11).

Because the schema of heteronormativity prescribes how men and women should act in accordance with social expectations, it also often results in woman-shaming and victim-blaming for domestic violence. Victim-blaming is the attitude which suggests that the victim rather than the perpetrator bears responsibility for the assault (Randall, 2010). It occurs when an individual is assumed to have done something to provoke the violence by actions, words, or dress (Harber, et al, 2015; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Victim-blaming is a major reason that survivors of sexual and domestic violence do not report their assaults (Gracia, 2014). Many victim/survivors are already grappling with feelings of guilt and shame for what happened, so it is essential that VAWC Desk officers do not reinforce these feelings. Blaming the victim minimizes the importance of the aggression and exonerates the perpetrator, suggesting, such as in figure 10, that the victim/survivor, rather than her partner, bears responsibility for the abuse.

It is noteworthy that, even as the abuser is central to the discourse of domestic violence, he is absent in most of the Desk officers' representations. Even as he drives the narrative of abuse – *nambugbog, inabandona ang pamilya, humingi ng tawad, hindi nagbigay ng sustento, womanizing* (battered the woman, abandoned the family, asked for forgiveness, did not give financial support, womanizing) – he is notable by his erasure, a privileging of sorts, constructing domestic violence as "something that happens to the woman."

In the same way, children are included only in the economic abuse narratives, thereby centering the woman's role as nurturer, and the absent man's role as economic provider.

A belief in romantic love as a heteronormative concept (Thorne, et al, 2019), is also manifested in the Desk officers' drawings (fig. 4, fig. 11). The universal sentimentality associated with heterosexual love, confined as it is within the private sphere, without contextualizing it in social, cultural political and gendered subjectivities, excuses domestic violence as "love gone wrong," and is cited as a reason why the victim/survivor cannot leave her abusive husband (Cross, et al, 2018; Fraser, 2005). The schema of heteronormative love also positions men and women in an assumed, but false, state of equality.

Heteronormativity also manifests in the belief in the perfect heterosexual family, which the Desk officers strive to preserve by reconciling their women clients with their husbands or partners. Intensive interviews with the Desk officers affirms that their first instinct is to reunite couples. However, when the Desk officers are exposed to cases of severe and repetitive abuse, they challenge this belief and form incongruent schemas, albeit in ambivalent

and uneven ways, through a process of critical reflexivity, empathetic vulnerability, and the adoption of alternative discourses. Incongruent gender schemas, or counterschemas, are mismatches that do not fit within the dominant schemas, and throws into question the naturalness of preconceived notions of gender. And, while other counterschemas might be present as the Desk officers continuously negotiate their way around these dominant beliefs, the drawing activity and the conversations around it revealed that tolerating repeat violence by a partner is inexcusable, and women who return to abusive husbands are treated with scorn.

The presence of counterschemas underscored the Desk officers' agency, capacity to resist heteronormativity, and, despite schema theory's relative skepticism of change, suggests that women can negotiate, challenge and resist predominant gender schemas.

The second dominant schema, which the author terms as *kita* (visible), views domestic violence as mainly a physical act, or an act of economic abandonment, both of which must be visible to be believed (Khurana, et al, 2020). To the Desk officers, the most common types of VAWC are physical and economic abuse, which to them are easy to detect because of the visible manifestations, such as bruising, wounds, blood, swelling, or, in the case of financial non-support, signs of economic need. All of the drawings depict women as being severely battered, or financially disadvantaged.

These examples show the dominant schema on identifying violence: the more noticeable the physical signs, the easier and faster they can provide interventions. Ironically, the Desk officers also find it more convenient and justifiable if a victim/survivor shows visible signs of abuse, because it makes for a more solid case against the abusers. As Myrna puts it during the sharing session, "Ang amba, mahinang kaso. Pabanat ka na para kulong agad!" [Mere threats to hurt you will not make a stronger case. Better let him hit you so we can jail him immediately!].

Because of this schema of visible violence, women victim/survivors now have the burden of proving the abuse, through some sort of physical manifestation. Otherwise, their stories are doubted. This is noticeable in figure 1, where Anna has reservations about Marlyn's truth claims: "Hindi nagtatrabaho pero all accessories saka maporma" [Doesn't work but accessorizes and dresses well].

As an offshoot of the visibility schema, the Desk officers believe that violence against women is schematically classified into two categories: serious cases, and non-serious reports, implying a hierarchy in the gravity of violence. To the Desk officers, serious cases involve grave physical and sexual violence. And all others fall under "non-serious," petty, or "away mag-

asawa" [marital discord].

This perceptual binary of serious/non-serious domestic abuse has implications about the nature of the interventions and treatment of women who report to the VAW Desk officers. As one Desk officer notes, the barangay considers non-serious cases, such as verbal abuse, to be unimportant and a waste of time. "Kung verbal naman, depende kasi sa complainant. Kung sa barangay pa lang, ayaw nila 'yung nag-waste ng time, ayaw na nilang makarating pa sa taas" [If the complaint is on verbal violence, it depends on the complainant. At the barangay level, they don't like to waste their time, they do not want it elevated to a formal proceeding]. This means women who report "non-serious" cases have their stories doubted or considered as frivolous.

Internally, the Desk officers cognitively weigh and challenge these two dominant schemas on the nature of domestic violence continuously in their everyday interactions with victim/survivors. For instance, they have to confront the dissonance caused by their official roles as welfare officers—which emphasize that Desk officers should merely set the process of VAW interventions in motion and not attempt to counsel the victim/survivors in any way—with the daily reality of facing severely abused women who need the necessary nudge to separate from their violent partners. One of the ways in which this schema is resolved is by speaking from personal experiences of victimization (see the side discussions of fig. 4), exemplified in stories such as "hindi uubra sa akin yan … iniwan ko ang asawa ko" (that will not work with me … I left my husband) and "yung nanay ko pinakulam yung kabit ng asawa ko" (my mother had my father's mistress hexed), thereby distancing themselves from their professional roles.

Conclusion

The barangay VAW Desk officers play a critical role in preventing domestic violence, providing victim/survivors with initial interventions and referring them to the State mechanisms for appropriate care. Thus, interrogating their worldviews, or schemas, is important for women's human rights advocates, so that information and training gaps can be provided with their participation.

The author believes that the dominant schema of heteronormativity and visibility of domestic abuse are interconnected, constantly interacting and feeding into each other. On the other hand, the schemas are also agentic: they are shaped and re-shaped, and eventually challenged, by the Desk officers in their daily lives. The idea is that people often draw on deep-seated knowledge about women and the nature of violence when dealing

with specific situations; such knowledge, i.e. the dominant discourse, can be contested in daily situations and face to face interactions in the form of oppositional or counter-schemas.

Several methodological insights can be gleaned from this study. Creative methods, such as art activities and sharing of experiences, can be utilized to elicit gender schemas, especially when combined with other qualitative methods. Because the participants did not use their drawings as expression and storytelling in isolation, researchers also need to look at the entire ecology of images they construct: the annotations, the micro-stories, i.e., names, titles, captions and short narratives, and verbal modes, i.e., sharing their work, discussing and debating their points with others.

This research attempts to illustrate the power of gender schemas in domestic violence, by linking the ways people think about abuse, and how they act on what they know. In the case of the VAW Desk officers, this has significant implications in the way that they communicate and behave towards victim/survivors, and how they talk about, respond to, allocate resources for, and offer services for survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence.

On a practical level, the insights yielded by this study can lead to exploring how training modules for Desk officers can integrate a gender schema lens to determine their dominant views on victimology, with a focus on identifying and countering schemas that perpetuate harmful stereotypes of VAW victim/survivors.

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