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*Feminist Diversities: Contemporary  
Issues in Gender and Development  
in the Philippines*



College of Social Work and Community Development  
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## FOREWORD

We know that women are not homogeneous: they are differentiated by other social identities. For the vast majority of Filipino women – indeed, the world’s women – gender justice and gender equality do not constitute the entirety of the struggle. Failing to take into account women’s distinct experiences of oppression, and how these are not merely gender-based, is also failing to recognize our own power and privilege along the other social axes of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, ability/disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. In the Department of Women and Development Studies, the academic unit tasked with the production of this issue (with the invaluable support of the Research and Extension for Development Office, or REDO), our bias is overtly for women who bear multiple marginalized identities - women who struggle more, and need more.

We argue that gender and development (GAD) must be conceptualized and operationalized using contextual and intersectional perspectives. Popularized by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the intersectional approach is a critical analytical framework feminist scholars utilize in understanding the interacting and reinforcing impacts of asymmetrical social structures on variegated subordinated identities. Social justice demands transformative action towards the equalization of inequitable and unequal power relations across all interlocking systems of oppression and domination. Thus, the goal-posts of gender justice and gender equality, and actions towards these, must be inextricably conjoined with other forms of and actions towards social justice and equality.

Feminism itself, as theory, action, and iterative praxis, is characterized by diversity. Through a prism is an apt metaphor for how women’s issues are refracted as subjects of advocacy and struggle in the Philippine context. As it is elsewhere, our women’s movement is animated by “feminisms,” by a multiformity of perspectives and practices, all striving to respond to the needs and interests that arise from being a Filipino woman in contemporary times. All are valued for their contributions to our protracted struggles.

The terrain of feminist scholarship is as heterogeneous as women themselves, the issues they confront, and the efforts undertaken to improve their condition and position. In this issue, we feature the experiences of lesbian women and urban poor women; a textual analysis of public remarks made by the highest public official of the land through the lens of masculinity studies; and two gender and development strategies, gender mainstreaming and feminist organizing.

Given the large number of women drawn into the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, which according to the ILO comprised 53.2 percent of the 1.3 million total number employed in 2016, an investigation into their situation is warranted. In “The L Words Lesbian and Labor: Physical and Social Health Impacts of Call Center Work on Lesbian Women in Quezon City, Philippines,” Mylene De Guzman sheds light on women at the intersection of gender and sexual orientation. She elaborates on how lesbian women contend with the additional impediment of discrimination in the workplace, on top of the numerous repercussions of call center work on their health.

Sabrina Laya S. Gacad’s “Pushing the Boundaries of Motherhood and Pagkadalaga: Sexuality and Reproductive Freedom of Urban Poor Women and Volunteers of the Likhaan Center for Women’s Health” focuses on low-income women of varying ages who have chosen to avail of contraceptive commodities. Through her study, she surfaced how consciousness-raising combined with free access

to reproductive health services contributed not only to their reproductive freedom and the enhancement of their socio-economic condition, but also to their empowerment as women and mothers.

We recognize how masculinity studies can enrich and sharpen our understanding of the unrelenting reproduction of asymmetrical gender relations. Shebana Alqaseer's and Joshua Carlo Tenorio Pile's "The President's Monologues: Duterte's Rhetoric and Toxic Masculinities" highlights Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's portrayals of masculinity through his public remarks, laying bare a conformity to orthodox masculinity and its perilous implications on culture and politics.

For government agencies, gender mainstreaming is a GAD strategy facilitated by the utilization of the five (5) percent GAD budget as provided for under the Magna Carta of Women and the General Appropriations Act. Allen L. Espino's "Problematizing Privatization: How Private Take-over of Local Water Districts Impacts Gender Mainstreaming" reveals how privatization resulted in a pushback in the capacity to utilize the GAD budget and to implement programs that target women's empowerment.

In "Mapping the Terrain of Feminist Organizing among Selected Organizations in Luzon and the Visayas," Teresita Villamor Barrameda inquires into the organizing efforts of women and LGBTQI individuals in relation to how they promote the development and empowerment of their members. It was found that some of the processes and practices mirror feminist principles, and that the utilization of feminist organizing could contribute to these organizations, enable the mainstreaming of gender, and facilitate the creation of alliances.

We owe the richness, the breadth, and the depth of the ground we cover in our praxis to our feminist diversities. It is in the application of the feminist value of respect for multiplicity and difference, to each other and to our work - as women, as feminists, and as scholars - that we can locate our strength.

Nathalie Africa-Verceles, DSD  
Issue Editor





**The L Words – Lesbian and Labor:**  
Physical and Social Health Impacts  
of Call Center Work on Lesbian Women in Quezon City, Philippines

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**Mylene T. De Guzman**

*The impacts of call center work have been the subject of several studies, but currently, there is paucity of research about lesbian women in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. Call center work poses several physical and social health concerns and the worker's lesbian identity poses yet another challenge in navigating this work environment. This descriptive study used a qualitative approach. Ten (10) lesbian call center workers gave their narratives through semi-structured in-depth interviews in more than a year of doing fieldwork in Eastwood, Quezon City, Philippines. Working in call centers has multiple detrimental effects to health. The participants of the study experienced physical health issues that include voice problems, sleeping problems, unhealthy eating habits, and unhealthy vices such as smoking. Call center work has also affected their social health due to the inflexible and highly variable shifting work schedule, and lesbian call center agents were subject to subtle forms of discrimination in the office. There is a need to look into the effects of call center work on lesbians, as they are inevitably subject to physical and social health impacts, and these impacts are compounded by different forms of discrimination in the workplace.*

**Keywords:** lesbian health, call center work, occupational health, discrimination, Philippines

## **Introduction**

The Philippines has become the global leader for business support functions, succeeding in its bid to become the “call center capital of the world” in 2010 (Natividad, 2010). A total of 851 establishments were registered under the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines in 2016, 96% of which were engaged in call center activities (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2016). The industry generated \$22.9 billion in revenues in 2016, and has generated an estimate of 1.1 million jobs by the end of 2015 (Ortiguero, 2018). Call center workers in the Philippines are young, with five out of eight workers (64.7%) ranging from 15-30 years old, and more than half of the total employment of BPO industry workers are women (54.3%) (PSA, 2016). Currently, there is no data as to how many members of the LGBTQIA+ community are employed in BPOs in the Philippines.

Garcia (2013) provides a glimpse into the paucity of research with regards to lesbians in the Philippines, noting the absence of discursivity of *katomboyan* (lesbianism) as compared with *kabaklaan* (gayness), with the notable exceptions of Ofreneo's (2003) work on Filipino lesbians and their process of identity development and the work by Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!) on the kinds of discrimination that lesbian women face in the country (2004). There is little research done on the experiences of lesbian workers in the Philippines, and this provided the necessary push to engage in the labor and lesbian geographies in call centers, to shed light on the physical and social health impacts of call center work, and to understand how these health impacts are compounded by negative effects of sexual orientation-based discrimination.

The overlapping literatures that inform this study include research on the health impacts of call center work, and sexual orientation-based discrimination, specifically sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace. The intersections of the physical and social impacts of call center work and sexual orientation remain understudied and this paper is a contribution to put forward a research agenda that recognizes the relationalities between these concepts

This paper examines the embodied nature of outsourced call center work in the Philippines by focusing on the health impacts of BPO work and experiences of discrimination through the narratives of lesbian call center agents.

### **Health Impacts of Call Center Work**

The working conditions in call centers are usually characterized by: night work, shift work, flexible schedule planning; high level of background noise, work done in front of computers; high demand for multi-tasking (speaking, listening, using fine motor skills); high levels of work monitoring; high physical and emotional demands due to contact with customers; and long-term use of their vocal cords due to the nature of the work (Benninghoven, et.al., 2005). These characteristics expose call center agents to multiple health issues as discussed in several studies from various disciplines. The findings from these literature state that call center agents are subject to mental health issues and work-related stress, sexual dysfunction, and various physical injuries, including musculoskeletal disorders, voice disorders (pain, croakiness of voice, loss of voice, cough, poor vocal power, inability to modulate, breathing difficulties) and auditory and visual fatigue (Toomingas, Nilsson, Hagberg, Hagman and Tornqvist, 2003; Sudhashree, Rohith and Shrinivas, 2005; Ofreneo, Ng and Marasigan-Pasumbal, 2007; Department of Labor and Employment Occupational Safety and Health Center [DOLE OSH], 2007; Charbotel, et.al., 2009; Hazlett, Moorhead, and Duffy, 2011; Subbarayalu, 2013; Kasture, 2014; Raja and Bhasin, 2014; Ramanuj, 2014). Call center activities (voice sector) posted the highest share of occupational disease (31,270 cases or 72.41%) under the administrative and support services industry in the Philippines (PSA, 2015). Filipino BPO workers suffer from the following health problems: headache (61.7%), fatigue (53.8%), eye strain (50.5%), chest and back pain (47.1%), voice problems (33.7%), hearing problems (15.2%), ulcers (14.6%), hypertension (14.0%), and urinary tract infections (10.3%) (Amante, 2010).

In addition to these health impacts, workers also suffer from a range of infectious and chronic diseases according to an advocacy-driven campaign started by the Department of Health, in cooperation with healthcare company Johnson & Johnson (Voice Your Care: Health Focus Areas, 2017).

### **Effects of Shift Work in Call Centers**

Shift work has become increasingly common given technological advances, changes in the economy, and the emergence of 24-hour societies, leading to the disruption of physiological, psychological, and social circadian rhythms (Bambra, Whitehead, Sowden, Akers and Petticrew, 2008). Call centers, especially those companies that are based in North America and Europe operate at night, to synchronize their office hours with their clients. A regular shift consists of eight hours on the “floor”, two (compensated) 15-minute breaks and an hour of lunch break, which is uncompensated. The lunch hour is usually scheduled four hours after the agent has logged into the system. Call center schedules are also highly variable and differs from company to company. There are companies that offer day shifts, mid-shifts, and night shifts or the graveyard shifts. The night shift is usually defined as the period of work of more than seven hours that starts between midnight and 05:00 AM (Carmel and Kojola, 2012). The work hours make the transnational BPO industry unique from most service industries in the Philippines, as it requires agents to work the graveyard shift in accordance to business hours on the other side of the world. Most call center accounts in the Philippines cater to clients based in the United States, and these companies have shifts that usually span between 8PM-4PM Manila Time. Call center agents are therefore expected to restructure their daily routines in accordance with these work schedules. Most BPO offices require employees to engage in regularly rotating shift work, forcing them to report to work during holidays, including Christmas, New Year’s, weekends, and transfer between morning, afternoon and graveyard shifts (Amante, 2010).

The impacts of shift work can be categorized into: disruption of the circadian rhythm (insomnia, sleep deprivation), physical and psychological effects of fatigue (mood changes, decreased cognitive functioning, predisposition to infections, increased probability for depression and anxiety disorder), and the disruption of family life (Hechanova-Alampay, 2010: See also Suri, Sen, Singh, Kumar and Aggarwal, 2007; Pease and Raether, 2003). Hechanova-Alampay (2010) further notes that isolation from family and friends is perhaps the most significant socio-psychological impact of night work on Filipino call center workers, considering that Filipino culture value family and social relations greatly. Studies about shift work have been undertaken in the past, but there is a lack of research on the impacts of shift work on social and family life (Kantermann, Juda, Vetter and Roenneberg, 2010). Patel (2006) also refers to the temporal entrapment of night shift labor, which marginalizes women by further excluding women from social and economic opportunities that are usually present during the day, the time that they allot to sleeping.

Despite these adverse physical and social health impacts, a lot of young people are still willing to engage in call center work mostly for monetary reasons. In 2013, the BPO industry paid an annual average compensation of \$9,297 per employee, more than thrice the average wage of \$2,580 in the rest of the country (Errighi, Khatiwada and Bodwell, 2016). The impacts of call center work have been investigated by scholars, but these studies fail to incorporate gender and sexual orientation, with the exception of studies on ‘purple-collar’ labor of transgender call center workers in the Philippines (David, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), the increasing number of gay men in the industry (Salonga, 2015), and a review of literature on the effects of call center work on women (Domingo-Cabarrubias, 2012).

### **Sexual Orientation-Based Workplace Discrimination**

Heteronormativity can be thought of as a set of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain assumptions of the existence of only two genders, those that reflect biological sex (male and female), and sexual attraction between these opposite genders is the only natural, acceptable and ‘normal’ kind of attraction (Kitzinger, 2005; Losert, 2008). Heteronormative assumptions persist in the workplace, and navigating a heteronormative space creates a discord for lesbian women, and non-heterosexual individuals. Valentine (1993) argues that lesbians can feel ‘out of place’ in ordinary spaces, such as the workplace, restaurants, hotels and such, because these places are usually organized and operated within the heterosexual norm.

In the Philippines, there is a lack of a national anti-discrimination law that can be used to protect the employment rights of the LGBTQIA+. In the absence of national legislation, local ordinances exist that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, along other grounds such as age, race, disability, religion, and health status, but these ordinances roughly cover only 10% of the country’s population (Ortega, 2015). According to the joint study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labor Office (ILO) in 2018, 30% of LGBTQIA+ Filipinos have experienced workplace discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

Several studies have looked into the workplace experiences of LGBTQIA+ workers, and these offer a glimpse into the nature of discrimination based on sexual orientation in the workplace. The types of discrimination identified were: getting fired, denied employment, denied a promotion, negative performance evaluations, verbal/physical abuse, and unequal pay or benefits (Croteau, 1996; Drydakis, 2014; Drydakis, 2015; Lau and Stotzer, 2011; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Ragins, 2004; Ragins, Singh and Cornwell, 2007; Ragins, 2008; Pichler and Ruggs, 2018). Studies reveal that sexual orientation-based discrimination have negative impacts on the mental health of individuals (D’Augelli and Grossman, 2001). Further qualified, workplace discrimination has deleterious effects on workers (Ragins and Cornwell, 2001).

To avoid discrimination, lesbian workers usually rely on denial and dissociation, avoidance, distraction, and token disclosure when asked about their lesbian identity in the workplace (Hall, 1986).

The group, Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!) Inc. published a research in 2004, which documented some of the forms of discrimination that Filipina lesbians face. The book focuses on blatant acts of discrimination, which manifest through physical and emotional violence. Narratives of lesbians from all walks of life and from different ages were compiled to paint a picture of what kinds of abuses lesbians face in the country. There are a myriad of issues faced by lesbians in the workplace, and stories from the compilation detailed how one's gender identity and expression could limit access to employment and employment benefits. A company decided not to hire a lesbian applicant, giving the reason that they were only hiring "females", failing to recognize and acknowledge that lesbians are females. Another lesbian was hired, praised for her efficient work, and then informed her that her boyish appearance (wearing slacks and having short hair) was not suitable for the company image. One lesbian was bypassed for a promotion, and another had no other recourse but to resign when she was subjected to harassment from her coworkers and the company refused to address the issue. Ocampo (2011) notes that there are no statistics that show cases of sexual discrimination-based employment discrimination in the Philippines.

### **Sexual Orientation Microaggressions**

There are other forms of sexual orientation-based discrimination, and untoward biases against the LGBTQIA+ can also manifest in other ways, usually through under sided remarks made to individuals with non-heterosexual orientations, using what Sue and Capodilupo (2008) calls sexual orientation microaggressions. These discriminatory acts can be defined as the "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative LGBT slights and insults to the target group or person" (Sue and Capodilupo, 2008). Microaggressions impact members of marginalized social groups detrimentally, and literature suggest that microaggressions lead to lower levels of self-esteem, prevalence of depressive symptoms, lower levels of psychological well-being, negative emotional intensity, and prevalence of binge drinking (See Nadal, et.al., 2016 for a review of literature on microaggressions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and transgender people.)

The preface micro-characterizes the subtle manifestations of this type of discrimination, making it difficult to detect and identify (Nadal, et.al., 2016), and therefore, challenging to address.

Call centers have been called havens for gender-nonconforming persons and are generally seen and marketed as inclusive workplace environments (Billing, 2018; Talusan, 2016; Sison, 2013). A study pioneered by the Philippine LGBT Chamber of Commerce (2018) shows that currently, only 17% of companies have anti-discrimination policies based on SOGIESC, and all of these companies are BPO corporations with foreign headquarters.

However, there appears to be an ulterior motive behind the drive to be inclusive. In the 2013 Philippine National LGBT Community Dialogue, Ging Cristobal, Project Coordinator for Asia Program of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (formerly IGLHRC, now called OutRight Action International), raised that in some call centers, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are hired because they are unable to legally marry and would therefore forfeit legal benefits that those who can marry enjoy, such as parental leave. LGBTQIA+ employees are also preferred by these companies because they are more amenable to work the graveyard shifts because they are less likely to have childcare issues (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and United States Agency for International Development [USAID] 2014).



The research is grounded on the following framework, which showcases how the call center is a field where shift work and instances of sexual orientation microaggressions occur (See Figure 1).

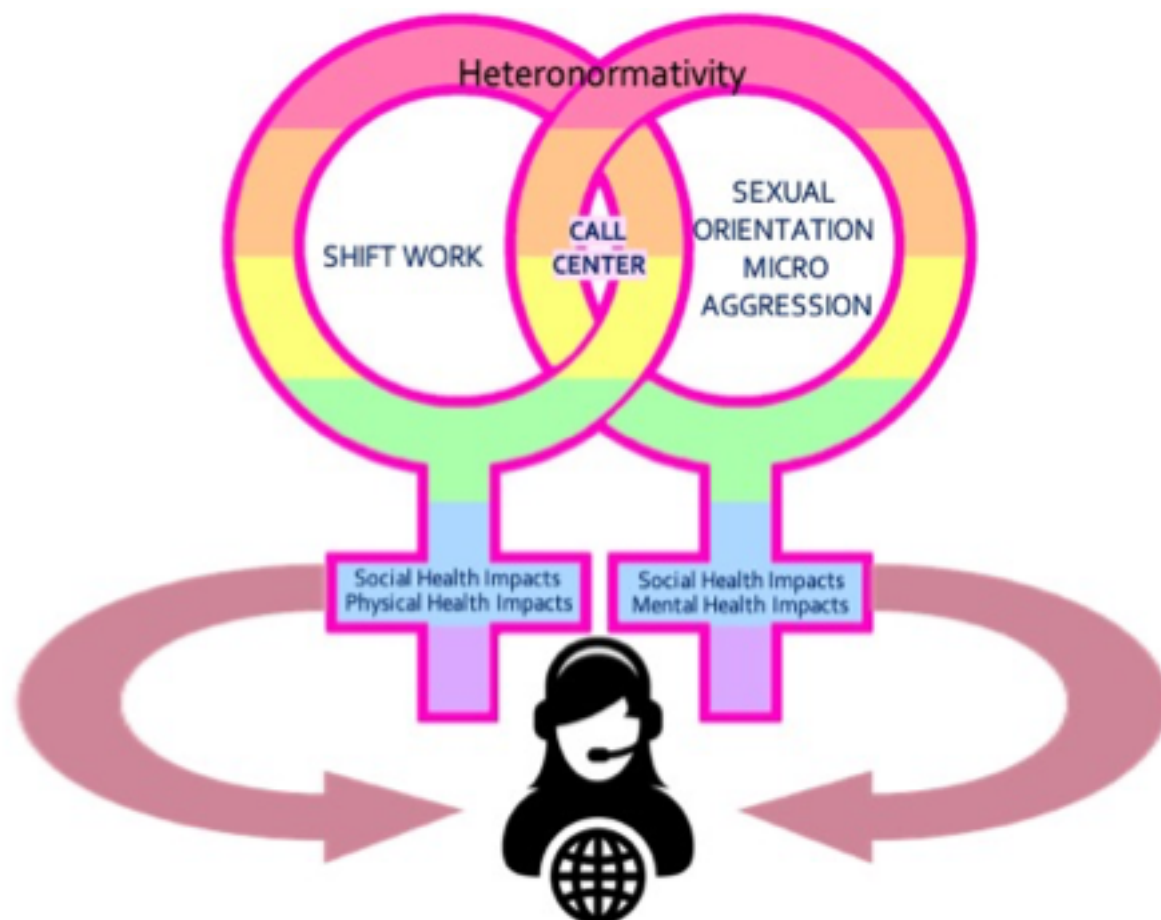


Figure 1. Impacts of Shift Work and Sexual Orientation Microaggression on Lesbian Call Center Agents.

The above model shows the heteronormative call center as a field where shift work and microaggressions occur. The lesbian symbol and colors used in the Venn Diagram symbolize the sexual orientation of lesbian call center agents, and this is an integral part of their experiences in the workplace. Literature has shown that shift work have marked effects on the physical and social health of individuals, and sexual orientation discrimination can negatively impact the social and mental health of people at the receiving end of discriminatory acts.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants and recruitment**

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 call center workers who self-identify as lesbian in three call centers in Eastwood City, the country's first Cyberpark, as mandated in Presidential Proclamation No. 191 (Official Gazette, 1999). Currently, there are 55,000 workers in the 10 first-class corporate office buildings, 500 commercial and retail shops, three lifestyle malls, and information technology (IT) park in Eastwood City (Eastwood City, 2019). The Cyberpark is located in Quezon City, the first city in Metro Manila to enact an anti-discrimination ordinance in 2014 (Quezon City Council, 2014). The ordinance identifies forms of discrimination in employment, education, and access to goods and services, ideally providing protection to members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Due to the complication of identifying lesbians for the study, I used snowball sampling for the research (Meyer and Wilson, 2009). The initial participants were lesbian women who were employed in call centers who I know personally or were referred to me by friends and acquaintances. Upon signifying their intent and availability to participate in the study, they were given individual written consent forms and I explained the process of getting their continuous informed consent all throughout the research process. Their narratives, though all equally important and unique, show that there are common strands among their experiences as lesbian call center workers and the degree of repetition of the responses suggested that data saturation had been reached with the narratives from the 10 participants.

### **Procedure and analysis**

All the participants were interviewed at least twice to understand their experiences as lesbian women who work in call centers. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in Taglish (Tagalog and English), and took approximately an hour to an hour and a half to complete. The interviews were done in two phases. The first phase of the interviews focused on their stories about how they navigate a predominantly heterosexual milieu. During this phase of the interviews, the respondents were asked about their experiences of being a lesbian at home, school, and the workplace. The participants then shared their process of admitting or confirming their sexual orientation to their family, friends, and colleagues. All of the participants were more than willing to talk about their individual experiences for the research. There were times when the interviews were laced with a myriad of emotions, which ranged from sadness, amusement, nostalgia, curiosity, irritation, and occasionally, anger.

The succeeding phase of the interviews focused on the health issues that they personally experienced as call center workers. Most of the participants I interviewed were working in mid- and graveyard shifts and they were usually only free after office hours. Most of the conversations occurred after their shift, ranging from 2am-7am, Manila Time. Participant observation was also used in the research, and I participated in their various activities outside the workplace, like eating, drinking, and videoke (video karaoke) sessions. Existing policies about outsiders' access to call center offices limited my data collection, so I conducted the semi-structured interviews in 24-hour restaurants and coffee shops, and in some cases, I was invited into the participants' homes for the interviews.

The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded for analysis. The transcripts were reviewed line-by-line and coded per emerging theme. I analyzed the data using a case-oriented analysis, to capture the experiences of the participants. The cross-case analysis, particularly a case-oriented analysis entails looking more closely into individual cases, with the goal of gathering as much detail about each particular case (Babbie, 2010). I employed a case-oriented analysis by looking into each 'case' or each shared experience very closely. I examined my data by identifying and delving into their everyday experiences of work, experiences of discrimination and ways of coping and resisting discriminatory practices that appeared across conversations with different participants. In understanding individual cases in-depth, certain elements of the participants' experiences can be seen as instances of a much broader collective experience of lesbians in the workplace.

The relevant themes from the interview include: health impacts of call center work and experiences of being a lesbian in the office. The narratives were then translated to English for inclusion in the manuscript.

## RESULTS

All of the women interviewed for the study identified as lesbian (n=10). They are all generally young, aged 23-35 years old at the time of the interview, with a median age of 27.5 years old. Between the participants, they share a total number of 54 years working in call centers with the median years of experience at 5.5 years.

### Health Impacts of Call Center Work

Due to the nature of call center work, agents are exposed to a wide range of health issues, mostly due to a compromised immune system because of lack of sleep, lack of access to healthy food options, and smoking. The studies done abroad about the health impacts of call center work echo the responses of the participants of the research. All of the participants shared that their health was adversely affected by call center work, based on their experiences of being sick while employed as a call center agent. All ten participants had issues with sleeping (insomnia, fatigue), 90% mentioned that their diet is mostly from fast food outlets, 60% mentioned that they have experienced voice problems (croakiness and/or loss of voice, pain, cough), and 80% of the participants are smokers, which lead to other possible health concerns.

A participant shared that on her first year as a call center agent, she had to go to the hospital almost every month with a different illness, which included hyperacidity, migraine, tonsillitis, sore eyes, severe allergic rhinitis, viral infection, and sinusitis. Missing work due to these diseases led to the docking of her wages, and she was repeatedly warned about her attendance record. Another participant shared her experience of getting sick because she had to be on the phone the entire shift:

*“When I was still with my previous company, it was my first time in years to be sick with pharyngitis. I had to take in 120 calls per day, which led to the swelling of my voice box. I also have eczema, with outbreaks every so often, due to stress and excessive consumption of coffee. I was also diagnosed with Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) or heartburn.”*

The agents usually come to work with not enough sleep, and are forced to result to smoking and drinking copious amounts of coffee and other energy drinks just to get through the shift. Eight out of ten of the participants are smokers, and two of them only started smoking when they were employed as a call center agent. These unhealthy habits contribute to the detrimental health impacts of working in the call center

*“I work in the late afternoon shift, so I usually sleep very late, and wake up in the afternoon. It is very tiring to get up in the afternoon. In addition to that, the work itself is stressful, so I smoke, and I tend to smoke a lot when under stress. It also does not help that a lot of my officemates are smokers too. I also drink coffee at least twice a day, and there are a lot of instances when I do not eat on time, and I usually eat fast food because I do not have a lot of time to eat.”*

The schedule of call center workers is strictly monitored, and it only allows for two 15-minute breaks and an hour of lunch break. The lack of time for a proper meal forces agents to purchase food from fast food outlets. The 15-minute breaks are usually spent smoking in the designated smoking areas, and the lunch break is used for eating and for sleeping in the sleeping quarters. A participant also noted that while there was an office pantry, there was a lack of healthy food offerings:

*"I hope the company considers the food sold in the pantries to check if it's healthy or not. Based from my experience, the food is usually crappy, and there is no variety, they always serve pork."*

Call center companies provide medical insurance coverage to their employees, to compensate for the slew of health impacts that are experienced by their employees every day. The health hazards previously discussed lead to high rates of absenteeism in the BPOs and call center agents who get sick are subjected to punitive attendance policies (in the form of forced unpaid leaves, suspension, or termination), which could lead to the decision for them to just resign. To avoid attrition, most call centers ask for bonds (PhP25,000 – PhP40,000), as assurance that the employee will stay in the company within the contract period. Five of the participants of the research admitted to being call center "hoppers." They usually leave the companies that they are working for right after regularization, after working for at least six months for the company. Six participants admitted to staying in BPO companies for only two years or less. Common reasons for leaving the companies are low salary, higher offers in other companies, schedule, type of account, stress, and location.

### **Effects of Shift Work in Call Centers**

All of the participants in the study admitted to having trouble sleeping because of their shifting work schedule. A participant shared that there was a stark difference on her health status when she was still working the graveyard shift:

*"When I was still working the night shift, I usually had cough and colds. Maybe it was because I lacked proper sleep. My other officemates had high blood pressure."*

The shifting schedule also altered their sleep cycles. A participant shared that she finds it difficult to get a restful sleep when she gets home:

*"Even when I'm really tired, I still could not sleep because I don't have airconditioning in my room, and it is so hot, and so bright. I usually sleep just 4-5 hours a day. I also could not sleep because of the noise, since everyone is awake."*

A participant turned her bedroom into a virtual cave to keep the sun out. She used cardboard boxes to block the windows to have a semblance of sleeping during the night after her graveyard shift.

Relationships with non-call center friends and family were also affected by their shifts. It was challenging to plan activities with their friends and family because of their variable schedules.

*"During my days off, I prefer to sleep than meet with my friends. It is also hard if there are get-togethers with the family on the weekends, I cannot participate because I have to go to work at night. It is sad, but I have to do it."*

Call center agents have limited means of socialization with friends and family outside of the industry because of the nature of the work and the erratic work schedule. Therefore, they tend to form bonds and friendships with their officemates in their current BPO companies. Call center workers also have variable days off, and are usually working on weekends. Some of the participants also narrated that sometimes they feel like zombies at home, because they come home very early in the morning and are asleep for most of the day, and they wake up in the evening to get ready to go to work. Therefore, their social lives usually just revolve around their officemates, posing several issues as to how they can maintain relationships with friends and family outside of the workplace. Most of the participants of the study maintain close relationships with their officemates, because they rarely see their friends outside of the industry.



Call centers, however, have very high attrition rates, as agents find it easy to leave and get hired in another company. They usually lose touch with close friends that they have made in previous companies and they choose to make new connections instead of cultivating the friendships that they have formed previously.

### **Effects of sexual orientation microaggressions**

All of the participants' companies have anti-discrimination policies in the code of ethics posted in their official company websites. However, only two of the companies specifically included SOGIE (or at least mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender) in their policies. These statements were directly accessed from the company websites (See Figures 2, 3, and 4).

#### Work Environment and Conduct

██████ believes that our Associates are the core of our business and values diversity and equal employment opportunity. ██████ is committed to providing a safe and healthy work environment that is free from harassment, discrimination, and acts or threats of violence. It is our goal to promote an environment that encourages open communication, promotes mutual respect and teamwork, and develops leaders. Applicants and Associates are evaluated and compensated based on their qualifications, demonstrated skills, and achievements. Associates should be familiar with local policies governing the workplace and reporting procedures. We encourage our Associates to report misconduct, raise concerns, and cooperate in investigations. ██████ protects Associates who act in good faith from retaliation.

Figure 2. Excerpt from the Code of Ethics of Company 1.

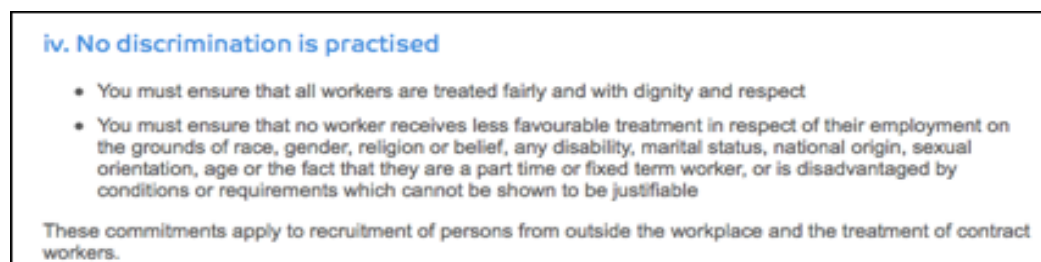


Figure 3. Excerpt from Company 2's Code of Ethical Business Conduct.

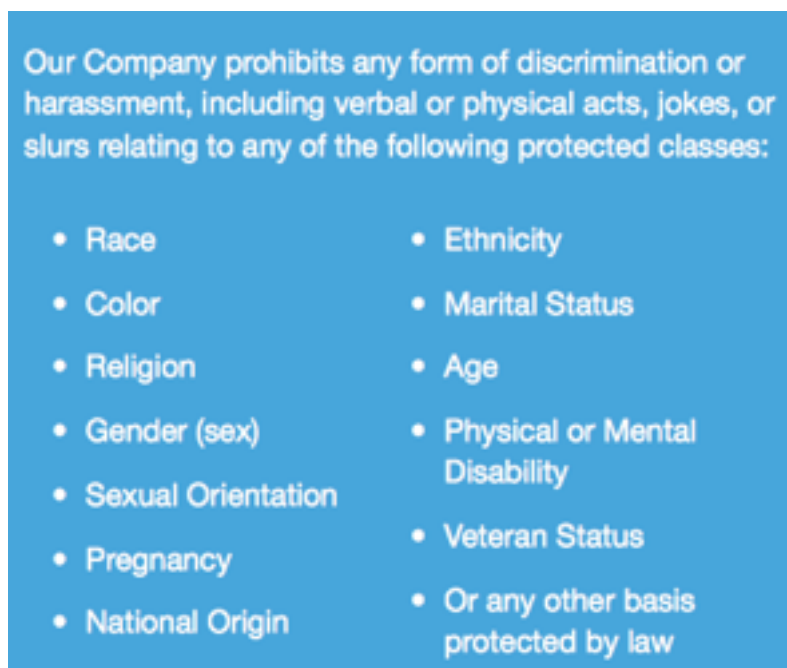


Figure 4. Excerpt from the Global Code of Conduct of Ethics of Company 3.

I have tried to get copies of the official company documents from the human resources (HR) divisions of the three companies where the participants of this research are currently employed in, but existing company policies prohibited them from disclosing the said documents. I have decided to use the information that is publicly available in the company websites. The vague and sweeping statements in these company policies pose serious issues when LGBT employees experience discrimination in their offices, as there are no clear ways by which their rights could be protected on the ground.

Despite the existing anti-discrimination policies, eight out of ten participants shared that they have experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation. The discrimination manifested through subtle forms, and mostly included underhanded remarks or comments with regards to their sexual orientation. The experiences of discrimination felt by the participants can be considered as sexual orientation microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Six of the participants are what can be considered as femme lesbians, and the way they look and dress make people assume that they are heterosexual because of their feminine appearance. People have a hard time believing that they are actually lesbians, based on what a stereotypical lesbian looks like. All of the participants admitted their sexual orientation in the workplace, thinking that they are in a space where they will be accepted and respected. Generally, their coworkers positively reacted upon knowing that they were lesbians. However, there were also reactions of disbelief, with one officemate even saying, "Too bad (you are a lesbian), you are very pretty."

A participant shared that some of her officemates always sang "Loving You" by Minnie Ripperton whenever she was around. She initially did not pay any attention to it, thinking that the group was just really fond of the song. She later found out that the song was being sung in her presence because certain lines in the song (La la la la la...), resemble the tongue action of cunnilingus, and is usually used (derogatorily) to refer to lesbians.

Discrimination was also palpable in inappropriate comments and questions from their officemates. Some of the questions were directed to know the reasons why they are attracted to other women:

*"Are you sure (that you're a lesbian)?"*

*"Were you ever raped?"*

*"Were you molested as a child?"*

*"You'll eventually get tired of being a lesbian."*

The participants also shared that they have gotten used to being asked about sex:

*"How do you have sex?"*

*"Who's the guy in the relationship?"*

*"Have you ever tried sex with a guy?"*

*"Maybe the guy just didn't know how to have sex properly. Try other guys."*

*"How can you satisfy a woman when you don't even have a penis?"*

A woman shared that there was once a bet among the men in her office on who will succeed with sleeping with her:

*"It is somewhat like college in call centers. Guys talk to each other, especially if they know that a girl is a lesbian, and she dresses like this (in a feminine way), they will dare each other, 'go ahead, try to have sex with her'. They have bets, it's as if I'm a prize, a material thing. It's awful."*

All of the participants admitted feeling uncomfortable when their officemates discuss their sexual orientation, but they usually ignore these comments. These microaggressions experienced by the participants show that they are seen as sexual beings and as prizes that can be won or converted. Sexual orientation microaggressions can produce psychological distress among lesbians and can lead to “hiding” or being closeted, internalized sexual stigma, identity conflicts, and psychological/mental health problems (Sue, 2010). These sexual orientation microaggressions can also affect their social health and can aggravate feelings of social exclusion in the workplace. The highly variable schedule of the call center makes it challenging for call center agents to form lasting bonds and relationships with other people, and the presence of microaggressions in the workplace can further exacerbate this. Psychosocial issues and stressful circumstance have been found to also impact on physical health and can lead to premature death (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003).

The lesbian call center worker, therefore, is at risk of suffering these effects of sexual orientation microaggressions, in addition to the negative physical and social health impacts of call center work.

## **COPING**

Coping with workplace heteronormativity requires a steady process in working life (Losert, 2008). Lesbians who are ‘out’ in the workplace have to actively adjust to changes in the workplace, and have to cope with microaggressions in a variety of ways. Militello (2015) found that gay men employ three (3) identity management strategies: concealing, tolerating, and educating. Though done primarily on self-identifying gay men, Militello’s research resounds with the findings of my research, in that some of the participants expressed that they have chosen to conceal their lesbian identity from their other officemates, fearing negative reactions. Most of the participants of the research also admitted to using humor as a way to navigate offensive remarks/questions. For instance, when asked why she did not have a boyfriend, a participant who also works part-time as a free-lance model replies: “I will have a boyfriend next year, I’m still very busy.” This is a very similar response to another participant who readily answers, “Not today, maybe tomorrow,” when asked the same question. These questions were both asked by their male officemates, and the participants felt that joking is a non-threatening way to skirt around their questions.

## **DISCUSSION**

Research about call center work has increased over the years, but less attention has been given to the impacts of call center work on LGBTQIA+ workers, specifically on lesbian women. In the study, the participants shared the health impacts of call center work and the experiences of being a lesbian in the call center. Through the conversations with the participants, I was able to understand the ways by which call center work impinge upon the grounded experiences of lesbian BPO workers. Working in call centers is attractive to jobseekers because of the highly competitive salary and other benefits (sign-in bonus, health card). However, it has detrimental impacts to the physical and social health of call center employees. The transnational character of BPO companies lead to a highly erratic schedule. Shift work can cause and/or exacerbate several health issues among the call center agents. BPO companies present themselves as inclusive workplaces because they benefit from the labor of LGBTQIA+ employees, and have undertaken ways to attract more LGBTQIA+ workers as a way to avoid providing certain benefits currently not afforded to same-sex unions. LGBTQIA+ employees are more amenable to working the graveyard shift, and usually agree to shifting schedules because of lesser familial responsibilities. Some call centers also do not provide health benefits to health dependents other than one’s legal spouse.

The BPO industry actively recruits members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but the narratives of the participants show that company policies are ineffectual in protecting them against microaggressions. Despite sharing that they have all felt these subtle forms of discrimination in their offices, none of the participants have ever reported these incidents to the proper authorities. They all know of the anti-discrimination ordinance and the policies of their companies but they did not feel that these acts have to be reported. They thought that these actions, though discriminatory, are harmless, and can just be ignored. They also felt that reporting these things could be considered as overreactions because there was 'no real harm done'. The microaggressions shared with me by the participants of this research show a kind of discrimination that are different from other forms of discrimination presented by previous studies done on discrimination. Vague company policies, though inclusive of SOGI-ESC, might not be enough to address such forms of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ workers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The participants' narratives reflect the unfortunate state of workers under the transnational BPO industry. Workers are exposed to health risks and hazards, due to the nature of the transnational call center industry, which require workers to adapt to flexible schedules/variable working hours. Aside from these physical health impacts, call center agents also experience social health impacts that directly affect their overall health. Lesbian call center workers bear the brunt of both physical and social health impacts in the current BPO labor system, and are subject to additional stresses due to their sexual orientation. The call center industry is still being actively promoted as a key industry for the Philippine workforce, but these impacts beg further inspection and critical scrutiny. There is a need to look into the various occupational health concerns of lesbians, as they are inevitably subject to physical and social health impacts, and these impacts are compounded by different forms of discrimination in the workplace.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Future research on the topic must be expanded to include participants from call center offices outside Metro Manila. It is also recommended to include data from health workers in call centers to adequately understand the health issues of call center agents based on the data from their offices. It is also recommended to conduct a more in-depth look into the mental health status of lesbian call center workers, as being subject to sexual orientation-based discrimination might exacerbate the levels of stress in this already stressful working environment. Further studies should also focus on the issue of contractualization and the lack of unions in call centers, building on Reese and Soco-Carreón's (2013) work. This is troubling, as the call center workers do not have a collective bargaining power to ensure that their rights are being protected. Call center agents are not in a position to demand better terms and conditions of employment because of the lack of backing of trade unions. Nearly every respondent in the study cited the 'no-union' policy in their contracts when asked if they would be willing to join a union. Agents fear termination by the management in the event that they join a union. This is also aggravated by the fact that the idea of disagreeing or being a troublemaker is frowned upon in Filipino culture. There is also a difficulty in forming unions because most call center agents view call center work not as a life-long career, and they do not intend to stay in the industry until they retire.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

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## **AUTHOR DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

No competing financial interests exist.



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## **Pushing the Boundaries of Motherhood and *Pagkadalaga*:**

Sexuality and Reproductive Freedom of Urban Poor Women and Volunteers of the  
Likhaan Center for Women's Health

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Sabrina Laya S. Gacad

*Through the conduct of feminist research in urban poor communities, this study reveals pathways to reproductive freedom anchored on women expanding the meaning and performance of moral motherhood and *pagkadalaga*, supported by free and stigma-free reproductive health service delivery and education. The study elaborates on the multiple meanings of *paglalandi*, the only space in mainstream Filipino society that allows the open discussion of sexuality. The study makes the argument that women's knowledge, life experiences, and aspirations around *paglalandi*, motherhood, and *pagkadalaga*, even as they are defined by patriarchy and limited by material conditions, are potent sites for eroding patriarchal and capitalist control of peoples' bodies, identities, and desires.*

Keywords: sexuality, reproductive freedom, motherhood, *pagkadalaga*, *paglalandi*

### **Introduction**

In urban, poor communities in Manila, women's contraceptive choices and reproductive freedom are marked by their compliance to the identity of the *mabuting ina* (the good or moral mother) and their aspiration for the near-mythical *dalaga* (the independent, unmarried woman). These identities are regulated by patriarchal control of women's bodies and traditional norms that annex sexuality to fringes of society. These identities are also shaped by the pressures of poverty. With limited social support from the state, (re)producing able-bodied, educated children determines a family's pathway to a better life. This study's original intention was to understand the motivation behind women's contraceptive use, and how this leads to reproductive freedom. It has since evolved into how women, with access to sexuality and reproductive health services and education, find empowerment within the identities of the moral mother and the *dalaga*, and contribute to the inter-generational erosion of patriarchy, the achievement of reproductive freedom, and the improvement of their socio-economic outcomes.

Poverty and patriarchy create enormous challenges for women in the Philippines. Limited public healthcare funding pushes women to endure overcrowded and under-staffed public hospitals and having to make hard decisions between spending on medication or food. The constant pressure to shift the burden of social services from public spending to individual pockets exacerbates the burden of care on women, and makes a clear economic argument for family planning. The country's landmark legislation on reproductive health, Republic Act 10354 or the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law of 2012, recognizes the rights of women over their own bodies and to plan their families, at the same time that it gives a nod to conservative norms around sexuality. The law guarantees the distribution of modern contraceptives in all public facilities and the provision of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education in all schools. It also requires youth under 15 years old to present parental consent to gain access to contraceptives and reproductive health services, and allows medical professionals to withhold medical advice or treatment that conflicts with their religious convictions under conscientious objection. Beyond the law, women's reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy continue to be challenged by traditional norms and expectations surrounding women's sexuality and their roles in families and communities.

The Philippines enjoys a total fertility rate of 2.7 children per woman; 40% of the population uses modern family planning methods (NDHS, 2017). However, around 2 million poor women of reproductive age continue to live with an unmet need for family planning (DOH, 2017). In 2017, less than half of sexually active teenagers used modern contraceptives; there were 47 births per 1000 women within 15 to 19 years old, only one unit shy of the 46 births recorded in 1998; for all other age groups, birth rates have dropped across a twenty-four-year period (ARROW, Likhaan, 2019). Manila is a densely populated urban center with a population of 1.78 million, its poorest communities are found in the Baseco Compound in the Port Area and Tondo, the fieldwork sites for this study.

Likhaan Center for Women's Health, a not-for-profit, non-government organization, provides free reproductive health and family planning services, and popular education on sexuality, reproductive health, and women's rights to clients in eight sites across the Philippines, five of which are clinics in Metro Manila. Tondo and Baseco are included in Likhaan's most extensive operations. They also have an advocacy arm that engages the women's movement, academic institutions, government bodies, and other stakeholders. Likhaan has a professional medical staff of doctors, nurses, midwives, community mobilisers (CMs), and a volunteer arm of community health promoters (CHPs). Their service delivery operations and community organizing go hand in hand, community organizers act as demand generators for clinic services. As an extension of organizing work, and to promote Likhaan's services from within neighborhoods, CHPs receive training on a range of health and political issues related to sexuality and reproductive health.

## **Methodology**

The feminist standpoint epistemology requires the recognition of women's epistemic authority (Doucet, Mauthner, 2007; Brooks, Hesse-Biber 2007), women's unique positionality places them inside oppressive social structures and gender norms, and informs their actions and strategies towards liberation and empowerment (Collins, 2014; Jaggar, 2014). Knowledge created through this methodology is thus a more accurate representation of women's realities. Feminist research also requires researchers to have a strong sense of reflexivity, mindful of the power imbalance between researcher and respondent, and how the researcher's own biases may influence data gathering and analysis (Jaggar, 2014). A final requirement of this methodology is the intention for social transformation.

To surface women's ways of knowing, data gathering was through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that encouraged participants to discuss their aspirations and values, as well as their experiences around the use of contraceptives, and their various roles in their homes and communities. The elements of social transformation include raising women's awareness and consciousness to shared experiences of negotiating bodily autonomy and controlling their fertility, and identifying how their narratives contribute to a systematic erosion of patriarchal norms and traditions around women's sexuality and reproductive health.

To reconcile the imbalances in power and privilege between researcher and the participants in the conduct of data gathering activities, the researcher emphasized the participants' authority over their own narratives, to which the researcher serves as witness and listener. The interviews and discussions tended towards a more casual, story-telling, and "*talambuhay* sharing" format, with the researcher adapting to the language and words and meanings popularly used in communities and deferring to participants' knowledge. At appropriate points in the conversation, the researcher shared her own perspectives and opinion about how women's empowerment comes with a stigma-free and sex-positive perspective of sexuality, and how contraceptives are important to allow women to indulge in their various pleasures and relationships, without the risk of pregnancy.

The researcher also shared her experiences of *pagkadalaga* and relationships, especially when participants asked about it. This led to the discovery of a common cause between both researcher and participants - that empowerment meant making choices to support even the identities prescribed by patriarchy and redefining these identities by making space for pleasure and desire. Ultimately, the researcher's privilege lies in "being able to walk away," carrying women's stories and aspirations, and this came with a heightened sense of responsibility to represent women's aspirations and stories accurately.

Interviews were conducted across four months, with nine Likhaan clients, and two volunteers (see Table 1). The data from the interviews were organized into themes and validated through a focus group discussion with five CHPs. One CHP participated in both the FGD and the interview. All participants, selected by Likhaan community mobilisers, lived in Tondo and Baseco at the time of the interview. Participants are all mothers in their early 20s to mid-40s, with as little as two children and as many as eight. Some participants are solo parents, and some have children from different partners. Their educational levels varied from having completed primary education to obtaining some or completing secondary schooling. In compliance with ethical standards, all names presented in this paper are pseudonyms.

The study is anchored on the concepts of reproductive freedom and domesticity. Reproductive freedom is the ability of women to control the number of children they have, and when, and in what circumstances to bear and raise them (Jaggar 1988). It is aided by contraceptive use and sexuality and reproductive health education. The meaning of reproductive freedom for individual women in urban poor communities was expected to be limited by traditional norms around women's sexuality, and assisted by the strong individual and collective assertion of women for rights over their own bodies, and the well-being of their children.

Domesticity (Williams, 2011) navigates the axis of market and family work, and the ensuing gendered relations of dominance. It describes the identities of the ideal worker (man) and the moral mother (woman), each fulfilling roles related to childrearing, care work and economic productivity, which may be shifting through time. It argues that as all family work became coded as "care", it ceased to be seen as "work" and became attached to the performance of being a woman. (Williams, 2001)

### Summary of findings

Reproductive freedom and moral motherhood, in the lived experiences of women from urban poor communities, appear to be mutually reinforcing. The full performance of moral motherhood compels women to use contraceptives; reproductive freedom is anchored on participants' identities as mothers. However, participants have a strong desire to see their children grow into independent single women, and experience their *pagkadalaga*, before settling down. To do this, they are pushing the boundaries of moral motherhood to include caring about their sexuality as well as their children's and this makes an inter-generational shift in reproductive freedom possible.

The paper will contribute not only to understanding the lives and well-being of women from urban poor communities, it also posits that childbearing, childrearing, and moral motherhood roles and identities that are key to the continuing effort to liberate women from the confines of patriarchy and poverty.

## Reproductive freedom coincides with being a good mother

For all research participants, contraceptives assist in achieving birth spacing or preventing further pregnancies altogether; this is critical to being a “*mabuting ina*” or good mother who devotes herself to improving her children’s life outcomes. Participants had their first child between the ages of 17 to 22, and learned of family planning and contraceptives after having given birth. Younger participants were able to maintain their desired number of children through contraceptives, older participants came to contraceptives after having more children than they intended. All participants agree contraceptives assist in the challenge to raise children well with limited resources. Participants also use “family planning” in conversations to refer to the use of modern contraceptives.

“*Magpa-family planning ako kasi ayoko na mag-buntis, mahirap manganak, mahirap ang buhay,*” [“I am using family planning (methods) because I don’t want to bear another child. Giving birth is hard, life is difficult.”] Cris, 26 years old with three children, shared how she opened the topic of contraceptives with her partner.

“*Mahirap mag-alaga. Minsan, nasubukan ko na sunud-sunod yung nagkasakit. Minsan pa nga, n’ung pinagbubuntis ko pa ito (gestures to infant in her arms), na-kompayn yun (gestures to other child).*” [“It’s hard work raising children. At one point, they were getting sick, one after the other. While I was pregnant with this one [gestures to infant in her arms], the older one had to be confined at the hospital.”] Ana explained the difficulty of raising eight children, when asked why she did not want to have any more.

“*Gusto po kasi namin mabonggahan ng seven years old ang panganay, birthday eh. Eh sabi ko, pag nagbuntis ako ngayon, kawawa s’ya, wala s’yang pang seven years old [birthday party], lahat ng gagastusin sa kanya, mapupunta sa baby. Kaya ayoko pang magbuntis,*” [“We wanted to have a grand celebration for our eldest’s seventh birthday. I told her that if I get pregnant now, she will not have anything for her birthday, everything that could be spent for her party will instead be diverted to the baby. This is why I do not yet want to get pregnant,”] said Jen, 27 years old, with two children and two cycles of sub-dermal implant and counting

Apart from explaining their reasons for using contraceptives, the women quoted above spoke of the different dimensions of being a good mother. In further discussions, the good mother identity emerged as having three main areas of responsibility:

*Health and hygiene*- mothers ensured their child’s proper nutrition and imposed habits such as napping during the day; good hygiene and grooming practices included regular baths and being clothed in clean garments when in public.

*Education*- mothers aspire for their children to complete primary and secondary education with their guidance. While not all mothers will commit to ensuring their children’s enrolment to tertiary education, they will make the effort to find funding, or support their children’s initiatives for gainful employment to save up for college.

*Pleasures* - with the view that pleasure is the “emotion of delight and joy” (Gilligan, 2002) mothers take particular pride in indulging in their children’s happiness with the occasional spending on toys, treats, and birthday celebrations, and other more family-oriented experiences that bring joy.



The good mother identity rose from women's desire to provide their children a better life than their own. Their experiences of poverty during childhood and adolescence indicated deprivation and hunger, a cramped yet often happy household, and a yearning for, in participants' words, "something more," indicating a desire for autonomy or a sense of control (Kabeer, 2007).

The participants also described the rewards or joys of good motherhood. Carrying a pregnancy to term and having a physical and psychological bond with a new-born allowed them to feel "complete" as a woman. Witnessing the joy and successes of their children in different endeavors makes their hard work all worth it.

*"Nakakatuwa lang, pag nakikita mo syang natutulog lang, pag napapagmasdan mo yung baby, parang ang sarap-sarap ng pakiramdam, yung parang tunay na babae ka... pag nakapagsilang ka ng isang baby, kapag naalagaan mo, napagtapos mo, napalaki mo sya ng maayos, di ba, parang fulfilment mo yun sa sarili mo kahit na di ka nakatapos,"* ["It makes me happy, watching over them, as they sleep, it brings such an overwhelming feeling of joy, as if I were a complete woman... Giving birth, taking care of a child, getting them through their education, raising them well, it gives me a sense of fulfilment even if I had not been able to graduate [from college] myself,"] Andrea said.

The good mother gives up all personal desires and devotes all her time and energy to ensuring that her children to grow into healthy and able-bodied individuals who can take responsibility for their own path out of poverty.

*"Kahit entertainer ako, o sabihin na nating GRO ng Olongapo o Angeles, binuhos ko naman ito sa mga anak ko, hindi sa sarili ko."* ["Even if I were an entertainer, what is called GRO, from Olongapo or Angeles, everything went towards raising my children, it was never about me,"] Mia said.

*"Kung ano po gusto kong makuha para sa sarili ko, yun na lang po, ilalaan ko na lang po sa mga anak ko, sa kanila na po... kasi parang, kung ano po yung hindi po namin naranasan noon, gusto po namin iparanas sa kanila."* ["Whatever I might want for myself, I would rather devote to my children, they should have it. All that we did not have then [in our childhood], we want them to experience,"] Kay said.

*"Siyempre magiging masaya po ako pag nasa magagandang buhay na yung mga anak ko. Yun po ang dinadalangin ko talaga sa taas, na sana maging ganun ang sitwasyon ng buhay namin,"* ["I would be happy if my children find better lives. I really pray to the heavens for this, for our situation and our lives would improve,"] Daisy said Quote from interview with CHP 1.

Some are fortunate to have financial or material support from their parents-in-law, their siblings, or, if they were solo mothers, their lovers. Mia even mentioned the support she receives from one of her "boypren" that she does not necessarily feel any love for: *"Siyempre iniisip ko pamilya ko, [mga] anak ko. Kasi inaano ko lang, magbigay ng pera ba, matulungan n'ya ako. Kahit hindi ko s'ya mahal, basta mahal mo ako, mahal mo ang pamilya ko, natutulungan mo ako, kasi pagdating naman ng huli, matutunan naman kitang mahal." "I only think about my family, my children. By giving me money, he helps me. Even if I do not love him, as long as he loves me and my family, and he supports me, then I may learn to love him eventually."*

The *mabuting ina* described by research participants follow the characteristics of domesticity's moral mother, the woman who puts the needs and well-being of her children above all else. Her work includes care work, household management, and the physical labor of cleaning and organising (Williams, 2001). However, mothers who appear to prioritize themselves at the expense of their children are commonly the topic of community gossip. Such women were described to take the time to dress up and socialize outside her home, while leaving her child to run dirty on the streets.

Because patriarchy codes all care work as a feminine ethic that requires devotion to others and selflessness, and is something “good women do” (Gilligan, 2011), the gossip that befalls women who do otherwise appears a natural consequence for their behavior.

#### *Moral motherhood, work, and carework*

Some participants also discussed their partners’ contribution to their decision to become stay-at-home mothers. Some partners discouraged women from working because they feel emasculated, and others assured women that they will provide for the family. In either case, women’s aspiration to find work was overcome by the unique responsibility of mothers to provide their children care. Especially if they had younger children, even if work provides families an additional source of income, spouses commonly point out that this will be spent on childcare, which mothers will still have to supervise.

*“Gusto n’ya [partner] focus na lang ako sa panganay namin, sabi nya, walang ibang mag-iintindi dyan sa bata kundi ikaw, kasi ikaw ang nanay. Tsaka breastfeed ako nun... kaya sabi nya, sya na lang magtatrabahao, ikaw, magalaga ka na lang sa bata, sa bahay ka na lang,”* [“He wanted me to focus on our eldest child. He said, we cannot expect anyone else to care for the child, because I am the mother. I was also breastfeeding then, so he said he will work, and he told me that I should take care of our child, that I should stay at home,”] said Andrea, who was working until she took a maternity leave to birth her first child.

*“Sabi nga po ng asawa ko, kaya ko naman kayo buhayin, huwag ka na mag-hanap buhay, intindihin mo na lang yung dalawa,”* [“My husband said, I can take care of you, you do not need to work, just take care of our children,”] Jen shared.

*“Minsan gusto ko magtrabaho, ayaw nya. Iniisip n’ya na nanglilit s’ya sa sarili n’ya na ganun na ‘yung ginawa ko noon, na ako yung nagtrabahao, s’ya ‘yung nasa bahay... Alagaan ko na lang daw mga anak n’ya, mga anak namin. Sinasabihan ko s’ya na papaalagaan ko naman sa mga kamaganak ko. Sabi n’ya, ganun din ‘yun, ‘yung papasahod mo sa kanila, wala rin, nagtrabaho ka pa,”* [“Sometimes I want to work, but he wouldn’t let me. He thinks it makes insignificant, he is ashamed that, back then, I was working and he stayed at home. I should just take care of his children, our children, he says. I tell him, I can ask my relatives to care for the kids. He says, we will have to pay them for child care, with what I will earn,”] Sara said.

The narratives point to male partners gaining power from subscribing wholly to the identity of the ideal worker, and this includes promising to provide for all their families’ needs (Williams, 2001). However, the capitalist configuration of low wages for low-skilled workers and the ever-increasing costs of raising children leaves families with great financial need, thus compelling women to seek work (Kabeer, 2007). Because this appears as a challenge to the breadwinning partner, men respond by reinforcing the duty of the moral mother - the mother who emanates care from her very presence (Williams, 2001), who cannot be matched by any alternative source.

#### *Challenges to women’s contraceptive options*

Women’s contraceptive strategies are challenged by their husband or partner’s compulsion to control their bodies and sexual desires. Participants describe their husbands’ response to the thought of them using contraceptives as being skeptical at best, and being violently against it at worst.

Daisy talked about how her husband tricked her into her seventh and last pregnancy. “Nung nagbuntis ako, di ko talaga expected ‘yun, kasi nagko-condom po ‘yung mister ko.. Ang alam ko, wala talaga, hanggang sa... naglilihi na po pala ako. ‘Yung mister ko, umamin po sya na binubutasan po n’ya ‘yung condom na gingamit n’ya... Gusto ko kasi tatlo lang... sa pangatlong panganganak, ligate. Hindi po pumayag [ang asawa ko]. Pag na-ligate na , mahilig po sa lalaki... ‘yun po ang expectation ng mister ko, kaya di po n’ya ako pinayagan.” [“I did not expect to become pregnant because we were using condoms then. I was certain there was nothing, until... I started having cravings commonly associated with pregnancy. My husband admitted to having punctured the condoms. I only really wanted three (children)... after the third child, I wanted ligation. He [husband] did not consent. Ligation makes women want men. My husband expected that, so he did not allow me (to have ligation)].”

Ela described how her abusive husband tried to stop her from using contraceptives. “Ayoko kasi ‘yung magparami ng anak...kasi maliit pa lang ‘yung isa, ano s’ya, araw-araw talaga. Talagang ikaw lang magsa-sawa ... pag di ako nagpapagamit, sinasaktan nya ako. Sasabihin nya, meron daw akong iba. Nung nalamang n’yang nagpipills ako, pina-stop nya sa akin yun. Ayaw nya, kasi baka daw mamamaya gumagamit daw ako ng ibang lalalaki. Seloso s’ya, pina-stop n’ya sa akin ‘yun. ...pero di ko ini-stop yung pills na ‘yun, sinabi ko lang sa kanyang ini-stop ko yung pills. Hanggang ngayon, tago ang pills ko, ang kakampi ko n’yan, mga anak ko.” [“I really do not want to have many children. When my first child was young, my husband was really going, every day... If I refuse to have sex, he hurt me. He would accuse me of having taken another man. When he found out I was on the pill, he made me stop. He did not like it, because he thinks I will take other men then. He is jealous, he wanted me to stop it. But i didn’t stop (taking) the pills. I told him I stopped, but I didn’t. Until now, my pills are all hidden, my children support me on this.”]

“Di ko talaga sinabi sa kanya na nakabitan ako ng IUD... sinarili ko ang desisyon kasi ayoko na talaga... Kasi gusto nya, magkakaanak pa kami ng pangatlo. Pero sabi ko sa kanya, anuhin muna natin ang agwat ng mga anak natin bago tayo magdesisyon sa pangatlo. .. Ayaw nya mag-family planning kasi nga, sabi nila, delikado raw yan, magkakaroon ka raw ng cancer, ganun-ganun. Sabi ko wala namang masama kung susubukan mong mag-IUD, eh ayun, tinry ko na hindi nya alam... Gusto ko sya subukan para malamang ko kung totoo talaga yung mga kakalat-kalat sa social media na ganun,” [“I really did not tell him that I got an IUD. I made the decision on my own because I was done [having children]. He wanted to have a third child. I told him, let’s space the births out before we decide on a third [child]. He did not like family planning, he said it was dangerous, it will cause cancer, and stuff like that... I told him there would be nothing wrong if I tried an IUD, I tried it without his knowledge... I wanted to try it to find out if it were really true, all the stuff on social media,” Ana explained.

“Gusto ng boypren ko magbuntis ako... Sinasabi ko sa kanya na meron ako, di ko sinasabi sa kanya na may ginagamit akong family planning,” [“My boyfriend wanted me to carry his child... I tell him that I get my period. I do not tell him that I am using family planning,”] Mia said.

Others negotiated with their husbands about using contraceptives. They explained the benefits of family planning in easing the burden of raising children with limited resources, and assured them that contraceptives are not harmful to their health. Participants also explained why they were in a superior position to decide about contraceptives than their partners were.

“Okay lang sa kanya. At saka, kahit di naman okay sa kanya, hindi naman puwede. Hindi naman sya ‘yung magaalaga... Kasi sya, gawa lang ng sya ng gawa. Tapos kami, aanhin pa namin ng siyam na buwan. Tapos pag lumabas nang ika-siyam na buwan, aalagaan pa namin hanggang sa lumaki. Eh sya, magtatrabaho lang, uuwi. Eh ako, maghapon, magdamag, magaalaga ng anak. Kung marami, eh di hindi ko na nagabayan lahat. Kaya gusto ko sana may agwat sila,” [“He’s okay with it [contraceptives]. And even if it weren’t, he can’t be the one to decide. He isn’t the one caring for the child. He’s just good for making babies.



We have to carry [the pregnancy] for nine months. After the birth, we have to care for them until they grow older. As for him, he goes to work, and then comes home. Meanwhile, I have to care for my children all day, all the time. If I had too many [children], then I would not be able to guide them and care for all of them. That is why I wanted to space their births too,”] Sara shared.

Modern contraceptives cause tension between women and their partners. At the minimum, men have ill-informed fears of its health consequences, at the worst, men are threatened by the myth that as modern contraceptives free women of pregnancies, women will take other men without their knowledge, leading men to make threats of or commit actual violence to impose their will. That women persist in their choices, with the support of networks such as Likhaan's, make contraceptives women's renegade choice (Gacad, 2019).

For women, this renegade choice is key to fulfilling their role as moral mothers. They know and accept that they bear the full burden of pregnancies and child rearing with limited material resources. Their partners prevent them from seeking employment to improve their socio-economic situation. The use of modern contraceptives represents women's control of their fertility, so they can raise their children according to widely-accepted standards of ability and productivity, even with their scarce resources.

There is a certain irony that reflects the interlocking oppressions that patriarchy and poverty have imposed on women. Patriarchy defines men's power over their partner's bodies and sexuality, even as it defines the very role of moral motherhood that women subscribe to. To resolve this requires understanding the inherent power that lies in women's decision to subscribe to moral motherhood. The power of moral motherhood is in the pleasure of raising children, and in confronting the constraints of poverty and providing their children that which the mothers did not have, a better chance at life.

### **Unplanned pregnancies, paglalandi, and pagkadalaga**

Women's narratives reveal other elements of empowerment in their experiences of unplanned pregnancies, sexuality, and their desire for their daughters to live as a dalaga.

A deeper level of empowerment lies in overcoming unplanned pregnancies by taking on the role of the moral mother. The stigma against unplanned pregnancies is vicious. Not only is it seen to cause a sudden shift in young women's socio-economic opportunities, participants explained that unplanned pregnancies cause grave disappointment and shame to their families and the women themselves.

This is told in the Andrea's narrative, as she recounted her experiences when she first got pregnant at 17.

*“Noong nalaman nila [family], parang nalulungkot din sila sa nangyari sa akin, pero kahit papaano, supportive naman sila ... may mga tsimosa... pag napapagusapan ba ng ibang tao, nahihiya sila [family]. Kaya nga nagdecide na rin ako na umalis doon ... Sa ingay ng mga tsimis sa amin, kaya nangupahan kami, bumukod kami,”* [“When they [family] found out, they were saddened [by the pregnancy]. Even then, they were somewhat supportive... They [family] were ashamed of how other people would talk and gossip [about my pregnancy].

So I decided to leave... we decided to rent a house,”] she shares about the tensions in her family and their neighbourhood. Even Andrea’s relationship with her in-laws were tentative. “*Mahirap din kasi nung umpisa, di ko naman pa ka-close yung pamilya nya, tapos nakabukod kami... Parang iniisip ko baka mamaya, di nila ako gusto, baka napipilitan lang sila kasi nabuntis ako ng anak nila... Kasi nung nagbuntis ako, di naman ako dinadalaw ng nanay nya, ako lang nagpapacheck-up sa sarili ko, wala man lang akong kasama. Tapos nung nanganak ako, ‘andyan na sila, ‘andu’n ‘yung mama n’ya, binabantayan ako; ‘yung ate n’ya, nagdadala ng pagkain; papa n’ya, nagpupunta sa ospital. Du’n na kami nag-umpisa maging close ba, nung nakita na nila ‘yung apo nila, nung nanganak ako. Pero nung nagbubuntis pa lang ako, wala na, parang tahimik, ako lang magisa.*” [“It was hard at first, I was not close to his family, and we lived on our own... I was worried that they wouldn’t like me, that they had no choice but to support me because their son got me pregnant... During my pregnancy, they did not even visit, I went to my check-up alone. Then, when I gave birth, they all came. His mom took care of me, his sister brought me food, even his dad visited at the hospital. That’s when we started to get close, when they saw their grandchild, after I gave birth. But during my pregnancy, there was nothing, it was all quiet, I was alone.”]

Another participant talked about how she does not regret having had an early pregnancy, given the successes that she has achieved as a good mother: “... *pero yung sasabihin mong pagsisi sa paglalandi, hindi. Kasi nakita mo yung bunga eh, ah eto yung anak ko, nagaaral, kahit pito sila, kahit pito yung nilandi ko, parang proud pa rin ako ... ito yung mga pinaglandi ko, ito, nagaaral lahat te. Parang proud pa ako sa sarili ko. wala akong pinagsisihan, being proud pa ako sa pamilya ko,*” [“...but to say that I regret having explored my sexuality and had sex then, I don’t. I see the fruits of my labor, here is my child, they are all in school, even if I have seven kids, even if I had flirted and had been sexual, I am still proud... I am proud of myself, I do not regret anything, I am proud of my family,”] said Lou, a Likhaan volunteer.

Through these narratives, moral motherhood represents women’s recovery from the shame of unplanned pregnancies.

#### *Paglalandi as the root cause of unplanned pregnancies*

The shame is tied to the stigma against paglalandi. Mothers commonly attributed their unplanned adolescent pregnancies to “maagang paglalandi” or a pre-mature exploration of sexuality. It is worth noting that in the interviews and the discussions among all participants, there appears to be no socially-acceptable time for women to explore their sexuality, even after adolescence.

To elaborate on the multiple meanings of “maagang paglalandi,” Likhaan CHPs came up with the following:

#### *Paglalandi indicates the transition of a person from childhood into adolescence*

- the physical and physiological changes, as well as the behavioural changes associated with this stage, for young women, this includes dressing up in adult fashion, using make up, and developing a concern for the appropriate feminine behaviour;
- finding other people sexually attractive, or, in colloquial parlance, having crushes or beginning to explore romantic relationships

*Paglalandi is a judgement against women who*

- have romantic relationships with one or multiple partners, having more partners increases the severity of judgement
- explore platonic relationships with young men

*Young women also experienced this judgement when*

- asserting independent decisions that clash with traditional norms around femininity
- expressing a liberal attitude when it comes to the use of street language and swear words, and when talking about sexuality
- demonstrating any and all other forms of defiance to conservative sensibilities

In essence, *paglalandi* refers to the exploration of sexuality and expression of gender identities that challenge the restrictions of patriarchy. The judgement of *paglalandi*, or of being *malandi* is deployed to regulate individual behavior. *Paglalandi* is the only space in society where sexuality is acknowledged openly, and in very negative terms.

Motherhood can present women redemption from judgement and stigma of *paglalandi*. According to the participants' narratives, by becoming mothers, they no longer were the teenagers that got pregnant because they were "malandi." They have become women with the important responsibility of raising children, in order to fulfill social expectations, and meet their personal aspirations for better lives.

### **The fantasy of pagkadalaga**

*Pagkadalaga* represents the identity of the free, independent woman who fulfils her desires by her own abilities and resources. It is an identity restricted in temporal and material conditions, characterized by a combination of the following:

- not having any children
- completing an education to get a good job
- enjoying hard-earned money by spending on clothes, jewellery, make up, good food, and other material things and life experiences.

Women would appear to be caught in the vicious cycle of lack of (or mis-) education, unplanned pregnancies, shame, and poverty, if not for mothers' aspirations to give their daughters what they never had, including their *pagkadalaga*. "*Pagsawaan muna niya ang pagkadalaga niya,*" was mothers' common response when asked what advice they would give their teenage daughter. This translates to making the most of the time that one is single, without obligations to a husband or child. Some elaboration on this advice came in the various interviews, quoted below:

"*Pag laki mo, kailangan may hanapbuhay ka at trabaho ka,*" ["When you grow up, you should be earning a living,"] Jen said.

"*Gayahin niyo si tita niyo, since birth, walang boyfren, hanggang ngayon, nagtatrabaho na rin sya... naka pagtrabaho muna sya bago nakapag-asawa,*" ["Be like your aunt, she hasn't had a boyfriend since birth, until today, and she is now working... She was able to work before she gets married,"] Kay would tell her children and younger relatives.

While the temporal dimension is not strictly defined in terms of number of years, *pagkadalaga* is limited by the traditional pressure that women must bear children at a reasonable age. For the participants, the appropriate age for a woman to have her first child falls around the early- to mid-twenties. Additionally, her adolescent daughter's unplanned pregnancy is viewed as an indication of a woman failing the moral mother role.

The power of *pagkadalaga* lies in its being a socially-accepted identity of women outside the moral mother identity. It comes with the pleasure of forming new romantic and friendly relationships, and the exploration sexuality. *Pagkadalaga* must be important to feminism because it is important to women; this confirms the theme in the literature that associates women's entry to paid work with a break from the control and surveillance of their families, a greater sense of autonomy, and an expansion of life options. (Kabeer, 2007).

#### *Pagkadalaga and sexuality education*

*Pagkadalaga* appears limited to a fantasy because women's sexuality is treated as an object of private, patriarchal desire that cannot be discussed freely. As a consequence, the fulfilment of *pagkadalaga* partly depends on parents' openness to discuss sexuality and sex-positive strategies to prevent unplanned pregnancies. When asked about how they would deal with their children's sexuality and prevent unplanned pregnancies, participants respond with answers that ranged from relatively liberal, to extremely conservative.

The most conservative responses to preventing unplanned pregnancies indicate a command and control strategy of their children's sexuality (Gacad 2019). This strategy includes monitoring social media and messaging accounts, maintaining curfews, and restricting dating (if it is allowed) to home visits enforced by both mother and father. Some participants also believe that family planning should only be given to women who have already birthed their first child, because of either of two misconceptions: discussing family planning with adolescents is an implicit promotion of promiscuity, and taking contraceptives before their first pregnancy will turn women barren.

A number of participants subscribe to a more moderate view of regulating their children's sexual explorations and curiosity. Without promoting contraceptives, mothers would advise their daughters to take care of their bodies and to prioritize their studies.

*"...Na huwag munang isusuko ang sarili niya, tama na muna yung halik-halik lang, boypren-boypren lang. Kung gusto mong ibigay ang sarili mo, sa tamang tao, sa taong mamahalin ka, yung handa kang panagutan hanggang sa magkaanak kayo, ganun,"* ["...Do not give yourself (to him), kissing should be enough, dating and having boyfriends should be enough. If you want to give yourself to someone, they have to be the right person, the person who will love you, who would be prepared to face the consequences of having children,"] Ana shared her advice to her daughter

*"Sasabihan ko na mag-ingat sa pangangatawan nya, lalo na pag mga lalakai ang kasama nya, ganun,"* ["I will tell her to take care of her body, especially when she is around men,"] said Jen.

*"Wala namang problema sa pagbo-boyfren, basta pagbutihin nyo ang pag-aaral nyo. Tsaka ang pagaasawa, nandyan lang yan, kahit ilang taon na kayo magasawa,"* ["There is no problem with having boyfriends, as long as they do well in school. They can get married later on, it should not be the priority. It won't matter at what age you get married,"] said Ela

*“Okay lang po mag boyfren habang nagaaral, basta alam nila ang limitation nila. Okay lang boyfren-boyfren, kilig-kilig. Yung iba sinasabi hanggang dito lang (hand gesture to the neck and chest),”* [“It is okay to have boyfriends while studying, as long as they are aware of their limitations. Boyfriends are okay, the thrill is okay. Others would also say, they should only go up to here,”] Kay advised, implying a physical limit for sexual exploration.

Throughout the discussions, it is interesting to note that mothers do allow some level of physical and sensual pleasure associated with *paglalalandi* and having relationships with people of the opposite sex. In compliance with patriarchal norms, this allowance falls within heteronormative expectations around romantic love, commitment, and building families.

### **Intergenerational shifts in reproductive freedom, motherhood, and pagkadalaga**

Likhaan volunteers’ narratives demonstrate a shift in parenting strategy towards progressive views of sexuality, and how this improves women’s relationships with their children, as well as their children’s socio-economic opportunities.

Volunteer training includes familiarization with clinic operations; reproductive health and family planning including adolescent reproductive health; sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); violence against women and children; and related gender issues. They are also given community organizing training so they may reach women who need reproductive health services, and amicably respond to misinformation and judgement peddled by sceptics and critics.

Volunteers are grateful for the inclusive, stigma-free space that Likhaan cultivates, which encourages them to express their sexuality. According to the participants in the focus group discussion, their trainings gave them a strong sense of self outside being a mother, an identity as a Likhaan volunteer and advocate for women’s health rights, and a collective that supports these.

#### *Redefining motherhood, including sexuality in the discourse and praxis*

CHPs’ sense of duty to their community is propelled by compassion for children who appear to have been neglected by their parents, as well as a sense of solidarity with other mothers in the neighborhoods.

*“Sa dami kong anak, gusto ko yung mga nanay ngayon, mapagitan yung mga [anak] nila eh. Kasi minsan naawa ako sa mga kapitbahay ko, ma’am, sunod sunod ang mga anak nila.”* [“Having raised my many children, I wish for mothers to be able to space their births. I pity my neighbours sometimes, their kids come one after the other,” Daisy said.

The CHPs who participated in the study also talked about how Likhaan’s trainings changed their approach to parenting. They have incorporated the inclusive, stigma-free, and sex-positive approach to adolescent sexuality when relating with their own children. They have made their homes safe spaces for open discussions on issues related to reproductive health and sexuality, and their discussions combine serious advice and light banter. They also make it a point to invite their children to Likhaan activities and events, especially those for adolescents. Some of the older volunteers have also successfully recruited their own children into the volunteer pool.

“Nung pag may paaral po si Mama Lina [a Likhaan community organizer] sa barangay namin, ine-encourage ko po silang makinig... sinasabihan ko po sila, ‘huwag kayong mahiya, kahit dalaga pa kayo puwede kayong mag-family planning. Di ko naman sinabing maaga kayong makipag-ano - talik...[pero] meron kayong matutunan pagka nag-lecture sila.” [“Likhaan conducted an educational discussion at the barangay and I encouraged them [my daughters] to listen, so they can learn... I tell them, do not be shy, even if you are single, you can start family planning. It’s not as if I tell them to have sex right away... [but] there is always something to learn from the lectures,”] Daisy said.

Daisy also talked about how one of her daughters had an unplanned pregnancy, and the latter chose to get a sub-dermal implant from Likhaan after the birth of her baby and went on to finish high school.

“Yun kagandahan sa aming mag ina, dahil magkahiwalay kami ng bahay, pag nagkita kami parang magkaibigan lang, kaya anlaki ng tulong sa akin ng Likhaan, sa [pakikipagusap sa] anak - pano nila ako dapat tratuhin, pano ko sila dapat tratuhin,” [“My daughter and I live apart from each other, and when we see each other, we are like friends. Likhaan helped me a lot in dealing with my children, how they should treat me, how I should treat them,”] Lou talked about how her relationship with her teenage daughters improved.

CHPs have also been responding to the stigma and judgement around *paglalandi*.

A young volunteer offered an interesting contention to the negative connotation around *paglalandi*. For them, *paglalandi* is an assertion of their individuality and autonomy as sexual beings; they are making a break from the traditional expectations around femininity and the behaviours and attitudes of young women. Volunteers across ages also agreed that there is pleasure in *paglalandi* that includes developing platonic or romantic relationships with men, and in knowing themselves and expressing their sexuality as they see fit. Some held the view that *paglalandi* is nothing to be ashamed of, and should in fact be celebrated.

Volunteer work creates an impact beyond the volunteers’ immediate families and neighbourhoods. Participants proudly describe how their children are creating shifts even in the lives of their peers. Armed with correct information and their mothers’ confidence in their respective choices, adolescent children become advocates of sexuality and reproductive health among their social networks. They discuss sexuality and *paglalandi* openly, and promote information about and means to access modern contraceptives.

Likhaan’s CHPs are chipping away at patriarchal norms and beliefs by creating an open discourse around sexuality and *paglalandi*. They have elevated the moral mother identity towards better motherhood, challenging the boundaries of traditional morality. Because they do not wish for their children to experience the difficulties of unplanned pregnancies, their practice of moral motherhood includes nurturing their children’s sexuality, reproductive health, and promoting utmost respect for bodily autonomy. By relating to their adolescent children with unprecedented levels of openness and trust, they begin to shift the dynamics between parent and child from domination through command and control, to a more equal configuration resembling sisterhood and solidarity.



Where patriarchal mechanisms regulate sexuality with the deployment of the judgement of *paglalandi*, CHPs are reclaiming *paglalandi* to represent the pleasures related to romance and sexuality, and related to defying traditional norms and gender scripts.

And, finally, where *pagkadalaga* is commonly seen as a matter of economic independence and a level of liberation from family caregiving duties, Likhaan's volunteers understand that it is also a matter of sexuality, where young women and men have the power to express their gender and other identities, and to explore relationships based on mutual respect and consent. A progressive view of *pagkadalaga* thus puts a premium on reproductive health and freedom, as much as it does on socio-economic well-being.

### **Recommendations**

This study has given feminist insight into how sexuality and reproductive freedom are key factors to empowerment for women living in poverty, with the individual woman as the unit of analysis.

The multiple meanings of *paglalandi* and its potential to dismantle patriarchal conditioning deserve a deeper exploration. Some possible points of inquiry into *paglalandi* can come from the perspective of girls and young women; the perspective of boys, and cisgender heterosexual men; of people of different gender identities and sexual orientations; and, of people with different abilities. As a discourse on Filipino sexuality, *paglalandi* can also be explored with the lenses of decoloniality.

Because the study explores the moral motherhood requirement of raising able-bodied adults, the principle of inclusivity makes it imperative to study the context in which people with different abilities navigate this identity.

Moral motherhood, *paglalandi*, and the desire to fulfill one's *pagkadalaga* can be enhanced by the application of a reproductive justice framework. This will surface the deeper analysis of the intersectionality of sexuality with poverty, social welfare policy, and feminist movement building.

At the policy level, planned interventions on adolescent reproductive health and unplanned pregnancies must consider the multiple meanings of *paglalandi*, starting with the following: a deepening sense of self as girls move towards adolescence, attraction, and building relationships. Adolescent reproductive health interventions must start with creating safe and stigma-free spaces, and must be accompanied with the promotion of correct information about health and sexuality and open access to all services that the youth may need. The hierarchical relationship that insists for adolescent bodies to submit to the blanket authority of their guardians or the state must be replaced by a relationship that respects and protects the youth's bodily autonomy and their reproductive freedom.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that most of the participants of the study had unplanned pregnancies when they were adolescents. Partly due to that, they continue to live in impoverished conditions, and strive, under severely limited circumstances, to achieve a better life for their children, if not for themselves. The participants have suffered the failure of the state to provide free and stigma-

free education and reproductive health services to all. In fact, some participants have even rallied at the doors of the legislative to demand the passage of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law.

In this study, there are two pathways to reproductive freedom for women from urban poor communities:

The first pathway is that of mothers who have begun childbearing in their adolescent years; they have recovered from the shame of *paglalandi* and unplanned adolescent pregnancies by fulfilling their role as moral mothers, aided by modern contraceptives. This is not possible without the work of organizations such as Likhaan that offer free reproductive health education and services, and deploy teams of community-based volunteers to seek out women in need of these very services.

The second pathway is that of adolescents who enjoy stigma-free guidance from their mothers on matters related to reproductive health and sexuality, or *paglalandi*. This represents the evolution of moral motherhood towards nurturing all aspects of their children's health. This empowers young people to explore and express their gender identities and sexuality, without compromising their opportunities for better socio-economic outcomes. This pathway is also anchored on the wide availability of reproductive health services for young people.

Through both pathways, the narratives from the margins demonstrate how mothers' seemingly independent efforts to achieve a minimum respite from poverty have come together into a collective response that undermines patriarchal and capitalist regulations on women's bodies and identities.

This study makes a strong point on a classic feminist debate about motherhood and freedom, and it is simply that the dichotomy is false. For women from urban poor communities, reproductive freedom serves the moral mother identity, and it is their impetus towards liberation from socio-economic pressures of poverty. The feminist problem with moral motherhood lies in the patriarchal regulations around it, the very definition of morality deserves a challenge.

Women from the fringes of society see it as their moral duty to raise children into able-bodied and accomplished adults; Likhaan volunteers have shown how this moral duty must include promoting progressive views of sexuality so children grow to be adults with a sense of ownership of their own bodies, and are able to respect the same in others. This duty expands to supporting women in reclaiming *paglalandi*, and using modern contraceptives to live as a *dalaga* and delay motherhood for as long as it pleases her, or forego motherhood altogether.

It is in the margins, in the narratives of the volunteers, the persevering mothers, the compassionate neighbors, that individual efforts aggregate into an elaborate, intergenerational network of women caring for women across urban, poor communities. It is through this strong network of solidarity that we, as a society, can erode the structures of oppression built by patriarchy and capitalism, towards more equitable relations among people of different genders, sexual orientations, abilities, classes, and convictions.



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**Table 1: Relevant information about interviewees**

Interviewee*	Age at the time of interview	Number of children	Age at birth of first child	Partner/s with children	Highest level of education attained
Mia (1)	40	4	18	3	2nd year high school
Ana (2)	26	3	17	1	2nd year high school
Kay (3)	32	3	22	1	high school graduate
Ela (4)	35	2	18	1	2nd year high school
Daisy (5)	45	7	20	1	high school graduate
Cris (6)	38	8	18	1	grade 6
Jen (7)	27	21	2	1	2nd year high school
Andrea (8)	23	2	16	1	high school graduate
Karen (9)	43	6 (+1 deceased)	19	3	high school graduate
Sara (10)	23	2	17	1	2nd year high school
Lou (11)	38	7	20	2	some college

\*all names have been changed to protect the identities of participants

## **The President's Monologues: Duterte's Rhetoric and Toxic Masculinities**

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**Shebana C. Alqaseer  
Joshua Carlo T. Pile**

*This study provides a preliminary analysis of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's displays and projections of masculinity by collating and analyzing his public remarks during his electoral campaign and the first three years of his presidency with the use of textual analysis. Given his position in Philippine politics and his prominence in mass media, Duterte's narratives, particularly towards gender and masculinity, call for thorough analysis. By examining Duterte's remarks through the lens of masculinity studies and framing it in theorizing on "precarious manhood," this study offers new insight and a fresh approach to decoding and understanding the context and underlying causes of his behavior - the results of which can, in turn, serve as a starting point for addressing its deeper origins and countering its harmful effects. Texts of Duterte's speeches and remarks were collected from official archives, supplemented by news reports. These texts were then read and interpreted along three key areas in masculinity studies: heteronormativity and gender and sexual scripts; homophobia and gender policing; and toxic masculinity. From this preliminary textual analysis, what emerges is a brand of masculinity that hews close to orthodox, traditional, or macho masculinity, marked by regular descents into toxic masculinity - one that calls for further study not just because of the volume of Duterte's remarks and the breadth of concepts in masculinity studies that can help decode them, but also because of this subject's considerable implications on politics and culture in the Philippines, now and in the years to come.*

Keywords: Duterte, textual analysis, masculinity studies

### **Introduction**

This study seeks to provide a preliminary analysis of how President Rodrigo Duterte displays and projects masculinity by collating and evaluating several key remarks he has made in his speeches. In his presidential campaign and in his tenure so far as the highest official in the Philippines, Duterte has displayed misogyny to a degree nearly unprecedented in Philippine politics - and the apparently considerable support such behavior has generated could perhaps indicate larger underlying problems as to how Philippine society views masculinity and gender issues. It is thus crucial to begin an objective conversation on the aspects and categories of masculinity that Duterte portrays and projects, which could then help illuminate the way forward in addressing these underlying issues.

This paper examines how Duterte, in his official statements and speeches, portrays and projects concepts in masculinity studies. At the same time, it draws on theorizing in masculinity studies to offer possible explanations for or interpretations of Duterte's remarks. It must be clear, however, that this study does not claim to provide authoritative interpretations of Duterte's own acts and pronouncements. This study does not claim to conclusively know the logic - if and where it exists - of Duterte's actions and his remarks. What it offers, instead, is simply a different reading of Duterte, which is just one of many other possible and plausible readings and interpretations. It offers a reading informed by the insights established in the field of masculinity studies - a different reading that might, however, help us gain new insights as we delve deeper into it.

This study illuminates both theory and practice in masculinity studies by holding them up together - thus grounding and elaborating on theory based on empirical analysis of political discourses.

This study cannot cover Duterte's entire repertoire of remarks, and studies with greater analytical depth and larger scope would be necessary, and of great help, in the future. In the meantime, however, it hopes to begin the conversation towards understanding - and, hopefully, ultimately countering - the negative effects of Duterte's behavior by seeking fresh insights through masculinity studies.

### **Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities**

This study draws on the Precarious Manhood theory developed by Bosson and Vandello in the field of social psychology to draw up its framework, along with other key concepts in Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (Hearn, Pringle, Ruspini, and Pease, 2011). Vandello and Bosson (2013) argue that this conceptualization of manhood overlaps with preexisting theories of masculinity in psychology and sociology, and that the notion itself of manhood as a problematic and anxious status is not original, as it is a commonly held assumption by many researchers. Specifically, however, they found that manhood is a "precarious social status" ruled by three tenets: that it is elusive or hard-earned; that it is tenuous or easily lost; and that it requires action and public proof, as it is a status confirmed and conferred by others (p. 103). Thus, fears of "losing" their status of manhood lead to strict adherence and policing of gender roles; aversion to femininity and homophobia; greater risk-taking; aggression and violence; among others (Bosson and Vandello, 2011; Vandello and Bosson, 2013). To examine these behaviors or practices, this study will then also draw on the corresponding concepts as further developed and elaborated elsewhere in masculinity studies, such as heteronormativity and gender and sexual scripts; homophobia and the fag discourse; and hegemonic masculinity, hypermasculinity, toxic masculinity, and masculine bravado.

### **Methodology**

To analyze how Duterte displays and projects masculinity, the study's methodology makes use of secondary data, specifically the texts of Duterte's speeches over nearly three years of his presidency and the months leading to his election, with transcripts and translations collected from the official website of the Presidential Communications Operations Office and supplemented by excerpts and translations from news articles online. The study analyzes phrases, sentences, and paragraphs within these public statements and speeches, as well as the themes and topics used and emphasized therein, using textual analysis to offer a reading or interpretation rooted in masculinity studies.

Textual analysis is a form of qualitative analysis that looks beyond the explicit content of media and focuses on its underlying ideological and cultural assumptions or the micro level functions and processes that construct reality socially (Fürsich, 2009; Pälli, Tienari, and Vaara, 2012). According to Hawkins (2017), it involves understanding the language, symbols, and pictures in texts to learn how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences. In this case, texts may be books, photos, advertisements, interviews, performances, social media, film, television, and historical artifacts (Hawkins, 2017); or, as McKee puts it, anything we make meaning from (McKee, 2003). Any cultural object conveying a message can be textually analyzed (Scott, 2006); and, often, these messages in fact indicate cultural values, beliefs, and norms (Hawkins, 2017).

The method opens up analysis not just of latent meaning in a text, but also its implicit patterns, assumptions, and omissions (Fürsich, 2009).

Fürsich (2009) notes that this method was found to be particularly useful by researchers studying media content. In the turn away from traditional quantitative content analysis, the qualitative method offered by textual analysis is seen not as a collection and examination of data, but as a reading - a term which, as Fürsich emphasizes, highlights the interpretive position of the researcher (Fürsich, 2009). Pälli, Tienari, and Vaara (2012) explain that content analysis sees texts simply as "expressions of content;" textual analysis, on the other hand, sees text as "meaning potential," from which actual meanings in context can emerge. The method allows the researcher to locate meanings in texts - for instance in analyzing how it promotes certain points of view, and how language casts those viewpoints as legitimate and self-evident while marginalizing alternative views (Pälli, Tienari, and Vaara, 2012). Because it is "interpretive by nature," however, researchers must understand that there are varieties of interpretations for any given text (Hawkins, 2017).

McKee (2003) admits, however, that textual analysis can be seen as unscientific, as it does not produce quantitative knowledge, and its methodology is not iterable. McKee (2003) also cautions that "readings" or "interpretations" of texts will vary widely - answers to the same question will vary from researcher to researcher, and even researchers with the same set of texts will not have the same answers. But as Hawkins (2017) emphasizes, the key point of poststructuralist textual analysis is that multiple readings of the same text exist; the goal is not to find one correct way to interpret, but instead to find a reasonable interpretation that is based on the text's clues and that is supported by the text itself.

In undertaking its textual analysis, the study will analyze the remarks it gathered to examine how Duterte adheres to and insists on heteronormativity and gender and sexual scripts; engages in homophobia and the fag discourse; and aspires to hegemonic masculinity and displays hypermasculinity, toxic masculinity, and masculine bravado, which it sees as all emerging from Precarious Manhood. These remarks are also read and explained along with the context in which they were made. This follows the basic process outlined by McKee (2003) for textual analysis: determining the research question, locating the necessary texts, and studying the context.

Pälli, Tienari, and Vaara (2012) also note that the sample for textual analysis can vary widely depending on the study; it can be a very large or a very small number of texts, but the actual analysis usually focuses only on either representative or revealing texts. As Fürsich (2009) explains, this method usually results in strategically selected and presented portions of analyzed text that serve as evidence for the overall argument. The time frame of the study covers relevant remarks from Duterte's earliest campaign pronouncements from the end of November 2015 until his latest relevant remarks at the time of writing, which is April 2018, as well as additional remarks made until early January 2019, when the study and its data were updated. This covers a total of 45 relevant remarks or texts that were located. From this total population of 45, 26 representative or revealing remarks were chosen to demonstrate and illustrate theories and concepts, as will be seen in the discussion that follows.



## Discussion

### A. Only Mistresses Allowed: Duterte, Heteronormativity, and Gender and Sexual Scripts

Ingraham (1999) defines heteronormativity as the view that “heterosexuality is the standard for legitimate and expected social and sexual relations” (p.17). As the lone default and the norm, heteronormativity decrees that heterosexuality must be adopted regardless of personal sexual preferences. Such a view necessitates the existence of fixed binary gender roles that are complementary, innate, and natural - even though Ingraham notes that heterosexuality framed as good sexual expression in opposition to homosexuality, and even biological sex construed as polar opposition between male and female, are not naturally occurring, but are instead the product of social constructs, thus reflecting less the natural state of things and more the dominant system of meaning in place. Being constructed instead of naturally occurring, heterosexuality requires learning and maintenance through social practices and systems of gender policing or oppression in order to keep “proper” manhood and womanhood in place.

“Learning” and “maintenance” is facilitated by various institutions within society such as religion, the state, medicine, and law (Ingraham, 2005). This can be illustrated, for instance, in the Church’s condemnation of same sex unions; the State’s laws on adultery and concubinage; family values; teachings in school; and other cultural values. All these contribute to the perpetuation of the heterosexual default, which then covers how an entire society perceives gender and sexuality.

Here, Duterte’s response to calls for the legalization of same sex marriage reveals how he subscribes to heteronormativity:

*“Wala nang gender, because you can be he or she...’yan ang kultura nila. Kayo lang. ‘Di ‘yan puwede sa amin, Katoliko kami (There’s no gender, because you can be or she...that’s their culture. That’s only for them. That can’t be applied to us, we’re Catholics). And there is the Civil Code, which is you can only marry a woman for me, and for woman to marry a man. ‘Yan ang batas natin...Dalawang brother-in-law ko gay. May mga pinsan ako na gay, wala akong ano, pero kung saan ka pinuwesto ng Diyos, diyan ka lang. (That’s the law in the Philippines...I have two brothers-in-law who are gay. I have cousins who are gay, I have nothing against them, but you have to stick to where God placed you.)” (Rappler, 2017)*

Duterte discusses sex and gender as something God-given, and thus fixed and innate. Furthermore, Duterte appeals to institutions such as the Church and the law in justifying his position to likewise reject same sex marriage and uphold the heterosexual default. Note that he does this while also occupying a leading position within an institution himself, since he currently serves as head of state and government.

In another instance, Duterte drums up the polar opposition between the female and the male, and suggests that it would only be natural to limit and allocate roles and positions based on gender:

*“[Women are] unlike men, kami suntukan, bakbakan, barilan. We grew up in a sort of mindset na sometimes prone to violence. Itong mga babae, mga prim and proper man yan, isang tingin lang sa nanay, tunaw na ‘yan. Tapos gawin mong pulis? Hindi sa wala akong bilib. I believe in the woman, their competence and capability, pero hindi lahat sa buhay dapat. (Women are unlike men. We engage in brawls, shootings.*

*We grew up with a mindset that is sometimes prone to violence. Women are prim and proper. With just one look of their mothers, they will melt. And you will make them cops? It's not that I don't trust them. I believe in the woman, their competence and capability, but not in all aspects of life.)" (ABS-CBN News, 2018)*

Heteronormative values define and differentiate the good from the bad, the desirable from the undesirable, though not uniformly; for example, it is acceptable - if not customary - for men to be more sexually aggressive than women, while the same trait in women is often derided or even condemned. As Landgraf and von Treskow (2016) point out, heteronormativity dominates social norms, leading to the reinforcement of "asymmetric" or sexist strategies and expectations. Men receive societal and sexual rewards for being sexually assertive, speaking openly about their sexual desires, and initiating or provoking sexual behavior, while women are rewarded for using passive, less visible, reactive, or "alluring" strategies, objectifying themselves and being objectified in the process (Landgraf and von Treskow, 2016). Because the social evaluation of sexual conduct is unequal, heterosexual norms for sexual activity and approach assign men a visibly initiating role, while the role of women is to be more reserved, careful, selective, and to limit sexual conduct (Landgraf and von Treskow, 2016).

For instance, here, in describing his affair with a girlfriend, Duterte lays down the natural roles expected of a man and woman in engaging in heterosexual relations and publicly discussing sexual relations:

*"Tatal ano naman ang biyahe natin sa buhay nating dalawa? Sunduin kita doon sa boarding house mo, pasok tayo ng motel, short time lang naman...Noong matanda na ako, short time, kasi napaka-short na talaga ang panahon ko. Pagkatapos ng isang kilat 'yun na 'yun. No more. (What trips do we take anyway? I just pick you up at your boarding house, we go inside a motel, it's only 'short time'... When I got old, I could do 'short time' only because I have such a short time left. After one erection, that's it.)" (Rappler, 2015)*

Duterte appears to ascribe a passive and docile sexual role to his girlfriend; as someone to be picked up and, for lack of a better term, "used" for a short time, and then brought home. Also note that the same remarks, when said in the same manner by a woman, will be received with derision or even condemnation in a heteronormative society, and will run counter to roles designating men as naturally more sexually aggressive, and more open about that aggression.

Heteronormativity is also perpetuated by the enactment of gender through gender scripts. Simon and Gagnon (as cited in Parker and Aggleton, 2007) describe a gender script as a metaphor for how social behavior is produced; individuals perform according to the script they learned, and act according to the role society assigned them. As such, gender and sexual scripts are social constructs; they are not inherent in individuals. These scripts function less as algorithms and more as guides. Simon and Gagnon (as cited in Parker and Aggleton, 2007) note that these may be altered by individuals according to their preferences or tastes, and an individual's performance of a script may vary depending on interpretation - subject, of course, to varying limitations.

Here, Duterte appears to offer his own interpretation of a man's part of the gender script when it comes to sexist behavior:

*"Ibigay mo na lang sa akin. Presidente ako. Sabihan na agad ng iba diyan 'sexist.' Sinong sexist? Sinong ayaw ng magandang babae? Minsan yun ang nawala eh, hindi ka na makabiro ng magandang babae. (Just give her to me, I'm the President. They'll say that it's sexist. Who's sexist? Who doesn't like beautiful women? Sometimes that's what's missing. You can't joke about beautiful women.)" (PCOO, 2017b)*

In defending himself against accusations of sexism, Duterte paints his behavior as something normal - if not inevitable - given the innate natural attraction of men towards women, as dictated by gender scripts.

In many cases, society dictates how men and women should act based solely on their sex. Thus, gender and sexual scripts tend to adhere to and reinforce stereotypes, while limiting what a man or woman can and should do. For instance, most gender scripts dictate that men should be providers while women should be caregivers; or that men should initiate sexual advances while women should act like they are not interested.

Here Duterte outlines the difference between male and female gender scripts when it comes to public service and government work:

*"Even sabihin mo mga bright 'yang babae, yung lahat nasa political horizon - you're better off with young people. Ayaw ko talaga ng babae. Gusto ko lalaki kasi marami akong utos. Suddenly, I will tell you you go to Marawi because nobody is supervising there. Mapapagawa ko ba 'yan sa babae, pasubuin? Ako, nasanay ako sa lalaki. Pero [pwede] yung mga position na hindi naman kailangan, tourism. (Even if you say women are bright, all of those in the political horizon - you're better off with young people. I really don't want to appoint women. I want men because I have a lot of orders. Can I make a woman do that, jump in? I got used to working with men. But they can be appointed to positions that aren't necessary, like tourism.)" (Rappler, 2018)*

He does the same when it comes to having affairs:

*"Balita namin babaero ka.' Tama, tama talaga. (They are telling me that they heard I am a womanizer. That is true. That is very true.)" (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2015)*

While he readily admits to and is even proud of being "a womanizer," he can, and does, often on the same breath, condemn the same behavior in women, such as in his following remarks, made on separate occasions, on opposition Senator Leila de Lima:

*"An immoral woman, insofar as the driver's wife is concerned, it's adultery...Here's a woman who funded a house of a lover and yet we don't see any complaint about it." (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016a)*

*"She was not only screwing her driver, she was screwing the nation." (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016c)*

Here, Duterte accomplishes two things: he raises his “credibility” as a man with his ready admission to womanizing, while establishing his strength and superiority by undermining a woman who, in another arena, occupies a position of power.

For men, following the gender script requires building masculine capital. It is a form of cultural capital that gives men the necessary “masculine” skills and cultural competence to achieve legitimacy and social recognition as respected men (Vasquez del Aguila, 2014). According to Vasquez del Aguila (2014), building a man’s masculine capital includes exhibiting masculinity through certain behaviors such as sexual expertise, drinking, and athletic interests; a man’s ‘masculine capital’ is considered his asset or credential that he invests in for him to become a real man.

Duterte is seen to engage in an attempt to build his masculine capital by boasting of having many wives:

*“I have no money but I have many wives. You said that you need money to have so many wives. My wives are all rich just like the Speaker Alvarez...This is a world of hypocrisy. Sino bang walang babae dito? (Who here doesn't have a mistress?)” (PCOO, 2017c)*

He proffers a fantasy of being provided for by his rich mistresses - instead of the other way around - thereby establishing his superiority over, among others, the male members of his audience, which included government officials and city mayors. At the same time, he establishes that having a mistress is something normal - perhaps even required - for men to be respected. At the time, Duterte was defending his key ally, then-House Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, who had just come under fire over an alleged affair (GMA News Online, 2017a).

Despite the strong emphasis on heteronormativity, homosociality still plays a key role in how men view and engage with women. As Flood (2008) argues, “male-male peer relations have a profound influence on some men’s heterosexual involvement” (p.339). Homosociality profoundly shapes male storytelling. It provides a safe space for men to make sense of their sexual and gender lives; it emphasizes “masculine credentials;” it facilitates access to sexual markets; it helps men face powerful women; it provides men an “audience” for male “boasting;” and reinforces male bonding, for instance in homosocial “teamwork” for their heterosexual pursuits (Flood, 2008).

As often happens in homosocial bonding, Duterte happily flashes his “masculine credentials,” and sets the tone of the conversation as an open space for “male boasting.” He encourages heterosexual relations as a key component of homosocial bonding, which at the same time includes competition:

*“Hindi pwedeng magdala ng asawa. Kabit lang. Para mas maganda ang labanan. (You can't bring wives. Only mistresses are allowed. So the competition will be more interesting.)” (PCOO, 2017d)*

Notice his framing of his offer for soldiers to vacation abroad: he says that only their mistresses are allowed to accompany them so that the competition will be better and much more interesting. He frames the offered vacation, which is arguably a venue not just for homosocial bonding but also for relaxing, as a “competition.”

Majors and Billson (1992) defined “cool pose” as a ritualized masculine identity that entails “behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control” (p.4). The “cool pose” is necessary in such attempts to raise masculine capital; it is something men have to do to prove their masculinity and project prowess. To gain masculine capital, one must not care about gaining masculine capital - or at least believably project such an appearance. One must readily take risks and not show any sign of weakness or emotion (Majors and Billson, 1992).

In the quote below, Duterte seems to strike the “cool pose” by taking the threat of imprisonment casually and even eagerly with his flippant and cavalier disposition. At the same time, he references his womanizing and even asks for more women, further building his masculine capital:

*“Pati ‘yan gusto nila ako ipakulong. Kung bigyan ba nila ako ng limang babae kasama ko doon, ‘di putang ina, bukas lilipad na ako. Saan ba ‘yang presohan na ‘yan? (They want me jailed. Well, if they give me five women there...son of a bitch, I’ll fly there tomorrow. Where is this jail?)”*  
(PCOO, 2018a)

#### B. I Don’t Want To Be Gay Again: Homophobia, and Gender Policing

Gender policing is the enforcement of cultural expectations of what forms of masculine and feminine expression are appropriate or normal (Payne and Smith, 2016). A key example here is the “fag discourse,” a concept explored by Pascoe (2005). According to Pascoe (2005), the fag discourse is a form of gender policing used mostly by men to police themselves and others into acceptably masculine identities. It involves the rejection of the fag identity and the confirmation of masculinity or enforcing dominance over women; it is not directed to homosexuals but to “fag categories” (Pascoe, 2005).

The “fag category” is an identity that can temporarily be attached to an individual in a given social space or interaction due to his “unmasculine” behavior, regardless of sexual orientation. Being “unmasculine” ranges from being stupid or incompetent, dancing, caring too much about one’s physical appearance, being too emotional, to expressing sexual or platonic interest in other men, among others. Strictly speaking, this is not homophobia; it is, instead, a gendered and racialized homophobia that functions as a salve to men’s anxieties, fears, and discomforts (Pascoe, 2005).

Here Duterte deploys the “fag category” to discredit his critics:

*“Ito namang isa (Roxas), ako raw ay diktador, pala-away, mainitin ang ulo. Kaya ka walang sumusunod sa gobyerno ninyo, kasi ikaw, bakla ka. (Now, this Roxas said I was a dictator, that I like picking fights, that I’m a hothead. You know why no one follows you in government? It’s because you’re gay.)”* (ABS-CBN, 2016)

In attaching the fag category to a political opponent during the 2016 presidential elections, Duterte does not necessarily ascribe a sexual orientation to his opponent. He points instead to a supposed weakness in Roxas’ leadership, and the latter’s seeming rejection of traits like the willingness to pick fights and being a hothead. His comments indicate that he considers these “unmasculine.” The same is true for his comments on United States Ambassador Philip Goldberg, who had earlier criticized Duterte’s controversial remarks on rape during the presidential campaign:



*"Kausap namin si Kerry. Okay naman siya kasi nag-away kami ng ambassador niya, 'yung ambassador, 'yung bakla. Putang ina, buwisit ako diyan. Naaasar ako sa bakla na yan... nakiki-alam sa eleksyon. (We were talking to Kerry. He's okay but I had an argument with their ambassador, that gay. Son of bitch, he really annoys me. He's interfering in elections.)" (Rappler, 2016b)*

The word *bakla* (gay) itself is dynamic, and the assignment of the category is situational; it can be used to describe males engaging in any sort of behavior that may be considered non-masculine, which in itself could vary. It features heavily in joking relationships between males, and Pascoe (2005) points to literature noting how it helps manage anxiety and discomfort among males. The mechanics are akin to "hot potato," where insults are traded in an attempt to deflect and avoid being the last to hold the fag category. As mentioned, the fag category is gendered homophobia. However, it does not connote the same meaning as "gay" used as a slur. Pascoe (2005) notes that boys in his study actively avoid directing it as an insult towards their homosexual peers; "gay" can be masculine, but "fag," as its direct opposite, cannot. Here Pascoe (2005) cites Wilchins, who coined the phrase the "Eminem Exception"—because, according to the rapper, he calls people "faggot" not on account of their sexual orientation, but because they are "weak" and "unmanly." Pascoe (2005) also emphasizes that invoking the fag discourse creates separation from it; as such, the boy who invokes a fag is not a fag. This is readily apparent in jesting imitations of the category; the joke ends with a quick return to masculinity, with the assurance that the category is indeed laughable. See the dynamism of the word at play in this example:

*"Sabi ng mga kalaban ko, imposible raw. Kasi bayot kayo. (My opponents say it's impossible. That's only because they're gay.)" (Rappler, 2016a)*

Duterte made these remarks in response to critics saying that his repeated promise to end crime, drugs, and corruption in six months is not feasible. Note that his use of "gay" as a slur had nothing to do with sexual orientation, but instead emanates from his perception that such a stance denotes weakness on the part of his critics. Duterte, however, also displays homophobia:

*"E tatal hiwalay man ako sa asawa ko and there are conjugal visits allowed in the Muntinlupa. You may want to visit me. Girls only. Walang...baka kasi pagpasok doon na — mahirap iyan. Ay kasi bakla na ako noon eh. Ayokong mabakla ngayon. (Anyway, I'm divorced. And there are conjugal visits in Muntinlupa. You may want to visit me. But girls only. If I go inside there...well, that's difficult. I already became gay then. I don't want to become gay now.)" (PCOO, 2016a)*

Duterte invokes being gay in the past as a joke, but says he does not want to repeat the experience - affirming his masculinity while simultaneously highlighting the undesirability of being so. Duterte does the same in his following remarks; he "confesses" to being gay, then quickly returns to masculinity by saying it is a joke, thus highlighting that such a sexual orientation deserves laughter and derision:

*"The makeup artists—I was acting gay and I told them, "Para kang nag bakla bakla niyan. Bakla talaga ako. (You're acting gay. You know what, I'm really gay.)" And they believed me [laughter]. You keep on saying that I'm gay. I'll be very handsome if I am. Wouldn't you like that?" (PCOO, 2017e)*

Homophobia and the fag discourse also figure in bullying - although the latter, in its extreme form, is a form of hypermasculinity, which will be tackled in greater detail in the succeeding section. Flouri and Buchanan in Kahn (2009) define bullying as “repeated unprovoked aggressive behavior in which the perpetrator is more powerful than the person or persons being attacked.” They further note the difficulty in estimating the real state of bullying given its various forms and the hesitation of boys to report incidents, especially when with their peers.

Duterte shows such behavior in lobbing insults against Commission on Human Rights Chair Chito Gascon, who, while appointed as chief of a Constitutional Commission, practically wields vastly less power compared to a sitting, elected President - something he repeatedly does, often without direct provocation, as in this case:

*“Yan ang mahirap—eh ito si Gascon, ilang araw na puro teen, teenagers, aka --- parang pedophile kang putang ina ka. Bakit ka mahilig masyado sa teenager? Are you? Nagdududa tuloy ako eh. Bakla ka o pedophile ka? ‘Yan lang nakatutok ka. (That’s what’s difficult. This Gascon, for so many days, it’s all teen, teenagers, the son of a bitch is like a pedophile. Why do you like teenagers so much? I’m starting to doubt you. Are you gay, are you a pedophile? That’s all you’re looking at.)” (PCOO, 2017a)*

His accusation seems to accord equivalence to being gay and being a pedophile. And whether true or otherwise, such accusations simultaneously serve to devalue the concerns raised by Gascon by attacking his gender and sexuality.

### C. Cannibalism, with a Dash of Salt and a Splash of Vinegar: Toxic Masculinity

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) defined hegemonic masculinity as the embodiment of “the currently most honored way of being a man” (p. 832). It is not a category or archetype; it simply pertains to whatever masculinity is atop the hierarchy of masculinities, which may differ across varying contexts. As such, it simultaneously sets down subordinate forms of masculinity, while also legitimizing the subordination of women. Hegemonic masculinity does not mean that an overwhelming percentage of men project this type of masculinity; only a minority of men fall under this category. However, it has normative power because even if a given man does not fall into this category, he positions himself in relation to it. This results in something akin to a code of ideal behavior, which then perpetuates the hierarchy. As Kupers (2005) notes, most men tend to veer away from the hegemonic norm - but simultaneously, they worry that others will deem them unmanly for such deviations from the ideal. While it connotes power, it does not mean violence. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) add that it primarily means ascendancy “through culture, institutions, and persuasions” (p. 832).

Understanding hegemonic masculinity is crucial in exploring one category of masculinity that this study explores: that of orthodox, traditional, or “macho” masculinity. Anderson (2005) argues that men who subscribe to orthodox masculinity do so in an attempt to “approximate” hegemonic masculinity, adding that this is done “largely by devaluing women and gay men” (p.338) though this also extends to less powerful men. Thus, the male identity is constructed based on the rejection of femininity and homosexuality. In addition, this form of masculinity also calls for risk taking and values the tolerance of pain. It emphasizes competitiveness and is overly conscious of power relations among men. Homophobia is not tolerated, but men exercise dominance over other men through the stigma of homosexuality.

Here, Duterte, in remarks made during his campaign for the presidency, aspires to approximate hegemonic masculinity by devaluing women, and highlights his readiness to take risks by issuing a remark that could have been damaging to his electoral campaign. In this quote, Duterte makes light of a heinous - and notably gendered - crime: the rape of Jacqueline Hamill, an Australian missionary, during a hostage crisis in Davao in the late 1980s:

*"Tiningnan ko yung mukha, 'tangina parang artista sa Amerika na maganda. Putangina, sayang ito. Ang nagpasok sa isip ko, nirape nila, pinagpilahang nila doon. Nagalit ako kasi nirape, oo isa rin 'yun. Pero napakaganda, dapat ang mayor muna ang mauna. Sayang. (I looked at her face. She was like a beautiful American actress. Son of a bitch, what a waste. I thought, they raped her, they lined up to rape her. I was angry that she was raped. That was one thing. But she was really beautiful. The mayor should have gone first. What a waste.)"* (Rappler, 2016)

Duterte stresses the idea that he "must go first," and that any beautiful woman is rightfully his. He no longer sees her as a victim of crime, but instead, as an object of desire, thus devaluing the woman - which usually emerges when men try to approximate hegemonic masculinity.

Another means through which men attempt to approximate hegemonic masculinity is hypermasculinity. Bengtsson (2016) notes that hypermasculinity "is based on an exaggerated and unique combination of values traditionally found in hegemonic masculinity" (p. 424). He adds that the frame of hypermasculinity is grounded on "a shared understanding of a masculinity that builds on assumed male superiority, overt sexuality, and a willingness to engage in violence" (Bengtson, 2016, p. 424). Scharrer in Kahn (2009) characterizes hypermasculinity as "the idealization of stereotypically masculine or macho traits," which, naturally, involves rejecting traits antithetical to machismo - similar to how Connell described dominant masculinity, often exhibited in violence towards others, both men and women. Mosher and Sirkin (1984), in an early study attempting to measure hypermasculinity, defined the concept as a "macho personality" and outlined three components forming the "macho personality constellation": calloused sex attitudes towards women, a conception of violence as manly, and a view of danger as exciting (p. 151).

Here Duterte personifies the macho personality outlined by Mosher and Sirkin:

*"Order bag-o ni mayor. Di lang daw mo patyon. Pusilon lang mo sa bisong arong—" Og wa na ma'y bisong, wa na ma'y silbi. (There's a new order coming from Mayor. We won't kill you. We will just shoot your vagina, so that - if there is no vagina, it would be useless.)"* (PCOO, 2018b)

He encourages violence and displays calloused sex attitudes towards women - equating their worth to their vagina. He does the same thing in the following remarks he made while addressing the Philippine military:

*"Pag naka-rape ka ng tatlo, aminin ko na akin iyon. (If you rape three women, I'll say I did it.)"* (GMA News Online, 2017b)

Note how he establishes male superiority and normalizes gendered violence within an already gendered arena of conflict and war, while also perhaps establishing his own superiority over his immediate male audience, among others, by framing the "invitation" to rape with the offer of a free pass for soldiers committing the crime. After all, such an authority to "allow" or "absolve" these rapes implies that Duterte possesses immense power and superiority. This also employs overt sexuality and signals a willingness to engage in violence, which, as mentioned earlier, are key aspects of hypermasculinity.

Kupers (2005) notes that toxic masculinity is constructed of aspects of hegemonic masculinity that “foster domination...and are, thus, socially destructive” (p. 717). This includes misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination, among others (Kupers, 2005, p.717). In explaining toxic masculinity, Haider (2016) draws on literature explaining how violence has become constitutive of masculinity, with inherently violent, and notably gendered, arenas like conflict, war, and militarism emerging as proving grounds where one affirms and asserts one’s masculinity. Haider (2016) further notes that in a patriarchal system, violence functions in two ways: as male guardianship - of women, the family, or the nation - and as policing and enforcing the patriarchal order. When this violence is challenged, it produces disillusionment with the established system of power and with the violence in this system. Haider (2016) then notes that inherently violent masculinity turns toxic when disillusion with violence arises—whether due to its lack of availability, or the fact that violence does not always yield the desired result.

Here Duterte emphasizes the centrality of violence in constructing identity:

*“Ang narinig ninyo, ‘yang extrajudicial killing sa Davao. (You’ve just heard about the extrajudicial killing in Davao). Look at Davao now. I invested a lot. Lives? Yes. You have to kill to make your city peaceful.” (PCOO, 2018c)*

In saying that killings are necessary to make a city peaceful, and that lives taken by extrajudicial killings are “investments,” he establishes his belief that the propensity or capacity for violence is desirable in leaders.

Haider (2016) then characterizes the rage resulting from violence, which he terms “the praxis of toxic masculinities” (p. 559). Rage is inherently unsustainable, so it manifests in flashes. It adds a “death drive” to the energy and potency that violence already brings to the equation - a death drive that obliterates the line between good and evil, dismissing ethics entirely. Having been humiliated and demeaned by the system of power in place, a man takes action, which he believes to be a cleansing force; in doing so, he is indifferent to what is destroyed in the process. As Haider (2016) sums it, “[this] recasting of violence is an explosion of the will to destroy” (p.561).

This seems to be particularly evident in Duterte’s handling of the Marawi siege. Months prior to the siege of Marawi by the Maute terror group, Duterte already spoke of intelligence indicating plans to attack the city and responded by challenging the armed group to go ahead and carry out its plans:

*“They said that they will go down upon Marawi to burn the place. And I said, ‘Go ahead, do it.’” (MindaNews, 2016)*

In the aftermath of the attack, instead of addressing the possibility that his boasts might have been instrumental in goading the terrorist group into attacking the city, Duterte doubled down on the violent rhetoric. Here Duterte displays textbook toxic masculinity. As head of state and commander in chief, he has under his command the military and the police, which are the main instruments of what Weber (1919) described as the state’s monopoly on violence or the legitimate use of physical force - and he made full use of them. Despite this, military efforts to retake the city were slow - leading to a possible disillusionment when the use of violence did not immediately yield the desired result. In its wake, he expressed readiness to “carpet-bomb” the city, saying he will “flatten the place” if necessary - signaling that he will tolerate pain and injury, even that of countless civilians, to end the siege:

*"As early as last year, it was already difficult to enter Marawi...You don't invade it with men. You really crush it with bombs...I will not put the soldiers at high risk. If I have to bomb the... if I have to flatten the place, I will do it. And I will take full responsibility for it...I will order the bombing...carpet already, carpet ah...I will really destroy everything...And I will really do that because I have a bigger responsibility and that is to the Republic of the Philippines." (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2017)*

Kimmel (2005) notes that the centrality of violence to the definition of masculinity predictably has significant and tangible effects on communities. Such violence is institutionalized by the emphasis of male entitlement to power; the formative function of violence in the transition to manhood; the conduct of male socialization as a socialization into the legitimacy of violence, which is accepted as a form of communication between men and against women; the status of violence as something that is rewarded and never punished; the gender gap and inequality in public and political participation, especially given that most public interaction is between men, and not between men and women or among women; the systematic separation of boys and girls at an early age; and the establishment, especially in most Western societies, of the "fierce and handsome warrior" as the ideal for manhood.

Citing the work of social anthropologists Signe Howell and Roy Willis, Kimmel (2005) further notes that violence tends to be high and masculinity and femininity tend to be very differentiated in societies where masculine bravado - the repression and denial of fear - is a defining feature of masculinity. Reichert (2004) highlights the common definition of bravado as an "ostentatious display of courage or boldness" or "action intended to intimidate," and notes that it is a common construct in the identity of boys, with "signifiers of masculinity" - such as acting brave, being unafraid, and posturing threateningly - given emphasis (p. 107). He describes it as "an outward look," or "a style for being male" that values - and penalizes the lack of -bravery, the inclination towards competition, risk-taking, aggressive self-assertion, and seeking dominance (Reichert, 2004, p.107).

Here Duterte compares himself to Hitler to signal the scale of the violence he is willing and able to commit:

*"Hitler massacred three million Jews. Now there is three million, there's three million drug addicts. There are. I'd be happy to slaughter them." (PCOO, 2016b)*

He normalizes, legitimizes, and possibly inspires violence with statements such as these. He also makes repeated admissions to committing murder and calls on his supporters to arm themselves and kill drug users. One such instance was when he promised to reward violence, made barely a month after he was elected:

*"Kayong nandiyan sa neighborhood ninyo (Those among you in your respective neighborhoods), please feel free to call us, the police, or do it yourself if you have the gun — you have my support... [if he resists] you can kill him. Shoot him and I'll give you a medal." (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016b)*

Addressing Islamic State terrorists, whom he warned not to enter the country, Duterte postures threateningly and ostentatiously projects "bravery" of exaggerated - and even absurd - proportions:

*"O, galitin mo ako. [inaudible] Abrihan nako imong tiyan, kuoton ko yang iyong atay. Isawsaw ko na sa suka og asin [inaudible] sa inyong atubangan. Ganun ako magalit sa mga tao ngayon. (Go on, make me angry. I'll cut your stomach open and take your liver. I'll dip it in vinegar and salt in front of you. That's how I get angry at people nowadays)." (PCOO, 2017f)*



## **Conclusion**

Violence has been the currency of Duterte's presidential campaign, especially targeted towards drug users, and he has continued using the same over his first three years in office.

Duterte currently occupies the most powerful political position in the country. Given the implications of such a position - such as control and supervision over the military and most agencies of government, norm-setting power particularly over other politicians, and the ability to command daily mass media coverage, among others - his behavior, particularly towards gender and masculinity, calls for thorough analysis. Unpacking his remarks through the lens of masculinity studies will be helpful in uncovering what he really means by what he says, and in understanding the context and underlying causes of his behavior. This can then illuminate the way forward in countering the possibly harmful effects of such behavior.

From this analysis, Duterte illustrates a form of toxic masculinity that deludes the boundaries between public and domestic patriarchy. It is also important to note the pluralities in his narratives, and the contradictions that have arisen in his identity over the course of his rise to power. It can be argued that he was marginalized in the sense that he is from Davao and not from so-called Imperial Manila, which is largely the homestead of high-profile national politicians, but in the space of a year or so, he has risen to power as the country's top politician. He was low-profile as a local mayor, but is now a regular fixture in daily mass media. Such pluralities and such contradictions, especially in how their effects manifest in his projections of masculinity, warrants further examination.

This article has focused on three key areas in masculinity studies - heteronormativity and gender and sexual scripts, homophobia and gender policing, and toxic masculinity - and the interplay between related concepts that may be used to unpack Duterte's remarks. More areas and concepts may also be ripe for exploration in further studies. The study does not cover, for instance, his numerous speeches touching explicitly on misogyny and rape culture. In addition, the cultural context is also important in analyzing Duterte's remarks. The construction of masculinity in the Philippines, particularly the identification or characterization of the hegemonic man in Philippine culture, may be crucial in such an analysis - lending a richer lens through which future studies may explore how Duterte portrays himself and the contexts in which he says what he says. For instance, from preliminary evidence, he appears to speak more about mistresses and is more likely to make sexual jokes in front of other men, particularly those in military or police service. Lastly, and this, perhaps, is most crucial, it is necessary to study how all these affect other men - in positions of power, particularly in the arena of politics and public service, and the man on the street. Anecdotal evidence already shows that a considerable number of politicians have indeed followed Duterte's lead in the way they speak and conduct themselves. How do these normalize misogyny and perpetuate oppressive structures of gender hierarchies in society? In the meantime, this study aims to simply be a helpful resource in starting these discussions. As in all things, any real and lasting solution begins only with a richer and deeper understanding of the problem at hand - and this study hopes that the reading it offers can represent a concrete step, however small, towards this direction.

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## **Problematizing Privatization:** **How Private Takeover of Local Water Districts Impacts Gender Mainstreaming**

**Atty. Allen L. Espino**

*Since the mid-2010s, more and more local water districts have been entering joint venture agreements as a means to pay off debts, and fund facilities upgrade and service expansion. Water security and sanitation is a development issue recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The implication of gender in water and sanitation has also been widely written about. As far as the SDGs are concerned, gender equality, while being a goal in itself, also permeates and informs the rest of the goals. Water and sanitation is also largely recognized as a promising entry point for increased women's meaningful participation in decision-making bodies, economic activities, and opportunities for children beneficiaries, especially girls.*

*In the Philippines, local water districts are required to allot at least 5% of their annual corporate operating budget to gender mainstreaming. This GAD budget should finance efforts to provide equitable water and sanitation access to women and men. However, privatization brings with it substantial changes in a local water district's operations, organizational composition, and financial position. This paper attempts to answer the questions: 1) "How does privatization--particularly the JVA model--affect the implementation of the GAD budget policy by local water districts?"; and, 2) "Can the revitalized operations promised by privatization be expected to boost local water districts' capacity to contribute to women's empowerment and gender equality in the context of their mandate?"*

*Looking into publicly available data and documents (GAD Plans and Budgets, GAD Accomplishment Reports, COA Audit Reports), this paper finds that the benefits of privatization have not extended to local water districts' gender mainstreaming efforts. On the contrary, the post-JVA structure (downsized plantilla, lower income, and restricted functions) has made it more difficult for privatized water districts to build gender mainstreaming capacity, much more to offer gender-responsive services to their concessionaires.*

**Keywords:** local water district, gender mainstreaming, privatization, joint venture agreement, GAD plan and budget, GAD budget policy, water, water security, water and sanitation, SDGs

### **Introduction**

The water sector has been attracting public attention for the past few months, owing to President Rodrigo Duterte's pronouncements against Metro Manila's two private concessionaires, Maynilad and Manila Water. As of this writing, the situation has escalated to a presidential threat of a military takeover if the concession agreement is not satisfactorily revised (Padin, December 14, 2019). Taking their cue from the President, people now see the privatization of Metro Manila's water and sanitation operations as oligarchy in action, driven purely by corporate greed.

However, since the mid-2010s, privatization of the water sector has been creeping across the countryside, as more and more local water districts - burdened with debts and lack of capital to fund facilities upgrade and service expansion - are succumbing to privatization. Perhaps the most successful private water concessionaire in terms of local coverage expansion is PrimeWater Infrastructure Corporation, owned by the Villar family. In its website (Where We Are, n.d.), PrimeWater flaunts its presence in 16 regions, 36 provinces, and 124 cities and municipalities. At present, over 70 local water districts have reportedly entered into joint venture



agreements (JVA) with PrimeWater for the financing, development, rehabilitation, expansion, improvement, operation, and maintenance of local water districts' water supply and septage systems (Romero, 2019, November 25). A number of similar JVAs are shown in various stages of review and operations in the Public-Private Partnership Center website (Projects Database, n.d.). Some are under review by the Philippine Competition Commission and concerned local government units.

## **Water, Gender, and Privatization**

Water security and sanitation is a development issue recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, Goal 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all) targets, among others, "universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water;" and "access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all" by 2030 (UN, 2018, p. 27).

The implication of gender in water and sanitation has been widely written about as well (World Bank, 2002; Sweetman & Medland, 2017; Garcia, 2019). As far as the SDGs are concerned, gender equality, while being a goal in itself, also permeates and informs the rest of the goals (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). For example, in relation to water and sanitation, the sanitation access target of the SDGs specifically imposes "special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations" (UN, 2018, p. 43).

Water and sanitation is also largely recognized as a promising entry point for increased women's meaningful participation in decision-making bodies, they being the primary users of domestic water and managers of local and household sanitation activities. More importantly, applying the gender perspective in water and sanitation projects has been found to have "multiplier effects" (ADB, 2006, p. 4) in terms of increasing women's economic activities and opening up opportunities for children beneficiaries, especially girls.

In the Philippines, like all other government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCC), local water districts are required to allot at least 5% of their annual corporate operating budget to gender mainstreaming (General Appropriations Act, 1995). In its bid to institutionalize the GAD budget policy among local water districts, the Philippine Commission on Women issued a memorandum circular (2015) providing guidelines for submitting their Gender and Development (GAD) Plan and Budget (GPB) to the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) for review and endorsement. The GPB should sufficiently show, among others, identified gender issues and how the local water district intends to spend its GAD budget to address these. Along with the GPB, agencies are also required to submit an annual GAD Accomplishment Report (AR) detailing the GAD activities, programs, and projects actually implemented.

Ideally, this GAD budget could - and should - finance efforts to provide equitable water and sanitation access, especially to female-headed households, pursuant to the Philippines' commitment as a signatory to the SDGs. By focusing on gender in the process of providing water and sanitation access, the GAD budget can also produce multiplier effects and contribute to women's economic and political empowerment (ADB, 2006).

Privatization, particularly the Joint Venture (JV) model, typically brings with it substantial changes in local water districts' operations, organizational composition, and financial position. This paper inquires into the effect of these consequences on local water districts' gender mainstreaming efforts. The move to privatize is most often a financial decision brought about by lack of funds for service expansion and modernization of facilities. Sorsogon Water District's JVA Primer (n.d.), for example, states that the JVA saves the local water district from having to contract loans to fund service improvements and expansion.

In fact, JVAs consistently state that it is meant for the “financing, development, rehabilitation, expansion, improvement, operation and maintenance” (SCWD Primer, n.d.; MOWD COA Audit Report, 2017; CSFWD COA Audit Report, 2017) of the water district’s water supply and septage system. The JVAs’ avowed purpose is consistent, even for water districts that are financially viable, according to opposing stakeholders, such as San Jose Del Monte Water District (Ofreneo, 2018, June 6).

The PCW defines “gender equality” as the state whereby “women and men enjoy the same status and conditions and have equal opportunity for realizing their potential to contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural development of their countries.” In the context of development, “empowerment” is defined as “individual or collective action by the disadvantaged to overcome the obstacles brought about by structural inequality” (Terms used in Gender and Development, n.d.). In the context of actual or anticipated positive developments arising from JVAs, this paper attempts to answer the questions: 1) “How does privatization - particularly the JVA model - affect the implementation of the GAD budget policy by local water districts?;” and, 2) “Can the revitalized operations promised by privatization be expected to boost local water districts’ capacity to contribute to women’s empowerment and gender equality in the context of their mandate?”

## Limitations

For this paper, the author initially coordinated with a local water district in southern Metro Manila, which committed to provide documents, including a copy of the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA). The water district subsequently declined, citing privacy issues.

The major challenge for this paper has been the lack of publicly available copies of JVAs. It appears that inaccessibility of this important document has been a common and consistent challenge for individuals doing research on the subject. For example, a couple of requests for copies of the JVA were lodged with the Public-Private Partnership Center and National Water Resources Board coursed through the FOI website ([foi.gov.ph](http://foi.gov.ph)). These were denied on the grounds that: 1) the responding agencies did not have a copy of the JVAs requested; and, 2) the PPP Center is prohibited from publicizing PPP contracts based on Department of Justice Opinion No. 26 (2017).

Given this major constraint, analyses were based on accessible public documents such as Commission on Audit Reports, GPBs, GAD Accomplishment Reports (ARs) as primary sources, and newspaper articles and reports as secondary sources. The local water districts mentioned here were selected on the basis of available public documents. Attempts were made to contact the water districts for additional insights or validation. However, no response was received.

## Mandate

Local water districts exist by virtue of Presidential Decree (PD) No. 198 (1973), otherwise known as the *Provincial Water Utilities Act* of 1973 (Title I) and *Local Water District Law* (Title II), which authorized the formation of local water districts for purposes of: “(a) acquiring, installing, improving, maintaining and operating water supply and distribution systems for domestic, industrial, municipal and agricultural uses for residents and lands within the boundaries of such districts; (b) providing, maintaining and operating wastewater collection, treatment and disposal facilities, and (c) conducting such other functions and operations incidental to water resource development, utilization and disposal within such districts, as are necessary or incidental to said purpose” (Title II, Chapter II, Section 5).

Under the PD 198, local water districts can be formed by any city, municipality or province by enacting a resolution. The resolution then forms the water district as an entity that is separate from the local government unit, and under the supervision of the LWUA. It is also provided under PD 198 (Section 46) that the water district thus created shall have exclusive franchise over domestic water service within the district “unless and except to the extent that the board of directors of said district consents thereto by resolution duly adopted.”

In 1994, Republic Act No. 7718, amending the Republic Act No. 6957, or the Build Operate Transfer Law, was enacted, authorizing government agencies to enter into contracts with the private sector for the financing, construction, operation, and maintenance of infrastructure projects. Pursuant to the BOT Law, Executive Order No. 68 (1999) was issued, prescribing the procedures for review by the LWUA of BOT and similar proposals on water supply projects. In 2005, then president Gloria Arroyo issued Executive Order No. 423, authorizing the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) to issue guidelines for government agencies entering into JVs with private entities. Finally, in 2013, the National Economic Development Authority issued the revised guidelines. This signaled the start of the privatization of local water supply and sanitation services.

### **Joint Venture Agreement**

“Joint Venture Agreement” is defined by the NEDA Guidelines (2013, 5.4) as “an arrangement whereby a private sector entity or a group of private sector entities on one hand, and a Government Entity or a group of Government Entities on the other hand, contribute money/capital, services, assets (including equipment, land, intellectual property, or anything of value), or a combination of any or all of the foregoing to undertake an investment activity. The investment activity shall be for the purpose of accomplishing a specific goal with the end view of facilitating private sector initiative in a particular industry or sector, and eventually transfer the activity to either the private sector under competitive market conditions or to the government. The JV involves a community or pooling of interests in the performance of the investment activity, and each party shall have the right to direct and govern the policies in connection therewith with the intention to share both profits and risks/losses subject to agreement by the parties. A JV may be a Contractual JV or a Corporate JV (JV Company).”

In all water districts reviewed, the form adopted is contractual, with a 25-year period of effectivity, subject to renewal. Under these JVs, the private partner is granted the exclusive right to use, manage, and operate the water district’s facilities and assets, and the concession rights to supply water and sanitation services is its contribution to the partnership. For its part, the private partner commits to investing a specified amount over the 25-year period and remits to the water district a fixed share of the revenues throughout the contracting period.

### *Drastic Decrease in Gross Income*

Across the local water districts reviewed, three major consequences relevant to the GAD budget policy were observed. First, the drastic decrease in the local water districts’ income, as a result of the JVs’ common provision that the local water district shall receive a fixed revenue share while the private partners shall retain all revenues in excess thereof (Metro Ozamiz Water District (MOWD) COA Audit Report, 2017). For example, in the case of Iriga City Water District (ICWD), whose JVA with PrimeWater took effect on July 1, 2018, the fixed revenue share accruing to ICWD is P13 million annually, increasing by P1 million every five years. Considering ICWD’s net income

of almost P92 million in 2017, the Commission on Audit, in its 2018 Report, questioned the basis for computing ICWD's fixed revenue share in the JVA. In the same vein, the COA (2018) raised as a concern the P18 million fixed revenue share stipulated in the JVA between Quezon Metropolitan Water District and PrimeWater for being unsupported by documents.

Table 1 shows a number of local water districts and their comparative gross incomes for the years before, of, and after the JVA's effectivity.

Note that consistent with the local water districts under JVA that were examined, the gross income substantially decreased from the year prior to the JVA effectivity, when all revenues accrued to the local water district, to the year of effectivity, when the gross income was a mix of fixed share from the private partner and direct revenues, and to the year after the JVA effectivity, when the gross income was composed mostly of the fixed revenue share as stipulated in the JVA. For some local water districts like Cabanatuan City (CCWD COA Audit Report, 2017) and Sorsogon City (SCWD COA Audit Report, 2017), the fixed revenue share setup has resulted in losses at least for the first year because the income was insufficient to cover the water districts' operational expenses.

Self-sustaining agencies like local water districts set a corporate operating budget every year based on their income and expenditures. In turn, the GAD budget is computed based on the annual corporate operating budget. Since a lower income results in a lower corporate operating budget, it follows that this also leads to a dramatic decrease in the GAD budget, which can ultimately impact the type and extent of GAD activities that the water district could fund.

#### *Downsizing and Displacement*

Another observed direct impact of privatization was the reduced number of employees retained by the local water district. In its JVA Primer, Sorsogon Water District explained that following privatization, regular employees had two options: 1) opt for voluntary retirement and receive two months' salary for every year of service; and 2) be absorbed by PrimeWater as a private sector employee, while retaining the retirement benefits already earned. To illustrate, for MOWD, the COA Audit Report (2017) noted the downsizing of the plantilla from 111 employees (combined permanent and casual) in 2016 prior to the effectivity of the JVA to only 10 permanent and two job-order employees in 2017 after its effectivity. By the end of 2013, Tarlac City Water District had a total of 188 employees. After its privatization in 2016, this was reduced to only 10 regular employees.

The displacement of employees after privatization has been raised in House Resolution No. 10 (2019), which seeks the conduct of an investigation into the effect of privatization on the provision of water services and security of tenure of water district employees. The resolution cited reports that some 300 employees of Bacolod City Water District (BACIWA) could be displaced by its highly publicized and widely opposed impending privatization.

The decimation of the regular plantilla items is a major element of the privatization formula. Because the local water district is left with a skeletal team, the creation of the GAD Focal Point System - with a functional Executive Committee, Technical Working Group and Secretariat - as provided for in the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW)-National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)-Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Memorandum Circular 2012-01 (2012), let alone the implementation of GAD activities, could also be adversely affected.

### *Restricted Functions*

This downsizing post-JVA is a direct consequence of the private partner's assumption of the major functions of the local water district. For example, post-JVA, MOWD's Administrative and Finance, Operations, and Commercial Divisions (COA Audit Report, 2016) were reduced to a Contract Monitoring Unit (COA Audit Report, 2017). ). Similarly, the CSFWD, with its 12 regular employees now also operate as a Contract Monitoring Unit responsible for validating PrimeWater's reports, and evaluating their performance against targets committed to in the business plan (COA Audit Report, 2017).

Gender mainstreaming is the process of "assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." (UN, 2002, p.1)

PCW's Memorandum Circular (2015) prescribing the Guidelines for the Review and Endorsement of the Annual GAD Plans and Budgets of local water districts prescribes two tracks for operationalizing gender mainstreaming: 1) developing organization and client-focused GAD programs, activities and projects; and, 2) ensuring the gender responsiveness of regular programs by using the Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines (HGDG, a tool developed by PCW to measure the gender-responsiveness of a regular program, activity, or project to determine how much of its budget can be attributed to GAD). With the migration of core functions to the private entity, the local water district is also left with fewer possibilities for gender mainstreaming, specifically for making regular programs gender responsive.

### **Impact**

#### *Essential Elements of GAD Planning*

The PCW-NEDA-DBM Joint Circular No. 2012-01 (2012, 4.0-4.4) enjoins water districts to prioritize the institutionalization of the essential elements for GAD planning and budgeting in the preparation of their GPB. These essential elements are: "(1) the creation and/or strengthening of the GFPS in accordance with PCW Memorandum Circular 2011-01, (2) capacity building on GAD, (3) conduct of gender audit; and (4) institutionalizing GAD database/sex-disaggregated data."

Despite the observed consequences, water districts under JVA are not exempt from submitting their annual GPB to the LWUA for review and endorsement. However, the significant changes in their functions and organizational structures can also unfavorably affect their capacity to institutionalize the four essential elements of GAD planning and budgeting.

First, with the decimated plantilla items, the creation and strengthening of the GAD Focal Point System (GFPS), with a fully functional Executive Committee, Technical Working Group and Secretariat, now appears to be impractical, if not totally impossible. For example, for a local water district with a plantilla of not more than 15 employees, the GFPS, if constituted in accordance with the guidelines, will most probably involve everyone in the Contract Monitoring Unit. While the local water district suffers from a lack of personnel to implement the GAD budget policy, the bulk of employees are lodged with the private entity, beyond the compelling reach of the GAD budget policy.



Second, the establishment of the GAD database containing quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data and/or gender statistics - or at least its updating, assuming the local water district has managed to develop its GAD database - and using this to inform GAD activities, could also become more challenging than ever. Given the limited human resources, lesser GAD budget, and restricted functions, this could even remain a non-priority.

Third, capacity building on GAD will also most likely be adversely affected, given the drastically reduced budget, and the lack of personnel who can be trained and can discharge the functions of the GFPS. In addition, even in the presence of trainable people, the practical question is, what use would intensive training on GAD serve, considering the local water district's limited functions?

Finally, the lack of financial and human resources could also discourage local water districts from initiating a gender audit in compliance with the guidelines. Even if it is able to successfully surface gender issues in the course of accomplishing their GPBs, the responsibility of implementing programs, activities, and projects that will address these issues will ultimately lie with the private partner, which has assumed the core functions of the local water district. However, being private in nature, it is not covered by the GAD budget policy and cannot be required to allocate a portion of its budget for gender mainstreaming. It also does not appear that the local water district, in its capacity as the Contract Monitoring Unit, can compel it to do so under the JVA. As such, in the absence of institutional mechanisms to enforce the GAD budget policy or exact accountability, local water districts' gender mainstreaming efforts run the risk of becoming a mere "technical exercise without political outcomes" such as institutional changes or improvement in the social position of women (Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p.86).

### **Case Study: Metro Ozamiz Water District**

MOWD was created on August 2, 1974, with the Provincial Board's submission to the LWUA of its Resolution creating the water district, and LWUA's issuance of the Conditional Certificate of Conformance to MOWD. According to its Operations Manual (2017), MOWD currently serves 21,613 service connections in Ozamiz City and the municipalities of Tudela and Clarin.

From 1974 until 2016, MOWD's operations were organized into the following major divisions: 1) Administrative, which was in charge of Human Resources, Procurement, General Services, and Management and Information System; 2) Finance, which supervised Accounting, Budget, and Cashiering; 3) Commercial, which handled Customer Accounts, Customer Services, and Marketing; and 4) Engineering and Operations, which covered Construction and Maintenance, Production, Planning and Design.

On December 16, 2016, MOWD entered into a contractual JVA with PrimeWater, effective for 25 years subject to renewal, for the financing, development, rehabilitation, expansion, improvement, operation, and maintenance of its water supply and septage system. The JVA was to take effect on March 1, 2017 (COA Audit Report, 2017). As previously mentioned, from 111 employees (combined permanent and casual) in 2016 (COA Audit Report, 2016), MOWD downsized to only 10 permanent and two job-order employees in 2017 as a result of PrimeWater's assumption of MOWD's major functions (COA Audit Report, 2017) including those previously discharged by MOWD's Commercial, Engineering, and Production Departments.



MOWD was transformed into a Contract Monitoring Unit that performs 1) strategic planning and policy setting; 2) asset management supervision; 3) customer relations; 4) tariff setting; and 5) performance review and monitoring functions.

Under the JVA, PrimeWater was given the “exclusive right to use the MOWD Facilities and the Concession Rights to provide Water Supply and Septage Management System Services and/or operate the Water Supply System and Septage Management Facilities in the JV Area.” (MOWD Operations Manual, 2017, p.22). For its part, PrimeWater was to infuse capital investment and expertise in the “rehabilitation, expansion, improvement, operation and maintenance of the Water Supply and construction and management of Septage Facilities in the JV Area estimated at One Billion Six Hundred Twenty Four Million Two Hundred Thirty Thousand Pesos (P1,624,230,000.00) over twenty five (25) years term” (MOWD Operations Manual, 2017, p.22).

The JVA also stipulated that for the duration of the contract, MOWD shall receive a fixed revenue share of P15 million while PrimeWater shall retain all revenues in excess thereof (COA Audit Report, 2017). As a result, based on Commission on Audit Records (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), GAD PBs (2016, 2017), and GAD AR (2015, 2017) MOWD’s financial position declined steadily as shown by Table 2.

In its Audit Report (2018), COA even decried the disadvantageous revenue sharing setup between PrimeWater and MOWD, which led to MOWD’s losses in 2018. COA’s revenue projection until 2041, when the JVA is supposed to end, shows that the income to be generated from the revenue sharing setup will not be enough to support even the Contract Monitoring Unit’s operations. This raises the question, how will MOWD be able to fund its gender mainstreaming efforts in the years to come?

For 2018, COA also made significant observations that point to MOWD’s challenges in gender mainstreaming, particularly in its efforts to institutionalize the essential elements of GAD planning. First, it was not able to create its GFPS, but was only able to appoint a regular employee as a focal person. It was also not able to conduct a gender audit or generate gender statistics to be integrated into its existing database. Additionally, while funds were spent on training, the COA observed major capacity gaps, specifically on ascertaining its level of gender mainstreaming and the gender responsiveness of its programs. Finally, as for the activities stated in its GAD AR, the COA noted that the HGDG was not used in the project identification and implementation of its GAD activities.

#### *Comparative Analysis: Pre- and Post-JV GAD Activities*

To assess the changes in the quality and quantity of MOWD’s GAD activities from prior to post-JVA, we looked into MOWD’s GAD ARs for 2015 and 2017. (The GAD ARs for the years 2016 and 2018 were also not publicly available.)

For the year 2015, MOWD’s total GAD budget amounted to P1,447,000.00, which supposedly represented at least 5% of its corporate operating budget. Of this, MOWD was able to utilize 61.61% or P891,428.10 entirely for GAD projects, activities, and programs (MOWD GAD AR, 2015). Since MOWD has not been capacitated to use the HGDG tool, no portion of the budget for regular programs was attributed to the GAD budget.

The GAD activities in the AR are categorized under either client-focused and organization-focused. In relation to PCW Memorandum Circular No. 2015-03, the PCW-NEDA-DBM Joint Memorandum Circular (2012, Section 5.2) defines client-focused activities as those that “address gender mainstreaming in major programs and other GAD-focused activities for agency clients” and organization-focused activities as those “addressing identified gender issues of the agency and its personnel.”

Of the total GAD budget utilized for 2015, almost 96% was spent on organization-focused GAD activities while only 4% was spent on client-focused GAD activities.

The client-focused gender activities implemented included: 1) feeding of identified malnourished children in a public school; 2) donation of one a sewing machine to a barangay women’s association; 3) information dissemination on the availment of discounts for senior citizens; 4) tree planting; and, 4) radio and TV broadcasting for a bloodletting activity.

For the organization, the GAD activities implemented included: 1) training and seminars on GAD for male employees; 2) GAD-themed team building activities and health lectures; 3) participation in Women’s Month activities, lectures, and LGU-initiated activities; 4) tree planting; 5) sports programs; 6) information dissemination on special leaves.

For 2017, MOWD’s GPB, which was prepared before the JVA took effect on March 1, 2017, indicated a GAD budget allocation of P1,609,250.00. However, the GAD AR, which now reflects activities that were actually implemented, shows that the actual budget allocation was slashed to P750,000.00, of which only P527,186.20 or 70% was utilized. From an initially long list of client-focused GAD activities laid down in the GPB (e.g., supplemental feeding and distribution of school supplies, bloodletting to reduce maternal mortality, livelihood programs, senior citizens welfare programs, barangay clean and green program, educational assistance to increase women’s participation science and technology, capacity building, national women’s month celebration, GAD benchmarking tour, physical fitness and welfare program, family day, monitoring and implementation of special leave benefits), MOWD was only able to construct a temporary lactation station, distribute flyers on violence against women, set up a GAD corner where information on GAD activities could be posted, post GAD information on their website, and conduct field visits to customers to educate them on water conservation. For the organization, MOWD was able to set up a fitness gym, and conduct training on gender sensitivity and gender analysis for its GFPS. Of the budget actually utilized, almost 82% went to organization-focused activities and only 18% was spent on client-focused activities.

The rapid comparison of GAD activities that were actually implemented (2015 vs. 2017; 2017 GPB vs 2017 GAD AR) shows how much of the plan was cut after the JVA took effect. It also appears that the quality of the activities suffered. Following the decrease in GAD budget, downsizing of personnel and restriction of functions, substantial compliance with the budget utilization requirement took precedence over gender mainstreaming, leading to an expenditure of over P218,000.00 for GAD training only.

#### *Comparative Analysis: Levels of Women’s Empowerment*

It is also useful to compare how the GAD activities that were actually implemented in 2015 and 2017 fit into Sarah Longwe’s Women’s Empowerment Framework to see if there were changes

and, if any, whether these changes were improvements or downgrades towards promoting higher levels of women's empowerment beyond access.

The Longwe Framework challenges the traditional perception of development as increased productivity, efficiency, or more effective use of labor (Longwe, 1991). For Longwe (1991), development must ultimately lead to women's empowerment, and interventions must seek to "enable women to take an equal place with men, and to participate equally in the development process in order to achieve control over the factors of production on an equal basis with men" (p.150).

The Longwe Framework provides five "levels of equality" (p.150), which approximate how far women have achieved empowerment. These "levels of equality" are also used to evaluate the extent to which development interventions are expected to promote equality between women and men. These levels are hierarchical, in that targeting the higher levels when planning for interventions is expected to lead to empowerment.

Longwe's (1991) "levels of equality," from lowest to highest, are:

- **Welfare**, which refers to women's access to resources such as food, income, medical care and other items related to women's material welfare
- **Access**, which refers to access to the factors of production, including land, labor, credit, training, marketing facilities, public services and benefits, as well as enabling policies that remove restraints on women
- **Conscientisation**, which is defined as a "conscious understanding of the difference between sex and gender, an awareness that gender roles are cultural and can be changed," and a belief in sexual equality
- **Participation**, which is defined as active and equal involvement of women and men in the process of decision making, policy development, planning and administration, monitoring and evaluation
- **Control**, which refers to a balance of control between women and men over the decision-making process, the factors of production, and the distribution of benefits (pp. 151-152)

To further analyze the quality of the GAD activities implemented in 2015 and 2017, we looked into the nature of the GAD activities and plotted them on the Longwe Framework, based on the level of empowerment that the particular activity appears to respond to.

It appears that between 2015 and 2017, while the budget cut reduced the quantity of activities, the quality, as measured against Longwe's hierarchical levels of equality and women's empowerment, did not change.

Should MOWD's clients look forward to activities that promote higher-level empowerment in the future, given the infusion of fresh capital? If the post-JVA setup is retained, it is highly unlikely, given the lack of human resources, which likely resulted in the one-person GFPS, and which will likely persist for the remaining 23 years; decreased GAD budget, as a result of the decrease in the corporate operating budget; the lack of direct access and control over capital, as a result of PrimeWater's assumption of MOWD's core functions; and, 4) the lack of policy, foresight or commitment to put Primewater within the coverage of the GAD budget policy.

## **Conclusion**

If MOWD's GAD ARs (2015, 2017) and GPBs (2017) are any indication, it appears that it has barely scratched the surface of possibilities for creating the real impact towards gender equality and women's empowerment that ADB (2000) envisioned. Like many other local water districts, based on MOWD's GPB, gender analysis has not been a priority (COA Audit Report, 2018). As a result, GAD activities supposedly funded by its GAD budget, although they may appear to address identified gender issues, do not appear to represent serious efforts to promote equal participation and control of resources among women and men.

The value proposition of privatization is anchored on funding that is supposed to enable water districts to reach unserved customers, some of whom will be inevitably women or female-headed households, with better and consistent water and sanitation services. It appears though, that this positive impact, if any, will be merely an incidental consequence of service expansion, not a deliberate result of promoting equitable access, unless gender mainstreaming is prioritized and enforced in the private partner's functions.

For MOWD, both the previous and reduced GAD budget have not been able to influence the local water district's core mandate of providing access to water and sanitation services, as shown by its GAD ARs (2015 & 2017). The client-focused GAD activities for the years observed address gender issues outside water and sanitation access. Prior to the JVA, this may have been the result of lack of capacity for gender mainstreaming, as pointed out in the COA Audit Reports (2016, 2017, 2018). However, the post-JVA structure (downsized plantilla, lower income, and restricted functions) has undoubtedly made it more difficult for the water district to build gender mainstreaming capacity. For local water districts under JVA, bridging the current disconnect between the GAD budget policy and the entity implementing the mandate, in the restricted context of contract monitoring, is the bigger challenge that lies ahead.

Finance and functions-wise, privatization of local water districts under the JVA model has given rise to a highly unequal arrangement where most of the financial benefits accrue to the corporate partner and the local water district is stripped of its core functions. In MOWD's case, the COA Audit Report went as far as recommending that the water district "reassume discharging all its functions and retract from any involvement in the implementation of the JVA" (2018, p. 3), citing, among others, the undue injury caused to the Government and its grossly disadvantageous nature citing the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (RA 3019, Sections 3(e) and (g)).

For local water districts like MOWD, should we expect to see marked improvements in its capacity for gender mainstreaming and in the gender responsiveness of its programs anytime soon? The mandate of providing water and sanitation access is in itself already very daunting. Compounded by the policy on gender mainstreaming, the task can become overwhelming for a 12-person agency serving over 114,000 people (MOWD Operations Manual, 2017) while attempting to expand to more households, but with little funds and power to work with. Unless changes in the current setup between the water district and the corporate partner takes place, it is also unfair to expect the local water district - in its present "bare minimum" state - to lead the process of utilizing access as an entry point for implementing programs, activities, and projects that create the multiplier effects of women's political and economic empowerment.

At present, it appears that the JVA operates like a "GAD shield" that removes considerable amounts of human and financial resources from the ambit of the GAD budget policy and related issuances.

First, the fixed revenue sharing arrangement with the local water district, and the resulting decreased GAD budget, restricts planning and implementation of GAD activities. Second, the downsized organizational structure makes it difficult or impossible to operationalize the GAD budget, even if designed well. Third, the transfer of core functions from the local water district to the private concessionaire reduces the local water district's sphere of influence while also removing the responsibility of mainstreaming gender in core functions. Without the GAD mandate to mediate the private concessionaire's operations, there is no compulsion for business decisions to not be motivated solely by wealth generation but also by the need to address gender inequalities.

The JVA also takes away the element of accountability for noncompliance to the GAD budget policy. As a result, the entity to which the core functions have been devolved, and to which most of the revenue accrues, does not have to worry about spending to make their operations gender-responsive, and for being called out by the COA should they fail to do so.

### **Reclaiming Water Districts**

While the JVA model promises significant value, especially for debt-ridden local water districts struggling to expand and improve their services, it has also resulted in negative experiences for some of the early adapters. From displacement of tenured government employees and losses (Magno, 2019, December 14) resulting from the fixed revenue share scheme, to regulatory issues such as failure to pay the full performance bond (Panti, 2019, July 5) and franchise tax (CSFWD COA Audit Report, 2018), illegal assumption of billing and collection functions and issuing of official receipts (MOWD COA Audit Report, 2018), to water quality issues and higher water rates (Reyes, 2019, July 7), to unmet operational standards such as failure to develop a water safety plan and present a concrete expansion plan, as well as increasing non-revenue water rates beyond the acceptable standards (Daraga City Water District COA Audit Report, 2017), the list appears to be growing along with the number of water districts signing up for JVA.

In fact, these stories have caught the attention of some legislators, leading to the filing of House Resolution No. 10 (2019), urging the House of Representatives to conduct an investigation in aid of legislation into the privatization of local water districts and their impact on the provision of water services and employees' security of tenure.

How do we move forward given the consistently observed consequences and their impact on local water districts' gender mainstreaming efforts?

In the face of the privatization wave, institutional and sectoral interventions need to be put in place so that local water districts can begin to maximize their potential to effect positive changes to structural inequalities using access as entry point. These interventions can be spearheaded by the LWUA, which is mandated to regulate and supervise local water districts' operations, as well as review and endorse their GAD budget.

For MOWD and other local water districts that have been privatized, the Contract Monitoring Unit that is left of the agency has to exhaustively and creatively look at how it can influence or compel contract implementation to be responsive to their concessionaires' gender needs. Policy making and strategic planning functions are generally retained by the local water districts under the JVA. The boundaries of these remaining functions need to be tested to see how the local water



the local water utility's management body can steer the JV towards mainstreaming the gender perspective in its operations, or informing business decisions with equitable access, gender equality, and women's empowerment goals. However, this can only be possible if the people retained have a deep understanding of and commitment to gender mainstreaming.

For water districts that have yet to be privatized, institutional mechanisms that are supposed to promote public participation (e.g. consultations with customers) could be effective platforms for surfacing opposition or negotiating positions. In defense, proponents of the JV have been quick to clarify that the arrangement is not technically privatization. After all, the arrangement is temporary, and is expected to slide back to its original state after 25 years, assuming it is not renewed. But 25 years is only five years short of the SDGs timetable - a long time to not move forward, and a difficult climb back.

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**Table 1. Local Water Districts Comparative Gross Income (Year Before, of and After JVA Effectivity)**

<b>Water District</b>	<b>Date of JVA Effectivity</b>	<b>Income for Previous Year (PhP)</b>	<b>Income for Year of JVA Effectivity (PhP)</b>	<b>Income for Year After (PhP)</b>
San Pedro Water District (SPWD)	February 16, 2015	170,140,989.18	93,473,129.54	60,324,240.04
Camarines Norte Water District (CNWD)	January 14, 2016	169,834,048.20	91,956,776.89	59,066,139.05
Sorsogon City Water District (SCWD)	October 17, 2016	73,748,736.54	69,511,473.69	18,190,581.60
Metro Ozamiz Water District (MOWD)	March 1, 2017	117,041,948.93	52,061,443.88	29,650,303.04
City of San Fernando Water District (CSFWD)	December 16, 2016	289,417,762.55	323,142,604.47	62,173,271.21
Tarlac City Water District (TCWD)	March 11, 2015	236,827,371.43	144,527,331.59	70,092,385.74

**Table 2. MOWD's Income, Expenditure and GAD Budget (2015 to 2018)**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Gross Income (PhP)</b>	106,700,618.67	117,041,948.93	52,061,443.88	29,633,856.00
<b>Expenditures (PhP)</b>	81,889,735.47	97,244,391.01	50,164,015.96	29,664,354.94
<b>Net Income (PhP)</b>	24,810,883.20	19,797,557.90	1,897,427.92	(30,498.94)
<b>GAD Budget (PhP)</b>	1,447,000.00	1,265,000.00	1,609,250.00* 750,000.00**	750,000.00

\* As indicated in GAD PB.

\*\* As indicated in the GAD AR.



**Table 3. GAD Activities' Levels of Empowerment**

Levels of Empowerment	2015	2017		
	Gender Issue/Mandate (per GAD AR)	GAD Activity	Gender Issue/Mandate (per GAD AR)	GAD Activity
<b>Control</b>		None		None
<b>Participation</b>		None		None
<b>Conscientization</b>	<p>Gender-insensitive bureaucracy due to lack of knowledge on gender sensitivity</p> <p>Lack of awareness about the Magna Carta of Women and the Violence Against Women and Children Law</p>	<p>GAD training for employees</p> <p>National Women's Month Celebration</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge and skills on GFPS' role and functions</p>	<p>GAD training for employees</p>
<b>Access</b>	<p>Insufficient income of the solo parents for defraying children's education expenses</p> <p>Maternal mortality</p> <p>Inadequate knowledge and training on GAD</p> <p>There is a need for employees to be kept abreast of CSC policies on special leaves</p>	<p>Donation of sewing machine for women's livelihood</p> <p>Bloodletting</p> <p>Teambuilding and career development training for employees</p> <p>Special leave benefits monitoring and information dissemination</p>	<p>Republic Act 10028 (Expanded Breast-feeding Act of 2009)</p> <p>Concessionaires have inadequate education about Violence Against Women Law</p> <p>Lack of awareness of concessionaires on Gender and Development</p> <p>Lack of awareness of concessionaires on water conservation and MOWD's vision and mission</p>	<p>Temporary lactation room</p> <p>Distribution of VAW flyers</p> <p>GAD Corner</p> <p>Field visits to consumers to educate them on water conservation</p>
<b>Welfare</b>	<p>Malnutrition and lack of enthusiasm for school among children</p> <p>Need to help the elderly</p> <p>Need to promote employee's health and wellbeing</p>	<p>Supplemental feeding and school supplies distribution to malnourished children</p> <p>Information dissemination to senior citizens to avail of discount</p> <p>Physical fitness program for employees</p>	<p>Promote employees' physical and mental health</p>	<p>Physical fitness program for employees</p>

## **Mapping the Terrain of Feminist Organizing among Selected Organizations in Luzon and the Visayas**

**Teresita V. Barrameda**

*Using in-depth interviews, documents review, and focus group discussions, this article examines the organizing experiences of 15 organizations led and dominated by women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + (LGBTQIA+) individuals to determine how they provide conditions for growth and empowerment of women members and other marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQIA+ members. At the same time, it provides an analysis of their organizing processes and practices that could inform theorizing in feminist organizing. This qualitative study was conducted in selected areas in Luzon and the Visayas. It highlights the following findings: 1) these organizations can be located in a continuum: from bureaucratic to democratic structures; from an accommodating political orientation to transforming the existing social structures, and; from service-oriented, alternative to progressive entities; 2) their common features include: a vision of an egalitarian society; democratic and participatory organizational processes, and; recognition of women's leadership and significant roles in organizations; 3) their organizational processes and practices reflect some principles and values of feminist organizing such as respect for diversity; the personal is political; an egalitarian vision of society; a de/reconstructed notion of power; and consensual and democratic organizational processes. In addition, their organizing processes and practices reflect, in some ways, feminist organizing principles such as how organizing women and LGBTQIA+ individuals leads to actions promoting women's and LGBTQIA+ rights or addressing gender issues; enables women and LGBTQIA+ individuals to make informed choices; promotes an awareness of the need to change the existing patriarchal culture and practices in organizations and communities; promotes non-sexist values; and most importantly, contributes towards an egalitarian vision of development and society. In conclusion, the following points are put forward: 1) the organizing processes and practices of these organizations reflect some similarities to feminist principles; 2) feminist organizing could complement the current practices and processes of these organizations; 3) since the processes and practices of these organizations, though in varying degrees, reflect feminist organizing, mainstreaming gender concerns in these organizations as well as coalition-building with them is feasible.*

**Keywords:** feminist organizing, gender mainstreaming, women, LGBTQIA+, organizing processes

### **Introduction**

Civil society organizations such as non-government organizations and grassroots organizations have been at the forefront of developing communities and social movements particularly during the repressive years of Martial Law in the country. The 1987 Philippine Constitution provides the mandate towards the formation of these autonomous organizations as well as highlights their roles in development, to wit:

The State shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation.

The State shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interest and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means. People's organizations are bona fide associations of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote the public interest and with identifiable leadership, membership and structure. (1987 Philippine Constitution, Art.11. Declaration of Principles and State Policies, Sect. 23)

Consequently, many grassroots and community-based organizations were established at that time and flourish until the present. For women's organizations, in particular, some claimed to be feminist organizations while others refused to be labelled as such or did not even want to be identified with feminism. A number of these organizations have organized grassroots women's organizations, established women-oriented services, and formed coalitions that championed women and gender causes.

According to Freeman (1979, as cited in Martin, 1990), a feminist organization has a pro-woman political perspective that seeks to improve women's political status, economic and social conditions, self-esteem, as well as access to power and opportunities. As Freeman (1979, as cited in Martin, 1990) asserted, a pro-woman, politically and socially transformational organization can be counted as feminist. Based on this definition, Martin (1990) affirmed that programs of mainstream organizations could be counted as feminist, for instance, a rape crisis center in a public or private hospital, and mental health agencies catering to women.

On the other hand, there are organizations that took efforts to develop new forms of democratic organizations such as lesbians' collectives and women-run organizations that consciously practice feminist values. Others established mechanisms for women's concerns such as women's desks in predominantly-male formations such as trade unions, peasant, and fisherfolk organizations. There are also organizations that established feminist modes of workplaces such as women's crisis centers, support groups, healing/counseling centers, and reproductive health clinics to supplement the inadequate traditional services for women provided by the government. The most recent are organizations that evolved in response to the growing needs and concerns of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + (LGBTQIA+) communities.

Over the years of organizing women, one of the significant outcomes worth noting is the passage of several gender-responsive and women-friendly laws and policies at the national and local levels. Another is the establishment of diverse and vibrant women's movements that despite differences in ideology and political position had worked together for the enactment of Republic Act 8353 (Anti-Rape Law). However, given the current social condition, these gains are slowly eroding. Misogyny is rampant in social media, as well as in public statements by government officials. For instance, derogatory statements against women are peddled as "harmless" jokes by these officials, while hate crimes and sexual abuse are regular news in media. In communities ravaged by extra-judicial killings, women are left to singly eke out a living; orphaned children suffer the shame over the death of a father addicted to or who is a peddler of drugs. And worse, children have died as collateral damage during police operations. These events happened in the midst of indifference and non-involvement of community residents.

As these gender concerns remain pervasive, organizing women and other marginalized groups to address them is once again necessary. As large number of women are members of various organizational formations – trade unions, self-help groups, cooperatives, and people's organizations with mixed (women and men) membership, it is important to determine how organizations, which are not necessarily feminist, develop and empower women as leaders and members.

At the same time, we interrogate how these organizations address women's and other gender concerns within their organizations and in their partner communities. Further, we look into the lessons that can be drawn from their organizing experiences that could inform theorizing in feminist organizing.

The article has four sections: the analytical framework and methodology; discussion of data; analysis and findings; and, conclusion.

### **Analytical Framework and Methodology**

Feminist organizing is “a process designed to legitimize the lived experience of marginalized women, include diverse partners, equitably distribute power and responsibility, and foster respectful connections” (Acker, 1995; Callahan, 1997; and Chinn, 2001 as cited in Ponc and Frisby, 2001). Winthorn (1984, as cited in Van Den Bergh and Cooper, 1986:1) noted that it is rooted in feminism that is “a transformational politics, a political perspective concerned with changing extant economic, social and political structures.” Further, it brings in the transformational perspective of feminism as it envisions a society that does not yet exist in which social, political, and economic change are requisites for the attainment of this vision (Mueller, 1987; Taylor, 1983 as cited in Martin, 1990).

On the other hand, Weil (1986) noted that a feminist framework for organizing melds organizing methods and action strategies with feminist principles, values, and approaches. Similarly, Hooyman and Cunningham (1986) observed that organizing with a feminist perspective embodies and carries out feminist values and principles in its strategies for action. These principles include: a) support of values of nurturance, attention to process, and respect for women's intuitive processes; b) emphasis on both process and outcome; c) recognition on the importance of consciousness raising and praxis; d) wholeness and unity that fosters sisterhood and solidarity rather than separation and dichotomy; e) a reconstructed notion of power and empowerment; f) democratic structuring in organizations; g) the personal is political, and; h) a social change orientation (Weil, 1986). These principles also reflect Van Den Bergh and Cooper's (1986, p. 10) premises of feminist analysis – “eliminating false dichotomies and artificial separations; reconceptualization of power, valuing process equally with [outcomes], renaming, and the personal is political.”

Given the above notions, Hooyman and Cunningham (1986, p. 166) asserted that (a) “all organizations run by and for women are not necessarily feminist, and (b) feminist administration is not necessarily limited to consensual or cooperative organizations.”

Drawing from the claims of Hooyman and Cunningham (1986), this study views organizations within a continuum ranging from consensual to bureaucratic. As such, it assumes that feminist organizational processes and practices might reside in varied organizational formations – in informal groups, in collectives, in mixed (with men and women members), in bureaucratic, and other forms of organizations.

The purpose of the study is to examine the organizing processes and practices of selected organizations to determine how they provide conditions for growth and empowerment of women members and other marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQIA+ members. At the same time, it aims to analyze their organizing processes and practices that could inform theorizing in feminist organizing.

This article is based on a qualitative study utilizing a sample of 15 organizations composed of all-women's groups, organizations with mixed membership, organizations with predominantly women members, women-led organizations, and LGBTQIA+ organizations. These organizations were purposively selected from Luzon and Visayas based on the following criteria: 1) members/staff are predominantly women; 2) formally or informally led by women; 3) organizations with program/s for women; and 4) LGBTQIA+ organizations or collectives. A combination of key informant interviews, documents review, and focus group discussions were used to gather data.

The analytical framework of the study is adopted from the organizational dimensions used by Hooyman and Cunningham (1986) in their exploratory study of the administrative style of women's organizations in terms of organizational structure, decision-making process, and organizational values. These organizational dimensions were further developed in this study based on the author's experience in organizational development and community organizing.

In operational terms, this study examined the processes and practices of these organizations in terms of: 1) organizational processes – a) vision-mission-goals; b) decision-making process; c) division of labor, and; d) organizational values or ideals; and 2) organizational practices – a) theoretical and organizing approach/es used; b) leadership/membership development; c) strategies for membership expansion&consolidation;d)strategiesformobilization;and e)sustainabilitymechanisms.

At the analytical level, salient themes drawn from the study are considered inputs that could inform theorizing in feminist organizing. Further, the analysis examined other critical factors affecting the sustainability of the organizations in terms of sources of funding, leadership and membership development, and the extent to which each organization responds to the changing socio-economic and political conditions over time.

## **Discussion of Data**

### **Profile of Respondent Organizations**

Of the 15 respondent-organizations<sup>1</sup>, six are from the Visayas (five in Cebu and one in Iloilo) and nine are from Luzon (two from Isabela, one from Palawan, one from Batangas, one from Camarines Sur, one from Albay, and three from Quezon City). The composition is as follows: three non-government organizations (NGOs), two government-run service facilities for women with special needs (survivors of violence and grieving mothers, respectively), one community-based savings group, two cooperatives, one regional network of cooperatives, one student organization, and five people's organizations (POs) or membership-based organizations (MBOs). The five POs/MBOs are comprised of two LGBTQIA+ organizations, one peasant organization, one fisherfolk organization, and one urban poor organization.

Organizational size ranges from nine to 438, while years of operation range from four to 33 years. In terms of geographical scope, six organizations have province-wide coverage, while nine organizations operate at the barangay level. Members or beneficiaries of these organizations are as follows: two organizations cater to women with special needs, three to LGBTQIA+, while the remaining ten organizations provide services for both women and men. Except for the community-based savings group and the two service facilities for women, the rest of the organizations have multiple programs.

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<sup>1</sup> From the Visayas island, five organizations were from Cebu and one from Iloilo while those from Luzon included two organizations from Isabela Province, one from Palawan, one from Batangas, two from the Bicol Region – one in Camarines Sur and one in Albay, and three from Metro Manila, in particular, Quezon City.



The areas of concern of these organizations cover one or two issues such as gender discrimination, violence against women, grief counseling, rural poverty and landlessness, access to health, HIV-AIDS, disaster, child labor, informalization of work, urban poverty, environment, social enterprise, and advocacy on local economic development. Particular to gender concerns, the three LGBTQIA+ and the two service facilities have programs and services on gender issues/concerns. For the organizations with mixed membership or staff, three have programs on gender concerns and one NGO is aware of the need to mainstream gender concerns in its programs but has difficulty accomplishing this.

## **Organizational Processes**

*a. Vision-Mission-Goals.* The organizations' statements of purpose, constitution and by-laws, mission statements, and brochures, if available, were examined to determine their development orientations. Except for the community savings group, the rest of the organizations have vision, mission and goals (VMG) statements. Common across these organizations is the vision of a fair, peaceful, and equitable society. The three NGOs and the regional network of cooperatives are concerned with improving the lives of women and men towards a transformed society, while the LGBTQIA+ organizations focus on inclusive development, the elimination of discrimination, and respect for diversity.

The organizations address either the practical needs – basic services, livelihood, health, counseling, social protection, and access to credit – or strategic interests – agrarian reform, empowerment, and equality – of their beneficiaries. These organizations noted that they were achieving their goals through the provision of basic services (46.6 percent), advocacy (40 percent), and counseling (20 percent). Majority of them have various programs or services, while the two service facilities started as counseling centers but later began to provide economic assistance to survivor-clients.

*b. Decision-making in the organizations.* The decision-making process of the organizations was measured through their strategies in resolving conflicts as well as in policy decision-making. Feminist organizing principles such as consensus, democratic and participatory decision-making, and collective processes are also common across the organizations. Conflicts are resolved through consensus where every opinion is heard and every option is discussed in order to come up with the best decision.

Despite the time-consuming process required in a consensual decision-making approach, the organizations prefer it over other processes. Such approach creates spaces for honing their skills that eventually empower them. As noted by some women respondents: “it made us committed to contribute to whatever decision we come to as a result of the process;” “we always have passionate debates and discussions but it made us feel good having our opinions and ideas heard and seriously considered, which is very empowering for me;” “though the process is tedious - considering each member's ideas in the process and imagine we are twenty-five in the organization - yet it made us accountable to whatever decision we arrive at.” On the other hand, the three NGOs noted they use “criticism and self- criticism” as a feedback mechanism in assessing individual performance.

In terms of decision-making, the organizations are very democratic and participatory as reflected in their structures. The NGOs and the POs with larger memberships employ a bottom-up approach to policy decision-making. The general assembly (GA) is a mechanism by which all the members are involved in policy-level decisions. Across the POs, NGOs, and cooperatives, the GA is considered the highest policy-making body.

In a similar manner, the members of the Board of Trustees or Directors (BOT/D), the second highest-level decision-makers, come from the membership body. For the three NGOs, their beneficiaries have representations in the BOT, while in the POs and cooperatives the BOT/D is composed of members and shareholders, respectively. It is also worth noting that even in the two government service facilities – within a group therapy work setting – survivors participate in decisions that would affect them.

c. *Division of Labor.* Except for the community-based savings group and the two service facilities for women, all the rest are formal organizations with an organizational structure, a set of officers, a constitution and by-laws, and are registered with the SEC or CDA as in the case of the NGOs and the cooperatives, respectively.

In terms of structures, majority of these organizations showed characteristics of a “flattened hierarchy.” According to Morgaine and Capous-Desyllas (2015, p. 267), a “flattened hierarchy” is “an organizational structure with very few managerial or upper level staff and where many staff or organizational members are considered equal in terms of decision-making powers.”

Although these organizations have a hierarchy, it only serves to facilitate the delineation of tasks and functions towards the efficient and effective achievement of goals. Instead, “collective leadership” (Batliwala, 2011, p. 27) is the predominant practice in which leaders, members, and staff members are treated as equals and decisions are based on consensus. As noted by some respondents:

*“I feel like we are a family where every member has an assigned task yet we are involved in other aspects that may affect us and the entire organization.”*

*“Despite the division of functions, we encourage the participation of members especially in decision-making and in providing inputs in whatever we do – in day-to-day interactions and activities – and most importantly, in planning and assessment activities.”*

d. *Organizational Values or Ideals.* Organizational values were measured in terms of an organization’s political orientation and sharing of power among staff, members, and beneficiaries. Political orientation is best reflected in their vision of social change – either addressing the structural causes of poverty or accommodating the existing social structures – as well as in the ways by which they engage with the government. Respondents categorized their organizations as follows: progressive, alternative, and service-oriented.

The NGOs and POs working for a transformed society consider themselves “progressive” organizations. Explicit in their methods of work is a clear pro-people standpoint and viewpoint of working for structural change. On the other hand, those claiming to be “alternative” organizations noted that their services and systems provide alternatives to the government. These include the cooperatives and the regional network of cooperatives that advocate for an alternative economic system promoting solidarity economy, fair trade, patronage (*tangkilikan*), and mutual aid (*damayan*). Likewise, some POs and the community-based savings group promote an alternative savings and credit system that bank on women and men considered not credit-worthy by mainstream financial institutions. In addition, some NGOs provide services to populations underserved by the government, while some self-help POs work outside the purview of the government.

In contrast, those that claim to be service-oriented organizations provide services to clients and communities and veer away from “political” activities that they consider “radical.” The two government-initiated service facilities for women follow the “bureaucratic” work style of government agencies.

On the other hand, the nature of their engagement with the State depends on their political orientations. Engagement ranges from full partnership to critical collaboration. The service-oriented organizations usually engage with the government either as beneficiaries or co-partners of government projects, while the “alternative” and “progressive” organizations engage in government projects through critical collaboration for fear of being coopted by government institutions that they want to transform.

Sharing of power with staff, beneficiaries, or members differs in the three categories of organizations. The “progressive” organizations noted that participatory democracy is central to their practice in which staff, members, and beneficiaries are involved in all aspects of decision-making – from planning to evaluation of programs, projects, and activities. Similarly, the processes of the “alternative” organizations are participatory, especially in matters that would affect their members or beneficiaries. In contrast, service-oriented organizations view their target beneficiaries as clients who are either beneficiaries or consumers of their services, and power sharing is limited to the latter’s participation in program implementation.

## **Organizational Practices**

*a. Theoretical and Organizing Models/Approaches Used.* All the organizations do not follow any organizing model or approach; however, all of them practice participatory and empowering processes in relating to their staff, members, partner-beneficiaries, or clients, though in varying degrees. In addition, the political orientation of each organization is reflected in their interpersonal relationships with staff, members, clients or beneficiaries and especially in the nature of their services.

Organizations belonging to the “progressive” and “alternative” streams adopt principles of human and women’s rights, participatory democracy, collectivity, and social justice as core principles in organizing. These principles are reflected in their organizational practices – collective leadership, committee system, task rotation, and rotational leadership – while decision-making is based on collectivity and participatory management. Likewise, the principles of human rights inform their programs, education/consciousness-raising, and advocacy work. Common across these organizations is the importance of consciousness-raising in which the members or partners-beneficiaries are capacitated to develop their awareness on current conditions and to take action to address such conditions.

On the other hand, the service-oriented organizations organize their members or clients within the context of a project. However, clients or members are encouraged to form autonomous or self-help organizations in the eventual termination of a project. Further, these organizations view their respective organizations either as a collective, support group, or “family.”

*b. Leadership/Membership Development.* Majority of the organizations view leadership and membership development as the core component in sustaining their organizations.

Common across the 15 organizations is the presence of an education committee or program that is tasked with the leadership and capacity-building needs of their members, staff, and clients. In-house education and capability-building activities cover knowledge and skills related to their organizational and program concerns. The women-led and women-dominated organizations view their organizations as safe spaces for sharing problems, joys, and fears as well as for building relationships: “When our leader assured us that as humans we have the right to err, I was encouraged to express my ideas. And when my suggestion was affirmed by others, it was very empowering that my suggestion mattered.”

“It is not only learning about our community problems and getting benefits from the fruits of our collective actions, but I treasured more the relationships that we have built inside our organization. As we do our work collectively, our relationship grew and nurtured each of us as women.”

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The service facilities have capability-building education programs for their clients. These education programs aim to assist clients to move from survivors to advocates or from “case to cause,” as articulated by a respondent. On the other hand, the education program of the cooperatives and the regional network of cooperatives focus on value formation, cooperativism, solidarity economy, and social protection. For the self-help and some POs, leadership and membership development education was provided by partner NGOs, while the progressive NGOs and POs have a holistic training package that covers the orientational, political, and organizational needs of leaders and members.

Although these organizations used different terms in describing their leadership styles - collective, shared, inclusive, rotational leadership, and bridge leadership - democratic participation is the common feature. As expressed by the respondents:

*“We practice rotational leadership and the term of the elected leaders is only for a year to give everyone a chance to lead.”*

*“We measure our effectiveness when a survivor became an advocate working to end violence and became a bridge-leader linking our services to their communities.”*

*“Ours is a sort of inclusive leadership in which all stakeholders are represented in our organizational structure. This is how diversity is practiced here in our organization.”*

On the other hand, the NGOs provide mentoring support or on-the-job training to their partner-POs in terms of managing organizations and on organizing. Since most of the POs have limited resources, they tap and participate in education programs provided by their networks and allied organizations.

*c. Strategies for Membership Expansion and Consolidation.* The organizations have varied strategies in expanding and consolidating their members. Recruitment and membership expansion strategies include mass mobilizations, community assembly, one-on-one recruitment, word of mouth, social media/on-line recruitment, “bring a friend” in general assemblies, and house-to-house visit cum recruitment. A distinct strategy used by those working for agrarian reform is membership by household. Membership covers all the female and male youth and adult members of a household based on the rationale that agrarian reform as a long-term struggle requires generations of peasants to sustain it. Respondents shared that the current members of their organizations are fifth and sixth generations of peasants.

Moreover, strategies to consolidate members include consciousness-raising and other educational activities, regular meetings, planning and assessment, participation in mass mobilizations, and team-building activities. “Progressive” POs and NGOs give importance to education to ensure that the consciousness-raising needs of members are adequately attended to. Likewise, the cooperatives provide education to inculcate social values among their shareholders and members.

Across organizations, education programs are given primary importance as a consolidation strategy to raise awareness on issues and to capacitate members and staff. As leaders and members have similar levels of capacity, members could easily take leadership roles once elected. Aside from education, regular meetings, and planning-assessments, the women leaders and members, in particular, used informal discussions (*huntahan*) and life story-telling (*kuwentuhang-buhay*) to consolidate their ranks and for sisterhood-building/support.

*d. Strategies for Mobilization.* Except for the service facilities and the community-based savings group, the rest of the organizations give importance to mobilization as a form of power. The cooperatives had utilized petitions and dialogues with the Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA) when they were confronted with stringent requirements.

Among POs, members were capacitated to lead and take action to address community issues through mass mobilizations, caravans (*lakbayan*), petitions, and dialogues to air their demands to the government and to claim entitlements over community needs such as accessing health services, road repair, water, irrigation, livelihood, to name a few. As these concerns were addressed, such small gains were utilized as stepping stones to assert and demand for other community concerns. The achievement of these gains, no matter how small, enabled these organizations to gain confidence in their strength and unity. They observed that mass mobilizations are educational and instrumental in empowering members and raising awareness about issues and power. As such, planning and assessment need to be embedded in mobilization activities.

On the other hand, the three NGOs support PO mobilizations in various forms – through financial, organizational, and technical assistance. The NGOs indicated that when POs take action on their own to address community concerns, it is an indicator of empowerment for the latter and a measure of organizing success for the former. One NGO deconstructed the concept of *lakbay-aral* (educational tour) in which partner-POs were mobilized to visit government offices to educate them about the latter’s functions and services. Having knowledge on how the government works, the POs submitted a petition demanding for a bridge for easy access during evacuation as the community lies at the foot of an active volcano. Within months of painstaking follow-ups and dialogues with government officials, the bridge was granted.



*e. Sustainability Mechanisms.* Two categories of strategy are used by the organizations in sustaining their respective organizations. One is internal or external resource generation and the other is institutionalization of programs in other organizations. Sources of funding are either from external donors or internal/self-generated from members. Self-help POs and community/school-based support groups generate their funds from members' monthly dues, fund-raising activities, and in cash or kind donations. The cooperatives and the regional network of cooperatives generate their resources from members and shareholders' monthly dues and individual shares. The NGOs rely largely on external foreign and local funding while the service facilities from government budget allocations.

Aside from financial/resource generation, institutionalization of programs is an innovative strategy developed by organizations to ensure program sustainability. One NGO institutionalized its social enterprise (rice mill and palay buying enterprise) by transferring its management to the partner-PO, in which the revenues were used to support the activities of the partner-PO and ensured the continuity of the enterprise when the project ended. Another NGO institutionalized its education program on disaster risk reduction (DRR) by capacitating public schools and barangay local government units (LGUs) to implement it in their respective localities. As an outcome, several public schools and LGUs adopted the program that benefitted more children and communities while the NGO took on a technical support role.

Moreover, other strategies devised by these organizations include raising funds from local communities - in kind contributions, sharing costs through partnerships with other organizations, cultural and community events, to name a few. Likewise, engaging in social movements, particularly, linking up with other organizations by joining networks and coalitions is considered as another strategy, especially by organizations pursuing long-term goals such as agrarian reform, the elimination of sexual discrimination, and environmental protection. As such, they have worked in partnership with other organizations especially in campaigns and advocacy work. Other organizations maximize the available resources such as information and training provided by coalitions and networks affiliated with them. Some POs and self-help organizations shared that they received trainings on gender by being part of a coalition or network.

Since external funding is difficult to acquire at present, the three NGOs developed alternative sources of funding to sustain their operations by establishing their own social enterprises and, eventually, be independent from foreign assistance. One of these NGOs even severed its ties with a donor as the latter was considered too imposing. Some respondents noted that:

*"We don't want donors to control our work by imposing on us their own agenda."*

*"It is frustrating that funding nowadays is sort of 'flavor of the month' of these funding agencies; in previous years its women, then environment, and now sustainable development goals, and what it is for tomorrow? We don't want to tweak our development agenda to conform to them; besides, a two- or three-year funding won't have much impact on our partner communities."*

*"I am saddened that instead of collaboration among NGOs with same goals or complementary programs and services, we are made to compete for that limited funding."*

On the positive side, the "imposition" by foreign donors, in some ways, contributed to the adoption of a women's agenda by these NGOs as part of the requirement for funding.

For instance, the NGO in Cebu went beyond compliance with such requirements. As an outcome, it reviewed its policies to ensure that these are responsive to the needs of women beneficiaries and staff. It also required its partner-POs to acquire gender sensitivity training, particularly on women's rights. It also improved its system by incorporating gender analysis in its social investigation and class analysis (SICA) tool for project development and in organizing communities.

### Findings and Analysis

The following findings are drawn out from the themes that were surfaced in the study, which mirror, in some ways, organizing principles similar to feminist organizing. At the same time, these themes surfaced salient gaps that could inform theorizing in feminist organizing.

- *Organizing leads to action that promotes women's and LGBTQIA+' rights or addresses gender issues.*

The organizations can be categorized within a spectrum: from the bureaucratic type that provides services to women, to organizations that empower women, and to organizations that fight for gender equality. Majority of them have awareness on the importance of upholding rights, especially those of marginalized groups. These organizations, though in varying degrees, provide opportunities for the development of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals – as staff, members, partner-beneficiaries, and clients. Although not all organizations have specific programs for women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, they have varying levels of responses to their practical gender needs – social services, psycho-social support and livelihood – as well as in empowering them to achieve their strategic gender interests – empowerment and freedom from gender-based violence and gender-based discrimination.

- *Organizing provides opportunities for women and LGBTQIA+ individuals to make informed choices.*

The organizations value education and consciousness-raising as important components of organizing. Through consciousness-raising, members, staff, and clients of these organizations learned to understand the factors – socio-economic, political and cultural – that influence their lived experiences and find commonalities out of these experiences. Moreover, through these consciousness-raising activities, personal experiences of poverty, marginalization, discrimination, and subordination were discussed, analyzed, and linked up to other social issues for them to see the connections. At the same time, these activities enabled them to see the connections that their individual problems have, and how these problems are rooted in societal structures and bred and perpetuated by social institutions.

Common to these organizations, whether progressive, alternative, or service-oriented, is the valuation of individual experiences, ideas, and analyses. The informal and formal meetings, planning and assessment sessions, and general assemblies serve as spaces in which these experiences and ideas are heard, contested, and supported. Particularly in organizations with mixed membership, the first opportunity for women to speak and have their voices heard was a very empowering experience. But prior to having the courage to speak, the women were able to utilize the informal huntahan and kuwentuhang-buhay sessions to speak out, to test ideas, and to be supported.

Moreover, the capacity-building and leadership/membership development programs and activities of these organizations provide members, staff, and clients with new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They apply these learned capabilities in different situations - organizational meetings, relating to co-members in their organizations and communities, as well as in dealing with other organizations and government units. Most importantly, these capability building and consciousness-raising activities enabled them to make informed choices on household and organizational - related decisions.

The above processes and practices of these organizations reflect the feminist analysis and perspective of the personal is political wherein the personal experiences of women are linked to community and societal issues, eventually making them realize their common conditions and enabling them to take collective action to address these conditions. Since most of the organizations focused only on a single oppression - class or gender - the intersectionality framing of feminism could enhance the analyses of these organizations by locating the lived experiences of members, staff, and clients as women, men, and LGBTQIA+ members within the interlocking systems of oppressions - class, gender, and other systems of discrimination - operating simultaneously in their lived experiences.

At the same time, such framing also challenges the notion that one oppression subordinates another oppression, as well as the notion that class is the overarching oppression in the layers of oppressions experienced by poor and marginalized people.

- *Organizing promotes an awareness of the need to change the existing patriarchal culture and processes in organizations and communities.*

Common among organizations is the practice of sharing power, though in varying degrees, as observed in their decision-making processes, leader-members relations, and the practice of leadership itself. They also share a common notion of leadership, though couched in different terms - collective leadership, shared leadership, participatory leadership, democratic leadership, etc. Despite differences in political orientation - either working to transform or accommodate the existing societal structures - their notions of leadership as collective, shared, participatory and democratic are alternative leadership styles that challenge traditional notions of power as dominance. As majority of these organizations practice power sharing in their organizational practices and processes, they have, in a way, challenged patriarchy, since hierarchy and the leader-subordinate divide are attributes associated with patriarchy.

Likewise, the notion of power sharing within the organizations is translated to the household level, especially among the progressive organizations. The trainings on gender sensitivity, laws on women, and women's rights separately given to women and men members are contributory factors in raising the awareness of both women and men about power relations within organizations and households. The requirement of donors and the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) to mainstream gender in NGOs and cooperatives, respectively, is another contributing factor.

Further, the practices of sharing power and the rejection of hierarchical relations are somehow similar to the feminist organizing principle of deconstructing power, in which power is not viewed as dominance. Instead, it is "re-conceptualized as transactive, limitless, and collective" (Weil, 1986, p. 202), and "a process that enables the accomplishment of aspirations" (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986 as cited in Weil, 1986, p. 202). As such, there is a commonality in regard to the notion of power between feminist organizing and the organizations in this study.

- *Organizing promotes non-sexist values and practices.*

Goldstein Wicker (1986, p. 33) defines sexism as “any action or social structure that subordinates individuals or groups because of their sex.” It was common among the organizations to claim that sexist values and practices were not tolerated as part of their everyday culture. Such claim was reflected in their constitution and by-laws, policies, and practices in relating to different groups.

The women, especially those in organizations with mixed membership, do not condone sexist and green jokes made by men. For instance, a woman member reprimanded a male co-member who made derogatory remarks against LGBTQIA+ people. In another instance, the leaders of a PO, after attending a training on women’s rights, reviewed their by-laws and drafted rules to address gender issues in the practices of the organization. As revealed in the study, organizations that had undergone a series of trainings on gender awareness were most likely to be open to the integration of gender concerns in the organizations. Further, women members in these organizations who attended gender awareness trainings learned to assert their rights on matters affecting them in their households and organizations, especially when both spouses are members of the same organization.

Aside from the observance and practice of non-sexist values, majority of the organizations, though in varying degrees, uphold the principles of democratic participation, collectivity, valuation of experiences, reciprocity, and upholding of rights - in dealing with women (including LGBTQIA+ individuals) as staff, members, clients, or partner-beneficiaries. Likewise, democratic participation and collectivity are stated in their constitutions and bylaws as well as in policies and rules, while consensus decision-making and cooperation are part of the day-to-day practices of most of the organizations. These values are also core ideals of feminist organizing.

- *Organizing contributes towards an egalitarian vision of development and society.*

All the organizations, regardless of their political orientation, have a common vision of an egalitarian society in which equality is a key attribute of that envisioned society. The goals aspired for by each of these organizations whether in the domains of economic, political, socio-cultural, and environmental were observed as contributing towards this envisioned society.

Further, their processes and practices of democratic participation, collectivity, cooperation, mutual support, and power sharing which are crucial elements in building an egalitarian society reflect values of feminist organizing.

## Conclusion

The organizations in the study can be located in a continuum: from bureaucratic to democratic structures; from an accommodating political orientation to one that aims to transform the existing social structures, and; from a service-oriented to alternative and progressive entities.

Despite these differences, their common features include: a vision of an egalitarian society; democratic and participatory organizational processes, and; recognition of women’s leadership and significant roles in organizations

On the other hand, their organizing processes and practices reflect, in some ways, feminist organizing principles such as feminist values of respect for diversity; a de/reconstructed notion of power; the link of the personal and social issues, sisterhood, reciprocity, consensus, and consensual and democratic organizational processes.

Moreover, these organizing experiences could inform theorizing in feminist organizing based on the following lessons: organizing women and LGBTQIA+ individuals leads to actions promoting women and LGBTQIA+ rights or addressing gender issues; enables women and LGBTQIA+ individuals to make informed choices; promotes an awareness of the need to change the existing patriarchal culture and practices in organizations and communities; promotes non-sexist values; and most importantly, contributes towards an egalitarian vision of development and society. On the other hand, feminist values and perspectives such as intersectionality, women's experiences as sources of knowledge, nurturance as leadership quality, and attention to both process and outputs are the ones that feminist organizing could offer to these organizations to further enhance their organizing work for the benefit of women.

And in conclusion, the following points are put forward: 1) the organizing processes and practices of these organizations reflect some similarities to feminist principles; 2) feminist organizing could complement the current practices and processes of these organizations; and 3) since the processes and practices of these organizations, though in varying degrees, reflect feminist organizing, mainstreaming gender concerns in these organizations as well as coalition-building with them is feasible.

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