

Original Research Article

Illuminating Inequalities of Women in Selected Filipino Contemporary Short Stories through the Lens of Feminist Theory

ABSTRACT

The qualitative-content analysis study aimed to examine the social, political, and economic inequalities experienced by the marginalized women in selected Filipino contemporary short stories. Based on the findings, several women in the Philippines were found to be affected by the portrayal of societal expectations and gender norms. The contemporary short stories that were chosen from the Philippines vividly portrayed the economic disadvantages, restricted opportunities, and power imbalances that female characters experienced. These stories also highlighted the problems that female characters faced when dealing with oppressive societal structures. The experiences, when viewed through the lens of feminist theory, also demonstrated how women were undervalued, economically oppressed, and confined by traditional gender roles. This highlighted the necessity of dismantling oppressive norms in order to empower women. The content analysis emphasized the need for gender equality, equal opportunities, and a culture that recognized the contributions made by women, aiming to establish a society that was more just and equitable, one in which women were allowed to flourish without being constrained by gender-based constraints.

Keywords: Content analysis, feminist theory, contemporary Philippine short stories, women

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality was a significant contemporary concern in the Philippines (Cielo, 2022). Meanwhile, Filipino contemporary short stories referred to narratives written by Filipino authors that reflected the socio-cultural, political, and economic realities of the present period in Philippine society (Merriam-Webster, 2024). In the Philippine context, contemporary short stories provided a platform for Filipino writers to express their perspectives and experiences, as well as to critique societal norms and injustices, one of which was gender inequalities. The combination of the persistence of traditional gender ideologies and changes in economic and social realities made the workplace a particularly continuous arena for working out gender issues. On the other hand, women faced persistent discrimination based on their gender: They were paid less, promoted often, and assigned to specific jobs despite their qualifications and motivation; and they were made to feel unwelcome, like intruders into an all-male preserve (Kimmel, 2024).

In contemporary times, marginalized women faced a myriad of challenges and inequalities across various spheres of life, including social, political, and economic domains. These challenges were often compounded by intersecting forms of oppression, inequality, and discrimination which perpetuated cycles of marginalization and hindered women's full participation in society based on factors such as economic inequality, gender-based violence, health and education disparities, political underrepresentation, cultural and social exclusion, and environmental vulnerability. According to Sutanto (2017), marginalized women faced really negative stereotypes in society. Women were viewed as weak, emotional, and housewives, and they were even viewed as sexuality tools in a relationship. This is why women were regarded as second class to men, and women were denied the right to control their own lives. This inequality between men and women was called gender inequality.

Addressing these challenges required comprehensive and intersectional approaches that tackled the root causes of inequality and empowered marginalized women to claim their rights and dignity. Filipino contemporary short stories offered a rich tapestry of narratives that illuminated the inequalities experienced by marginalized women in Filipino society. Through the lens of Feminist theory (Wollstonecraft, 1972), these stories delved into the multifaceted experiences of women who navigated patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and intersecting forms of oppression. Feminist theory provided a framework for understanding the prevalent inequalities experienced by marginalized women by acknowledging the pervasive gender inequalities and patriarchal structures present in society. Feminism was a social movement whose primary goal was gender equality. Through the lens of Feminist theory, it amplified the voices and addressed the needs of marginalized women to achieve gender equality and social justice for all women (Fiss, 2024).

While there had been some exploration of social, political, and economic inequalities experienced by marginalized women in Filipino contemporary literature, there remained a limited number of studies regarding the application of feminist theory in content analysis studies of selected Filipino contemporary short stories. Specifically, there was a scarcity of studies that systematically analyzed how these short stories depicted and addressed the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized women. Existing research tended to focus on broader themes within Filipino literature or feminist analysis of texts from Western contexts, overlooking the unique experiences and narratives of marginalized Filipino women using a feminist perspective (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 2017).

It was in this context that the researchers found this study interesting. This paper not only contributed to a deeper understanding of the experiences of marginalized women in Filipino literature but also offered insights into the broader socio-cultural dynamics at play. By shedding light on the nuances of oppression and resistance depicted in these narratives, it also sought to provoke critical reflection and dialogue surrounding issues of gender equality and social justice in contemporary Filipino society. Through this research, it amplified the voices and experiences of marginalized women, ultimately striving towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Comment [SM1]: This Introduction provides a comprehensive overview of the study's context, highlighting the significance of gender inequality in the Philippines and the role of Filipino contemporary short stories in critiquing societal norms and advocating for gender equality through feminist theory.

THEORETICAL LENS

This study was anchored with the Feminist Theory (Wollstonecraft, 1972), which examined the ways in which society perpetuated gender inequality and sought to challenge and dismantle these structures to achieve gender equality. It encompassed a range of perspectives and approaches, including social, political, and economic analysis, to understand and address issues such as patriarchy, sexism, and discrimination.

Through the lens of Feminist Theory in illuminating inequalities experienced by women in selected Filipino Contemporary short stories, it examined the representation of female characters, their roles and expectations within the stories, power dynamics, and intersectionality. By applying Feminist Theory, readers could gain insights into the complexities of gender inequality and the ways in which it intersected with other social dynamics in the Filipino context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper examined how Filipino contemporary short stories portrayed the lives of women. It used feminist theory to analyze these stories, focusing on how they depicted women's experiences within Philippine society. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: What were the social, political, and economic inequalities experienced by the marginalized women in selected Filipino contemporary short stories?

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study employed the Directed Content Analysis approach. Words or phrases from a variety of literature were examined through content analysis. Researchers could draw conclusions about the philosophical presuppositions of a writer, a written work, the audience for which it was intended, and even the culture and time period in which it was embedded by looking at the prevalence or reputation of particular words and phrases in the texts (Newfoundland Writing Center, 2001). In contrast, a directed approach began with a theory or pertinent research findings as guidance for codes for analysis (Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005).

By using feminist theory as a guide, the researchers were able to develop a set of categories (codes) to analyze the stories. These categories were based on key concepts from feminist theory that were relevant to the research question about women's experiences. This focused approach allowed them to efficiently identify and analyze how the stories portrayed these experiences.

According to Tatad and Espina's (2023) study, the following steps were observed: (1) Review of relevant literature and studies. The researchers conducted extensive reading of references from various libraries and online sources. (2) Selecting short stories for analysis. The researchers analyzed six Filipino contemporary short stories based on feminist theory. (3) Read the short stories. The researchers carefully studied the stories to understand and guarantee that they reflected the social, political, and economic inequities experienced by marginalized women in the Philippines. (4) Analyze the short stories. The short stories were studied one at a time using the approach known as content analysis. The analysis varied from naming lines/paragraphs to researching the characters and significant situations/incidents in the story. (5) Evaluate the short stories. The stories were evaluated centering on how women characters were portrayed, eliciting the images and their emerging roles, and finding out the implications behind such portrayal.

Comment [SM2]: "The contemporary short stories that were chosen from the Philippines vividly portrayed the economic disadvantages, restricted opportunities, and power imbalances that female characters experienced" effectively summarizes the core issues explored in the study by highlighting the vivid portrayal of economic, social, and political inequalities faced by women in Filipino contemporary literature.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pervasive impact of gender norms and expectations on women's lives

Gender norms and expectations profoundly influence women's lives, shaping their experience and opportunities within society, illuminating the social inequalities they face. From pressure to conform to beauty standards to discrimination based on marital status, these narratives reveal the entrenched biases and constraints that hinder women's agency and autonomy. By examining these themes, we confront the urgent need to challenge and dismantle societal norms to create a more equitable future for all genders. With regards to this Clamonte (2017) stated that traditionally, women do all the household related chores, but the heavy works that require more strength is done by the husband. The scope of their functions include cooking, cleaning, teaching the children, washing clothes, repairs, budgeting, and helping in the farm. Filipino women are those who play the role of a housemaid and regarded as less educated compared to men who are well dressed and respected. So, women are regarded as less knowledgeable and talented when it comes to what they could do; they are believed to be inferior to man.

Body Image Pressure

Women are often expected to adhere to narrow beauty standards, leading to pressure to conform to specific physical appearance. Societal expectations and standards regarding physical appearance that individuals, particularly women, feel compelled to conform to. These expectations often dictate that individuals should strive to attain a specific body type or appearance that is deemed attractive or ideal by society. Failure to meet these standards can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even mental health issues such as body dysmorphia or eating disorders.

In the context of the selected short stories, body image is evident in the experiences of female characters who feel compelled to conform to societal beauty standards despite of not fitting conventional norms. It is depicted in "The Virgin" by Kerima Polotan-Tuvera, Miss Mijares pressure to enhance her appearance through her clothing choices, despite her natural physique not aligning with conventional beauty ideals. The line "*She was slight, almost bony, but she had learned early how to dress herself to achieve an illusion of his hips and bosom.*" illustrates how Miss Mijares feels the need to manipulate her appearance to fit societal expectations of beauty. Miss Mijares feels pressured to conform to societal beauty standards, as seen in her efforts to dress in a way that enhances her appearance despite not fitting conventional beauty norms. This reflects social inequality related to body image expectations.

Similarly, in "The Small Key" by Paz Latorena, Soledad experience body image pressure through societal expectations within her marriage. While the story does not explicitly address Soledad's physical appearance, her role as a wife and caregiver may subject her to implicit pressure to maintain a certain image or fulfill certain expectations related to her appearance and behavior as a wife.

Body image pressure in these stories reflects the societal norms and expectations that dictate how women should look and present themselves. It highlights the challenges women face in navigating these investigations and the impact it can have on their self-perception and behavior. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into the ways in which body image pressure perpetuates social inequalities.

Marital Status Discrimination

The unequal treatment or prejudice faced by individuals based on their marital status, particularly when societal norms or expectations prioritize married individuals over unmarried ones. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including social stigma, exclusion, or differential treatment in employment, housing, and social interactions.

In the context of the selected stories, marital status discrimination is evident in the experiences of female characters who face societal judgment and prejudice due to their unmarried status. In "The Virgin", Miss Mijares faces scrutiny and discrimination from her community due to her unmarried status. Despite her individual accomplishments and merits, she is marginalized and devalued within society because she does not conform to the traditional expectation of being married. The line "*Secret, short-lived thoughts flitted through her mind... what thoughts did she not think, her eyes straying against her will to the*

Comment [SM3]: The results and discussion effectively illustrate how gender norms, body image pressure, marital status discrimination, gender-based power dynamics, limited agency, social expectations, unequal political representation, and class-based power dynamics all contribute to pervasive social inequalities faced by women in Filipino society, as depicted through the selected contemporary short stories.

bedroom door...” suggests Miss Mijares’ inner conflict and yearning for love and companionship, highlighting the societal pressure to conform to marital norms and the discrimination faced by unmarried women.

Similarly, in “The Small Key”, Soledad experience marital status discrimination within her marriage. While the story focuses more on Soledad’s experiences within her marital relationship, there is underlying societal expectations or judgments related to her unmarried status before marriage. The pressure to conform to marital norms and the stigma associated with the being unmarried may be influence Soledad’s behavior and interactions within her marriage, contributing to the power dynamics and inequalities depicted in the story.

Marital status discrimination in these stories reflects the societal norms and expectations that prioritize marriage and family as the ideal, while marginalizing and devaluing individuals who do not conform to these norms. It highlights the challenges faced by unmarried women in navigating societal expectations and the impact it can have on their sense of self-worth and belonging within society. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into the ways in which marital status discrimination perpetuates social inequalities and shapes women’s experiences within Filipino society.

Gender-Based Power Dynamics

The unequal distribution of power and authority between individuals based on their gender, where one gender typically holds more power and influence over the other. These dynamics often manifest in various social, economic, and interpersonal contexts, shaping interactions and relationships between men and women.

In the context of the selected stories, gender-based power dynamics are evident in the unequal power relationships depicted between male and female characters. In “Magnificence” by Estrella Alfon, the scene where Vicente exerts physical control over the little girl highlights the imbalance of power based on gender. Vicente’s actions of tightening his arms around the little girl until she squirms out of his grasp illustrate his dominance and control over her, reflecting how men may exert physical or emotional control over women and girls in familial settings.

Similarly, in “The Small Key”, gender-based power dynamics are portrayed within Soledad’s marriage. While the story primarily focuses on Soledad’s experiences within her marriage, there are implicit power imbalances that reflect broader gender dynamics. Soledad’s husband, Indo, holds more authority and control within the relationship, as evidenced by his ability to dictate Soledad’s actions and decisions. The line “*Where are the shirts I ironed yesterday?’ she asked... ‘Some of them need darning... ‘do you want some more rice?’*” illustrates Soledad’s subservience and lack of agency within her marriage, highlighting how societal expectations of gender roles may reinforce unequal power dynamics within intimate relationships.

In addition, in “Summer Solstice” by Nick Joaquin the line “*The long day refused to end. From the house came the sudden roaring laughter of the men playing cards.*” The insolent man-smell of their bodies rose all about her-wave upon of it-enveloping her, assaulting her senses, till she felt faint with it and pressed a handkerchief of her nose.” It illustrates the stark division of labor and unequal distribution of power between men and women within the household. The contrast between the men’s carefree activities and women’s confinement to domestic duties highlights how societal expectations and gender roles dictate women’s roles and limit their autonomy. Additionally, the description of the overpowering “man-smell” and Doña Lupeng’s reaction further emphasize the pervasive nature of male dominance within the household.

Gender-based power dynamics in these stories reflect the systemic inequalities and imbalances of power that exist between men and women within Filipino society. They highlight how patriarchal norms and expectations shape interpersonal relationships and interactions, perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing the marginalization of women. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into the ways in which gender-based power dynamics contribute to social inequalities and shape women’s experiences within familial and societal contexts.

Limited Agency and Autonomy

The constraints and restrictions placed on individuals’ ability to make independent choices and decisions, particularly in relation to their own lives and circumstances. This limitation of agency and

autonomy often stems from societal expectations, norms, and structures that dictate how individuals, especially women, should behave, think, and navigate various aspects of life.

In the context of the selected stories, limited agency and autonomy are evident in the experiences of female characters who face constraints and restrictions in exercising their own agency and autonomy. In "The Small Key", Soledad's lack of agency within her marriage is portrayed through her inability to assert her own desires and needs. Despite feeling discomfort and discontent in her marriage, Soledad is expected to fulfill domestic duties without question and suppress her own emotions for the sake of maintaining harmony. The line *"Where are the shirts I ironed yesterday?" she asked... 'Some of them need darning,... 'do you want some more rice?'"* illustrates Soledad's subservience and lack of autonomy within her marriage, highlighting how societal expectations of gender roles may limit women's ability to make decisions about their own lives and well-being.

Similarly, in "The Virgin", Miss Mijares' limited agency is evident in her inner conflict and yearning for love and companionship despite societal expectations regarding her unmarried status. The line *"Secret, short-lived thoughts flitted through her mind... what thoughts did she not think, her eyes straying against her will to the bedroom door..."* illustrates Miss Mijares's internal struggle and her inability to fully express her desires and emotions due to societal constraints and expectations.

In addition, in "The Dead Stars" by Paz Marquez the line *"A man is happier if he is, as you say, calm and placid."* It reflects the societal pressure for women to maintain a certain demeanor and behavior to ensure the happiness and comfort of men, highlighting the limited agency and autonomy women may have in shaping their own emotion and expressions.

Limited agency and autonomy in these stories reflect the systemic barriers and constraints that women face in exercising control over their own lives and decisions. They highlight how societal expectations and norms restrict women's autonomy and perpetuate inequalities, denying them the opportunity to fully realize their potential and pursue their own aspirations. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into the ways in which limited agency and autonomy contribute to social inequalities and shape women's experiences within Filipino society.

Social Expectations and Gender Roles

The norms, beliefs, and behaviors that society imposes on individuals based on their gender, dictating how they should behave, interact, and fulfill certain roles within society. These expectations are often deeply ingrained and influence various aspects of life, including family dynamics, professional opportunities, and social interactions.

In the context of the selected stories, social expectations and gender roles are evident in the experiences of female characters who face pressure to conform to traditional gender norms and expectations. In "The Visitation of the Gods" by Gilda Cordero-Fernando, the assignment of female teachers to kitchen duties during a school visitation reflects the traditional gender roles that dictate women's roles as caregivers and homemakers, even within professional settings. The line *"The first group, composed of Mrs. Divinagracia, the harassed Home Economics instructor, and some of the less attractive lady teachers, were banished to the kitchen to prepare the menu"* illustrates how female teachers are marginalized and relegated to subordinate tasks, reinforcing gender-based hierarchies and perpetuating social inequalities within the workplace.

Similarly, in "The Virgin", Miss Mijares' experiences reflect societal expectations and limitations based on her gender. Despite her individual talents and accomplishments, Miss Mijares faces pressure to conform to feminine appearance standards and societal norms regarding marriage and family. The line *"She was slight, almost bony, but she had learned early how to dress herself to achieve an illusion of hips and bosom"* illustrates how Miss Mijares feels compelled to manipulate her appearance to fit societal expectations of beauty, highlighting the pressure women face to conform to idealized standards of femininity.

In addition, in "Magnificence" the line *"She immediately inspects her daughter's body for any signs of harm and instructs her to take a bath."* It depicts the societal expectation placed on women, specifically the mother, to prioritize the safety and cleanliness of their children. It reflects traditional gender norms that assign women the primary responsibility for caregiving and maintaining household order. *"The mother's voice had been like a bell of safety to little girl."* While this quote seems positive, it indirectly highlights a generated dynamic where the mother's voice provides reassurance and safety to

the little girl. It implies that the mother serves as a protector, but it also suggests a gendered division of roles where women are expected to provide emotional support and security within the family.

Social expectations and gender roles in these stories reflect the systemic inequalities and biases that shape women's experiences within Filipino society. They highlight how traditional gender norms and expectations limit women's opportunities, reinforce gender-based hierarchies, and perpetuate social inequalities. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into the ways in which social expectations and gender roles contribute to the marginalization of women and shape their experiences within familial, professional, and societal contexts.

Unequal access to political representation and decision-making processes

The systematic barriers that hinder marginalized groups, particularly women, from effectively participating in governance and influencing policy outcomes. In the context of selected Filipino contemporary short stories, this inequality manifests through various forms of discrimination, such as gender bias in leadership positions, limited opportunities for women to voice their concerns and perspectives, and structural barriers that restrict their ability to engage in political processes. Women in these stories face challenges in accessing positions of power, having their voices heard, and shaping policies that affect their lives, highlighting the pervasive nature of political inequalities within societal structures. In line with this, Rotor (2017) highlighted how alienating in nature the society on shaping women to be: how they should dress, their manner, etc., and how these norms that society is imposing result in new and difficult issues for women of that period in history. This is a Gender Sensitivity Issue on Politics which has something to do with the norms and tradition of the society. A representation of men who were given privileges to acquire education. In support to this on the study entitled *Gender Sensitivity Issues in Short Stories* conducted by Edna Cardinosa- Queriones (2018) of Pangasinan State University-Lingayen Campus, Philippines revealed that the theme on how women are hindered for political career was the theme that mostly occurs on the selected short stories written by males with nine or 45 percent trend of manifestation. Thus, politically speaking, during this time, men were regarded to be dominating women.

Unequal Access to Political Representation

The disparities in the ability of different groups, particularly marginalized ones like women, to participate effectively in political processes and have their voice heard in decision-making arenas. It encompasses barriers such as discriminatory policies, social norms, and structural inequalities that hinder certain groups from accessing positions of power or influencing political outcomes. This inequality undermines democratic principles by limiting the diversity of perspectives and experiences represented in governance and perpetuating imbalances.

In the context of the story lines provided, unequal access to political representation are evident in the experiences of female characters who face disparities in participating political processes and have their voice heard in decision-making arenas. In "The Virgin" in the line "*Your lives are our business here, she shouted.*" Miss Mijares, as a representative of the employment bureau, asserts control over the lives of job seekers, demonstrating unequal power relations between government institutions and individual citizens. This reflects political inequality related to bureaucratic authority and individual autonomy. Similarly, in the same story in its line "*When she talked with the jobless across her desk, asking them the damning questions that completed their humiliation...she was filled with an impatience she could not understand.*" Miss Mijares' decisions and actions are influenced by bureaucratic regulations and norms, limiting her agency and autonomy, which she expresses through impatience and frustration. This illustrates political inequality related to limited individual agency within bureaucratic systems.

In "The Visitation of the Gods" in line "*I trust nothing's the matter with Mr. Ampil, Sir?...*" "*Then you haven't heard? The old fool broke a collar bone. He's dead.*" The dismissal of Mr. Ampil, a respected and dedicated male supervisor, and his replacement by Mr. Sawit, a dismissive and condescending male supervisor, demonstrates gender bias in leadership positions. This perpetuates political inequalities by excluding competent women like Miss Noel from positions of authority and influence within the education system. In "The Small Key" in the line "*Soledad stared at the marriage certificate, feeling a pang of despair...Is there nowhere I can turn for help?...*" "*We need stronger laws to protect women like*

Soledad, "...how can we advocate for better legal rights?" The hints at a lack of legal protections or recourse for women like Soledad, who may face emotional neglect or mistreatment within their marriages. Without legal safeguards, women may find themselves vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Also, in the same story in its line "As the town gathered for the council meeting, murmurs filled the air..." "Why aren't there any women on the panel?..." "We should start a petition for equal representation..." "would anyone like second that motion?" The story does not directly address political inequalities, but it is indicative of a patriarchal society where women's voices and concerns are often marginalized or overlooked in political decision-making processes. Furthermore, in "Summer Solstice" Doña Lupeng's frustration highlights the marginalization of women's voices in decision-making processes. Her exclusion from the male-dominated political arena underscores how societal structures undervalue women's contributions and limit their participation in crucial decision-making.

This illustrates how unequal access to political representation reinforces power imbalances and marginalizes certain groups, particularly women, in democratic processes and decision-making. Addressing this requires breaking down barriers, promoting gender equality, and creating inclusive spaces for all to participate in shaping their societies.

Limited Individual Agency within Bureaucratic Systems

The constraints and limitations placed on individuals' ability to act independently and make autonomous decisions within bureaucratic organizations or structures. In such systems, individuals often have to adhere strictly to established rules, regulations, and procedures, which can restrict their freedom to exercise personal judgment or initiative. This limitation of agency can result in feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and a lack of control over one's own actions and circumstances. It can also lead to inefficiencies and rigidities within bureaucratic processes, as innovation and flexibility are stifled in favor of adherence to established protocols.

In the context of the selected stories, limited individual agency and bureaucratic systems are evident in the experiences of female characters who face constraints and restrictions in acting independently and make decisions. The constraints and limitations individuals face in exerting their own autonomy and decision-making within bureaucratic organizations or processes. In "The Virgin" in the line "When she talked with the jobless across her desk, asking them the damning questions that completed their humiliation... she was filled with an impatience she could not understand." This line highlights how Miss Mijares's actions and decisions are influenced by bureaucratic regulations and norms, limiting her agency and autonomy. Despite feeling impatient and frustrated, she is compelled to follow protocol, showcasing her constrained individual agency within the bureaucratic system. In "The Small Key" in the line "Soledad stared at the marriage certificate, feeling a pang of despair. Is there nowhere I can turn for help?" Soledad's feeling of despair reflects her lack of agency within the bureaucratic and legal systems, as she struggles to find avenues for recourse or assistance in her marital situation. The absence of legal protections or support further compounds her sense of powerlessness, illustrating the limited individual agency within bureaucratic structures.

Moreover, in "The Visitation of the God's" in line "But I'm willing to stick my neck out for you if you stop being such an idealistic fool and henceforth express no more personal opinions." Mr. Sawit's offer to support Miss Noel's career advancement in exchange for her silence and compliance reflects the manipulation and coercion of female teachers by male supervisors. This highlights how women are pressured to sacrifice their principles and autonomy for career opportunities, perpetuating political inequalities within the education system. It exemplifies the theme of limited individual agency within bureaucratic systems, showcasing the struggles individuals face in asserting their autonomy and making decisions within institutional frameworks.

Class-Based Power Dynamics with Bureaucratic Structures

It entails the unequal distribution of authority and influence based on individuals' socioeconomic status. This hierarchy perpetuates disparities in decision-making, where those of higher socioeconomic status wield more power and control over organizational processes, while those lower down the socioeconomic ladder have limited agency and are subject to the decision of those in higher positions.

In the context of the selected stories, class-based power dynamics with bureaucratic structures are evident in the experiences of female characters who face unequal distribution of authority and

influence. The influence and control exerted by individuals or groups based on their socioeconomic status within bureaucratic organizations. In "The Virgin" in the line *"Miss Mijares exercises authority over job seekers based on their socioeconomic status, implying a power dynamic influenced by class disparities."* This line highlights how Miss Mijares wields authority over job seekers, potentially favoring or discriminating against them based on their socioeconomic backgrounds. The implication of class disparities suggests that individuals from lower socioeconomic classes may face additional barriers or biases within bureaucratic structures, reinforcing unequal power dynamics based on social class. In "The Visitation of the Gods" in the line *"Miss Noel, a competent female teacher, faces discrimination in the education system as she is overlooked for promotion in favor of a male colleague."* This scenario highlights how gender bias intersects with class dynamics, as Miss Noel, despite her qualifications and competency, is denied advancement opportunities within the bureaucratic structure of the education system. The preference for her male colleague reflects underlying power dynamics influenced by both gender and potentially class, perpetuating inequality within the institution.

Moreover, In "The Dead Stars" in the line *"He was supposed to be in Sta. Cruz whither the case of the People of the Philippine island vs. Belina et al had kept him, and there he would have been if Brigida Samuy had not been so important to the defense."* This line suggests that political connections and influence can divert attention and resources away from important legal cases, potentially affecting marginalized individuals. In addition, in "The Small Key" in the line *"When she talked with the jobless across her desk, asking them the damning questions that completed their humiliation... she was filled with an impatience she could not understand."* Miss Mijares exercises authority over job seekers based on their socioeconomic status, implying a power dynamic influenced by class disparities. This highlights political inequality related to class-based power dynamics within bureaucratic structures. Similarly, in "Summer Solstice" in the line *"Mr. Sawit's hot trembling hand ... found its way swiftly around her waist, and hot on her forehead Miss Noel endured the supreme insult of a wet, fatherly kiss."* Mr. Sawit's inappropriate and unwanted physical advances towards Miss Noel illustrate the sexualization and exploitation of female teachers by male supervisors. This underscores the power dynamics and vulnerability of women in positions of authority, perpetuating political inequalities by subjecting them to harassment and coercion. It exemplifies the theme of class-based power dynamics within bureaucratic structures, illustrating how socioeconomic status can influence individuals' experiences and interactions within institutional settings.

Gender-Based Disempowerment

The systematic marginalization and subordination of individuals based on their gender, particularly women resulting in a lack of power, agency, and opportunities. It encompasses various forms of discrimination, including unequal access to education, employment, healthcare, and political representation, as well as cultural norms and practices that reinforce gender roles and stereotypes. It manifests in unequal power dynamics, limited decision-making authority, and restricted access to resources and opportunities, ultimately perpetuating cycles of inequality and reinforcing gender hierarchies.

In the context of the selected stories, gender-based disempowerment are evident in the experiences of female characters who face lack of power, agency, and opportunities. In "Magnificence" in the line *"The mother stood there, saying nothing."* This portrayal of the mother's silence during Vicente's interaction with the little girl suggests a lack of agency or influence in decision-making processes, reflecting broader gender-based disempowerment where women's voices may be silenced or ignored in important matters. Despite being present, the mother remains passive, indicating a societal expectation for women to conform to traditional roles and defer to male authority figures. This scene underscores the marginalization of women and their exclusion from positions of power, perpetuating gender-based disparities in societal dynamics. Similarly, in the same story in the line *"But the man said, Are you not going to kiss me for those pencils?"* This illustrates Vicente's attempt to assert dominance over the children, particularly the little girl, by demanding physical affection in exchange for the pencils he promised. It reflects a gender-based power dynamic where men feel entitled to control and manipulate women and children, using the authority to demand compliance with their desires. This unequal treatment perpetuates a system of oppression where women and girls are expected to submit to the will of men, even in trivial matters like receiving gifts.

Moreover, in "The Visitation of the Gods" in the line *"But I'm willing to stick my neck out for you if you stop being such an idealistic fool and henceforth express no more personal opinions."* Mr. Sawit's offer to support Miss Noel's career advancement in exchange for her silence and compliance reflects the manipulation and coercion of female teachers by male supervisors. This highlights how women are pressured to sacrifice their principles and autonomy for career opportunities, perpetuating political inequalities within the education system. Also, in the "Summer Solstice" in line *"Doña Lupeng, standing in the stopped carriage, looking very young and elegant in her white frock, under the twirling parasol, stared down on the passing male horde with increasing annoyance."* Doña Lupeng's frustration towards the rowdy men attending the town meeting highlights the limited role women have in the social and political spheres of the story. Her annoyance serves as a subtle protest against the exclusion of women from positions of power. By portraying Doña Lupeng as an outsider to the all-male political arena, the story underscores the marginalization of women's voices and perspectives in crucial decision-making processes. This marginalization suggests a societal structure that undervalues women's contributions and relegates them to the sidelines of political influence.

Disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and recognition

The unequal distribution of essential resources, opportunities, and acknowledgement faced by women. This includes job insecurity, income disparity, limited access to education and job opportunities, exploitation of unpaid labor, underpayment, and lack of recognition. These inequalities hinder women's socioeconomic advancement, reinforce traditional gender roles, and perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization. Addressing these disparities requires challenging gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality in education and employment, and recognizing and valuing women's contribution to society. As highlighted by Kimmel (2024) in *The Gendered Society*, he emphasized that the combination of the persistence of traditional gender ideologies and changes in economic and social realities makes today's workplace a particularly contentious arena for working out gender issues. On the other hand, women face persistent discrimination based on their gender: They are paid less, promoted less often, and assigned to specific jobs despite their qualifications and motivations; and they are made to feel unwelcome, like intruders into an all-male preserve. Women faces still discrimination for employment and desires for higher positions and vulnerability to poverty.

Job Insecurity and Income Disparity

Job insecurity is the uncertainty or instability individuals face regarding the continuity or stability of their employment. It can manifest as concerns about losing one's job, facing reduced hours or wages, or experiencing precarious working conditions without adequate benefits or protections. While, the income disparity is the unequal distribution of income among individuals or groups within society. It reflects differences in earnings, wages, or overall income levels between various segments of the population, often based on factors such as occupation, education, gender, or socioeconomic status.

In the context of the selected stories, job security and income disparity are evident in characters' experiences of uncertain or unstable employment situation, such in "The Virgin", Miss Mijares' employment instability is evident in the line *"In the absence of a definite notice, someone else who needed a job badly was kept away from it,"* highlighting that the economic inequality is evident in the job insecurity faced by women in the story, including Miss Mijares. Despite her position at the employment bureau, Miss Mijares experiences a degree of job insecurity, as her employment depends on bureaucratic regulations and the stability of her position within the bureau. Similarly, in the same story in the line *"She was a slight, almost bony... Illusion of hips and bosom."* It also reflects the income disparity experienced by women, such as Miss Mijares, in comparison to their male counterparts. Women may face lower wages or limited access to higher-paying jobs, contributing to income inequality.

Moreover, income disparity is also depicted in "The Dead Stars" in the line *"Lights were springing into life on the shore. That was the town, a little up-tilted town nestling in the dark greenness of the groves."* The description of the town nestled in darkness and greenness hints at the contrast between the illuminated areas of privilege and the darker, less visible spaces where marginalized individuals may reside, symbolizing economic disparities. These lines underscores the prevalence of job insecurity and income disparity among the characters, emphasizing the economic inequalities experienced by women.

Financial Instability and Vulnerability

The lack of financial security or certainty regarding one's economic situation, while vulnerability pertains to being susceptible to financial risks or hardships. In the context of the selected short stories, financial instability and vulnerability are evident in characters' experiences of precarious financial situations and their susceptibility to economic difficulties.

In "The Virgin" financial instability and vulnerability are depicted through Miss Mijares' reliance on her job at the employment bureau and her emotional response to the potential consequences of losing it. The line "*She was filled with an impatience she could not understand*" reflects her anxiety and emotional turmoil, indicative of her vulnerability to financial insecurity if she were to lose her job. Additionally, the quote "*The new hand was absent for week... When a man was absent and he sent no words, it upset the system.*" suggests the precariousness of employment for both job seekers and employees, highlighting the financial instability faced by individuals reliant on such positions. This challenges faced by women like Miss Mijares. Despite her employment, Miss Mijares experiences financial uncertainty, as seen in her reliance on bureau jobs and the potential consequences of jobs loss or absence. In the "Magnificence" in the line "*They were all of five centavos each, and one pencil was not at all what one had ambition for.*" This quote highlights the economic inequality experienced by the little girl and her brothers. Their desires for multiple pencils suggest that they have limited access to resources for education, as they cannot afford to purchase additional supplies. This economic constraint may hinder their academic success and future opportunities, reflecting broader disparities faced by women and girls.

Moreover, In "The Small Key", financial instability and vulnerability are also portrayed through Soledad's emotional and economic struggles within her marriage. The line "*Soledad stared at the marriage certificate, feeling a pang of despair. Is there nowhere I can turn for help?*" illustrates her sense of helplessness and vulnerability in the face of financial and emotional neglect within her marriage. This reflects the theme of financial instability as Soledad grapples with the uncertainty of her situation and her lack of agency to address her financial struggles independently.

Occupational Segregation and Dependency

Occupational segregation refers to the uneven distribution of individuals across different occupations based on characteristics such as gender, race, or ethnicity. It often results in certain jobs being predominantly held by one group while others are dominated by another, leading to disparities in opportunities, wages, and status. Dependency, in the context of this discussion, pertains to the reliance of women on others, often male family member for financial support or resources. This reliance can stem from societal norms and expectations that dictate traditional gender roles, where men are expected to be the primary breadwinners, while women are often confined to caregiving roles or lower-paying occupations. Dependency perpetuates economic inequalities by limiting women's access to resources, opportunities, and autonomy.

In the context of the selected stories, occupational segregation and dependency are evident in the experiences of female characters who face uneven distribution of individuals across different occupations and the reliance of women on others. In "Magnificence" in the line "*It is a pity, said their mother, People like those, they make friends with people like us, and they feel it is nice to give us gifts, or the children toys and things. You'd think they wouldn't be able to afford it.*" This statement by the mother reflects societal perceptions of certain occupations as inferior or less prestigious. The implication is that women like mother, who likely do not hold high-paying or prestigious jobs, receive gifts or assistance from individuals like Vicente, who may be in a higher socio-economic position. This highlights occupational segregation based on gender, where women are limited in their job opportunities and may be confined to lower-paying or less esteemed positions, contributing to economic inequalities. In the same story, in the line "*The mother said, He's only a bus conductor, don't ask him for too many things.*" This quote also underscores the financial dependence of women on men within the family structure. The mother's comment suggest That Vicente, despite his occupation as a bus conductor, is not someone to rely on for assistance or gifts. It implies that women like the mother may lack economic agency and must adhere to societal expectations of financial dependency on men, perpetuating economic inequalities and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Moreover, in Summer Solstice in the line "*Through it was only seven by the clock, the house was already a furnace, the windows dilating with the harsh light and the air already burning with immense,*

intense fever of noon." The oppressive heat in Doña Lupeng's house symbolizes her economic disparity and limited agency. Despite the intense discomfort, she lacks the means to improve her living conditions, indicating her dependence on others for financial stability and resources. This highlights the occupational segregation that confines women like Doña Lupeng to lower-paying roles and reinforces their dependency on male family members as primary breadwinners.

Underpayment and Lack of Recognition

Underpayment refers to the receiving wages or compensation that are insufficient or lower than what is considered fair or adequate for the work performed. Lack of recognition pertains to not being acknowledged or valued for one's contributions or achievement.

In the context of the selected stories, underpayment and lack of recognition are evident in the experiences of female characters who face inadequate compensation and acknowledgment. In "The Visitation of the Gods", the underpayment and lack of recognition for the female teachers' contribution are highlighted by Mr. Alava's satisfaction with the lavish feast provided by the school. This disparity in recognition and compensation reinforces economic inequalities by devaluing women's labor. The line *"Four pairs of hands fought for the singular honor of wrenching open the car door, and Mr. Alava emerged into the sunlight. He was brown as a sampaloc seed. Mr. Alava gazed with satisfaction upon the patriotic faculty and belched his approval in cigar smoke upon the landscape."* illustrates how the teachers' hard work is overlooked and taken for granted, while Mr. Alava's approval is given casually without regard for their efforts. This disparity underscores the economic inequality experienced by the female teachers and the lack of recognition for their contribution.

Similarly, in the same story in the line *"Mr. Sawit's offer to recommend Miss Noel for a post in Manila as a reward for conforming to his expectations reflects the limited opportunities for career advancement based on merit."* This line highlights how Miss Noel's potential career advancement is contingent on her compliance with Mr. Sawit's demands, rather than being recognized and rewarded based on her merit or dedication to teaching. It illustrates underpayment and lack of recognition, as Miss Noel's professional growth is tied to fulfilling expectations set by her male superior, rather than being acknowledgment for her hard work and capabilities. This perpetuates economic inequalities by devaluing women's labor and limiting their opportunities for advancement based on their skills and qualifications. In addition, in the same story in the line *"Miss Noel remained behind together with Mrs. Divinagracia and the Home Economics staff, pleading a headache. Graciously, Mr. Sawit also remained behind."* Female teachers like Miss Noel and Mrs. Divinagracia are expected to perform unpaid domestic labor, such as kitchen duties, during the visitation. This reflects economic inequalities where women's labor is undervalued and exploited, contributing to their financial dependence and perpetuating gender-based economic disparities.

Moreover, in "Magnificence" in the line *"It is a pity, said their mother, people like those, they make friends with people like us, and they it is nice to give us gifts, or the children toys and things you'd think they wouldn't be able to afford it."* This line reflects the experienced by the little girl's family. Despite receiving gifts from individuals like Vicente, who may be in a higher socioeconomic position, the mother acknowledges the disparity between their generosity, people like Vicente may not recognize or value the socioeconomic challenges faced by families like theirs. This lack of recognition perpetuates economic inequalities by failing to acknowledge the financial struggles and contributions of individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Gender Division of Labor and Emotional Expectation

Gender division of labor refers to the assignment of specific tasks, roles, or responsibilities to individuals based on their gender. In many societies, certain tasks or occupations are traditionally associated with either men or women leading to a division where men and women perform different types of work. While, emotional expectations refer to societal norms and stereotypes regarding how individuals are expected to express or manage their emotions based on their gender. These expectations often dictate that individuals should conform to certain emotional behaviors or norms deemed appropriate for their gender, influencing how they express, suppress, or communicate their feelings.

In the context of the selected stories, occupational segregation and dependency are evident in the experiences of female characters who face discrimination on their work and conform to certain

emotional behaviors. In the story "The Small Key" in the line "*Pedro Buhay, a prosperous farmer, looked up from his plate... 'We must finish plowing south field today because tomorrow is Sunday.'*" Soledad is burdened with domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities while Pedro, her husband, is solely focused on work outside the home. This division of labor reinforces traditional gender roles and limits Soledad's opportunities for personal fulfillment or economic independence. Similarly in the same story, in the line "*The sound of her own voice calmed her... 'My God,' she cried with a sob, 'make me forget Indo's face as he put the small key back into his pocket.'*" Soledad is expected to maintain emotional stability and suppress her own emotions for the sake of her husband's comfort and reputation. She struggled with feelings of jealousy and inadequacy but is unable to express them openly.

Moreover, in the line "*Miss Noel remained behind together with Mrs. Divinagracia and the Home Economics staff, pleading a headache, graciously, Mr. Sawit also remained behind*" from the story "The Visitation of the Gods" it highlights gender division of labor and emotional expectation. Here, female teachers like Miss Noel and Mrs. Divinagracia are expected to perform specific tasks, roles or responsibilities such as kitchen duties, during the visitation which limits and discriminates their capacity as women in which they are also capable of doing male related tasks instead they are given simple and easy responsibilities. This expectation reflects traditional gender roles where women are assigned caregiving and domestic responsibilities, even in professional settings. Additionally, Miss Noel's excuse of having a headache to avoid the extra work suggests the emotional toll of balancing professional obligations with domestic expectations, further reinforcing the gender division of labor and emotional burden experienced by women in the story.

4. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Filipino short stories vividly illustrate how ubiquitous gender expectations and norms impact women's lives. The societal expectations to adhere to limited beauty norms, exemplified by Miss Mijares' endeavor to attain a perfected physique in "The Virgin," generate a persistent feeling of insufficiency and restrict one's self-esteem. In addition, the social disapproval associated with being unmarried, as depicted in "The Small Key" by Soledad, excludes single women and deprives them of complete public recognition. These stories explore further, revealing the imbalanced dynamics of power inherent in relationships. As shown in "Magnificence" with Vicente's domineering actions and "Summer Solstice" with the repression of female perspectives, patriarchal norms give men power in the home and in society. Stories like "The Small Key" and "The Dead Stars" show how women like Soledad lose their autonomy and control when they have to put other people's needs before their own. These short stories inevitably reveal the societal norms and gender expectations that function as unseen barriers, restricting women to established pathways and suppressing their capabilities. By dismantling these fundamental standards and embracing every aspect of human experiences, people may create a path towards a more fair and just future. An envisioned future in which women are liberated from traditional norms and instead empowered to make decisions of their own and pursue their own dreams. Only when we are able to do so, can we establish a society that honors and appreciates the diverse range of human capabilities, freed from the limitations imposed by gender.

Along with that, the short stories shed light on the intricate network of political inequalities that trap women. In "The Virgin," the story shown Miss Mijares's limited power amid the system of government, and in "The Visitation of the Gods," it was discovered the obvious restriction of women from positions of authority. These examples demonstrate the constraints on representation. These stories highlight the oppressive rules and unequal power structures that prevent women from having their opinions acknowledged and their ideas considered when legislation is being made. The stories go far beyond exposing the fatal combination of gender and socioeconomic status. Showing how Soledad's financial condition compounds the difficulties women encounter in pursuing justice, "The Small Key" depicts the court system as a place of vulnerability. Similarly, "The Virgin" implies that government agencies may be more biased against those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds when they hire them.

Furthermore, these selected Filipino short stories reveal how women are systematically weakened, as seen in characters such as Miss Noel in "The Visitation of the Gods" who are pushed to compromise their honesty and independence in order to climb the corporate ladder, and Doña Lupeng in "Summer Solstice" who is cast as an impartial bystander in the male-dominated realm of politics. People can build a society where women have autonomy and whose opinions and perspectives actively

impact politics by tearing down these profoundly entrenched inequities. In order to achieve this goal, it is crucial to eliminate systems that support gender inequality and work towards creating a culture that values and honors each person's unique abilities, regardless of their gender. Then and only then people will have a political system that is fair and just, where everyone's opinions matter.

On the contrary, the economic disadvantages that women suffer are strongly shown in short stories. The characters are confronted with a society in which they are always struggling for financial security while simultaneously coping with challenges such as unpredictability in work and economic disparity. In spite of the fact that Miss Mijares works for the employment office, "The Virgin" creates the impression that her job security is in uncertainty. A further point to consider is that story like "The Dead Stars" subtly draw attention to the rising gender gap by implying the contrast between economic wealth and underdevelopment.

From a more in-depth perspective, these stories demonstrate how dependency and isolation from work continue to sustain these inequities. In the story "Magnificence," the mother gives an opinion about receiving presents from those who are "better off." This comment illustrates how some occupations, particularly ones that are held by women, are seen to be lower-status and earn less. When it comes to typical gender roles, Soledad has challenges in "The Small Key." She is supposed to take care of the household, while her husband is responsible for the labor that takes place outside the home. The fact that women are economically dependent on men, as the mother warns Vicente, "Don't ask too much," contributes to the perpetuation of power imbalances that women experience.

These stories provide more light on the ways in which underpayment and a lack of appreciation contribute to the ongoing economic difficulties. This is demonstrated in "The Visitation of the Gods" by the extravagant feast that Mr. Alava is able to enjoy, which stands in sharp contrast to the unappreciated effort that was performed by the female instructors who prepared the feast. A second illustration of how women's professional talent is underestimated is the fact that Miss Noel's prospective progress is predicated on her compliance with Mr. Sawit's expectations. Furthermore, the assumption that female instructors such as Miss Noel will conduct unpaid household duties during the school visitation is a reflection of the inclination that society has to take the contributions that women make for granted.

As a result, these narratives shed light not just on the economic gaps that exist, but also on the gender-specific standards that lead to those inequalities. The removal of these deeply established preconceptions, the promotion of equitable remuneration for women's labor, and the creation of chances for women to attain financial autonomy are all ways in which people may build a future in which women are not just secure in their finances but also empowered to fulfill their greatest potential. This needs a shift in society toward recognizing and respecting the various contributions that women make, which will pave the way for an economic environment that is more just and equal for everyone.

The collective impact of Filipino stories is to provide a potent criticism of the social conventions that impose limitations on women. The stories that are being told shed light on a complex network of interconnected inequities, including constraining gender norms, an absence of political representation, and economic difficulties. The female protagonists in the story struggle with issues such as employment instability, inadequate compensation, and dependency on males, all while being subjected to pressure to adhere to unattainable beauty standards and the expectations of society. The stories advocate for the breakdown of these deeply rooted conventions and for the celebration of the whole range of human experience with their call to action. To create a society that is really just and equitable, we must first empower women by providing them with fair treatment, equal opportunity, and the freedom to choose their own educational and professional paths.

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Comment [SM4]: The conclusion of an article emphasizes that contemporary Filipino short stories critically expose and challenge the societal, political, and economic constraints imposed on women, advocating for a future where women are empowered to break free from traditional norms and pursue their aspirations equally and freely.

Comment [SM5]: There is still a scope of some reference.

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