

Social Psychological Aspects of Advocating LGBT Human Rights in the Philippines

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Abstract

Key political events in late 2009 and early 2010 brought to national consciousness the marginalization and ongoing struggle for equality and rights of Filipinos who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. We argue that one pathway to achieve legal empowerment and equal human rights for LGBT Filipinos is collective action that leads to social change and the reduction of inequalities. Using analytic perspectives from critical citizenship studies, social psychology, and LGBT studies, we examined collective action in the form of advocating for LGBT human rights in the Philippines. Using a peer-nomination procedure with participating organizations in the 2009 LGBT Manila Pride March, we identified key actors in the pursuit of social justice and equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Filipinos. In-depth qualitative interviews with nine LGBT human rights defenders delved into their pathways to participation in advocacy work, subjective experiences in and motivations for LGBT activism, and reflections on the meanings of LGBT activism in the Philippines. Our findings highlight key themes in the personal narratives of Filipino LGBT human rights defenders, including actions for LGBT human rights activism, the perceived benefits and costs of being an LGBT activist in the Philippines, the centrality of self-identification as an “activist”, evolving motivations and commitment for engaging in LGBT human rights work, and constructions of future selves in and out of activism. These narratives were lived out in the context of dominant human rights claims pursued by the Filipino LGBT movement in relation to Philippine law and legal policy, particularly freedom from discrimination, political representation and participation in the legislative sphere, and marriage equality.

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The marginal position of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Filipinos in Philippine society invaded national consciousness in November 2009 when the Commission on Elections denied accreditation to a political party called Ang Ladlad. As a partylist representing LGBT Filipinos, Ang Ladlad was excluded from participating in the national elections of 2010, a critical exercise of citizenship and democratic rights. This exclusion was justified by the commissioners from COMELEC's second division using a particular form of moral reasoning – that LGBT people are, as a whole, indecent and degraded, “advocate” against moral standards, and therefore violate both the Civil Code and the Revised Penal Code (Ferrer, Tagle & Yusoph, 2009). In addition, LGBT Filipinos purportedly posed a moral “threat” to the Filipino youth and their well-being.

Though eventually overturned five months later in a Supreme Court ruling that reiterated that “moral disapproval of a disfavored group” was not legitimate grounds for excluding minority citizens from enjoying equal rights (*Ang Ladlad LGBT Party v. Commission on Elections*, 2010), the case of Ladlad highlighted a persistent reality known to many LGBT Filipinos – that across many domains of life, anti-LGBT discrimination and stigma are alive and operating in Philippine society. This stigma exists in the form of bullying of gay children, banning transgender individuals in business establishments, labeling lesbian and gay adults as “sinful” or “abnormal”, media portrayals of gay men as comedic and at the same time sexually predatory, “corrective” rape of lesbian women, and increasingly documented violence targeting people perceived to be LGBT.

Before the law, at least three options can be pursued by LGBT Filipinos seeking to assert their rights as citizens (Litong, 2012). Seeking protection under existing laws is one. Second, new laws specifically crafted to address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity may be enacted. And third, advocacy for the legal empowerment of LGBT Filipinos can lead to structural and social change.

In this paper we argue that one concrete pathway to achieve LGBT legal empowerment and enjoyment of equal human rights is collective action – in the form of LGBT rights activism. This study contributes to the intersection of scholarship in critical citizenship studies, social psychology, and LGBT studies using the case of LGBT Filipino rights activism.

We begin by examining the social psychological underpinnings of group inequality and how such inequalities relate to everyday experiences of stigma, discrimination, and hate. We then argue that the inequalities faced by the LGBT community can be understood within a framework of citizenship, particularly the analytic construct of sexual citizenship. This state of marginal and partial sexual citizenship of LGBT Filipinos may then, under certain circumstances, lead to collective action and rights activism, which we explore using empirical data.

Group Inequalities: Social Psychological Insights

While democratic ideals assert that we are equal before the law, social life is structured along many social inequalities. Individuals, because of their membership in particular social groups, enjoy more privileges than others, while others have less access and must endure poorer

outcomes. These group inequalities can be observed along the lines of gender, race, class, age, and ability.

While structural inequalities are important to analyze and address in and of themselves, social psychological research has established that such inequalities also give rise to particular intergroup relations. These relations are often marked by negatively valenced perceptions, emotions, ideologies, and actions (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Individuals in more high-status positions often look down upon lower-status groups, ascribing to them less human-like characteristics (e.g., perceiving them as animal-like or as less “civilized”), underestimating their intelligence and abilities, and casting them into stereotypes that are resistant to change. Emotions such as awkwardness, anxiety, and the so-called dark triad of contempt, anger, and disgust may be felt and expressed in relation to outgroup members. High-status groups may construct a narrative that legitimizes their place in the social hierarchy (e.g., religious dogma that appoints stewardship and privilege to the group), which in turn justifies denigratory, discriminatory, and occasionally benevolent but protectionist actions towards members of the lower-status group. Individuals from the disadvantaged group, in turn, may internalize this stigma in some circumstances, even believing their suffering to be legitimate, and have to endure from poor outcomes in health, work, well-being, and quality of life (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Meyer, 2003).

Challenging such group inequalities, and therefore addressing the negative intergroup relations, is a task often carried by the disadvantaged. Social change is possible, but this possibility depends on many factors, including the propensity of members of the marginalized groups to engage in collective action (Wright, 2003). Collective action is when a group member acts as a representative of her or his group, with the aims of improving the conditions of the

entire group (and not merely the self) and challenging the system of inequality. Acts such as speaking up about oppression, reaching out to fellow in-group members for consciousness-raising, and seeking changes in practices or policy are some examples. Collective action may be conducted by an agent acting alone (e.g., individual heroism) or in coordinated fashion with fellow minorities (e.g., social movements); what distinguishes it from other acts is the intent to create structural change and end oppression.

Sexual and gender minorities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have experienced long, often complicated histories of oppression and inequality (Human Rights Watch, 2009; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011). In some cultures, even the mere perception of being trans or being in a same-sex relationship puts people at risk for discrimination, violence, and other human rights violations. This oppression and inequality can be framed within an analysis of citizenship, particularly sexual citizenship and sexual rights.

Sexual Citizenship and Rights

Classical views of citizenship construct it as “a status based on those who are full members of a community” (Marshall, 1950). Citizenship, in this perspective, serves as a package of rights and duties that define an individual’s members in a polity (Isin & Wood, 1999). We can distinguish two dimensions to this construct: (1) access, the rules that separate citizens from non-citizens (e.g., who counts as a Filipino citizen?), and (2) quality, the subsequent rights and duties that accompany the status of citizen (e.g., what rights are Filipino citizens entitled to? What are the obligations of Filipino citizens?). This bundle of rights and obligations has also been classically analyzed along the so-called triad of citizenship: civil rights

(individual freedoms to act, speak, and think), social rights (enjoyment of basic levels of welfare and well-being), and political rights (participation in the process of democracy) (Marshall, 1950).

Critical political and legal scholars however have pointed out that classical notions of citizenship fail to take into account dimensions of exclusion and partial inclusion (Lister, 2003; Richardson, 2000). Throughout history and across cultures, the notion of citizenship has traditionally been used as a means to codify and legitimize social hierarchies and group inequalities along race (for example, colonizers versus indigenous peoples, Whites versus people of color), age (adults versus children), and gender (men versus women). The last analytic approach, called gendered citizenship (Pantelidou Maloutas, 2006), draws attention to the argument that rights and substantial democracy as a social project cannot be realized without interrogating the existing system of gender relations.

Departing from gendered citizenship, early scholars such as Ken Plummer (1995) and Jeffrey Weeks (1998) extended the analysis of citizenship into the domain of sexuality, sexual rights, and sexual relations beyond the male/female gender binary. This approach has come to be known as *sexual citizenship*. Two ideas lie at the heart of sexual citizenship. First, notions of citizenship, contrary to original formulations, extend from the public to the private and “intimate” domains of modern life, including our erotic, sexual, and emotional lives (Plummer, 1995; Weeks 1998). Legal regulations of sexual behavior exist, validating certain forms of romantic and sexual acts and relations, particularly heterosexual, married, monogamous, reproductive, at-home sexuality – what feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984) had earlier labeled “good, normal, natural, blessed sex”. At the same time, erotic practices that lie outside this circle of “good sex” may position individuals, couples, and groups as lesser citizens before

the law, as in the case of anti-miscegenation laws in Apartheid South Africa and anti-sodomy laws in post-colonial states like India, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

A second key idea is that sexuality, like gender, determines access to and enjoyment of full human rights. Those living in polyamorous unions, for instance, have little access to the legal rights that come with civil partnerships and marriage, whose definition is restricted, with few exceptions, to a union between two individuals. Persons living with HIV, a status often situated within the realm of sexuality, contend with restrictions on their rights to travel freely, with a number of countries including Singapore and Brunei barring HIV-positive travelers from entering their territory. But the most well-analyzed exemplar of sexual subjects who experience exclusion or partial inclusion into the mantle of human rights would be LGBT people (Edgar, 2008; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011).

Globally, inequalities exist between heterosexual and LGBT individuals in their enjoyment of human rights (Asia Pacific Forum, 2010), including various civil rights (including freedom of sexual expression, marriage equality, and adoption), social rights (access to education and dignified work), and political rights (ability to run for public office, to participate in peace-keeping and served in the armed forces). While the past two decades have seen enormous strides in improving the human rights situation of LGBT people especially in Western countries, marginalization and oppression of sexual and gender minorities persist, often with grave consequences. In 78 countries, same-sex relations remain illegal, and in five countries -- Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen -- the punishment imposed is the death penalty. Even in democratic countries that uphold the fundamental equality of their citizens, LGBT people possess the same obligations as heterosexual citizens (payment of taxes, civic participation, compliance with their respective Constitutions, etc.) but have to tolerate less than

equal access to full marriage rights, employment and economic well-being, education, religion, and sport (Badgett & Frank, 2007).

LGBT Activism: Collective Action toward Enjoyment of Full Human Rights

Challenges to the inequalities and oppression faced by transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian come in the form of LGBT rights movements. These social movements seek to promote social justice, equal rights, and well-being of LGBT individuals, families, and populations. LGBT rights activism is a prime example of collective action, as participation in the pursuit and promotion of LGBT human rights is guided by social identity (i.e., a person's membership in the minority group; Tyler & Smith, 1998) or in the case of heterosexual allies to the LGBT community, by the politics of identification and alliance (Thompson, 2004). In addition, LGBT activism is strategic collective action, i.e., it is intended to improve the circumstances of the ingroup in a specific domain of life (e.g., in workplaces, in schools, or in the legislative sphere) or in society as a whole.

As a specific form of collective action, social movements such as LGBT rights movements are hypothesized to have a number of core features (DeLamater & Myers, 2011). They are marked by sustained, disruptive, and organized action by a relatively large group of people, traditionally headed by leadership and involving social processes like recruitment and mobilization as well as cognitive processes like ideology formation. Social movements unfold over time, gathering momentum, as opposed to taking place in one single episode. They disrupt, or at least attempt to disrupt, an existing social order that privilege other groups over the ingroup. And generally, social movements involve actions by many individual social agents in a more or

less coordinated fashion. Recruitment, whether formal or informal, is often necessary to maintain the life of a social movement, and mobilization of numbers demonstrates the capacity of a movement and its reach. Agents in a social movement may look to particular ingroup members as leaders or key players, though again, leadership may not necessarily be formalized. What may be explicitly articulated, documented, and disseminated is a guiding ideology and set of principles for the movement, for example, in manifestos, position statements, or even in slogans or strategic messaging. This ideology provides a framework and a narrative which members can help formulate, internalize, and deploy as they pursue their collective goals.

Social psychological research into intergroup relations has identified factors associated with participation in collective action versus individual action or even inaction (Hogg & Abrams, 2007; Wright, 2003). Collective actions such as social movements, for instance, often trace their genesis to a precipitating event, one that draws attention to a disadvantaged group's subordinate position in a status hierarchy. Borrowing from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, as cited in Hogg & Abrams, 2007), three other factors must be aligned for collective action to take place: (1) perceptions of impermeability of intergroup boundaries, (2) feelings of illegitimacy of the status hierarchy, and (3) perceptions of instability of the status quo. When disadvantaged group members remain in the group and own up to their group membership (based on the subjective belief that group membership boundaries are impermeable and that exit from the group is not a possibility), individual action is forsaken and a choice between inaction and collective action becomes possible. The pathway to collective action rests on group members' judgment of their marginalized position as unjust (illegitimacy perceptions) and their capacity to imagine a world where the ingroup's position in the social order is improved (perceptions of a mutable hierarchy). In other words, the oppressed will take action when they become conscious

of their oppression and if they come to believe, to borrow from the words of the US gay activist Dan Savage, that things can get better (Savage & Miller, 2011).

Once these enabling conditions are in place, collective action ensues. And one particular form of collective action of interest in this gender and justice research project is *activism*. Activism, according to political psychologists like Klar and Kasser (2008), is to advocate a political cause via a wide array of possible means, ranging from institutionalized to unconventional acts, with the intention of seeking social change. Activism in the service of a particular social group's political interests can be explored using a social psychological perspective along a number of analytic dimensions:

- (1) Pathways to activism -- how members of a marginalized group move from individual actions of self-interest or inaction to collective action;
- (2) Political actions -- the specific behaviors group members engage in in order to challenge the status hierarchy, ranging from normative or institutionalized to nonnormative or radical;
- (3) Commitment -- the strength of motivation to advocate for the disadvantaged group, as well as factors that ensure sustained engagement and prevent exit;
- (4) Activist identity -- perceptions of the self as an advocate for the disadvantaged ingroup and how this identity figures in relation to other social identities.

Using these analytic frames derived from the literature on group inequality, sexual citizenship, and collective action, we explored LGBT rights activism as a form of collective action that aims for social change and political empowerment of LGBT Filipinos.

Research Problem

How can we understand Filipino LGBT rights activism using social psychological and sexual citizenship perspectives? Two related goals guided this study. First, we wanted to explore the subjective experiences and social psychological dynamics behind the advocacy work of selected players in the Philippine LGBT rights movement. Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions:

- (1) *Pathways*: What factors enable the development of citizens toward becoming activists and defenders of LGBT human rights?
- (2) *Action*: What do Filipino LGBT activists do in order to advance the interests of LGBT Filipinos?
- (3) *Commitment*: What motivates Filipino LGBT activists to advocate for equality and social change?
- (4) *Identity*: What does being a “Filipino LGBT activist” mean for those engaged in such collective action?

Our second goal, from a broader and more citizenship-based perspective, was to identify and analyze the rights claims pursued by the LGBT rights movement, from the perspective of actors engaged in collective action. In particular we sought to answer the following:

- (1) What have been the dominant goals on the agenda of the LGBT rights movement in the Philippines?
- (2) How have these goals been pursued, especially in the context of Philippine law?

For the purposes of this presentation, we focus on the results of our analysis of the personal narratives of Filipino LGBT human rights defenders. We aim to contribute to reflexive discourse on Southeast Asian human rights scholarship and activism by highlighting lived experiences of activism in the domain of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights in the context of the Philippines.

Method

Design

The study was built on a qualitative, multiple case-study design using in-depth key informant interviews with select Filipino LGBT human rights defenders. These long, semi-structured conversations provided rich description of personal narratives of collective action based on the lived experience of informants. At the same time, the interviews allowed for a discussion of the rights claims and collective goals of the Filipino LGBT rights movement. Prior to the actual interviews, we also sat in various events organized by local LGBT groups such as planning meetings of the Manila Pride March, discussion-fora on LGBT rights, the 2010 national convention of the Ladlad LGBT Party, and the 2011 Baguio Pride March. These participatory exercises were conducted in part as preparatory field work in order to reestablish contacts and strengthen relationships with colleagues from the Filipino LGBT community, as well as to obtain a more grounded and nuanced view of Filipino LGBT rights activism from the “inside”.

Participants

Informants were selected using a peer nomination procedure. We asked organizations participating in the 2009 LGBT Manila Pride March the question “Who are the people you consider to have played or are currently playing a significant role in the LGBT rights movement in the Philippines?” Responses were tallied and we invited individuals most frequently nominated to participate in our study. Participants were not selected with the objective of representing Filipino LGBT human rights defenders – indeed, in the course of our interviews, informants made recommendations about other activists to interview not on our original short list. Likewise our analysis was not conducted with the aim of arriving at generalizations that could apply to all Filipino LGBT activists (for instance, all our interviewees were based in Metro Manila, the Philippine capital). Nevertheless, we tried to arrive at a diverse range of informants in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity backgrounds; the final sample included two trans, three gay, and four lesbian Filipino activists who have been involved in various LGBT non-profit organizations, both local and international, as early as the 1990s.

Interviews

We conducted nine in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured conversations about our participants' personal narratives and perceptions of the Filipino LGBT rights movement (similar to McGuire, Stewart & Curtin, 2010). One member of the research team took the role of lead

interviewer while the other member was the documentor and secondary interviewer, alternating roles in the next interview. Both Eric and Bea were present in all interviews.

An interview protocol with guide questions was prepared and pilot-tested with one young Filipina trans activist involved in LGBT rights advocacy who also provided feedback on the interview process. We began each session with introductions and an overview of the goals of the study, situating it in the larger IHR/CWS Gender and Justice Research program. Participants were assured that all data would be used for research purposes only and that they could decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. The conversation was divided into two main parts: the first delved into lived experiences and personal narratives of LGBT rights activism and participation in collective action; the second probed into informants' views and own analysis of Filipino LGBT rights activism vis-a-vis the present situation of LGBT human rights in the country. Interviews were concluded with a summary of the conversation, as well as a short reiteration of the goals of the research project, an opportunity for participants to provide feedback or ask questions, and acknowledgments and thanks for their time and participation.

Each conversation lasted for one long session, except for one interview that had to be split into two sessions due to scheduling concerns. On the average, each interview took 2.96 hours, (about two hours and 57 minutes) with a short break in between; they were conducted in Filipino and English in quiet, mutually agreed upon settings over refreshments, with good exchange of ideas and even laughter. All interviews, a total of 26.7 hours of talk, were voice-recorded with the consent of participants and fully transcribed for analysis.

Analytic Procedures

The following strategies were used in our qualitative data analysis. Immediately after each interview, we conducted a short discussion of the case, jotting down analytic memos on salient points raised during the conversation. After all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, we performed multiple readings of each transcript, guided by the particular research questions of the study. The aim was not to confirm hypotheses based on the literature, rather we wanted to explore the range of detail across cases with an eye for common themes as well as unique points. Initial, “evolving” analyses of the findings were presented at various public fora – including one national psychology conference, one national demography conference, and an international summer institute for LGBT psychology – to obtain formative feedback for the final analysis. After all interviews were transcribed, we divided the final sample of cases between us for independent coding using a shared QDA template, after which we met to discuss the individual case outcomes with respect to the specific research questions. Finally, we selected illustrative quotes from the dataset for presentation.

Results and Discussion

The succeeding section presents an exploration of Filipino LGBT rights activism as a form of collective action as informed by our standpoint as academic LGBT psychologists using analytic frames borrowed from the literature on political psychology, critical citizenship studies, and LGBT studies. We begin with a short description of the human rights defenders whose narratives contribute to this project. We then delve into the subjective experiences and social

psychological dynamics behind the advocacy work of this sample of key players in local LGBT social movement. Finally we contextualize these experiences within the rights claims pursued by the Filipino LGBT rights movement, from the perspective of these actors engaged in collective action.

The Activists

The nine activist-participants we talked to were a diverse group with varied experiences as members -- in some cases, founding members -- and leaders of various LGBT organizations. All names and identifiers have been changed to protect the privacy of informants.

Two were involved in LGBT rights work as transgender activists. Irma was chair of an organization of transsexual Filipina women and during the time of the interview was also affiliated with the local LGBT party, as well as an alumna of an LGBT student organization in a large public university. Amy, meanwhile, had a post in an international LGBTI rights association, in addition to being part of a transgender rights organization.

The three gay men who shared their stories were Niño, Steve, and Roman. At the time of the interview, Niño was a volunteer moderator for an online social network that provided a venue for Filipino gay men to interact and discuss issues ranging from dating and health to politics and empowerment. He was also on the organizing committee for the annual LGBT Manila Pride March. Steve, on the other hand, was part of an NGO that aims to promote sexual health among MSM (men who have sex with men) and trans Filipinos. In addition, he was also part of the lesbian and gay caucus of a political party representing marginalized sectors in the Philippines.

Roman, on the other hand, is founding member of a leftist LGBT organization and at the time of the interview, also affiliated with an international association of LGBT Pride organizers based in the USA.

Nora, Elena, Emma, and Uma were the four women who contributed to the project as lesbian activist informants. Nora is project coordinator for a regional LGBT organization and also a founding member of a lesbian organization in Manila. Elena, on the other hand, was a founding member of an NGO that provides legal resources and services for Filipino LGBTs. Emma worked in the public sector and legislative advocacy for LGBT issues. Finally, Uma is with a non-profit organization that promotes sexual and reproductive health in the context of HIV/AIDS and migration.

Though from varying professional backgrounds and with diverse educational origins, the activists in our study involved themselves in LGBT rights work, some even starting their own organizations, and many wearing multiple hats and contributing to different LGBT advocacy groups. Some like Roman, Uma, Nora, and Steve had been involved in the early years of what is now known as LGBT rights activism in the Philippines.

Becoming and Being Filipino LGBT Activists

We analyzed participants' narratives using the dimensions of activism described by Klar and Kasser (2009) in their work on political psychology. These dimensions were: (1) their *pathways to activism*; (2) their *actions as activists*; (3) their *commitment to activism*; and (4) the

meanings of an activist identity. In the following sections we describe the themes that emerged in each dimension of our participants' stories of being LGBT activists.

Pathways to LGBT activism. Participants' accounts of how they became LGBT activists were varied, identifying different starting points, significant events, and people who played important roles in their journeys. Three major factors were cited variously by our participants as critical enabling conditions that led to their activism in the LGBT rights domain: prior experience of (non-LGBT) activism, personal experiences of anti-LGBT marginalization, and the presence of a mentor (see Figure 1).

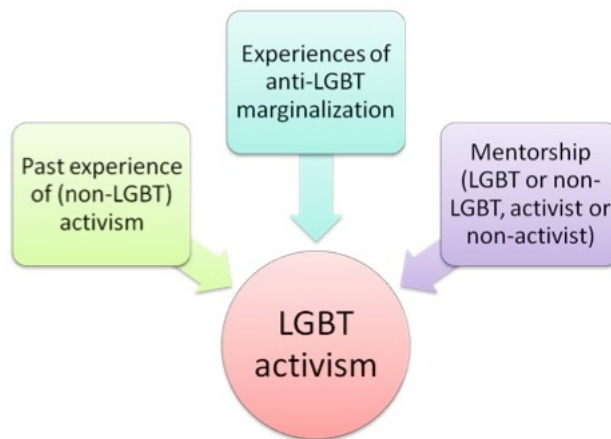


Figure 1. Three factors that led to LGBT rights activism

Our participants described their involvement in activism or advocacy work on non-LGBT issues, including student activism, feminist activism, and urban poor organizing, as a significant part of their individual journeys towards LGBT rights activism. Some became activists during their college years—for example, Steve and Roman started out being involved in university-based activist groups, and Nora talked about participating in street-based political actions such as

rallies. Others became activists after university; for instance, Uma worked in development-oriented NGOs before becoming involved in the women's rights movement. These experiences led them to see activism as a viable strategy for addressing social inequalities, including inequalities due to sexual orientation and gender identity. For some, involvement in social justice organizations was also an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals. According to Uma, her involvement in what she described as a radical feminist organization gave her and other young women a space to discuss lesbian issues, and eventually led to the formation of other groups that focused on lesbian or LGBT concerns.

“That's also where lesbian feminist activism kinda started. And that got other lesbians and feminists interested. It started the discussions and the movement in a way.”

These discussions within the organization and the sense of tension between lesbian feminist activism and the broader women's movement at the time were the starting points for the formation of one of the first lesbian organizations in the Philippines in 1992.

Our participants also talked about experiences of anti-LGBT discrimination and stigma as part of their pathway to LGBT activism. While many described personal experiences of discrimination and harassment within their families, schools, or workplaces, others mentioned more indirect experiences such as observing the difficulties undergone by other Filipino LGBTs. Although these were clearly negative experiences for our participants, in some cases they were also the impetus for becoming engaged in LGBT activism. Steve, for instance, described how fellow student leaders reacted when he came out:

“I was involved with campus politics and I was working with a lot of macho organizations kaya it was difficult. When I came out, talagang kita mo yung negative

reaction nila. May nag-slam ng Bible in front of me to say imoral ‘yan. So I started becoming active in lesbian and gay groups.”

I was involved with campus politics and I was working with a lot of macho organizations so it was difficult. When I came out, you could really see their negative reactions. Someone slammed a Bible in front of me to say, that’s immoral. So I started becoming active in lesbian and gay groups.

Similarly, Niño's account of his tenure as a youth leader included experiences and observations of marginalization that opened his eyes to the need to challenge existing social inequalities.

“Isa yun sa mga nakatulong sa pag-realize na, ay bakit ganun, ang baba ng tingin nila sa mga bakla? So siguro nakatulong yun sa pag-agitate sa ‘kin, na kailangan kong i-pursue yung LGBT activism. Tapos dun ko nakita kung paano tinatrato ng barangay yung mga bakla. Okay, programs para sa mga bakla, magpa-Miss Gay tayo. Doon ko nakita kung pa’no tinatrato ng mundo dahil bakla ako.

One of the helpful things was realizing, why is that they look down on gay men? So I suppose that help in agitating me, that I need to pursue LGBT activism. Then I saw how gay men were treated by neighborhood officials. Okay, there were programs for gay men, Miss gay beauty pageants. That’s where I saw how the world treats gay people.

Meanwhile, Amy was told by family members, educational institutions, and potential employers that she would be acceptable only if she identified as a gay man, but not if she identified and presented as a woman:

“Nag-out ako sa nanay ko as trans. Sabi ko lang sa kanya I need to live as a girl. Akala niya phase lang kasi I had a gay brother. Akala niya I’ll get over it. Okay lang naman sa kanya to be a gay guy but not as a transwoman... Hindi ako pinag-entrance exam sa college. Because I’m trans. Sabi nila sa ‘kin nang harap-harapan, alam naming makakapasa ka. Magiging mataas yung grade mo, pero what we’re concerned about is the way you present yourself. Tapos pangatlo, nag-aapply ako ng trabaho. Call center. Tanggap na ko. As in kontrata na lang, pipirmahan ko na lang. The next day naka-receive ako ng email, your qualification didn’t match the job that you are looking for. After a month, yung gay brother ko who works there, tinanong niya. Tapos may nagchika sa kanya, alam mo ba kung bakit hindi natanggap yung kapatid mo? Nakita kasi siya ng HR manager na gumagamit ng CR ng pambabae.”

I came out as trans to my mom. I told her I need to live as a girl. She thought it was a phase because I have a gay brother. She thought I’d get over it. To her it was okay to be a gay man, but not a transwoman. I wasn’t allowed to take an entrance exam for college. Because I’m trans. They told me directly that they knew I would pass. That my grades would be high, but that they were concerned with the way I presented myself. Then I applied for a job. Call center. I got accepted. I just needed to sign the contract. The next day I received an email saying your qualification didn’t match the job you were looking for. After a month, my gay brother who works there made inquiries. Someone told him, do you know why your sibling wasn’t hired? It’s because the HR manager saw her using the women’s toilet.

Amy described these incidents as significant events that helped solidify her commitment to fight for transgender rights.

Emma also described a sense of inequality resulting from everyday personal experiences, such as her family’s discomfort with her same-sex relationships:

“I wouldn't have fought that hard if it was not happening din to me personally. Hindi naman horror stories per se, pero realizing na hindi ka pa rin on equal footing, every day of your life nase-sense mo pa rin yun. My relationship, my partnership, dun ko most naramdaman. Tanggap nila, kilala nila, pero that same level of acceptance, hindi pa rin. Pag family picture, one time [my girlfriend] was handed the camera. So photographer ka lang. Hindi ka kasama dito.”

I wouldn't have fought that hard if it wasn't also happening to me personally. Not horror stories per se but realizing that you're still not on equal footing, every day of your life, you still sense it. In my relationship, my partnership, that's where I felt it most. It's acknowledged, it's known, but still not the same level of acceptance. During family photos, one time my girlfriend was handed the camera. You're just the photographer. You don't belong here.

These personal experiences of anti-LGBT stigma and discrimination served as precipitating events that drew the activists' attention to the subordinate position LGBTs in Filipino society. Such events do not have to be grand in scale and affect the entire disadvantaged group directly or even symbolically, as in the case of the COMELEC's denial of accreditation to Ladlad for being an LGBT political party (*Ladlad v. COMELEC*, 2010). What seems more important is how a negative experience, such as the unwelcoming climate in the neighborhood for Niño or the workplace discrimination against Amy, is deemed both personal *and* political (Curtin, Stewart & Duncan, 2010). That is, experiences of stigma are not simply attributed to some feature of the self, but construed as symptomatic of group inequality and oppression.

Finally, in describing their development as LGBT human rights defenders, some participants emphasized the significance of people who, in an official or an unofficial capacity,

had a mentorship role in their life. In some cases, participants identified other LGBT activists as their mentors. Amy, who deplored a dearth of transgender activists in the Filipino LGBT rights movement when she was starting to become politically involved, talked about writing to international transgender rights activists, who later encouraged her to share her experiences as a Filipino transwoman to the international community.

Interestingly, activists identified individuals who were neither LGBT nor activists as their mentors. Irma, for instance, recalled her former boss, a heterosexual woman, as the embodied source of values that she wished to bring into LGBT rights activism.

Behaviors as LGBT activists. Activists talked about a variety of behaviors aimed at changing the marginalized status of LGBTs in Philippine society. Specific collective actions depended partly on their skills and preferences; for example, Niño, who teaches part-time, talked about his preference for staying behind the scenes helping out in organizing rather than being on the front lines, as well as his interest in mentoring younger activists. Actions also depended on the objectives of the organizations they belonged to and the roles they played in these groups. Some organizations had specific objectives, such as providing legal services and information for LGBT Filipinos or organizing the Manila Pride March. Other groups had a broader range of goals which entailed various activities; for instance, Ladlad, which sought political representation for LGBTs and also conducted educational activities with LGBTs across the Philippines.

With respect to the social psychological literature on stigma and group inequalities, we can situate Filipino LGBT activist behaviors along two dimensions of responding to social injustice and oppression (Tyler, 2003). Actions may be individually oriented, seeking to restore justice for the self, or collectively oriented, seeking redress for the entire marginalized group or

at least for the self as a member of the group. Responses may also lie along a range of normative acts (indicating institutionalized strategies conducted within the socially approved ways of effecting social change, akin to working “within the system”, such as filing appeals through channels) to non-normative acts (referring to strategies considered outside the established means of seeking justice, including more radical, even illegal, actions). Within this framework, Filipino LGBT activist behaviors qualified as collective action that were primarily normative (e.g., forming a political party, filing for SEC-recognition of one’s LGBT organization, organizing talks about LGBT rights in schools), along with some occasional accounts of action outside institutionalized systems (e.g., protesting anti-LGBT rulings).

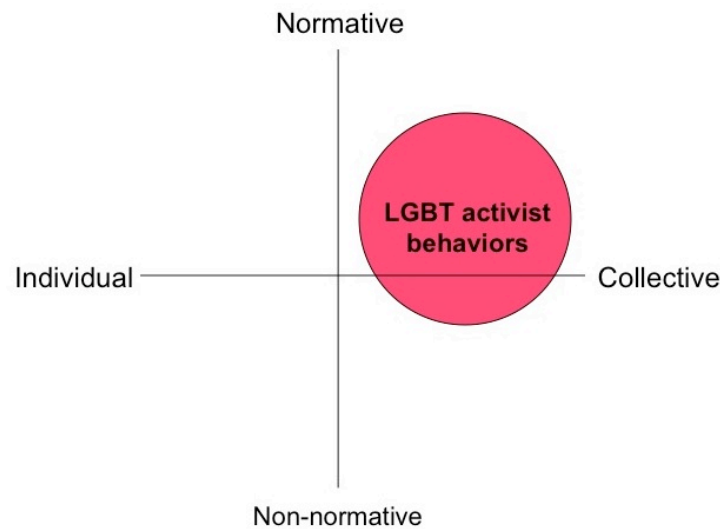


Figure 2. Filipino LGBT activist behaviors as forms of collective and predominantly normative action, following Tyler (2003)

Apart from this classification, we propose another way of analyzing LGBT activism behaviors on the basis of the social targets of a particular action. Although activism and its many behavioral manifestations benefit the group, by definition, we can distinguish specific strategies that are *internally directed actions*, which address and cater directly to fellow members of the LGBT community, versus those that are *externally directed actions*, which aim to raise the status of the disadvantaged group by impacting various sectors of the general public.

Filipino LGBT activists like Emma and Elena organize paralegal training for LGBT Filipinos in Cagayan de Oro and Davao, while Irma and Amy organize support group meetings dedicated for transwomen. Niño and Nora volunteered time and skills to help organize the Manila Pride March. Uma and Roman wrote about coming out, same-sex relationships, and other LGBT issues in a magazine that enjoyed national circulation. Some actions were targeted towards LGBT Filipinos in general while others were directed towards more specific sub-groups within the LGBT community, such as MSMs or school-based LGBT youth. Such internally directed actions aim to empower fellow members of the marginalized group by providing information, skills, and resources, as well as strengthening relationships and connections toward building a community (see Table 1).

	Internally directed	Externally directed
	Forming and/or joining Filipino LGBT organizations.	Writing letters of complaint and request to establishments and the government
	Conducting LGBT rights workshops and other educational activities across the Philippines	Conducting LGBT rights workshops for government agencies, public school teachers
	Addressing internalized stigma among fellow LGBT Filipinos	Lobbying

Participating in international LGBT rights activities	Engaging with media
Conducting research and documentation	Participating in street-based protests
Disseminating LGBT health information	Conducting research and documentation
Attending (or organizing) Pride Marches	Writing about LGBT issues in mainstream media
Mentoring next generation of LGBT activists	
Providing legal resources and services for LGBT Filipinos	
Writing about LGBT issues in mainstream media	

Table 1. Internally and externally directed actions of Filipino LGBT activists

On the other hand, actions such as Steve and Nora lobbying members of Congress to pass anti-discrimination legislation or Roman writing press releases about LGBT events for local media were examples of externally directed strategies that aimed to raise awareness of LGBT concerns to larger, non-LGBT audiences.

Commitment to LGBT activism. To probe into motivation and commitment to activism work, we asked informants how long they had been involved in the LGBT rights movement, how much time they spent doing LGBT human rights work in a typical week, and how much longer they foresee themselves as activists. Reasons for entering as well as continuing to be LGBT activists were also discussed.

One construal of LGBT activism was it filled the gaps of LGBT-inclusion in Philippine civil society work. For some, the experience of being LGBT in organizations working on non-LGBT issues led them to see a need for groups that focused squarely on the issues of lesbians,

gay men, bisexuals, and/or transgender Filipinos. Roman, describing his experiences as a student activist, said, “When I was in college, [doing] urban poor [activism], I felt there was organization for us. There were organizations for farmers, for women. I always asked myself, why is there no one standing up for gay issues?”

Others pointed out the fact that LGBT citizens in other parts of the world enjoy social and legal recognition, inclusion, and acceptance. Reducing the disparities between local LGBT realities and the situation elsewhere (e.g., gender recognition laws for transgender citizens in Europe versus in the Philippines) was another source of motivation for Filipino LGBT activism. Finally, some activists remarked on their vision of improving the status of LGBT Filipinos as the primary reason for staying committed to LGBT activism. They emphasized the personal aspects of these visions, including the kind of society that they envisioned living in and raising their families in. These reimaginings of the status quo, with LGBT individuals and families enjoying equality and full citizenship, enabled activists with temporal direction and facilitated meaning-making in the course of advocacy work.

Asked about the perceived costs and benefits of LGBT activism, our informants pointed to a degree of negative impact on some aspects of their lives as a cost to fighting for LGBT rights. However, this was outweighed by the benefits experienced in the course of advocacy work. Some activists felt that the amount of time spent working on LGBT-related issues meant that most, if not all, of their friends were other LGBT activists.

Others described ways in which engagement in LGBT activism had negatively affected their romantic and/or sexual relationships. Being out, being relatively visible in the public eye as a vocal supporter of LGBT human rights was difficult for partners who preferred to stay closeted, be selectively out, or remain “stealth” about being in a relationship with a member of

the LGBT community. Amy, for example, met potential partners who found her openness as a transgender activist to be a deal breaker. “There are men who don’t like what I do,” she shared. “They would like to live a stealth life. So I ask myself, is this it, is this the life for me?”

Similarly, Roman felt that his visibility as a gay activist who frequently engaged broadcast media became a barrier to forming relationships with men who were not out to their families. “My feeling is because of my media exposure, I have no boyfriend,” explained Roman. “Because when I was trying to date, people would either say, you’re too effeminate, you’re too exposed on TV.” Likewise, others felt that the amount of time and effort they devoted to activist work was a source of conflict in relationships with partners who were not activists themselves.

Being an activist, and particularly an activist for LGBT rights, could also take a toll on family relationships. Roman, for whom LGBT activism has involved a high degree of visibility in mass media, pointed to negative impact on his family relationships.

Aside from affecting social relationships, activists also described how the demands of advocacy resulted in having less time for leisure activities. Nora, for example, said that she typically clocked in six days of LGBT-related work in a typical week, and only had time for family activities on Sundays. Emma, on the other hand, stated that she spent “about half of [her] life” so far on her LGBT rights advocacy and activism.

The constraints on leisure and disengagement may be related to stress and burnout, which were common experiences among our informants. For some, burnout was attributed to a sense that LGBT activism was a 24/7 commitment, that they needed to be on-call all the time. Others pointed out that the lack of immediate tangible outcomes was another major source of stress in LGBT activism.

Conflicts with fellow LGBT activists, whether over interpersonal or more activism-related matters, was another source of frustration. Irma, for example, articulated difficulties in working with other activists whom she perceived as being “immature” or uninformed about LGBT issues. Despite the emotional costs of these conflicts however, activists perceived it as an inevitable aspect of being an LGBT advocate because of the highly personal nature of most of the rights issues that they deal with.

LGBT rights activism, perhaps similar to other forms of human rights activism, entails a number of costs such as restricted friendship networks, disapproval of family and even romantic and/or sexual partners, less leisure time, and high stress levels. Nevertheless, these disadvantages were outweighed by the benefits experienced in the course of advocacy work.

First, informants described a sense of personal growth and development from LGBT activism. Many mentioned the development of various skills, such as designing research, public speaking, and educating others about LGBT issues, as perks. Some, like Emma, developed skills that they had not thought themselves capable of. Emma also described the positive impact that LGBT activism has had on her career. “You’re unique. You have a niche,” she explained. “For some, it gives you respect. It’s like wow, you’re so brave for going into that field!”

Amy likewise described her activism as an experience that made her stronger and gifted her with a sense of personal fulfillment, as well as a means to learning about other related forms of oppression:

“It’s a learning experience. I think it made me stronger as a person. It’s my passion in life. Knowing I’m still faithful to that passion gives me a sense of fulfillment as a person. It’s like I can commit to something, at least one thing in my life. It serves as a gate, it opens you to other issues as well. If you go deeper into transgender activism, you get a

sense of connection to other people who are oppressed, who are not necessarily trans. So it broadens your horizon. You get to see the bigger picture.”

Feeling that they contribute to the advancement of LGBT rights and in some way to the improvement of the lives of fellow LGBT Filipinos was a second important benefit of being an activist. “You can relate because you’ve seen and you know that this is the remedy for what you’ve been through,” explained Steve. “You can empathize with what others have been through. Therefore as an activist, you can quickly channel those emotions into your action. There’s a sense that you can do something on an issue or problem and there are results that you can achieve.” A sense of personal resonance with the issues that he worked on, combined with a feeling that he could provide meaningful solutions makes activism satisfying, according to Steve.

Opportunities to meet individuals from diverse backgrounds, including activists involved in LGBT and non-LGBT issues, is a third benefit of LGBT activism. For Amy, these opportunities broaden worldviews and challenges personal stereotypes, an experience activists related to very well. “You get to meet a lot of people. Not just transgender people but different people,” she explained. “In my entire activism, I’ve met UN-level diplomats, street activists, sex worker activists. You really have a stereotype of those people before. Once you get to talk to them, your stereotypical views about them suddenly shatter. You’ll never be the same person again once you meet these people. So my life gets enriched, not just my life as an activist, but my life as just an ordinary person.”

Finally, activists reported being intrinsically motivated to continue being activists simply because of the feelings of enjoyment and fun that advocacy brought to their lives. They found

ways to inject a sense of fun into their activities as a strategy to keep themselves and fellow activists motivated, despite the amount of work to be done and the various obstacles that hindered them from realizing their visions. Elena, for instance, described herself as a proponent of “fun advocacy”. “Advocacy has to be fun. Otherwise you will inevitably run out of air. Sometimes you lose sight of why are you doing this but you have friends there and they help bring you back. If it's no longer fun, it's not worth doing.”

Similarly, Uma recalled her earlier years in LGBT legislative advocacy. “We decided to really incorporate the fun. We'd have dinners. There was a time that it was always like that.”

Because of the combination of LGBT activism’s costs (tensions with friends, family, and partners; less leisure; chronic stress) and benefits (personal growth, sense of group contribution, meeting diverse others, intrinsic enjoyment), being a Filipino LGBT human rights defender entails a certain amount of self-regulation and emotional labor, that is, managing the ups and downs of sustained action that intends to uplift the conditions and status of LGBT Filipinos despite the uncertainty – or alongside the hope of – social change.

Meanings of LGBT activist identity. All of our informants considered themselves LGBT human rights activists, although some mentioned other labels that they felt were equally accurate descriptions of their involvement in LGBT rights work, such as LGBT rights advocate. But regardless of the particular self-ascription, being an activist for LGBT rights was considered to be part and parcel of everyday life, even in situations where sexual orientation or gender identity were not operative. Or perhaps more accurately, LGBT activist identities carried over across the various domains of life and found expression through behaviors that are at least partially independent of the demands of these situations, exhibiting what social psychologists call transsituationality (Stryker, 2000). Rather than being compartmentalized into specific pockets of

their life-worlds, salient identities as activists or as members of a social movement could be expressed beyond working for an activist organization or engaging in activist behaviors.

This transsituationality was reflected in their expression of activist identities not being limited to the organizations they worked with or the activities they did. Irma, for instance, described how her principles as an LGBT activist were part of her engagement in other aspects of her life, such as her work and her family relationships. “Even when I’m not doing activist work, in my day job, I bring my [activist] principles,” she explained. “I teach them the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. I was pretty lucky with my last work. The employees were very accommodating and understanding.” This transsituationality may also be linked to informant accounts of LGBT activism as constant pressure, a 24/7 commitment, and a precursor to burnout.

Because of the global demands of LGBT activism, some described it as a “vocation” or a “calling” – something that they performed as an expression of a strong inner impulse, which they saw as being an enduring part of their self-construal. Amy, for example, declared, “Whatever happens in life, I’ll always be a transgender rights activist.”

Others, especially those with relatively longer involvement in LGBT activism, described shifts and changes in the meanings of their LGBT activist identity. Uma, for instance, found herself focusing on various LGBT-related issues at different points through her twenty years as an LGBT activist. During her initial years as a founder and member of organizations, Uma identified primarily as a lesbian feminist. As she became involved in groups of a more coalitional nature and worked on issues that encompassed the concerns of the broader LGBT community, she also came to consider herself an LGBT activist.

Interestingly, envisioning future selves no longer as deeply engaged in LGBT activism was a possibility. Some saw their post-LGBT activist selves as still having some involvement in the LGBT rights movement, but in a less central capacity. Niño told of a desire to take on a more “behind-the-scenes” role as someone who would “mentor” future generations of activists.

Meanwhile, others thought of their future selves as having little to no involvement in the movement, like Irma who said, “I see myself living a quiet life with my husband, hopefully raising children. Sometimes I tickle myself with the thought that I will just be a lounge singer, singing in a jazz bar somewhere in Europe.” Irma also acknowledged that expressing a desire to someday “exit” the LGBT movement might be unacceptable to other activists, but felt that they should also be cognizant of their personal well-being.

“Some people in the community are actually uncomfortable with that idea, because they come from that school of thought that activism is life-long. There’s no exit for you as an activist,” said Irma. “But of course there’s always an exit clause. You can always take out yourself from advocacy work, especially when it gets too stressful, if it’s not making you happy any longer. I mean there is no point in doing it if you’re totally unhappy. I’m glad, at least now, I’m planning to leave advocacy work happy. No bitterness.”

Conclusions: Bridging the Personal and the Political

LGBT human rights activism is a prime example of collective action, wherein members of a socially disadvantaged group engage in sustained, strategic, and organized strategies in order to challenge group inequalities and systems of hierarchy and privilege. It can also be a deeply personal social identity, linked to lived experiences of oppression and to complex individual

outcomes ranging from strained social relationships and burnout to personal growth and enjoyment, a finding supported by the LGBT literature (Levitt et al., 2009).

Our findings highlighted key themes in the personal narratives of a handful of Filipino LGBT human rights defenders, who perform actions both directed internally to directly benefit the Filipino LGBT community and externally to the larger Filipino society. Serving as an advocate for LGBT causes and full human rights in the Philippines entails a mix of costs to the self and one's social world and of benefits, both personal as well as ultimately collective. These collective benefits, though few (e.g., public visibility of LGBT concerns; increasing numbers of LGBT organizations) are now being reaped by LGBT Filipinos, though clearly, the three tangible targets of the social movement – such as national anti-discrimination legislation, political representation, and marriage equality – remain ahead of us.

Caveats and Unanswered Questions

This research project evolved and unfolded over the course of two years, during which we observed a paradox in how human rights and sexual citizenship struggles played out for the Filipino LGBT community. On one hand, there were advances. The Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision for *Ladlad*. New avenues for LGBT activism opened, such as ongoing initiatives to systematically document anti-LGBT hate crimes and lobby for hate crime legislation, an effort that was not present when we first began conceptualizing this study. And global developments took place that brought to the fore LGBT issues such as homophobic bullying and marriage equality in states such as the USA, which we expect to have ripple effects in the country. On the other hand, the three targets of nondiscrimination, political representation,

and marriage equality remain elusive, even as local counter voices grow louder, often appealing to nonsecular moral standards linked to religious fundamentalism. Thus, the story of LGBT rights activism in the Philippines is a continuing one, and this study presented only a partial account of it, limited by the methods and the particular sample of activists who participated in the project, as well as by our particular analytic frames that drew upon social psychology, critical citizenship studies, and LGBT studies (see Tan, 2004, for another account of the Filipino LGBT community, including activist organizing, from a more anthropological perspective).

Unanswered questions remain, and here we pose three. First, compared to other postcolonial countries like Singapore, India, and Indonesia, there has never been any explicit anti-homosexuality law in the Philippines (Laurent, 2005; Sanders, 2002). This fact has impacted on the local LGBT human rights agenda -- there was no need to undo explicitly anti-LGBT laws, at least one that criminalizes same-sex relations. The development, or in this case, the non-development, of so-called “anti-sodomy laws” in the Philippine legal context would be an interesting problem to investigate, especially considering that Spain and the USA both penalized same-sex sexualities until the late 20th century.

Second, do the targets of collective action always have to be on the national level? Localized changes in the legal empowerment of LGBT Filipinos are available (e.g., the ordinance against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in Quezon City, the code of ethics for social workers with prohibits anti-LGBT discrimination). The development and impact of these gains need to be documented for activists seeking to replicate best practices.

Finally, beyond activists who arguably represent some of the most “elite” working towards challenging group inequalities and the status quo, we need to investigate the dynamics behind lay people’s support for and opposition to full human rights for LGBT Filipinos (Ellis,

Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2003; Ji, 2007; Morrison & McDermott, 2009). Empirical knowledge about the structural and social psychological underpinnings of Filipino political attitudes and behaviors related to LGBT rights can allow for further, informed collective action in the service of equality based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and ultimately, advance the legal empowerment of LGBT Filipinos.

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