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# FILIPINO COLLEGE STUDENTS' VIEWS ON THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL APPEAL TO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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*Musings of thirty-six college students from three higher educational institutions in the Manila, Philippines were used to look at the constructs of physical appeal and its power to influence leadership. By thematically analyzing the musings of the students, the research found physical appeal concepts that are associated to leadership. The study revealed that the students perceive leadership in two ways: from “within” the leader such as skills and knowledge, and from the “outside” where leadership is associated to goals, to influences, and to authority. In terms of physical appeal, leaders are expected to possess physical beauty (kagandahang anyo). Moreover, leaders are seen as individuals who have good manners (kagandahang asal). Interestingly, the college students claimed that leadership should also be based on capacity (kakayanan) and connection (koneksyon). These findings revealed that leadership has its physical and ethical forms that help the students visualize their idealized national political leader.*

*Keywords: Political leadership, physical appeal, Philippine*

*Kegiatan refleksi atau perenungan dari tiga puluh enam mahasiswa dari tiga institusi pendidikan tinggi di Manila, Filipina digunakan untuk melihat konstruksi daya tarik fisik dan kekuatannya untuk mempengaruhi kepemimpinan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa konsep daya tarik fisik terkait dengan kepemimpinan. Studi tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa siswa memandang kepemimpinan dengan dua cara: dari “dalam” pemimpin seperti keterampilan dan pengetahuan, dan dari “luar” di mana kepemimpinan dikaitkan dengan tujuan, pengaruh, dan otoritas. Dari segi daya tarik fisik, para pemimpin diharapkan memiliki kecantikan fisik (kagandahang anyo). Apalagi para pemimpin dipandang sebagai individu yang memiliki tata krama (kagandahang asal). Yang menarik, para mahasiswa mengklaim bahwa kepemimpinan juga harus didasarkan pada kapasitas (kakayanan) dan koneksi (koneksyon). Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa kepemimpinan memiliki bentuk fisik dan etika yang membantu siswa memvisualisasikan pemimpin politik nasional ideal mereka.*

*Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan politik, daya tarik fisik, Filipina*

Abstract

Abstrak

Philippine elections are existing times for the nation. This year, Filipinos have elected Rodrigo Roa Duterte. Before being elected, commentaries have been published that depicted him as sloppy and unfashionable. He is also criticized because of his color, too. Then Pres. Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III had the same comments, too. In 2011, as Aquino III has been sworn into office, news reports that highlighted how he can be given a physical appearance makeover. Filipinos in Twitter claim that Noynoy needed hair implants. Filipino tweet that he also needed make up lessons and posture tips. Some others wanted Noynoy to work out, wear less loose clothes, and even consult a stylist. There are agreements that both Duterte and Aquino lack the physical appeal to be the next President of the Philippines- appearance-wise.

In the same breath, former Philippine Presidents and other national and local leaders would be under the watchful eye of media, the Internet, and even in some informal conversations about how they look and present themselves in public. Whenever a national gathering like the State of the Nation (SONA) and the State Dinners would be organized, there is much buzz to what and who people wore during the events. In a report by Servando (2009), Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s presidency has been so much associated with the “hits and misses” of her fashion sense-claiming as if her clothing dictated her reign. From Arroyo’s jewelries to her Filipiniana attire, ethnic designed cuffs to gown color choices; everyone had their own opinion to how it affected the nature of the Presidency. Comments on how “safe” Arroyo was to how “outdated” her choices were part of lifestyle sections of Philippine

magazines, blogs, and radio programs. At times, Arroyo was hit hard because of the lavishness of her clothing that was deemed inappropriate for the then fluctuating nature of the Philippine economy.

Even skin color has become a source of debate in the Philippines. Sinogba (2013) feels a great deal of disturbance on the “meme-fication” of Philippine senator Nancy Binay in social media. In the article, Sinogba mentions how she is not surprised by the way the online world has played on Binay’s skin color. She claimed that, “The Nancy Binay hatefest on Twitter is just a painful reminder that the landscape of Pinoy popular (and political) culture is dotted with references to skin color and its relationship to beauty, status, and goodness” (para.6). It seems that, as what Sinogba has highlighted, associating the skin color to political and leadership inexperience has paraded in the emerging media. There have also been constant claims that political leaders have used their “looks” either as tools or excuses in national campaigns. For one, Philippine senator Risa Hontiveros, despite capitalizing on her “magandang laban” (beautiful fight) political campaign, did not relate well to the electorate. Most of the time it’s the young Filipino voting population that either makes the comments or act as audiences to the concept of fashionable political leaders in the Philippine society.

#### Research Question and Objectives

Given these accounts, it is interesting to study the perceptions of Filipino youth about the nature and value of physical appearance to leadership. Using the perceptions of college students from three higher educational institutions in Metro

Manila, Philippines, this research explores on the question: What are the musings of selected Filipino youth about the value of physical appeal to leadership?

Specifically, the study wants to:

1. Determine the explanations of the concept of political leadership from a selected group of Filipino college students;
2. Establish the knowledge of the nature of physical appeal from the musings of selected college Filipino students; and
3. Evaluate the understanding of the Filipino youth of physical appeal and political leadership among these college students

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Defining Physical Appeal*

Physical appeal, being heavily associated with what is aesthetically pleasing or beautiful, has been present in various cultures around the world. Culturally, the pre-Hispanic Philippines had long been immersed in naming and putting value on what is beautiful. The intricate designs in the art of tattoo, ornamentation, local fabrics, and even the predecessors' adoration for gold show that there have been idealized constructs of what would be attractive, adorable, and beautiful. Males are expected to be muscular, manly, and mannered while females in pre-colonial times are to be the prettiest members of the community.

Because of colonization, the notion of beauty has been equated to a somewhat different representation. Although the notion of fairness in skin was

present before the Spaniards came as in the cases of the Binukot and the Maranaos, there was much adulation to the effect of a lighter skin color, a more chiseled nose, and a taller individual - the statuesque characteristics of the colonizer (Reyes-Encanto 2004; Del Mundo 1998). The fair-skinned became the mainstream, and the dark-skinned became support. Worse, the growth of the association between fair as a representation of the pure and the virginal and dark as evil became more obvious (Orsal 2007). Another possible reason for Filipinos wanting to be fairer than they are can be attributed to the way Filipinos are being discriminated against in neighboring nations. Shin (2014) argues that Filipinos prefer to don the Chinese, Korean, or Japanese looks in order to assimilate to nations that discriminate against Filipinos. Dark-skinned actresses are a rarity, and more often than not, cast in roles that are exotic in nature, be it a tribal chieftain or seductive dancers.

Notions of appeals based on physical characteristics, therefore, are not innocent representations in the Philippines as these can be sources of power, intimidation, and affirmation-even leadership. Captivating, the discussions on the perceptions of the representations of leadership have interested the academic world. Moreover, prominence is given to the value of observation as a vantage point in developing descriptors for leadership. It seems that constructivist notions on leadership have shaped how individuals look at leaders, how leaders perform in organizations, and how organizations function, in general. Furthermore, there is a dearth of literature on how Filipinos - especially the youth - perceive leadership. It is, therefore, necessary to determine how

young citizens perceive leadership. Interestingly, this paper centers on the notion that might be a physical appeal component to political leadership. In this study, physical appeal is defined to overarch from facial features and expressions, posture, clothing, grooming, and skin color.

### ***Linking Physical Appeal and Leadership***

Interest in the nature of one's physical appearance and its influence to a variety of variables such as hiring decisions and even election results in different parts of the globe is growing. Research indicates that from the perspective of the person, physical appearance is a needed attribute. Physical appearance, mediated by appearance-related social skills, affects the emergence of the leader (Cherulnik 1995; Jackson, Sullivan and Hymes 2001).

From the side of the perceivers, attractiveness too, is a factor. Shannon and Stark (2003) learned that physical appearance variables might play a role in employment hiring decisions. By examining the influence of beardedness and attractiveness on personnel selection, results of their investigation showed that level of attractiveness of the photographs significantly affected the evaluation of the application to which it was attached, but did not significantly affect the subjects' final selection decision. In 2008, Rule and Ambady studied whether impressions of Chief Executive Officers (CEO) would be related to the performance of their companies. The researchers note, "even when we controlled for age, affect, and attractiveness, CEOs from more versus less successful companies could be distinguished via naive judgments based solely on perceptions

of the CEOs' facial appearance" (p.110).

In the realm of Western politics, the same trend of appearance and leadership exists. Riggio and Riggio (2010) argue for facial qualities of competence while Little (2012) asserts the physical appearance link to occupational success. Facial images predict actual political decision and leadership success in the corporate world.

The literature cited above highlights the perceptions of physical appearance and leadership in settings like the office, school, and even during elections. Studies suggest that individuals' notion of good physical appeal affect their projection of themselves. Moreover, research on perceived physical attributes of leaders have paved the way in naming certain physical forms as marks of the "idealized" leadership in the workplace and beyond.

### ***Describing the Nature of Perceptions***

In the literature, perceptions play a great role in developing attitude, behavior, and practices. Across cultures and societies, contexts and content, perceptions of how leadership is portrayed, valued, presented, and lived have intrigued researchers and practitioners of leadership.

A perception is said to aid in accurately presenting objects, property, and relations in the environment (Gregory 1966). In a sense, perceptions can give good semantic relationship between representations and the represented objects or concepts. It can be deduced that perceptions are cognitive visions that influence people in naming objects, people, and concepts. Moreover, it is

also implied that such constructions are informed by the perceivers' social situations and realities. This means that in order for one to perceive a concept properly, there must be a focused and grounded introspection that comes from one's experiences.

Students perceive leadership as a source of power (Astin and Leland, 1991, Helgesen 1995), positive civic responsibility that shaped not only their schools and universities but also their lives (Rosser 2003). Similarly, Ford and Kiran (2008) have found perceptions as powerful sources of information in assessing leadership and transformation of a community. Students also demand accountability from their leaders (Dugan and Komives, 2007). The role models they choose shape millennial students' notions of leadership and their experiences (Shehane, Sturtevant, Moore & Dooley, 2012).

Cultural dictations related to perception of leadership must also be considered. In collectivist nations, leadership is seen as a binding force especially if it is participative (Hofstede 2001, Jayasingam and Cheng 2009). In the Philippines, Sobritchea (2005) pointed out that gender has long played its role in shaping leadership. She argued that because there are still stereotypes in what leaders are supposed to be, "masculine and feminine roles strongly influence career options and people's choice of their leaders" (p.129).

It seems that with all these accounts in leadership, there is a plethora of definitions and demands for what the leader should and could be. From being a process to being a responsibility to having a gender component, leadership is seen as

a positive source of power across cultures. Leadership, therefore, cannot be universally defined but should be culturally constructed.

### ***Constructing the Filipino Mindsets***

The Filipino youth is part of a collective body that is slowly shaping the political sphere of the world. Because of the trust that young people have strengths - creativity, energy, and other potentials - then the community can teach them the values of accountability, honesty, and diligence. These young Filipinos are also active off and online (AIJC Report n.d., Sebastian 2013) so their exposure and experience in perceiving the world is wide. These writings point out that the Filipino youth have the capacity already to create their own perspectives on many social processes. Because of their active involvement on and off-line, they are aware, informed, and exposed to various ways of knowing. In this paper, their perceptions of the physical forms of leadership were investigated.

Moreover, the Filipino has been characterized in various sociological, psychological, cultural, communicative, etc. ways. In the literature, he is thoroughly discussed as someone who has the unique concept, mindset, behavior, and even patterns of communication (Enriquez 1993, 1994; Gastardo-Conaco 2005). However, Maggay (1999, 2002) doubts the collectivist notion when she said that Filipinos have "surface westernization that lends a certain facility to interactions with outsiders that misleads outsiders into thinking that they could operate significantly within the culture without having to cross substantial cultural and linguistic barriers" (p.34).

### ***Expounding on Physical Form of Leadership: The Filipino Way***

There is a dearth of literature on how physical appeal is considered to be part of political leadership. De Viana (2013) have found accounts that Gregorio del Pilar's youthful looks have been mentioned in historical accounts but have never been connected to his leadership as a general. Covar (1993) claimed that since there is a dichotomy of inside (loob) and outside (labas) in the Philippine thinking schema, there would be components of such perceptions. Captivatingly, he mentioned that for labas to happen, there must be the presence of face (mukha) to mirror one's experience. He clarified further that it is mukha that one can learn to know feelings and emotions of the people.

Roffey (2000) studied and found cultural leadership strategies such as qualities of compassionate involvement and concern, ethical responsibilities, and other cultural norms amongst Filipina leaders but did not identify physical appearance as a social characteristic. Interestingly, the gendered cultural values associated with maganda (beauty) emerged but were described more by the research participants as having socially acceptable behavior to extend beyond physical characteristics of "impeccable grooming and fashionably dressing."

These accounts project a research gap into the notions of leadership in the Philippines. With the extensive local accounts of beauty and aesthetics in history, the mass media, and literature, there has been no current established connection between the perceived "standards" of physical attributes and leadership styles.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper argues from some of the concepts of Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model of Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, and Owen (2006). The model argues from different vantage points - student development, relational leadership, leadership development, and grounded theory.

From the student development perspective, it has been argued that in order to develop social identity, there must be an identification of how components such as race, sexual orientation, gender, class, etc. affect one another. Learners must be able to identify how the components are able to relate, integrate, and change as time progresses. Moreover, the interaction of the components of social development may also be used in looking at how one's leadership identity is developed (Komives, et al. 2006). Moreover, in looking at the development of leadership, psychosocial and cognitive processes are usually used as variables. On one hand, the psychosocial aspect of growth highlights purpose and integrity as factors that cause the development. On the other hand, cognitive development focuses on thought processes. Taking a constructivist stance, it argues that knowledge on leadership is achieved by making sense of the world (Komives, et al. 2006).

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

#### ***Research Design***

This study is exploratory-descriptive in nature. The researcher utilizes the qualitative approach of research to explain the musings, insights, and

perceptions of college students from three higher educational institutions in Metro Manila. Focus Interviews (FI) are used in the study. Based on their constructed ideas of what physical appeal and leadership are, the researcher thematically arranged the responses of the students.

### ***Participants***

Participants in this qualitative study were 36 middle class college students who have been chosen because of their exposure to Philippine politics and political leadership. The 36 students were from the undergraduate classes of the researcher when he was still a lecturer in three higher education institutions in Manila, Philippines. These participants represent the population of students from the University of the Philippines Diliman, the Far Eastern University Manila, and the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila. The participants' age ranged from 17 to 21. They come from different year levels. All of them were to be first-time voters in the 2016 National Elections. All of the students are familiar with the concept of national political leadership.

### ***Research Instruments***

Focus interview (FI) guide and observation logs were used. The researcher conducted the interviews at the three higher educational institutions in Manila, Philippines. Three guide questions were prepared in order to give direction to the flow of the interviews: 1. What is your concept of national leadership? 2. What are the three concepts of physical appeal that national leaders must possess? 3. Why were these chosen? 4. If you do not think that national leaders must possess appeals, justify the reason. The researcher

wanted the top-of-mind perceptions of the students, so he asked for only three concepts of physical appeal.

The interviewees were encouraged to talk freely and openly about their views and practices on branding in order to capture real-life data. The observation logs were to serve as validation of the information mentioned in the transcripts of interviews. This provided the cohesion that the research wanted.

### ***Sampling Method***

The researchers used the voluntary response sampling method. Letters were sent to the students for permission to conduct the interviews at their most convenient time to elicit more natural responses. To ensure confidentiality, students were asked to fill out forms and to sign informed consent forms.

### ***Data generation***

The data were arranged in a dendrogram to identify the most significant statements mentioned by the participants. Moreover, the dendrogram was used to list significant statements, categories of statements, and themes of the experiences and perceptions of students on PPT use. FI were organized per school to determine their musings. Letters were sent to the students for permission to conduct the focus group discussion at their most convenient time and venue to elicit more natural responses. FI data were subjected to "data reduction": the researcher categorized and coded only those parts that were deemed significant to the study. Thematic analysis was used. Meanings and relations of the utterances/texts were related to the objectives and problems of the study.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focused on the college students' experiences and musings about leadership, its physical appeal components, and the discrepancies that they feel about the nature of leadership. Under the context of national politics, the students were keen on identifying the concepts that they feel should be present in leadership.

With the different responses of the students about what leadership is, there emerged some commonalities of perceptions such as it being a skill, a goal, an influence, an authority, and a form of knowledge. In this study, two main themes emerged: leadership as coming from within (skill and knowledge) and leadership that comes from outside forces (achieving goals, influence, and authority).

### Leadership defined from “within”

#### Leadership is a skill.

Based on the answers of the students, leadership is perceived as an innate skill. Twenty-nine out of the thirty-six students claimed that in order for a leader to emerge in the sea of potential chiefs of a nation. One of the students, MJ, 19, said that a leader should be able “to develop what their followers have to offer to the group.” Most of them also said that leaders must be able to motivate the followers in order to uplift potentials. Ann, 17, said that leadership allows one to “give tasks that will enhance their followers' strengths.” It was also a common sentiment among twenty-four students that leadership must be based on ability. Arnold, 18, claimed that leadership is “a capacity of a person to lead a certain group of people.” Sharmaine, 18, claimed,

*“it is a facility to practice what one preaches.”* Furthermore, they also shared that leadership “is being able to guide other people.”

#### Leadership is knowledge.

Leadership is also an exercise of the accumulated understanding of a person. Twenty-seven students agreed that in order for leadership to emerge, there should be enough know-how on how to operate a country. Stella, 20, mentioned that it is “having enough knowledge and advocacy to promote an agenda.” Mond, 19, said that “leadership also means that a leader can encourage his followers to share their ideas or knowledge that will contribute to what project, agenda or problem the group is about to solve.” Miguel, 21, also supported the claim by saying that leadership allows one to “identify problems and provide solutions. The leader knows how to handle different situations.”

#### Leadership defined by outside forces.

#### Leadership is achieving a set of goals.

Twenty-nine out of the thirty-six students claimed that leadership is being focused on the end product. For Kris, 20, “leadership is defining the direction and goals of the organization, communicating it to the people who are part of the organization. It is leading people to the right path to achieve the goals they wanted.” The students also mentioned that leadership entails developing a vision and being focused on getting towards the direction of success. It was also mentioned by Dexter, 19, that “leadership is action” as leaders are able to take a stand so that a movement can be created. A

common sentiment among twenty-eight students was that leadership is “*creating a movement*” so that the group can be “*results-driven*.”

### **Leadership is influence.**

Thirty-two students agreed that leadership enables others to follow instructions by means of persuasion and power. Boy, 20, thinks that “*It is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task*.” Cindy, 19, claims, “*It is an authoritative task that is about pushing people to do their part in their group and observing the group’s weaknesses and strengths as a group and as per each individual in the circle*.” Students also mentioned that the nature of the influence is not visible to only a small group as leadership should be a reflection of a certain society. Maricel, 20, argued, “*Leadership can be defined as a social influence process by which one individual influences others towards the attainment of group or organizational groups*.”

### **Leadership is authority.**

There is also a realization that leadership should be asserted. There is an agreement amongst thirty-two students that it is asserting something by means of election or agreement. Tony, 20, stated, “*leadership is serving as a leader of a group or organization*.” However, some students said that authority in leadership must not be abused, as there is an element of positivity in it. Cherry, 19, claimed that leadership is “*being authoritative but also being considerate*.” MJ, 19, said, “*it necessitates authority in moderation*.” There should also be an element of change just like

what Arnold, 20, said: “*it is doing transformative authority*.”

### **Notions of Physical Appeal**

The students were also asked to identify their perspectives regarding the appeal of national leaders. Asked to name three “*appeals*” that would make them trust leaders, the students’ responses can be categorized into three themes: outside/physical appeal, internal/trait-based appeal, and “*no-effect appeal*.” Outside/physical appeals include posture and poise, smile, clothing, and skin color. Internal/trait-based appeals include grooming, neatness, decency, and family background. Some students mentioned that appeal should not matter as records and connections should be the basis for leadership.

#### **Appeal as physical beauty (kagandahang-anyo)**

##### **Posture and Poise**

All students mentioned that in order for a leader to exert him/herself, it requires good stance. For the students, a straight back when one talks and who does not slouch creates a sense of respect. For Jose, 20, posture and poise “*are important because a leader must look like a formal and a well-respected person that the way he act and walk must be fine*.” Marlit, 19, argued that “*posture indicates our inner firmness, rigidity, flexibility or volatility and laxity or agility*.” Secondly, some postures make our physical aspect normal/active for working.” For Anthony, 18, proper posture allows one to “*show how strong or how weak a person is*.” People may ask, “*Is he physically capable of doing tasks given to a leader [or] Is he strong enough?*” Janice, 17, stated that posture “*gives*

*the notion of consistent confidence.”*

### **Smile**

Thirty-one students claimed that leaders must always wear a smile. For them, a leader who always smiles connotes a positive outlook. It also says that the leader is approachable. For Nina, 20, *“it is also important for a leader to always wear a smile despite of the inconvenience of the situation. Followers will depend on him and when they see a frustrated and confused leader, most likely they will lose their senses to strive for the task to be done.”* Martin, 19, adds, *“it contributes to the personality. The more smiling face he/she has, the friendlier he/she becomes.”* Arlene, 18, claimed that *“smiling is approachability because the people need to know/think that their president is down to earth and reachable, relate able. They need to know that she is just like one of them, tao, Pilipinong may pakialam.”*

### **Clothing**

Twenty-nine students agreed that leaders must wear proper clothes. For them, leaders must be concerned with how they present themselves in public. Since the leader is the representation of the people, s/he must be perceived as physically neat. Jose, 17, claimed that *“if that leader is in rags and dirty clothing, then, surely, others will not find it convincing to follow him and let him lead them.”* Armie, 19, said, *“a leader should have presentable attire. In this way, a leader can be respected because clothes reflect how he'll lead.”* Tony, 20, mentioned that *“simplicity in clothing results to humility while exemplifying an extravagant lifestyle is associated with corruption.”* Anthony, 18, argued that *“fashion is*

*key in leadership as dressing up means defining the standards that they are setting.”*

### **Skin Color**

Interestingly, twenty-two students have expressed that skin color can be a source of leadership. For them, it is not essential whether the leader is fair-skinned or dark-skinned. They want to eliminate the notion that fairer individuals would be more suited to become good leaders. For Cherry, 20, *“color/Complexion is a factor especially the people who possess the “kayumanggi” complexion. They look like “maka-masa” if they have brown skin.”* This was countered by MJ, 20, who said, *“skin color is regarded as a very racial trait. So, it is the first thing that a person sees to others. From what I have observed [just an opinion] people judge others by their color and thus creating notions of hierarchies.”* Allan, 20, agreed that this racial determinism must be torn down as people with *“darker skin tends to be judged as less respectable.”*

Other physical attributes were named but these did not come from the majority of the respondents. Physical appeal attributes that were mentioned include body language, facial structure, health, vocal clarity, and expressive eyes.

### **Non-physical Appeal as good manners (kagandahang-asal)**

#### **Grooming**

Thirty-two students mentioned that it is important to establish good grooming for a national leader. As a symbol of a nation, the leader represents the people, they said. It would be appropriate for

the chosen national leader to look his best in any gathering. Aian, 20, said, “grooming is associated to always being ready to face the people. A leader should look presentable and appeals well –respected.” Leslie, 19, also claimed “the members will be encouraged to follow if the person looks worthy to lead them.” Eric, 20, asserted too that “leaders should be hygienic. They should be pleasant in front of people. You cannot trust someone who cannot take care of himself.

### Neatness

The students agreed on the notion that leaders need to be tidy in order for them to be perceived as good leaders. Thirty students agreed that neatness is a sign of efficiency. They noted that if the leaders would have the time and the capacity to take care of themselves, they would also show such trimness in their work. Dexter, 19, claimed, “if leaders are not presentable, they wouldn’t look respectable. So, no one will follow them. They must be the first ones to set as good examples.” Arlene, 18, cited that “an individual doesn’t need to have a perfect face, what she needs is neatness to gain respect.” Furthermore, Tony, 20, said, “to look accountable, the leader must be presentable. Being presentable is also one way of showing that one is trustworthy.”

### Decency

Thirty students mentioned that leaders need a sense of decency. For them, this covers politeness, courtesy, and proper decorum. The students agreed that they look for properness in behavior since etiquette is expected among Filipinos. Cindy, 19, claimed that “the

more decent a leader looks, the more recognizable that leader will be. People will always distinguish and choose leaders who have decorum.” Boy, 20, also uttered that “being decent looking emphasizes authority. If one leader is decent, then that leader can command respect.” Moreover, Sharmaine, 18, asserted, “decency is associated with positive attitudes.”

### Family background

Lineage has also been mentioned as one of the indicators of leadership. For twenty-six students, an excellent family will always produce good leaders. For them, if there is innate goodness in a family’s name, then that would produce good leaders. Ann, 17, mentioned, “physical appearance is brought about by their demographic background such as family background, educational attainment, etc. It’s their experiences that contribute in the formation of their attitude.” Mond, 19, also commented, “if they come from a good family- a prayerful one- then they could be good leaders.” Janice, 17, also commented, “I don’t believe that the facial features/ physical concepts of a politician do affect his or her standing. Family lineage is associated with their fame.”

Other traits that were mentioned by the students were respectability, confidence, and approachability. For them, these qualities would be necessary in order to assert themselves to their people. They also cited that national leaders must be motivational, charismatic, and young.

### Leadership as Capacity (kakayanan) and Connection (koneksyon)

For some students, there is no reason why appeal should even be considered

as a requirement for leadership. For these students, the real reason why they would choose a leader would be about past performance, platform, and ideology. Oriel, 20, talking in the vernacular, argued that *“Hindi ito importante. Maliban na lamang kung may malaking naitulong ito sa kaalaman at kakayahan. Pero napakababaw na dahilan na maging basehan ang physical characteristics sa pagpili ng iyong gustong kandidato. Dagdag pa rito, binibigyang pansin ko sa pagpili ng kandito ay ang kanilang track record, plataforma at mga ideolohiyang pinaniniwalaan. (It is not important. Not unless this helps in the knowledge and capacity of the leader. It is still a shallow reason to base votes on physical characteristics. I look into track record, platforms, and ideology more than looks.)* Gen, 19, argued further, *“physical features are not significant to the elections. I think that it is the candidate’s ideas and achievements that matters the most.”* Alfred, 19, also claimed, *“in my opinion, physical appearance does not matter when it comes to politicians and leaders. I value their track record rather than physical traits.”*

Some students also mentioned that connections of leaders to other components of society are vital to leadership. For Mel, 20, connections matter. He said, *“Physical appearance is not a factor for voting for president in the Philippines. I don’t recall any significantly good-looking president-man or woman but I recall whom they were with. Therefore, it’s the connections that matter.”* Aldrin, 18, also shared the same sentiment by highlighting that *“people vote for someone whom they think is their “kakampi” (ally) and claims to help them forward their cause such as*

*President Estrada, Ramon Magsaysay, Cory Aquino or someone who is outstandingly smart and work efficient like Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Fidel Ramos. Yung koneksyon ang mahalaga (connection is important)”* Other students mentioned that media make leaders so would-be leaders need their support. Alice, 20, claimed, *“media sometimes dictate who should be the leader. Or someone who is simply well known for his goodness or prominence in media becomes elected.”*

Overall, students have positive perceptions about leadership. They, too, have constructive physical attributes assigned to leaders. Because the respondents of this study came from the Filipino middle class, their cultural and class-related sites have aided them in these perceptions. This validates the UNICEF and Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) report that media exposure and social networking help build the perceptions of young Filipinos, especially those that come from the National Capital. Moreover, this study supports the findings of Sebastian (2013) when he said that constant communication with other students in an off-line setting helps them in reproducing these common sentiments, too. The students’ perceptions did not just simply emanate from their innocent minds. They were informed by their exposure to media forms, immediate environments, and their own social class.

### **Leadership as pang-labas (outside) and pang-loob (inside)**

This study supports the findings of Hogg (2001) when he claimed that leadership perceptions of students are positive because leaders are idealized

in their immediate environment. Similarly, in this study, it is claimed that students would have positive definitions because their education and their social class would highlight the modeled and consensual traits in various forms and means. The students' definitions of leadership as charismatic, empowering, and harmonizing concepts were informed by their social condition. For these Filipino students, leadership is not circumstantial. They perceive that skills and knowledge are internal requirements for leadership to exist. There is also a need to consider outside forces like goal achievement, authority, and influence as part of the make-up. This seems to point that leadership must come from within and should also be an attribution from the community.

The results of this study, however, counter the findings of Ford and Kiran (2008) especially when they claimed that teamwork is no longer an expectation from the voters when they think of national leaders. In this study, the Filipino students mentioned that in order to transform the nation, there is an expectation that leadership must have influence and authority to achieve a certain goal.

Interestingly, the findings of this study also support Sobritchea (2000) when she argued that leadership is a participatory process. For her, "an effective leader has listening and attending skills and is able to foster an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect" (p.10). Both Sobritchea's findings and this paper's results argue that leadership has its transformative nature. Moreover, in this current study, the source of transformative leadership comes from how the students define leadership from their internal beliefs,

experiences, and philosophies. The results of the study also support the findings that students' notions on leadership were based on previously assumed leadership philosophies. Since the study is somewhat grounded, their notions of leadership may have been values of their role models and internal belief systems in assuming the nature of leadership. Furthermore, they have developed leadership philosophies such as leadership as a position and a management role.

It also appears that morals and values that shape the internal conditions of the Filipinos were the basis of the definitions. Having mentioned that leadership is a combination of internal factors such as skills and knowledge and external factors such as leadership by means of goals, influence and authority as perceived by followers; the students think that the value of leadership rests on empowerment that a person feels from her own *kalooban* that the *kapwa* see. This study, therefore, supports the findings of Covar (1993) when he claimed that Filipinos have internal and external consideration in defining *pagkataong Pilipino*.

#### **Leadership as "kagandahang anyo" (physical beauty)**

There are students who have clear notions of the physical attributes that leaders must possess. It appears that Filipino students also have the impression that physical appearance, when mediated by appearance-related social skills, can better define leaders. Perhaps because the students' notion of an idealized leader has been shaped by different exposures to various media forms, the students see a relationship between the presentation skills of the national leaders and their level

of physical attractiveness. Although no names were mentioned during the course of the interview when it comes to who they perceive is a physically appealing leader, there are certain attributes that they think should emerge.

Although this current study is perception-based, the findings of Riggio and Riggio (2010) are also evident on this research. The students have mentioned certain facial qualities like smiles and eyes as part of the facial qualities associated with competence. The students demand that leaders smile a lot since this is a non-verbal that is highly associated to non-threatening behavior. Sincerity is also attributed to good eye contact and a smiling face. Furthermore, the mentioned facial qualities are strong signs of trustworthiness. In effect, the students have perceived that appearance-based attributes can be related to success in leadership. These findings run parallel with the claims of Little (2012) when he pointed out that there are evidences linking physical appearance to occupational success.

### **Leadership as “kagandahang asal” (good manners)**

The study also found that students perceive physical appeal as synonymous to cultural leadership strategies. For most of those who were interviewed, leaders are attractive if they possess qualities such as grooming, neatness, decency, and a good family background. These findings support the claim of Roffey (2000) when she studied the cultural norms of Filipina leaders a decade and a half ago. Interestingly, in the course of Roffey’s interviews, no physical appearance component was mentioned

as part of the social characteristics of leadership. Kagandahan was more of a panloob na anyo rather than what is flaunted to a public.

Students, in this current study, seem to have that notion, too. They mentioned that it is expected that leaders should be neat and decent since they are always asked to be present in gatherings. For them, leaders will be socially acceptable if they are virtuous in the eyes of the people. They expect leaders to be ethically abiding citizens more than being fashionable and fabulous.

### **Counter narratives on leadership and physical appeal**

There were students who thought that physical attributes should never be equated to leadership. As mentioned in the results, these respondents think that good records via past performance, platform, and ideology, and connections with media and other politicians would be necessary for politicians to become great national leaders.

These accounts seem to point to the tensions of deconstructing notions of leadership in the Philippines. On the one hand, there are those who think that leadership has physical and ethical manifestations. On the other hand, some others hold that leadership should never be viewed from the vantage point of beauty and appeal but rather on performance and connections. It appears that both camps are proof the presence of negotiated leadership images that stem from the narratives of the students. Counter discourses like this need to be cultivated and nurtured, too. This is because at the level of discourse, inequality and misrepresentations occur (Sobritchea, 2005).

Although there was no direct mention of gendered forms of the physicality of leaders, it would appear that Sobritchea (2001) was correct in saying that constructs of Filipinos are guided by social class. This appears to be part of the struggle to recreate the discourse of leadership in the country. Perhaps, although it is not part of the objectives of the paper, a closer scrutiny on the gender construct of appeal and leadership can be undertaken to see, question, and counter the persistence of a traditionally patriarchal construction of a leader in the Philippines. Looking at the problem of inequality from the level of discourse among students can be a source of data to slaughter the “othering” of women. Representations and constructions of leadership, therefore, must always be scrutinized.

## CONCLUSION

Perceptions are powerful sources of narratives. They are sites of awareness, constructs, and discourse. Musings were used in this study to look at the constructs of physical appeal and leadership among college students from three higher educational institutions in the Metro Manila Area. By thematically analyzing the musings of the students, the research found premises and concepts that are associated by these select groups of middle class students on leadership and physical appeal. Leadership can be seen from “within” the person - skills and knowledge. Leadership, too, can be seen as attributed from “outside” forces such as goals, influence, and authority. Leaders are expected to possess physical beauty or *kagandahang anyo* that include posture and poise, smile, clothing, and skin color. Moreover,

leaders are seen as individuals who have good manners or *kagandahang asal* that include neatness, decency, and a good family background. Some other students did not agree to the notion that physical appeal must be associated to leadership. They argued, however, that leadership should be based on capacity and connection.

In this study, perceptions of leadership are slanted towards the positive. Although the students were given the free hand to discuss the negative constructs of physical appeal, they never did so. It appears that, for them, leaders are sources of transformation and inspiration so they have mentioned only good constructs. Moreover, the musings revealed that constructs of physical appearance and traits are intertwined for the students. Despite the fact that the guide questions were asking physical attributes that they associate to leadership, they discussed leadership qualities and traits such as grooming, neatness, decency, approachability, and the like.

It is, therefore, the argument of the researcher that physical appeal should be discussed as a component of leadership. There is a need to empirically study the concepts of physical attributes and appeal in the Philippine setting to strengthen the literature on such a connection. Future research on this topic must acknowledge the variations of perceptions among social classes, gender, and age group. Research on the effect of physical appeal to leadership in private and public organizations may also be done via experimentations to control the variables.



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