I was a Tomboy: Labels, Constructions, and Understandings of Women's Sexuality in the Philippines

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I was a Tomboy: 
Labels, Constructions, and Understandings of Women’s Sexuality in the Philippines

Senior Honors Thesis
Boston College Sociology Department
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Maraming Salamat Po!
Abstract

How does sexuality differ across cultures? Across genders? I propose that women in the Philippines face unique constraints on acceptable sexualities. Historical context and contemporary influences (i.e. the mass media, Catholic doctrine, education, and family) continually define and redefine acceptable behaviors. I conducted ten qualitative, open-ended interviews with Filipina women via video- or voice-conferences in early 2014. Based on the data collected, non-traditional women’s sexual orientations primarily were constructed through appearance and behavior, and not simply on sexual orientation. Women appearing or acting in a masculine fashion are labeled tomboy. Attitudes surrounding these alternate practices varied, especially as a result of religious beliefs or personal experiences. The data collected from the participants supported the importance of appearance and external influences in the constructions of and attitudes towards women’s sexualities. Furthermore, trends in the responses suggest a changing social culture in the Philippines that could lead to greater social acceptance for same-sex oriented identities.
I. Introduction

Sexuality is an essential part of our everyday lives; sexual desires, motivations, and attractions help define who we are, how we act, and what we want in our lifetimes. Women’s sexuality is an evolving field in the realm of sociology, growing out of general sexuality studies, feminist critical theory, and intersectional theory. Important to studies of sexuality, is the issue of context – sexuality is not the same all over the world and does not exist in a vacuum. For a particular person, his or her sexual identity is influenced by local and global understandings of gender, culture, and history. Thus, with various geographical locations and different cultural histories, diverse categories for understanding sexuality arise.

While scholarly research regarding sexuality recently increased in popularity (Sinnott, 2010; Chou, 2011; Gamson & Moon, 2004), many cultures remain in need of further research. One such area, of particular interest to me, is the exploration of women’s sexualities in the Philippines. This line of inquiry generated the following research questions: “How is women’s sexuality understood in the Philippines, and specifically, what are the different sexual identities (accepted and deviant) for women and what place do they have within the greater community?” and “How does the application of the Western term ‘lesbian’ influence Filipina women?” I am particularly interested in investigating how these labels (e.g., straight or lesbian) and understandings apply to women who have sexual relationships with other women.

This research is especially engaging given that understandings of sexuality are not globally stable. Labels do not cross over cultures, nor are they understood the same way all over the world. Therefore, to understand sexuality in the Philippines, research specifically based on Filipina women’s lives is necessary.
Literature on Cross-Cultural Studies in Sexuality

Across cultures, sexuality has various meanings and, even within cultures, definitions are continually constructed and reconstructed. Recently, scholarship surrounding sexuality in Asian cultures has surged (Blackwood & Johnson, 2012; Chou, 2011; Sinnott, 2010). These studies consciously investigated patterns of sexuality without simplifying non-traditional Asian sexualities into a Western import (Sinnott, 2010). These in-depth studies found a more complex reality of sexual identities that combined native cultural understandings and a growing global movement surrounding LGBTQ individuals.

One such site is the Philippines – where, along with what might be understood as the traditional heterosexual culture, there is a thriving community of gay men, often labeled “bakla.” There is a plethora of published research on these men, and yet there is virtually no research on the same-sex sexual culture of women in the Philippines.

Sexuality in the Philippines

The Bakla Identity

_Bakla_ is a popular term used for gay men; however, it refers to a specific kind of gay identity – that of an effeminate man. Although a strict macho culture may influence men in Philippine society (Garcia, 2008; Chou, 2011; Fajardo, 2008), a _bakla_ culture also thrives.

Men in the Philippines are expected to be masculine providers for the families, and often seem unaffectionate in front of their loved ones (Chou, 2011, Garcia, 2008). Yet there exists an accepted subculture for men in which they can act effeminately, have relationships with men, and in some cases, even dress as women (Garcia, 2008; Manalansan, 2003). These effeminate men are called _bakla_.

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2 | Rodis
Garcia (2008) made an important distinction between bakla and homosexual, noting that the two labels have several important differences that should prevent them from being used interchangeably. First, bakla refers strictly to the effeminate or cross-dressing male. These men often, however, have same-sex relationships not with other bakla, but with other men who are interested in same-sex sexual practices but do not act effeminately or cross-dress. Second, the use of the term bakla predates the use of homosexual in the Philippines. Third, Garcia notes that the two terms evolved out of two different cultural contexts and, therefore, cannot relate directly without obfuscating or changing the meaning of one or both of the terms (p. xxi-xxii).

In understanding this subculture, it is important to note that the bakla culture has a relatively constrained or marginal level of acceptance. The bakla are accepted within Philippine culture as long as they “do it within reason,” and with “respect” (Collins, 2009, p. 474). Bakla is also a Tagalog word. Tagalog is one of eight main regional languages in the Philippines, and Pilipino, the national language, is roughly based on Tagalog (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). However, because concepts surrounding sexuality are not universal, terms like bakla must be understood within their specific context. In the Philippines, this means that it is necessary to consider how different languages are understood by different groups of people. Still, Manalansan (2003) noted that bakla is the best word to use in the Philippines as it has received the “wide[st] circulation,” due, in part, to the popularity of Tagalog films (p. 24).

**Marginal Acceptance**

Much of the moderate acceptance of a gay subculture is restricted to specific contexts within which the bakla identity is allowed or even celebrated (Manalansan, 2003; Garcia, 2008). Elements of location and class matter tremendously in the lives of bakla men.

Collins (2005; 2009) noted that several locations in the Philippines are marked as gay,
particularly with the introduction of gay tourism. These sites can be “both sexually liberating and exploitative” for the gay men of the host country (Gamson & Moon, 2004, p. 57). Sites like the ones referenced in Collins’ articles are locations where foreign tourists hold all the power—their social position as wealthy foreigners allows them more freedom to act in whatever manner they choose and not be bound by Philippine societal expectations. However, Filipinos (men and women), as natives in their own country, are constrained by societal forces of class, gender, and religion.

Class, ultimately, is one of the most important factors influencing bakla and other sexual identities (Manalansan, 2003; Collins, 2009). Class defines the acceptable boundaries for different groups, and so men of different socio-economic levels have different expectations for their behavior. Those bakla who are publically visible are seen as “lower class” (Collins, 2009, p. 474). Bakla-identifying men who are among the upper class, socio-economically, are expected to be more discreet regarding their sexual preferences; they are expected to hold their families’ reputation above their own desires (Manalansan, 2003; Collins, 2009).

The existence of the bakla subculture in the Philippines suggests that there could be room in Philippine society for women’s same-sex practices. Yet, limited research exists on the topic of women’s same-sex sexuality in the Philippines, which makes it a particularly valuable area to investigate.

**Articles on Filipina Same-Sex Practices**

The little research that discussed women’s same-sex practices in the Philippines did not focus on female subjects. Most of the literature that exists focused on the aggregate gay subculture (Nadal & Corpus, 2013) or men’s sexuality specifically, with only tangential comments regarding women’s practices (Garcia, 2008; Manalansan, 2003). Finally, one article
focused on Philippine masculinities, discussing the *tomboy* identity, but specifically regarding men’s issues (Fajardo, 2008). However, the previous research is important in laying a framework for this study to expand upon the understandings of women’s sexualities.

The research that has been done shows that, just as gay men are often labeled *bakla*, gay women in the Philippines are often labeled *tomboy*. *Tomboy* refers to “women with a more ‘masculine’ appearance” (Nadal & Corpus, 2013, p. 167). *Tomboys* are not necessarily women sexually interested in women, nor do they necessarily always identify as lesbians or with the general lesbian movement (Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Fajardo, 2008).

In understanding women’s sexuality, especially the practices of women who have sex with women, there are several important factors to consider, including: the rigid definitions of sexual orientation, the creation of public and private identities, the importance and use of invisibility, and the construction of transgender versus woman-identified lesbian *tomboys*.

The first three factors are inter-related. The rigidity of definitions of sexual orientation creates a narrow context in which women are accepted into roles as gay women. This contributes to a creation of public and private identities, where individuals present one identity to a public audience – strangers, acquaintances, and in some scenarios, friends and family members – and another, possibly more complete, private identity to a second audience (Nadal & Corpus, 2013). Individuals are able to strategically mask their orientation, which is termed “contingent invisibility” (Newton, 2013). Unlike race or biological sex, sexuality is an element of identity that can be masked or hidden from the world (Newton, 2013; Nadal & Corpus, 2013). Therefore, to understand sexuality, these three factors must be explored at both an individual and societal level. Invisibility at a societal level might mean the marginalization of an entire subpopulation, whereas invisibility at the individual scale may be intentional and, therefore,
positive rather than negative.

Finally, in his article, Fajardo (2008) explored the assumption thattomboys are masculine-identifying women instead of transgender female to male. He claimed that this assumption is a theory often expressed by diasporic and middle to upper class Filipina feminists (p. 405). In this study, I focus on women who are seen as women with masculine traits, rather than transgender individuals.¹ In discussing labels regarding different sexualities, it thus seems important to note that a single label can often encompass many different lifestyles and perspectives.

**Definition of Important Concepts**

One established understanding of sexuality is the categorization of all sexualities on a spectrum between homosexuality and heterosexuality.² However, this simple and linear understanding of sexuality also establishes societal norms such as heteronormativity, or “how regulatory forces of societies direct the proliferation of ‘normal’ sexual identities, genders, and bodies; they compel dominant performances of gender and sexuality, discursive productions of identity, [and] regulated kinship roles” (Collins, 2009, p. 467). It is worth noting that the Philippine culture is largely heteronormative.

An understanding that goes beyond the hetero-homosexuality definition of sexuality

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¹ This was not a conscious decision to exclude transgender individuals, but I wanted to let the respondents define *tomboy* as they were inclined to and not as I was asking.

² While such a spectrum could be seen as simply a description of the various types of sexualities, homosexuality is often seen as a negative construct. Homosexuality comes from medical “terminology which differentiates homosexuality from heterosexuality.” Moreover, “stigma has been attached to same-sex loving sexualities. The mere act of labeling homosexuality as a practice creates a discourse of deviant behavior that strays from the ‘norm,’ heterosexuality. Similarly, laws construct a discourse surrounding sexual acts, dividing them into acceptable and unacceptable categories” (Chou 2011, p. 6-7). Thus, a spectrum between homosexuality and heterosexuality, is also a spectrum between unacceptable and acceptable.
would allow for a more egalitarian and realistic understanding of sexuality. Moreover, while it is theoretically understood that sexuality exists on a spectrum, it is often more practically understood as an individual having to choose one of three options: heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). An understanding of sexuality that allows more freedom within labels would help to establish a more liberating sense of self and potentially allow the labels to be more accurate. With this in mind, I attempted to construct a study that would be sensitive to the more complex understandings of sexuality. Moreover, throughout this paper, I underline the importance of looking beyond narrow understandings of identities and the difficulties of applying labels on to real people.

**Intersectionality**

Many of the articles reviewed touched upon the importance of examining multiple elements of identity. In developing black feminist theory, Collins (1991) helped to develop the concept of intersectionality, which is the idea that one individual is at the intersection of several different forms of oppression and identity. Here, various societal and cultural factors such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation simultaneously impact individuals and, thus, society as a whole (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1991). These factors unite oppression and identity because individuals are simultaneously put either into positions of domination or subjugation through different categories of identity. For example, in the United States, a white woman would simultaneously be put in a position of domination and subjugation because white is seen as powerful while female is seen as weak.

Importantly, Collins’ definition of black feminist theory can be used to understand women of any color. Black feminist theory is supposed to be a theory made by women and for women. An essential part of this theory is the idea of self-definition. bell hooks stated that
without self-definition the only way to describe an individual would be through the view of an outsider, and so there would be no clear way of knowing which element of identity is most salient in any given situation. Moreover, self-definition, following feminist critical theory, allows individuals to author their own power and locate themselves in the world – and not have anyone else do it for them. Therefore, in thinking about women’s lives, it is necessary to consider the historical, social, and cultural ties influencing an individual (Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Blackwood & Johnson, 2012; Chou, 2011; Collins, 2005; Collins, 1991).

Self-definition is important in this research as women in the Philippines have largely been unable to speak for themselves. Both of the articles reviewed that mentioned Filipina sexualities were authored primarily by men. While it is difficult to directly allow a group to speak for themselves in an academic setting, women respondents would most likely speak differently with a man than with a woman on the issue of women’s sexualities. Keeping in mind Collins’ and hooks’ understanding of intersectionality is essential in creating a project where marginalized women not only are allowed to speak for themselves, but also are allowed to define their own situations.

**Labeling Theory and Foucault**

In attempting to understand women’s sexuality, labels are clearly important. The differences between gay and *bakla*, lesbian and *tomboy*, homosexual and heterosexual, and homosexual and same-sex sexual are immense and significant. Despite their simplicity, these words hold real power; according to Foucault (1994), “the proper name... is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents” (p. 9). Through this passage, Foucault highlights that how one labels

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3 Nadal & Corpus was written by a man and a woman. However, the head investigator and first author is a man.
something or how one speaks about an object or a category becomes equivalent to the object in question. Thus, labels are very real and have great importance, even beyond the consequences of self-definition (Collins, 1991). Within the specific context of sexuality, the lack of multiple labels and of a culturally acceptable option beyond heterosexuality is also problematic for individuals still attempting to understand who they are. Therefore, it is important to understand the labels used, and not just the various sexualities that exist in a given culture.

**Performance of Identity**

At any given moment one is giving a performance to someone else, which is presented to elicit a certain response. Goffman (1959) contended that we perform for the sake of others (p. 17). In understanding one’s public versus private identities, this concept becomes especially important. We give a particular performance to a particular audience not only to get what we want out of life or the particular interaction, but to keep others content.

Manalansan (2003) also noted that several aspects of the *bakla* identity could be associated with performance. Looking in detail at the construction of the *bakla* identity, Manalansan wrote, “*bakla* is not an identity that is assumed by particular men but more accurately is a slippery condition, a performative event or series of events of self-formation” (p. 186). Thus, the idea of *bakla* becomes more complicated. It is no longer just lower class effeminate men who have no choice but to be publically out, but it may actually be an identity that a man or a transgender woman takes on. *Bakla* may simply be another face we present to some audiences and not to others. Therefore, the idea of being publically out becomes questionable in the context of Philippine culture. In fact, several sources I reviewed examined the idea of “coming out” as an American concept of homosexuality that did not readily translate into the Philippine culture (Manalansan, 2003; Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Garcia, 2008).
Manalansan (2003) noted that “Public visibility, canonized in the mainstream gay community, is questioned and held at bay by these men. In my conversation with many Filipino gay men, coming out, or more properly the public avowal of identity, is not necessary for their own self-fashioning” (p. 33).

Conclusions

These studies illustrate the need for further exploration into women’s understandings of sexuality. Chou (2011) underlined the importance of allowing everyone, especially those most often silenced, to speak for themselves.

The review of the literature on women’s sexuality and, specifically, women in the Philippines illustrates that a significant gap exists in the literature when it comes to women’s sexuality in the Philippines. While there is fruitful discussion on the historical constraints of women’s role models, contemporary women are largely unheard from.

Moreover, the understandings and labels by which most Filipina women live are particularly important. Opportunities to further develop and understand women’s conceptualization of women’s sexualities in the Philippines are abundant. From the reviewed literature, a lack of focus on cultural meanings attributed to sexualities and qualitative methodology is obvious. Therefore, in-depth research in the subject area, focused on women living in the Philippines, is necessary.
II. Background

At any one point in time, there are multiple strands that influence one’s identity; this is made clearer with ideas of intersectionality which establish that there are multiple societal forces influencing an individual at once, including gender, sexuality, class, and religion. Thus, for a population in a given location, one must look to the location’s culture and socio-historical context (and the context surrounding individuals within that population) for insight. An archipelago nation near the Southeastern edge of Asia, the Philippines contains one of the world’s largest populations: thirteenth in the world and seventh in Asia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). However, for such a large population, the Philippines remains relatively invisible on the world scale.4

Nadal and Corpus (2013) explored this relative invisibility by looking at the Philippines’ unique influences compared to other Asian countries. Historically, due to its colonization, the Philippines is marked deeply by its Spanish and, furthermore, Catholic influences (Diaz, 2003; Bautista, 2003; Manalansan, 2003). This renders the Philippines more Latino than Asian in many cultural aspects – especially as many Asian countries are traditionally influenced by Taoist, Confucianist, and Buddhist traditions (Diaz, 2003; Nadal & Corpus, 2013).

Colonization by the Spanish, for over 300 years (1521-1898) had a lasting and indelible effect on the Philippines (Diaz, 2003). One of the most important and long-lasting impacts of Spanish colonization was the introduction of Roman Catholicism into Philippine culture (Diaz, 2003; Bautista, 2012; Garcia, 2008; Nadal & Corpus, 2013). American colonization (1898-1946) did little to change the status of women in the Philippines (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). During this period, the Catholic Church remained powerful. Both Catholicism and

4 Some greater global awareness of the Philippines has come with the devastation caused by Super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda.
American colonization encouraged domestic roles for women – where they were supposed to take care of the household and to raise families (Roces, 2012; Aquino, 1985). Adherence to domestic roles enforced a growing patriarchal society, which was not as prevalent in the Philippines in pre-colonial times (Diaz, 2003; Aquino, 1985; Roces, 2012).

Religion is important in understanding women’s sexuality for several reasons. Religion, as a moral system, teaches what is right and what is wrong. Catholicism has been fairly direct about its views on homosexuality. Moreover, the values instilled by religion may be more important than other lessons inculcated by outside influences such as education. Finally, changing perspectives in the Philippines on religion may suggest a change in the general Philippine culture, and, more specifically, changing views on sexuality.

Catholicism brought impossible and foreign female idols – the Virgin Mary – to colonial Filipinas (Roces, 2012; Aquino, 1985). Currently, 82.9% of Filipinos identify as Catholic (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). This high level of religious identification illustrates how deeply embedded Catholicism still is in the Philippines and suggests the level to which Catholicism has become part of the cultural identity of the Philippines. Manalansan (2003) observed that, for many, “religious devotion is the mark of being Filipino” (p. 118). Go (1994) noted that the inculcation of religious values is a part of growing up (p. 66). Therefore, Catholicism is often seen as the “moral compass” of the country (Bautista, 2010, p. 31).

The Spanish were particularly successful at implanting cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman and, in turn, what it means to be a man. Roces (2012) contended that Filipina women today mostly blame the Spanish colonial period for introducing “‘the impossible model’ of the Virgin Mary as the ideal woman.⁵” The Virgin Mary and Maria Clara, her

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⁵ To this day, many Filipina women are named Maria, after the Virgin Mary. This name is then followed by a second name which most women will actually use to refer to themselves.
Philippine literary equivalent, became established as archetypes through Philippine culture, where women were supposed to be domestic, obedient, religious, and virginal (p. 21-3). These models, while rising and falling in popularity, still exemplify what is expected for women today (Roces, 2012; Aquino, 1985; Espiritu, 2001; Nadal & Corpus, 2013).

The prescribed roles assigned to women influence available sexualities (Chou, 2011; Roces, 2012; Aquino, 1985). The role of the familial unit is important in understanding these responsibilities – women are culturally trained to see themselves first as a member of the family unit and second as an individual. This aspect of identity thus raises the importance of familial values and cultural constructions of what a family should be (Aquino, 1985; Espiritu, 2001; Chou, 2011).

Filipinos emphasize the importance of their family connections (Go, 1994; Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Espiritu, 2001; McCormick, 1993; Aquino, 1985); Nadal & Corpus (2013) noted that families are “considered central to participants’ identities” (p. 170). As such, individuals are raised to be more collective-minded than self-centered or individualistic (Aquino, 1985; Chou, 2011; Go, 1994; McCormick, 1993; Upadhyay & Hindin, 2006).

This version of the self creates a specific dynamic, including the inclination to sacrifice personal desires to maintain harmonious family relationships. This predisposition often results in a culture of silence – where personal slights or desires may go unvoiced in order to maintain relationships and keep up the pretense of solidarity and unity (Roces, 2012; Nadal & Corpus, 2013; McCormick, 1993; Chou, 2011; Go, 1994; Garcia, 2008; Espiritu, 2001). Often these silences can go unnoticed or are performed unintentionally as they are a product of cultural norms. Moreover, it should not be necessarily presumed that a culture of silence is always a negative situation. In some cases, silence can be taken as conditional acceptance (Manalansan,
The dynamics of each family are also important because they shape the individual family members. Families are seen as the starting point for moral standards (Espiritu, 2001; Chou, 2011). It is through our parents, our siblings, and other extended family members that we learn what is right and wrong. In the Philippines, religion, and particularly the level of devotion within the family, are important in defining those morals.

Families are also important in understanding traditional gender roles. Espiritu (2001) noted that parenting is intertwined with gender, and that there are different expectations for daughters than for sons. This comes with a mentality that “boys are boys and girls are different. Girls are supposed to be protected, to be clean” (p. 430). In effect, women are expected to maintain the cultural and moral traditions of the family and bring them into the future (Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Go, 1994; Espiritu, 2001).

Women are often idealized as the bearers of family and tradition (Espiritu, 2001). As such, their actions are more implicitly controlled. Their behaviors reflect the values of the family and, as such, must always maintain the correct level of decorum and poise. In matters of sexuality, women “are taught to silence their sexual feelings and desires” (Chou, 2011, p. 115). Such matters are inappropriate to discuss or act upon until marriage – dating is often prohibited when girls are young and living at home, yet marriage is expected. However, many girls do not leave their parents’ homes until much later in life. Thus the prohibition on dating can be problematic in situations where older women are still living at home with strict rules. Nonetheless, their families expect them to find husbands promptly. This bind creates issues for teenagers with heavy expectations (Espiritu, 2001).

Aquino (1985) noted the importance of socio-economic class on the ability of women to
have any flexibility within societal mores, with upper class women having the financial stability
to branch out and take roles normally offered only to men (p. 324). Roces (2012) argued,
however, that the Virgin Mary ideal, in which women became martyrs, cuts across all classes in
its influence (p. 22). Nonetheless, women within higher socio-economic statuses may have more
flexibility surrounding familial traditions, which introduces greater flexibility in choosing sexual
orientations.
III. Methods

Setting and Sample

In attempting to uncover the cultural meanings and understandings of women’s sexuality in the Philippines, I conducted ten open-ended, qualitative interviews with Filipina women. As a requirement of their involvement in the study, all of the women spoke English and spent the majority of their formative years (ages 0 to 20) in the Philippines. They had an average time of 40.9 years residing in the Philippines and a range of 20 to 60 years of residence. The mean age of the respondents was 50, with a range from 33 to 60. All of the respondents were out of school and had already transitioned to their professional lives when interviewed. Only one of the participants stopped schooling after high school and two out of the ten stopped after receiving their bachelor’s degrees. Two stopped after getting their master’s degrees. One stopped schooling after obtaining an MBA. Another two got their medical degrees and the final two their PhDs in various fields. When asked about their professions, one reported being retired and one a housewife – all the rest of the participants (n=8) were working. Six of the ten participants were married, one was separated, and the final three were single. Finally, all of the participants identified a Roman Catholic upbringing, and, interestingly, only one of the ten admitted to not currently being religiously inclined.

I contacted my respondents through a combination of a snowball sample and recruitment via flyers posted on Facebook, which I posted on pages that were dedicated to Philippine Entertainment. This strategy allowed me to recruit among immediate contacts in the Boston area and also in the Philippines. While I cannot estimate the number of possible respondents who saw the flyer on Facebook and decided against responding, 77% of women who contacted me at least once ultimately interviewed. I recruited my sample of ten Filipina women from the months of
Instrument

I conducted ten in-depth qualitative interviews in the style of Irene and Mark Rubin’s Responsive Interviewing Model. This type of interview style attempts to develop a deep, personal connection between the conversational partner and the researcher (Rubin and Rubin 2012, Pp. 36, 72). A copy of my interview guide appears at the end of this manuscript (Appendix B).

The guide has three main sections: categorizations of women’s sexualities, experiences of women’s sexualities, and understandings of women’s same-sex sexual identities. The first section, which asked respondents to suggest categories of women’s sexualities, established the underlying basis for this research study. The questions were focused on how the respondents understand women’s sexuality. For example, one question from this section was: “In the US, some people talk about women’s sexuality in categories such as gay, straight, and bisexual. Is this the same in the Philippines?”

The second section concentrated on the ways that women’s sexualities might be fluid or experienced in ways other than culturally accepted norms. This section investigated how categories influence the experiences of women, but with no reference to respondents’ own sexual experiences. A question from the section was: “Does having more or different labels allow women to have more options about their sexuality?”

The third and final section investigated the cultural understandings of women’s same-
sex practices. The questions in this section explored respondents’ understandings of same-sex sexuality – for example by asking: “Do you know of any other words that may be used to describe women who romantically love or have sex with other women?”

### Data Collection

The interviews all took place in January, February, and early March of 2014. For each of my interviews, I used Skype to set up a video- or voice-conference. At the time of the interview, four of the participants lived in the United States, and the remaining six lived in the Philippines. Before the interview itself, I went over the informed consent form with each of the respondents. After they agreed to participate in the study and spoke their consent, we began the interview. The project received approval by the Boston College Institutional Review Board prior to the start of data collection.

### Data Analysis

After each interview, I went through several steps to analyze the data. The same day of the interview, I wrote down any notes that I did not have time to record during the interview. I also included my general impressions of the interview. Later, I listened to the recording. I began to transcribe the interview and included in memos any thoughts that came up during the transcription process. I then created a fact sheet for each interviewee that included her educational history and her definitions of the terms bakla and tomboy. I have included my completed fact sheets in Appendix B. Using these fact sheets and the memos, I wrote a general

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6 I use the term same-sex here because I find the term homosexual difficult, as noted in a previous endnote.
Next, I coded the transcriptions. I used a deductive method in coding, meaning that I started with a raw transcription and went through several coding phrases. I began coding using concepts and themes suggested by previous literature; for example, the idea of public and private knowledge came from Nadal & Corpus (2013) on page 170. I also created codes using my own research questions as a basis for concepts.

I combined material coded in the same way into separate files. After coding each interview I looked over my codes and searched for larger patterns that might emerge or whether any of the codes could be combined. This was especially useful as each interview yielded further insights, which could help inform the next interview. After each restructuring of the codes, I kept track of any new conclusions through memos and notes. At the conclusion of coding, I reviewed and summarized each code file. I analyzed the contents of each file, often by sorting and re-sorting the data within each file to identify patterns. Throughout the process, I continually searched for new themes to help better understand women’s sexuality in the Philippines.

A Note on Names

When referring to the ten respondents, I will use pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. I also will include their given occupation and age at the time of the interview to provide some context.

A Note on Generations

One trend I noticed among my participants was a divide in perspectives along generational lines. Just over half (n = 6) of the interviewees were older than 55, with ages ranging from 56-60. The remaining interviewees (n = 4) were younger than 45, with ages

7 I chose names based on common Filipina baby names.
ranging from 33-43. It seems reasonable, then, to see these two groups as two separate
generations. Especially when examining their understandings of mass media (which will be
discussed in further detail in the next section), breaking the respondents into two generations
underlined how these two groups see the world differently.

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<th>Table 3.1: Generational Differences Among <strong>Participants</strong></th>
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IV. Findings

In the following sections, I address two different types of findings derived from the interviews. In the first section, I examine the respondents’ understandings of the different available sexualities for women. By considering the bakla subculture as a model for alternate sexualities in the Philippines, I argue that rigid definitions of labels (Nadal & Corpus, 2013) identifying women’s sexualities result in either strict adherence to recognized identities or the relegation of taboo practices to a hidden or private sphere. Moreover, I examine how these understandings are created by looking at the specific cultural influences that the interviewees suggested inform these constructions.

In the second section, I examine the respondents’ attitudes towards same-sex sexualities. I argue that these attitudes can broadly be divided into two general categories: conservative and liberal perspectives. While the limited size of the sample prevents conclusive generalizations, the respondents of generation alpha were more likely to have conservative attitudes than generation beta. Although this is not surprising, dividing the respondents into two generations helped to explore the broader cultural attitudes and possible trends.

Constructions of Identity – Understanding Sexuality

This section will explore the understandings of sexualities available in the Philippines in light of the interviews. Beginning with an analysis of the terms, bakla, tomboy, and lesbian, I will then discuss how these labels influence the performance of sexual identities. All of the respondents were familiar with the terms bakla, tomboy, and lesbian, however there was variation on the definition of terms, especially surrounding tomboy and lesbian.
Early on in my data collection process, I encountered one interviewee who was doubtful about the impact or influence of labels. She said, “labels are just words” (Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59). However, I believe the words with which we construct available identities are crucial in understanding something about the value and respect afforded each of these identities. For example, the term tomboy is more acceptable than the term lesbian within the Philippines. Although these two words can be used as synonyms, their actual, contextual, usage and subjective understanding differ widely. As I will discuss, lesbian carries with it a loaded and negative connotation that tomboy does not. Therefore, it is imperative to pay close attention to the use of language to describe sexuality in the Philippines.

Dude Looks Like a Lady – Discussions of the Bakla Identity

As I have discussed, a subpopulation of men in the Philippines are known as bakla. All of the women I interviewed knew this term and defined bakla as an effeminate man.

“‘Bakla’ was the word used to describe outwardly effeminate men, cross dressers, the stereotype for gay men in the Philippines.”
[Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59]

Someone who is “very womanly” and “works in a salon” and has “curlers in his hair.”
[Stephanie, Singer, age 40]

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8 I could understand her perspective, especially in the Philippines – an archipelago with 7,007 islands and almost as many regional dialects – it is difficult to imagine that one word or set of words can easily cross all cultural and regional borders (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013).

9 As I mentioned earlier, in the Philippines, individuals speak many different languages. However, due to American colonization and wide-spread population of Tagalog films and persons, both English and Tagalog are widely used throughout the Philippines. Moreover, many Filipinos speak in what is called Taglish, a language in which both Tagalog and English are used interchangeably. Therefore, I was comfortable conducting these interviews in English as I believed my interviewees, who are fluent in English, would be able to accurately discuss with me their terminology in English and Tagalog.
“There's a term bakla in the Philippines … I think, a lot of people maybe generalize that word, but I think [we] mostly use that” word to describe “specifically those that are more flamboyant.”

[Michele, Senior Project Manager, age 33]

Manalansan (2003) stated that bakla men prefer as partners real or “straight, macho men” (p.26). These real men are the product of the pervasive macho, patriarchal society first set in place by the Spanish. Moreover, in certain ways, bakla men are still following traditional gender roles by seeking someone of the opposite gender as a partner. In contrast, while discussing the gay culture in the Philippines, some of the women implied that one bakla sought out another bakla for company.

Therefore, the meaning of bakla is not stable. As several interviewees noticed, bakla is starting to refer to orientation and not just the specific group of men acting effeminately.

“It is only recently that ‘straight’ - looking gay men have arisen, mostly those protecting a family or business image, including actors who portray masculine roles. Their gayness is repressed but expressed only in guarded moments, hence these people have not ‘come out’.”

[Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59]

While male sexuality was not the focus of the interviews, it is interesting and important to understand how the bakla subculture works as a model for understanding women’s same-sex
practices. In analyzing the data given by the respondents on the *tomboy* subculture, it is easy to compare the evolution of *tomboy* with that of the *bakla* subculture, which I was able to more fully access through the literature. The stages each subculture may experience are the following: growth into marginal acceptance; label reference changing from one specific behavior to define a larger group of individuals, for example, *bakla* moving from specifying effeminate man to encompass all gay men; and finally, popular acceptance as a term or identifier.

**Lady Looks Like a Dude – Discussions of the Tomboy Identity**

As with *bakla*, the term *tomboy* was well-known to all participants. A *tomboy* was a woman who dressed as, acted like, or resembled a man.

“A woman who behaves like a man, but it does not necessarily mean that the woman loves or has sex with other women. I also think the term is used more often to refer to young girls, maybe in their teens or younger.”

*[Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59]*

“*Tomboy* isn’t necessarily, you know, negative. It's just that you're not as … I would say not as girlish … as you should be.”

*[Jasmine, Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59]*

“A female who dresses like a guy, who exhibits more masculine characteristics, so they walk like a boy, they dress like a boy … I can't tell, other than the appearances if-if there's something else.”

*[Jenny, Actuary, age 56]*

Several (n = 4) of my interviewees were quick to note that *tomboy* did not necessarily imply sexual orientation. This is dissimilar to *bakla* because, as one participant noted, once a man was labeled *bakla* it was assumed he was gay (*Mariel, Entrepreneur, age 60*). The reason *tomboy* only sometimes has a sexual implication seems to be because it is often applied to girls
in childhood.

“I was a *tomboy* as a little girl”  
*Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59*

As this participant noted, it is very common to hear this phrase among Filipinas. This statement refers to the idea that, while young, many girls may act more boyish than would be acceptable when they are older. The term is sometimes used when sexuality is not at issue or not the defining attribute – for example, in some situations, attaching sexuality to the label would be to attribute sexuality to a child.

What sets girls apart as *tomboyish* can be small: wearing pants, liking to play sports, and even playing the guitar. Society tolerates all of these activities to a certain age. According to my interviewees, this turning point came sometime around high school or college. As one participant put it, her mother began to ask her, “why don't you go to parties, where there are many boys that you could meet?” (*Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43*).

Around this age, despite strict parents, girls are supposed to go boy crazy (*Jenny, Actuary, age 56*). It is expected that they will accept the traditional cultural norms (especially those of heterosexual preferences) and begin to act upon them. Moreover, it is around this age that questions of sexuality seem more relevant and necessary.

*Quote Unquote Lesbian*

While *tomboy* does not always carry a sexual component, it is also often used as equivalent to or in place of the term *lesbian*.

“*Tomboy* is like the label for lesbians, right?”  
*[Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43]*
“Tom-Boy … yea that would… refer to them being lesbian.”

[Stephanie, Singer, age 40]

“Tomboy is just … a Filipino word for lesbian. You know if somebody is talking straight Tagalog or Filipino they’re going to use tomboy – it’s kind of like what fits that statement. If they’re talking in English, they can interchange the usage, if they’re in the Philippines, because Filipinos usually do – [use] Taglish.”

[Christine, Professor, age 34]

Despite these definitions, lesbian is still a highly problematic label in the Philippines. Lesbian is a heavy term, “it’s serious. It’s not used on the street,” nor is it used commonly (Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43). Moreover, considerable stigma is attached to the term. One interviewee commented that “the term [may] seem neutral or mild but the social stigma associated with being lesbian is nasty and pervasive” (Kimberly, Recently Retired Dermatologist, age 60).

Only three of the respondents verbalized the term lesbian before I asked them about it specifically and its role in the Philippines. In discussing women’s alternate sexualities, many of the interviewees were more comfortable using the words tomboy or gay to describe women. Each of these words seems to have a context which makes them more acceptable in society. Tomboy refers to masculine women or young girls who are not as feminine as society would expect. When applied to young girls who are not overtly feminine, it does not imply sexuality (though it does not negate it either). Therefore, many women use tomboy without having to deal with any sexual, and therefore awkward, connotations. The term gay is also more acceptable because of its broad spectrum of meanings. While it is still tied to sexuality, its generality also allows broader use, which mitigates its more awkward connotations. In contrast, the definition
of lesbian is absolute and specific – if a woman is a lesbian, than she is sexually involved with other women.

**Other Labels**

Beyond *bakla, tomboy*, and lesbian there are a number of other terms used (especially those in languages other than English and Tagalog). However, two other terms worth considering in particular are bisexual and transgender. Although all ten of the respondents were familiar with the term bisexual, beyond mentioning it as a possible category for sexualities, they did not bring it up or provide a cultural context. Transgender is also an interesting category as two interviewees mentioned women they had known who had gotten sex change operations. However, before the operation they were known as tomboys and not transgender.

**Sexuality as a Performance**

Strict definitions of sexual roles force Filipinos to choose whether or not to be publically out in all contexts or just some. While the concept of “coming out” is not popular in the Philippines (Manalansan, 2003; Nadal & Corpus, 2013; Garcia, 2008), the idea is necessary to understand that individuals must actively appear or behave abnormally to be recognized as anything other than straight (*Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43*). Therefore, sexuality becomes more of a performance, in which non-heterosexual individuals must choose whether or not to act in such a way as to alert their audience of their sexual orientation.

Nadal & Corpus (2013) discussed how Filipino individuals might create two different identities: a public self and a private self. Thereby, they create two spheres of identity, one in which their sexual identity is hidden and one in which it is apparent. In some ways, this public versus private concept addresses the idea of sexuality as a performance because sexuality is often identified with particular behaviors and appearances.
Therefore, strict definitions of same-sex sexualities provide a script to follow when wanting to appear gay. For women, as noted above, this means acting in a masculine fashion, dressing in more masculine clothing, and not wearing a lot of make-up (Jasmine, Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59).

The same definitions can also provide instructions for keeping one’s taboo identity invisible from society, or from friends and family. Hiding a portion of ourselves from those we love most is not just a symbol for the negative view that we have of ourselves, but an assessment of what our families can accept. While not ideal, being able to hide one’s orientation allows a person to maintain a civil and comfortable relationship with those he or she loves most – to avoid giving “grandma … a heart attack and that sort of thing” (Stephanie, Singer, age 40).

**Learning about Identity**

To further understand these constructions of women’s sexuality, it is useful to underline the influences that inform them, such as education.

Nine of the ten interviewees spent their entire primary and secondary education in religious, Christian operated, institutions; the final participant spent kindergarten to third grade in a private institution and third grade through high school in a public school. Moreover, all of these religious institutions were all girls’ schools.

Several interviewees suggested that all girls’ and all boys’ schools promoted a space in which alternate sexualities could flourish. This is not to say that heterosexual orientation was not predicted or preferred, however relationships with the other sex are difficult for those confined to a single gender school. Therefore, the respondents noted that many young girls used their time in these institutions to go through a “lesbian phase” (Kimberly, Recently Retired Dermatologist, age 60). One interviewee noted, because *tomboys* are the closest thing to boys on an all girls’
school campus, they become targets for sexual or romantic attention (Jenny, Actuary, age 56).

Several of my participants gave examples of tomboys they knew when in school. These tomboys had cut their hair short, acted in a masculine manner, and seemed to have no interest in attracting boys. One interviewee discussed how there had been a tomboy in her school and she had wanted to befriend her, “I knew she was … a tomboy, but like, yea, I just thought she was cool, you know regardless. I mean that was my first experience of seeing anyone like that, I just wanted to be- I wanted to be her friend because she was different, you know like, that sort of thing” (Stephanie, Singer, age 40). Another respondent remembered a tomboy in her own school who had actively rebelled against her parents. This interviewee reported hearing from the other girls that her parents were forcing her to wear earrings in an attempt to bring out her feminine side. Nonetheless, at school, she would revert to being a tomboy; she even had several girls who would follow her around. More than half of the participants discussed the lesbian phase in some fashion, usually by discussing with me their peers who had been tomboys.

Attitudes towards Same-Sex Sexual Identities

Among my sample of respondents, I discovered two broad attitudes: one that was more liberal and one that was more conservative. While I do not presume that I found the only perspectives that exist in the Philippines, these two categories help to understand a general framework guiding women’s attitudes in the Philippines. First, the Philippines is a modern nation, influenced by the United States, and as such, discrimination against non-traditional sexual orientations is becoming a thing of the intolerant past. Second, the conservative attitudes, often expressed according to Church doctrine, view homosexuality as unnatural, heretical, and
selfish.

The first perspective suggests a liberal attitude, in which sexual orientation is no longer a great issue for society. The majority of persons with this attitude believe that some women are just naturally attracted to other women, and that society should accept them. This is principally due to changing societal forces, such as the mass media. The second perspective suggests the strong influence of the Catholic Church in creating an understanding of what is morally correct in society, and what should not be accepted.

**Liberal Attitudes**

Within the liberal attitude, there were two main ideas. First, was the thought that all discrimination towards same-sex sexualities had ceased. I labeled this the post-sexual attitude. The main advocate was one of the youngest interviewees in my sample. Her career in academia may have allowed her to maintain an unusually liberal lifestyle isolated from more conservative influences, which helped to establish this perspective. However, her understanding of an evolving Philippine culture reflects many of my respondents’ concept of a better, more tolerant modern generation. This perspective is informed by looking at what society presents as normal and correct in the present day. Based on what she was seeing on television or in movies and among popular figures who are “out,” Christine (Professor, age 34) believed that the Philippines has an accepting culture – that discrimination or consequences for an alternate sexual lifestyle no longer exist.
“Yes,” it’s acceptable in the Philippines to be not straight, “especially now, with everybody in the Filip[ino] entertainment [industry], really just instantly coming out like that. It's very much, like all over the place in the Philippines, you know, it's not a taboo thing. Like, you try – if you're gay, you just say, say it out loud, ‘I'm gay.’ You know, especially those people in the Entertainment business. So I guess ordinary people, would not feel as- something out of the ordinary.”

[Christine, Professor, age 34]

A second subset of the liberal attitude was the idea that, despite growing marginal acceptance, subtle discrimination still heavily impacts same-sex oriented individuals. I labeled this as the heteronormative attitude, which insists that there are underlying influences society uses to oppress non-traditional sexual behaviors. The heteronormative attitude still approves or accepts same-sex sexualities, but underlines the problematic position in society that same-sex oriented individuals occupy. Its proponents emphasize the importance of institutional forces within society that enforce “the proliferation of ‘normal’ sexual identities” (Collins, 2009, p. 467). They see non-traditional sexual behaviors as looked down upon in mainstream society, and that these behaviors, thus, become hidden.

Societal forces can come from a number of sources. In the interviews, the mass media was one of the most important influences discussed as it plays an important role in defining what is acceptable and what is not in modern societies.

As I noted in the Methods section, the respondents could be reasonably split up into two generations based on their ages. There was a significant divide among the generations when considering the influences of mass media on attitudes towards women’s alternate sexualities. Generation alpha, the older six interviewees in the study, all noted the change in the media, but did not emphasize it as a significant influence. Generation beta, however, believed that they had
grown up with a more accepting mass media and that this was important in shaping the culture. The mass media influences attitudes in the Philippines but also connects Filipinos across the world. Moreover, it presents Filipino culture and provides role models for a new, more tolerant culture.

Generation alpha noted the importance of mass media, but at a distance. For them, the media mostly consists of television programming. Jenny stated that a recent reconnection with The Filipino Channel (hereafter referred to as TFC) “was eye-opening” (Actuary, age 56). This quote illustrates that Filipino culture has changed over that last few decades and institutions as well as individuals are more accepting of same-sex oriented individuals.

TFC, established in 1994, purports a mission statement of “bring[ing] together Filipinos on the internet to watch, share, and talk about homegrown Kapamilya content they enjoy and love. We are here to serve and nurture the relationships of Filipinos worldwide” (“Tfc.tv,” 2005). The creation of this network, both online and available in certain cable packages, speaks to the idea of the mass media in reaching Filipinos all over the world. Moreover, the content of TFC helps establish patterns of what is acceptable.

Christine, a member of generation beta, underlined that the mass media was possibly the most vocal proponent of the liberalizing change (Professor, age 34). She noted that what she saw on the television and in the movies deeply influenced her own understandings of sexuality. Referencing the connection between the United States and the Philippines, Christine (Professor, age 34) argued that the mass media in the Philippines was almost identical to that of the United States. Beyond the residual influence the United States has in the Philippines, much of the popular television, movies, and music comes straight from the United States; because of this, Christine believed, the Philippine media illustrates a broad spectrum of possible sexualities,
which, in turn, makes the Philippines more broadly accepting of different sexualities.

Vice Ganda, a popular television actor, is also a well-known for his bakla identity. Ganda hosts a television show entitled “It’s Showtime,” which several of my interviewees mentioned. “It’s Showtime” is a noon-time variety show that has multiple segments, one of which is called, “That’s My Tomboy.” According to my participants, this segment is often a beauty contest for the most beautiful tomboys. While several interviewees noted that they initially were shocked and even embarrassed to watch the televised contest, the presence of a show regarding tomboys illustrates a certain level of acceptance within society. The mass media also promotes other popular figures who advance a non-traditional lifestyle.
Recently several popular Philippine singers have adopted *tomboy* appearances. Above are pictures of actress and singer-songwriter, Aiza Seguerra and singer, Charice Pempengco. To the left, you will see their previous images and to the right is their current appearance. Many respondents of generation beta attribute changes in cultural liberation to role models such as these in the mass media.

Seguerra and Pempengco are also worth noting because of their interesting transitions.
from feminine to masculine. Seguerra was named a Little Miss Philippines on a television program called “Eat Bulaga.” She became a child sensation and then continued her career in the entertainment industry as a singer-songwriter. Her adult career has been spent as a *tomboy*.

Pempengco also found fame as a singer in the Philippines. She even guest starred on the popular American television program, Glee. All of this was before her switch. In May of 2013, Pempengco changed her entire image, from girly girl to *tomboy*. In response to these public identity shifts, one interviewee stated that it was strange, but not incomprehensible to see each of their switches. At one point each woman had been so pretty, so feminine, “and just like, then snap turns into a gay” (*Christine, Professor, age 34*). Christine understood this change as being because neither was pretty enough to be models or tall enough to find a decent man, and therefore becoming gay was the only option.

This pattern in popular media seems to show that cultural tolerance of *tomboys* has reached a level of marginal acceptance notionally similar to that of *baklas*. Nonetheless, this acceptance is limited. One interviewee noted that, “Up to this day Very Important Personalities – whether in politics, business, and even in show business – still have a lot to lose if they admit to homosexuality” (*Mary Grace, Housewife with Small Business, age 59*). Thus, being labeled gay or homosexual is still untenable for most individuals.

Moreover, Stephanie (*Singer, age 40*) who has had success within the Philippine entertainment industry stated that, although there have been successful coming out stories, pressures of image maintenance still prevent full openness about matters of sexuality, even within the supposedly liberated entertainment industry. Finally, Kimberly noted that, in general, “the perception of lesbians is not [as] well looked upon as male homosexuals, who have a place in TV shows” (*Recently Retired Dermatologist, age 60*). It is also worth noting that, although
there are gay individuals in the media, they are often treated unfairly or made fun of, which in turn promotes a negative connotation (Jasmine, Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59).

Liberal attitudes exist in part because of a changing social scene in the Philippines and in part because of liberalizing institutions in the Philippines. Despite the existence of liberal attitudes, acceptance for same-sex practices is far from complete – while some figures have “come out,” the decision remains controversial and the actual treatment of visible same-sex oriented individuals within the mass media is somewhat negative.

**Conservative Attitudes**

The second broad attitude towards women’s same-sex sexuality expressed by my respondents was defined by its conservative nature. Despite continuing modernization, the Philippines is a conservative nation (Michelle, Senior Project Manager, age 33). Much of this is due to the dominance of religion, specifically Catholicism.

In exploring the conservative attitudes towards same-sex sexuality, understanding religious beliefs is crucial. Two of the interviewees Nicole and Mariel expressed this perspective best. Their understandings of Catholic dogma framed much of our conversations.

"Gayness is unnatural; i.e., not what God intended for humankind because only a man-woman relationship can beget children. Hence, homosexuality should not be supported."

[Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59]

The moral system established by Church doctrine is the moral system of most Filipinos, and so forms the basis for the conservative nature of the Philippines. These beliefs guide religious individuals and cause them to view life in a specific way: each individual has a certain role to fill. A family is supposed to be made up of a man and a woman: as one interviewee
stated, “men and women should go together so that they would have a family, for procreation's sake” (Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43). Thus, same-sex couples (and even worse, flings) can be seen as disrupting religious norms. This is yet another reason for the creation of a private identity for those struggling to reconcile non-traditional sexualities and religious beliefs.

Expanding upon Angel’s comment, Mariel (Entrepreneur, age 60) explained to me that having a family of a man, a woman, and at least one child was a special way of practicing Catholicism by replicating the form of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, not following this model was to shun Catholicism and its tenants. While the Catholic Church preaches a “Hate the sin, not the sinner” attitude, this is manifested through a strict adherence to the Catholic moral system and abstention of any non-traditional sexual behaviors.

Moreover, Nicole argued that following a “homosexual” path, especially one involving a transsexual procedure, was selfish.

“In other words, having more options actually compounds the confusion. And, maybe deep-seated in my religiosity is that life goals should not focus on attaining personal happiness alone or no matter what but directing your life and those around you towards God. Selfish or self-indulgence versus selfless[ness] or focusing on bigger issues. Taking responsibility for others, uplifting society, and realizing God's plan rather than insisting on one's own agenda or understanding of God's plan and taking all measures to do so.
It's like the emerging love for tattoos and piercing, why bother spending time & money to decorate yet another part of your body when there are many hungry people in the world who can use your small change to stay alive for a whole day?! We are all responsible for others, even those miles away. It will put gay people to shame spending time & attention & money for hormone injections & surgical procedures when the lives of others could be saved with your $50!"

[Small Business Owner, age 59]

Individuals are influenced not only by their own religious views, but also the views expressed by their families. Therefore, the religiosity one’s family also shapes the formation of one’s attitudes towards same-sex practices.

“Filipinos are very family-oriented and the influence of how one's family, especially one's parents think, believe, or perceive things is still very important. It is usually the case that one would never want to disobey, displease, or go against one's family values, beliefs, practices, and perceptions.”

[Mariel, Entrepreneur, age 60]

Jasmine (*Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59*) noted how it had been her brothers who first exposed her to the concept of same-sex sexualities. With three older brothers, she had been somewhat *tomboyish* herself as a girl. Hanging around them, she often heard them use the term *bakla*. Much as individuals in the United States sometimes use the phrase “That’s so gay” to refer to an unappealing or gross subject, the use of the term *bakla* was negative. Thus, very early on, Jasmine knew that it was unacceptable to be *bakla*, and, in turn, a *tomboy* when she was older. Jasmine’s experience illustrates the ability of families to dictate one’s understandings of sexualities in a non-direct manner.
Generational Impact on Attitudes – A Final Thought

Generational differences within the sample underlined key differences among the respondents. Those in generation alpha (the older generation) were much more likely to have a conservative attitude, and those in generation beta were more likely to have a liberal attitude. This is consistent with the trend of liberalizing social change in the Philippines that many of my participants also noted. Specifically, the Philippines seems to be becoming more tolerant and less defined by conservative perspectives (such as those supported by the Church).
V. Discussions

After nine months of working on this project, including four months of recruiting and interviewing, I reached many different conclusions about women’s sexuality in the Philippines. I spoke with ten incredible women about a subject that may have initially seemed esoteric, but, by the end of each interview, I hope they each found something of interest.

Some of the major themes I noticed were that appearance matters, normal is desirable, a double standard exists among same-sex understandings, and identities are often hidden in plain sight.

Appearance Matters

One important and evident trend that developed through my interviews was that, in matters of sexuality, appearance is essential – what one looks like and what one acts like matters. People take you at face value; if you look normal, then you are expected to be normal. If you are effeminate and male, then you are considered bakla. If you are masculine and female, then you are considered tomboy.

“You never see like somebody that looks like you and me, but they prefer the same sex. Like you know what I mean.”
[Michelle, Senior Project Manager, age 33]

“Some ‘gay women’ here in the Philippines dress like men while there are also those who dress like women, in general and it is difficult to actually know if they are gay or not.”
[Nicole, Small Business Owner, age 59]
Some gay men, you know they’re gay because “they're just too concerned about how they look, or how they, you know like taking care of their bodies a little bit more than the average guy.”

[Stephanie, Singer, age 40]

These quotes emphasize that sexuality is tied to behavior. As Jasmine said, same-sex sexuality is about “a certain demeanor, and your preferences are for … somebody of the same sex. But usually, it's more … just their behavior” (Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59). Each traditional gender, male and female, has assigned roles. Exactly fulfilling these roles, however, seems to matter less than the appearance of fulfilling them – properly appearing to fulfill a role makes one seem normal.

Normal Is Desirable

During our conversation Mariel said that “Filipinos are actually very open about their sexuality” (Entrepreneur, age 60). I found this remarkable because many of my conversations revolved around the intentional invisibility of women’s same-sex practices. Eventually, I realized Mariel was talking about straight women – that heterosexual Filipina women who have nothing to hide are open about their sexuality is not surprising.

Only select gay individuals with enough faith in their families, their peers, and themselves announce their sexuality openly. This is why the concept of “coming out” is not generally practiced in the Philippines. Many gay people even choose to marry (a member of the opposite sex) to properly fulfill their expected role, which demonstrates how pervasive heteronormative activities are in Philippine society. Popular bakla actor, Vice Ganda even told reporters that eventually he wanted his boyfriend to settle down with a girl and have children – to have a nice normal life (Delizo, 2014).

Normality came up several times in the interviews. Jenny wondered why two young
tomboys she knew remained unmarried to this day and never had a normal relationship with men. Nicole used normal to label heterosexual persons (Small Business Owner, age 59). These examples illustrate that, despite acceptance of the tomboy subculture, same-sex practices are still abnormal.

**The Other Sexual Double Standard**

_Bakla_, the principal label for male same-sex sexuality in the Philippines, specifically refers to gay men who act effeminately, but has also come to be the main identifier for gay men in general. Specific rules outline what gay men can and cannot do, while still being accepted in society. There are specific jobs and specific locales in which _baklas_ are allowed, even celebrated. These professions are often in the entertainment industry, in the fashion industry, and in beauty salons – arenas in which effeminacy is accepted or even expected. However, these men are also considered to be of a lower class.

_Tomboys_ have a parallel cultural acceptance. These women appear and act in a masculine fashion. Acceptable or expected professions are also those in which masculinity is necessary. For example, “there are some jobs that are categorized … for a lesbian. Like a security guard, or someone who works for the police, or … things like that. But not probably, you know, as a Professor” (Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43).

Several of my interviewees mentioned that women in their lives had more options available to them than men. Despite the relative stability of the _bakla_ label, men seem to have exactly two options: the macho, straight man or the effeminate gay man. However, the latter must be willing to deal with discrimination, with gossip, and with public disapproval.

The term _bakla_ carries some derogatory connotation even in contexts where it is most acceptable. In certain contexts, by contrast, _tomboy_ is seen as fairly benign. While I cannot
accurately compare *bakla* and *tomboy* labels, it seems that *bakla* is often seen as heavier than *tomboy*.

Moreover, women with same-sex orientations can more easily go under the radar. There is a double standard, where men and women are treated differently in this regard. Several of my interviewees provided examples of women in their lives who might have had relationships with other women, but no one thought anything of it— as long as it was not too public of an affair.

“We actually had aunts who were probably lesbians that they lived together, but it was kind of accepted, that these two women were like best friends, and that they lived together, and you didn't, like think twice about their situation.”

*[Jasmine, Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59]*

“One of my aunts, I don't really know, I never asked; but I think she's leaning toward being a *tomboy* rather than being a woman, but I've never seen her having a relationship with another girl. So I grew up… with her, so I've seen her, and it wasn't anything like that to me, but eventually, I had been very good friends with people who actually do have relationships with females and it really didn't bother me at all, so I'm okay with that.”

*[Christine, Professor, age 34]*

“I knew this one person, kind of close to the family, you know, every now and then this person would be close to certain women, but you couldn't tell if they were just good friends, or if there was something else going on; but they wouldn't … if there was, if they, if they were lesbians they would-they would not let – they would not tell people they were, nor would they make it obvious. So they made it look like, so they hid it.”

*[Jenny, Actuary, age 56]*
Affection between women is not immediately seen as sexual; therefore, two women living together might just seem like two older spinsters, whereas two men living together after a certain point would be suspicious. This creates a double standard, where any hint of male homosexuality would trigger negative societal forces, while women can more easily hide intimacies under the cover of traditional female behavior.

**Hidden in Plain Sight**

It is common for individuals with same-sex inclinations to hide their taboo practices. In the Philippines the maintenance of a public and a private identity can have interesting consequences. Several interviewees noted examples of married persons who also had same-sex relationships on the side. I hereafter will refer to this idea as married and gay. Moreover, these interviewees considered this concept of married and gay as a common practice.

“I had this friend who is now engaged\(^\text{10}\) ... to this girl ... they're both lesbian ... the girl used to be married and she has a child. That's like very common here. You know ... that women tend to have been married before and then can one day realize... Oh, you know, I can also have a relationship with a woman.”

*Stephanie, Singer, age 40*

“You might not come out of the closet and have a relationship, you know, with somebody of the same-sex, but actually, you know, still have a husband, and you know just for show. So I think there’s a lot that may go on that's not open.”

*Jasmine, Pediatric Pulmonologist, age 59*

There are several possible explanations for how married and gay became a common

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\(^{10}\) The two women are engaged to be married, though they will be getting married outside of the Philippines as the Philippines does not allow gay marriages.
situation – likely, it was a combination of the following factors. First may be the late awareness of an alternate preference or a switch of orientations. Several interviewees thought it probable that women could potentially gain attraction to other women during the course of their life, suggesting a switch in orientation rather than a phase. It is also possible that instead of a switch from absolute heterosexuality to absolute homosexuality, a woman might reach a state somewhere between these two extremes. This could be either bisexual or “mostly gay/lesbian,” or some other label not yet established (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012).

A second potential explanation is intense pressure to maintain a heterosexual lifestyle. This could be pressure from one’s family, pressure from one’s peers, or general pressure from a largely heteronormative society. Same-sex relationships would thus only happen in a private sphere, with a public heterosexual relationship to keep up appearances. While one might consider it strange to marry for the sake of appearance, the expectation is that almost everyone in the Philippines gets married (Go, 1994). Therefore, marriage could be used as a way of fitting into the mainstream society.

The concept of hiding one’s orientation was extremely prevalent in the interviews. Respondents gave examples of hidden practices, not just for individuals who married heterosexually and dated homosexualy, but more broadly. Much of this notion of privacy is derived from the taboo connotations or stigma attached to same-sex labels and understandings.
Limitations

While I endeavored to present materials and conclusions in a clear and unbiased way, there are several limitations to this study.

First, the study used a small, convenience sample. The relatively small size limits generalizability, while the convenience sample may create a bias in the participants. Living in the United States, I found that gaining access to women in the Philippines was a challenge, and my lack of fluency in Tagalog required me to limit the sample to women who are fluent in English. At the same time, the use of the social media site, Facebook, substantially broadened the reach of this study. Second, the study was cross-sectional. While the goal was to understand the cultural meanings of sexuality in the Philippines (and so a longitudinal study was not necessary), having the ability to speak with participants across several points of their lives would have been advantageous to understanding how cultural understandings evolve over the duration of a woman’s life.

All the participants were women who had a high degree of education and who were relatively stable in their personal lives. However, while several participants volunteered their socioeconomic status, I did not specifically request this information. Further research might more expressly investigate how socioeconomics influence conceptions of sexuality.

Despite these limitations, many valuable conclusions can be drawn. Without generalizing to the whole population of women in the Philippines, I was nonetheless able to explore an area that has seen little research and begin to understand how women’s sexuality is conceptualized and treated in the Philippines.
Suggestions for Further Research

The research I conducted on women’s sexuality aims to fill the gap in the current literature. This means that there are still many areas in need of further research.

I designed this study in part based on a feminist critical standpoint – I wanted to give marginalized women a chance to speak for themselves. To understand women in the Philippines, further research into traditional and evolving gender roles and sexualities is, of course, necessary. Further research could include the voices of men, transgender persons, and self-identified *baklas* and *tomboys* to get a broader perspective on women’s sexualities\(^\text{11}\).

I chose in-depth interviewing for this project because I was interested in the meanings and understandings women associate with different available sexualities – those both culturally accepted and rejected. The conversations I had were fruitful and honest. However, the interviews make it clear that many aspects of women’s sexualities are hidden, which makes them difficult to identify or study. Therefore, to investigate more specific and local subtleties, further research needs to be conducted that is ethnographic in nature.

Finally, through many of my conversations I discovered the importance of the media. While I tried to present some of the more relevant examples, future studies should use and analyze the images and concepts presented in the mass media and its influences on Filipinos.

\(^\text{11}\) I intentionally chose not to include these voices because I wanted to focus on giving women, who previously had remained out of the literature, a chance to speak for themselves.
Conclusions

In the Philippines, religion influences everything.

“I think religion and culture gets mixed up in the Philippines because it is so abundant.”

[Michelle, Senior Project Manager, age 33]

While this interviewee said it best, many of the women I interviewed expressed similar views on Catholicism. One even remarked that an individual’s Christian denomination did not matter as Catholicism is so influential that it impacts almost everyone in the Philippines (Christine, Professor, age 34). Moreover, Catholicism seemed to not only spread the teachings of the Church, but also create a kind of religious perspective, such that the majority of Filipinos are conservative in their religious and social beliefs (Michelle, Senior Project Manager, age 33).

The impact of religion on Filipino culture cannot be overstated. Religion creates the moral framework for understanding what is right and wrong; it both produces the understanding of where homosexuality fits in society and the attitude used to combat it.

However, as the world moves forward into the twenty-first century, cultures and individuals are becoming more connected on a global scale. Modern ideas of tolerance and liberalism are merging with or replacing traditional beliefs. In the Philippines, other major religions are gaining acceptance and popularity. For example, Islam is growing steadily, and Muslim holidays even being recognized on the national calendar (Michelle, Senior Project Manager, age 33).

Moreover, globalization also seems to mean an acceptance of Western culture. With its ties to Spain and the United States, the Philippines is steadily adopting Western habits.

“’When the US sneezes the Philippines catches a cold’? We try so hard to be Little Brown Americans but at this point I would have to
say that cultural traditions and religion are still quite ingrained in the Filipino.”

[Mary Grace, Housewife (with Small Business), age 60]

“We're a very Americanized nation … I guess we, you know we watch the same kind of, you know, we have the same pop culture references … we idolize … the same of type of people, like people in Hollywood.”

[Stephanie, Singer, age 40]

“If you look at the American Culture and the Philippine culture in terms of in the social culture, it's kind of the same, like we see the-the social culture kind of the same. It might be that, the Philippines is copying something of the American culture.”

[Christine, Professor, age 34]

It seems apparent in these interviews that social change in the Philippines is, in part, driven by Western influence. As the Philippines is globalizing, it is becoming more “Americanized.” In the United States, LGBTQ issues are currently being fought on the main stage, bringing much attention to the cause. In the Philippines, this may eventually mean an increase in tolerance, and then acceptance for non-traditional sexual behaviors.

While acknowledging the changing social landscape of the Philippines, this study is an attempt to understand the various cultural realities of women’s alternate sexualities. To be straight is not only the norm, but an expectation for women. Breaking these standards means public embarrassment and potentially difficult familial relationships. Practicing same-sex sexuality in secret is an option for some women, but not all. As sexuality is at least partially performative, relegating one’s sexual inclinations to hidden moments can be difficult and destructive. Unfortunately societal discrimination can similarly be putative.
“You just know that you're different. So that when, you grow up being treated in a different way, looked upon in a different way, because you don't really meet the expectations of the people around you... And, you're not like your other siblings. So, you sort of feel that you're not-you're not meeting some expectations. So you grow up with that, with that chip on your shoulder. Until you decide that umm you probably declare your distance, and say, okay I take this, this label on. And you just decide to be that. Alright, so actually owning the label, labeling yourself, is actually more liberating. Right? Because you already accept that you'll be treated differently, it may be more difficult for you to get a job, right?

Then after taking that label on you realize, you know you could just go on living your life. With that chip on your shoulder and-and feeling inferior to everybody else. Or you just, just decide that that I will have opportunities available for me, just like everybody else, because I have distinct capabilities also, so... you know, at the onset, people try very hard because they're gay or they're lesbian. It's like they overdo things, you know, because I'm gay I have to earn so much money. I have to be more successful than most people. [They] try to make up for it, but after some time, you just-you just relax and you say that, you know, I'm just like everybody else, trying to make a living, you know, Or, you know... on the road to self-actualization, things like that.”

[Angel, Telecommunications Executive, age 43]

At the end of our interview, Stephanie told me about why she wanted to participate in the study.

“I would like to add I guess, just to kind give you a little background on what I care about, my best, best friend in all the world since I was twelve years old is gay, and my youngest sister is gay, and well fortunately, she didn't have, well I think it wasn't such a hard coming out... it's something, it's an issue that I care about and every time that I
read anything about it, you know there's something umm, like on social media, you know, and it's stuff like, it's one of the things that I very strongly support… you know, it's an issue that I do care about and I think it's just… it's amazing how in the year 2014 this can still be something that is an issue, you know, and I find that, I just, I find that outrageous. You know, if there was anything I could do to support my sister or-or my friend, or in any way help out and just, umm, in just, umm, making people realize that this should just not be an issue, you know I would do it.”

[Singer, age 40]

No matter how or why society changes in the Philippines, hopefully it will lead to a more just, tolerant, open and accepting society for everyone.
References


*Enjoying Wonderful World*. Retrieved April 6, 2013 from


Appendix A: Literature Tables
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Study Population</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chou R</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Asian Americans</td>
<td>55 Interviews</td>
<td>• Constant forces imposing identity on us (notions of intersectionality)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Definition of sexuality</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Start with the voice of the marginalized as the starting point</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women are taught to silence their feelings – in connection to Asian Family Values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collins D</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Filipino Hosts for Gay Tourist Spots</td>
<td>Interviews and Ethnographic Fieldwork</td>
<td>• Interactions between gay men in the Philippines and their hosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transnational Gay Expatriates Living in Manila</td>
<td>Interviews and Ethnographic Fieldwork</td>
<td>• Intense focus on place, and their interdependent relationships between history, lived experience, and spatial locations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Correlation of hospitality and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins D</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gay tourism industry in the Philippines</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Homonormativity and heteronormativity</td>
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<td>• Importance of Class in defining gay identities</td>
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<td>• Philippines as a possibly accepting location for gay identities</td>
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## Table A.1 Continued: Literature Based on Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Study Population</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Espiritu Y | 2001             | Filipino-American Immigrants | 100 In-depth Interviews | - Specific morality enforced by family bonds and values  
- Womanhood is idealized (Especially as holding onto the norms and traditions of culture)  
- Close-knit character of families; Sexuality as a core aspect of social identity  
- Filipino mentality that boys are different than girls |

| Fajardo K | 2008             | Filipino Seamen | Ethnographic Fieldwork | - Construction of Philippine masculinities  
- Tomboy as a transgender identity, as well as a female gay identity |

| Garcia J  | 2008             | Filipino Gay Men | Interviews and Ethnographic Fieldwork | - Different and dissimilar meaning of bakla and gay  
- Lack of academic research into gay culture  
- Influence of the West on the Philippines |

| Manalansan M | 2003           | Filipino-American Gay Men | 50 Interviews and Ethnographic Fieldwork | - Filipinos occupy a unique position among diasporic groups due to their colonization histories  
- Filipinos are constantly negotiating their sense of self with their post-colonial position in the world  
- Modernity is established not through rejection of tradition, but combinations of new and old  
- Cultural citizenship isn’t one monolithic construction, but a continual competition of ideologies  
- Caution that Tagalog is not a language that unites all Filipinos, however, bakla has a wide circulation because of the media  
- Religious devotion is a mark of being Filipino |
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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Study Population</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nadal K &amp; Corpus M</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Gay Filipino-Americans and Canadians</td>
<td>24 Participants in Four Focus Groups (Divided by Gender)</td>
<td>• Understandings of Filipinos in history – connections to Latino vs. Asian countries&lt;br&gt;• Little research on lesbians&lt;br&gt;• Impressions of gay life&lt;br&gt;  o Religion&lt;br&gt;  o Family&lt;br&gt;  o Sexuality&lt;br&gt;  o Public versus private identities&lt;br&gt;  o Multiple identity struggles&lt;br&gt;  o Rigid definitions in the Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newton N</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Vietnamese Lesbians</td>
<td>75 Interviews and Ethnographic Fieldwork</td>
<td>• Productive possibilities of invisibilities&lt;br&gt;• Challenge of Western biases in looking at an Eastern locale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roces M</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Women’s Organizations</td>
<td>78 Interviews, Ethnographic Fieldwork, and Analysis of Organizational Materials</td>
<td>• In order to understand the Filipina woman, it’s necessary to understand women in their unique contexts&lt;br&gt;• Women’s Movements blamed the Spanish and Catholicism for these new ideals: “The impossible model” of the Virgin Mary and the mistakenly upheld Maria Clara&lt;br&gt;• Catholic Church continues to be a great challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Publication Year</td>
<td>Study Population</td>
<td>Study Design</td>
<td>Major Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upadhyay U &amp; Hindin M</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Cebuano Adolescents</td>
<td>1,943 Adolescents in Longitudinal Survey</td>
<td>• Adolescents are strongly influenced by their parents’ attitudes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Moral standards are different for girls and boys</td>
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<td>Vrangalova Z &amp; Savin-Williams, R</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>US Survey Respondents</td>
<td>1,784 Survey Respondents</td>
<td>• Definition of sexual orientation (on a continuum, in practice discreet categories, usual definitions of sexuality)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Would be more realistic to have greater categories</td>
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<td>• People need to rely less on biological sex than attraction to understand identity labels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Publication Year</td>
<td>Article Design</td>
<td>Major Findings</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Aquino B        | 1985             | Concluding chapter in a book and an overview of then contemporary research     | • Western feminism isn’t equal to Eastern feminism in the way women understand what equality means  
• Pre-Spanish Philippines was a golden age for women in the Philippines  
• Maria Clara, the colonized Filipina, intended to symbolize oppression, instead became a female ideal  
• American colonial period was not as damaging for women’s roles, but encouraged women to stay in the home  
• The female self-concept is family orientated  
• Importance of class and gender in understanding women |
| Bautista J      | 2010             | Investigation of the Catholic Church in the Philippines through historical detail and current legislature | • Roman Catholic Church (RCC) & Church Presence in the Philippines through the (CBCP)  
• Roots of Catholic and Church Power (Spanish & American Colonizations, Marcos Regime & People Power Movement, and Second Vatican Council)  
• Vast Majority of Filipinos are committed to Catholic Faith |
| Blackwood E & Johnson M | 2012           | Introductory article on gender and sexual subjectivities in Asia         | • Rise of recent studies taking a contextual look at sexuality (especially taking a look at colonial & post-colonial impacts)  
• Attempt to reframe traditional genders versus modern sexualities – need to start looking at intersecting or emerging forms of distinctly “same-gender sexualities”  
• Need to look carefully at Western assumptions in looking at Asian sexualities |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Article Design</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Diaz         | 2003             | Discussion of postcolonial theory and third wave feminism and its manifestation in the Philippines | • Philippine colonial history is incredibly important in understanding and conceptualizing Filipino women’s experiences  
• Spanish Catholicism helped to become an important tool for conquest (And transformed women in the Philippines)  
• American colonialism brought English and also genders Filipino society; Focus on the self, and how it produces and is reproduced to particular experiences within particular circumstances |
| Gamson J & Moon D | 2004 | Review article on then current sociology of sexualities | • Sociology of sexualities have seen phenomenal growth  
• Looked at the construction of sexuality and how identities are neither stable or unified  
• Labels both help and hurt individuals  
• Religion is a source of sexual-moral discourse  
• Sexuality works with and along other lines of oppression |
| Go S         | 1994             | Interpretation of statistics surrounding changing family structures in the Philippines | • Importance of family and relatives  
• Importance and uniformity of marriage expectations  
• Inculcation of religion as a part of growing up  
• Influence of the mass media  
• Family and its regulation of sexual behavior |
| McCormick N  | 2013             | Compilation of research on sexualities on four female subpopulations in the United States | • Qualities of Asian families  
  ○ Harmonious relations  
  ○ Sacrificing for the greater good of the family  
  ○ Not speaking openly about upsetting issues  
• Lesbianism is looked down upon  
• Asian women do not talk about sex  
• Little research on sexuality of women of color |
| Sinnott M    | 2010             | Review article on recent studies regarding Asian sexualities | • Recent boom in the literature  
• Sexuality in Asia isn’t just a Western imposition, but a complex response  
• Need to start looking at the way meanings are attached to particular bodies (sex and gender play a role) |
Appendix B: The Interview Guide
Interview Guide

Demographics:
I would like to begin by asking you for some general information as a means of getting to know you a little better.

1. What is your age?
2. Where are you from?
3. How long did you/have you lived in the Philippines?
4. Where did you go to school?
   a. What was the highest level of education you attained?
5. Do you identify with any particular religion?
   a. Was this the same religion you grew up in?
      i. (If not,) What religion were you raised in, if any?
6. What do you do for a living?
7. Are you married?
   a. If not, are you currently in a relationship?

Domain 1: Construction of Categories
I am interested in understanding how women’s sexuality is understood and categorized in the Philippines.

1. In the Philippines, what categories for women’s sexuality are there?
   a. In the US, some people talk about women’s sexuality in categories such as gay, straight, and bisexual. Is this the same in the Philippines?
   b. Do you think religion plays a role in sexuality?
2. Does each person choose which category they are a part of or does someone else choose for them?
   a. Who else might choose a woman’s sexuality?
   b. How do you think a woman’s family/religious affiliation/peers influence a woman’s choice?
3. Can you think of when you first heard of these categories? Maybe when you first learned of the category or when someone explained it to you.
4. What are the consequences of being labeled ‘[Use one of the answers from question one]’?
Domain 2: Experiences of Categories (Fluidity and Language)

*I am interested in understanding how women experience the different categories for women’s sexuality in the Philippines.*

1. Can one woman be in multiple categories at once?
   a. (If no) What would be the problem of one woman being in multiple categories?
   b. Have you heard of the terms bisexual or pansexual?
2. Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?
3. Does having multiple labels allow women to have more options about their sexuality?
4. (If living in the US:)
   a. Has living in the United States changed your understanding of women’s sexuality? How so?
      i. Are there more categories available to women in the U.S.? Fewer?

Domain 3: The Same-sex Sexual Category

*I am interested in understanding how homosexual identity is understood in the Philippines.*

1. What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines?
2. What does *bakla* mean?
   a. Is it ever used when speaking about women?
3. People in the US often talk about women who engage in sexual relationships with other women as “lesbians.” Do you think that this category corresponds to relationships that women have in the Philippines?
   a. Is there another word, maybe in Tagalog that corresponds to this English word?
   b. Do you know of any other words that may be used to describe women who romantically love or have sex with other women?
      i. Where have you heard them used?
   c. Have you ever heard of the term, ‘tomboy’? What does it mean?
4. Do you think these alternate words can tell us something about differences in how people think of women’s sexuality differently in the Philippines than in the US?
Appendix C: Fact Sheets

Notes:

_These fact sheets were inspired in part by Heidi Pascuiti in her Boston College Senior Thesis._

_All unnecessary uhhs/umms/verbal tics deleted from direct quotes._
Interview Number: One
Age: 43
Schooling: De La Salle University, undergraduate and master’s degree; University of the Philippines (hereafter UP), PhD (statistics)
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Single
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Lesbian, and Bisexual
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: No
Definition of bakla: “is really used exclusively for men... maybe before it would mean that we have you are looking at an effeminate man... But increasingly, it has moved on to more, more like the sexual orientation. So you could call a very masculine looking man bakla, If you knew that, you know”
Definition of tomboy: women who “want to look like a good looking man”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“As a gay woman... [or] lesbian... it’s really your choice of partner... that [a woman] decide[s] to be with women rather than men. That [one’s] attraction is towards the same-sex, rather than the opposite sex”
There’s a popular noontime variety show with a section that is basically a beauty contest for good looking tomboys, “But sometimes, you know, it took weeks before I actually, could actually watch that, because it made me cringe. I don't know, maybe it’s too upfront, that display, but, it’s also an indication that it’s a society quite open to the gayness of people.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“I guess that label straight is not used, only the label lesbian is used, or bisexual, or I refuse to label myself... because, everyone is assumed to be straight... of course, once you decide to take that label for yourself, you would know, that you may be, you will be treated differently... Basically that labeling came much later... The appearance, or you know... that, you know when you get the feeling that you’re lesbian, it starts very early... and you don’t have a label. You just know that you’re different. So that when, you grow up being treated in a different way. Looked upon in a different way, because you don’t really meet the expectations of the people around you” (pg. 3). Then she discusses how your mother or siblings might treat you differently or just underline how/why you are different. “So you grow up with that, with that chip on your shoulder. Until you decide that umm you probably declare your distance, and say, Ok I take this, this label on. And you just decide to
be that. Alright, so actually owning the label, labeling yourself, is actually more liberating... Because you already accept that you’ll be treated differently, it may be more difficult for you to get a job, right? Or, there, there are some jobs that are categorized for you know, this kind of a job for a lesbian. Like a security guard, or a someone who works for the police... Things like that. But not probably, you know, as a Professor”

I asked her to say a little more about the weight that having a different label might put on someone and she explained it as, “you could just go on living your life, with that chip on your shoulder and feeling inferior to everybody else. Or you just, just decide that that I will have opportunities available for me, just like everybody else because I have distinct capabilities also, so... you know, at the onset, people try very hard because they’re gay or they’re lesbian. It’s like they overdo things, you know, because I’m gay I have to earn so much money, I have to be more successful than most people... [They] Try to make up for it, but after some time, you just relax and you say that, you know, I’m just like everybody else, trying to make a living” all on the path to “self-actualization”

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?
Yes, because sexuality is like a continuum. Also depends on who you’re with, gave an example of a woman who was straight all her life until she got involved with a woman, but that did not mean she necessarily had to take on the label of lesbian or tomboy, “She’s just a woman having a relationship with a woman”

**Religion and Sexuality**

You have more options with better education, especially an exclusive girls’ school – which taught Feminism early. It was an environment where, “Women are made to think more freely... and critical thinking is highly encouraged.” Yet, religion also provides the backbone to society, in which, “it is commonly... stated what is... explicitly not supposed to be done or men are supposed to be with women only, things like that.”
Interview Number: Two
Age: 59
Schooling: Maryknoll College, Catholic school for girls, K-12
          UP, undergraduate & Masters’ degree (financial management)
Religious Affiliation: Roman Catholic; Same religion as the one raised in; Currently
          active in
          CFC (Couples for Christ), a Catholic evangelical group for married couples
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Male, Female, Gay (bakla or
tomboy) and Transvestite

Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Yes.
“Yes, I think it’s possible for a woman to be in multiple categories of sexuality at
once. As I pointed out, it appears to me that homosexuality is a state of confusion in
the mind of young people who have disturbing experiences or a lack of good role
models at a young age. The confusion could persist in later years, and since some
may be so confused, they may not even have clear preferences.”
Definition of bakla: “Bakla’ is a term used for gay men in the Philippines.”
“Bakla’ was the word used to describe outwardly effeminate men, cross dressers,
the stereotype for gay men in the Philippines. It is only recently that ‘straight’-
looking gay men have arisen, mostly those protecting a family or business image,
including actors who portray masculine roles. Their gayness is repressed but
expressed only in guarded moments; hence these people have not ‘come out.’”
Definition of tomboy:
“Tomboy is a word used for a non-girlie girl, especially a young girl. In context, it
does not necessarily refer to a gay nature but rather a preference for wearing
comfortable clothes, indulging in the outdoors, and roughing and tumbling – a
natural occurrence for kids who are not yet "into boys". They also outgrow this stage
as part of growing up. Hence, we hear lots of girls say "I was a tomboy as a little
girl". “Nowadays, this term has taken on a new meaning, to refer to gay women
who are masculine (in dressing or bearing) & who actually pursue women
romantically. So we now use the term ‘tomboy-ish’ to refer to the young girl who is
not very ‘girlie’ yet.”
What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines

“Being ‘gay’ here referred to flamboyant effeminate men who were cross dressers, usually hairdressers or coutouriers. ‘Gay’ is only now extending to include gay women due to the awareness campaigns by gay women's groups in order to improve their welfare.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay

“In the Philippines, being gay is still not widely accepted.”

“In the Philippines, there are no real consequences to being labelled as gay. Among kids, it may set them apart from others but it is strange that in a boys' high school here, I heard that it was more common to be gay than normal. Being different will always set kids apart, depending on the norm.”

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?

“Yes, I have a classmate who has grandchildren but is now a lesbian and it is because she was disillusioned with her early marriage. She was enamored with her musician-guitar teacher who got her pregnant. She married at 16, as proper girls from wealth do at the time—and she gave up so much to live with a poor musician! And the guy was more than ten years older. She later found out that he had children about the same age as hers! So that ended the marriage and she became a lesbian ever since, a militant feminist too who absolutely hated men! The tender age of 16 and idealism that goes with it and her artistic nature added to her vulnerability and resultant absolute abhorrence of all men.”

Religion and Sexuality

“Religiosity is also often a family variant so it cannot be a strong influence unless the family is also religious (or not). But suffice to say that the predominant religion here is Catholicism, which does see homosexuality as not to be tolerated. Dogma teaches gay-inclined people to merely avoid sin by not engaging in homosexual acts, but does not reject them. Pope Francis has emphasized this too.”

“Summary of my personal ‘theories’ – that ‘gayness’ is unnatural, i.e., not what God intended for humankind because only a man-woman relationship can beget children. Hence, homosexuality should not be supported.”
Interview Number: Three
Age: 60
Schooling: Maryknoll College for my Kindergarten, Elementary, and High School education UP for undergraduate and Masters’ degree (Public Admin)
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Gay, Straight, and Bisexual

Definition of *bakla*: “In the past, it was the term used mainly for gay males,” though not used in reference to women.

Definition of *tomboy*: “A woman who behaves like a man, but it does not necessarily mean that the woman loves or has sex with other women. I also think the term is used more often to refer to young girls, maybe in their teens or younger.”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines?
To be gay, “usually means being bisexual” (2)

*Also see below response.*

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“There is still a stigma for women who may be perceived as or have admitted to being “lesbians”. This topic on the categories of women’s sexuality is still rarely written about here in the Philippines.

“I would not say that if one is labeled lesbian or *bakla* that it immediately means that the person is specifically involved with persons of the same sex. Filipinos are actually very open about their sexuality but—I believe—it is not automatic here that all lesbians or gay women have involvements (physical or otherwise) with persons of the same sex, despite the fact that rarely are they immediately judged or ostracized because of their being labeled” (3)
Religion and Sexuality

“As a Catholic, I believe that God created only a man and a woman and the main purpose for creating us is for us to enjoy and take care of everything He created for us and use all the gifts of mind, body, and soul to express our love for God in worship and praise and in service of one another. A very special way of thanking God is to express our love for one another and in complete self-giving and sacrifice, in marriage, produce children who we can also teach to love God and serve God in this way. And since we believe in the Triune God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—all 3 united in love in one person), it is this unity in the Trinity that a family is modeled. Of course there may be those who, when born may have some physical abnormalities that may cause them to be confused of their sex, if they are man or woman. It is the role of the parents to help these children by raising them as a male or as a female and give them all the care and support in helping them understand and accept their true sexual identity. If I may digress, I'd like to add that it is more the mass media that now plays a major role is sexuality here in the Philippines.”
Interview Number: Four
Age: 59
Schooling: Maryknoll College for my Grade and High School education
UP for undergraduate (Bachelor of Science)
UP of Medicine in Manila (M.D.)
Religious Affiliation: “I grew up as a Catholic, I was raised as a Catholic, still Catholic.”
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: United States

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Gay (Lesbians and Gay Men)
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: “I think it’s possible.”
“I just don’t know people who are like bisexual in the Philippines. ... So I think there’s a lot that may go on that’s not open.”
Definition of bakla: “a label for a homosexual male”
Definition of tomboy: “It’s just that you’re not as – umm, girl- I would say not as girlish as, as you should be.”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“I think being gay in the Philippines means that you have a certain sexual demeanor. A certain demeanor, and your preferences are for... somebody of the same sex. But usually, it’s more their behavior. They’re like the men who are very effeminate, or who cross dress, they’re considered gay. And you automatically think that because they do that, that they dress like women that their sexual preference is for men. And then, the women also, those people who are considered tomboy are the ones who will dress in pants and not wear, you know, feminine clothing. They’re not, you know, like, really wearing make-up. So, again, the connotation is that they’re orientation is not for the opposite sex, but for somebody of the same sex. So, I think a lot of it, is like certain types of behavior, you know, rather than just sexual orientation.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“I think the consequences are more negative...a label for a homosexual male is bakla. So that term is very derogatory, so you actually use that label to identify men who are more effeminate and, you know, that gives a very negative connotation. When you’re considered a homosexual.”
Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?

“I think they would do things like umm—were hidden; but … I think umm a lot of what you know probably goes on is just not out in the open”

**Religion and Sexuality**

“You grow up thinking that the only type of relationship people can have is that between a man and a woman. However, you know, as you get older, you do meet people who are gay, one of my best friends is a lesbian, and she actually is very much involved in non-government organizations in the Philippines to help women with regards to educating women about you know sexual education and she’s also involved in helping abused women, so she was actually married to a man and later came out as a gay indiv—as a lesbian, you accept the person as they are, but I think that’s not as … well-done in the … it’s not as well accepted in the Philippines as it would be in the United States.”

“I think education helps,” in teaching tolerance for alternate sexualities, “but I think the umm the control of the Catholic Church regarding what’s right and what’s wrong may have a stronger hold even among educated people.”
Interview Number: Five
Age: 60
Schooling: Grade School & High School - Maryknoll College (now Miriam College)
Undergraduate - Assumption College (Literature)
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Separated
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: “Homosexual, Fag or Faggot (outdated, though), Lesbian, Gay, AC-DC (seldom used), Straight, Dike, Bitch, Butch, Tomboy or T-Bird”

Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Possibly
Definition of bakla: ”In the dark ages, bakla was usually interchangeable with the word binabae or merely an effeminate man.” It is sometimes used to speak humorously about women.
Definition of tomboy: “could refer to either a girl with boy-ish or boy-like actuations; or a girl having a crush on another girl; or both.”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“It means that Thank God! There’s another option and that one can be open about it now.” (2) “Although “coming out” already has tacit approval in Filipino Society there is still a degree of disapproval and shock, sometimes even derision. We still don’t have an Ellen Degeneres, or the basketball player Jason Collins, or the TV anchorman (I forget his name) who have happily and totally come out but there are LOUD murmurs about this and that personality who are reputed to be gay but deny it. Even Pres. Noynoy Aquino is rumoured to be gay! Up to this day Very Important Personalities – whether in politics, business, and even in show business – still have a lot to lose if they admit to homosexuality.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“In the 60’s and 70’s we just tended to avoid them or let them be, but we snickered and “pointed” at them behind their backs.” However, now having more options “would definitely be more liberating, emotionally and physically.” There’s also a greater sense of things being open (people being allowed to take other labels.)
Religion and Sexuality

Religion does play a role in sexuality, “but I would have to qualify that by saying that there is a lot of hypocrisy where religiosity is concerned.”

“Initially these would indeed exert huge influence and lead to a lot of guilt and conflict: there would perhaps be a lot of second-thinking and second-guessing, and trying to deny one’s sexuality, and a lot of secrecy would be involved.”
Interview Number: Six  
Age: 60 years old  
Schooling: Primary and Secondary: Maryknoll College  
Tertiary: University of the Philippines, University of the East, Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center 
Religious Affiliation: Catholic 
Marital Status: Yes 
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight/lesbian pretty much 
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Yes 
I have heard of “straight” ladies living a lesbian lifestyle. 

Definition of bakla: Male homosexual 
Definition of tomboy: Female who dresses as a male, and is assumed a as a lesbian 

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines 
It means a person whose sexual orientation is directed towards persons of his/her own sex. In the RP, the perception of lesbians is not well looked upon as a male homosexuals, who have a place in TV shows. Some of the biggest movie stars are male homosexuals. On the other hand, females who recently “came out” have been getting a bashing on social media. 

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay 
Women also face more risks with, when being labeled, “Lesbian: peer/family/social discrimination or ‘persecution’, social isolation,” and “labeling which may persist for life”. There is a “stigma associated with being lesbian is nasty and pervasive”.

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen? 
“Yes, a close friend and a female cousin.” Also, “my friend came from a bad marriage to an abusive man, willfully decided that females were a more compassionate companions, hence a change in orientation.” Finally, “we heard that my cousin was in a lesbian relationship with her best friend in college. Both eventually moved on to marry men and raise their families.”

Religion and Sexuality 
Yes, religion has an influence on sexuality in so far as creating a perspective or point of view about it.
Interview Number: Seven
Age: 40
Schooling: Grade School (St. Paul and Assumption)
High School (Montessori High School)
Religious Affiliation: No current affiliation.
“I was baptized Catholic, and there was a point that when, I guess I was a teenager, that… my whole family was umm born-again Christian, but it just kind of all like, fizzled out towards I guess like as I got older.”
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: The Philippines

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Gay, and Bisexual
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: “Yea I don’t think it’s that common, you know, I’ve known of women or actors and stuff like that… I wouldn’t say that’s very common, but yea definitely I think that, compared to maybe men I think women are more… I think it’s more flexible
Definition of bakla: Male gay. (There are many different types of male gay)
Definition of tomboy: Lesbian.

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“Obviously there are a lot of different types of gay people like the ones that are, the ones that really feel like they’re not, they shouldn’t be in the body that they’re in, you know, like-like really struggling, you know like, a woman in a man’s body type of thing. Or like, when-or like, someone who feels like she really should’ve been a boy, but is in a girl’s body and like that-that, that entire thing is not even feeling comfortable in their own skin. Yea, you see that every so often, but then I think the more common one would be, that yea we’re- like for instance, for gay men, it’s like, you know, the yea we’re cool with being men and it’s just that we, we’re attracted to other men. You know, and we have the same kind of thing, with umm, with lesbians; yea, you-you have, you have that sort of thing. And then there are women who really look like women, I mean like, they like to fix up, you know, you have every, you have every kind of—of variety of lesbian. You know, you’ve got… like the one that I wa- this, this actress, whose my friend, whose engaged now, umm, they’ll have to get married in the states obviously, but yea, the girl, the girl that she’s proposed to recently, yea she’s like, she’s, she was a wife and mother. So she yea, she looks totally, she’s pretty, with long hair, very you know, very feminine, everything like that and she’s in love now with my friend, who, who looks like a little boy, who’s always been like a little boy, you know, has always been very manly. You know, so, yea you have every kind of… you know, you have everything, that and everything in between.”
Consequences of being labeled straight/gay

“It depends on, because there’s just so many, different types of families and so many different types of rules. Like for instance I’ll give you an example, my make-up artist, who’s gay; he’s married, and is still married to a woman and he has children, because it’s… that’s not an uncommon thing here, because like, especially in Chinese-Filipino families. You know, a lot of the inheritance is dependent on you being able to have a family of your own, like it’s, if you have to have children, etc. It’s kind of like the rule, and if you break away from that you could get disowned, you know, I mean, I think it’s happening, over less and less-over the—maybe in the current-like more the later generations, but for sure like… maybe in my generation if not like the generation before they used to be a little more traditional about that. And, yea it’s … it just depends on what kind of family you were born into, there’s, there’s … some families that ‘oh we’re okay with, you know, gay- you know, we’re- we’re cool with all the gay people, but as long as my kid’s not gay.’ You know? That’s sort of thing-and if ever they did find out they’d be super disappointed, but at the end of the day they’d be okay with it, you know? Like there are all these different, I think, different levels you know different, so you know depending where – depending on the kind of family you were born into.”

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?

“I had this friend who is now engaged to this girl... they’re both lesbian... the girl used to be married and she has a child. That’s like very common here. You know, that- that women tend to have been married before and then can one day realize... Oh, you know, I can also have a relationship with a woman.”

Religion and Sexuality

“Well definitely there’s this whole, right or, you know, like what’s-what some people think is like right and wrong, you know, it does I guess affect people in the sense that… if you’re born into a very religious family, maybe, as you’re growing up, and- if you felt like, you know, there was something different about you , maybe it’s be a little bit harder, you know for you to come out, but I believe that it’s not something that can be conditioned. You know, you-you are who you are, you... you kind of are born in to it and you know you realize that. And I guess in some cases if you think you’re parents are really going to be really disapproving then you, you know, you, then you try to, you try to hide it”
Interview Number: Eight
Age: 34
Schooling: Kindergarten to Third Grade in a Semi-Private School
Fourth Grade through High School in a Public School
Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Worcester, MA, USA) for a Ph.D.
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Single
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: United States

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Gay and Bisexual
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Yes
Definition of bakla: it’s almost a term for gay
Definition of tomboy: lesbian
“we call like male gay as bakla and female gay as tomboy.”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“I think that’s how Filipino women think. Some- some do that just because – it’s what influences them, like they have people around them that are acting that way, or they don’t-- they sometimes, – some of them probably in the beginning don’t intentionally want to be branded like that but that’s where they fit, so they just go with the flow.”

“I think” that it is acceptable to be something other than straight in the Philippines, “especially now, with everybody in the Filip-entertainment, really just instantly coming out like that. It’s very much, like all over the place in the Philippines, you know, it’s not a taboo thing. Like, you try – if you’re gay, you just say, say it out loud, “I’m gay.” You know, especially those people in the Entertainment business. So I guess ordinary people, would not feel as- something out of the ordinary.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“Uhh, I don’t really see that much negativity... I really don’t see that much, like, negativity in being that, or having that kind of orientation in the Philippines at least.”

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?
“I’ve seen like a few [students], just, just switching from that to being that. I was so surprised to see them have that transition and then I’ve seen the other way around too. Like some students are … so girl when I first met them, are now into that orientation. They’re now even dating women [sigh].”
Religion and Sexuality

“My understanding is from what I watched in the news and all religion really has like a really strong influence in everybody’s life, and lifestyle in the Philippines, it doesn’t matter whether you’re Catholic or you’re practice some other Christian denomina—denomination, it’s—it’s very influential. So, whether well, it’s... as is the case, the Church would say there’s only men and women, there’s nothing in between. And it really is just a big deal between them, so – if you’re a gay or lesbian, pretty much, it’s not really that kind of like accepted in terms of Church, they still see you as a male and a female. But they don’t really like, I guess, excommunicate people who do have that kind of orientation.”
Interview Number: Nine
Age: 33
Schooling: Kindergarten through High School in Poveda Learning Center
Four trimesters at De La Salle University (Manila, Philippines)
(One semester off in moving to Boston, MA, USA)
MassBay Community College (for two and a half years)
Wartburg College (Computer Information Sciences Degree in Waverly, IA, USA)
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: United States

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Gay, and Bisexual
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Yes
Definition of bakla: “males that are homosexual, more specifically those that are more flamboyant”
Definition of tomboy: “women that prefer more... tend to be more sporty, more, do prefer more masculine, masculine, I guess activities, like sports and likes to wear you know pants and, you know, like boyish type clothes, that I think would be tomboy. For me, it doesn’t equal sexual...orientation, exactly.”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“Well, I think-I think for the longest time in the Philippines at least when I was growing up it was like: there’s gay people, and they are most, like you’ll see it mostly like umm in the entertainment business and or their like you know I mean I don’t think it was ever like a something that people were wanted to be or were very open about it, because a lot of people in the Philippines are very conserva- conservative. So, I think, being gay in the Philippines, were – was taboo for a long time... Was very taboo for a long time, and so, a lot of people were closeted for a long time. I think, and I think in my generation, like the generation of the people – well like around my age... my generation I the Philippines, I think they’re getting to be more open and they’re being more accepting and they’re becoming more brave and opening up and exposing other people to umm to a different lifestyle, I think, and just being open in general.”
Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“I think you might definitely feel like a second class citizen. I mean I’ve had classmates that would, I don’t know if they’re like jokingly or you know or not, if they got touched by somebody that was gay, umm they’d get like grossed out about it. Which I think was kind of ridiculous, but it… Yea I definitely think that you’re looked down upon. Yea, unless you make a lot of money and they don’t care, I guess.”

Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Yes

Religion and Sexuality
“I think a lot of people probably don’t talk about it as much, especially when I was growing up, because of- umm because of religion, and I think religion and culture gets mixed up in the Philippines because it is so abundant – you know many people are Catholic in the Philippines. Since I’ve left, there has been more acceptance with different religions, but umm, I think because it’s been very – like a lot of people in the Philippines are Catholic, then... culture and religion is kind of mixed a little bit”
Interview Number: Ten
Age: 56
Schooling: Kindergarten through High School in Convent School, UP for undergraduate degree, University of Michigan for Masters, MBA
Religious Affiliation: Catholic
Marital Status: Married
Currently Living in the Philippines or the United States: United States

Which women’s sexual categories did they come up with: Straight, Gay, and Bisexual
Can one woman be in multiple categories at once: Not sure
Definition of bakla: “men who act effeminate”
Definition of tomboy: “a female who dresses like a guy, who exhibits more masculine characteristics... I can’t tell, other than the appearances if-if there’s something else. Like, you know, if-if you’re truly sexually attracted to other women. I’m guessing that’s what going on, but I don’t-didn’t really have any, you know, personal discussions with them about it”

What does it mean to be gay in the Philippines
“Well, I also think there’s a difference between what happened thirty years ago and what might be happening now? So like thirty years ago, you know, when I left the Philippines, in my twenties and when I was growing up it was less acceptable for women to like other women, and so I think, if there were women who felt that way, they would never like say that publically, but now, when I’m looking at some of these shows, it looks like there’s more acceptance of that, and that’s probably true in the United States too, so that like thirty30 years ago it was less acceptable that today it is.”

Consequences of being labeled straight/gay
“Well growing up, it wasn’t accepted to have— for women to like women or men to like men, that was not acceptable growing up. You know, you were... I mean it was like... I shouldn’t say that people were ostracized. Maybe I should say, I don’t think parents accepted it. In school, though, like you could tell who were women who maybe... who may... I actu... I don’t know if they were attracted to women, or if they, they were tomboys. And... I don’t know. Nobody really cared. You know, it wasn’t like they were bullied or ostracized, they were just left alone by the other girls, but I –I got the sense that maybe their parents weren’t happy about it. The peers, I don’t think the peers really cared.”
Have you known of cases in which women shift between categories in different situations or over the course of their lives? Why did that happen?

“I just remembered someone else who was a *tomboy*, who may have changed sex. So a close friend, of... someone I knew, in fact, I met this woman, didn’t – I mean did she act like a *tomboy*? Yea she did, very attractive, umm, and then, but it looked like she was going both ways; and then, and then, I only heard later on, you know, years later, that she went to LA, and then, while she was there, you know she --- and maybe she was always this way, but she couldn’t, because it wasn’t acceptable, she couldn’t let her parents know, so it was only until she went to the United States that it came out, that that was her orientation”

**Religion and Sexuality**

“I think so. I think... I mean, I don’t know for sure, but I’ve often wondered – ahhhh – having grown up in a convent school, whether you know some of my ... some of my classmates have a ... a kind of guilt feeling...Guilt. Guilt feeling, like... Yea... kind of like no-no; and I don’t know if that had any impact on their, like you know, so –so they were sexual , but because they couldn’t be seen with boys, they turned to women. So it’s not clear to me that they were really interested in women, or women were safer than men. Or girls were safer than boys, because there were... you know, Fathers were so strict. That, you know, if you were seen with boys or tried to go out with boys, it was a big no-no, but you weren’t, you know, there was a lot of freedom to be with girls, and so if you wanted to experiment with sex, it might, it was more accessible to do it with girls than it would be with boys. I just wondered. You know, I don’t know exactly.”