

1-1-2007

**Pagbukadkad ng bulaklak = Blooming of the flower : an ethnographic study of a friendship group of same-sex attracted middle-class young men from Metro Manila in the Philippines**

Ronald Macdonald  
*Edith Cowan University*

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***PAGBUKADKAD NG BULAKLAK (BLOOMING OF THE FLOWER): AN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A FRIENDSHIP GROUP OF SAME-SEX  
ATTRACTED MIDDLE-CLASS YOUNG MEN FROM METRO MANILA IN  
THE PHILIPPINES***

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Bachelor of Social Science with Honours in Youth Work**

**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Education and Arts**

**Edith Cowan University**

**March 2007**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I examine “gay” life in the Philippines by focusing on a long-standing friendship group of same-sex attracted middle-class young men living in Metro Manila who identify as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. I explain how dynamics of gender and sexuality including identity expression are conceptualised, articulated and negotiated through the interphase of Philippine culture, social class, economic status and the cultural appropriation and adaptation of elements of Western gay discourse and lifestyle.

Ethnography was selected as the most appropriate qualitative research method because of its theoretical and philosophical “fit” with the methodological assumptions that underpin this study. A key feature in both the theoretical and ideological approaches taken in this project has been the inclusion of Filipino theoretical perspectives rather than coming from a purely Western paradigmatic viewpoint.

I argue that collectivism is a fundamental concept and guiding principle that underscores Filipino cultural life and societal worldview, and because of these affectations, dynamically informs on the ways in which social relations of gender and sexuality are structured and experienced. Western societies function on the psychological and ethical principle of individualism (a concept connected with notions of political autonomy rather than group association), and it is because of the inherent differences between these social paradigms that I conclude that local Filipino forms of homoeroticism and gender variance are conceived in cultural conditions unlike those embodied in equivalent Western metropolises. The data presented in this dissertation elucidates these systemic differences by exploring pertinent social issues that link the experience of urban Filipino cultural life with gender and sexuality.

## DECLARATION

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the Youth Work staff from Edith Cowan University who, through their intelligence, compassion, and support, enabled me to complete my honours degree. I am most grateful to Meaghan Delahunt, who in my first year at university wrote on an assignment paper that I should read Lynne Segal's book "Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men." I did, and it sparked my interest in studying gender and sexuality as my chosen area for research attention.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Trudi Cooper for supervising both my honours and my doctoral theses. I cannot emphasize enough how much time and effort Trudi has expended in helping and supporting me in my endeavours. I am most grateful for her constructive critique and feedback. My doctoral studies have at times taken a rather convoluted path, and without Trudi's kind offer of professional assistance I doubt whether this work would have come to fruition. Many thanks Trudi.

It is also with much gratitude that I thank Associate Professor Margaret Sims for taking on the project at such a late stage, and for her helpful and constructive suggestions and critique. Although there is a considerable distance between the Northern Territory and Western Australia, both Margaret and Trudi have always been just an email or phone call away, and it was with that knowledge that I felt confident and assured in undertaking the write-up of my thesis. Thanks so much to both of you.

I would like to give a very special thank you to Veronica Baldwin from Charles Darwin University who in her capacity as Research Degrees and Scholarships Officer helped me to gain a university scholarship so that I could travel to the Philippines and begin my fieldwork.

To those I love and share my life with, thank you for your emotional support and for travelling the journey with me. Your devotion and dedication sustains me.

Finally, it is with the deepest gratitude and pleasure that I would like to give a heartfelt thank you to those wonderful young men who so warmly and openly accepted me into their lives. They truly have been an inspiration to me, and I am so much the richer and wiser for having known them. I can honestly and unequivocally say their philosophies and approach to life have changed me, and for that I am forever grateful.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iii
<b>DECLARATION</b>	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>	ix
<b>CHAPTER 1:</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Western Perspective</b>	1
<b>Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Cross-Cultural Perspective</b>	6
<b>CHAPTER 2:</b>	
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	13
<b>Method</b>	16
<b>Designing the Research Process</b>	17
Personal Considerations .....	17
Entry into the Field .....	18
The Study Participants .....	19
Refining the Study Focus .....	21
<b>Research Design</b>	22
Interview Procedure	24
Language Considerations .....	25
Data Presentation and Analysis.....	30
Strengths and Weaknesses .....	32
<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	35
<b>CHAPTER 3:</b>	
<b>REPORT OF FINDINGS</b>	38
<b>Category One: The Significance of the Friendship Group</b>	38
The Background of the Friendship Group .....	38
The Extended Friendship Network .....	40
The Friendship Group as Family .....	42
Dating and the Extended Friendship Network .....	45



<i>The Happy Room</i> Online.....	48
<b>Category Two: Gender Ideation and Issues of Cultural Identity</b>	50
Gender and Language Concepts.....	50
Traditional Gender Roles and Gender Thinking.....	53
Putting Gender and Identity into Context.....	56
Western Culture and Local Interpretations.....	58
The Social Structuring of the Gender Hierarchy.....	61
<b>Category Three: The Catholic Education System and the Development of Identity and Group Solidarity</b>	63
Safety Within the Group Structure.....	63
Religion and Considerations of Gender and Identity.....	64
Gender Identity and Educational Achievement.....	66
Grade School Experiences.....	68
High School Experiences.....	70
Days with the Lord.....	72
Brother Santos and the Genesis of <i>The Happy Room</i> .....	73
Religious Retreats and “Coming Out”.....	77
University Experiences.....	79
<b>Category Four: Affectations of Class over Gender and Identity</b>	82
<i>Swardspeak</i> and Issues of Education, Class and Identity.....	82
<i>Parloristas</i> and the Classed Differences of <i>Bakla</i> .....	87
Class Position and Considerations of Gender and Beauty.....	92

## CHAPTER 4:

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

<b>Globalisation and Difference: Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Multi-Sited Perspective</b>	94
<b>Category One: The Significance of the Friendship Group</b>	97
Figure 1. Illustration showing the basic and commonly shared framework of the generalised Filipino social organisation.....	99
Figure 2. The <i>bakla</i> friendship network system.....	107
<b>Category Two: Gender Ideation and Issues of Cultural Identity</b>	115
Figure 3. Diagram showing the concept of <i>labás</i> and <i>loób</i> in the Filipino value system.....	129
Defining <i>Kabaklaan</i> .....	130
Cultural Model.....	144
<b>Category Three: The Catholic Education System and the Development of Identity and Group Solidarity</b>	151
<b>Category Four: Affectations of Class over Gender and Identity</b>	165
Figure 4. The different categories of <i>Gandá</i> .....	178

<b>CHAPTER 5:</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	185
<b>Limitations and Future Directions for Research</b>	195
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	199
<b>Appendix 1:</b>	
Letter of Support from <i>UP Babaylan</i> .....	200
<b>Appendix 2:</b>	
Plain Language Statement.....	201
<b>Appendix 3:</b>	
Consent Form.....	204
<b>Appendix 4:</b>	
Life Story Focus Guide.....	205
<b>Appendix 5:</b>	
Excerpt from Ferdie’s Interview on Dating and the Extended Friendship Network.....	206
<b>Appendix 6:</b>	
Excerpt from Ben’s Interview on <i>Swardspeak</i> .....	210
<b>Appendix 7:</b>	
<i>Vakler</i> Vocabulary .....	215
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	218

## Glossary of Terms

**Babaylan:** ...cross-dressing religious functionaries from the pre-colonial period (2001a, pp. 226-227).

**Bakla (also termed *bading*, *binabae*, *bayot*, *bantut*):** The Filipino term most widely used as a gloss for “homosexual” is *bakla*, a contraction of the words *babae* (female) and *lalake* (male). As an adjective, *bakla* means uncertainly, indecisiveness....*Bakla* refers specifically to men who are effeminate, with cross-dressing as a major index feature (Tan, 1995, p. 88)

**Barkada:** ...this unit is composed of a group or groups of people who come together for a specific purpose – as a workforce, going on a trip, or just being together. The *barkada* is loosely organised. Membership is not permanent. The members may be playmates, professional colleagues, or coworkers [sic] in religious or civic movements. While the structure of the *barkada* is loose, the organization is nevertheless important. It is from this unit that one derives psychological and economic support outside of the family. For instance, the acceptance in a *barkada*, particularly in a professional organization, is deemed necessary in promoting one’s career and enhancing one’s business. In times of crisis, the *kabarkada* (gang mates; professional colleagues) also come to help and provide emotional support, thereby strengthening group cohesion (Jocano, 1998, pp. 155-156).

**Coming out of the closet:** One of the most significant outcomes arising from the construction of the homosexual/heterosexual binary has been the creation of the conceptual homosexual “closet.” The closet is a cultural metaphor for concealment against discrimination and oppression, and its continuing existence attests to the fact that homophobia and sexual discrimination still remain as issues for significant concern. The act of “coming out” of the closet is of itself necessitated by the need to remain covert and closeted in order to avoid the potential for negative reactions and responses that can arise from a disclosure of being gay or lesbian.

**Days with the Lord (DWTL):** A three day long Catholic religious retreat that all of the participants attended during their third year of high school.

**Diwà:** ...is a configuration of the relationship between the physical body and the spiritual essence of being human. It is this harmony that transforms our potentials into

drives and our impulses into sentiments. These drives and sentiments, in turn, give rise to our physical, mental, and emotional capacity for action....[and]... enables us to adapt collectively to our environment....Thus viewed, *diwà* refers to the inner force that lies at the core of our *kaloóban* (selves) and from which emanate all personal and social sentiments.(Jocano, 2001, pp. 99-162).

**Gandá:** ...represents the sum total of *katángian* (traits) associated with anything – material or nonmaterial – that give the highest pleasure to the senses.” It is prominently manifested in physical appearance (*ayos*) and social character (*ugali*). These two referents complement each other to produce a pleasant experience. Behaviourally, even if a person has a pleasing appearance but his/her character (*ugali*) is not, he/she is not *magandá* (beautiful). The converse is also true. *Gandá* is a totality and not a mere aspect of a social, intellectual, and material reality.

*Gandá* is further seen as *katauhan* (personality). Sometimes the term *sarili* (physical self/self) is used to describe the totality of appearance associated with *gandá* in a person. The face, the body, and the character are not seen as separate entities but as complementing units that combine to form an expression of *gandá*. It is the collectivity that matters, not the individual unit or aspect of it.

The collectivity of *katauhan*, as an aesthetic judgement, is based on the relationship between a person’s physical attributes and his character – *mukhâ* (face), *katawán* (body, especially the trunk), and *ugali* (character). The central points of attention on the *mukhâ* (face) are the *pisngí* (cheeks), *ilóng* (nose), and *matá* (eyes). The cheeks are appraised as *magandá* if they are symmetrically shaped, free from pimples and scars, and rosy in colour. The nose must be *matangos* (aquiline). The eyes must have the following characteristics: *mapungay* (doe-eyed), *maluningning* (bright; sparkling), and *malalantík ang mga pilíkmatá* (long eyelashes). Also included in the *mukhâ* are the lips or *bibíg*, which ought to be *manipis* (thin) and *namúmulá-mulá* (reddish) (Jocano, 2001, pp. 135-142).

**GLBT:** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender.

**Hiya:** The foremost value [amongst Filipinos] is called *hiya*. It is the currency applied within the society, controlling and motivating individual and social behaviour. *Hiya* is shame. *Hiya* is a universal social sanction, creating a deep emotional realization of having failed to live up to the standards of society (Roces & Roces, 1986, pp. 33-34).

*Hiya* may be defined as a painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one's ego. It is a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed, unprotected, and unaccepted. It is a fear of abandonment, of 'loss of soul,' a loss not only of one's possessions or even of one's life, but of something perceived as more valuable than life itself, namely the ego, the self (Bulatao, 1964, p. 428).

***Kabaklaan:*** Like *kaloóban*, the term *kabaklaan* can be seen as derivative of the prefix *ka*, which roughly translated means "sharing," and broadly represents mutual involvement and togetherness. When joined to the term *bakla* (effeminate male), *kabaklaan* means something like "shared effeminacy." Just as the participants however, have expanded and reshaped their own identities and definitions of *bakla* to include "gay" and "homosexual", it is posited that the meanings associated with these terms also need to be inclusive of the more traditional elements associated with the gender of *bakla*. Therefore in recognition of the meanings given by participants to their own sexual and gendered selves, and with consideration for the conceptual framework and position taken in the current research project; the term *kabaklaan* will be defined in the study as "gayness," of which effeminacy forms a congruent and integral part, and is a phenomenon that is shared within the group by its members and is physically marked through language and comportment.

***Kaloóban:*** The term *kaloóban* is derived from the root word *loób*, meaning "inside." It is also used to refer to disposition, will, volition, feeling, and emotional assessment of external events....As a concept, *kaloóban* consists of the basic assumptions, premises, and postulates of the larger society that we have internalized as our own in the process of growing up as part of our feelings and guiding principles in our participation in community affairs as adults. Once internalized, assumptions, premises, and postulates serve as blueprints of behaviour that tell us, among others, what counts and what does not, what is proper and what is not. They are the rules that govern our life. We do things because we consider them rational, right, and acceptable. It is only rarely that we act on impulse. Metaphorically, *kaloóban* means entering into other persons' inner systems of symbols and meanings, and sharing with them the understanding of the surrounding world. The converse is also true – i.e., we allow others to enter our *kaloóban* and share with them our understanding of the surrounding world. This mutual involvement and togetherness is indicated by the prefix *ka*-....We mutually share our inner feelings, evaluation of events, and understanding of the situation we are in. It is through this

mutual sharing that our actions and ideals are properly communicated to and understood by others and our personalities are formed. If we do not share with other people our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, we are labelled as *makasarili* (selfish), a bad trait. *Kaloóban* is thus also used to refer to our “inner understanding,” about social realities in the environment. It is what takes place inside us as we confront these external realities. It is through the enactment in our observable behaviour of our inner understanding and knowing that we develop a personality of our own, our *sarili* [self].... *Kaloóban* functions as the internal code of meanings that enables a person to define the parameters of *sarili*....(Jocano, 2001, pp. 98-111).

***Loób/Labás (inside/outside):*** ...the major organizing principle around which revolve many of the Tagalog-Filipino’s systems of value...(Garcia, 1996, p. 99).

...we often use *loób* as the point of reference in describing our physical, mental, and emotional conditions.....*loób* [characterises]...the inner dimension of life [and]...implies the presence of an outer dimension so that, even if life is abstract, it can still be experienced in concrete terms. This outer dimension is called *labás* (outside). *Loób* represents the inner reality of life, and *labás* is its outer behavioural manifestation. The former is latent: the later is manifest. (Jocano, 2001, pp. 168-169).

***Maglaldad ng kapa:*** The local term for coming out, *maglaldad ng kapa* has a literal translation of unfurling one’s cape and was clearly coined in the context of the *parlorista bakla* (Tan, 2001a, p. 122).

**MSM:** Men who have Sex with Men.

**MM:** Metro Manila

**NCR:** National Capital Region

***Pagkababae:*** Femaleness.

***Pagkalalake:*** Maleness.

***Paglaruan ang mundo:*** To “play with the world.” Filipino gay men’s construction of cross-dressing. (Manalansan, 2000, p. 191)

***Parloristas:*** This is a generic term for low-income MSMs [men who have sex with men]...many of whom work in beauty parlors although there are also those working as domestic servants, small market vendors, and as waiters. For the average Filipino, the *parloristas*, who are found throughout the country, represent the entire “homosexual” population, defined as *bakla*...(Tan, 1995, p. 87)

***Pusong babae:*** ...a man with a woman's heart (Tan, 2001a, p. 122).

***Sarili:*** It refers to an individual as the subject of his/her own consciousness, of one's perception of his/her status and role vis-à-vis such phenomena as (1) physical body, (2) emotional well-being, and (3) mental state (Jocano, 2001, p. 97).

***Silahis:*** A local term for bisexual.

***Swardspeak:*** Various called jargon, argot, sublanguage, and lingo, and arbitrarily christened "swardspeak," this very colourful, intriguing, and indicatively *bakla*/homosexual language sees its efflorescence in the seventies....To talk about *swardspeak* as if it were an identifiable and actual language would be to miss the point. From the way the studies go on it...*swardspeak* is less an actual language than a linguistic feature that is *built* upon any language (in this case, either Tagalog-Filipino or Cebuano-Filipino), whose signifieds (sic) remain more or less constant, even as the signifiers vary: *swardspeak* is certainly nearly always loaded with sexual terms, as (homosexual) sex is the only one reality gays are obviously most obsessed with (Garcia, 1996, pp. 89-90).

***The Happy Room:*** During the three day long retreat (DWTL began on a Friday and ended on a Sunday), *the happy room* was the place where the *bakla* students slept and socialised together in an atmosphere of fun and congeniality. Knowledge of its existence had been passed down orally from one generation of students to the next, and had become an unpublicised though integral part of the retreat experience for each succeeding cohort of *baklas*. Later, when the participants had left high school *the happy room* was recreated on the Internet. All of the current study participants have access to the Internet either at home or at work or both, and in conjunction with texting are able to remain in regular contact with each other when a physical presence was not possible. *The happy room* was created for this purpose, and fundamentally, it is an online emailing facility. In effect *the happy room* is the electronic version and extension of the actual group, and an electronic communication system through which the individual members can maintain their friendships and relationships through the posting and sharing of emails.

***Tomboy:*** ...loosely equivalent to the butch dyke in western societies...the *tomboy* is constructed as a man trapped in a woman's body. Like the *bakla*, the *tomboy* has particular stereotyped niches, mainly as security guards and bus conductors (Tan, 2001a, p. 122).

**UP:** University of the Philippines.

**UP *Babaylan*:** University of the Philippines GLBT student advocacy organisation.

***Walang hiya:*** ...a recklessness regarding the social expectations of society, an inconsideration for the feelings of others, an absence of sensitivity to the censures of authority or society. It would thus be the opposite of *hiya*...since it is a lack of the painful emotion that should arise in one's relation to an authority figure or to society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation that should have been perceived as dangerous to one's ego. It is a lack of anxious care for society's acceptance. *Walang hiya*, by truism, is the absence of *hiya* or at least of the actual behavioural inhibitions which should follow upon *hiya* (Bulatao, 1964, p. 430).

***Vakler:*** Over time, the group had developed their own particular version and variation of *swardspeak* they have named *vakler* (a corruption of the term *bakla*) which is based on the use of Tagalog, English, and Spanish, though it can also be flavoured and influenced by other languages such as Japanese or French to provide a more "exotic" and nuanced sound and texture. *Vakler* never remains static because it is constantly and often spontaneously being re-thought, revised and reinvented by the participants to reflect new and changing life events and experiences, and so can be considered a sociolect rather than a dialect.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.”*

(Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis VI)

*“You’re born naked and the rest is drag.”*

(Quotation from African-American drag artist RuPaul)

*“You can probably compare us to let’s say flowers. You have different seeds to start with. You have eight seeds. You can plant them on the same ground with the same nutrients – same sunlight, same amount of water. And then when they bloom – flowers bloom – they are different and uniquely beautiful. But the important thing is the common ground. Same soil – same nutrients – same sun – same amount of water. Our support for each other. Our love for each other. That is what you can compare to the common ground. The soil. And that nurtured us into becoming the flowers that we are now.”*

(Quotation from one of the participants that appears in the study)

### ***Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Western Perspective***

Gender and its consanguine, sexuality, are the codified bodily imprints given to conceptualisations and interpretations of that part of being human that disturbs and flouts the tangible and the easily discernable aspects of corporeal life and experience. It is precisely for these reasons that there has been a concerted effort in the West to “capture” and give meaning to these human phenomena that in more recent times have come to be recognised, identified and labelled as gender and sexuality. Historically, human reproduction has been viewed as the cause of strong and natural urges that are responsible for libidinous arousal in a person. Gender is the term used to describe the appropriate social behaviour and appearance that align with a person’s sex as a man or a woman. Masculinity and femininity are viewed as complementary but opposing fields of expression that became attached to human sexuality in such a way as to inspire a

mutual attraction between the sexes, metaphorically likened to the magnetic attraction between the north and south poles of two magnets. These mainstream representations are elucidated in descriptive terms and discursive labels including sexual magnetism (when describing the biological attraction between a man and a woman), or animal magnetism, which is a metaphor used to describe a primitive and innate masculine biology imbued with social characteristics and behaviours reputedly responsible for unshackling feelings of lustful attraction and attention in women towards men. In women, biological characteristics discursively appear in the use of terms and expressions like “femininity” or “feminine charms” when attracting the attention of a desired male. Gender, then, becomes normalised not just as the appropriate behaviour for one’s biological sex, but as a kind of socio-sexual allure – an essence or essential quality that is biologically driven and attached to erotic desire – one’s sexuality.

A third imprint codified to encapsulate the meanings and purposes to which gender and sexuality are determined and designated is another intangible social marker, and that is culture. Historically, male-to-male love has always existed, and when focussing his discussions on the sexual ethics of the ancient Greeks during the classical Hellenic age, Greenberg notes that at that time “It was the quality of the relationship that was important, not the sex of the partner” (1988, p. 205). In the modern era of Western cultural development it is sexuality and sexual identity that are the criteria used to demarcate and differentiate between individuals and the types and nature of the relationships they form. As Cameron & Kulick (2003, p. 4) suggest:

*Sexuality* has entered common usage as a shorthand term for being either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ – that is, it denotes a stable erotic preference for people of the same / the other *sex*, and the social identities which are based on having such a preference (e.g. ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’).

Sexual identity represents something of an end product or outcome elicited through a process of adolescent sexual development which begins with being born either male or female (one’s sex), and is then characterised and expressed through gender (being masculine or feminine). The process is thought to be completed when an individual has established a sexual identity as being either homosexual or heterosexual. In Western mainstream cultures the successful resolution of this process is to have developed a hetero-identified sexuality because it is regarded as the predetermined and “natural” outcome of innate biological drives and essences. Gender expression, as a precursor to identity development, is critical to the process because having the “correct”

gender for one's sex (masculinity for boys and femininity for girls) is a prerequisite in achieving a (hetero) sexual resolution. The importance of "getting it right" is exemplified in mainstream culture when parents, concerned that their son or daughter might be gay or lesbian, seek out "professional help" to try and rectify the problem. There are also examples where parents write or contact the mainstream media to acquire advice because they fear their son is either behaving in an effeminate manner or their daughter is displaying traits of masculinity. The "problem" as it is seen at this stage of development is that their son or daughter will not grow up to have the correct gender to be considered a "normal" heterosexual<sup>1</sup>. In some instances, inappropriate gender attributes and behaviours are deemed to be "fixable" (usually through the utilisation of "normalising" gender role reinforcement techniques and methods) because of the belief that the child or adolescent has not yet developed a concrete and bona fide sexual identity. To put it another way, gender is the idiomatic medium of expression through which sexuality and sexual identities are conceived, legitimised and (if heterosexual) publicly endorsed and celebrated. On this point Cameron & Kulick (2003) comment:

The conflation of gender deviance and homosexuality comes about because heterosexuality is in fact an indispensable element in the dominant ideology of gender. This ideology holds that real men axiomatically desire women, and true women want men to desire them. Hence, if you are not heterosexual you cannot be a real man or a true woman; and if you are not a real man or a true woman then you cannot be heterosexual. What this means is that sexuality and gender have a 'special relationship,' a particular kind of mutual dependence which no analysis of either can overlook (pp. 6-7).

Gender and sexuality appear then as two peas in the corporeal pod, and are considered to be stable, static and unchanging because the basis of human life is built on the fixed reality of continuous biological reproduction. In Western countries with a Judeo-Christian historical background or heritage, this means that a man and a woman join together for the purpose of guaranteeing the procreation of human life. To identify as homosexual or to engage in "homosexual acts" is considered a sin against God and nature, leaving the disavowed individual in need of moral help and guidance in assisting them to denounce their homosexuality and return to the heterosexual fold (or if this proves unattainable, to become celibate). As Greenberg has noted however, in the pre-

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<sup>1</sup> The following links have been included to provide examples of this sort of thinking.  
<http://www.theonion.com/content/node/31073>  
<http://ask.metafilter.com/mefi/53429>

modern world there was no social concept of exclusive homosexuality or indeed of a homosexual person. He elaborates:

It was the production and dissemination of a medical discourse in the recent past that gave birth not just to the *concept* of a homosexual person, but also to homosexuals themselves, and at the same time, to their antitwins, heterosexual persons (1988, pp. 486-487).

The creation of the identity of the homosexual and the representation of homosexuality within scientific medical discourse resulted in the creation of complex sociocultural issues and outcomes for those identified as homosexual. Where once there existed a personal aesthetics of desire governed by an individual's own ethical choices and moral principles, the creation of the modern homosexual (and by default the heterosexual) signified a power shift from private control and management of sexuality by the individual to public control and institutional governance perpetrated through state interventions into the lives of its citizens (Foucault, 1978; Greenberg, 1988). The early inculcation by medico-scientific discourse of homosexuality as pathology resulted in the creation of public discourses of gender and sexual deviance which has given rise to widespread social discrimination and castigation of homosexuals often characterised by homophobia (the fear or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality). As Cameron and Kulick have noted:

Prejudice does not focus only on the supposedly 'unnatural' sexual practices of gay men and lesbians, but also on their alleged deficiencies as representatives of masculinity or femininity. Gay men are commonly thought to be effeminate (hence such insulting epithets as English *pansy*), while lesbians are assumed to be 'mannish' or 'butch.' Conversely, straight people who flout gender norms are routinely suspected of being homosexual (2003, p. 6).

One of the most significant outcomes arising from the construction of the homosexual/heterosexual binary has been the creation of the conceptual homosexual "closet." The closet is a cultural metaphor for concealment against discrimination and oppression, and its continuing existence attests to the fact that homophobia and sexual discrimination still remain as issues for significant concern. The act of "coming out" of the closet is of itself necessitated by the need to remain covert and closeted in order to avoid the potential for negative reactions and responses that can arise from a disclosure of being gay or lesbian. The fact that there is no heterosexual or "straight" equivalent is of course because heterosexuality is the dominant paradigm for gender and sexuality and appears as the legitimate cultural blueprint for sexual relations and sexual

development. There is no need within social discourse for a person to attest to being “straight,” because it is the assumed and accepted as the sexual norm. In recent times, gay liberation and the development of a gay and lesbian focused politics of gender and sexuality has had an impact on the closet in as much as gays and lesbians now have something concrete to come out to – gay and lesbian communities, community groups and supporting networks.

My own research interest in gender and sexuality studies began during my undergraduate years at university when I pursued an academic interest in the various political discourses and theoretical frameworks that addressed issues of gay and lesbian life and experience. This interest culminated in undertaking and completing a research thesis in my honours year that investigated the “coming out” experiences of a small group of young men aged in their late teens to mid-twenties who lived in my home city of Perth, Western Australia. I wanted to discover if “coming out” in the 1990’s had significantly changed over the past few decades. Unfortunately, the core issues that negatively impacted on the act of “coming out” were basically the same. Homophobia (including religious homophobia) remained as a socially threatening force engendering fear of discriminatory reactions if the participants disclosed to significant others that they were gay. Early experiences during adolescence of isolation and loneliness resulting from living in the closet had created a high degree of emotional turmoil and stress. This was compounded by low self-esteem issues arising from the participants’ belief that living a lie by hiding their true selves was being deceitful, particularly to their parents. An outcome of the study was that the main structural factor that impacted on the young men’s lives was cultural conceptualisations of heteronormative masculinity and sexual identity. Homophobia and definitions and representations of homosexuality as “un-masculine” were shown to have evoked a range of negative emotional responses during adolescence that had included internalised homophobia, suicide ideation and one attempted suicide. An exposure to gay culture was shown to have had a positive influence over the “coming out” process by providing the young men with an alternative range of possibilities and choices. In a physical sense the gay community had afforded a safe haven against a potentially hostile outside world, and emotionally was able to provide a source of support and understanding. The most influential role that exposure to gay cultural life had engendered however was in presenting the young men with an expanded range of gender choices other than the normative masculine stereotypes they had previously been exposed to in mainstream culture. The experiences participants had

within the parameters of gay cultural life indicated that an exposure to alternative representations of gender expression had a positive and affirming effect by helping them to resist the societal inculcation of masculine stereotypes and to explore their options when making important decisions about their own identities (Macdonald, 1996).

### *Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Cross-cultural Perspective*

It seemed apparent that the caging of desire within the rigid cultural identity framework of the Western homosexual/heterosexual binary was to say the least debilitating for those who did not aspire to its paradigmatic principles or to its structural forms. When I began writing my doctoral thesis I had developed a strong research interest in examining the ways in which Southeast Asian cultures experience homoeroticism and how related dynamics of gender and sexuality were being articulated and negotiated in these cultural settings. Through my readings of relevant Southeast Asian literature on gender and sexuality it had come to my attention that the Philippines operated on a gender-based system of social relations. I decided to conduct my doctoral research project in that country in order to investigate how gender and sexuality were both culturally and theoretically framed and experienced. I chose Metro Manila because of the connection I had established with a middle-class gay Philippine national (introduced in this study by the pseudonym of Ben) via the Internet. Through the conversations we had, I became aware of incongruities in the way that gender and sexuality were being conceptualised and expressed cross-culturally, and this further aroused my research interest in pursuing an investigation into these differences.

A review of relevant literature in the subject area revealed a general lack of research studies conducted in the Southeast Asia region including the Philippines that specifically addressed the topic of non-mainstream genders and sexualities. This scarcity is an issue to which a number of social researchers have alluded.

The paucity of information on the sexual activities of Christian Filipinos prompted one clinical psychologist to report recently that Filipino attitudes and behaviour in the sexual realm are not much studied and are certainly not well understood as yet (Sechrest, 1966, p. 32)...[and]...when the subject of Christian Filipino sexual behaviour is limited to homosexuality and transvestism; published sources on this subject are almost non-existent (D. V. Hart, 1968, pp. 211-212).

In both a theoretical and empirical sense, homosexuality – in broad terms – has been a well explored subject in Western countries. In the literature, homosexual behavior's etiology, dynamics and risks are commonly explained employing

varying perspectives and paradigms. Much of the current knowledge on the subject [in the Philippines]...has been generated in the United States. Similar data from other developed countries have been collected as well, but they are fewer than those derived in the US. Developing countries have not seen numerous research efforts on homosexuality except beginning in the late 1980's when international action to prevent the spread of AIDS was initiated (Lee, 2002, p. 36)

...we...lack detailed historical studies of the transformations in Asian discourses which have incited the proliferation of new modes of eroticised subjectivity. We also lack studies of the changes in economies, social organization, and political systems which have created the spaces for the emergence of Asian gay and lesbian scenes. Current histories, ethnographies, and sociologies of gay and lesbian identities are overwhelming from the West, and we need studies of gay Bangkok, gay Seoul, gay Mumbai, gay Taipei, and other major Asian cities that are as detailed and comprehensive as those we have of gay Sydney, gay New York, gay London, and gay Amsterdam (P. A. Jackson, 2001, pp. 1-2)

When planning my research I noted there was considerable concern amongst Philippine academics and social researchers that Western models and social theories were being unconditionally applied to Filipino everyday life. Following the tenets of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology), they claim that outcomes of the data gathered from utilising Western theories, methods, and applications, did not accurately portray the legitimate Filipino social and cultural experience. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* is defined by Enriquez (cited in V G Enriquez, 1990) as referring to “psychological theory, knowledge, method and application developed through the Filipino culture as basis.” Enriquez argues that there is an unwritten bias within Filipino psychology that relies on the Western psychological tradition for its directives, and comments that “a growing number of social scientists have been wary of the inappropriateness or even patent inability of Western models in the Third World setting” (1989, p. 121). When discussing the applicability of Western social science concepts, values and methods within Asian societies and cultures, Espiritu (1989, pp. 111-118) argues that:

The traditional social sciences which have been developed as part of the totality of learning in the West have been brought over to Asia. It is now becoming increasingly evident that the validity of such social sciences, whether in the realm of research theory or of action policy, can no longer be accepted uncritically. An appreciation of what is valid or invalid, applicable or inapplicable is therefore imperative.

Such analysis is necessary not only as an academic venture; social change is basic to the Asian aspiration for modernization and the need is urgent for such change to be directed towards the achievement of what may well be Asian as

distinguished from non-Asian goals....There is a need for escaping the universalizing that characterizes much of the social sciences as they have developed in Western academic circles....It should be constantly borne in mind that there are limits to the applicability of Western concepts, values and method to Asian realities....With a commitment to intellectual efforts with a decidedly Asian value base, more genuine works of scholarships in the social sciences should come out of the academic world. With the growing data from field works and social sciences which enable us to verify the referents of concepts in our respective countries, we may usefully embark on the ambitious project of setting up a theory for the developing Asian nations, and in the process, hopefully, understand ourselves.

Examples given by Filipino researchers and academics illustrate the problematic of utilising Western models, concepts, and values uncritically. These examples highlight the need to develop concepts and definitions in the social sciences that reflect an indigenous perspective. Using concepts such as household, family, literacy, income, marriage, education, religion and the like, Feliciano (1989, p. 104) points out that:

...in diagnostic studies wherein these concepts need to be stated in more refined or precise terms some adaptation is necessary to avoid getting inaccurate data which all too often results in researcher frustration. This is so frequently overlooked since it is so convenient *not* [author's emphasis] to study these concepts in their new setting with all their attendant institutional trappings and associated values.

Take for instance the phrase *religious affiliation*. In the West, where individualism and not familism prevails, this implies not only membership of an individual in a religious group, such as the Protestant group, but usually religious preference as well. In the Philippines, where close family and community ties are predominant, religious affiliation becomes a family or community matter. Hence, the term usually does not imply religious preference of the individual.

Another example is concerned with *family types*. In this country, one may not find a simple or nuclear family defined and interpreted according to Western standards. For, although it may appear simple or nuclear structurally, functionally it usually partakes of the character of the extended type.

The Philippine academic and social researcher Michael Tan discusses the dearth of gender and sexuality studies that have been conducted in the Philippines and comments on the problems that Western researchers have had in understanding local forms and expressions of gender and sexuality. He elucidates that:

The high public visibility of the *bakla* and *tomboy* – complete with cross-dressing in varying degrees – is often interpreted as public tolerance, even



acceptance, of homosexuality in the Philippines. The few published articles on male homosexuality in the Philippines, written by Westerners (D. V. Hart, 1968; Whitam & Mathy, 1986), focus on the *bakla* and this acceptance. This interpretation is not quite accurate: “acceptance” is conditional, as long as the *bakla* remain confined to certain occupational niches and fulfil certain stereotypes (2001a, pp. 122-123).

In his book “Philippine Gay Culture: The Last Thirty Years,” Neil Garcia (1996, p. xvi) points out that as a result of cultural imperialism and the globalisation and expansion of Western systems of knowledge, “a certain kind of equivalency” exists in the Philippines between Western and indigenous sexual frameworks which is problematical when analysing gender and sexuality from a local perspective. In particular, Garcia argues that the effeminate cross-dressing Filipino *bakla* have been portrayed and pathologised as Western style gender inverts because local forms of gender identify and experience have been misinterpreted and conflated with (homo) sexual orientation and identity. As a result, the cross-dressing *bakla* have often been assigned within the various identity categories of transgenderism, transvestism and transsexualism. He concludes that “...the predominant framing of the issue of homosexuality in the United States is within the discourse of orientation, not gender; accordingly, the homosexual orientation does not necessarily produce gender inversions in persons who possess it” (1996, p. xix). After due consideration of the arguments, points and issues raised by these academic writers and researchers, it appeared little had changed in terms of the continuing paucity of Southeast Asian gender and sexuality research (particularly in the Philippines), or of the incorporation and application of indigenous knowledge, concepts, values and methods within the overall research design. As Berg (1989, pp. 3-4) elaborates:

Data-gathering techniques are intentionally coupled with various theoretical perspectives, linking method to theory. Data gathering is not distinct from theoretical orientations. Rather, data are intrinsically associated with the motivation for choosing a given subject, the conduct of the study, and ultimately the analysis.

The data on gender and sexuality in this dissertation are organised in an interpretative theoretical framework that is primarily drawn from Philippine-centred theoretical texts and literature, and this was done in order to bring a greater degree of cultural authenticity and analytical accuracy and clarity to the study.

When I arrived in Manila in January 2003, I became acquainted with Ben’s group of close friends who had known each other since their early school days. The

middle-class friendship group of eight young men became the focus of my fourteen month fieldwork research project, and I “hung out” with the group as a participant observer. The Philippines has a long historic tradition of oral storytelling, and so part of the research design includes the ethnographic method of collecting life stories which I deployed by conducting a series of informal interviews with the group members. I purposefully chose to place boundaries on the project by limiting the study to a small group of participants, because I wanted to obtain a deep and rich source of descriptive data. The distinctions between the upper, middle, and lower classes in the Philippines are very clearly defined, and I was fortunate in having ready research access to a friendship group of middle-class “gay” young men. It is due to the limitations placed upon the study by the factors of age, generation, location and social class, that it has achieved a high degree of research rigour. Broader qualitative research studies addressing the topic of “gay” life in the Philippines are likely to produce more general and amorphous forms of descriptive data. Subsequent studies would then be required in order to verify and clarify the nature and content of the findings from the original study. The limitations of this study over which I had no control are discussed in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

By the time I concluded my fieldwork trip to Metro Manila I had gained considerable empirical knowledge and understanding of how the Philippine gender system operates as a *modus operandi* for structuring social relations. I had also developed an increased awareness of how gender was conceptualised, experienced and negotiated by these young men through “hanging out” with the group members and documenting their life stories and histories. The advantage of conducting an ethnographic study in the Philippines was that it had allowed me the chance to experience everyday life over an extended period of time, and thus to get a “feel” for the environment and culture in which I was living. To put it more succinctly, I came to realise there is a considerable difference between theorising about a social phenomenon and experiencing it. My fourteen month stay in Manila gave me the opportunity to bridge that gap. I need to add the disclaimer that as a non-local I could not actually walk in the shoes, so to speak, of the participants that I had come to know. As a Westerner I was bound to have a different experiential perspective than those who had been born, grown up and were living their lives in the Philippines. Another issue to consider was my social and financial circumstances and arrangements. My university scholarship stipend when converted to pesos was a good income by Filipino standards, and I was

able to live in a small but comfortable apartment in one of the more desirable housing locations in Quezon City, close to the University of the Philippines. I did not have to go out to work each day and earn an income, which allowed me the opportunity to virtually come and go as I pleased without any significant restrictions on my time or daily routines. This meant I was somewhat “cocooned” from the normal rigours and pressures of everyday life in the Philippines, and I was aware this could contribute to experiencing the local culture and population from a slightly romanticised viewpoint. That being said, over the period of time I was there I felt myself becoming more and more drawn into the culture and lifestyle – something I expect many other ethnographers have experienced before me.

Of particular relevance to this study is how socialising and “hanging out” with the group and the immersion within a social environment principally structured around gender effeminacy and performance, had allowed me the opportunity to get a sense and feel for this kind of gendered expressionism (referred to in the study by the Filipino term *kabaklaan*), which was enacted and performed through the group members’ interactive discourse and behaviour<sup>2</sup>. Earlier in this chapter it was discussed how in Western cultures gender is eroticised and given expression through sexuality and sexual identity. In the traditional Philippine gender system it does not need to be resolved in this way. Tan (2001a) points out that historically in Philippine society and culture there were only *bakla* and *lalake* (real men). “A proper *bakla* would never have sex with another *bakla* for that would be tantamount to lesbianism.” (p. 121). As Garcia has already mentioned, in the West you can identify as gay or homosexual without necessitating effeminacy. This issue was given attention in my 1996 “coming out” study, where I found that it was not out of a concern that being gay or homosexual meant actually being effeminate, but rather, as I mentioned earlier, was out of being considered by society as “un-masculine,” and this was an issue that caused considerable conflict, anxiety and pain for the young men concerned. These feelings and beliefs were attributed to issues of sexual identity and the inculcation of established cultural norms of heteronormative masculinity. For the young Filipino men who participated in this study “coming out” (*magladlad ng kapa*) took quite a different road. It is within the contextual framework of “coming out” that the conclusions reached in this dissertation

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<sup>2</sup> Under the Philippine gender system the closest word to homosexual is *bakla* – a Filipino term used to describe men who are effeminate (a more detailed explanation can be found in the glossary of terms). There is no Filipino word for heterosexual. In this study the participants all self-identify as *bakla/gay homosexual*, however when the group gets together socially to relax and unwind, it is generally the *bakla* part of their identity that they give expression to.

are decisively situated. “Coming out” was considered an effective structuring mechanism and focal point from which to draw together the data presented in the study. *Maglaldad ng kapa* can also be understood as an embodiment of the participants’ life journeys and experiences together, and when coupled with the study’s own self-ascribing metaphor of *pagbukadkad ng bulaklak* (blooming of the flower), express and bring meaning to the inner character and essence of this research dissertation.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

Studies undertaken by Western researchers in Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines and Thailand, have repeatedly attempted to understand sex and gender diversity by applying Western sexual theories, categories, and identities as universal paradigms for interpreting and describing the differing sex and gender practices and relationships they encounter. This is because in Western culture and society, gender and sexuality research have historically been formulated and understood in terms of the omnipresent and conceptual homosexual/heterosexual blueprint for human relationships. The homo/hetero binary has determined the construction of sexual categories (including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transvestite) and circumscribed patterns of sexual and gender identities, behaviours and practises, which have influenced discourse and knowledge systems including medicine, law, and the social sciences.

The homosexual/heterosexual paradigm has its foundation in the social constructionist/essentialist debates surrounding the nature of human sexuality, and is important because of their influences in mapping over non-Western patterns of gender and sexual relations. Briefly, the essentialist argument poses that human sexuality is a biological given, and therefore informs on a person's sexual orientation, behaviours, and activities (De Cecco & Elia, 1993). Sexual behaviour is said to be transhistorical, thus taking precedence over historically determined variables. Differences in sexual behaviour (exemplified in the "effeminate" male or "masculine" female), are assumed to be the consequence of underlying biological or psychological differences that exist between those individuals, (Vance, 1989; Weeks, 1991), therefore gender is thought to be sexually determined. Although homosexuality was regarded as "natural" in so far as its causation could be located in nature, medical and psychological theories of sexually gendered inversion (males adopting female-identifying characteristics and females displaying masculine-identifying characteristics), stereotyped the roles of male and female identities and behaviours (De Cecco & Elia, 1993; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

From a constructionist viewpoint, the concept of identity is not innate and unchanging, but is socially constructed and culturally determined by historical factors and circumstance. Constructionists argue that homosexuality is a nineteenth century invention that saw the social creation of a particular cultural personage with a specific identity – “the homosexual” (Greenberg, 1988; Laumann et al., 1994; Vance, 1989). At the same cultural moment as the homosexual person was created, so too (by default) was the heterosexual, and along the way both sexualities have been imbued with specific gender traits and behaviours. For those non-Western societies who have historically not developed in this way, sex and gender can hold very different cultural meanings and interpretations. When tracing pre-colonial concepts of gender and sexuality in the Philippines, Garcia (1996) uses his *bakla*/homosexual model to describe relations of gender and sexuality. His findings suggest that all the local Philippine cultures have to address in terms of sexuality and gender are maleness (*pagkalalake*), femaleness (*pagkababae*), and a mixture of both (represented by *bakla*, *binabae*, *bayot*, et cetera).

Juxtaposed with the homo/hetero distinction, these identities readily confirm the Philippines-specific genderisation of sexual desire, by which homosexuality is confined to the effeminate and mannish personhoods of the *bakla* and *tomboy* respectively. On the other hand, exactly by the same token, heterosexuality can only be attributed to the ‘girl’ (*babae*) and the ‘boy’ (*lalake*). This coupling of homosexual object choice with gender transitivity is what I call the ‘miscomprehension’ – by Philippine society as a whole – of the Western concept of homo/sexuality. To the degree that sexual orientation refers simply to sexual object choice, one’s masculinity or femininity need not affect nor be affected by it. To think otherwise would be to misunderstand what the words homosexual and homosexuality – and heterosexual and heterosexuality – mean (pp. 202-203).

The expansion of Western capitalism into the global marketplace has seen the cultural exportation (particularly from America) of Westernised sexual identities into Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines (Altman, 1996, 2001; Garcia, 1996). The importation for example, of television programs, cinematic film, literature and pornography, has exposed indigenous cultures to Western ways of thinking about sex and gender. In turn, this has influenced how same-sex attracted males conceptualise and negotiate their own gender and sexuality. A desire to partake in the contemporary “gay” world necessarily indicates bridges and intersections with Western gay men; however the desire to retain cultural specificities of their own sexuality and gender has meant that Filipino *bakla* are necessarily reinterpreting Western notions of gender and sexuality at

the local level (Altman, 1996; Garcia, 1996). Currently, there is considerable debate in social science research about the extent to which Western categories of sex and gender are universal givens. One school of thought holds that while there are some differences in the patterns of homosexual expression, this can be understood as cultural variations of a shared and universal homosexual identity (Sullivan, 2001). There is another school that views the expression of sexuality and gender as culturally defined and specific, therefore requiring a theoretical and interpretative understanding initiated at the local level of cultural experience (Bolton, 1995; Garcia, 1996; Marcus, 1998). In other words, rather than to simply impose Western theoretical frameworks of research onto non-Western sexualities (outside-in), a better approach would be to study how indigenous cultures conceived of their own modes of sexual expression (inside-out). The Philippine anthropologist, philosopher, and ethnographer F. Landa Jocano (2001) argues that in order to understand Filipino society and culture it is necessary to first have an understanding of the Filipino worldview. He elaborates that to have an understanding of how Filipinos view the world is to have an understanding of the internal representations Filipinos have of their external environment, and of how they see the world “looking out”. The Filipino worldview, he argues, is central in understanding how Filipinos view culture as shared knowledge. Enriquez (1990) discusses the evolution and development of Sikolohiyang Pilipino in the Philippines as a framework for theorising and studying the Filipino psyche through the study of language and linguistics. He explains that the study of *diwà* (“psyche”) is referent to a wealth of ideas expressed through the philosophical concept of “essence” and includes other concepts ranging from awareness, motives, and behaviour. A key tenet of Sikolohiyang Pilipino is that Western research theories and strategies should not simply be applied uncritically, but that care should be taken in utilising them because the sources for theoretical explanations are very different from those found in the Philippines (Bonifacio, 1980; Ventura, 1980). When exploring aspects of contemporary middle-class Filipino life, Mulder (1997) argues that for Filipinos, culture is viewed as knowledge, and it is this knowledge that informs on the practice of everyday life.

The current study will draw upon relevant Philippine-centred theoretical texts and literature to bring a greater degree in clarity of understanding to the research project. It is proposed that an engagement with theoretical and cultural knowledge generated at the local level of cultural understanding will provide a strong interpretative and theoretical base from which to approach the study.

## *Method*

Ethnography was chosen as an appropriate research style for this study because it fitted a number of research-based criteria. The first consideration was that ethnography is usually focused on the study of a small group of subjects undertaken within their own cultural environment, and it describes that culture or way of life from the local's point of view (Geertz, 1973). An ethnographic approach employs participant observation as a method in which observers participate in the daily lives of the subjects under study and employs data collection techniques including naturalistic observation, documentary analysis and in-depth interviews. While these methods can be used independently, what marks their ethnographic application is they are used to study people in "the field," in which the researcher participates directly, and where there is an intent to explore the meanings of this setting and its behaviour and activities from the inside (J. D. Brewer, 2000; Geertz, 1973). Mulder (1997) elaborates on this point when he discusses how the anthropologist understands everyday life as life taken-for-granted, where people know what to think and say, while they act in accordance with their life world. He concludes:

Technically, the social scientist calls this their "cultural construction of everyday life," that is, a mindset that may be nothing more than logical and taken for granted by the insiders of a society but that may be just as nonunderstandable [sic] to the outsider as the native language and way of communication. The anthropologist's task is to search for the hidden assumptions informing the everyday life of the people he studies and to make them as clear as possible.

The vantage point of an outsider-observer is particular. In his attempt to understand other people's lives, he tries to see, participate, and penetrate, but he will always remain a stranger, hopefully accepted and respected, yet never "one of us". This does not necessarily doom the anthropological effort, and while it is true that the knowledge it generates is subjective, as much as insider's knowledge is, it may also be expected that the tension it generates between the local and the extraneous points of view contributes to a better understanding of local, autochthonous life. The best that can be hoped for is that it results in a serious discussion that clarifies both indigenous assumptions and outsiders' prejudices (p. viii).

It is precisely within the textuality of discussion that ethnography-as-method holds relevance, because it encourages discursive interactions between the researcher and the researched, and through these interactions thick descriptive data are generated (Geertz, 1973). This leads to considering how an engagement in the fieldwork process allows for the generation of theory (inside-out) at the local level, rather than pre-



emptying or over-determining this discovery by applying established theoretical principles and frameworks (outside-in) that may not in the end produce an accurate description or interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Marcus warns that ethnography should not be over-determined before it begins.

Instead of the danger of too easily accepting naturalized categories, this time, the danger leading to the premature closing down of ethnography to possibility is the too rapid assimilation of the research project and its definition by theoretical terms that have been so influential from work over the past decade....The anthropologist really does have to find something out she doesn't already know, and she has to do it in terms that ethnography permits in its own developed form of empiricism (1998, pp. 17-18).

A final consideration is that an empirical anthropological approach in the fieldwork process would provide a potentially rich source of data that might otherwise be lost or contaminated by utilising a more formalised methodological approach. In many of the social sciences such as anthropology and sociology this is an acceptable process (Walters, 2002). A comparable ethnographic study undertaken by Ralph Bolton is an example of this process.

To gather information, I conducted interviews...and collected written materials from both official sources and gay publications. Mostly, however, I hung out in gay venues, observing and engaging the men who frequented these places in conversations about their lives....Fieldwork, as I understand it, is not a nine-to-five job. It's a twenty-four hours a day on call.... It is easy for lab scientists working with animals, or even for those in the human sciences gathering data by administering questionnaires or conducting focus groups, to segregate their professional and personal time and to separate their roles as scientists and as individuals. But for ethnographers, life is not so simple. All perceptions and experiences are potentially data (Bolton, 1995).

On a practical level, ethnography was considered to be the best research tool for gathering the kind of data required for the research investigation. The following section of this chapter will provide a detailed account of how that was achieved.

### *Designing the Research Process*

#### *Personal Considerations*

My connection with the Philippines began as a result of internet chat room conversations I had with a male Philippine national who was living in Metro-Manila

(hereafter referred to as MM)<sup>3</sup>. The conversations took place over a twelve-month period, during which time a personal and intimate relationship began to develop between us. Initial conversations came about because of our shared interest in each other's cultures and the fact that we were both gay. Ben (a pseudonym used for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality) began to tell me what it was like to be gay in the Philippines, and it became evident that there were cultural anomalies in the ways that gender and sexuality were being conceptualised and expressed when compared to a Western country like Australia. My curiosity was aroused, and I became interested in formally pursuing an investigation into these differences. I therefore decided to make this exploration the focus of my doctoral research study. Soon after my arrival in MM Ben and I decided that we would become partners, and after the fieldwork was completed he returned with me to Australia. We now live together as a couple, and Ben has been officially recognised by the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as my de facto partner.

### ***Entry into the Field***

I first visited MM for a three-week period in November 2002. The trip was planned as a forerunner to the actual fieldwork study, with the purpose of testing my orientation to the field. It was intended to help me determine if I could live and function in a different cultural milieu to my own. In other words it would give me an opportunity to “get a feel” for the social setting I intended to live and work in for the longer term study.

[The Republic of the Philippines]...is an archipelago comprised of over 7000 islands with a total land area of about 300,000 square kilometres. It is bounded on the west and north by the South China Sea, on the south by the Celebes Sea, and on the east by the Pacific Ocean. It has a tropical climate characterised by hot, wet and humid conditions most of the year (HAIN, 2002, p. 2)

As of May, 2002, the Philippines had a population of 76.5 million with approximately one third of the population living in the National Capital Region (NCR) with an average population density of 15,617 persons per square kilometre. The statistics indicated that by 2005 the population living in the NCR was projected to be 11, 289,368. (HAIN, 2002; NSO, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> He was later to become one of the participants in my study; therefore I will call him by his research pseudonym of Ben.

Another reason for my visit was so I could make initial contacts with organisations and academic staff that might be a source of local information, knowledge and assistance. Prior to my departure for the Philippines I established email contact with a leading Philippine academic who had agreed to meet with me and discuss my proposed study and field trip. I had also been in touch with the Dean of the Asian Centre at the University of the Philippines – Diliman campus – (hereafter referred to as UP), and he had also agreed to meet with me to discuss my research and affiliation with the university as a visiting research fellow. This status would allow me access to university resources such as the library, and the use of a computer on campus. I would also have the opportunity to attend official functions and meet with other university staff and students. Importantly, an affiliation with the university would also legitimise my application for a research visa with the Bureau of Immigration in the Philippines when I returned. Ben had arranged for suitable accommodation close to UP, and was my initial contact on arriving in the country. During my brief stay in the Philippines I was able to negotiate an application for research fellow status at UP which was to be ratified before my return the following year. In addition, I spoke with two Filipino academics at the university who have researched and published widely in the area of sexuality and gender in the Philippines, and who kindly agreed to advise me on issues including local protocols and cultural sensitivities. I also contacted UP *Babaylan* – a gay organisation affiliated with UP – who were willing to provide a letter of support for the study to be undertaken<sup>4</sup>. The organisation also acts in an advisory capacity to the university on issues of sexuality and gender<sup>5</sup>.

### ***The Study Participants***

During the three weeks I was in MM Ben introduced me to his group of friends, and we met socially on several occasions. It was during these interludes that I began to learn more about his friends. The friendship group (including Ben) consisted of eight young males aged between 23 and 26 years. For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity they have been allocated the pseudonyms of Pao, Manuel, Ferdi, Angelo, Danny, Alfonso, and Benjie<sup>6</sup>. It is important to mention that the group in fact consists of

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1, for a sample copy of the letter of support from UP Babaylan.

<sup>5</sup> It was a requirement of the university's Human Ethics Committee that I obtain a letter of support from a recognised gay organisation in the Philippines before the Committee would give the project ethical clearance.

<sup>6</sup> All of the participants who are members of the friendship group under study have been allocated pseudonyms, and this procedure has been extended to include any other individual who has been named by participants during the course of their discussions. It is also the case that out of consideration for the safety and security of other generations of high school students of a similar gender background, the name

eleven members; however the other three were living overseas during the interview stage and were unavailable to participate in the study. These members were however mentioned by the participants during their interviews, and will therefore be referred to by the pseudonyms of Jao, Chris, and Bing.

I learned that *barkadas* (friendship groups) are an intrinsic part of cultural life in the Philippines, and different types of *barkadas* exist within Filipino society. It was also explained to me by several of the participants that while their group could indeed be described as a “gay” *barkada*, it held far deeper meanings, feelings, and emotions for them than simply being a participating member of a gay group. Important differences were that the participants had been together since school, and membership in the group was regarded by them as permanent and for life. Moreover, while the group was formed out of a shared experience of feeling different from others at school, it was because of their interwoven and shared life journeys and experiences that they had galvanised together as a close knit unit of friends. Another point made was that many of the group were also members of other *barkadas*, including a singing group, a church youth group, a literary group, a drama group, and a group whose shared interest was comics. In these instances membership was not exclusively *bakla*, but also contained heterosexual men and women who may or may not be of the same or similar age as the study participants. The various *barkadas* mentioned were groups that provided access to others who shared similar hobbies or interests; however these *barkadas* were of significantly less importance to the various members than their own friendship group. This was because all of the participant members had grown up together and met each other at various stages of their school lives. Ben was the only group member who was not currently employed with the exception of one of his friends who was completing a Masters degree at university. Their various occupations included call-centre employees, a high school teacher, a television executive, and a bank manager. Of particular interest was that the participants had remained together as a friendship group through their school years including university, and still remained together as a bonded group of close friends. It was also apparent that class position and economic status appeared as important factors when considering the group’s ability to socialise and “hang out” together. In its most basic form the group structure consists of eight friends who met as a result of attending school. Each of them were members of their school “batch,” which is the same as the

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of the high school attended by the current study participants has been omitted from the study. Similarly, the names of specific night clubs and gay venues in MM have been changed to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality both for the participants and the members of the general public who attend these venues.

Western idea of years in attendance at primary through high school, for example, year one, year two et cetera. Originally, three of the participants attended grade school in the same year and were members of the same school batch. They consider themselves to be the “core” of the group (Ben is one of the core group members) because they met first, and then the other members followed at later stages during their school lives. Ben informed me that in his high school batch one quarter of the class were known by him to be *bakla*. The participants would at times refer to other younger batches and batch members (meaning younger *bakla* students) “coming up through the ranks” of school life, and of older *bakla* batches or batch members who had gone before them, some of whom they knew or met at high school or university. In this respect the group is similar in composition and structure to other groups of *baklas* who first meet one another and form friendships and relationships through the Philippine school and education system.

It is therefore suggested that the current group under study may well represent a microcosm of the broader cultural formations and social structures, characterised by aspects of the social life and lifestyle that are inherent within other friendship groups of middle-class *bakla* of the same or similar generation who reside in MM. Further, when attention is given to the life stories of this particular group of participants it becomes clear that a deeper and more meaningful range of life experiences and circumstances emerge that require consideration when framed within these broader social schemas. A deeper and more detailed investigation into the structures, patterns and formations of these social and cultural phenomena will therefore be provided later in this study.

### ***Refining the Study Focus***

I had originally intended to visit gay bars and night clubs in MM and interview the populations that frequented them. This would have constituted a “big” ethnographic study of a largely transient population group. Given that the aim of the study was to investigate the cultural specificities of local patterns of homoeroticism in MM, and the cultural parameters that impact on these (including class-based differences, the economy and socio-political life), it didn’t take much stretching of the research imagination to see the potential in focussing the study on the friendship group. I was convinced that a study of the group and its core members would reveal how cultural dynamics of gender and sexuality were being experienced, interpreted, and expressed at the local level. I asked Ben if he wouldn’t mind acting as an interim contact and get in touch with the other group members to find out if they would be interested in taking part in my PhD study. The reaction was positive, so I consequently contacted all of the

group members by phone and briefly explained what the study was about and what I would be requiring of them as participants. I pointed out that if they agreed in principle to participating, I would clarify their role and rights as participants in greater detail prior to the commencement of the study. I added that my initial contact was simply to establish their willingness to participate. All of the young men I contacted agreed to participate in the study on my return the following year.

### *Research Design*

I arrived back in the Philippines in January 2003 to commence the fieldwork stage of the study. I was awarded a university scholarship to undertake the research, and remained in the Philippines for fourteen months til my departure in March 2004. Prior to the commencement of the study I had obtained ethical clearance from my university enabling me to begin my fieldwork with the group participants.

The study employs the ethnographic methods of collecting life stories by using the techniques of participant observation and informal interviewing. Life stories represent a focused way to gather descriptive and insightful information about the significant events, thoughts, experiences and meanings that characterise people's lives, and it was in consideration of these factors that it was chosen for this study. Further, the employment of multiple methods of data collection strengthens the study and increasing its credibility and validity by extending the range of data (J. D. Brewer, 2000; Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1990). I had decided that on my return to the Philippines I would initially "hang out" with the group and record my observations, thoughts and feelings either by carrying a small notepad with me, or if that proved inconvenient or obtrusive, would record my observations on computer when I returned home. Participant observation is possibly the data collection technique most commonly associated with ethnographic research, and involves gathering data by means of participation in the daily lives of informants in their own social setting, and watching, observing, and talking with them in order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities (J. D. Brewer, 2000).

My research deals with a group of young Filipino *bakla* who might have felt suspicious and alienated by a more formal interventionist approach into their lives and personal space. Through participatory observation, and engaging in informal conversations with the group members, I was able to gain a greater degree and depth of insight and understanding. This approach was also extremely valuable when conducting

the informal interviews because it allowed me to build on the rapport I had developed with the group members and then to extend these informal relationships into the interview stage. Over time a relationship of trust and mutual understanding developed between us, and I believe this was a key factor in participants feeling relaxed and at ease during the interview sessions and consequently contributed to a richer depth and density of research data. The long term strategy of “hanging out” with the group had allowed me the opportunity to increase my conceptual understanding and interpretation of the interview data because I spent so much time in the company of the group members. I believe the deployment of this technique resulted in giving the study an added claim for strength and validity.

On my return to MM Ben and I rented a small apartment in Quezon City and I spent the first couple of weeks establishing myself within my local environment. One of the first things I did was to purchase a mobile phone so that participants could contact me directly at any time. I invited the group members to the apartment for *merienda* (afternoon tea) to discuss their participation in the research, and so that we could become reacquainted with each other. There were several issues I wanted to discuss with them and gain their approval before I actually began the study. Since I sought to “hang out” with the group, I wanted to clarify with them exactly what I meant by this. I first asked if they would all be happy to have me “hanging out” with them in the first place. I explained that I would be a participant observer, meaning that I would not only be socialising with them, but would be observing the group and its members as well. This would involve taking notes and writing on my computer the thoughts, feelings and ideas I had about the group and its members. I explained that I wanted to gather this kind of information so I could write about their lives and their experiences, and they all agreed to allow me to engage in this type of group participation.

I spent the first six months of my fieldwork spending time with the group members on a regular basis. During this time I attended an assortment of social events including birthday bashes, movie outings, going out to dinner, going for coffee, shopping expeditions, going to clubs and bars, and day trips outside of MM to amusement parks and trips to the beach. I purchased several Tagalog phrase books and dictionaries, and Ben began teaching me basic Tagalog. I learned enough of the language to make myself understood, and so was able to travel by jeepney<sup>7</sup>, tricycle<sup>8</sup> or

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<sup>7</sup> A jeepney is the most common mode of transport in the Philippines. It is so named because it is a locally built and modified version of jeeps used during World War II. Jeepney owners tend to decorate and

taxi relatively unhindered. I was able to carry on daily activities like going to the local supermarket or water station (in MM it is unwise to drink the tap water) which also gave me a degree of independence and autonomy. I had set up one of the rooms in the apartment as an office, and would regularly write up fieldwork notes after I had been out with members of the group. Sometimes I would meet with just one or two members, and then on other occasions it would be with the whole group. There were also times when I would invite group members to the apartment for *merienda* or for dinner.

Spending six months in their company proved highly valuable because it not only allowed me the opportunity of gathering detailed and descriptive information about the group, its members, and its activities, but it also provided me with an introduction into daily cultural life in the Philippines. I discovered that Filipinos are generally indirect and coy about approaching an important issue, and may skirt around a topic before getting to the point. Showing politeness, respect and courtesy are behaviours taken very seriously in Filipino culture, and are seen as indications of good manners and education, personal merit, and social status. I also observed that Filipinos like to do things together in groups rather than as individuals, and so it was uncommon for members of the group to go out socially on their own. Rather, they would go out in smaller group units, or with the entire group, or with other friends such as workmates or from their Church group. It was in consideration of these kinds of cultural proclivities that had ramifications for the ways I refined the design and structure of the procedural steps of the interview process.

### ***Interview Procedure***

I conducted the interview stage of the fieldwork between September and December 2003. Prior to the commencement of the interviews I informed the participants during one of the group outings that the interview sessions would be starting in about a month, and I would be contacting each of them by phone to discuss a time and venue that would be agreeable and convenient for them to attend. Knowing that all of the participants were living at home I suggested the apartment as a possible location because it would provide a safe and secure setting. If this proved unsuitable because of distance or location, other options I mentioned were cafes or restaurants. I told the group it was entirely up to them to choose a suitable venue and location, and I

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personalise their vehicles, and so there is a wide array of colours, emblems and designs. It is also common for Jeepneys to display icons, symbols and slogans of a religious significance.



would be willing to meet them in any place of their choosing. I had purposely selected a group outing to discuss these issues because I had noted that Filipinos do not like to make quick off-the-cuff decisions. Rather, they like to deliberate for a time with friends or family before committing themselves to a final decision. I informed the participants that it would be perfectly acceptable to bring a friend, family member, or someone else of their choosing to the interviews. The general consensus was that they would think about it and let me know when I contacted them again.

### *Language Considerations*

During my first visit to MM I had noted that while all of the participants were proficient in speaking English there were significant differences between them in terms of their level of conceptual understanding, interpretation, and expression<sup>9</sup>. Officially, Filipino is the recognised language of the Philippines. Since a bilingual education policy was introduced in the 1970's both English and Filipino have been modes of instruction taught in primary and high schools, colleges, and universities throughout MM. Not only is the method of instruction bilingual, but primary and high schools are also teaching units of English and Filipino. The Filipino language in fact has its roots in the indigenous Tagalog dialect and is essentially an expanded form of Tagalog. Within the National Capital Region Tagalog is spoken by 94.34 % of the population (NSO, 2003)<sup>10</sup>. The participants had all been taught Filipino and English as subjects at school, and Tagalog was the tongue they generally conversed in because it was the most familiar and comfortable means by which they could communicate and express themselves<sup>11</sup>. Their knowledge and experience of English can be attributed to the school

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<sup>8</sup> A tricycle is a motorbike that has a sidecar attached. There is also a push-bike version of the tricycle called a pedicab. It is a quick and efficient way to be transported over relatively short distances.

<sup>9</sup> A rather amusing anecdotal example of this kind of conceptual difference was when I became reacquainted with one of the participants on my return to the Philippines. His first words toward me were "Ron, you still look great!" What he meant of course was that given he hadn't seen me for a while I was looking well.

<sup>10</sup> Since the National Capital Region (the seat of power) was established in a Tagalog province/region, Tagalog became the official language of the Philippines. It was however decreed that the national language be called "Pilipino," then later on, the Westernised spelling "Filipino." It was intended as a political move on the part of the government so as not to offend the non-Tagalog-speaking sections of the Philippine population living outside of MM. It was also seen as a move to instil a sense of national unity, pride, and patriotism. While it is more politically correct to call the national language "Filipino," most Filipinos still refer to it as "Tagalog." This is why Westerners acknowledge "Tagalog" as the official language of the Philippines. For the purposes of this study a distinction will therefore not be made between "Filipino" and "Tagalog," rather a reference will be made to the vernacular as "Tagalog" in accordance with the more common and popular view (Agoncillo & Guerro, 1986; Bresnahan, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that when the participants socialise together in their group they speak their own version of swardspeak (Filipino gay lingo) which they call *vakler*. It is mentioned here because I asked Ben and one of the other participants to attend an additional session after the interviews were completed

curriculum, and expanded through speaking to each other in English as well as watching and listening to Western television programmes, movies, music, reading magazines and the like. Most of the group however, had little knowledge or experience with regard to having a conceptual or colloquial understanding of English patterns of speech and thought. This was because they had little direct contact with Westerners in their lives, and so any ideas and notions they formed about Western ways of thinking, speaking and acting were mostly second hand and were formed with little understanding of the many stylistic nuances that are woven into Western ways of conceptualising and expressing English. In the Philippines, the influences from the West have largely come from America given their past history and involvement with the United States.

In order to minimise any confusion or misunderstandings that might arise over the interviews and procedures involved, I had prepared a Plain Language Statement<sup>12</sup> outlining the purpose of the study, what was being asked of participants, and issues of participant rights and confidentiality. I had also prepared a Consent Form<sup>13</sup> to be signed by all of the study participants after they had read the Plain Language Statement. I gave the participants a copy of each of the forms and asked that they read them carefully. I told the group that if there were any issues they wished to raise, or questions they had about any part of their participation in the study, or if they didn't understand or were unsure on any point or issue appearing in the Plain Language Statement or in the Consent Form to ask for clarification. I told the participants they could keep the forms for their own reference, and I would supply new forms prior to the actual interview. At this time I would supply another copy of the Plain Language Statement which we would again go through together before the Consent Form was signed.

I also engaged Ben as my language translator for the study, and I did this for several reasons. I felt that I would require a translator in instances where a participant might feel uncomfortable in communicating in English, or if the participant had difficulty in expressing himself in English. Another reason was to assist me in transcribing any Tagalog words, sentences, phrases or expressions that may appear on the tape-recordings. I had also asked Ben to translate as he was extremely adept in speaking and understanding English because of his long-term engagement with Western popular culture and his interactions with Westerners through the Internet. I subsequently

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when I could record a conversation between them that included vakler. It will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 2, for a sample copy of the Plain Language Statement outlining the interview procedure.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 3, for a sample copy of the Consent Form used for the interview sessions.

discussed Ben's presence during interview sessions and his access to the tape recordings with each of the participants. In this instance I felt it more appropriate to discuss the issue individually because a negative response might have adversely affected group harmony and cohesion. I informed each of group members that it was their right to make a decision either way, and that whatever they decided was perfectly acceptable. They all expressed the view that it would be a positive and desirable step to engage Ben in this capacity, and agreed to have Ben in attendance.

Towards the end of August I began telephoning the participants and making arrangements for the interviews. Four of the interviewees had asked if they could get back to me with a time and date because weekends were the only suitable period for them to attend. During the week they had work commitments, including working overtime and shift work as well as social and study commitments. Five of the participants lived quite a distance from the apartment, and attending after work would mean negotiating with the horrific traffic in MM. Only one participant had access to a car, so the participants would have to rely on public transport to attend. This would mean spending a lengthy period of time commuting to the apartment, time spent for the interview, and then another lengthy period on public transport. This also meant that participants would be travelling home quite late at night which can be dangerous because muggings and theft are quite common in MM, and participants would be vulnerable. The other consideration was that members of the public often have to change jeepneys at least once and then use tricycles to transverse large areas of MM. This is also time consuming and exposes participants to potential danger late at night.

I was aware that wages were extremely low in the Philippines and I didn't want participants to be financially deficit as a consequence of attending their interview. I decided that given the possible dangers in commuting to the apartment, and in consideration of participant's finances I would provide each of them with 250 pesos for a round trip by taxi cab to the apartment. This amount would certainly cover any travelling expenses incurred by any of the participants. Visiting the apartment was the favoured option by the participants, and seven attended for weekend interviews in the afternoon. One participant specifically requested that I visit him in his office because of work commitments. On that occasion we had arranged beforehand to meet for dinner and then conduct the interview at his office. It was the only instance where Ben was actually present during the entire tape recording of the interview, and this had been at the request of the participant. All of the participants said they were comfortable in

conducting the interviews in English. I had decided I would interview Ben last. I did this because I felt there was a potential that information he would provide, particularly with regard to the group, may influence the focus and direction I might take when interviewing the others. With this in mind, and to generally keep myself focused and on track during the interview sessions I constructed a Life Story Focus Guide<sup>14</sup>. I had spent the past six months observing and writing field notes about the group and its members, and there were definite issues and themes that had surfaced which I wanted to explore further during the interviews. By referring to the guide I was able to maintain a focus and keep on track during the interviews, and if participants went off on a tangent I could guide the conversation back to more fertile ground. In order to stimulate or initiate the conversation I would commence by asking the participant “Can you tell me about your family?” I began with this question because I knew from my prior research and from my experiences in the field that Filipinos are extremely family oriented and have strong kinship bonds. The question was therefore likely to generate an immediate interest and thus stimulate conversation.

Three of the participants were immediately available to be interviewed, and times and dates were arranged for them to attend. With some of the other participants I had to be persistent and chase them up to remind them about the interviews. This did not however develop into an issue, and eventually all of the participants completed their interview sessions. As I mentioned before, there are certain cultural protocols and social relations in Philippine society that are meant to reflect courtesy, respect and good manners. Food plays a large part in how Filipinos socialise with each other, and the provision of food for a guest or guests in the house is an indication that one is welcome and respected. I had therefore invited the participants to partake in *merienda* before we began the interview. I found that spending half an hour engaging with the participants in this manner helped to alleviate nervousness and apprehension prior to their interviews. It also helped me “warm up” by engaging participants in casual conversations and small talk. Ben’s presence proved to be useful in establishing a relaxed and social atmosphere because he would intermittently chat in Tagalog, and this also helped in putting the participants at ease. After *merienda* we retired to the lounge room to commence the interviews. I had arranged with Ben that for the duration of the interview sessions he would retire to the end bedroom of the apartment and close the door. To ensure participant confidentiality, Ben would either watch television or listen to music so that

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 4, for a sample copy of the Life Story Focus Guide

he could not hear what was being discussed in the interviews. If his presence was required I would ask him to enter the lounge room if requested by the participant or with the participant's consent. I could not use my office for interviewing because there were open slats on the upper level of the walls, and conversations could be overheard. I had therefore prepared the lounge room table for the purpose of interviewing. The tape recorder was placed in close proximity to the interviewer and the participant. I had provided a pitcher of water and glasses if the participant wanted a drink during the interview. Prior to the commencement of the interviews I gave participants a copy of the Plain Language Statement. After they had read it and indicated they had understood its content, I presented them with the Consent Form to read and if satisfied were then asked to sign it. I had purchased a micro-cassette tape recorder for the purpose of interviewing and asked participants for their consent to use it during the interviews. All of the participants gave their consent for their interviews to be tape recorded. I also had a pad and notepaper with me so that during the course of the interview if a participant asked for his voice not to be tape recorded, I could turn the tape recorder off and either substitute with the notepad or if asked not write or record anything at all.

At regular intervals during the interviews I would ask the participant if they would like to take a short break, and allow them the opportunity to relax and gather their thoughts before moving on. It was during these break times that I discovered an important issue that I had not considered before commencing the interviews. The participants informed me they were mainly thinking and conceptualising in Tagalog, and then expressing their thoughts and feelings in English. The longer the interview progressed, the more tired they became at engaging in this conversational process. The result was they often found it increasingly difficult to relate their thoughts, feelings and ideas in English and would revert to Tagalog in order to provide a verbal description or explanation. On several occasions they asked that Ben be present because there was a word, expression or phrase in Tagalog they could not express in English, and at these times I would ask Ben to translate. After completing the required task he would retire to the bedroom. When the interviews were completed I asked each participant if there was anything else they would like to add to their story. It was at this particular moment that participants often gave a deeply emotive and philosophical response to the life story they had just told. After the completion of the interviews I spent time de-briefing the

participants<sup>15</sup>. I would ask them questions like “Were you okay with that? Is there anything you want to say now that it’s over? How are you feeling now?” It appeared the participants seemed to have enjoyed the experience, because they would continue having conversations with me after the interviews were over. I made a point of thanking them for having taken part in the study, and for giving of themselves so openly and freely.

### ***Data Presentation and Analysis***

After completing several of the interviews, I began to transcribe the tape recordings on to computer disk. There were occasions when I asked Ben to translate a specific Tagalog word, sentence or phrase that had slipped through during the interview. There were also occasions when I would have difficulty understanding the participant’s accent or pronunciation of English words, and because Ben was already familiar with their respective accents and vocal nuances was able to decipher them for me. After all of the interviews and transcriptions were completed I contacted several of the participants to expand on what they had told me during their interviews and to clarify several points they had made. I did this by initially sending the participants a brief text message explaining my purpose and asking them to contact me so we could arrange a time to conduct the second phone interview. Any extra information I gathered was then added to the participant’s transcripts and entered as additional information.

My role as social researcher, interpreter, and analyst did not cease when the interviews were completed, but was a process I continued to engage in after my departure from the Philippines. Writing up the results is consequently an ongoing procedure that should not be restricted to the end of the research process (J. D. Brewer, 2000). As I have noted earlier, during the periods that I was “hanging out” with the group and conducting interviews I was aware of the participants’ use of gay lingo. It was something they spoke whenever two or more of the group were together, and was a topic discussed during the interview sessions. I decided on the completion of the interviews to ask two of the participants to attend an additional session where I could tape record an audio conversation that included *vakler*. My reason for taking this further step was that it would provide a documented resource of the group’s version of gay

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<sup>15</sup> I had considered calling on the services of a social worker or psychologist, but this is not how Filipinos (particularly the middle-classes) tend to respond to emotional situations and crises. A more likely response would be to contact their priest, family member or friend for emotional or psychological help. I had already been informed by participants they regarded the group as their family, and it was to other members that they were more inclined to turn in times of deep crisis or distress.

lingo albeit a small sample recording. Even if listeners within or outside of the Philippines did not understand what was being said, it could nonetheless provide them with a contextual “feel” for what was taking place within the discourse. Whether or not the recording would be included in the final thesis presentation would be dependant on the outcomes of data interpretation and analysis. Ben volunteered to take part and contacted one of the group members who also agreed to participate. A time was organised and the session was conducted in the apartment under the same conditions as the previous interviews. The only difference was a Plain Language Statement was not used and a Consent Form was not signed because the taped conversation did not contain any personal information or details that would break participant confidentiality or anonymity. The participants did not name themselves or disclose the name of any other participant during the conversation, and I informed them they would not be named in any written documentation. The recording would simply be called *vaklerspeak*. Although the whole session was somewhat contrived in that it did not represent a real scenario, I was able to obtain a comprehensive tape recording of *vaklerspeak*. In addition, over the months that followed I worked with Ben in the Philippines compiling a list of *vakler* words and their meanings<sup>16</sup>. *Vaklerspeak* was something that I had not originally planned or made allowances for in designing and planning the research, but rather came out of the ethnographic process of collecting and analysing the data. According to Humerman and Miles (1998) data analysis involves three sub-processes: data reduction (selecting units of the data from the total universe of data); data display (assembling the information in some format); and conclusion drawing (interpretation of the findings). The authors stress that these sub-processes occur before data collection (during research design), during data collection (as interim analyses are carried out) and after data collection (developing the finished analysis).

Data collation and analysis for this study will be in accordance with some of the steps outlined by Brewer which include beginning to focus the analysis on:

- The original questions that were generated in the planning stage and prompted the research in the first place;
- The insights about analysis that occurred during data collection;

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 7, for a listing of definitions in the Vakler Vocabulary.

Further analytical insights come once analysis proper begins after data collection. This consists of a series of processes or steps which are;

- Data management (organizing the data into manageable units);
- Coding (indexing the data into categories and themes);
- Content analysis;
- Qualitative description (indemnifying the key events, people, behaviour, providing vignettes and appropriate forms of counting);
- Establishing patterns in the data (looking for recurring themes, relationships between the data);
- Developing a classification system of 'open codes' (looking for typologies, taxonomies and classification schemata which order and explain the data);
- Examining negative cases (explaining the exceptions and the things that do not fit the analysis).

It is worth noting that some steps may be inappropriate to one or more type of ethnography. In addition, all of the fieldwork notes and observations that have been recorded and committed to computer disk will be included in the collation, interpretation and analysis of the data (2000, p. 109).

### ***Strengths and Weaknesses***

After careful consideration of my fieldwork expedition to the Philippines, I believe that a major strength of the study has been my relationship with Ben. It was as a result of our relationship that I was first introduced to the friendship group, and consequently accepted by the group as a participatory member, although in reality I was an outsider. Given the close-knit and closed structure of the group, I think that being in a relationship with Ben not only allowed me access to its members, but also gave me a degree of acceptance and credibility I feel I may not otherwise have been able to achieve. This was apparent by the unhindered and at times candid, raunchy and flirtatious nature of the conversations and discussions in which the group would engage,



and by the relaxed body language and behaviour they displayed between one another and towards me.

Another major strength I believe is the fact that I am a gay researcher. I think that the depth and quality of informal discussions and conversations I had with the group were based on a shared experience of “being gay.” Although both the group members and I were aware there are social and cultural differences between us (and hence our mutual curiosity), nonetheless we did share a commonality in sexual object interest. Over the past two decades there has been a growing interest (particularly from within anthropology) in writing and discussing the experiences of gay and lesbian researchers in the field and the methodological significance thereof. Kulick (1995) suggests that the “invisibility” of lesbian and gay researchers in academic fieldwork studies can largely be attributed to general cultural taboos about discussing sex, particularly our own. These discussions Kulick refers to as “erotic subjectivity,” which he argues are a potential source of considerable insight. He elaborates:

...erotic subjectivity *does* things. It performs, or, rather, can be made to perform work. And one of the many types of work it can perform is to draw attention to the conditions of its own production. That is, for many anthropologists, desire experienced in the field seems often to provoke questions that otherwise easily remain unasked, or that only get asked in a rarefied manner once back at home seated comfortably behind one’s computer. The questions are basic, quite uncomfortable ones. They are questions about the validity and meaning of the self-other dichotomy, and about hierarchies on which anthropological work often seems to depend. They are questions about exploitation, racism, and boundaries. They are questions...about issues that lie at the heart of anthropological knowledge (p. 5).

Other researchers and ethnographers agree that there are significant methodological advantages for gay and lesbian researchers to be open about who they are whilst working in the field, particularly when studying populations of a similar sexual proclivity. For example, Lewin and Leap (1996) discuss how substantive literature on fieldwork methodology provides techniques and devices for bridging the distance between the anthropologist’s own culture and the field and for making it easier to fit in with the local culture. The texts cover issues such as learning the local language, situating oneself in the community, finding a place to live, engaging with the daily tasks of survival, engaging research assistants, and figuring out whom to believe, who to talk to, and how to behave in the research setting. The authors argue that being open about one’s sexuality when engaging in ethnographic research among “one’s own” in other

cultural settings is not only advantageous because it frees the anthropologist from engaging in exploitation or offers the intellectual advantages of existing knowledge, but also enables the researcher to learn something about herself or himself. Williams (1996) discusses the life history interviews he conducted with *winktes* (gay indigenous American Indians), and their relatives and neighbours. He concludes:

I ended up observing, and eventually participating in, traditional religious ceremonies to which I am sure I would never have been invited had I not established a personal gay-to-gay...relationship with my native informants...I believe my acceptance in the community was because of my association with *winktes*....Being openly gay thus provided me an advantage in this fieldwork situation (p. 75).

My fieldwork experiences indicated there were significant advantages in forming gay-to-gay relationships with the study participants, particularly when I was arranging and conducting my own life story interviews. During interview sessions the participants were extremely open, forthcoming and candid about their lives, and I believe their candour was due in part to them knowing that I was gay. This can be exemplified in participant responses such as “you know what it’s like” or “you know what I mean.” I think that because of shared sensibilities I was able to ask questions that may not have been answered so openly and honestly if I had been heterosexual. It could be the case that a heterosexual interviewer may not have the “insider” knowledge to ask important or pertinent questions, or who might feel uncomfortable in doing so because he or she is not gay.

The study has been designed around exploring the lives and experiences of a small group of friends that, by the very nature of the group, have shared experiences together over time. I had originally intended to visit gay bars and clubs in MM and conduct impromptu and anonymous interviews with clientele who frequented them. If I had “hung out” in the bars and clubs, there was the potential to explore sexuality and gender from a different perspective and from within a different social and environmental setting. The number of potential participants would have been much larger and represented a more disparate and diverse study population than the participants in the current study. Rather than producing a deep and more holistic picture of gay life through a small group focus, this type of ethnographic study could elucidate a broader and potentially more sexually explicit side of gay urban life in MM which was not the aim of this study.

As a Western researcher I have gained local cultural knowledge from reading relevant literature and texts, and from insightful knowledge provided to me by the locals themselves. This means that my interpretations and analysis of the data are based upon second or even third hand knowledge. Geertz (1973) discusses this issue and concludes that anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and are thus fictions in the sense that they are something made, adding that only a “native” can make first order interpretations because it is his (or her) culture. In terms of this study, the range and depth of interpretation and analysis that I bring to the research are largely dependent on my understanding and interpretation of the local culture. This means that there is constant space for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. In other words there is always a distance between me as an outside researcher and local insider knowledge. If the same or a similar study were to be undertaken by a researcher who was himself or herself a local, then the interpretations and analyses brought to the study might be qualitatively different, and thus produce a differing range of outcomes and findings.

### *Ethical Considerations*

To ensure that participants involved in this research study were treated by the researcher in an ethical manner, provisions were made through the development of a Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to guarantee participant rights were acknowledged and protected during the entire research process and to provide an assurance of participant confidentiality and anonymity. There were however ethical issues that surfaced during the course of the study which will now be considered.

In my role as participant observer and interviewer there were occasions when I was privy to intimate and personal knowledge and details about participants’ private lives. In accordance with the purpose of the study my line of questioning was specifically focused on researching the life stories and experiences of the participants. During the interview sessions I did not ask questions that delved into details about a participant’s private life or lifestyle, or ask any questions that were unrelated to the study. For example, I did not ask for personal details about a participant’s relationships; intimate details about their sexual practices; or ask about their political affiliations. If during conversations a participant did divulge such information, it was not included in my fieldwork notes or in the write up of the study. If I felt that participants were becoming uncomfortable with my line of questioning I would immediately desist and change the conversational focus.

An ethical issue that I had to consider before, during, and after the fieldwork stage of the study was the question of covert versus participant observation. Although I had received prior consent from the participants to observe them and record my observations, these observations would remain covert, because unless I asked for further information or clarification of some aspect of group behaviour or experience the participants would be unaware of what I had observed and recorded or how I was interpreting and analysing the information collected from them. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2001) specifically deals with research involving the covert observation of participants. It was in accordance with these guidelines that I conducted my observations with the group. I have detailed the guidelines below.

#### National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans

17.2 In some fields of research, for example the study of human behaviour, there may be exceptional circumstances where studies cannot be conducted without deception, concealment or covert observation of participants. Before approving a research proposal which involves any degree of deception, concealment or covert observation, a Human Research Ethics committee must be satisfied that:

- (a) The provision of detailed information to prospective participants about the purpose, methods and procedures of the research would compromise the scientific validity of the outcome of that research;
- (b) The precise extent of deception, concealment or covert observation is defined;
- (c) There are no suitable alternative methods, not involving deception, concealment or covert observation, by which the desired information can be obtained;
- (d) Participants are not exposed to an increased risk of harm as a result of the deception, concealment or covert observation;
- (e) Adequate and prompt disclosure is made and de-briefing provided to each participant as soon as practicable after the participant's participation is completed;

- (f) Participants will be able to withdraw data obtained from them during the research without their knowledge or consent; and
- (g) Such activities will not corrupt the relationship between researchers and research in general with the community at large.

Prior to the commencement of my fieldwork research in the Philippines I applied for and received ethical clearance from the Human Ethics Committee of my university to employ covert observation as a legitimate data collection technique.

## CHAPTER 3

### REPORT OF FINDINGS

#### *Category One: The Significance of the Friendship Group*

The outcomes arising from data collation and content analysis indicated that an overarching feature and central theme in each of the participant's stories was the importance that the friendship group played in their lives. It represented a common thread linking together a series of shared life experiences, behaviours, events, and relationships which held and continues to hold significant meaning for all of the group members. It is from within the paradigm of the friendship group that the various typologies, taxonomies and classification schemata of the study have emerged. Pao brings conceptual meaning to the group's friendship and relationship when he comments:

You can probably compare us to let's say flowers. You have different seeds to start with. You have eight seeds. You can plant them on the same ground with the same nutrients – same sunlight, same amount of water. And then when they bloom – flowers bloom – they are different and uniquely beautiful. But the important thing is the common ground. Same soil – same nutrients – same sun – same amount of water. Our support for each other. Our love for each other. That is what you can compare to the common ground. The soil. And that nurtured us into becoming the flowers that we are now.

#### *Background of the Friendship Group*

All but one of the participants came from middle-class Catholic family backgrounds (Alfonso was brought up as a Methodist), have all attended private exclusively male middle-class Catholic schools, and are all university educated. All of the study participants have siblings. Ferdi has an older sister, and Benjie has an older brother. Alfonso has a younger and an older brother, and Angelo has a younger and an older sister. Ben has two younger sisters and a younger brother, and he is referred to by his siblings as *kuya* (an older brother). Danny has two other brothers and is middle child. Manuel is one of eight children, has two sisters and five brothers and is the third born. Pao has an older brother and an older and a younger sister.

The group had its beginnings in grade school when the core members Manuel, Ben, and Pao first became close friends. Later, in high school, the three befriended the

others and the group was complete. Each of the participants were members of their school “batch,” which is the same as the Western classification of years in attendance at primary through high school, for example, year one, year two et cetera. Originally, Manuel and Pao were classmates in grade five and although Ben was not in the same class they were all in the same school batch. The three friends were academically high achievers in their year. Angelo, Chris and Bong also attended the same grade school, and also achieved good grades. Ben explained that students who attained good grades and awards in grade school went on to the honours class in high school, and so Manuel, Ben, Pao, Angelo, Chris and Bong went on to become honours students at high school. Danny and Jao also excelled scholastically, and transferred from another grade school to the honours class. It was during their second year at high school that they grouped together as friends.

Actually the group started to become close in second year. Because during our first year in high school the group was already identified as a group. But there were smaller groups even within our group, so there were them – the ones who were close – closest since grade school – and there was us who were the new ones in the high school (Danny).

It was explained that classes were known as sections, and the honours class was known as A section. B section was the semi-honours class designed for students who could not make it into the honours group. In honours and semi-honours classes the students do not change classrooms. Although the subjects taught and the teachers change the students stay together, therefore throughout the four years of high school Ben, Manuel, Pao, Danny, Angelo, Chris, Jao and Bong remained classmates. It was because of their shared status as *bakla* honours class students that the group became known as “the daughters of A,” or were sometimes referred to as “the magic 8.” In their third year of high school the group met Ferdie, who was from the same batch, as well as Alfonso and Benjie who were in their fourth year of high school. Alfonso was a semi-honours section student and Benjie and Ferdi were regular school students within the school system.

Angelo revealed that in their high school honours class one-fifth of the forty students were *bakla*.

I just got to know them better when we were in high school, because you’re all school mates. Pao, Ben, Manuel and Danny got together with Jao, Chris and Bong who were also in our group. We were part of the honours class in our batch. By the time we graduated there was eight of us who admitted to ourselves

in the group, in the class, and to most other people that we were gay. And eight students out of the forty in our class – that’s 20 percent of the honours class.

Alfonso also made comments that he knew that in his semi – honours section one quarter of his classmates were *bakla*. The participants would at times refer to other younger batches and batch members (meaning younger *bakla* students) “coming up through the ranks” of school life, and of older *bakla* batches or batch members who had gone before them, some of whom they knew or met at high school or university. In this respect the group is similar in composition and structure to other groups of *bakla* students who meet one other and form friendships and relationships through the Philippine school and education system.

### ***The Extended Friendship Network***

The participants discussed how the membership system that operates within their group allows for the addition of other gay males from other similar friendship groups. This extended network of gay friends therefore produces overlaps within the friendship system and can be understood in terms of overlapping friendship rings or circles. Comments included:

Now he – Benjie, introduced me to some new friends he met in his college ... There’s Nortan, Anton – so that’s a different group. That’s sort of like, their group merged with my group – sort of it’s become that – so it’s different. These people are different from the people in *the happy room* and yet some people there overlap, like Ben.. So that’s what I said when I have lots of different gay circles that I have (Alfonso).

**“And there would be other groups like your group in the Philippines – in Manila?”** Of course. **“And the idea of *barkada* and that two people would know somebody from this group and they’d know people from that group, so it’s like circles within circles?”** Yes, and we become a very big family group. **“So there’s the core people you’re close to, but there’s also other people...”** Yes of course, yes **“...on the parameters.”** There are some people who want to enter – there are some people who want to enter our group and we accepted them. For me the people you associate with will reflect you as a person. So I still consider them as friends. I still have this one group *na* [that] – I still have this group, our group which is very close to my heart. But we are very open with other friends – we are open with other friends. There is one person – there will come a time that that person will join our group who will really – who we’ll have a chemistry with – and we are willing to adapt with him. (Benjie)

Although the group fragmented as a consequence of attending different universities the bonds created between them during their high school years meant that



all of the group members continued to remain in touch with each other. Even when they made new friends at university, the original group membership remained connected.

**“Okay, moving on to college from high school, what sort of things changed? Did you make more friends? Did the group fragment or stay together?”**

Well yeah, lets say it fragmented because – because of physical reasons. Because we didn’t all go to the same college. So obviously you can’t hang out together all the time. And of course in college you make new friends. Not just gay guys, but you get female friends, straight guy friends. You gain more friends. But the old high school group fragments but you’re not totally apart. You’re not really – you’re still in touch with each other. Maybe during the weekends we’d hang out – watch a movie, have dinner. Because the friendships in high school are that strong (Ben).

The ability of the group members to go outside of the core group and extend their network of friends meant that they were building and expanding the group network through the other friendships they established.

**“And these people you say you go outside the group to talk to – they are also part of a group? They are involved with another group of gay guys?”**

Uhuh, yeah. **“And so it would be like your group, and you know somebody from that group?”** Yeah, sort of branching out, yeah. **“It’s very nebulous.”**

Yes, exactly, exactly, if you would like to term it that. For example now – let’s say Benjie has – he studied in UST – for college. Medical technology. So he would know friends who are also gays from his university. And through Benjie we would get to know these groups. So they become part of the group eventually. So right now okay, when I have a birthday, I wouldn’t just invite my own group. But the different friends of the different groups, which the other persons know. Probably because of work – because of course we already have different work situations. Because of work – because of different universities.

**“So that’s how you actually would get to know people?”** Oh yes, from other groups. **“So with other groups it would be through mutual friends, through work who would be the catalyst?”** Exactly, exactly. That...we’re not really

much a closed group I should say. Because we can accommodate – the more the merrier. We can accommodate a group from here – from there – different situations – from different places. As long as they’re gay of course (Ferdi).

The findings showed that the participants are also members of other social groups, and on occasion may include these people in social events patronised by their core group. However the core group remained the primary group for the participants because it dated back to high school when the group was formed out of a shared “gayness.”

**“And when we’re talking about gay networks being extended and you know somebody from this group, but would that also happen with other sorts of groups? I’m thinking of how Alfonso often invites members from his comic**

**group.”** Yeah, he invited them to his birthday. **“So you could have maybe a straight group of friends from work, or some hobby you’re involved with, that would mix with your group, or would your socializing be mainly just gay focused?”** Not really, because we also mingle with a lot of straight guys, straight girls, not really confined, it’s not really strictly like martial law – never interact with people of a different gender. **“As long as they’re accepted.”** Yeah, yeah. But it all boils down to whether we have the same lives, whether we jive, and we are comfortable talking and sitting beside each other under one roof. I do also have a lot of girl friends, girl – friends, who they know pretty much, and who also get invited whenever they have an occasion. So there you go, it’s not really confined to a group. But for our purposes – when I say group – it’s really people whom I’ve met since high school. And these would be mainly gays – I mean gay people. But then the group is not totally closed. As long as we get to hang out with you, as we often do – no problem (Ferdie).

### *The Friendship Group as Family*

The participants often referred to the group as their family, and a general theme was that they could not discuss their most intimate and private thoughts and feelings with their biological families for fear of receiving negative reactions and responses. The friendship group had provided the necessary help, support, and nurturing environment they needed, primarily because they felt they were all *bakla* together and shared a common bond through their experiences and identity as *bakla*. The participant’s gave a range of responses as to why they considered the group to be their family.

As I said I’m not really close to my family, so ever since school the people to whom I really opened up were friends. With this group – my friends – because at home I’m really the quiet one – the loner – so it’s really important. The friends that I have made through my life. My young life. They really really are very important. Maybe even – I’m sure most of us are like this – we’re even closer to our friends than our families. So it’s really important. And I’m really lucky to have had a group like ours – way back in high school (Danny).

Actually the group is more than family....I’m not that close to other relatives, even my brothers. I’m not close to my brothers. Because my sexual preference inhibit [sic] that. Inhibit that closeness....Even my mother – I can’t talk to her openly about certain issues. About my love life. So what I have are my friends. So the group is really important to me. I can say to them my things – my insecurities – my weaknesses – and they’re really there for me – my ups and downs. So actually the group is my family (Benjie).

You are probably aware of the concept of extended family and so on okay? Your in-laws are family – the in-laws of your in-laws are also family. Close friends are considered family. For us, the group was our refuge and therefore it was family. Okay, let’s say my parents fight at home. And there was a time I wanted to give up, and then I would tell Ben okay? In school – in writing okay? Ben would write me back and say don’t worry – blah, blah, blah, and he’d start

telling me about his own life. And then of course you feel not really relief, because he's relating a bad experience, a similar bad experience, but you'll find support okay? He would say don't worry – that problem will eventually be of course solved, and so on. You find sincerity okay? When you have friends like that – because I'm not saying that heterosexual friendships are not that – how do you say – not that close, but there are certain secrets that only a gay person can tell another gay person, because they are comfortable together (Pao).

The notion of “family” was something that the participants felt very strongly about, and their relationships with their respective biological families were built on the certain assumptions and beliefs they held about themselves, the other family members, and their role and place within the family structure.

At the time the study was conducted all of the participants were living with their biological families. Living at home had at times created difficulties in reconciling their identity as *bakla* and their role and position as dutiful son within the household and extended family kinship structure. Cultural expectations by parents that their son would succeed academically, have a successful career, and then proceed to have a happy and fulfilling marriage, were cultural and religious mores that participants had been brought up to believe in and hold in high regard. Alfonso discussed how he had experienced difficulties in coming to terms with the expectations his parents had placed on him.

Ever since I was a kid my parents always had expectations because I was a smart kid and that's modesty aside. I was always getting first honours and stuff like that. And I guess since I was like five or six years old, I was always getting first honours and stuff like that. I guess they always had this expectation of me and I was always following these expectations and I sort of like – I was sort of trapped in that sort of situation where I always have to be the best in terms of my studies.

Alfonso told his story about the difficulties he experienced in living at home and trying to keep his sexuality a secret. He comments:

Actually my parents don't know I'm gay, well, they don't know but they sort of know. Ah, it's a long story, I'll tell it to you. So I guess uhm I guess they sort of suspected when I was a kid and stuff like that – I wasn't really into sports and stuff like that. And back in college – so then I became gay, but of course I didn't tell them – and back in college, my mom was fixing my room because my future sister-in-law was gonna stay in our house, she's gonna use my room and found some magazines in my bed. They sort of asked me about it, and they said – so at that time I was sort of gay – I started to argue out with her that maybe it's uh I didn't choose it and stuff like that. But my mom, being my mom, is very, very religious. She's very, very – she's a hardcore Methodist – my mother's side family, hardcore Methodists. Our family, I mean my mother's side, we're basically one of the first families in Taytay, in our town, who got converted back

in the late 1800's to Methodism. So we're about one of the three or four families that are really old-money family in town. And so, my mom – of course they're very religious – of course her views are quite fundamental in those terms and of course – on the other hand – my dad also found out of course about that issue – he's not religious at all. He's a non-practicing Catholic. He's a bit – he's nice, but he's a bit of a chauvinist kind of guy who would never want his children to be gay and stuff like that. So they sort of found out when I was eighteen. And I really was – it was a long story, they – my mom even called her pastor to exorcise, to pray over me and stuff like that. And my dad, on the other hand though he's not religious, supported my mom. And he sort of threatened to you know disown me and stuff like that. But of course I wasn't – I was dependent on them, I still lived under their roof and stuff like that. So I sort of pretended that I changed already, so there. And from now, that's the way it is at home, they don't know. But I suspect they know – they know subconsciously – definitely. Sometimes my dad, not really directly, ask me about it, and so would my mom who'd still ask me, do you have a girlfriend already and stuff like that and I just brush it off and I just say something. Well, the good thing is, some of our *yayas* (nannies) or maids or even my grandmother would say, that's okay because you're too young to marry and stuff like that. So it's sort of – but I guess they know. They know I think. I think they know it's just that they don't really – we don't really talk about it anymore.

Angelo described how he initially shunned a couple of his friends because of the disapproval his family would have if he were to befriend gay schoolmates and was found out. Like Alfonso, Angelo was a successful student, and felt that being openly gay at school would bring shame not only on himself, but on his family. He comments:

Back in grade school I was still in denial of my sexuality even during the first year in high school, and I would be one of the gay bashers, but I was effeminate back then, that's why we joke around – Jao, Chris, Bong – we joke around about how I always kept on pushing them away, but while I was pushing them away they were already talking about me that – that guy's just in the closet – he just doesn't want to [laughs] ahhh...admit himself and to other people that he's gay, but one of the main reasons actually why I was trying to hold back – I was thinking about my family. That's why until now my family – well at least my family – my parents and I don't discuss about my sexuality, but I'm pretty sure that they have an inkling already. My god, at twenty five I haven't introduced a single girlfriend to them. I haven't told them any story whatsoever about me courting a girl. But going back, my parents were – especially my mum, was active in the parent teacher organisation back in grade school, so she was visible. She was known by most of the teachers, and I think I was relatively famous in the sense that I was an honours student back in the grade school. I was – my parents always had to be there to pin some medal – or to receive something for me because I won several awards for extra curricular activities like a declamation or an elocution contest or a math contest. So especially my mum most of the time was there, so I was in school. So I was really very careful about admitting or being out in the open about my sexuality.

Because of his success at work Benjie's sexuality has received tentative acceptance by his grandmother.

Actually they know now that I'm gay, but they don't talk about it because in the family as of now I'm a breadwinner, so they see me as a successful person, because as of now I'm a manager in a bank, so they don't question about my sexuality anymore. But I don't talk about it.

Danny recounts how he has not told his family that he is gay, but in the past his parents have chastised him for acting in an effeminate manner.

Nobody in the family knows up til now. But there was a time of course growing up, that my brothers, my mother, my father would talk to me. Actually not talk but – how do you say that – *pinagsasabihan* [being chided] – they would tell me off [laughs], I dunno. But there were never serious talks about it. But they would tell me to avoid acting like this [sarcastic tone] – acting like a girl, or liking whatever girly stuff, and staying away from gay friends in school. But of course growing up that's what happened, but not – it wasn't a regular thing. Like if I average it out like once, twice a year or when my brother would see me with other effeminate friends in school he would tell me. And then my mother would – once or twice in my whole life – would tell me not to – to avoid flicking my fingers as if I was you know a diva or something, but there never was any confrontation or sit-down talks about it. So I never found the reason to – to come up to them and tell them that hey, I'm like this so...

### ***Dating and the Extended Friendship Network***

The ways in which close personal relationships are formed and transfigured within the friendship group and its extended network system of social contacts is of major importance and concern in keeping the group untainted by the formation of “incestuous” intimate relationships between the primary circles of group members. The data revealed that the participants had their own unwritten moral code of conduct that covered such matters. Group members would therefore seek out their friends to put them in contact with friends or acquaintances that they may know, so it becomes friends of friends that are contacted in the dating cycle. Initial contacts were usually made (if the participants had agreed to give out their telephone numbers) through text messaging and then later by telephone. Several of the participants commented that if they wanted a sexual one-night stand they would either visit a local online chat room and link up with someone there, or visit one of the many gay bars, clubs or massage parlours situated in MM. Others commented that they were not interested in one-night stands, so they were not viable options for them to consider. All of the participants were in agreement however, that while it was possible to meet someone for a relationship through online

chat, they were more likely to seek a potential boyfriend by approaching someone from within their group and asking if he knew of a suitable person for them to date. Although these issues have been addressed in the reported findings presented below, a more detailed account provided by Ferdi appears as Appendix 5 at the end of this study.

During his interview, Ben explained how the system of dating and forming relationships works within his friendship group. Passages taken from the interview have been included below to provide more comprehensive details and information on how this occurs.

**“Could you tell me how intimate relationships are formed within the group?”** Well it’s sort of a taboo thing to ummhhh have relationships – romantic relationships with your friends. First of all we wouldn’t think of it that way – we wouldn’t see each other that way – anyway – so yeah. **“So what happens then?”** Ahhh, ‘cause it depends. ‘Cause there’s that sort of unwritten, unspoken rule that you don’t do your friends. So, but if it’s just a friend of a friend who you’re just casually acquainted with yeah its possible. You’d be sort of more open to it. And I guess it hasn’t happened. So that reinforces the idea that you don’t get involved with friends in that way. ‘Cause it’s a thing that once you become friends you treat each other as friends. You wouldn’t see that person in a romantic way – even just possibilities. Even if you’re not attracted to him you wouldn’t even see the possibility. **“Even just for sex?”** Yeah, especially – especially sex. It is like an incestuous thing, ‘cause we see each other as sisters. **“So how would relationships be formed then? Through things like the internet? Through mutual friends of friends? How would a person in your group form relationships?”** In my group it would be through Internet chat – and through cell phones – texting. Or meeting someone in school. Meeting someone at work – in the workplace, or ummh outside social activities. Going to bars, going to clubs, discos, that sort of thing. That could happen. That’s the thing, ‘cause the thing now is do internet chat ‘cause it’s the safest way to meet people. You go in there with the intention of meeting up with someone. If you like them or not, or you’d meet the real guy and possibly have something happen whether it’s just for sex or a relationship. **“So you were saying text, so that links up with text then?”** Text as well ‘cause ummh you’d chat and then you’d give your number and he’d give his number. He’d text you and ask permission to call. ‘Cause ummh its impolite to suddenly ring someone’s cell phone – I mean if you’re a stranger. So you text first and ask permission. **“So would that be for.”** Text is non-confronting; it doesn’t put you on the spot. ‘Cause ummhh there are times here when you can’t talk freely. So you can’t always pick up the phone and just talk. So texting would be safe. Texting the naughtiest dirtiest things and no-one would be the wiser. **“So that would be meeting for sex primarily – you’d do that?”** Well it depends on the person but yeah, for sex. **“So internet and texting would be to meet up for sex primarily?”** Primarily. **“And so if you wanted to meet somebody for a more permanent relationship how would that happen?”** Well it could happen through texting and chatting – ummh – I dunno how you can really pursue that. **“So can you tell me how you’d be introduced to someone?”** Through friends of other friends, that sort of thing. You meet someone somewhere so... Not everyone is really looking for

a permanent long-time relationship. It's just a boyfriend. Someone to be with. Someone to go out with. Someone to hang out with. Someone to call every night. Someone who'll call you every night, so that sort of thing. And with my friends anyway, I don't think any one of them ever dreamed – they haven't really pursued anyone. They just let it happen. They don't go out – sort of going out on a Saturday night in the hope of landing a boyfriend. **“But does it happen for sex then?”** Yeah, but for sex it is – but for relationships, it's almost like a bonus thing. If it works out then that's great. **“So friends then would be another way to link up with somebody, for whatever reason?”** Yeah, introduce you to new people. And they don't – your friend doesn't have to be very good friends with that close friend – I mean with that other person. They wouldn't have to be close, but maybe your friend met that guy or his group of friends in a party or in a bar or something, and you get introduced as well. You link up that way, but it's just for friendship or for a romantic relationship. I dunno it occurs for the sex thing, 'cause it's like – I think it would seem like you're pimping your friend or something, so I don't think that would happen for sex. I dunno if I'm being naïve, but I'm sure it's happened to other people. **“So what about – we're talking about friendship groups – say a friend of yours has another group of friends – ummh – it could be a group you met through work, or it's a work group of friends that has gay friends involved as well. Would they say I think that person would suit that person?”** You mean friends playing match-maker? **“Yeah.”** Yeah, that could occur 'cause there's – I have one friend, Franco, whom – I've known him since grade four – and he was asking me if I would be interested in meeting this guy, a friend of his from his workplace. And it's like setting people up on a date. Say that one of the persons – ummh one of the – yeah – you're looking for someone to be with or – so basically, it's a blind date. That could happen.

Benjie discusses his own thoughts, feelings and experiences with relationships when he comments:

You can meet guys in the bars, the net, through text messaging, through referral. Actually my last boyfriend was a referral from Ferdi. So we just broke up actually – last month. He stayed for one month [laughs], so it wasn't actually painful. Actually our group – our group, Ben, Alfonso, Ferdi, and Chris. We don't actually go to Malate that often, but I have friends in my office who go to Malate every week [laughs], but sometimes even in a week – in a month – I go to Malate to hide out with guys. Almost every Saturday hiding for fun, not for anything else. Because they said that if you would find someone coming from Malate, that guy would not be serious. But I don't believe that. I don't believe that. So actually in Malate there are spots for sexual intercourse – casual sex. So if you want immediate sex without any payment, or without any remorse you can find in selected spots in Malate. **“In clubs?”** In clubs or near clubs or massage parlours. But there are high class bars there where you can pick up for friendship, you can find a companion. And for me, especially in The Castle. The Castle is very popular now in the Philippines. It's the most popular gay spot in the Philippines, and the people there are friendly – are sociable – not that sexually active [laughs], unlike in other bars – such as Minnies and Pant. The place is such – that place Pant – the places are very dirty. **“You mean the bar itself is dirty?”** Not such a physical, because the things that people do there is public – it's a side show. And for me I don't go for that. I don't go for those

things – for those dirty things that will have – later on will have a great effect on my life. Because for me I know I am a gay, but I’m not promiscuous. I value my principles in life. But in The Castle, it’s a good bar. It’s a very good bar. You can see people kissing each other, that’s okay, that’s okay.

### ***The Happy Room Online***

The online version of *the happy room*<sup>17</sup> – an e-mail group – was set up for the purpose of allowing the members of the friendship group to remain connected and in touch, whether they were in the Philippines, or living, visiting or working overseas. In effect it is an electronic version and extension of the group itself, and a way for its members to maintain their friendships, their closeness and their solidarity together through the posting and sharing of emails. It was so named after the DWTL *happy room* which had been a joyful and meaningful period in the lives of the participants. It had originally been set up by Alfonso after he had completed university and commenced work, and was initiated in response to his feelings of environmental change from university to work, and the isolation he felt from his friends at university. Alfonso elaborates:

I set it up [*the happy room*] right after college, when I was working as a teacher already and I thought maybe I should – and at that time I was only starting to – my first job, I was alone in terms of I didn’t get to see many of my friends. It was as a tutor in MSA [an after school tutoring and exam review service], and the people were nice. I was lucky with my bosses, but sort of you know I really didn’t get – have contact with too many of my old friends, so I thought that it would be a great way to have it, so I set it up.

Ben explains the various roles that *the happy room* fulfils when he comments:

Basically it’s an e-mail group to keep in touch with people you’ve known since high school, even though you don’t get to see each other as much. It’s a way for people to get in contact with each other. ‘Cause having gone through the same experiences – well as I told you *the happy room* came from DWTL – that term – we adopted that. Although we can’t claim ownership of the name. I think we just adopted the name as a title for the e-mail group. ‘Cause it’s something that’s common to all of us. People send all sorts of stuff. Pictures, jokes, chain letters, news, news about the entertainment industry, gossip, that sort of thing, everything including porn.

Alfonso discusses how *the happy room* can be used to obtain updates about friends who have gone overseas, and how *the happy room* reflects the nebulous nature of the extended friendship group. He adds:

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<sup>17</sup> The origins and purpose of “The Happy Room” will be given further consideration later in the chapter.



Some of us are already in – some of us are abroad already like Pelle, so we sort of get updates on him, what he's up to. He's a flight steward now I think, so we get an email about his experiences in Rome and stuff like. And we sort of – we use it like for example when Bro Santos died, we sort of used it as a means of communication also that oh, so and so has died or stuff like that, just update each other basically. When there's a party or someone's birthday is coming up, we can use it. But the thing with *the happy room* is that we also get uhm – because even within *the happy room* – because there are some people we're not as close to, like Gina and stuff like that – so even then, there's still also that small divide there, I guess. I guess the most clique-ish I mean in terms of – even within *the happy room*, there is, there are mini-cliques I guess. And in those terms I guess, one of the mini-cliques would be me, Ben, Benjie, Ferdi, Pao and the other one would be a separate group, you know.

For Ferdi *the happy room* also provides a useful vehicle to keep in touch with friends who are overseas. He comments:

But with *the happy room*, the great thing about it is I get to hear from my friends who are not in the country. Let's say Sapi is now – I learned through happy room that he's now in Dubai. And so that's the good thing about it. And I can easily reply my thoughts to him through that. It's really an extension of an otherwise normal meeting, where we meet in one place and we talk. It's the online version if you would like to call it that.

Angelo explains that in the modern world of work and social commitments, *the happy room* is a convenient and accessible way to remain in touch with his group of friends, and discusses some of the other features and roles that *the happy room* engenders. He comments:

It is some sort of a room where we are in our own niches, in our respective homes, in our offices, because even though we don't get to see each other often as a group, there's still correspondence, and even though it's still a very intangible way of representing that there is a relationship among us. It is the most tangible I think as I look now, as I analyse it. It's – the happy doesn't exist, there is no such room. But it is a very much tangible representation that we are connected with each other. That there is a relationship or something, whatever that something is between each of us and among us. And anything can be communicated, anything! Ahh it can be an issue on love life. Issues on career, like one of our friends Pelle was hired as a flight attendant recently so from I think an advertising job he got this job as a flight attendant. So he was telling people and attaching pictures of him training for the airline, and socialising with some of the other flight attendants. What else do we talk about – jokes – forwarded messages even. Nude pictures of men. Our choices for the recent beauty pageant. Other choices – our bets for the Oscars – for the Emmys. Madonna's latest video. Old flames that we saw somewhere, and would like to share that how about we saw this friend back in high school, and he's still hot, and it can be something as mundane as such, or as really heavy as talking about careers. That I migrated to Singapore only to discover that I would be

unemployed. So yeah. In fact, there was one time, probably two or three weeks when no-one was emailing anything to *the happy room*, not even forwarded messages. And one of our friends emailed and said why is *the happy room* so quiet? Where is everybody? And it started another string of conversations and emails. Because again it becomes a tangible representation that we exist as a group. That the friendship does exist among us.

### ***Category Two: Gender Ideation and Issues of Cultural Identity***

When attention was focused on the participants experiences in defining and interpreting their own gendered selves, two key developmental factors emerged that require consideration to socially and culturally contextualise the emergent codes of the study. The first was that the participants all had a good knowledge and understanding of their own indigenous culture. This was primarily because they had all been born into middle-class Catholic Filipino families (with the exception of Alfonso, however he also grew up in a religious household), and had acquired an excellent high school and university education. The second was the participants' increased exposure as they were growing up to elements of consumer capitalism and Western ways of conceptualising and thinking about gender and sexuality, relationships and lifestyles. An important issue to be considered here is that the local cultural paradigm came first. Participants had received exposure to the tenets of their own culture long before they had been exposed to Western ways of life, and so when cross-cultural interactions did occur they had an impact on how participants interpreted Western paradigms of gender and sexuality, particularly in terms of same-sex relationships, identities and lifestyles. This was shown by the ways that participants had interpreted these ideas in the light of indigenous socio-cultural knowledge and understanding, and in the process had produced their own definitions and interpretations of what it means to be *bakla*.

#### ***Gender and Language Concepts***

One of the characteristics that was initially confusing in conversations and interactions with the participants was how they often interchanged the labels and identities of “gay,” “homosexual” and *bakla*. For example, “gay” can be used within the same context and have the same or similar conceptual meaning as *bakla*. Likewise “homosexual” can also connote *bakla* just as “gay” can mean “homosexual.” Similarly, instead of using the word “gay” as an adjective, four of the study participants used it as a noun, that is, referred to a person as “a gay” or used the collective noun “gays” to connote an identity as a particular type of person in the same contextual way as “homosexual” and “homosexuals” are used as specific identity labels in the West. A

good example of this kind of interplay is the following quotation taken from Danny's story. He also makes a gender distinction between being gay as meaning attracted to another person of the same sex, and his own gendered feelings and beliefs in terms of being "like a woman" and thus attracted to a person of the opposite sex.

I'm sure it's the same with a lot of other gays, but I'm one of those who really perceive themselves to be the girl. I mean if I meet – my friends would tell me *parang* [like] if I look at you I don't see a gay person I see a girl. I'm that type. That's why from there – from there stems all of these – religion – the girl would be the more religious type. About safe sex the girl would be the more wise one. The girl would be the more conservative one. The girl would be the more achieving one or studious one. That's why in the career or in work – that's where it stems from. But you know the self-perception. I'm the classic woman trapped in a man's body. Because I dunno with you, but there are other gay people who – they're really guys, but they're just attracted to guys. I mean I'm just a girl trapped inside a man's body. And the girl is attracted towards guys.

An initial consideration is that in Tagalog there is no word or term for gay or homosexual. The word that is used in the Philippines is *bakla*. One of the major outcomes of data analysis was how the term *bakla* had been reinterpreted by the study participants as part of the process of redefining themselves. It appeared that when the participants come together as a group they freely used the term *bakla* between themselves, particularly when they were joking and lampooning with each other, and in this context the term became one of affection and friendship. When the participants talked and discussed issues in a more formalised manner they tended to use the terms gay or homosexual because they do not contain the negative connotations and stereotypes that are imbued in *bakla* as it is generally used within mainstream Filipino culture. Another point is that the terms gay and homosexual are Western imports that had been culturally appropriated by the group to reflect their own concepts and identity issues. Often the participants would use the terms *bakla* and gay interchangeably in the same conversation. A final point to be made on the issue is that the accounts given by participants, particularly with reference to their earlier lives, are reflective accounts given from the present, and as such are imbued with the participant's current interpretations and definitions of their gender and identity. This would explain why participants often refer to themselves as gay or homosexual when they were very young and might also reflect the propensity to avoid the negative connotations of *bakla*, particularly when they were discussing themselves as children. The data indicates however, that they either thought of themselves as effeminate or *bakla* rather than as gay or homosexual, and this began to change when they had increasing exposure to

Western sexual and identity concepts and behaviours. It would appear that just as *bakla* has been contextualised within certain social situations and circumstances by the group members, so too has the use of the terms gay and homosexual. An issue raised by participants was that the actual tonal sound affected by the word *bakla* is harsh and sounds derogatory. The preferred term by group members was *bading*, because it has a softer and less confronting sound. *Bakla* however, is the officially recognised term that appears in Filipino dictionaries and is used within mainstream Filipino culture, and will therefore be used as the preferred term of reference for the purposes of the current study.

The participants revealed that from a very young age they had learned from their families, their Church, the media, and the broader Filipino community what was considered appropriate and fitting behaviour for their gender. If a male was seen to desire another male, the word used was *bakla*, and this was equated with negative and derogatory connotations of effeminacy and “being like a girl.” I was informed that the *Swardspeak* expression for an effeminate male is *pa-girl* (meaning like a girl), and for a “straight-acting” male the term is *pa-man*. Angelo describes his own gender experiences when he comments:

I knew from a young age that I was different. Definitely the label was *bakla* because that’s the term for – the degrading term for – the way you’re being bullied [here he means verbally] and teased by your class mates or your school mates. But I think a catalyst also was – to me actually discovering that I am different – that I am indeed a homosexual – that I am gay – was the theatre experience. When I was in grade five I think – I really wanted to join the school theatre back in the grade school, and my parents, especially my mum and dad didn’t want me to join the organization, because they had their image, or concept that if you join theatre, that would mean you’re gay.

I asked Angelo where he thought that thinking came from, to which he replied:

Probably family and the media. Because you’re from the very start – ahh, polarities have to be – bi polar ends have to be established. Man/woman – boy/girl – pink/blue. The way we dress, Barbie dolls and GI Joes – doll houses and toy guns. Skirts and pants. Hats or a baseball cap and a bonnet. So from the very start you knew that there was – that things have to be separated bipolarly – yahh – into opposite ends. And so probably the feeling then was I should be part of one end – the boys’ end. Yeah, but I have other quirks – other things that don’t fit into the box of how a boy should be, how a boy should act. And I probably do think that these quirks fit into the other box. The girlie box. And so that’s probably how you see homosexuality and being gay then, was being like a girl while still being biologically and probably physically still a boy.

### *Traditional Gender Roles and Gender Thinking*

Without exception, the participants discussed how initially they had placed themselves in “the girlie box” to which Angelo has referred because it was the culturally defined gender category they had learned was deemed appropriate for males with their particular feelings and desires. At this stage in their lives the participants tended to align themselves with the feminine, adopting the gendered role of a girl. The participants believed that by participating in a repertoire of effeminate behaviours they would be fulfilling the gender role and identity that was culturally appropriate for them. It was out of a consideration for this gender paradigm that participants began to engage in a process of re-evaluating and re-defining themselves. An important point to be made is that the participants did not engage in this type of gender behaviour on their own, but it was rather something acted out and shared between them within the context of their high school environment. This aspect of group development will be given further attention later in the chapter when participant involvement with the school and education system is discussed.

I can say now that there's just a wide spectrum of homosexuality, or sexuality for that matter. Why does that have to be defined as – again defined by two poles, and then everything in the middle. Why does it have to be that? Why can't it be defined as something fluid like – it's multi-centric. You need not be defined with just one centre, and there are two extreme ends. But back then you wanted to become a girl – being gay was becoming a girl – you would also want to have a relationship with a straight guy. Because what the girls should have I should have too as a gay. But of course now, if you want to engage in a meaningful relationship – in an effective relationship with the same – with a male person too, that guy probably should be gay as well (Angelo).

Pao confides how he first thought of himself as effeminate, and then redefined himself as gay. He comments:

So the image of a father as ummhh somebody masculine was never there. My father was – in truth my mother okay? My mother played the role of father and mother. So I identified more with my mother, and then because my father was never there for us.... That's what probably enhanced my being effeminate, and then later on being gay.

Other comments included:

When I was younger my mindset was that I wanna be a girl. I was definitely a bottom, but in the past three or four years – I've always started to feel that arbitrary, 'cause I've started enjoying being a top. And I think I'm versatile, but

I don't take it against people that are exclusively bottom or exclusively top. But at least on my end I think I'm versatile (Alfonso).

The perception back then was ummh – you were attracted to a straight boy, not a gay boy. But a straight boy, 'cause that was perceived as the ideal. But yeah, you'd have a straight boyfriend. But then again if he was to become his boyfriend – and he wouldn't be straight anymore. But that wasn't an issue, 'cause it was really just based on fantasy – that we had to – school crushes – you had a crush on your classmate or some other classmate from another class, but you didn't have any inkling to what a gay relationship really means. Even what a relationship – a romantic relationship really means. The straight boys would have girlfriends. You didn't have anything.... 'Cause it's thinking that you're a girl. Yeah, 'cause a girl has to be with a macho guy, but I never saw myself as a girl. I'm sure I'd act ummh – I'd act in the ways that we perceive as effeminate, but I never saw myself as a girl really (Ben).

But the group. It gave me uhm...I mean, seeing how these people acted, I mean, how they, you know, how they presented themselves, gave me my early ideas on what being gay was. And at that time, being gay was being a little bit flamboyant – being a little bit witty – funny even (Manuel).

Actually my ideas about gays – mmhh – more on the feminine side. So when I was in high school I do make ups, I do cross-dressing, but not that much, because I have a very slim body, because I can take all girl's clothings [sic], so sort of that, so. More on the feminine side, and the heart – it's more feminine. So when the guys are actually inviting me to join them – I felt very – I felt very happy because they sort of considered me as a girl (Benjie).

I asked Benjie if the guys he was talking about were gay or straight, to which he replied:

Straight guys. Straight guys *na* [already]. So actually during high school I realized that – later part of high school – I realized that I would never be happy with straight guys, because I had relationships with straight guys. And sooner or later they would find a girl. They would find girls for themselves. Now I have a wider horizon when it comes to relationships. Actually I had a lot of relationships already – short time relationships – and there are two types of straight guys. The first type is the poor type actually. That straight guy will treat you very well – like a girl – he will give you roses – so basically he will keep you like an opposite sex. But there will come a time for that man – actually it's more of a friendship between a straight guy and a gay.

I then asked Benjie if sex was involved in the relationships, and he commented:

Yes. But, it's a one way sex, so the straight guy is always the satisfied one not the other. And then the other one – but there is love, the guy's so sincere like – the other one is the user type. There is no love involved. He will use you for

money or things or popularity or what, so that type of guy is bad, so I don't like that type. And now- **“That would be guys in high school?”** Yes, in high school. And when it comes to love life, actually it evolved. From straight cute guy – physical qualities of the man – actually it transcends to a more – a deeper qualities – inner qualities. So from straight guy I realized that what I want – what I wanted in life is a partner. Regardless of his physical qualities – regardless of his background. So, and I could find that. ‘Cause we have a group right? Ben, Ferdi, Alfonso, and the rest of the gays. We grew up together. Before we were looking for boy-next-door guys perhaps, and as we grew older, we realized that we wanted something more – more than – physical qualities. We wanted relationships that will last. **“And we’re talking about other gay guys not straight guys?”** Yeah. And we can – admittedly – we admitted to ourselves that we couldn't find that happiness – that feeling of fulfilment with straight guys. We could only find them with people like us. And that's the most important thing. Actually we're very proud of ourselves because we're maturing. We're maturing already. When it comes to relationships or careers and so on.

Danny also describes how in high school the ideal relationship was built around notions of a relationship with a straight guy. He adds:

You wanted a relationship with a straight guy and the ultimate would be marriage. When we were in school it was disgusting to even think – to even you know think that I'd have sex with another gay guy. Because the perception is the gay guy is a screaming fag. Now it's near impossible for you to have a relationship with a straight guy. Because we've matured already in seeing the landscape of an impossible – for prospects. It was just lately or in college or even after college that I realized that if I am to be in a relationship it should be with another gay guy. But before that. The ideal would be I want to be with a straight guy because I'm a girl. Of course we had to really shift our paradigm so that we could find some of the – what if?

Ferdi describes his own high school experiences and crushes he had on other boys. He states:

And the thing with all guys school is – if you happen to be the softer – if you happen to be on the softer side you're considered a female of the species. I had my own share of experiences back then – high school. And crushes as well. Back then we used to treat crushes as if they were already our husbands, something like that. And we had this concept that if you were my crush, you'd solely be my crush. Nobody would have a crush on you anymore. **“And that could be straight guys?”** Yeah, these were straight guys. And in relation to that I would like to say that we also had a concept before that we were meant for a straight guy. I dunno with the others, but for me, especially for me, I did not have a concept back then that gay people can be with a gay. A gay person can be with a gay person also. And that relationships last. Well in high school that was my concept. It was our concept – most of us. **“And what do you think it was based on?”** Well because it was based on our crushes. That when we have to have a relationship if ever, it was really a stereotypical guy and girl. You should be the girl – you're meant for a straight guy. We didn't have an inkling that we

can be meant for each other. A gay person and another gay person. It only came about when we were already in college. That was when we were more or less exposed – ahh, okay – that is possible for two guys to be actually in a relationship. It was probably in high school we thought it was only til the level of infatuation. It didn't occur to us that oh yes, it might be love, but you know, chances are it will be just love equals crush.

During his interview, Ben discussed the cognitive and experiential processes through which an awareness of *kabaklaan* occurs. In many ways it provides a summary and explanation of experiences discussed by other participants in this section of the chapter, and brings a degree of clarity to the participant's conceptual understanding when identifying as *bakla*. He concludes that:

You realise that you're gay because you've built up this repository of images and words that other people say to you or otherwise. Like your dad telling you that boys don't cry, or that you should play sports, or play with the boys instead of girls, or that boys don't play with dolls et cetera, because you act soft and sensitive, and act in a manner that is perceived to be weak. And then other boys at school tease you and say you're *bakla* because you're not rough and tough like them. Then self denial comes in because you don't want to be what they're saying that you are because you're afraid. Maybe because you've been made to feel that it is wrong or is a sin. Therefore your awareness of your *kabaklaan* has been built up through time and experiences and through gendering of yourself by others. It doesn't occur to you that you're *bakla* because you've had same-sex experiences. Sure, you eroticise and fantasise when you're old enough, but actual sexual experiences rarely happen, being sheltered middle-class Catholics and all that. And anyway because of Catholic beliefs, pre-marital sex is wrong. So I guess there is no sexual epiphany in those terms. You don't define yourself albeit unconsciously or subconsciously as *bakla* because you've had homosexual experiences. Perhaps it is because Filipinos don't define themselves in terms of their sexuality. You're either a boy or *bakla* because of the way you act and talk, for example flailing hand gestures, facial expressions or being soft spoken.

### ***Putting Gender and Identity into Context***

The issue of what was considered by participants to be appropriate social behaviour and gender comportment for **themselves** "as *bakla*" was a recurrent theme that appeared in relation to various aspects of their lives, and was closely linked to perceptions of class status and shared patterns of social and cultural learning. When viewed from this perspective, gender can be seen to represent the common ground that Pao was discussing in the beginning of this chapter because it links together commonalities in gender experience, ideation, comportment and identity. The data showed that the abovementioned elements of gender were formed in relation to knowledge and experiential learning gained from participation in the family, the school



and education system, and the Church. These three social and cultural institutions were seen to play a pivotal role in shaping how the group members framed their attitudes, beliefs and responses towards their gender and identity. Another social institution – the mass media – was also named by participants as a force that emphasised traditional Filipino family values and relationships by showing Filipino films that portray socially acceptable male/female relations and behaviours while stereotyping and lampooning *bakla* whenever they made an appearance in Filipino films and television.

During conversations with the participants it was discussed how *bakla* were widely viewed by Filipino society as a lower-class, loud and crass cross-dressing group of people who were usually hairdressers (*parloristas*) or involved in the beauty or entertainment industry. Ben and Manuel commented that practically every street or shopping mall in MM has *parloristas* working in hairdressing shops, and so they are well known to people from all walks of life in MM. They added that *parloristas* were a constant source for degrading and derogatory comments and jokes that had included deriding remarks made by their own parents and siblings. This they said was the attitudes they had grown up with – that to be *bakla* was to be something bad and shameful.

Pao had experienced personal conflicts over his effeminacy because of the negative stereotypes present within the Filipino media. He comments:

It's a conflict okay? But then we weren't really taught that homosexuality....actually we don't have a definition of homosexuality other than being effeminate okay? So when you're effeminate you're already branded as gay. In school they didn't teach us the morality about being gay. We only found out from society. From the news, from movies, from the TV programmes we've watched. For example, we hear in the news that a fashion designer or a hairdresser gets killed by his lover – his boyfriend. So it is imprinted in our mind that there must be something about being a fashion designer or a hairdresser that is bad. Why are they being killed? Actually in most crime cases the lover or the boyfriend asks for money, and then when the gay refuses he gets killed okay?

Benjie revealed that during his earlier high school years he was publicly rebuked for appearing as *bakla*. He elaborates:

As long as you would not exceed that level – people would not treat you as something trash. Because actually if we exceed too much of being a girl, quote, unquote, people would treat you bad. That would hurt you. It happened to me many times before. I was walking the streets – people there shout “*bakla, bakla, bakla.*” *Bakla* is the Filipino term for gay. It was the way I act – I was very

feminine before. I was very very feminine. And actually I didn't dress up that very girly thing, only hung shirts and hot red pants (he laughs).

### *Western Culture and Local Interpretations*

When participants were engaged in discussions focusing on the influences responsible for reshaping and redefining their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes about their sexuality, gender and identity the unanimous response was the West. Analysis of the data indicated a cultural cross-fertilisation of Spanish Catholic and American materialistic colonialism. This was reflected in the ways that participants retained aspects of a traditional and conservative Catholic ideology and upbringing (for example, the belief and focus on family and kinship and in the maintenance of appropriate moral and social graces and standards), married with a desire to partake in Western consumerism and by extension Western gay imagery, hedonism, relationships and lifestyles.

The use of pornography was shown to have had a major influence in how the participants began to reshape their identity to include gay sexuality and homoeroticism. Ferdi explained how the group would discreetly share pornography between themselves, and during his explanation illustrated how Western gay pornography had a significant influence in giving the group an exposure to Western sexual and homoerotic proclivities. He comments:

We would hang out at another person's house. And you would do it secretly, because of course back in high school you would dread being caught – of course until now you would dread of course being caught by your parents. So your brothers or sisters who would not have a clue as to who you really are. So we did pretty much the porn stuff. Similar to what the guys do, but it was less rampant. Meaning it was less pronounced compared to the straight guys, because of course most of them would be straight guys, so it was easy for – it was easy and well comfortable for them to be sharing pornography inside the classroom rather than we do. It was a totally different thing. So if we do share those, we would discreetly put it in brown envelopes, and then we would make the rounds – okay! It's your time to borrow, then once you're through give it to the next person.

They were all guys naked. I would doubt if they were straight. But as long as a guy was there – in the magazine. We had our own share of heterosexual pornography – a guy and a girl. Again, this was more prevalent than gay pornography. So we were also exposed to that – that medium. But of course we knew we were gays, so we had to only have that particularly catering to gays. So that was just our knowledge back then. As long as we had these magazines we knew we were gay.

Ben describes how Jao came from a wealthy family and travelled to the United States every year for a vacation. While there he would purchase gay-focused print materials which would be shared with the other group members on his return. Jao's earlier exposure to gay life outside of the local environment had also been expedited by the purchase of a home computer with Internet access which allowed him to chat to other gay people overseas.

Ummh – well in high school – in our class there were eight of us. But we were sort of always together as a group – as eight people – we'd be small pockets of people. Just two people, hangers, it's a very general friendship group. But yeah, we talked about personal stuff and we also shared pornographic materials – that's another thing – 'cause Jao had – Jao was the rich kid in high school. So he had money to burn. And he was the most advanced in terms of being gay [laughs] because ummh he was exposed to ahh – other gay realities. **“What do you mean by that?”** Ummh – how Western gays are – gays of the West – U.S. specifically. Ummh – they travel every year. They go out of the country and travel. And he had money to buy books about gay life or gay poetry. And at that time he was the first one to have a computer and an internet connection. So he was chatting with other people, other gay people. He was the first one to be exposed to gay life outside the sphere (Ben).

Pao revealed how he was experiencing inner moral conflict as a consequence of looking at pornographic imagery because he felt it put him in direct confrontation with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The moral prohibitions on homosexuality by the Church, and his inner fear of being punished by God were named as primary reasons why he has abstained from having sexual relations with another male. Pao does however reveal that his fears had not prevented him from privately viewing and discussing pornographic materials with his friends. He concludes:

Inside okay? There was a conflict. Of course being in a Catholic school, all of us would say that it's wrong. Probably none of us could imagine that we were – or that we would be able to do that, or we would be able to engage in let's say a sexual act with another person of the same sex. I think more than – more than ignorance, it's fear okay? But then when we started watching let's say videos, and then we looked at magazines. **“You're talking about pornography?”** Yes, pornography definitely [laughs] – pornography. Probably something in us got curious okay? I will say this – I haven't – I don't have any sexual experience with other men. So I don't really know. Probably I'm inhibiting myself because I am very Catholic. For me there is strong fear of God, that's why I'm not doing it, although I am gay – no doubt about that because I have feelings towards other men okay? Although I'm not manifesting it through sexual act okay? So when we were looking at let's say the videos or the magazines, probably – of course also it's taboo. In the Philippines even if you say you're gay – you look at gay magazines, or gay videos you still won't be able to discuss that among yourselves, even if you're already close friends. It's talk confined to – let's say

the bedroom okay? If you have someone in the bedroom with you [laughs]. So we weren't really able to talk openly about it. And then in college probably, we didn't have to project a certain image. Of course when you are in Catholic schools you should behave (Pao).

An underlying issue to consider here is that since the participants do not live in the West the non-tangible aspects of Western culture and lifestyles are open to interpretations given by the participants within the framework of their own social and cultural understandings.

Angelo comments:

Western thought has very much influenced and invaded and ahh – the way the colonies think. I think it's most especially the Philippines. Here in the Philippines, the Western thought, Western fashion, Western education, Western history, has very much influenced us. And so I think that superstructure permeates the way gays – the way the gay people see themselves. It's difficult really to identify how it influences the gay culture specifically, but in fashion – how we should dress up. Whether you're gay, whether you're straight, whether you're a guy or a girl. You still consult how models look like in the catwalks of Paris or New York or Milan. And very seldom do you really aahhh pay attention to how the Manila catwalks or the Cebu catwalks are actually trying to – begin an evolution of how we should dress up as Filipinos.

Angelo discusses how Hollywood movies and television have informed his thinking, and talks about his own thoughts and interpretations of their content. He comments:

I'm not very much informed though about permanent homosexuals in the west. **"I guess I mean through media, especially films."** Yeah, ahh...You have "Queer As Folk" now, you have – I hear there's this reality TV series that have queer as well as straight guys. "Will And Grace" – you have that sitcom. Ellen Degeneres came out in the show. Whatever happened to their career when they came out? That also had an effect. But other positions of power I think. If the modern world or if post-modern thought recognises that there are superstructure – there are certain structures that we have to contend to – to contend with – to contest – they might as well use these superstructures – these several multiple superstructures for homosexuality to be able to – prove what the hell of the point is [laughs]. But if we would just be seen in media in hairdressing, in costume designing, in fashion. If people don't see strong gays in politics, being respected.

He adds:

We discussed earlier about the difference in economic class. How also the view – how the concept of homosexuality differs in the social classes, because the availability of education of interactions between different people. But I think the

movie “To Wong Foo” with Patrick Swayze, John Leguizamo, and Wesley Snipes. I think there is a difference in social classes. We have the character Vida Boheme – the Manhattan – [laughs] the sophisticated transsexual, and John Leguizamo’s character who is a Chicano gay of the street. Probably the counterpart of our *parloristas*. They have differences in the way – how they view homosexuality. I mentioned “To Wong Foo,” because there just might be similarities in terms of viewing homosexuality because of social class. Because of “To Wong Foo,” it means – “To Wong Foo” has this show-biz difference in homosexuality in relation to social class.

Pao comments that the Hollywood image and portrayal of gay characters as “straight-acting” is influencing a change in the ways that gay people in the Philippines see themselves and are seen by the general public. He comments:

The colonial mentality is still there. What Hollywood dictates, the Philippines follows. So right now gays in America are being portrayed as that – straight looking, straight-acting people okay? They are the lead actors and confident. Because Hollywood changed the image of a gay. Of course the Philippines also want that kind of portrayal. You will see famous Filipino actors portraying gay roles that are not really screaming faggots or drag queens. They are normal looking, straight looking I mean, even handsome, but they are gay. So Hollywood or overseas influence is really a contributing factor to how the Philippines or the Filipino people perceive homosexuals. Probably we have adapted an image of the gays similar to Hollywood gay in the sense that we don’t colour our hair anymore. We don’t wear contact lenses. We don’t wear dress up in drag anymore. We look like the typical yuppie – young urban professionals. We can wear neckties. We can wear whatever. We can come out in sneakers, sweat shirts and so on.

Ben also believes that Western media has an effect on shaping how gay Filipinos are rethinking their gender roles and so challenges the traditional view of the effeminate *bakla*. He comments:

But it’s from Western TV shows – movies – that you get to learn that there are gay relationships existing to seemingly non-gay people but who are gay – they have relationships – all that sort of thing. But it doesn’t have to be that you’re a gay person and you’re effeminate, and you’re with a straight guy, and you have a relationship. ‘Cause it never happens anyway. That’s just like the prevailing fantasy.

### ***The Social Structuring of the Gender Hierarchy***

Alfonso brings a degree of clarity to the similarity/disparity dualism when he explains how gender in the Philippines is often seen as a three-tiered hierarchical structure of gendered relationships that are loosely based on notions of public perception and physical appearance. At the top is the “straight-acting gay” who does not

display any visible signs of feminine or effeminate behaviours or mannerisms. This type of person generally comes from the middle to upper classes and has had extensive exposure to Western ways of thinking and acting in terms of gay sexualities and lifestyles. In the centre position is generally the middle to lower middle-class gay or *bakla* who also has had exposure to aspects of Western sexuality and lifestyle, but who is regarded as effeminate, but not overtly so. At the bottom of the tier is the lower-class *bakla* or *parlorista* who may choose to openly dress like a woman, but more importantly behaves in an overtly effeminate manner.

Alfonso positions his own group within this structure when he comments:

I guess because in the Philippines, unlike let's say in America where hairdressers are like in these really big parlours and stuff like that – here in the Philippines, beauticians are a bit more quote-unquote cheap. I guess because they can be found in every rural village – everywhere. And they tend to be viewed by the majority as cheap I guess even if they are in bigger salons like in the malls. But I guess – they're being stereotyped. These beauticians are being stereotyped for that and for being umm queens basically – for being drag queens basically. But the thing – the thing you see, with my group – Ben and Benjie – our group is sort of like, in between. Because I know there is also that divide with – between the queens and the straight-acting gays. In the Philippines, I think that's sort of a very, very – that divide is obvious, especially if you go to places like Malate where it's the world of straight-acting guys. The thing with me and I guess with most of my friends, it's sort of different for us. We're sort of in-between, you know. We're not really the type who'd be super-straight-acting or to the point of being closeted. But we're also not – because it's obvious that we do show effeminate characteristics also – but at the same time, on the other hand, we're not going around in normal days anyway in skirts or stuff like that.

For Alfonso, having an exposure to Western ideas has altered his perceptions of gender relations. He elaborates:

I started – I mean, but when I was younger – definitely I'd say I was an exclusive bottom when I was younger. But that's part of the evolution I was telling you about when I started to realise that I'm sort of different. I evolved and changed when I grew up – I mean got older, not grew up – when I got older. And I was exposed to more Western ideas because I guess when I was a kid my idea was very, very local. And I had this notion that I'll find someone straight. But now my mindset is quite Westernised, I guess. And I think that also has to do with education and class because more of the straight-acting guys, gays I mean, tend to come from the class A, B, C I guess – as far as I know, as far as I have seen it. A, B, C – I mean middle to upper class because we call it A, B, C, D, E. Because class A, B, C people – they're more of straight-acting gays. I guess it's probably because of exposure to international media. They're more exposed to concepts and studies and education – that comes from abroad,

whereas class D, class E are more localised in terms of their exposure. So they still tend to have more traditional – I mean, traditional Filipino ideas of homosexuality. So I think that also contributes to that divide which really – it's just not a class divide – it's also a straight-acting versus feminine kind of gay divide. So I think it's quite complicated actually. They're all intertwined I think.

### ***Category Three: The Catholic School and Education System and the Development of Identity and Group Solidarity***

The continuity and longevity of the friendship group was forged from friendships and relationships that began at grade school, had continued to expand and grow through high school and were established and complete by the time the participants entered university. It was the Catholic school and education system that had initially been responsible for bringing participants together in one place and at one time, however analysis has shown that it was cultural connections based on gender and sexuality, social class, and educational status that were initially responsible for the integration and development of the group as a strong and cohesive unit within the broader social framework of educational and religious teaching and learning.

#### ***Safety within the Group Structure***

Participants described how during their school years membership in the group had provided them with a safe and secure social space in which they could feel free to express themselves. The group also acted as a security blanket and buffer against potential abuse and ridicule from their peers. Possessing a sense of shared interests with the other group members, and feeling safe and secure within the group structure had also given the participant's a sense of agency within the school structure which allowed for academic growth and achievement. Comments included:

Probably we had – of course when you're in a group you have collective strengths. We thought we were – in fact we were untouchable in high school okay? They [the teachers] were trying to break us up in terms of separating us let's say in a group project. Usually we would form in groups of eight. And of course we were already eight, and naturally we would group together. But people were trying to break us up, probably because they were jealous that we were so strong. All of us in that class were strong academically. But probably personality wise, because some of us were still quiet or still repressed okay? We already felt secure (Pao).

I felt supported because they were comfortable being themselves. Feeling that you had other people's – other people's – but not supporting, but ummh – well yes, support as well, but ummhh you feel safe that you can express yourself. Because they're like you are. And that you have people who are – who have

common interests. Okay, it's basically – you find very good friends in high school. (Ben)

Especially when we were in high school – acceptance. Because – acceptance because of course I think more than acceptance as acceptance that you are also gay. I'm sure Ben told you now we weren't exactly a minority in our class. We were a big group – we were eight, so just by having a bigger group – acceptance – getting acceptance was a bit easier because we were recognised. Unlike if you were just alone, or you were just two gays in the whole class. It was harder to be accepted by everyone else, and so that's what acceptance – accompanied or strengthened by the fact that we were a big group (Danny).

### ***Religion and Considerations of Gender and Identity***

A significant issue discussed by the participants was how they attempted to reconcile their Catholic selves with their gendered selves in the context of their school's Catholic teachings and religious instruction that had included homosexuality. Comments varied, depending on the standpoint of the individual, however issues of religious ethos within the broader school structure figured highly in the participant's stories about school life and their own feelings during that period. They included:

Jesuit education is very much liberal minded I think. It's very much open. I think I'm grateful because I studied in [name withheld] and you had people like Brother Santos and you had other teachers as well who were also – probably they were not graduates from our school, but nevertheless they were part of the system of the Jesuit education, but they were very much open to discuss these things. And again discourse about what should be and what shouldn't be. In the light of Jesuit education, in the light of Catholic doctrine. It was nevertheless – even though we felt afraid, and we felt being suppressed and being marginalized, nevertheless the fact that there was discussion and discourse about what should be and what should be at least about homosexuality. With my friends we would talk about how we should have our hair cut – about how long we should grow our nails – about how we should dress up. What bags to carry to school. What accessories to bring. It was a discourse nevertheless, and it was a liberating experience as I look back, because the fact that yeah the objective probably was to suppress us or to put us – to put the homosexuality to the minimum – it was difficult yeah [laughs]. We grew in that structure because we knew that we had to define our homosexuality (Angelo).

I was never really religious 'cause I was always lazy about going to mass – going to confession. And religion was my least favourite subject 'cause I found it so boring. 'Cause in [name withheld] they teach religion as a subject – as a major subject, so it could be.... In grade school they called it Christian Life Education. In high school they called it Religion. But yeah, it was mostly Catholicism. You only get to learn about other religions through history, like Asian history subjects, war history subjects, but yeah. It's not really religion as a whole, it's Catholicism (Ben).



I mean, back in grade school, we were told that, you know, being gay is bad. And now in high school, we were being told that, you know, “it’s okay, God accepts you even though you’re like that.” And that was a big deal for me, but I guess, by that time I was also... I’d, I had also experienced really too much – too much disappointment, too much disillusion with society in general and their perceptions about being gay – that I didn’t... I didn’t really fully give in to that great feeling – that being loved by Jesus (Manuel).

Probably for me it is – it’s a conflict okay? Inside okay? Personally I found out for myself that in the Catholic Church – in Catholic teachings – the homosexual person is not bad. But the homosexual act is detestable to God. I’m not claiming to be an expert in Church law, but ummhh – people say – of course by homosexual act we mean sodomy or anal intercourse.... There was a conflict. Of course being in a Catholic school, all of us would say that it’s wrong. Probably none of us could imagine that we were – or that we would be able to do that, or we would be able to engage in let’s say a sexual act with another person of the same sex. I think more than – more than ignorance, it’s fear okay? We were formed to be good Christians. So although we had thoughts okay? We were curious about how this and that feels, or how this or that could happen okay? We were being prevented by the structure itself – the school (Pao).

Participants also discussed the processes of reasoning they had worked through when trying to put their feelings and identification with their religion and the Church into a perspective with their feelings and identification with their gender and sexuality. Comments included:

I may not be as religious as I was when I was a kid – I would even teach Sunday school. I may not be as involved with Church, but I’d say I’m still a very spiritual person. I still pray every night before I sleep. I’d still pray when I wake up. I’d still talk to God. So I’ve already found – I don’t know how, but I’ve found a way to sort of put my homosexuality in perspective of my beliefs. Cause if you wanna go to some more details, I mean, someone – I read it somewhere that it’s true – I read in the Bible that sins of homosexuals were mentioned like what, seven or eight times, but sins of heterosexuals were mentioned like hundreds of times – things like that. And in those in places where homosexuality was quote-unquote condemned, these were also places where things like menstruation and stuff like that are also condemned, right – in Leviticus or something like that. So it sort of makes – it sort of gives you a perspective already of maybe it’s the way you interpret it. And besides, somebody was right, I don’t think anybody – Jesus never mentioned anything about it in the New Testament, in the Gospels he never mentioned anything about it. So it sort of already made me have that perspective already. I mean, I had found a way to reconcile my religion, my beliefs with that (Alfonso).

Well of course Catholic Church teaches you to – teaches you that being gay is wrong. So nowadays they’re saying that – what they’re condemning is ummh – homosexual acts – quote unquote, but not the homosexual. But yeah – I’ve never really – I didn’t feel like ahh I was being punished by school or anything – but –

but – I would say that I had conflicts with religion. Possibly stemming from the fact that it's at odds with Catholicism. But ummh – I guess it's a general sort of mistrust that causes it. But it's not solely because of my being gay. Again it depends on the person. They could be repressing gayness. It would be 'cause – they can have a way of reconciling religion with their being gay with being Catholic. It depends on the person to work his way through it (Ben).

I deliberately don't think about it. Because it's hard to reconcile – it's really hard. From what I was brought up to believe and what you know, and the balance that you're really asking, and what I know they still believe in. They're in clash or in conflict with what is practiced. And because my stand is I don't make it an issue. I don't even connect it or attach it to my religiosity or to my religion or to my faith. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I'm really not interested or that – you know – into the active gay sex lifestyle. Maybe, I dunno [reflecting]. Maybe there's still that Catholic schoolgirl in me telling me that hey, it's bad. I don't think so [laughs]. Maybe I'm really the person that's not that horny [laughs], or sensual, I dunno. But don't know if it's that conscious, but I don't really attach the religious ideals to it. I make it a point to separate it. If only to save both I separate them. **“So that would be for preserving a sense of your own identity?”** Perhaps. **“So maybe you can protect who you are?”** Yeah, correct. Exactly that. I consciously – or I have this shield between the two. Just to keep them both (Danny).

I guess I pretty much thought that being gay was not a good thing. Because ummhh – the school, aside from being an all-boys school, is also a Catholic school, and religion really did play a big part in my early perceptions about being gay. Because, I mean, these priests would be telling you that having feelings for your... persons of the same sex is wrong. And they really wouldn't be able to explain to you except that, you know, they'd just be citing text from the Bible and, you know... now, you know... I mean, we could all say that – you know – that they have taken it out of context, those phrases. But back then, I mean, I was just a kid. I was impressionable, and I really didn't know how to think for myself yet (Manuel).

### ***Gender Identity and Educational Achievement***

A strong desire to achieve and succeed scholastically was a theme shared between the participants. Analysis of the data revealed that a primary reason for achieving at school was to compensate for the negative attitudes and beliefs that surrounded the *bakla* stereotype. There was a strong belief that setting high goals and working hard would override the negative connotations of their gender proclivities and protect them from criticism and abuse while proving themselves worthy of gaining the respect and admiration of their families, peers, and society in general. Being successful was also a means by which to negate the issue of bringing shame on their families. By showing that contrary to the stereotypical belief that *bakla* were considered to be lower class, poorly educated, loud, crass people of low moral value and substance, it was their

intention to reconstitute this image and social status through achievement and success – virtues they knew were admired by their families and within their culture. It was also mentioned (as shown in Pao’s quotation), that academic achievement was a mechanism used to ward off any suspicions of being considered *bakla*. Comments included:

So when I entered college I set my love life apart because I had to be serious with my career. See I wanted to prove to everybody that I can make it – I can make it to the top regardless of my sexual preference. So I studied hard. I became the student council president of my university. I also became the editor-in-chief of our magazine. So even though I didn’t become an honours student I received the leadership award from the university. Actually it was the Manuel Quezon Leadership Award, and fortunately I was the first gay to receive that very prestigious award. Manuel Quezon by the way is one of our national heroes in the Philippines. So he’s the father of the Commonwealth Government. So right after the Spanish era in the Philippines he became the President. So I was very proud – my friends became very proud of me, because I gained their respect without actually asking for it. So somehow I proved to them that gays are not only good in fashion or beauty or entertainment. Gays are also good in leadership and management. So when I entered the student council way back in college I had to make decisions for the student body, and fortunately the students and the administrations of my neighbours be accepted – appreciated my decisions for the body. That’s why I got the most prestigious award of the university. I’m glad that I touched my life because they think that parlour gays are only for entertainment – are only people to make you laugh. They realise that gays can do more than – more than a real man can do (Benjie).

That’s why, I dunno. Maybe unconsciously we try to excel in whatever we do because we wanted to show to people that my being gay is nothing – has nothing to do with what I can do, and what I can do for you, or what I can do for this person. I dunno, unconsciously. Maybe that’s why when some people would tell me that when the person is gay for sure he has some sort of talent or some sort of brilliance about him or her. And it helps. And it helps of course to have that perception.... And then secondly we were the honours class. So people can’t just shun us away and say “Yuk! *Bakla iyan!*” [“Yuk! He’s *bakla!*”] But we were *bakla*, and we had the brains, we had the talent. We would impress everyone including our teacher (Danny).

When I was in Grade 5, the library gave me this award. I was probably the only student they ever gave this award to. They gave this award for having the most number of books read in a certain year. I probably read about 250 books on that particular year. Yet pretty much every night, I’d be reading one book, one book every night. And, you know, it was my way of not dealing with my, with my anger, my frustrations, with my classmates, with my family, with not having any kind of outlet.... So I liked being a teacher’s pet, I guess because we all got along with our teachers – being smart. I also associated that with being gay. I don’t know why, but it just seemed to me that most gay people I met during High School were smart and got, you know, high grades, stuff like that (Manuel).

Gays in the Philippines, especially in private schools turn out to be achievers because they – probably because of their fear early on in life, let’s say in grade school. I was afraid of being ostracised in school. I kept to myself and concentrated on my studies. I forced myself to study because my thinking was if I get the top honours – if I get awards – nobody can say anything bad against me. Although I am gay – although they identify me as being effeminate or being loud okay? Nobody can claim that I was mediocre in school, especially in a private school. You can’t say that a person is mediocre because he is gay. You can only say a person is mediocre if he really didn’t do good in school. That’s our defense mechanism okay? It’s our security blanket. We shielded ourselves from criticism by studying – studying well.... I used academics [sic] to eliminate any suspicions. From the parent-teacher meetings okay? The teacher would probably mention that sir/ma’am, your son is effeminate, perhaps inclinations to become gay. So I’m sure my parents suspected okay? Suspected that I was effeminate. But then since I kept on bringing home good grades and so on, they brushed it aside. So it’s not so much proving myself to my parents. I just use my academics, or performing well in academics to shield myself from any suspicions (Pao).

### *Grade School Experiences*

The data revealed that attending grade school had provided an early opportunity for the young men to meet each other and form the core of the friendship group. It was a time when they first also had contact with other young *bakla* who had similar thoughts and feelings to their own, and this sharing of *kabaklaan* allowed for early experimentation and flirting with their gender.

Ben discussed how he met his friend Manuel at grade school.

Manuel was the one who approached me and talked to me about music and got me interested in books then. There was this natural gravitation towards each other. We knew that we were all gay, although at the time you wouldn’t admit it to yourself and you wouldn’t admit it to another person. Although it’s something that you just know. I’ve had friends who weren’t gay, but most of my friends in grade school were gay so it’s a natural gravitation towards gay people.

Pao recalls how he befriended Manuel and Ben.

The arrangement in class was usually alphabetical. Manuel was letter “T.” I was letter “V.” Ben’s last name is letter “Y,” so we got in the same column, so we developed a friendship. And you know the saying birds of the same feather flock together. People would see us together, and other people, other class mates won’t join our group okay? Because probably they saw something different that we did not see.

Ben tells his story about the experiences he had during grade school.

I never had any problems with other students. I wasn't bullied or anything. But you'd get the occasional teasing for all sorts of stuff, not just for – not just because they perceived you as gay or anything, but ummh just normal kids' stuff. But, well the teachers – ummh – I'd say I was a bit of a teacher's pet [laughs] because I got good grades. So I wasn't really – although I remember there's one time in grade seven – Pao was my class mate in grade seven – Manuel was in the next class – and Pao and I had two other gay class mates – ah – Martin and Franco and they tend to act in a very effeminate way. They did their hair and stuff so...everyone knew they were gay and effeminate. And – 'cause there were other guys in grade school who were like that. Who were very effeminate, and I think during one break time a teacher approached them, because they were – ummh – they were gathered in front of the comfort rooms [toilets]. They usually do their hair and preen in front of the mirror in the comfort room. So when they went out the teacher saw them as a group then – I think the teacher was asking them – actually I wasn't sure about what the teacher actually asked them but it was something about their being gay. And the teacher was asking if they knew of anyone else – anyone who was gay as well. And I was passing by – happened to pass by during that time – because our – actually our classroom was right in front of the comfort room – so I went out to class with my class buddies going to the comfort room and one of them – I think it was Chris – who pointed to me and told the teacher – Chris pointed to me and told the teacher that I was gay as well. And the teacher looked at me and asked – “so are you gay?” – and of course it was all spoken in Filipino – and I said that – I denied it [laughs]. Very tired of hiding – ugghh – being found out – everything – so yeah.... But I never did anything in school to get punishment for. Ummh – with other guys – with other gay guys – teachers would confiscate items from them like make-up or – so they'd get punished for it 'cause we have a rulebook in grade school and in high school. There's a section there where they're punished for any conduct unbecoming a gentleman. So that's our school rule. So it's a very vague rule – it's not really explained. What stuff you can or can't do with regards to being a gentleman. So yeah, teachers could use that – invoke that rule. They would confiscate ummh compact mirrors, makeup or whatever, 'cause some of the gay guys – the effeminate ones – would brush their hair while teachers lecturing – they would look at themselves in the mirror – put on lipstick or lip gloss or powder their faces – something like that. But I never never did anything like that. **“And that's in grade six?”** Grade six, grade seven – even before that with the other guys.

Manuel describes his experiences at grade school.

I started realising when I started going to school that I was also different from my classmates. I was into different things. They were into sports. I was... what was I doing? I was into flowers [laughs] and, you know, growing things. And I had no desire to, you know, do rough sports. I enjoyed singing. In fact, I was part of the choir in grade school. I was pretty much into very... very artsy stuff back then. And from then on, you know, I could tell that I had different interests. I only began to suspect that I was gay when I started having feelings for, well, for my classmates which was around I guess grade 4, yeah. I had this huge crush for this classmate of mine and I'd...well, it was a strange feeling and I really didn't know what to do about it 'cause I didn't know who I could share this, this experience with. I guess that's probably why I got used to being a loner and

keeping stuff to myself back then. **“And then you met up with Ben and some of the other guys?”** Yes. **“Who are still with your group now?”** Yes. They were like, you know [laughs], they were like my way of escaping also, in the sense that I had found this unique group of people whom I could share my experiences with – who I didn’t have to pretend to be somebody else with. Yeah, and I guess having that group back then was such a big deal for me precisely because I didn’t really have any lasting relationships with anybody else. Back in grade school, we would be... well, we would spend most of our recess time and lunch time and dismissal time together. And uh, this uh, well, we would have this sort of a *tambayan* [a regular hang-out], like a place where we would usually hang out. Like this was our place [laughs], and it was usually the waiting shed where we would all be... we would be all waiting for our parents or drivers to fetch us.

Pao describes the gender experimentation that took place in grade seven and how that began to change when they entered high school.

Seventh grade we were still together, the three of us, and we had two more friends in our class and there were others who were more out than us okay? The eyelashes were curled – somebody – one of them already claimed that he had had liposuction as early as twelve years old. He was indulging in that kind of beauty treatment already okay? Okay, curled eyelashes, ummh fragrant women’s perfume – someone was using women’s perfume. Ummh, basically we just – we remained the same, only our interests were probably leaning towards the feminine type more and more. So probably in high school, that’s when we started fitting in to a specific identity.

### ***High School experiences***

High school was the place where the remaining group members met and joined up together, and was the period in their lives when the participants strengthened and consolidated their friendships and relationships. The school programme and curriculum provided a structure and setting in which the group members could bond together as *bakla*, and share their ideas, emotions, thoughts and feelings.

Ferdi feels that over the past decade school attitudes have changed to the point where his group are now tolerated by their peers.

[Brother Santos] used to tell me back then that during the eighties gay people were really – probably persecuted in the sense that their underwear would be hung on a tree for everybody to see. Really those discrimination things....So lucky for us already – this was during ninety three, ninety four, ninety five, that people were changing much about their views, attitudes towards gay people. So yeah, we were tolerated.

Benjie explains how the closeness and support he feels towards the group was based on understandings shared between the group of friends.

I went out with them and I liked their company. Because I could express my feelings, my emotions, and we had the same wave length intellectually – intelligence. Because gays are very intellectual. We share the same feelings. I can actually confide in them my best secrets, my crushes, my insecurities in life, and they were very very supportive during that high school life. The good thing about our friendship is our friendship is so deep that we already understand each other's feelings. We don't have any big quarrels. We support each other. We will always be here for each other. Always, forever.

Danny describes how their group was accepted within their batch because of their academic accolades and this made him feel proud and part of a community.

In the honours there were eight gays there, so couple fabulousness with brains and what do you have? A great group of eight gays strutting their stuff. We would succeed, we would be – we would end up at the top of our class, of our batch. So acceptance even pride – I dunno – was also a big thing. And then of course the friendship because we also bonded we would go to each other's houses. We would tell each other our secrets. So there. High school was really fun because of the community that we had back then. And we were also fortunate because during our time there wasn't really any – of course there was, but not harsh discrimination. We weren't really discriminated against. Maybe because we were this group of smart *baklitas*.

Manuel discusses how the group helped him work through his negative feelings during high school.

At high school I was still being picked on for acting and speaking in a certain way, but at least at that time, I pretty much figured out, you know, I was gay. And it, it was pretty hard to accept, but I was on my way there and, uhm, most of my other friends were coming to that point also, so it was a lot easier for us now to start, you know, telling each other about our experiences at home, sharing, you know, sharing thoughts and ideas about being gay. It, it, I guess yeah, in a sense it was easier for us. Because for us, the class we got into turned out to have had... I guess, about one fifth of that class turned out to be, you know, sort of uhm, gay. So it was fun because, uhm, me personally, I drew strength from that, from the fact that we were this many. And..I guess high school was a lot more bearable to go through

Pao also comments on the strength he received from within the group

As early as first year I can't say the common interest was in men already okay? Because we were only about thirteen. Some were even twelve okay? Probably we just felt secure and safe within a group okay? Since we are eight we were I

think forty. We were one-fifth of the class. We were a strong force to reckon with.

High school was also shown to be a time of increased growth and development for the participants, and they began to experience a wider knowledge and understanding of the world outside of their immediate families and local communities, and this had included exposure to Western literature and ideas surrounding sexuality and gender. Several group members had obtained Western pornographic videos and magazines from local street vendors, and the members would circulate the materials between themselves. The data showed that viewing of pornographic materials by the group members was more than a gesturing towards the erotic or the sexual. It represented an effort by the participants (through the sharing and discussing of the materials), to align themselves with the imported visual imagery, and in the process began to ground and develop their identities within the realities of their own social and cultural milieu.

The particular school attended by the participants was a private Catholic high school staffed by Jesuit priests. Several of the participants commented that high school was much more institutionalised and rigid than primary school. They described it as a power structure of teaching and learning that was not simply responsible for their intellectual growth, but for their moral and spiritual development as well.

### ***Days with the Lord***

Days with the Lord (hereafter known as DWTL), was a major event that had a significant impact in the lives of each of the participants. It is a three day voluntary Catholic spiritual retreat for students that is officiated by the Jesuit priests from their high school<sup>18</sup>. In their first two years of high school, students attend a one-day class retreat. In their third year the retreat is called DWTL and is attended by a mixture of students from different batches and sections, and then in fourth year there is another three-day retreat for students from their own section only.

DWTL was designed for the purpose of allowing third year students to gain a closer relationship with God in an atmosphere of community, friendship and congeniality. Colloquially it is affectionately called “Days,” and the students are known as “Dazers.” Events included prayer sessions, talks, and personal meditation. Although

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<sup>18</sup> The basic objective of the Days with the Lord sessions is to enable the participant to realise more intimately the personal love of Christ, so that the participant may be disposed to respond freely to the invitation of that love.



intended for religious and spiritual purposes DWTL also provided the structure and environment that had allowed gay students from the various high school sections and batches to meet each other and socialise in a safe, relaxed, atmosphere and social setting. It had provided an opportunity for the participants to bond together and strengthen their existing friendships and relationships and for making new friends and establishing new relationships. It was during the retreat that Alfonso, Benjie and Ferdi met the other group members. Comments included:

It was going through DWTL in third year I would say helped me by exposing me to other gay people as well because I met Alfonso, Ferdi, Benjie, Ricki, Paul – all the other gay guys that I now am in contact with through email. Ummh, but they were from a higher batch. Some of them were in my batch who were from a different section. So it gave an opportunity to mix and meet with other gay guys. (Ben)

Even though I was Protestant I wanted to go join it.... DWTL was a real life experience, not because of the religious side, but it was the *barkada* – because of the *barkada* atmosphere of the event. It's a three day long event and it was really fun for me. I met lots of friends, and it was basically fun. And I met new friends there. And then as the time went by, I really really got involved in it because I really liked the environment (Alfonso).

Of course, high school was so much fun because of – because of course of the group, and then when we got to know the other people like Ferdi from the other sections – from the other classes – and then later on in third year when we met the other gays – gay groups or *barkadas* in the other year levels it became really a lot more fun. Especially in third year I remember when we started ummhh, being active in Days with the Lord. I'm sure Ben has told you about that. It's the seminar, and then well in a way the gays of the high school ruled – Days with the Lord (Danny).

### ***Brother Santos and the Genesis of The Happy Room***

A key figure in the lives of the participants during this time was Brother Santos, affectionately known by the participants as “Bro.” He was the coordinator for DWTL, and at various times during the participants’ candidature fulfilled the roles of assistant principal, acting principal and school guidance counsellor. “Bro” was much loved by the participants because he was openly accepting of the gay students at the school, and his acceptance and positive attitudes had helped students become more self – accepting as gay and Catholic. He had referred to this particular group of students as “the happy people,” and it was from this reference that the name *the happy room* was coined in the early 1980’s and became known as the room at DWTL where the gay students met and

socialised. Knowledge of *the happy room* had been passed down orally from one generation of gay students to the next, and so had become an integral though unpublicised part of the structure of “Days.” Brother Santos was a well respected community and religious personality, and had at various times offered advice and counselling to a number of the participants. Comments included:

Brother Santos was very fond of gays actually, so we realized that we are really part of the community because of that person. And during our time he was the acting principal, so he was very supportive of our conditions – of our extracurricular activities and so on. Other faculty members are very discriminative, so they are dream stealer. And they were dream stealer and Brother Santos was always there to support us. He was really a very important person in our lives. He touched us. He was very supportive of the gay community. Actually he even allowed me to do make-up in his office [laughs]. It’s okay with him (Benjie).

There was this counsellor of ours – back then we used to be really close to him because he was the defender of the gay people around. Whatever batch – gays would really run to him for advice or help, be it family, be it school, be it everything (Ferdie).

The basic thing was we were gays. But foremostly it was we were there on retreat. We were there to affirm our relationship with God. Yes, we were gays, but there was still a spiritual side to it. Because it’s really a stereotype that if you’re gay you are irreligious, or you are a carnal being with no sense of the spiritual. That was a time wherein we affirmed, not just our being gay, but our relationship with God (Danny).

Going back I – *the happy room* days really helped me. Maybe sort of reconcile ummh, being gay and being Catholic. ‘Cause the person who was in charge of DWTL, Brother Santos – or fondly called him “Bro.” He never condemned the gay guys for being there. For staffing, for helping out, and he actually sort of supported them – that it’s a safe place for them to be. To participate in. So yeah. Sort of reconcile being gay with being Catholic. That it’s not actually wrong. To be gay and Catholic. So that’s why during DWTL that I finally accepted myself as a gay person (Ben).

*The happy room* was also important to the participants because it was a place where the gay students could “hang out” and galvanise together through group interaction and participation in various fun activities, and this had provided the participants with a sense of acceptance of each other in the presence of a shared common identity. Comments include:

I'm sure my own experiences are pretty much like everybody else's. Like when we joined or went through DWTL a whole batch, or the whole batch before us were already taking care of us because we were the new gays in the community [laughs]. So we were pretty much welcomed warmly already from the very start, because they knew that these are the next batch of gay students who'd rule – something like that – so it was really the more like of a family, and then we had this room – it was called *the happy room*, because gay – happy, so instead of the gay room it was *the happy room*. So that was where all the gays from all the batches converged during the “Days,” so we really really had a fun time. Of course like in any school or even in any company you really bond when you work together, and I think that's also where we got closer, not just our group, but also with the other batches – the other gays from the other batches, because we were working together to put up each seminar through. So there. And then in between really we had – we hung out – and it was – DWTL was one weekend, so I mean being with those people for what, seventy two hours, so we really spent a lot of time with each other. We really had a lot of fun. Of course we would talk about our lives – we would talk about a lot of things (Danny).

I got to meet people from the upper batches. I also got to meet people from the lower batches. So it was an opportunity for us to be familiar with – find comfort with each other in this community of all gays. The sense of belonging is that hey, we're all the same. We all have the same lives (Ferdi).

In fact, because of DWTL I developed my friendships – I knew them first because of that. I got to see them first and second year high school, but just seeing them. I know they existed, that's all. They knew I existed, that's all. But during Days with the Lord it gave that opportunity, because you can write letters. There's a night that you read letters from people – good luck and – tear jerking stuff [choked up]. You get to write to these people – you get to, hey – ummhh – I wanna be your friend – I get to see you, but – you seem to be a nice person – things like that. So our friendships I might say started – really formally started with that. Because afterwards when we are all staffing, we have a different room to ourselves – that is why in fact we got *the happy room*. Because we had the room – the classroom – just a classroom – we would just sleep on the floor. We would just bring sleeping bags and pillows. We would set aside the chairs, and then we would use the centre of the floor. That room – meant only for gay staffers was *the happy room* – it was gay happy, something like that. Then we would decorate the blackboard, and this is where we would do the beauty contest things – that's the noisiest room [laughs] (Ferdi).

The happy room is the gay room, because gay is synonymous to happy. That's why it was named *happy room*. So all the gay – the gay people – the gay students sleep there, and we communicate there. Through board, through letters. Actually it's what we call the main operating room, because all the ideas about DWTL came from there. So even though we don't know each other we feel that we're very close because of that *happy room*. We sleep there together for the first time. We do our feminine things there. Doing makeup, doing beauty contests. **“And that's where you met everyone?”** Yeah. That's the place where we met each other. And that's also the place where I admitted to myself that I was a gay. But actually when we graduated high school that happy room was

used by the younger generations of gays. And it became a network now in the Internet. So we communicate through that *happy room* (Benjie).

Although DWTL was designed and officiated by the Jesuits, it was staffed by student volunteers who had completed the retreat. There were two levels of volunteer workers – the rectors and the staffers. The rectors were hand picked by Brother Santos and had a proven record of reliability and responsibility. They would coordinate the various daily activities, and the staffers, who would help the rectors in their various duties as well as providing assistance to the participants. All of the study participants had at some point volunteered as staffers while several had gone on to become rectors. Analysis of the data revealed that the gay students often gendered the roles and relationships of rector and participant in such a way as to depict the traditional family arrangement of husband, wife and children. A gay rector would therefore be considered as a mother, and a “straight” rector would be considered a father or husband. Participants would be considered as “the children” of the family (because they were new to the DWTL experience), and would often be referred to and refer to themselves as “sisters”. Ferdi explains:

And so with the succeeding batches you get to staff. And then if you are lucky enough you can become a rector. Meaning you handle the batch itself. If you're gay – this is the system there – if you're a gay rector like Ben, you're a mother. And then if you are a “straight” guy rector you're the husband really – the father. And then the participants are your children and sisters together. And we get to refer to gays from the upper batches who are our rectors – my rector for example, as my mother. So it gets you into a more personal stance with gays from the other batches.

Alfonso elaborates further on how this concept operates when he gives an account of his own experiences as a rector.

And in the following year, fourth year, I became a – because of my really super-involvement with “Days” – I became a rector. Meaning, you get to head one of the next batches. You sort of organise one of the batches. And in my batch, the batch I was rector on, I met four people – uh four of my children – we call them children; we were the parents, the rectors were the parents, it's just for fun – that's what we called them – of them I had five who were gay. Although at that time there were four only, the fifth one sort of became later on – because we were all friends – came out to us. That was Pao – I'm sure you know him – Manuel, Jao and Danny. They were my four gay children. The following batch – that was batch [gives number], that's my batch – the following batch was [gives number] – that was Ben's batch. And he was really close of course to Pao and stuff like that, so that's also how I got to know him because I was really, really close to these four – my four children quote-unquote. And Ben of course

obviously was very, very close to Manuel and Pao. They've been sisters since they were like grade school. So that's also how I became very, very close to Ben. And again, we really clicked because I got to know them. They were like my group of gays.

### ***Religious Retreats and "Coming Out"***

The data revealed that of the eight participants interviewed, three had "come out" to significant other during high school retreats including DWTL. The emotions generated during these experiences had engendered feelings of solidarity and camaraderie, and in so doing had created an atmosphere conducive for the participants to feel comfortable enough in "coming out" and express their innermost thoughts and feelings to their friends and family. Pao recalls:

Most of us had the same problems in the family – an absentee father, or a father who was loving but he was not there because he was busy with work....Some of us were too rich [laughs] – probably were rich, and whose parents again – too busy for us. So there is a recurrent pattern okay? And then we were happy that there are people in the world like us. When you're in grade school you think that you're the only one, that's why it's very difficult to come out. I'm the only one who has this feeling – I'm the only one who had this unfortunate experience and so on, but when we had our talks and our retreat, things came out, and this made us stronger and brought us together.

Benjie discusses his own conflicts and "coming out" experiences.

Actually when I entered DWTL I was in a closet. I was a closet queen. You see I didn't want to admit to myself that I was a gay. Finally I met them and I realised that I haven't found that happiness before when I was with my straight friends, because I couldn't express myself very well. I couldn't comment on certain issues because I feared they would not accept my comments and associations, because at that time my ideas have a feminine – a feminine touch! So I feared that. Especially – I grew up in a classroom where all of the guys are straight, so I don't have – unlike Ben and Alfonso, they have companions.

Ben discussed how the DWTL experience had made him more accepting of himself, and because of this experience was able in his final fourth year high school retreat to come out to his parents. For Ben, coming out to his parents had initially proved to be a negative experience, and it highlights some of the gender issues in Filipino society that can impair the coming out process. For this reason I have detailed a more inclusive account of Ben's coming out story.

**"So did you have any difficulty reconciling being gay with your family?"**

Yeah. I was concerned about it for a time. Ummh – 'cause I wanted to – 'cause

there's also an unsaid thing that you know that your family knows, but it's something like "don't ask, don't tell." And that can be very prohibiting. It's an unnecessary impression. So, well in my fourth year we had a retreat. A Catholic – it's a three day Catholic prayer thing. I stayed there – somewhere in the retreat centre run by the Jesuits. And during the end of the retreat we were asked to write a letter to our parents just expressing to them whatever you want to say. In addition to meditation and prayers. You get to be in touch with your inner feelings.

**“So could you explain more of that to me? You said you wrote a letter to your parents.”** Yeah – I wrote a letter to my parents and I told them that ummh – then my dad was very – typical straight person making fun of gays – faggots, faggot – of course in Filipino. Crack jokes about them. And even saying not very nice things about my friends. ‘Cause they were obviously gay – effeminate. And I wrote them that ummh – it hurt my feelings that they would talk about my friends that way. And they knew that they were my friends anyway. So I said that we were all the same. Well, meaning that we were all gay. It was sort of my “coming out” letter. But the funny thing was with my dad – ‘cause the retreat went on from Friday night to Sunday night. Ummh Sunday afternoon, so Sunday afternoon my parents picked me up at the retreat centre. They read the letter. During that time my dad talked to me and said it was okay and he doesn't really understand it – why or how I'm gay it's just – be very – ummh – girl clothes. ‘Cause I'd suddenly be wearing dresses and putting on makeup. [The meaning here was that his dad was okay as long as Ben didn't do anything to publicly disgrace his family like wearing girls clothes et cetera].

**“So it's okay as long as you don't act effeminate – it's a public thing?”** Yeah – ‘cause it's also the thing – it's public – yeah – as long as you don't act gay, but if you're not obviously gay it's alright ‘cause then you wouldn't bring shame to your family or big embarrassment to your family, yeah. But when I was with my dad it was alright, he said that just not to wear dresses, but I wouldn't anyway. That was never a problem with me.

**“What about your mum? How did she feel?”** But with my mum ummh – for one week she didn't talk to me. And she ignored me and she wouldn't look me in the eye for one week. The following Sunday she talked to me and she broke down and she was crying. Appealing to me – actually telling me that it's not true that I'm gay. That I was just being influenced by my friends.

**“Did they stop you from seeing your friends?”** No. They never did that. **“They discouraged you?”** They never said anything. It's just that my mom told me that I'm not gay. And ummh that I should promise her that I wouldn't be gay because it would break her heart really. **“So you went along with it?”** Yeah.

**“What age were you?”** I was in fourth year high school so I was seventeen. Seventeen – yeah, I was seventeen. **“Did the other family members – your brothers and sisters know you were gay?”** Ummh, I only had one sister. She was too small. Ummh but my brother was still in grade school. I never told him back then.

**“So you’ve come out to your brother though since that time?”** Yeah. After – what was it – I think it was in ninety seven or ninety eight that I came out to my brother. Because – oh no – it was in two thousand I think – the year two thousand? Nineteen ninety nine? In their fourth year retreat – it was my brother’s retreat in fourth year high school. I wrote him a letter.

**“So you went to the retreat?”** No, no ‘cause ummh – during the retreat I forgot to mention that you get letters from family, friends, relatives, encouraging you, supporting you in whatever way they perceive they’re supporting you right now – an affirmation thing – if you’re doing good – that sort of thing. But with friends of course – friends know you better really – how you are really, so friends would write to you. Ummh – ‘cause it’s in fourth year high school, so you’re graduating. They’d write you and tell you how much they treasure your friendship – that sort of thing. The feel-good thing.

**“And so how did your brother take your letter?”** Ummh yeah so I wrote him a letter. He read it during his retreat. And yeah, it was like he knew anyway – that I was gay – so it wasn’t an issue for him. But I guess it just needed to be said out in the open so we don’t walk on eggshells.

**“And it was in your fourth year that you actually came out to your parents?”** Yeah. But it was going through DWTL I would say helped me by exposing me to other gay people as well.

### *University Experiences*

Graduating from high school and moving on to university was a significant milestone in the lives of all of the participants. Many of the old restrictions and rules and regulations that had structured their lives and experiences within the Catholic education system were now gone, and the participants had a greater freedom to explore and experience a more liberal educational system and environment. The friendship group fragmented in a physical sense when the group members proceeded to different universities<sup>19</sup>. Alfonso, Ben, Ferdi and Pao enrolled at University of the Philippines which is a public university. Benjie went to University of Santo Tomas, and Manuel, Angelo and Danny attended Ateneo de Manila University. Both of these institutions are private Catholic universities. While enrolled at the University of the Philippines, Ben, Ferdi and Alfonso joined UP *Babaylan* (a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender advocacy organisation) that was named after the pre-colonial cross-dressing male shamans. A consequence of joining, was that they made gay as well as lesbian friends through the organisation, and so formed a new gay and lesbian group at university. As a

result of the more liberal attitudes and environment of UP, the participants were part of a setting in which gay men and lesbian women were seen to show affection towards each other. Ben discussed how this for him had prompted a realisation that same-sex relationships were indeed possible and real. Ferdi discussed how he entered his first relationship with another male at university. Pao (who was arguably the most closeted and conservative member of the high school group), revealed how the more open and liberal atmosphere of the university had prompted him to engage in “risk taking” behaviours such as being seen in public at a gay bar, and mentioned how the fear he had felt during his high school days had now dissipated.. Although the original high school group had physically split up the participants still remained “as family” and remained connected to one another. This consecration of significant friendships and group unity, loyalty, cohesion and longevity, was seen to have begun out of a mutual need and desire as adolescents to explore their gender and sexuality. School was the social institution to which they were socially contracted as young people to attend, therefore it became the social setting in which the participants shared their dreams, desires and aspirations. By the end of this period and journey in their lives the participants had shared much together, and so the camaraderie they enjoyed was sustained as they moved on to university and then into the world of employment and work. Comments included:

Of course in college you make new friends. Not just gay guys, but you get female friends, straight guy friends. You gain more friends. But the old high school group fragments but you're not totally apart. Your not really – you're still in touch with each other. Maybe during the weekends we'd hang out – watch a movie – have dinner. Because the friendships in high school are that strong (Ben).

Actually when we graduated high school we already went our separate ways kinda. Some of us went to one school. The others went to another school. But we kept in touch. We would see each other regularly. Maybe not every month, but every now and then we would see each other. But the group was still there. We would still acknowledge the fact that we were a group, so every time there's a reason to go out or to meet up we were sort of complete, except some of us really never kept in touch, so I dunno what happened there. Lost interest maybe, but the core group has really been there. But when we were in college it already decreased of course because we couldn't see each other regularly anymore. But now it's still a recognised fact that we are a group and we never did fall out with each other (Danny).

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<sup>19</sup> In the Philippines each university has a number of colleges on campus. This structure is patterned after the American system of tertiary education. That is why the participants often refer to attending college rather than university.



As members of UP *Babaylan* Ben, Ferdi and Alfonso attended a number of workshops that focused on gender and sexuality issues. Ben discusses the organisation and his affiliation with the group, and how it changed his perceptions of relationships. Comments included:

In *Babaylan* we had gender-sensitivity workshops, that sort of thing, so we had talks about gay issues, health issues, AIDS, that sort of thing. And even in ummhh – it's available to the whole student population – gay issues, health issues, women's issues, all the issues that can be talked about – there's a venue for it in the university. I'm talking about UP, 'cause Ateneo is a Catholic university so they're not as free...UP *Babaylan* was really a formalized organisation for gays and lesbians and other students to gather in one place and hang out and stuff. Alfonso had known people in *Babaylan* because they were in high school together. Because they were in "Days" as well. So some of them I had met as well, through DWTL.... So Alfonso was the one who got me into *Babaylan*. But *Babaylan* was a pretty well-known group in UP anyway. Everyone knows that *Babaylan* is for – it's a gay group. So yeah, Alfonso brought me into it. He wanted us to sign up for it with Ferdi as well. But that wasn't until my second year in college. The first year – the first year of college, three of us hung out together. We even had a subject together – a PE [physical education] subject together. So in second year I joined *Babaylan* with Alfonso, Ferdi and Chris. And so I met other gay people there – lesbians as well. And within *Babaylan* we had a group as well. There were three of us and there were two lesbians. There was Raphael as well. Raphael was also from my grade school and high school. I've known him since grade four. So he joined us as well and we had our own group there. And of course Alfonso would have his own group from people in his course. With Ferdi it was the same – of course with other people. That would be the case as well.

I asked Ben to reflect back to when he went to high school and the notion of desiring a relationship with a straight guy and when that concept had changed for him. He replied:

It changed for me when I got into college then I realized that ummh – well Jao was the first to realise it. 'Cause he fell in love with a straight guy – a classmate – giving him gifts and stuff. Writing him letters but of course that quote-unquote love wasn't reciprocated. Then of course Jao was the most exposed to the outside gay world. So yeah, maybe he realized that ummh if you're going to have a relationship it's probably with another gay person. I realized that in college. Maybe I think that by joining *Babaylan* I realized that. 'Cause to see it in action – to see it in existence – to see it functioning in the real world you realize that's how it is.

The UP *Babaylan* experience had also changed the way Ferdi thought about his relationships. He comments:

My mind changed completely though, because in college it was my first time to have a relationship with another guy. It was also my org [organisation] mate – in *Babalyan*. But prior to that we were friends – acquaintances – but he was really my first boyfriend. When I entered into a relationship with him – that was when I realized – oh – this can be possible after all. But I also had to recognize he was not a straight guy. He was also gay. And having a relationship with a straight guy would be so rare that if it would be possible – here in the Philippines – if it would be possible chances are it would be more of – you know – the guy would have to get money from the gay – that unfortunate gay person – so on and so forth.

For Pao, growing up combined with the easing of restrictions he experienced in high school had meant more freedom in college for self-expression. He comments:

When we were in college we were of course older and more mature. We could make decisions on our own. Or we could at least risk – take risks without being afraid of being reprimanded by parents or by teachers. In college we didn't care if we were let's say seen in front of – let's say we are outside let's say a known gay hangout place, we don't care. But if we were in high school let's say, and somebody passes by and sees us standing outside let's say a gay bar – that would have a bad connotation already. In college we didn't have that fear anymore.

#### ***Category Four: Affections of Class and Education over Gender and Identity***

Class consciousness and class position were issues that featured strongly in each of the participants' stories. Sustaining a middle-class status within Filipino society was an attribute that engendered a certain sense of pride amongst the participants. This was reflected in the thoughts and feelings they had regarding their educational background and achievements, intertwined with self-defining and determining notions of their gender, identity and status within the hierarchical schematic of the urban gay or *bakla*, and in terms of their position in relation to mainstream society and its social institutions within MM.

#### ***Swardspeak and Issues of Education, Class and Identity***

*Swardspeak* or gay lingo is an adjunct feature of the friendship group in so far as it does not with any degree of certainty identify or define the participants as group members per se. This is because *swardspeak* is spoken and used by a range of other gay-affiliated and classed groups in the Philippines including the upper-classes, lower-class *parloristas*, and members of the general public including people from the entertainment industry who wish to bring some colour or “coolness” into their conversations. There is not sufficient space within the context of the current chapter to give a complete and detailed account of *swardspeak*, therefore an in-depth interview

recorded with Ben in the Philippines on the subject appears as Appendix 6 at the end of this study. Briefly, *swardspeak* is not a language, nor is it a dialect. In MM it consists of Tagalog peppered with words, sentences and phrases that are constructed by individuals for the purpose of remaining somewhat covert in their conversations, so that others who are not familiar with the lingo cannot understand what is being said. *Swardspeak* can be considered as a sociolect rather than a dialect because it is constantly being changed, revised, and added to, depending on the needs, wants and circumstances of its creators. It can also be considered class-based and group oriented, because it is often used by members of a specific gay *barkada* or friendship group to extemporise and share accounts of individual or group experiences that are usually humorous or humorous and sexualised. Examples could include discussions about boyfriends, relationships, a recent social event attended by members of the group, or even a beauty contest. It could also be something recalled from the past such as high school experiences that others in the group are also familiar with and can relate to. It is because of the shared nature of the experiences (and consequently the *swardspeak* words that are made up to relate these experiences) that can lead to identifying with your own social class and friendship group, therefore extolling feelings of group solidarity and group identity. The participants of this study have developed their own version of *swardspeak* which they have called *vakler*.

Alfonso describes how he learned gay lingo at high school and uses it to remain covert when speaking to friends. He elaborates:

*Swardspeak* is very important, I guess in a certain sense. I know it's existed way before I was born, at least locally. I started using it I guess when I was in third year high school when I started you know, some of my friends were using it. At first of course I wasn't adept, but then I became more adept I guess. And I believe in what people said in that it's a way of you know – for one thing it's a way to keep – if you want to converse with a friend of yours in public, but you'd talk about someone or something, it's just something that you can use to actually talk to each other about.

Alfonso also discusses how members of the mass media in the Philippines use gay lingo, and so as a consequence of mainstream use of specific words and phrases, new ones are coined in an attempt to keep the lingo covert. He adds:

That's why it continually evolves. I think that's the reason why it constantly evolves. It's because the thing here – the funny thing about the Philippines is that it's a paradox really. They sort of marginalise gay people and yet they adapt a lot of things that gay people use. So the moment a specific – or specific

examples of gay words or phrases are being adapted by mainstream society – that it will definitely change in the gay community because people are starting to use it outside. And that means people are starting to understand it so it has to change. And definitely, definitely mainstream media has – which I guess is full of gay people – has definitely, definitely been instrumental in propagating a lot of gay lingo which is why you can actually already start hearing straight people... **“I can hear it on TV, Filipino shows.”** Exactly, even straight people start to use some of the phrases so that’s exactly the – that’s the ironic thing, I mean, they marginalise gay people and at the same time they adapt a lot of things.

Benjie describes his own thoughts and feelings about *swardspeak* and the friendship group when he comments:

*Swardspeak* is very important to me, especially – we grew up in an exclusive school for boys so we had – we can talk – we have different lingo – language – but the straight men cannot understand so we could communicate in front of them that we like that guy without him knowing – without him knowing. And of course gays are very funny – they laugh at things, people [laughs], but it’s a reality. When we go – when we commute – when we commute we see a lot of things around us that for us are funny. So we can’t really say that that girl is funny – that girl beside you is funny because the girl will understand and we may get a spank – a slap on our faces so we talk in gay lingo – gay language. But the girl will not be able to understand, and that’s a very powerful tool for the gay community because we understand each other. We understand our minds, our hearts through gay language. **“And that’s something you started in high school?”** In high school. **“Through the group?”** Through the group. Actually most of our languages – we invented them. We shared them to others. **“And that’s a spontaneous creation of language?”** Spontaneous. For example, for male – for straight male – we call them *mhin*, but sometimes we add suffixes, so *mhinchikolitis*, *mhinchin*, *mhinchu*, *mhinchuria*, so but we understand even if it’s expressed in different forms.

Danny shares his recollections of the formation and use of gay lingo from his high school days when he comments:

As I mentioned, we really had our own language. And early on the *swardspeak* was already embedded in our – in the way we would – berated each other – even with other – with uh non-gay classmates or batch mates from school. And some of us – they’re not really in our group already, but from the higher batches – the gays from the higher batches. They were the ones who would really invent languages. They could really coin terms that built the lingo that was high school gay. It was really fun. And some people there were really ingenious and creative in coining such terms, so there. We made fun of other people. Creatively, and critically creatively, and we really made a career out of it that we would invent a whole culture out of it. We would invent our own language – something, some sort – something like that. Just to make fun of people. And of course we would make fun of each other. Oh, that was also another [laughs] fun part. It was of course – it wasn’t downgrading at all. Maybe at the start, but of course that’s one

of the reasons why we really bonded – because we knew each other’s faults – so that’s why we really grew close. Because we knew each other’s faults – we would make fun of each other – and it would be our nicknames. We had nicknames, and our nicknames would be about our shortcomings. Like we had a friend – we call him – because he looks like a dog so we would call him *poochie* or something, or *negra* because someone was dark-skinned. Gina was called *bitchesa* because she was a bitch, so it was really a culture. A fun fun culture.

Danny discusses how *swardspeak* is important in so far as it helps define his identity as being *bakla*, but is not a signifier of the deeper, complex and more meaningful parts of his identity. He comments:

So *swardspeak* is very important, but it’s just superficial. It won’t define my gayness maybe. Of course it does define it, but it wouldn’t be the end all – be all, because I know – I know a few gay people who really don’t use it but who really are gay. But in the superficial level it’s really important because it gives you character. For example when I go ahh – in the workplace of course as I said it’s normal to use *swardspeak*, so it’s not even giving you character. It’s what relates you to the other people.... And the funny thing is that’s why as I said it’s really superficial is that every time I would meet with other friends in the group, or other college friends – straight friends – I would introduce them to other terms that I picked up from here, so it’s really funny how the *swardspeak* evolves. Because you’re exposing yourself to different groups at the same time, so it really evolves, the language, the lingo, and it’s fun because every now and then new words come up, and then new terms are coined. But as I said it’s really not a fundamental – but it certainly defines what a gay person is, especially in this industry.

For Manuel, *swardspeak* held more importance for him while he was in high school when it helped to galvanise them as a group. He comments:

*Swardspeak* was important in high school – also college. Now, not so much. But in high school – having that secret language between us friends. It added to the tightness of the group. Yeah, I would say that having our own lingo – coming up with new words for us made us feel more special.

Ferdi talks about the changing nature of *swardspeak* and provides an example from his own experiences to illustrate class related differences in terms of how it is used. He comments:

I might say that if you record a particular expression today – tomorrow it could be totally different. So it’s very dynamic. **“So it’s a living language?”** Yeah, definitely. As far as I can remember I first picked it up at high school, because some of my classmates were gays. And let’s say – even – there’s no restriction already if you come from – if you’re working as a *parlorista* or you’re educated – and if you’re both gays you come to understand a common language. But the

difference comes when – there are really some words which educated people would not know, but *parloristas* would normally use. And that is probably because they really get to talk more with gays, day in, day out through their work....So a distinction between us would be more or less through language usage. Say for example, there would be a word which is used differently, but for them it is also a different meaning – carries with it a different meaning. For us it's green – it's malicious – but for them it's not. Say for example the word *emyas* For us it means masturbation – as far as my group is concerned. It's quite an old word [laughs], normally we don't use it now – we use another word [Ben told me it is *bayas* – derived from *bayo* – meaning to pound as in rice] but anyway it's still gay lingo, so for us – as far as our group is concerned – our level is concerned – it means masturbation. But we were surprised when a *parlorista* used it. I can't recall if he was a *parlorista*, but somebody from that level or group used it, and he meant it as putting make-up. It's make-up. So it was like he was telling “oh, I did *emyas kagabi*” [*kagabi* is Filipino for last night] which shocked us at his honesty, because we thought he was meaning I masturbated just last night. But then he was actually telling us I was putting on make-up last night. So you see some words might have a different meaning, with another group compared with our group. So the distinction comes in.

Pao provides an example of how a social situation is transformed and codified into a gay contextual form that can then become part of *swardspeak* and humorously shared between the group members. He comments:

Probably an example of a situation which creates a new word okay? Let's say Miriam Quiambao – Miss Philippines was first runner up in Miss Universe. To refer to her – to the tripping incident – she fell down during rehearsals. That's why she endeared herself to the judges. She fell down and then she got up and she pretended – she smiled okay? Grace under pressure okay? I can't remember – somebody coined a term for that. It's like doing a Miriam Quiambao or something like that. So a specific situation which usually sticks to a gay's mind – usually something funny will become the source of a new word or phrase.

Angelo describes some of the reasons why *swardspeak* is divided along geographical and class boundaries, and how this has affected the ways in which it has evolved. He also comments on how gay lingo contributes to group solidarity and identity:

In the Philippine gay lingo is very much alive in the sense that we coin new words – we corrupt new words, and it's alive! Gays who frequent Greenbelt definitely would not understand the language that is being used by the *parloristas* in Tondo [regional area of MM]. **“There are differences between areas then?”** Yes, yes. And it's like building your own nation. Your own small nation. Nation versus narration. You're building your own language. **“And that's with the group as well – there's words you use that....”** Yes, in fact we have our own...In fact when Pao and Ben went to UP, Alfonso – we were in Ateneo, their gay language proliferated – it grew. Where our language – Danny, Manuel and me – since we never got to talk using gay lingo – and we never had

other people to talk to in gay lingo. It never really evolved as much as the way Ben and Pao and Alfonso were using their lingo. And they had some words that we didn't know – couldn't understand – the first time we heard them. So eventually just learned the new terms that they were – that we coined after talking with them again. So what – UP and Ateneo is just a few kilometres away and yet it's almost the same kinds of people in terms of social class probably. Both are educated, but they evolved a different language as well, and I think such a language held their group tight even – you know, how language also helped tighten their group. Language became an – definitely become an identity. For gay *parloristas* who can talk about their problems – their issues – how they liked this guy across the street. Or how they liked this guy doing – they're doing a hair cut to, without this guy understanding the conversation. It's how narration – how discourse – how building their own language also defines your borders as homosexuals. And at the end, yeah – the Tondo homosexuals – the Tondo *parloristas* will definitely have their own domain together with their language – together with their parlours – together with their physical territories. Different from the Dasmariñas [upper class exclusive village in Makati City] – the high end gays, who would not have probably their own new language, but would probably refer – call a beautiful young woman Mona Lisa, and they would understand that hey there's a Mona Lisa over there. And they would understand why they call this girl a Mona Lisa. Definitely you would have to be educated and part of a specific class to understand how Mona Lisa is a term for exceptional beauty. If you were a *parlorista* I don't think you would understand immediately how that statement that hey, there's a Mona Lisa over there – that it means that someone is very beautiful. They wouldn't know anything about art or culture.

### ***Parloristas and the Classed Differences of Bakla***

Analysis of the data revealed that a social division existed between the poorer lower-classed *parlorista bakla*, and the middle-class participants represented in this study. The two groups rarely mixed together, and this was evident by the absence of *parloristas* in the participants' friendship group, and because individual participants did not “hang out” or include *parloristas* within their extended friendship network.

In his role as president of youth activities in his local parish church, Angelo had befriended a number of poorer *bakla* in his area. He comments:

That's why – why is it that gays from the – most gays I know from the lower-classes. Why is it that their idea of homosexuality still is that I am a boy wanting to become a girl, therefore the perfect guy for me is one who is straight.... I have my own friends back in Marikina where I live. They're not really *parloristas* technically in the sense that they don't have beauty parlours of their own. I don't want to sound condescending, but I think that the way they view their homosexuality – because they're also homosexuals – I think they view their homosexuality the way *parloristas* as we have been talking – as we have been defining them in our conversation. The conversation the way *parloristas* do, in that whenever we talk, why do they frown on straight-acting gays? They call

them immediately as closet gays, when in fact no, these gays are out in the open, but they're not just like you. Combing their hair long, and strutting their way in the streets, or would want to join a beauty pageant. I feel sometimes – I sometimes feel I am in a difficult situation, because I don't want to be – too imposing on them, and trying to be too academic, and being like a teacher to them, and explaining to them, that you know, you should view sexuality as so much more. I seldom discuss these things to them, but I just observe that that's how they – and I would define my friends there as being part of the lower-class.

In the quotation above Angelo discusses his belief that educational status is a factor that influences gender ideation and identity, and how this in turn is reflective of class position. It is the reason given by Angelo to explain why “straight-acting gays” are viewed by *parloristas* as *bakla* who are still “closeted” because they do not publicly express themselves as *pa-girl*. Angelo counters this viewpoint with his belief that education has meant an exposure to a wider range of possibilities, but feels it would be condescending and an imposition on his part to take on the role as social educator with these young men from his parish.

Angelo describes how coming from different economic, educational and social backgrounds and a difference in age has prevented him from having the same sorts of relationships with this group of young men that he enjoys with his own middle-class group of friends. He comments:

I'm also much older. I'm also older than the others, because I've graduated; I'm already working and taking over graduate studies. But of course that notion that I studied in an exclusive school they've already I think put me in a position of authority, so I'm like an older brother to them. That's why – we of course have our own problems. We have our own rifts – we have our own conflicts – they have their ill feelings for me at times, and they have their own, but I interact with them differently primarily because of the age difference and again educational background. Unlike with Ben, Alfonso, Pao, and Danny – our group. We're of the same age, from the same educational background. ....I never get to discuss with them books that I've read. Again I don't want to sound condescending, but I really never get to discuss with them about – ahh – because they have a different – they have a completely different economic background from me and that means – most of them are just high school – some of them are high school graduates. But some of course are in their college – are having their college education, college degree at the moment. Some act like *parloristas* – some are straight-acting – but when we get together of course we would just be flamboyant and loud [laughs]. One used to wear his hair long. But now all of us have our hair a little short – I mean clean. They are quite ummhh – adventurous when it comes to sexual encounters. Ahhh – what we usually do, we watch movies – we discuss soap operas – we discuss how we should – oh! – we discuss usually how this feast would be organised. How this image of the blessed virgin would be dressed up for this feast. How – what songs we would be singing for this mass. These guys are usually commissioned to be flower arrangers for some



events. For weddings – as I would be asked or commissioned to be the programme host or MC of the wedding or the event. Ummhh, and again the distribution of labour is an issue there. Like the point of discussion. Because I would be the one most saying, and they would be the ones doing the manual labour.

Since UP is a public university, student tuition fees are subsidised by the Philippine government. The system allows for students from poorer families who can't make a monetary contribution to their child's university education to be eligible for further state assistance. During conversations I had with the participants I was told that students from lower-class backgrounds similar to those described by Alfonso also attended UP and had become members of UP *Babaylan*. He describes how this had created divisions between the groups formed in *Babaylan*, and how these divisions were class-based. Alfonso comments:

In my third year I joined *Babaylan* with Ferdi, Ben and Chris. And it sort of – that really helped me. Although, and this sounds a bit mean, but there was still a class divide there, not in terms of – well, it's not a sexual divide, but a class divide – because a lot of people there in *Babaylan*, we didn't really like, it was really more of the advocacy, and there were some people we did like. But I guess it's the pride in us for having come from an exclusive school for the well-to-do. We were sort of a different – we had our own little sub-group there. And I guess people there sort of didn't really like us too much for it, although many did like us, but there were certain people I know who didn't. I guess it's the money. I mean, like I mentioned I wasn't really a materialistic person, but I guess I do come from a well, not rich, but I guess a bit well-to-do family. So I guess even though – I know it's bad – but it sort of still has that – you're still sort of a bit put off by people who weren't as well-to-do (Alfonso).

Ben concedes that there is an element of class snobbery attached to the division between the two groups, but feels it is more out of a sense of shared experience that the various group members galvanise and form groups together; however class still remains an underlying feature. He comments:

There are differences. Well there's also a class difference – snobbery, so yeah. But ummhh mostly it's because of commonality of experiences. So it would be stick with the people ummh who went through the same things as you did. There is also a wavelength thing. Of course talk to people whom you can talk to. 'Cause you talk about the same stuff and you appreciate the same things. You do the same things. You watch the same movies. That sort of thing. So it's also a wavelength thing.

Benjie speculates about the possibility of his friendship group interacting both as individuals and as a group with lower-class *bakla* and concludes that they could not

sustain the same relationships with them as they could with each other. His comments include:

We would still consider them, but sometimes when we were with them we cannot really talk that much. We cannot really express each other's feelings with them around, because they will not understand. That's one of the good things about our group, because we share our comments, our suggestions. If you are wrong we will tell you that you are wrong. And we will give you advices but not to the point that you will control the life of your friend. So if a person will enter our group he must have those qualities. He must have those qualities at the very least. *Pero* [but] we will consider them – but we will consider them as friends but not best friends. Not best friends.

Pao likens the structural differences between the classes to a caste-system in which those with money and education have good life prospects, and those without have limited choices in life. He comments:

There is how do you say it – a caste system – like the Indian system – the hierarchy okay? If you work in a beauty salon, you are a lower kind of gay. Or if you work in the market – you are a barker – [illustrates in a high pitched voice “buy this, buy that”] – you're loud. You are somebody who is low. In the same way that in society there is a gap between the rich and the poor. Money is what influences. Money and consequently education is what separates gays okay? If you're not well bred – it's very sad really – if you're not well bred, if you're not educated, or at the least if you're not rich, because some people who are rich and gay really have bad manners. So if you're not educated then you would belong to the lower kind of gays who would end up being hairdressers and so on. It's not their fault. They didn't have the money to study. We are very fortunate to have the chance to study.

Ferdi details his own thoughts and feelings about issues pertaining to his own middle-class affiliations and his views in relation to *parloristas*. He comments:

Let's say for example – if it just so happens we get to mingle with *parloristas* or hairdressers – and as long as we like each other's presence, we are part of the group – we are part of one big group. **“Is that more theoretical than practical?”** That's the theoretical, but practically speaking – practically speaking [pauses to think and clicks his fingers] it's more of – it just so happened that we are all together from the same class. We've met through the same school. That's what happened. But what if I was a hairdresser myself? I would definitely not be mingling with people who are educated. Why? Because I'll be more comfortable expressing myself and being together, and having the same tastes with people of the same level as me. So that's practically, yes – it just so happens. The other side of it – of what I'm talking about – the other side of it would be – it may be not possible – unfortunately so, because let's say for example before, we had this acquaintance who knows a hairdresser – a *parlorista*. And just because of the way she – he talks – very very different. He

gets to be scorned by us. Well not directly me, but more or less people of the same level as me, who are educated, who are middle-class. And it just so happens that one of them has known a *parlorista*, and he brought him along. You know – he gets to be scorned because of how he speaks and how he talks. Essentially because he comes from a different background. He has a different life, he has a different language, and speaking of language – in terms of that there is no problem, but the thing is, practically again, say for example we go to a mall, and then you see these *parlorista* type people coming. We would insult them within our group. The way they talk, the way they behave everything. And in turn, for them, they also would. Oh, these people are so pretentious! Because they're educated! You know there is tension sometimes when these two groups come in contact in the same place. Both sides would have to say something about the other. And it's because they have different backgrounds. They have different opportunities with them. But in terms of language they would easily understand each other, and that's the thing. One person, one group can be so sensitive to what the other is saying because they understand each other. It's just a matter of twisting a few words, but the emphasis is there, and the other group can understand what the other is saying. So in terms of language more or less it's equal. There's an equalizer there. **“And what about dress? You were saying that parloristas dress differently.”** Oh yes. **“They dress as women?”** Yes. It's probably because they have access to it easy [laughs]. **“So would that be the thing – that they go outside the status-quo more than your group?”** I think so, because we are aware – we are conscious that if we go beyond the status-quo, we would be treated differently already, which should not be the case because we're educated. It's as if – to go beyond this status-quo we don't deserve such treatment. So we just tend to be limited to what we are, and then – except for several instances, say there is a party – we just – it's a private party – everybody would see this so it's okay. But otherwise in everyday case we would not of course dress like a woman. Number one we have work. Number two – unless you're so beautiful to do that. Let's say Gina – you can come out as gay – you can express yourself as a woman and not be so distasteful at the same time. I'm not saying that the *parloristas* are distasteful, but the way people judge. That's what I'm basing it on.

In his discussion Ferdi raises several important issues that other participants either outwardly expressed or inferred in their own discourse when discussing class status and position. Although there are political and ideological reasons why the two classed groups of *bakla* could unite this has not occurred. Instead gender boundaries have been established within the class defined parameters of economic and social difference. In his discussion Ferdi quite clearly expressed how being well educated has set his group of friends apart from hairdressers and beauticians, and the justification given for this separation (other than social incompatibility), is a desire and capacity to express oneself and share life experiences with others of a similar character and disposition. To put it another way, it is not gender per se that separates the participants from their lower-class counterparts, but it is rather out of their consideration for and alignment with middle-class values and cultural mores that have precluded *parloristas*

from sharing the same social spaces as the study participants. Again, Ferdi is clear on the issue of not overstepping the boundaries of acceptable social behaviour and “good taste” when he discusses their public profile as middle-class *bakla*. He mentions the group’s awareness that there is a price to pay for overstepping the gender line in public, because if crossed it could mean public shame and humiliation. Ferdi comments however, that in private it is possible to openly transverse the gender divide. On several occasions I was fortunate to be invited along to birthday parties given by the participants. Usually a private suite in an exclusive hotel was chosen because birthdays are regarded as special social events by the group. They certainly were occasions for celebration, and participants openly expressed themselves in an often overtly effeminate manner and very much *pa-girl*. Voices would be raised to high levels, and the group would furiously chat with each other using *swardspeak* to give heightened meaning and effect to their conversations. Stories were often shared between the participants and included conversational topics such as recounting usually humorous experiences and events from their school days, or chatting about boyfriends or people and mutual acquaintances they knew. The atmosphere was always one of fun and frivolity, and it was during these times that I had a real glimpse into the deep significance and shared social meaning that being *bakla* held for this group of young men.

### ***Class Position and Considerations of Gender and Beauty***

A final issue raised by Ferdi in this discussion was the ability to convincingly appear as a woman, and again taste was mentioned as a factor that was aligned with beauty, and *parloristas* were generally not perceived to have the beauty or the social graces and comportment to be able to pull off the transition from man to woman successfully. Ferdi discusses how Filipinos love beauty contests, and how the media has influenced perceptions of what Filipinos believe constitutes a beautiful woman. This ideation of beauty according to Ferdi, has also meant an evaluation of class relations as they apply to transgender beauty and appearance. He elaborates:

It’s really ingrained in everybody, because what we see if you have television is not only what we should see. That’s the thing with Filipinos – that’s why all these height above actors – height above self, because you don’t understand actually – they get popular, because Filipinos equate what they see on TV as something real. So once you have that it’s something to your advantage. So going to that beauty concept, gays are really – second nature for them to like beauty contests. I’m talking as far as Filipinos are concerned. Aside from the general culture that we have, wherein we love watching these kinds of – it takes us away from problems. We can appreciate beauty in whatever form. And

secondary to that would be the gay – the innate liking of dressing up, and then the whole idea of contests, costumes – everything. It also sets a standard by which we also judge other people. Fellow gays as well. So let's say between Maria and Gina – between them and a *parlorista*. We tend to distinguish as well. Because these ones fit what we see on TV. Hey, you approximately look what we saw. Yeah, I saw a while ago if you observed, I told you hey – this one looks like Gina [Ferdie was referring to a beauty pageant we were watching earlier on television]. Because we associate it already. You could rarely say that hey this person looks like the one doing my hair in the parlour. If I would say that, that would be an insult.

Ben discusses further how beauty and beauty ideation are closely linked to visual imagery portrayed by the Filipino entertainment industry as a representation of the Filipino beauty ideal. He elaborates that:

Attached to the entertainment industry is the beauty industry. Celebrities are there to be beautiful so it feeds into it that your average person would like to be as beautiful as the celebrity in every way, so yup. And Filipinos are appearance-obsessed anyway so cosmetics, beauty products, lotions, astringents, ummhh whitening lotions for fairer skin – 'cause the ideal beauty here would be a fair-skinned person – something like a Westerner – which we call a *mestiza* for females or *mestizo* for males which are ummhh– Well 'cause technically, *mestiza/mestizo* are quote-unquote half-breeds. It's like they're half-Filipino, half-Westerner/half something else so technically that's a *mestizo* but to be called *mestiza* you'd have to have certain looks – with your fair skin, doe eyes, a non-Filipino nose – a sort of high, straight nose. That would be the ideal beauty... Gay people are so vain. Gay Filipinos are very vain so they have all the beauty products to make themselves more attractive physically. It's not so much we go to the gym as though – that sort of thing – it's after a more Westernised image of an attractive gay person.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### *Globalisation and Difference: Approaching Gender and Sexuality from a Multi-Sited Perspective*

In the introduction chapter of this dissertation attention was given to the ways in which the sexual identity categories of homosexual and heterosexual are modern historical constructs designed to bring meaning to the concepts of gender and sexuality, in particular what it means to be a “man” and what it means to be a “woman.” It was discussed how in ancient times it was the quality of the relationship that took precedence over the actual sex of one’s partner. Padgug adds:

Sexual categories do not make manifest essences implicit within individuals, but are the expression of the active relationships of the members of the entire groups and collectivities.... Homosexuality and heterosexuality for them [the Greeks] were indeed groups of not necessarily very closely related acts, each of which could be performed by any person, depending upon his or her gender, status, or class (1999, pp. 21-22)

What will now be considered are multiple sites of reference – changing systems of thoughts and actions that interact and intersect in shaping and transforming the experience of gender, sexuality and identity in any given culture or society at any given historical moment. This approach appears in contradistinction with the viewpoint outlined in the introduction of the study which holds that homosexuality and heterosexuality are static, monolithic, and therefore universal givens. As Jackson (2004, p. 204) notes, “It is necessary to revise accounts that imagine the West, in particular the United States, as the sole originary site of contemporary gay identities and see multiple, and parallel, forms of gayness emerging in diverse cultures.” When considering this approach Padgug suggests that:

Heterosexuals and homosexuals are involved in social ‘roles’ and attitudes which pertain to a particular society, modern capitalism.... ‘Homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ *behaviour* may be universal; homosexual and heterosexual *identity* and *consciousness* are modern realities. These identities are not inherent in the individual. In order to be gay, for example, more than individual inclinations (however we might conceive of those) or homosexual activity is required; entire ranges of social attitudes and the construction of particular cultures, subcultures, and social relations are necessary. To ‘commit’ a

homosexual act is one thing; to *be* a homosexual is something entirely different...For example, as feminists have made abundantly clear, while every society does divide its members into 'men' and 'women', what is meant by these divisions and the roles played by those defined by these terms varies significantly from society to society, and even within each society by class, estate, or social position. (1999, p. 22)

This dissertation is a micro-study of a non-Western friendship group that self-define themselves as *bakla*/gay/homosexual and who exists within the macro-world of urban mainstream Philippine cultural. It is in consideration of this position that Western categories and rubrics of sexual identity including "coming out," homosexual, transvestite or transgender cannot readily be applied within the cultural contexts of the Philippines. As Padgug elucidates:

The point is clear: the members of each society create all of the sexual categories and roles within which they act and define themselves. The categories and the significance of the activity involved will vary as widely as do the societies within whose general social relations they occur...Not only must the categories of any single society or period not be hypothesized as universal, but even the categories which are appropriate to each society must be treated with care (1999, p. 22)

It will therefore be the purpose of this chapter to use relevant Philippine theoretical literature as well as other significant cultural and literary texts of relevance to produce deeper and more insightful understandings of the subject group and the social and cultural milieu in which they live. An attempt to theoretically extricate the participant's experiences of being *bakla* from the contextual frameworks in which they were formed would potentially weaken the analysis and discussion of the study findings. It could only represent an inequitable and somewhat distorted picture of the particular social phenomenon under examination because this study constitutes an investigation into the lives of a group of middle-class young Filipino men who live in the inner urban areas of MM.

While the decision to include indigenous Filipino literature and ideas was a calculated methodological step undertaken to strengthen and bring a high degree of authenticity and interpretative clarity to the study, it is also important not to "Filipinise" the findings by overemphasising "the Other," thereby over-accentuating difference while minimising or ignoring sameness. On this point Boellstorff and Leap suggest that:

...the tendency to equate globalization with Westernization, that is, to see it in unilinear and teleological terms such that if X is impacted by globalization then

X must be becoming more like the West...It is not only that many globalizing processes result in greater difference but also that the calculus of similitudes and difference is always culturally constituted and thus caught up in the globalizing processes it seeks to describe. In other words, how we determine what counts as “the same” or “different,” what counts as “change” or “continuity,” is a product of globalized processes (2004, p. 6)

When discussing globalisation as it relates to his own ethnographic study on male homosexuality and emerging gay communities in Brazil, Parker (1999, pp. 226) sees the need to “...escape the simplistic dichotomies between center and periphery, between the developed and developing worlds,” adding that:

It is also this influx of outside influences (whether the outsiders are in fact foreigners, or simply the diverse ethnic and economic groups that have long been present, but largely excluded, from the dominant patterns and structures of gay life in the so-called First World) that has begun to break down the apparently monolithic character of white, middle-class, gay male life in many parts of the Anglo-European world, replacing it with what some have described as the more open, diverse, multicultural structures of queer or postgay culture at the end of the twentieth century....

I must briefly call attention to the ways in which the processes described here for Brazil are similar to those taking place elsewhere in the world. Indeed, it is precisely because of the interconnectedness of the modern world that the vast majority of the transformations described above are ultimately neither entirely unique nor entirely exceptional. On the contrary, comparable forces would seem to be at work, and similar processes can be found taking place in geographically diverse sites as the twentieth century draws to a close.

There is now a growing literature...not just of “indigenous” homosexualities but also of the myriad hybrid configurations that have begun to take shape around the world ...Indeed, increasingly visible and articulate gay subcultures, communities, and organizations can surely be found today not only in Brazil but also in countries as different as Indonesia and Mexico, South Africa and the Philippines; not only in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (or even Fortaleza) but also in Bangkok, Bogotá, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Lima, Manila, Mexico City, San Juan, or Santiago (1999, pp. 226-227)

The multiple sites of reference discussed above highlight the changing shape of homosexuality and gay life, and the complex interplay of relationships that exist between individual experiences, local social structures and broader global processes (Parker, 1999), and therefore provide a strong rationale for undertaking a decentred approach towards social analysis and interpretation.



### *Category One: The Significance of the Friendship Group*

The friendship group played an extremely important and substantive role in the lives of all of the group members, as evidenced by the emotive responses given by the participants. The formation of the group can be referenced to a sharing of common demographic factors including a similarity in age, living within accessible proximity to each other in MM, attending the same schools, and coming from similar middle-class family and religious backgrounds. While it can be argued that other friendship groups are formed along a similar demographic axis, the difference here is that the social catalyst and primary reason for the group's formation is based on a shared gendering – that is the group members are all *bakla*. Several of the members discussed how they were involved with other *barkadas* which highlighted their diversity in terms of pursuing social hobbies and other social interests; however the participants' overriding allegiance and commitment was to their *bakla* friendship group. In his study of urban gay men's friendships in the United States, Peter Nardi came to similar conclusions as to why gay friendships and friendship networks were formed. He suggests that:

...the combined power of urban dwelling (most of the gay men in my study resided in cities) and self-selection to seek like-minded others may result in an increased intensity surrounding the meaning of friendship in gay men's lives....As these friends become part of someone's network – that is the exchange value of the interactions remains rewarding – this network in turn becomes a social structure that constrains future interactions and friendships....a comprehensive analysis of friendship should also include the influences that differences in race/ethnicity, age, social class, location in the occupational and residential spheres, sexual orientation, and so on might have on relationships (1999, pp. 22-43).

In the Philippines friendship groups are called *barkadas*, and according to Jocano (1998), and are the third most important unit in Filipino social life and social organisation after kinship and family. He explains that:

...this unit is composed of a group or groups of people who come together for a specific purpose – as a workforce, going on a trip, or just being together. The *barkada* is loosely organised. Membership is not permanent. The members may be playmates, professional colleagues, or coworkers (sic) in religious or civic movements.

While the structure of the *barkada* is loose, the organization is nevertheless important. It is from this unit that one derives psychological and economic support outside of the family. For instance, the acceptance in a *barkada*, particularly in a professional organization, is deemed necessary in promoting

one's career and enhancing one's business. In times of crisis, the *kabarkada* (gang mates; professional colleagues) also come to help and provide emotional support, thereby strengthening group cohesion (pp. 155-156).

For the participants in the current study, their *barkada* constituted a strong friendship and support group and was an important source of deep emotional and psychological connectivity in terms of sustaining their physical, social and cognitive care and well-being<sup>20</sup>. This was shown by the love, loyalty and dedication shared between the group members, and by the longevity of commitment they have all invested over time. When discussing gay families in her book "Families We Choose," Kath Weston concluded that:

...sentiment and emotion often appeared alongside material aid, conflict resolution, and the narrative encapsulation of a shared past....love represents as much the product as the symbolic foundation of gay families. Closely associated with the experience of love were the practices through which people established and confirmed mutual, enduring solidarity (1991, pp. 115-116)

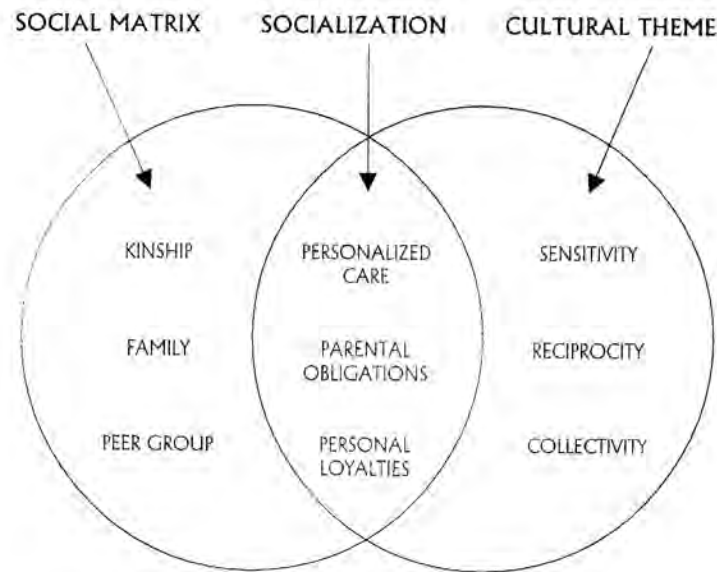
The nature of the study participant's commitment and solidarity as a group can be explained in terms of the shared patterns and cultural themes that form the cultural basis for Filipino social organisation and also by the "incest" taboo.

As Medina (1991) and Jocano (1998) discuss, the Philippines is not a society based on individualism, but is based on the concept and theme of *kabuuhan*, or collectivity, which they argue, accounts for many of the similarities between Filipino people. Similarly, another commonly shared concept within Filipino community life is *pagkamatapat* or loyalty. It is a moral requirement that includes a commitment that may take the form of emotional, financial, or legal support and assistance. Personal loyalty toward family and kin is not just encouraged but is a core value within the extended family system. It is also viewed as more than a one way process, and is based on the value of reciprocity whereby it is expected that those who are helped when they require it are obligated to return the favour when asked (Jocano, 1998). The following diagram and explanation of the basic outline and framework of Filipino social organisation is taken from Jocano (1998, pp. 153-154).

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<sup>20</sup> In the Philippines there is no exact Filipino word for the Western term "self", the closest in meaning being the term *sarili*. It refers to an individual as the subject of his/her own consciousness, of one's perception of his/her status and role vis-à-vis such a phenomenon as (1) physical body, (2) emotional well-being, and (3) mental state (Jocano, 2001, p. 97).

The social framework of community organization in all ethnic groups is the same. The most important units of this framework are kinship, the family, and the *barkada* (peer group).



**Figure 1. Illustration showing the basic and commonly shared framework of the generalised Filipino social organisation**

The relationships and connections between kinship, family and *barkada* within the context of Philippine society needs to be discussed, particularly given the significance and frequent references made by the participants to the group as their family. When discussing how perceptions of family and kinship vary significantly between societies and within societies according to class, economic or social position, Padgug concludes:

All societies have some conception of kinship, and use it for a variety of purposes, but the conceptions differ widely and the institutions based on them are not necessarily directly comparable. Above all, the modern nuclear family, with its particular social and economic roles, does not appear to exist in other societies, which have no institution truly analogous to our own, either in conception, membership, or in articulation with other institutions and activities. Even within any single society, family/kinship patterns, perceptions, and activity vary considerably by class and gender (1999, p. 22)

In her study of gay and lesbian family and kinship relationships in San Francisco, Kath Weston found that “The families I saw gay and lesbians creating in the

Bay Area tended to have extremely fluid boundaries, not unlike kinship organization among sectors of the African-American, American Indian, and white working class.” Weston uses an example of a participant’s own gay friendship and kin network to show how:

...family members [appeared] as a cluster surrounding a single individual, rather than taking couples or groups as units of affiliation. This meant that even the most nuclear of couples would construct theoretically distinguishable families, although an area of overlapping membership generally developed. At the same time, chosen families were not restricted to person-to-person ties. Individuals occasionally added entire groups with pre-existing, multiplex connections among members. In one case, a woman reported incorporating a “circle” of her new lover’s gay family into her own kinship universe.

In the Bay Area, families we choose resembled networks in the sense that they could cross household lines, and both were based on ties that radiated outward from individuals like spokes on a wheel. However, gay families differed from networks to the extent that they quite consciously incorporated symbolic demonstrations of love, shared history, material or emotional assistance, and other signs of enduring solidarity. Although many gay families included friends, not just any friends would do (1991, p. 109)

A significant difference between the families and networks described by Kath Weston and the current study participant’s own gay friendship group and network is that all of the participants continued to at home with their biological families. In some instances this had created tensions and conflicts in reconciling their identity and life as *bakla* with their role and identity as dutiful son within the household and extended family kinship network and structure. Cultural expectations by proud parents that their son would succeed academically, have a successful career, and then proceed to have a happy and fulfilling marriage, were often juxtaposed with the participant’s personal viewpoints about self-worth, personal fulfilment, and moral veracity.

The construction of intentional family ties and relationships with friends has also received attention in a recent study conducted by Anna Muraco (2006) that investigates the nature of intentional family relationships between friends of different genders and sexual orientations. The study focuses on friendships and relationships between lesbians and straight men and between gay men and straight women. She notes that:

Chosen family networks are important for gay men and lesbians who, historically, have had compromised access to families of origin because of rejection or geographical distance resulting from a move to live in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities. Gay men and lesbians also have constructed alternative family forms to challenge normative conceptions of “the family.” Moreover, restrictive laws limit gay men’s and lesbians’ full participation in legally sanctioned forms of family life that emerge from marriage and parenthood (p. 1314).

When discussing Philippine society, Ramirez (1984) proposes that the study of the Filipino family is of extreme importance for the understanding of both society and the individual in society. She concludes that the Filipino family can be viewed from three different standpoints that include a) the family as it interacts with major institutions in society; b) the family as seen in the relationships between family members; c) the family member in his or her varied social roles within society-at-large. Ramirez points out the high value placed on children in the Filipino family because they are believed to be gifts from God. In more practical terms, they are regarded as constituting the family’s wealth and as such constitute a symbol of vitality and a source of pride for the families. The child is regarded as the centre of the home, and grows up with strong ties, not just with the immediate family, but also with a network of grandparents and relatives as well as neighbours and friends who, by ritual ties, are considered members of the kinship group.

Jocano explains that the social character of kinship is embodied within the concept of being relatives, which is a social condition and metaphor of perceived structural connection. He concludes:

It [kinship] is founded on genealogical and affinal<sup>21</sup> concepts. It is incorporated in the kinship domain by the use of kinship terms, which give it a biological and social status. That is, an individual occupying a position in the kinship domain has to be born into it or is initially assigned to it. In this context, the person becomes a social personality: husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, in-law, and cousin. Persons thus designated are expected, thereafter, to play the role appropriate to the kinship status they have in the social structure. Their actions are now governed by certain rules of conduct specified by their positions in the group.

In other words, kinship functions as the cognitive map of Filipino society, the blueprint for individual and group behaviour, “the grand plan of society.” It sets the range and defines the limits of possible interaction, as in incest between

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<sup>21</sup> Consanguinal ties are reinforced and expanded by affinal bonds. An affine is a person whose relations with the other members of the kinship unit are established by the ritual of marriage (p. 40)

parents and children, between siblings, or between those who recognize each other as first cousins, thereby regulating group behaviour in a number of contexts and situations.

Should individuals choose to deviate from the existing rules, they take the risk of being sanctioned by the other members of the group. These sanctions are expressed in traditional ways, like ostracism, gossip, and scandal. Or, if the espoused behaviour changes are accepted, these become the new rules of conduct specific to the position they occupy within the kinship domain (Jocano, 1998, p. 14-15)

When comparisons are drawn with the Western nuclear structured family and Western gay friendship groups, community networks, and peer support groups, there are several issues of difference that arise which need to be considered. As previously discussed, social structure in the Philippines is based on a culture of collectivism which is in contrast with the Western focus on the individual within society. This cultural difference has significant ramifications when considering the issues of gender, sexuality and identity. In Western countries like Australia, the United States and Britain, the organising principle on which gay friendship and peer groups are most commonly and primarily based are issues of sexuality rather than gender. In the Philippines a person is considered either *pusong babae* (an effeminate) or a “real” man. In Western mainstream culture an individual is considered to be either heterosexual or homosexual based on their sexual object choice, and therefore either gay or straight. If gay, whether the person is considered to be “straight-acting” or “a queen” (masculine or feminine acting) is largely irrelevant because it is sexual orientation that separates the two camps, and it is up to the individual to determine and define their own sexual identity in terms of which group they belong. Gender enters into the equation when issues of biology and the nature and cause of homosexuality are raised, and it is in this context that gender can give rise to homophobia.

Western familial life is patterned on the individual nuclear family model which differs from the Philippines, where the extended family and kinship model are more common. The nuclear family functions in such a way as to encourage the formation of friendships and relationships outside of the family structure, and its reproduction is secured when siblings establish their own separate nuclear family unit and bear children. Gays and lesbians also come from nuclear families, and similarly form independent friendships and relationships which may or may not be fashioned along the lines of sexual orientation and identity. Of course gay men often do have their own gay

friends, but they typically have straight friends of both sexes with whom they also socialise and form relationships (Macdonald, 1996). It is within this contextual framework that Muraco (2006) suggests that the functions that families serve are similar regardless of who engages in performing the tasks which include ongoing emotional support, financial assistance, and care, and these functions are at the very core of family life. In the concluding section of her paper, Muraco comments that “Contrary to allegations that the family is threatened by gay men and lesbians, we may instead be viewing an expanding definition of family via the voluntary bonds of friendship” (p. 1324). Although conceding the presence of homophobia in relation to the perceived security threat to the nuclear family posed by gays and lesbians, the study does not acknowledge the likelihood of any duality in familial arrangements. It does not for example, acknowledge the prospect whereby a gay or lesbian person can satisfy certain wants and needs from within his or her biological family while simultaneously fulfilling other needs and wants through participation in an intentional family structure, and further, for the reasons discussed above, does not entertain the possibility of persons entering into a gay familial arrangement that can exist in tandem with their biological family at one time and in one place. Rather, for reasons of either rejection or relocating to a LGBT community, an individual has had to compromise by choosing one in preference over the other.

A discussion of the manifestations and reasons for the current study participants’ fears of rejection and alienation from their families will receive attention in the next section of the chapter, however what will be discussed here is the psychological conflict that a rift within the family and kinship structure had caused for participants, and how the friendship group played an important role in helping to reduce this conflict and return to a state of comparative equilibrium and harmony within their lives.

The participants discussed how they had received the necessary help, support and nurturing from the group that was not provided for within their biological family network. This is not to suggest they did not love and care for their immediate family members and extended kin. The point is that it was the structural and functional elements of the family and kinship system (that is the regulatory social and moral precepts on which the system of social relations is based) that had caused feelings of alienation and reduced participation from within the familial structure. This was particularly the case in the longer term, where marriage and the future social and economic rewards and benefits to their families would be expected as outcomes of

marital stability and procreation. Participants often described how not having a girlfriend and not getting married were real issues of concern in the relationships they had with their family and kin. As Jocano points out however, if the behaviours are accepted the rules of the game can change. Benjie discussed how his family has become more accepting of his sexuality because he has gained social status as a bank manager and because he also provides financial support to the household. Ben had “come out” to his family, and while his sexuality did not immediately receive unconditional acceptance by his parents, over time the relationship with his parents has returned to a state of comparative normality. Other participants commented that they believed their families knew they were *bakla* however the issue was never discussed, and so potential conflict had been avoided.

When discussing how Filipinos resolve conflict, Mulder (1997) concludes that however close the family may be, conflicts arise that require resolution, and quite early in life family members learn to suppress their negative feelings and to control their emotions so as not to disturb each other unduly. Discord amongst siblings is regarded as disgraceful, and any negative feelings need to be suppressed. Conflicts with parents is considered almost sacrilegious and to be denied, but if it does occur it is experienced as socially shameful and self-destructive. People learn to see themselves as members of a reliable group that defines part of their identity and from which they derive a considerable amount of their self-assurance. Within that group they enjoy a somewhat low degree of self-autonomy and readily accept hierarchy and deference for age as unquestioned moral criteria, including criticism from relevant others from whom they also derive part of their self-security.

The relatively dependent identity and other-directedness make for a high degree of vulnerability at the hands of others, and of the easy arousal of feelings of shame and wounded dignity. It is because people know this about themselves and each other that they are likely to be cautious. Mulder notes that often it is a person’s own negative emotions that are felt to be as threatening as the presumed negative opinions of others. Whatever the case may be, tensions and frustrations are likely to build up and require a release. To restore equilibrium, friendships and company appear to be vital, and it is the gregarious nature and supportive and tolerant environment of the friendship group (*barkada*) that allows for the voicing of opinions and for letting off steam. Relationships in the *barkada* tend to be more relaxed, more tolerant, and guided by the principle of *pakikisama* which means actively getting and going along with each other as members



of the group. The *barkada* therefore appears as a necessary complement to home and family.

The participants' friendship group can be viewed simply as a gay *barkada*, and categorised under the same organisational principles and precepts that have thus far been discussed. This however, would be to ignore the participants' own definitions of the group "as family" which underscore the social meanings and significations placed on the group by the participant members, and which exceed the boundaries and functional definitions of complementation. In other words, by definition, a *barkada* is a socially organised friendship group that is experienced outside of the domains of the family and kinship structure. In the current study there is somewhat of a blurring between these boundaries, and while the group structure can be seen to fulfil many of the functions of a *barkada*, it has been deepened and extended beyond these limits.

The findings of the study have shown how participants felt that the group was their family because they could not discuss their most intimate and private thoughts and feelings with their biological families for fear of receiving negative reactions and responses. The friendship group had in many ways taken on the emotional and nurturing role traditionally provided by the biological family, and had given the necessary help, support, and caring environment they needed, primarily because they felt they were all *bakla* together and shared a common bond through their experiences and identity *as bakla*.

The Filipino family is typically characterised as consanguinal because blood ties are considered so important that even relationships with distant cousins, aunts and uncles are recognised (Medina, 1991). The family is regarded as the core of the kinship system, and viewed as the basic element of social organisation, and is the source from which Filipinos obtain most of their socialisation. Moreover, it is the family who provide its members with personal security that is not to be found elsewhere in society, and in times of need, the family members can depend on each other for mutual support (Jocano, 1998; Medina, 1991; Mulder, 1997; Ramirez, 1984). When discussing family relations, Jocano (1998) describes how the family functions somewhat like a shock absorber in times of crisis, and provides the example of a "disgraced" girl who would normally find support from her family if she had a child that was born out of wedlock. Both mother and child would become an integral part of the family. Similarly, a man

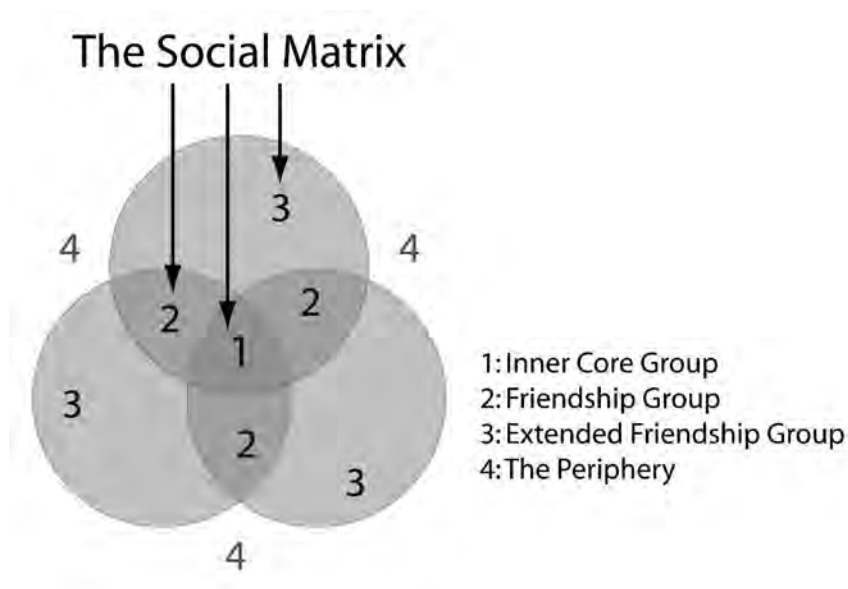
who is released from prison is immediately accepted by the family who provide him with a protective social milieu. He concludes:

A Filipino normally sees himself first as a member of his family of orientation, or if he is married, that of procreation, and secondly as a member of the group or of the community. How he behaves towards each member of the family is determined by his age, sex, structural position, and personal feelings. It is the family that provides the average Filipino with a stable reservoir of emotional security and support. It is in the family that he acquires his first orientation to group activities, learns and internalises the values of Filipino culture, and finds guidance through life (p.65).

Ramirez (1984) argues further that it is because of this mutual support that has earned for the Filipino family the trait of closeness of family ties that can be seen to be emotionally displayed at functions like family gatherings and reunions, or on special occasions like Christmas, birthdays, weddings and funerals where religious rituals play a significant function.

The study findings revealed that the group was seen to function on three distinct though interrelated levels of social experience. They are the physical, the emotional and the structural. As Ramirez and Jocano have pointed out, a child is socialised into a familial structure that begins with the immediate family but also includes an extended family network of kin where the experience of “being related” is a social metaphor and precondition for perceived structural connection. The nuclear component of the structure – the immediate family – is experienced as the primary unit of socialisation, and as such meets the immediate physical, emotional and environmental needs of the family members. The consanguinal family and kinship connections are then expanded through affinal bonds which are established through the ritual of marriage.

What became apparent in the analysis of the findings was that the family and kinship structure and network of social relations had been modified and employed by the participants as a blueprint of social relations and social structure for the friendship group, and it was because of this connection that the participants referred to their group as family. If consanguinal ties are seen as being reinforced and established through affinal bonds, then it can be argued that the social “relatedness” of group members to each other was formed through the common bond of sexuality – of being *bakla*, and this relationship is the social metaphor and precondition for the structure and social networking to which the group and its own extended and nebulous friendship network comply.



**Figure 2. The *bakla* friendship network system**

The *bakla* friendship network system was seen to be augmented from time to time by the admission of friends of the participants, and so was responsible for the exponential growth and structuring of the social network. It was shown how the eight members of the current study were socially linked to other similar groups through common group members, and these were friends from work, from their social *barkadas*, other *bakla* whom they know from different school batches or university and boyfriends, so the spiralling and expanding structure of this social network is extremely nebulous and fragmentary. To quote Danny, it is like “circles within circles,” and the status that a person holds in the network system depends on their relational position within the social matrix. For example, in the current study and taken from Ben’s position, the inner core group consists of Pao, Manuel, and himself. They have remained extremely close to each other from grade school onwards, and share a deep and intimate friendship and relationship. Ferdi, Benjie, and Alfonso are also close, but this is more of a shared social friendship, so they often go out to clubs and bars together on weekends. Danny, Angelo, and Gina (Danny’s cross-dressing friend from work), also “hang out” together and share the common interest of theatre and the dramatic arts<sup>22</sup>. Gina is regarded by the friendship group as a member, but is part of the extended membership and thus not one of the primary eight. This is because she had not been part

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that included in the *bakla* friendship network are a number of cross-dressing middle-class *bakla* who cannot be classified as a group in the same way as the *parloristas*. This issue will receive further attention in Category Four, when relationships between class, gender, identity, and beauty are discussed.

of the formation and consequent growth and development experienced by the original group members. If, for example, Gina was the person in the social matrix on which attention was focused, then the social schemata would automatically form around her. She would be placed at the core of the matrix, and Ben and the other group members would then move outwards toward the periphery thus occupying a similar position to the one Gina occupies in relation to Ben's group. This would also be the case for any of the members of the friendship group or their extended network of friends. The social matrix is therefore never static because new friends can come and go due to a number of impacting factors (for example moving out of MM, working overseas or relocating overseas), and this is why the matrix can be seen as fragmentary and nebulous.

While other social researchers investigating homosocial relationships in the Philippines have alluded to specific groupings of homosexual or gay/*bakla* populations in MM (Garcia, 1996; Tan, 1995) it has generally been to point out the variations and tensions that exist between the various class-based groups including the *parloristas*, the middle and upper class gays, and other MSM (men who have sex with men) population groups. In his HIV/AIDS paper "From Bakla to Gay" Michael Tan points to the existence of various homosocial populations within the urban regions of MM, and argues that they are defined by variables that include socio-economic status, age, ethnicity, rural/urban origins and religious affiliations. Within this urban environment, *parloristas* are rarely seen to patronise "gay" establishments, and are most likely to organise their own social activities such as beauty pageants through their local neighbourhood associations. On the other hand the middle-class gays do patronise and socialise in the gay establishments of MM, however according to Tan, are a difficult group to access because they largely remain covert and discreet about their sexual orientation (1995).

Although it can be claimed that the *bakla* friendship network system is generationally focused and therefore age specific, it can likewise be argued that the model goes a considerable way towards explaining (and thus making accessible and visible) some of the social strategies and organisational techniques that connect middle-class gay/*bakla* men together within the social milieu of MM. For example, when consideration is given to the participants' own beliefs and comments that they will remain a part of the friendship group for life, the longevity of their commitment is apparent. This would suggest that if other friendship groups within the social matrix had similar beliefs and commitments to their own group members, then the *bakla* friendship

system will not only remain a viable and ongoing model for explaining middle-class homosocial relationships for a specific generation, but will continue to exist over the life spans of the group members and participating groups that exist within the matrix. Further, the participants discussed how at school there were younger batches of *bakla* students “coming up through the ranks” as well as older ones that had preceded the current group of participants. In this respect the group is similar in composition and structure to other groups of *bakla* students who meet one another and form friendships and relationships through the Philippine school and education system. This suggests that a common intergenerational link exists between these population groups, and while attention should be given to the ways in which these relationships are evolving and changing over time, the model could still remain a useful and viable tool in understanding the patterns and organisation of this social phenomenon. Indeed, the model itself is not static and therefore is constantly open to re-evaluation and re-development. A final point is that if as Michael Tan suggests, “This [middle-class] group has become visible only in the last two decades in Metro Manila” (1995, p. 87), then the model might become a useful and viable construct for understanding the social and cultural formations and developments inherent within this particular section of the urban population.

To further draw attention to this point, consideration will now be given as to how the extended friendship network functions, its connection with the dating arrangements undertaken by group members, and finally how the friendship group has been electronically reconstituted on the Internet via *the happy room* – an online email facility accessed by the participants. As was discussed earlier, the friendship group periodically admits *bakla* friends or acquaintances of its members within the group’s friendship network, and similarly, the eight members can also be socially linked to other *bakla* friendship groups for similar reasons. This can be shown by the example of two or three members of the participant group going out together and then linking up with a friend of one of the members who is from another *bakla* friendship group. They in turn may be invited to socialise with that friend’s group, and so have the opportunity of meeting and extending their own social network. This pattern of extended friendship networking also has particular significance in terms of providing its members with the opportunity of establishing emotional and intimate friendships and relationships with other *bakla* males. A point to be made is that while the eight members of the group are also members of other interest groups or *barkadas*, and socialise and network with

members of other similar friendship groups, they still remain inherently loyal and faithful to their primary group, and this bond is important in achieving and maintaining group cohesion. Maintaining internal group cohesion for the various groups involved in the extended social network is structurally important because it allows group members the mobility to transverse the boundaries of their own personal group and move between the participating groups at their entry point within the social matrix. Without the maintenance of group cohesion from within, the participating groups and the existent patterns of extended social networking would most likely fall apart.

The study findings revealed that the ways in which close personal relationships are formed and transfigured within the friendship group and its extended network system of social contacts is of major importance and concern in maintaining group cohesion and harmony by keeping the members “untainted” by the formation of “incestuous” intimate relationships between the primary inner circles occupied by the group members. This is an issue also discussed by Nardi in his study of gay friendships when he posits that:

...first-order friendships (those between best friends) and second order friendships (those between good friends but are less permanent than are first order friendships) are entirely nonsexual, while extended encounters (for example, “being kept,” or perhaps a relationship with a fuck buddy) and brief affairs (one-night stands, tricks) are unstable sexual relationships with those not in one’s friendship clique and are without the kinds of emotional support that good or best friends provide. In other words, gay men tend to separate those individuals who serve their social needs (friends) from those who serve their sexual needs (1999, p. 78)

How then, do the current friendship group members proceed in pursuing personal relationships outside of the group? The findings showed that a common approach was to seek out other members from within the friendship group and ask if they could be put in contact with friends or acquaintances they may know, so it becomes friends of friends that are usually contacted in the dating cycle. Again, comparisons can be drawn between the ways that the participants adhered to certain roles, steps and procedures when formulating intimate and personal social relationships within the group, and the traditional social roles of conduct instituted by the family and the *barkada* when overseeing close personal relationships of siblings and friends. To quote Ferdi:

Every time you're in a fight with your boyfriend, you easily go to your friends. I wouldn't think of going to my family, because "oh – my boyfriend and I had a fight." It really wasn't much of an open thing. So I'd rather talk it out with the group. Because number one, they're gay themselves, and number two, they provide the courage I need for me to easily divulge the problem. And so they definitely advised me of the exact thing to do. And let's say eighty percent of the decisions I make in my relationships come from friends' advice.

A further example of this kind of group matchmaking process was provided by Benjie when he discussed how he was placed in contact his last boyfriend through Ferdi after approaching him and asking to be set up with a date. In her discussion of the roles that the family and other primary groups play in relations of the heart, Medina concludes that:

Besides parents, other persons close to the individual may directly or indirectly influence the selection of the mate. Siblings and other relatives usually have something to say about a match. They often serve as critics or even as unsolicited matchmakers themselves. The peer group or *barkada* and other reference groups, directly or indirectly, encourage or discourage, praise or criticize, and in effect screen the potential partner of the individual (1991, p. 82).

The points raised here by Medina can also be applied to the current group of study participants, and this is primarily because the participants perceive themselves to be sibling (*bakla*) sisters within their (*bakla*) family. As discussed earlier, there has been a blurring between the concepts of family and *barkada*, which has resulted in a kind of social fusion of the two concepts into a more composite *bakla* family model, thus linking together elements contained in both socio-cultural structures and organisations. In more practical terms, this is manifest in the ways that the group members look after, support and care for each other, which includes affairs of the heart.

The findings of the study have shown that initial dating contacts were usually made (if the participants had agreed to give out their telephone numbers) through text messaging and then later by telephone. Several of the participants commented that if they wanted a sexual one-night stand they would either visit a local Internet chat room and link up with someone there, or visit one of the many gay bars, clubs or massage parlours situated in MM. On this issue Tan (1995) makes the point that it is important to differentiate between casual sex partners and lovers because the distinction sets the boundaries for a network of dating and steady relationships with people from the same class background. However the boundaries can easily be crossed for casual sex in the same way as they would be for low-income sex-workers or other such pick-ups.

Other participants commented that they were not interested in one-night stands, so they were not viable options for them to consider. All of the participants were in agreement however, that while it was possible to meet someone for a sexual relationship through online chat (and several of the participants have used the Internet for this purpose), they were more likely to seek a potential boyfriend by approaching someone from within their group and asking if he knew of a suitable person for them to date. Ben and Angelo were the only two participants that had ever been in a longer term relationship, and this was the first time for both of them. Pao had never had a date, and Danny had only been on a few dates. Alfonso had never had a boyfriend, and the others had dated other middle-class males but this was only ever short term. A general consensus was they were not interested in pursuing and maintaining serious longer term relationships. The most common reasons given was that work and career commitments were a priority (and therefore they could not give the necessary time and emotional commitment to a serious relationship), or felt they were not yet ready at that point in their lives to seriously commit to a relationship. Ferdi, Benjie, and Alfonso discussed how they would often go out on the weekends to the bars in Malate, and sometimes pick up someone for a one-night-stand. Manuel rarely went with the other three if he was looking for sex, preferring to go alone. This he said was because the other three were too “effeminate” and he wanted to pick up a “straight-acting” guy, and felt the other three would lower his chances of finding the type of pick-up he wanted. Interestingly, Manuel was the only participant that stated he had picked up a call boy for sex. It was mentioned however by a group member that on one occasion four of the group had “shared” a call boy between them at a birthday bash and had engage in oral sex with him. It appeared that those within the group who were sexually active chose to go to a gay bar to find someone rather than using the Internet although they had on occasion used it to hook up for sex. Ferdi explained this was because they could tell if the person was “decent” by looking at his appearance and talking with him to ascertain if he was “well spoken and well mannered,” and then deciding if they wanted to sleep with him. It would seem therefore that if the participants were seeking someone, even if it were just for casual sex, that social position played a role in determining their suitability. The Internet did not allow for this kind of public screening, and so was not the most common method used. Although the Internet was not used by the group as a primary source for dating, it did however, constitute an important communication tool that was used by the members to remain in regular contact with each other both within the Philippines and overseas.



The expansion of global technologies of mass communication such as the Internet have received much attention recently from writers and researchers who have sought to discover the social impacts these new technologies are having in regional locations like the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and Thailand (Berry, Martin, & Yue, 2003; P. Jackson, 2003; P. A Jackson, 2001; McLelland, 2003; Medina, 1991; Pertierra, Ugarte, Pingol, Hernandez, & Dacanay, 2002). Over the past two decades the use of the Internet in the Southeast Asian region has increased dramatically. For example, in Korea, over half of the population over the age of 17 are regular Internet users, and in Japan, 47 million Japanese currently use the Internet (Berry et al., 2003), with statistics showing that by February 2000, 21.4 percent of the population had Internet access in their homes (Gottlieb & McLelland, 2003). In the Philippines the situation is very similar, with the popularity and rapid expansion of the Internet increasing over the past decade to the point where there are currently approximately 3.5 million Internet users in the Philippines (Pertierra et al., 2002).

All of the current study participants have access to the Internet either at home or at work or both, and in conjunction with texting are able to remain in regular contact with each other when a physical presence was not possible. *The happy room* was created for this purpose, and fundamentally, it is an online emailing facility. In effect *the happy room* is the electronic version and extension of the actual group, and an electronic communication system through which the individual members can maintain their friendships and relationships through the posting and sharing of emails. The facility was so named after the DWTL *happy room* which had represented a happy and meaningful period in the lives of the participants. Originally it had been set up by Alfonso after he had completed university and commenced work, and was initiated in response to his feelings of environmental change from university to work, and the isolation he felt from his friends at university. Since all of the participants came from middle-class households, it can be argued that class status played a role in the ability of participants to sustain their friendship group online because either they or their families had been in a financial position to be able to possess a personal computer with Internet access, or they had access to the Internet through work, through the use of cyber cafés, or some combination of the three.

According to Pertierra (2002), most Filipino Internet users are women aged between 20 to 34, and who are economically secure, are either employed or studying, who access the Internet from home (as a shared facility with parents), and use the email

more than any other application available on the Internet. The Manila Times reported on a survey conducted by AC Nielsen Philippines, and found that an estimated half of the Internet users in the Philippines are located in MM. The survey also noted that 45 percent were aged 12-19 years; 36 percent were under the age bracket of 20-29, while the 30-39 year olds comprised 12 percent of the total, and the 40-60 age bracket represented 8 percent (Sabangan, 2003). The survey also showed that half of those who accessed the Internet belonged to the A-C classes, or the upper and middle economic strata, though class D users who mostly accessed the Internet from cyber cafés and schools, were also increasing. It can therefore be concluded that the current study participants are also eligible to be placed within the range of this demographic, given their economic status and class position. Further, Pertierra (2002) asserts that the Internet is a communication tool used by Filipinos, particularly those located overseas, to remain in touch with their families and friends and as a means of preserving their linguistic and cultural identities. Filipinos have also appropriated the medium and transformed it by rejecting some elements while retaining others, thus making it more accessible to a wider Filipino population. While the abovementioned discussion is focused on the mainstream Filipino population and culture what has been left unsaid is that the population groups to which Pertierra is referring are assumed to be heterosexual. As McLelland (2003) points out, the Internet provides:

...one important means of access to a large number of individuals, groups and communities whose sexual practices fall outside the heteronormative roles endorsed by mainstream media....There has been considerable research done into the ways in which the Internet has facilitated community identification, particularly among Western gay men, but less work exists on lesbians, transgender individuals, sex workers and other sexual minorities in both Western and non-Western societies (p. 141).

The study participants have transformed the medium of the Internet to suit their own needs, and in the process have made it their own. The ways in which the group uses the facility appears to operate on two specific levels. The participants discussed how *the happy room* has allowed its members to remain connected and to share their experiences whether they were in the Philippines or living, visiting, or working abroad. This has meant that the group members can remain in touch wherever they are in the world, and has allowed for the bonds of friendship to be sustained and remain intact across time and space. *The happy room* has also been used as a means to keep members updated with contemporary events, happenings and other occurrences that are currently taking place in their lives. As Ferdi explained, “It’s really an extension of an otherwise

normal meeting, where we meet in one place and we talk. It's the online version if you would like to call it that." On another level however, *the happy room* was shown to constitute a medium whereby new and innovative possibilities for group interactions were being constituted and explored. For example as Ben pointed out, the participants were able to share pictures, jokes, chain letters, personal news, news about the entertainment industry, sharing the latest gossip, and the sharing of online pornography. Engagement with the online materials could take place at the individual member's own leisure and convenience because it did not require the physical presence of the others for individual members to connect with the group.

It can be concluded that *the happy room* is the result of an embracement by the group members of the availability of new technological advancements in mass communications in the Philippines, and have personalised the services under offer for their own purposes. In the absence of the Internet, contact between its members would have been situational and dependent on the availability of the members to physically get together in one place and at one time. *The happy room* has meant that the group can remain in contact with each other at any time, and that any recent event or happening can receive an immediate response. It has also allowed the members to "play" with technology, and to extend the nuances of the physical group into cyberspace, therefore allowing for the growth and expansion of the group to continue. Finally, *the happy room* has not only become a window of opportunity towards self-expression, but has extended the bonds of family and friendship in such a way as to allow for the continued emotional support and structural needs of the group to be met. It is in consideration of these factors that *the happy room* can be seen as contributing to the maintenance and support of the extended friendship network and its infrastructure.

### ***Category Two: Gender Ideation and Issues of Cultural Identity***

As discussed in earlier chapters, for well over a hundred years the creation of the modern homosexual has become an established cultural norm within Western industrialised societies such as Australia, America and Britain, and along with homosexuality's didactic "other," heterosexuality, they have come to represent the normative and mainstream blueprint for contemporary sexual relations (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 1992; Altman, 1996, 2001; Fuss, 1991; Greenberg, 1988; Kimmel, 2000; Plummer, 1992; Weeks, 1991). By comparison, the Philippines have traditionally sustained a gender-aligned system of sexual relations, exemplified by the absence of the sexually oriented terms heterosexuality and homosexuality from within the Filipino

language. Accordingly, the Filipino terms that relate to sexuality and gender are maleness (*pagkalalake*), femaleness (*pagkababae*) (Garcia, 1996). The closest term in Filipino that represents the Western identity term and label gay is *bakla* (which includes elements of both *pagkalalake* and *pagkababae*) – also known as *bading*, *bayot*, *binabae* – which is a cultural reference to effeminate males. According to Rodriguez (1996) *bakla* represents a third gender within the Philippines which is regarded as one-half man and the other half woman. In this context *bakla* can be referred to as *hap-hap* (half-half) or *balaki*, which is a combination of the term *lalake* (meaning man or boy) and *babae* (meaning girl or woman). Another term used is *binabae*, meaning a man who has feminine qualities. As Tan explains:

The Filipino term most widely used as a gloss for “homosexual” is *bakla*, a contraction of the words *babae* (female) and *lalake* (male). As an adjective, *bakla* means uncertainty, indecisiveness...*Bakla* refers specifically to men who are effeminate, with cross-dressing as a major index feature. It is the concept of effeminacy, of a man with a woman’s heart (*pusong babae*), that dominates public discourse, lumping together homosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, and hermaphrodites....Curiously, the term “gay” has also become widely used, mainly as a synonym for homosexual. I should emphasize that “gay” is used like the term “homosexual,” which still centres on the *bakla*, the effeminate male or the male with a woman’s heart, expanded to include, rather hazily, a sexual persona (1995, pp. 88).

When discussing the transgender *kathoey* of Thailand, Jackson (1997) explains how in Thai culture, discourses on gender and sexuality are conceptualised in relation to the performance of masculine, feminine, and transgender roles which are believed to be biologically situated in maleness, femaleness and hermaphroditism. He concludes that:

Within this traditional discursive context, male and female homoeroticism are conceived in terms of sex/gender inversion. While the homosexuality of a *kathoey* is assumed to derive from biological hermaphroditism, a same-sex erotic preference among masculine-identified men is explained in terms of psychological hermaphroditism, that is, having a woman’s mind in a man’s body (p. 170).

In order to better understand the complexities involved in the ways that the current study participants think about and construct their gender and sexuality, it would be helpful to consider how the group members identify themselves through the discourse they use, and then situate the discussion within the context of relevant theoretical positions and conceptualisations that focus on issues of same-sex identity, Cameron and Kulick (2003) conclude that language use is of itself an ‘act of identity’

whereby people convey to each other what kind of people they are, and this can be related to sexual identity as well as identities of gender, class, ethnicity, and regional provenance. A characteristic of group conversational discourse was how the group members often interchanged the labels and identities of “gay,” “homosexual,” and *bakla*. For example, “gay” was used within the same context and had the same or similar conceptual meaning as *bakla*. Likewise “homosexual” was used in place of *bakla* just as “gay” was synonymous with “homosexual.” Similarly, instead of using the word “gay” as an adjective, four of the study participants used it as a noun and referred to a person as “a gay,” or used the collective noun “gays” to connote an identity as a particular type of person in the same contextual way as “homosexual” and “homosexuals” are used as specific identity labels in the West.

Garcia outlines what he perceives as basic differences in meaning and construction between *bakla*, homosexual and homosexuality and concludes:

1) *Bakla* as a term is specifically denotative of the identity of the effeminate and/or cross-dressing male, while homosexual strictly refers to sexual object choice and hence it cuts across sexes. (And so, the term homosexual may be appended to either male or female, while *bakla* may not). 2) *Bakla* connotes a certain comportment in the same-sexual act which differentiates him from his masculine partner who is not considered a *bakla* precisely, while homosexual connotes a certain form of orientation, preference or desire which both parties in a same-sexual experience engender and share. 3) *Bakla*'s specific history predates that of homosexuality in the Philippines and until now, certain of its former non-sexual significations that relate to fear and confusion may be found in it. 4) Finally, it needs to be reiterated that *bakla* and homosexual are terms belonging to two different knowledge systems, and therefore can only irrevocably be different from one another. The fourth point of contrast between *bakla* and homosexual underlines the fact that even in the present time, these terms are continually evolving in signification, accumulating cultural connotations and accommodating registers which may not necessarily have been there initially (Garcia, 1996, p. xvii).

It is in consideration of this final point made by Garcia that Tan (2001a) discusses the impact of the Western “gay” movement over the local scene in the Philippines. He concludes that the terms gay and lesbian have been in common use since the 1970's, and are now part of Taglish (a hybrid of Tagalog and English). Further, he concludes that the terms gay and lesbian are interchangeable with *bakla* and *tomboy* (a masculinised woman), and can be used for example, in the traditional sense that a person could not be considered *bakla* or gay if he was not effeminate. Tan gives the example of young men and women writing letters to the media asking why they are

attracted to others of the same sex, but having no desire to engage in cross-dressing. This he attributes to the emerging groups of localised middle-class gay men who were looking for relationships with other gay men and not with “straight” men. He concludes:

These were men, too, who generally did not want to cross-dress and who talked of themselves being “decent gays” as apposed to cheap *bakla* – Philippine society’s class stratification was now being reproduced in the gay scene....*Bakla* ideology (or more precisely, ideologies) is central but understanding *bakla* will mean teasing it out from its social matrix, including its interface with other sexual ideologies (2001a, pp. 124-140).

The class-defined tensions and related social and identity issues between the current participants and the *parlorista bakla* is a theme that will be discussed further in later sections of this chapter.

Over the last decade there has been considerable academic debate over the impact and effect of the global exportation of Western cultural taxonomies and typologies of gay identity and lifestyle into non-Western countries like the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. In his book “Global Sex,” Denis Altman argues for the emergence of a global gay identity. Central to his argument is that our understandings and attitudes toward sexuality are reflections of larger changes that are occurring through the globalising effects of Western capitalist expansionism, and the development of a global consumer based culture that is being universalised through advertising, the mass media, and the flow of capital and people across cultures and regional borders (2001).

The possibilities of disenfranchisement and minoritisation as a consequence of a universalising standpoint on gay identity also need to be considered. As Jackson (2001) points out, the notion that “gay” is a Western construct can be used by certain conservative governments in Asia to deny the important histories of homoeroticism and transgenderism within their own societies. He also notes that when an indigenous sex/gender category is used in forwarding an identity label such as *kathoey*, Western analysts are prepared to consider the local history involved, however if a Thai male self-identifies with the label “gay,” then Western researchers are likely to overlook the possibility for a local history for that identity, and rather frame it in terms of the influences of globalisation and “borrowing” from Western models. Parker notes that:

...in Brazil as in any other part of the world, capitalism and gay life have been intimately linked yet have evolved distinctly from a more Anglo-European

model. It is in large part as a result of this interaction between local social and cultural systems and generalized economic and political forces over the closing decades of the twentieth century that increasingly complex and diverse homoerotic subcultures and gay communities have been established in large urban centers...(1999, p. 224)

When discussing the global diffusion of Euro-American cultures into countries including the Philippines, Nanda notes how cultural contact is an important source of change in sex/gender ideologies and identities. She comments that:

Euro-American sex/gender identities, such as “gay” and “lesbian,” have become incorporated into traditional sex/gender ideologies, though often in ways that change their original meaning. The widespread incorporation of Western ideas means that in most societies today several sex/gender systems – indigenous and foreign – operate simultaneously, with gender variant individuals moving between and among them as they try to construct their lives in meaningful and positive ways (2000, p. 6)

When discussing the linguistic constructions that “gay” men use in Indonesia to identify themselves, Boellstorff concludes:

I define “*gay men*” emically as Indonesian men who term themselves *gay* in some contexts of their lives. Throughout, [the paper] I express *gay* in italic to distinguish this Indonesian term from the graphically and phonetically similar English “gay”; *gay* Indonesians know that their self-label transforms the English term, yet they also observe that *gay* in the Indonesian language is a distinct concept. *Gay men*, then, are not an Indonesian variant of a hypothesized global gay culture: their forms of desire and senses of selfhood are transformations, not derivations, of those found elsewhere

Nanda also makes the salient point that such cultural exchanges are not merely directed from the centre to the periphery, but local non-Western societies and cultures also have influence over Euro-American sex/gender systems. She adds that:

Cultural influences spread in many directions....The sex/gender ideologies of other countries also influence those of the West, significantly through the medium of anthropological representations. The cross cultural data of anthropology, demonstrating that sex/gender identities and roles are understood differently in different cultures, have found their way back into Euro-American culture as one of the important sources of the transgender movement, the gay rights movement, and the increasing willingness of the larger society to understand, and perhaps even appreciate, sex/gender diversity (2000, pp. 6-7)

When discussing the *bakla*, Garcia goes some way towards considering contemporary cultural change and development, but maintains that *bakla*/homosexual

are two different knowledge-based systems and therefore can only develop independently of each other. Tan, on the other hand, positions the recent emergence of a new middle-class *bakla* population (who refer to themselves as gay as well as *bakla*) in contradistinction to the *parlorista bakla*. While Tan acknowledges the impact of the Western “gay” movement on the local scene in MM, his paper also highlights how the interchangeable use of the terms *bakla* and gay were not so much focused towards a Western model of gay identity, but rather tied in with a more traditional approach whereby gay is conflated with *bakla*, and *bakla* with effeminacy. Similarly, Boellstorff reveals how Indonesian gay men have transformed the Western understanding of “gay” by situating it within their own indigenous conceptualisations of the term. Further, he alludes to the fluid nature of gay men’s sexual identity, when he concludes that they will identify themselves as gay within certain internally circumscribed contexts within their lives. An outcome of the current study findings was how the perceptual meanings surrounding the term *bakla* had been expanded to include the term “gay” and this was a decision made by the participants as part of the process of redefining their identity as *bakla*.

When attention is focused on how the current participants defined and interpreted their own gendered and sexual selves, two key developmental factors emerged that require consideration in order to contextualise the interpretations and conceptualisations that they brought to their identity as *bakla/gay/homosexual*<sup>23</sup>. The first is that all of the participants had a good local knowledge and understanding of the cultural beliefs, mores and social norms (including those pertaining to sex and gender) that operated within their own society and could therefore identify with these indigenous ways of “being Filipino.” This was primarily because they were all born into middle-class Catholic Filipino families (with the exception of Alfonso, however he also grew up in a religious household), and had acquired high quality high school and university education. The second was the participants’ increased exposure as they were growing up to elements of consumer-based capitalism and Western models of conceptualising and constructing sexuality, gender and desire (both homosexual and heterosexual). These cultural precepts were articulated through Western stylised pop music, movies, videos and VCD’s (similar to Western DVD’s), television programmes,

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<sup>23</sup> From this point onwards in the study the identity *bakla/gay/homosexual* will be italicised to reflect the participant’s self-identification as *bakla* and *gay* and *homosexual*.



and the print media including fashion, music, gay and lifestyle magazines, as well as related video, VCD, movie and magazine-based pornographic materials.

An important issue to be considered here however is that the local cultural paradigm came first. Participants had received exposure to the tenets of their own culture long before they had been exposed to Western ways of life, and so when cross-cultural interactions did occur the more traditional ways of understanding and conceptualising the social were often conflated with the participant's interpretations of Western models of gay relationships, identities and lifestyles, and in the process had made their own transformations when identifying as *bakla* or *gay* or *homosexual*.

The following quotation taken from Danny's story in the findings chapter is a good example of linguistic conflation of this kind (similar to that described earlier by Tan), and has been repeated here to highlight the issue.

I'm sure it's the same with a lot of other gays, but I'm one of those who really perceive themselves to be the girl. I mean if I meet – my friends would tell me *parang* [like], if I look at you I don't see a gay person I see a girl. I'm that type. That's why from there – from there stems all of these – religion – the girl would be the more religious type. About safe sex the girl would be the more wise one. The girl would be the more conservative one. The girl would be the more achieving one or studious one. That's why in the career or in work – that's where it stems from. But you know the self perception. I'm the classic woman trapped in a man's body. Because I dunno with you, but there are other gay people who – they're really guys, but they're just attracted to guys. I mean I'm just a girl trapped inside a man's body. And the girl is attracted towards guys.

Here, Danny evokes the more traditional *bakla* gender concept of effeminacy – of considering himself to be *pusong babae* – a man with a woman's heart. He makes a distinction between being “gay” as meaning attracted to another person of the same sex, while simultaneously combining this with his own gendered affectations of feeling “like a woman” and thus attracted to a person of the opposite sex. Moreover, Danny uses the collective noun “gays” as a referent term to self-identify with others who also shared his sexual orientation that is “homosexuals,” thus bringing a sexual dimension to the identity construct. Finally, in ways not dissimilar to those highlighted by Boellstorff, Danny is aware of the Western identity concept of the “straight-acting” or “masculinised” type of gay male when he comments “...but there are other gay people who – they're really guys, but they're just attracted to guys.” However he has rejected this identity for himself in preference for the inclusion of the more traditional Filipino concept of *pusong babae*. By so doing, Danny brought his own inner desires and sense

of selfhood to the identities of *bakla/gay/homosexual*, thereby transforming and reshaping their meanings and inner structure.

In his discussion of the gender identity and sexuality of the *waria* in Indonesia, Oemoto (2000) finds a similar tradition in cross-gender association when he reveals that many males in this group also refer to themselves as “women trapped in men’s bodies.” He notes that *banci/waria* is a label used to categorise nonconforming gender behaviour or gender identity rather than a label connoting sexual orientation and (much like the public perceptions of *bakla* in the Philippines), may extend to include men who identify themselves as “homo” or “gay.” However as Oemoto highlights:

Within *waria* and gay communities themselves [there is] ...an almost watertight distinction between the categories “*banci/waria*” and “*gay*” [with]...a correlation between socio-economic status and identification as *waria* or *gay*. *Waria* are mostly working-class or from working-class families, while most *gay* men either hail from middle-class families or aspire to climb to the middle-class....*Waria* perceive themselves as a third gender, in addition to *laki* or *laki-laki* (“male”) and *perempuan* (“female”)....and see themselves as embodying elements of both maleness and femaleness....*Waria* divide men into two categories: the *laki* (“men”), or *laki asli* (“real men”), and the *gay* men. The great majority are not interested in having sex or forming relationships with men they perceive as *gay*. (pp. 53-55).

There are obvious similarities here between the Indonesian *banci/waria* and their *gay* counterparts and the Philippine *bakla* and *gay* males as discussed in this study. In much the same way as class is shown to play a divisive role in relationships between the current study participants and the *parlorista bakla*, class also plays a significant role in maintaining tensions and divisions between the *waria* and the *gay*-identified Indonesian males. While there is also sameness inherent in both the traditional *waria* and *bakla* viewpoints in terms of seeing themselves as “women trapped in a man’s body,” or “men with a woman’s heart,” there are notable differences between the *waria* as described by Oemoto, and the current study participants in terms of how they have constructed their gender and sexuality.

The findings showed that while effeminacy was the prerequisite for being *pusong babae*, the fulfilment and legitimising of this role was to enter into a relationship with a “straight” male. The study has revealed that all of the participants began their processes of identity expansion believing this as what they should aspire toward. Ferdi for example, comments that “...when we have to have a relationship if ever, it was

really a stereotypical guy and girl. You should be the girl – You’re meant for a straight guy.”

All of the participants described how they had high school “crushes” on other guys (for example, Pao’s referral to the high school Adonis), but these feelings of attraction only became sexualised and eroticised if the object of desire was believed to be a “straight” male. For example Ferdi recalls “Back then we used to treat crushes as if they were already our husbands.” As Ben points out however, the straight boys had girlfriends which meant the effeminate “gay” boys had nothing, and as Danny indicates, this was primarily because to have a relationship with another “gay” boy was considered disgusting. Out of the eight study participants it was Benjie who had formed a sexual relationship with a “straight” male, and this was during his early high school years. He recounts:

The straight guy will treat you very well – like a girl – he will give you roses – so basically he will keep you like the opposite sex. But there will come a time for that man....sooner or later they will find a girl. They would find girls for themselves.

Benjie comments that such a relationship is one sided because the “straight” guys will exploit the *bakla* for personal gain (usually asking for money), and so there is no love involved in the relationship. It was as a result of this experience however that Benjie decided he wanted to have a long term relationship and a life partner, and this would be with another gay male. Benjie concludes that the only relationship that can exist between a straight guy and a gay guy is one of friendship.

The participants described how their thinking had changed to such a degree that they were willing to consider the possibility of entering into a relationship with another “gay” guy, and these changes began in their latter high school years and continued into university and beyond. Comments included:

So actually during high school I realised – later part of high school – I realised that I would never be happy with straight guys, because I had relationships with straight guys (Benjie).

Now it’s near impossible for you to have a relationship with a straight guy. Because we’ve matured already in seeing the landscape of the impossible – for prospects. It was just lately or in college or even after college that I realised that if I am to be in a relationship it should be with another gay guy. But before that. The ideal would be I want to be with a straight guy because I’m a girl. Of course

we had to really shift our paradigm so that we could find some of the – what if?  
(Danny)

It would actually be more accurate to compare the *parlorista bakla* with the *waria* than the participants involved in the current study, and this is because of the participants' transformation of the more traditional gender notions of being *bakla* that were expanded to include self-identification as “gay.” In this context, Danny for example, is just as likely to seek a relationship with a “gay”-identified (albeit masculine behaving) man as he would with a “real” (meaning heterosexual) man, because his rethinking of the gender system had included a recognition of his sexual orientation and desires towards other “homosexuals” thus allowing for the possibility of a same-sex gay relationship rather than believing it to constitute an “incestuous” gendered coupling akin to “lesbianism” as is the case with the *waria*. The study findings revealed that in most cases the participants either had negative experiences in relationships with “straight” men (usually because they had been left when their boyfriend formed another relationship with a female) or had come to the decision that it was more realistic and satisfying in the longer term to seek out a relationship with another gay person. The engagement in a “gay” relationship/s and lifestyle/s had also become more of an actual possibility for the participants as a result of their exposure to Western movies, television programmes, and contemporary magazines that contained gay-identified characters who lived various gay-stylised lives, who dated or were partnered with other gay men, and who had identities and lifestyles that were usually portrayed and contextualised in a positive light. This often appeared in contrast to the negative portrayals and perceptions of being *bakla* they had grown up with in their own culture.

The participants revealed that from a very young age they had learned from their families, their Church, the media, and the broader Filipino community what was considered appropriate and fitting behaviour for their gender. If a male was seen to desire another male, the word used was *bakla*, and this was equated with negative and derogatory connotations of effeminacy and “being like a girl.” In gay lingo, the expression for an effeminate male is *pa-girl* (meaning like a girl), and for a “straight-acting” or masculine gay male the term is *pa-man* or *pa-om* (meaning like a man), which share a similar identity position to the Western labelling of fem (feminine) and butch (masculine) gay men. Tan explains that:

“Om” is a phonetic rendition of the abbreviated *hombre*, Spanish for male. The prefix “pa” describes mimicry, loosely translated as “to be like.” The linguistic

choice here reifies perceptions of a liminal status: neither male nor female, only like-male, and like-female. A “real” male remains an *om* (or *hombre*) and a “real” female remains a *girl* (1995, p. 90).

It is useful at this juncture to revisit some of the comments made by Angelo when describing his own gender experiences:

I knew from a young age that I was different. Definitely the label was *bakla* because that’s the term for – the degrading term for – the way you’re being bullied [here he means verbally] and teased by your class mates or your school mates. But I think a catalyst also was – to me actually discovering that I am different – that I am indeed a homosexual – that I am gay – was the theatre experience. When I was in grade five I think – I really wanted to join the school theatre back in the grade school, and my parents, especially my mum and dad didn’t want me to join the organization, because they had their image, or concept that if you join theatre, that would mean you’re gay.

I asked Angelo where he thought that thinking came from, to which he replied:

Probably family and the media. Because you’re from the very start – ahh, polarities have to be – bi polar ends have to be established. Man/woman – boy/girl – pink/blue. The way we dress, Barbie dolls and GI Joes – doll houses and toy guns. Skirts and pants. Hats or a baseball cap and a bonnet. So from the very start you knew that there was – that things have to be separated bipolarly – yahh – into opposite ends. And so probably the feeling then was I should be part of one end – the boys end. Yeah, but I have other quirks? Other things that don’t fit into the box of how a boy should be, how a boy should act. And I probably do think that these quirks fit into the other box. The girlie box. And so that’s probably how you see homosexuality and being gay then, was being like a girl while still being biologically and probably physically still a boy.

Angelo’s comments above highlight two interrelated identity issues that underpin the social processes undertaken by the study participants in transforming and reshaping their identity as *bakla*. One is the internal and subjective nature of identity formation, and the other is the external factors that impact on how the identities are shaped and transformed. Discussions thus far in the chapter have centred on the various ways that participants have come to transform and give meaning to their own self-identification and internally driven understanding of themselves as *bakla*. The participants however, were also exposed to potential external condemnation from their families, from the Church, and within the school and education system if they were seen to identify themselves as *pusong babae*, and this was because of the negative connotations associated with the woman-centeredness of being *bakla*. In the second quotation given by Angelo the comments focus on his early experiences of socialisation

into normative and binary gender roles which had caused him to feel confusion, conflict and distress. The physical examples he provides to illustrate his points (Barbie Dolls, GI Joes, baseball cap and a bonnet) show the cross-cultural connection with Western binary models of gender normative socialisation, in particular with America. Angelo's comments also highlight the tensions and confusions that arose from having to negotiate two conceptual models of gender construction, both of which alluded to gender conformity and normativity. His feminine feelings did not fit into the biologically determined Western model of gender normativity, and while the *bakla* model did provisionally allow for the expression of effeminacy, it was derided because traditional cultural norms dictate that a male should be "*lalake*," – a "real man" – and therefore not *pusong babae* and ultimately not *bakla*. In order to contextualise the experiences of the study participants in the discussions that follow, attention will be given to some of the more significant theoretical assumptions and arguments that underpin the concepts of sex and gender that currently exist in the Philippines.

Tan (1995) concludes that the cultural absorption of the medicalisation and pathologisation of homosexuality from the West has resulted in its incorporation into popular Filipino perceptions of the *bakla*. He attributes the prevalence of Freudian theories that characterise male homosexuality as a consequence of having a dominant mother and an absent or weak father as offering a "logical" explanation to Filipinos for the gender inversion that is often associated with being *bakla*. This "outsider" theoretical perspective is viewed by Tan as important in understanding how the definition of *bakla* as an effeminate male is ideologically dominant, particularly in relation to how same-sex attracted males construct their own gender identity and behaviour.

In her book "Holy Confrontation," Carolyn Brewer argues for an earlier period of cultural intervention into the Philippines sex/gender regime as a direct result of colonisation by the Spanish. When discussing the male transvestite shamans that existed in the pre-Hispanic period in Filipino history, Brewer is in agreement with Neil Garcia (1996) and Mark Johnson (1997) when she concludes that:

...the sexuality of effeminate and gender-crossing men, such as the bayoc and babaylan...was culturally un(re)marked. However, because the male shaman's voice has been silenced, it is neither possible to discern how these men understood their own gendered subjectivity, nor to understand how other Filipinos perceived them (2001, p. 231)

What Brewer does ascertain is that the categories of sex, sexuality and gender were introduced to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries together with notions of “anatomical deficiency, and/or ‘deviant’ sexuality.” Spanish reports of transvestism, non-conformist gender behaviour and/or gender identity were regarded as “defective” anatomy, and labelled as “an abominable sin against nature” or sodomy, of the Filipino individuals. “To use ‘homosexuality’ in this context would blur the gender issue, because the ‘sin against nature,’ in the source documents, refers to anal intercourse between two men or, just as often, a man and a woman” (2001, p. 233).

She concludes that:

Nevertheless as Andaya put it, the missionaries were adept at enforcing conformity of the population into...[a] two sex, two gender model, and it is undeniable that Catholicism itself had a huge impact in regendering the male to conform to Hispano/Catholic sex/gender congruence. There did however, emerge one unchanging aspect of male shaman behaviour. That is, that the minimum prerequisite for male entry into the ranks of shamanism was that he dress in feminine clothes for ritual purposes. Even after other life-style choices that reflected a sex/gender ambiguity had been renounced, a form of male-feminine transvestism remained a prerequisite for Animist ritual (2001, pp. 237-239).

In a discussion paper based on her research in the Philippines, Brewer makes the theoretical point that separating biological sex (that is male and female) from sexuality is not clear cut because of the ambiguity contained in the term sex, and in much the same way neither is sexuality so clearly distinct from gender, and suggests this was an issue the Spanish failed to make in their colonisation of the Philippines. In her discussion of the issue Brewer asserts:

...it is my contention that the essentialist position which links sex with sexuality, sex with nature, and nature with both woman and nurture, and therefore gender, was imported into the Philippines by the Spanish missionaries in the sixteenth century, who themselves relied on the biologically deterministic philosophies and theologies of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas (1999, p. 2)

In his discussion on the inculcating effects of biological essentialist theories of gender inversion within Philippine-based systems of gender and sexual identity, Garcia (1996) utilises *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology) and its theoretical principle of *loób* (meaning “inside”) when discussing issues of inversion as they relate to notions of the “self.” Briefly, Garcia calls upon the Filipino concept of *loób/labás* (inside/outside) to explain the gendered relationship of a *bakla* as possessing an inverted

feminine *loób* and desirous of a partner with a “normal and un-inverted” masculine *loob* – in other words a “real man,” could then be seen to fulfil the *bakla*’s object of being desired as a woman.

While the arguments forwarded by Garcia provide an insightful exploration of the operations inherent in the gendering of the *parlorista bakla*, it could only provide partial insights into how the current study participants have negotiated their gender and sexuality, and for the same reasons as discussed earlier in relation to the Indonesian *waria*, this is because of the transformations they have made to their own identities as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. While Garcia contends that *bakla* and homosexual belong to different knowledge-based systems, he does concede however that as a consequence of colonialism, there are “slippages” between the two. In the context of the middle-class *bakla* identifying participants in this study, the findings indicate an expansion of their *bakla* identity to incorporate elements of *gay/homosexual* identities. This did allow participants to engage in “slippages,” however the gay and homosexual components of their respective identities had been re-shaped and transformed, and as such were not direct blueprints or reproductions of Western forms of gay or homosexual conceptualisations or expressions. The study is more inclined towards the *gay/bantut* model outlined by Mark Johnson in relation to transgendered sexualities and identities in the Southern Philippines. Johnson uses the *gay/bantut* dynamic to highlight “...the discontinuity between Western models of homosexuality and local conceptualizations of gender transformation” (1997, p. 37). He argues that the term *gay* as used in the Philippines, is qualitatively different from the same term used in Britain or America which is a claim also made in the current study. The difference between the two studies is that Johnson conducted his research with a transgendered group, whereas the middle-class participants of this study are not transgendered, although they do share a number of characteristics with the cross-dressing *parlorista bakla*.

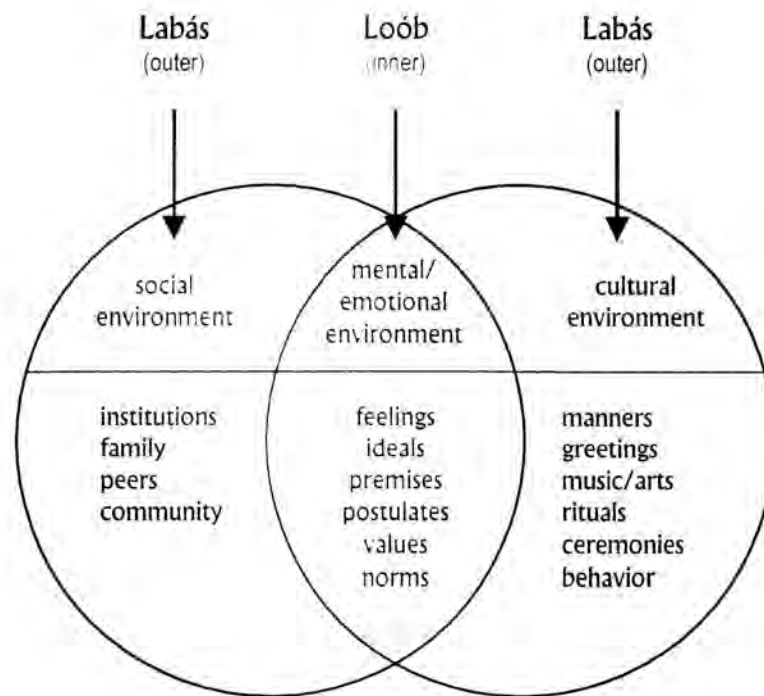
In theoretical terms however, the application of the concept *loób/labás* outlined by Garcia remains an important tool in the analysis of gender relations because it constitutes the major organising principle around which revolve many of the Filipino systems of value (1996). Although anthropology often utilises emics and etics as a framework from which to compare the “local insider” versus “scientific” knowledge, the Filipino *loób* principle is used here ostensibly as a means of understanding and contextualising the participants’ inner sense of self-expression and gender identity. *Loób* (inside) is central to the Filipino way of thinking, believing and acting, and is



often used as the point of reference when describing Filipino’s physical, mental and emotional conditions. *Loób* is therefore used to characterise the inner dimensions of *diwà* (the essence of life) and implies an outer dimension called *labás* (outside). *Loób* therefore constitutes the inner reality of life, and *labás* is its outside behavioural manifestation (Jocano, 2001).

When attention is given to the issues that underpin the discussions and analysis incurred in this category it becomes clear how the principle of *loób/labás* can be utilised. To reiterate the points made earlier, one is the internal and subjective nature of identity formation (to which *loób* will be applied), and the other is the external factors that impact on how the identities are shaped and transformed (to which *labás* will be applied). As Garcia (1996, p. 104) highlights “...the *loób* is not an unmarked metaphysical spirit, but rather a gendered subjectivity.” The following diagram and explanation of the character of *loób* and *labás* is taken from Jocano (2001, p. 170)

While *loób* provides us with basic drives, it is *labás* that shapes these into specific and regulated modes of actions (The distinction is outlined in Figure 3.)



**Figure 3. Diagram showing the concept of *labás* and *loób* in Filipino value system**

In terms of social relations, the *loób* and the *labás* concepts are also used to distinguish members of the family and the kinship group from those who are not. The in-group consists of parents, siblings, and relatives. They are *nasa loób* or *tagaloób ng pamilya* (inside the family).

When the concept of *loób/labás* is considered in relation to gender, it can be seen how external social factors had an impact on the subjectivity of participants, resulting in their engagement and performance in behaviours that were deemed appropriate when identifying as *bakla*. Angelo for example, concluded that “Back then you wanted to become a girl – that being gay was becoming a girl – you would also want to have a relationship with a straight guy.” Such ideas were not merely plucked out of thin air, but were cultural signifiers of being *bakla* that came from the social environment – part of the participant’s *labás* – that impacted on the subjective nature of feelings, desires, ideas, values et cetera that formed part of the participant’s *loób*.

### ***Defining Kabaklaan***

It seems appropriate at this point of the discussion to unpack the Filipino linguistic term *kabaklaan* because it forms an integral part of the subjective nature of the participant’s identity as *bakla/gay/homosexual*, and therefore a definition reflecting the group’s physical and cognitive embodiment of the concept would appear fitting. Garcia (1996) broadly defines *kabaklaan* as effeminacy, tying it in with discussions of *loób* and contextualises the concept in relation to the *parlorista bakla* and theories of gender inversion. When writing the introduction for the Philippine anthology of gay writing – *Ladlad 2*, Garcia comments:

It might also prove illuminating to remember that even without becoming perceived as a homosexual, the *bakla* was already a person that left more to be desired: being effeminate, he was the natural object of scorn in a masculinist society such as ours is and may well have always been...Likewise, imagining for the *bakla* a life to which he is otherwise not naturally entitled in the culture that has engendered him, bespeaks a kind of warm-heartedness, an alternative vision for ***kabaklaan*** [author’s emphasis]: by celebrating the virtues of being effeminate...(Garcia & Remoto, 1996, p. xvii)

While *kabaklaan* was rarely discussed or directly referred to by the participants, it was nonetheless enacted by the group members in both a physical sense – through behavioural and discursive manifestations – and as a metaphysical and spiritual “essence,” positioned at the level of cognition whereby meanings seemed to be implicitly “understood” by all of the group. It is argued here that these two interrelated

aspects of *kabaklaan* require further discussion and analysis if the totality of the concept is to be made explicit and therefore relevant to the current study findings.

Like *kaloóban* (a term that will be discussed later in the chapter) the term *kabaklaan* can be seen as derivative of the prefix *ka*, which roughly translated means “sharing,” and broadly represents mutual involvement and togetherness. When joined to the term *bakla* (effeminate male), *kabaklaan* means something like “shared effeminacy.” Just as the participants however, have expanded and reshaped their own identities and definitions of *bakla* to include *gay* and *homosexual*, it is posited that the meanings associated with these terms also need to be inclusive of the more traditional elements associated with the gender of *bakla*. Therefore in recognition of the meanings given by participants to their own sexual and gendered selves, and with consideration for the conceptual framework and position taken in the current research project, the term *kabaklaan* will be defined in the study as “gayness,” of which effeminacy forms a congruent and integral part, and is a phenomenon that is shared within the group by its members and is physically marked through language and comportment.

Taken at the metaphysical and spiritual level, *kabaklaan* appears as a signifying “essence” that is fluid, esoteric and implicit, being mutually shared amongst the study participants and communicated at the sensory level of cognitive understanding. This should not be confused with “essence” as contained in the term “essentialism.” Essentialists argue for the existence of innate or “normative” biologically and genetically encoded patterns of gender characteristics and/or behaviours to be found within the corporeal structure of the individual. Rather, *kabaklaan* “as essence” is more attuned to the Filipino concept of *diwà*, defined by Jocano as representing a core concept of Filipino selfhood.

*Diwà ...is a configuration of the relationship between the physical body and the spiritual essence of being human. It is this harmony that transforms our potentials into drives and our impulses into sentiments. These drives and sentiments, in turn, give rise to our physical, mental, and emotional capacity for action...[and]... enables us to adapt collectively to our environment....Thus viewed, diwà refers to the inner force that lies at the core of our kaloóban (selves) and from which emanate all personal and social sentiments. (2001, pp. 99-162)*

The term “essence” will be used in this study to describe the internal and non-physical elements of *kabaklaan* that are representative of the shared feelings of identity which occur out of commonalities of sexuality, sensuality and desire, and which are

manifest in the physical sense through “gayness” – the externally shared social signifier of *bakla*.

During his interview, Ben makes explicit some of the cognitive and discursive processes and subjective experiences through which a repository of knowledge and awareness of *kabaklaan* occurred, and consequently his early self-identification with *bakla*. In many ways it provides a summary and explanation of similar experiences discussed by the other participants in this category, and brings a degree of clarity and understanding of the functioning of the *loób/labás* principle as it relates to the participant’s gender and sexuality. He concludes:

You realise that you’re gay because you’ve built up this repository of images and words that other people say to you or otherwise. Like your dad telling you that boys don’t cry, or that you should play sports, or play with the boys instead of girls, or that boys don’t play with dolls et cetera, because you act soft and sensitive, and act in a manner that is perceived to be weak. And then other boys at school tease you and say you’re *bakla* because you’re not rough and tough like them. Then self-denial comes in because you don’t want to be what they’re saying that you are because you’re afraid. Maybe because you’ve been made to feel that it is wrong or is a sin. Therefore your awareness of your *kabaklaan* has been built up through time and experiences and through gendering of yourself by others. It doesn’t occur to you that you’re *bakla* because you’ve had same-sex experiences. Sure, you eroticise and fantasise when you’re old enough, but actual sexual experiences rarely happen, being sheltered middle-class Catholics and all that. And anyway because of Catholic beliefs, pre-marital sex is wrong. So I guess there is no sexual epiphany in those terms. You don’t define yourself unconsciously or subconsciously as *bakla* because you’ve had homosexual experiences. Perhaps it’s because Filipinos don’t define themselves in terms of their sexuality. You’re either a boy or *bakla* because of the way you act and talk, like flailing hand gestures, facial expressions or being soft spoken.

As Ben reveals, his self-realisation that he was gay was premised on the viewpoints and opinions of people apart from himself, and had included visual signifiers of being *bakla*. During informal conversations with the participants it was discussed how practically every street in MM has a beauty salon that is staffed or operated by *parloristas*, and so from a very young age all of the participants had been aware of the effeminate appearance and behaviour of the *parlorista bakla*. They also had exposure to their family’s negative commentary and lampooning of *bakla* within their own homes, and had also seen the negative media portrayals on television and in Filipino films that showed *bakla* as weak and inferior to “straight” men or in the stereotyped role of the village idiot. The participants had therefore grown up in a social and cultural

environment that had denigrated and minoritised the *bakla*, and these were the kinds of socio-cultural signifiers that the participants had grown up with.

Tan (1995) suggests, there are alternative terms circulating in the Philippines for *bakla*, and one is *syoki* (evolving from the Chinese word syo k'i) which means weak-spirited. Garcia comments that his own research has shown that as a signifier, *bakla* connotes ideas of cowardice and fear, and until sixty years ago was used as a verb and/or adjective to denote indecision, fear, or cowardice (1996). Tan draws attention to the circulation of Sigmund Freud's theories as an explanatory factor in the portrayal of the *bakla* as weak and inferior by comparison to masculinised norms.

Freudian theories that attribute male homosexuality to a dominant mother and absent or weak father continue to be widely evoked, perhaps because they offer a "logical" explanation for the consequences of a subversion of the machismo norms....Parents explain their sons being *bakla* as resulting from going around with other *bakla*. *Bakla* is *nakakahawa*, contagious, an interesting conflation of concepts of danger and contagion (1995).

The findings of the study revealed how the participants themselves had generally accepted this kind of argument and explanation for their being *bakla*. For example, Pao believes that being effeminate was a result of having an absent father. He comments:

So the image of a father as ummhh somebody masculine was never there. My father was – in truth my mother okay? My mother played the role of father and mother. So I identified more with my mother, and then because my father was never there for us.... That's what probably enhanced my being effeminate, and then later on being gay.

Benjie describes how his father left home and married another woman, leaving him to be brought up solely by his mother, which he believes contributed to his being *bakla*. "So because I don't have any father image – I think that's part of the reason – part of the process why I became gay."

For Ben, these kinds of externalised socio-cultural representations and values (taken from his *labás*) had impact on his inner feelings and values (his *loób*) and at that time in his life were aligned with the widespread belief that to be *bakla* is wrong and a sin (guiding moral principles), that caused Ben to fear and deny that he was *bakla*. This pattern of fear and early denial in response to moral values or principles was also replicated in the stories of other participants. For example, Angelo describes the reasons for initially denying to himself that he was *bakla*. He comments:

Some of my friends were already gay back then [in grade school], but we tried to – they were my friends, but we tried to sort of avoid them because we thought they were gay – they weren't good people – stuff like that. But it turned out that even my friends back then who turned out later to be – all of us turned out to be gay also. So I guess this is subconscious maybe denial of something we knew really deep down. So we tried to avoid those who were more “out” at an early age, whom everyone knew were gay...I guess me and my circle of friends tried to avoid them. But then later on when we were older we realised that that maybe that's part of it. I think one of the reasons why we tried to avoid those people. Because maybe – we saw in them something that we really didn't wanna see in us.

Angelo discusses how in grade school he was in denial of his gender, and this continued into his first year of high school. He cites the main reason for his denial as concerns over what his family would think if he came out of the closet. In Filipino gay lingo, the local term for “coming out,” is known as *magladlad ng kapa*, which has a literal translation of unfurling one's cape and was coined in the context of the *parlorista bakla* Tan (2001a). Tan contends that coming out in the Philippines is a long and difficult process, especially for those gay Filipino men who do not fit the *bakla* mould (meaning the effeminate traditional *parlorista bakla*) because of the external representations and repercussions of acting effeminately and behaving effeminately in public. He provides the example of a Filipino “coming out” movie in which the protagonist is a “butch” masculine character, while his alter ego is a drag queen portraying Diana Ross. The dialectic angst produced is seen by Tan as a device for self-marginalisation and as a causal element in tensions between the *parlorista bakla* and other MSM groups in MM. He comments that “Given that effeminacy is the gold standard for ‘coming out’ as *bakla* or as ‘a gay’...it should not be surprising that people opt to remain in the closet...” (1995, p. 91)

For the participants, the primary issue they had to contend with was not sexuality – (as Ben reveals “It doesn't occur to you that you're *bakla* because you've had same-sex experiences”) – but rather one of gender ideation, and was an awareness informed upon by culturally signified and institutionalised values and norms. In this context Ben explains that “...your awareness of your *kabaklaan* has been built up though time and experiences and through gendering of yourself by others.” This is a key issue in terms of the processes and changes that are incurred in the development of *kabaklaan* as the person grows up. Pao, for example, begins his explanation of why he is *bakla* by drawing attention to his asthma as a “sickly” child preventing him from partaking in “masculine” and “tough” sports like soccer as a legitimising reason for

undertaking sports that were considered not so masculine like swimming. He believes these types of sports do not contribute to “toughening a person up” and making them more masculine, or to the development of a well-developed masculine physique, which for Pao are contributing factors towards attaining “real” masculinity. The notion that a masculine or “real” man (*lalake*) has a physique of an Adonis (a term used by Angelo to describe an idealised example of masculine beauty) is contrasted by Pao in terms of what he perceived as his own weaker physical self and concludes this could be a reason why others could think of him as being “effeminate.” He concludes this was why “I really didn’t experience how it was to become a normal Filipino boy.” A link was established however, between understandings of what effeminacy was, to actually self-identifying as effeminate. He adds “In second grade – somebody already told me that I was gay okay? In other words I was *bakla* – *bakla* – you are gay, you see? I don’t know how they were able to say that.” Here there has been movement from an understanding of the rituals (sports) and behaviours and affectations (strength and physical prowess) that are associated with masculinity and a sense of weakness associated with effeminacy to a position whereby Pao identified **himself** as effeminate. This was not an action that appeared out of an inner sense of sexual epiphany (as Ben explained) but was in response to a gradual gendering of himself as *bakla* that was inaugurated by others that had included his peers at school. He adds that “People would see us together, and other people, other class mates won’t join our group okay? Because probably they saw something different that we did not see.” It appeared that as a consequence of such experiences, Pao began to develop his *kabaklaan* principally through the connections and friendships he made with Ben, Manuel, and other young men that he met through the school system. All three have commented that when they first met each other and became friends, they knew they were “different” from their classmates, but were still in self-denial that they were *bakla*.

Although I was – in the sense that [laughs] my hands were flying all over. How do you call it – flailing – my voice had developed a distinct gay purr right? You listen to my friends – our other gay friends – we have that characteristic gay sound, especially when you record. But then I can change my voice. It’s throaty – it comes from the throat. So probably from my mannerisms and from my voice people could tell I was at least effeminate. I love fixing my hair of course, and when you reach the age of puberty you have pimples. Of course you do things about that. You buy soaps and so on, but I felt that was part of growing up....

As Ben discusses however, in the Philippines you are considered to be either a boy (meaning *lalake*) or *bakla*, and this gendering is prefaced on the way you act and

talk, and exemplified by flailing hand gestures, facial expressions, or being soft spoken. Pao remarks that in seventh grade things began to change for him and his group of friends. The group according to Pao was about eleven or twelve years of age by this time, and their sense of *kabaklaan* had developed to a point where they felt more outwardly confident and comfortable in expressing effeminacy.

But then – I don't know – something changed okay? In seventh grade we were probably about eleven or twelve. Ben and Manuel started having ummhh a preference for tunes – singing groups – singers – It probably was an obscure stage for me no? I can't really tell. They really idolised these women – a girl band – Wilson Phillips [laughs] – not a boy band. It was okay with me, but I didn't really want to identify myself with that group because it's a girly girly group, although I was still with them okay and again, I loved fixing my hair – I also liked perfumes, and I was probably becoming more confident of myself.

Seventh grade we were still together, the three of us, and we had two more friends – actually in Ben – our class who were more out okay? The eyelashes were curled – somebody – one of them already claimed that he had had liposuction as early as twelve years old. He was indulging in that kind of beauty treatment already okay? Okay, curled eyelashes, ummh fragrant women's perfume – someone was using women's perfume. Ummh, basically we just – we remained the same, only our interests were probably leaning towards the feminine type more and more. So probably in high school, that's when we started fitting in to a specific identity. Ben, Manuel and I were very fortunate to be in the same class. And then there were five more people in the class who were the same as us. Some of us have similar family situations that might have contributed to our being at least effeminate or as we claim now, we are gay.

How then, did the participant's effeminate character develop? What were the cultural markers and signifiers that were called upon in the development of their *kabaklaan*? If consideration is given to Figure 3, it can be seen how an explanation of gender functioning appears through the concept of *labás* and *loób*. Thus far it has been discussed how family and community attitudes, beliefs and values regarding male effeminacy had been internalised within the participant's *loób* or inner self, and had been responsible for causing feelings of fear, and anxiety that initially led to self-denial or rejection of effeminacy as an identity characteristic principally because it had not been directly aimed at the participants. It was only when effeminacy and suggestions of *kabaklaan* became personalised through naming by others (and consequently internalised within the participant's *sarili*<sup>24</sup>), that recognition of oneself as effeminate was actually acknowledged. The study shows that it was primarily through the early and

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<sup>24</sup> *Sarili* represents the outer or observable dimension of the self that separates an individual from other individuals (Jocano, 2001, p. 98).



ongoing connections and friendships that had been established at school which allowed for the continuing growth and development of the participant's *kabaklaan*. What is argued here is that initially it was only the first level of *kabaklaan* that was invoked in the developmental process. The metaphysical level followed later as part of the process of shared group experience, and took place over an extended period of time. The transition or rather the expansion of *kabaklaan* into the more esoteric level began as Pao suggested in about seventh grade, when gendered interactions were taking place between the participants. Further, it is argued that the culturally exterior aspects of group behaviour (the flailing hand gestures, the facial expressions, the putting on of perfume and make-up) were not just feminised activities undertaken by the group members, but were also observable to each group member through their exteriority of construction. In other words, the participants were also learning through role playing to each other, and mimicking each other's patterns of speech and behaviour, while comparing and sharing their interpretations, knowledge and understanding of what it meant to be effeminate. When discussing the embodiment of transvestism in Philippine cinema, Tolentino (2000, p. 329) notes that "'Gayness' is implicated through the performance of feminized bodily parts. Through *malantik* (curvilinear, as in curves of eyelashes and fingers) and *malambot* (soft, refined), pedagogically characterized gay gestures and speech, these parts are parodied in everyday performance.'

Participants' own comments included:

But the group. It gave me uhm...I mean, seeing how these people acted, I mean, how they, you know, how they presented themselves, gave me my early ideas on what being gay was. And at that time, being gay was being a little bit flamboyant – being a little bit witty – funny even (Manuel).

Actually my ideas about gays – mmhh – more on the feminine side. So when I was in high school I do make-ups, I do cross-dressing, but not that much, because I have a very slim body, because I can take all girl's clothings, so sort of that, so. More on the feminine side, and the heart – it's more feminine. So when the guys are actually inviting me to join them – I felt very – I felt very happy because they sort of considered me as a girl (Benjie).

The straight boys would have girlfriends. You didn't have anything.... 'Cause it's thinking that you're a girl. Yeah, 'cause a girl has to be with a macho guy, but I never saw myself as a girl. I'm sure I'd act ummh – I'd act in the ways that we perceive as effeminate, but I never saw myself as a girl really (Ben).

As previously mentioned, the participants had grown up around *parlorista bakla*, and could quite easily pattern their speech and behaviours around this model. Similarly, they had seen *bakla* representations in Filipino movies and television programmes which they could copy. Manalansan (2000) calls upon the symbolic phrase *paglaruan ang mundo* (meaning “to play with the world”) – a phrase used by Filipino gay men who are in drag – to describe how Filipino gay men overseas have reshaped their identities in relation to other expressions of same-sex gender and sexuality. It is suggested that in the context of this study “playing with the world,” can be used to signify the experimentation and the sharing of effeminate gender performances and stylised behaviours which formed part of the group’s own processes of experiential learning and contributed to the development of their *kabaklaan* and identity as middle-class *bakla*. When discussing his research into the discursive and sexual practices of male sex-workers in Bangkok, Storer (1998) calls for the need to unravel gender identity and gender roles as well as patterns of sexual behaviour and sexual meaning. He concludes that:

These [sexual meanings] are neither given nor fixed, but are continually ‘worked at,’ and negotiated through interaction. Thus, while individual actors learn and enact ‘sexual scripts,’ they also contest and reshape the ‘rules of play.’ Agency is central here for it is the intended and unintended consequences of human action that reproduce and transform social structures (p. 2).

Thus far consideration has been given to how local cultural manifestations and imaginings of *bakla* had given rise to the sharing of effeminacy (*kabaklaan*), located at the core of the participants’ *loób*. The continuing development of their *kabaklaan* was largely built on to their increasing exposure to Western conceptualisations and affectations of gay sexuality, which was often experienced at the level of homoerotic desire, sexual imagery and imaginings as well as at a more practical level of Western gay-centred and stylised materialism and consumerism. The stories provided by participants indicated that they had begun to incorporate many of the sexualised concepts and ideas from the West into their own repertoire of sexual and gender comportment. The findings of other researchers have shown how gender and sexuality, although appearing as distinct categories of experience are actually related, and it is within this relationship that the subjectivity of non-conforming expressions of gender can be located.

In his ethnographic research of the transgendered *travestis* in the city of Salvador in Brazil, Kulick (1998) argues that for the *travestis* there are three distinct types of gendered individuals, and they are *homens* (men), *mulheres* (women), and *viados* (faggots). Kulick argues that in configuring sexuality, gender and sex, the *travestis* identify males and females not so much in terms of their genitalia, but rather the function that the genitals perform in sexual liaisons. He concludes:

Here the locus of gender difference is the act of penetration – if one *only* penetrates, one is a “man;” if one gets penetrated, one is something other than a man – one is either a *viado*, a faggot, or a *mulher*, a woman (p. 227).

Kulick argues that *travestis* do not think of themselves as women (which would be an insult rather than a compliment), but rather see themselves as homosexual men. In this regard, Kulick posits that *travestis* occupy a position in the gender system alongside women, and it is a system that privileges masculinity because it is predicated on the act of penetration. Johnson (1997) appears in agreement with Kulick that penetrator/penetratee is an important distinction in the defining of gender roles. He comments:

...as in many other cultures...it is not genital sexual object choice but rather the position one assumes or one is conventionally expected to assume in sexual intercourse (penetrator or receptor) which not only continues to be gendered masculine and feminine respectively, but also continues to be crucial to the realization of gender....As I suggest...male sexuality is defined in the first instance not by who one's sexual partners are but by one's demonstrated ability to be sexual penetrators or inseminators (p. 35).

Johnson argues that in his critique of gender in the Philippines, Garcia over emphasised the importance of Western theories of sexual inversion as a determining signifier in relation to the sexuality of the *bantut* and *bakla* and underestimated “...the historical and the ongoing significance of sexual comportment to indigenous conceptualizations of the *bakla*” (p. 35). Here Johnson argues that the sexuality of the *bantut* is defined by reference to their supposed impotency and their receptor role during sexual intercourse. In his study with middle-class “gay” male participants, Tan (1995) found the group were in agreement that the alternating roles of inserter and insertee occur more frequently in oral sex than in anal, and suggests that masculine/feminine imagery in anal intercourse is seen as more powerful in terms of the roles of penetrator and penetrated. He concluded that anal intercourse evoked images of

male and female for the participants, and that anal intercourse had represented a relationship of domination and submission.

In terms of the current study, there appeared to be a subjective reshaping by the participants of their alignment with the purely submissive/penetrated gender compartment of the *bakla* to a position in which they could also identify with “gay” sexual performativity and homoeroticism.

When I was younger my mindset was that I wanna be a girl. I was definitely a bottom, but in the past three or four years – I’ve always started to feel that arbitrary, ‘cause I’ve started enjoying being a top. And I think I’m versatile, but I don’t take it against people that are exclusively bottom or exclusively top. But at least on my end I think I’m versatile (Alfonso).

In the quotation above Alfonso describes how he had originally aligned himself with the concept of *pusong babae*, and had accepted the passive “feminine” gender role of a “bottom.” This has changed over time to the point where he now also sees himself as a masculinised “top,” which for Angelo situates himself in the more amorphous approach of considering himself both a “top” and a “bottom,” thus placing himself in a position of being “versatile.” By reshaping his thinking in relation to gender and sexuality, Alfonso no longer was tied to the inserter/insertee binarism. Previously, he had followed the traditional gender normative stance that to be *bakla* meant adopting the submissive “female” role and therefore being penetrated. What is particularly interesting is how Alfonso brings a moral dimension to his logic when he projects a non-judgmental stance in relation to the gender positioning of top/bottom and by extension masculine/feminine. It is suggested this can be seen as a reflection of the wider cultural beliefs associated with being *bakla* because as previously mentioned, in the Northern Philippines you are either *lalake* – a real man – or you are considered *pusong babae* – like a woman, and as Tan (1995) suggests, this includes the lumping together of homosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, as well as hermaphrodites.

What is of particular relevance here is to understand how the participants have come to embrace Western “gay” sexuality as an integral part of their own *kabaklaan* and sexualised identity as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. It is suggested that pornography had a significant role to play in engendering the beliefs, concepts, reactions and responses that participants had to homo/sexuality. For example, the terms “top,” “bottom,” and “versatile,” used by Alfonso are more likely to be found in the classified section of a Western gay magazine than they are in the classified section of the Manila Times. An

important issue to also consider is that the participants discussed how they had shared pornographic videos, VCD's and magazines. It was explained how these would be passed between themselves whenever new materials were purchased. The other issue to consider here is that according to the participants, the magazine pornography was usually American and the video/VCD materials were also American, and to a lesser extent eastern European. This meant that quite apart from other visual and print materials that were more to do with contextualising gay lives and lifestyles within the social milieu of middle-America, the pornographic visual imagery was directly focused on to specific types and patterns of sexualised desire and displays of homoeroticism and sexual performance<sup>25</sup>. During informal conversations with the participants, they alluded to how males portrayed in the porn movies were "butch," "straight-acting" and masculine types of "gay" men. What appeared to have impacted on the participants was that the men portrayed in the movies engaged in anal and oral sex that showed the "actors" being both penetrated and penetrating each other for the purpose of gaining sexual pleasure and mutual satisfaction. This of course was a far cry from the gender comportment of *pusong babae* and the sexual morality espoused by the Filipino Catholic Church, particularly with regard to "acts of sodomy." During the interviews Ferdi explained how the group would share pornography between themselves. His comment that "As long as we had these magazines we knew we were gay," illustrates how Western gay pornography had been subjectively shaped within the shared *loób* of the group's experience.

The statement Ferdi makes here is important because it highlights how the exterior world of his *labás* (in this case the visual imagery of gay men in Western magazines) is embraced in order to bring meaning to his inner subjective sense of self-identity and awareness – of considering and feeling himself to be gay. Since the ritual of sharing porn was something the whole group ascribed to, then it follows that in much the same way as effeminacy formed part of the participant's *kabaklaan*, that is through observation and visual imagery, the inclusion of gay sexuality was also embraced and legitimised in much the same way. The only real difference is that with effeminacy the participants could mimic and experiment amongst themselves, whereas given the more intimate nature of sexual performance and homoerotic interplay, experimentation or mimicry either remained at a cognitive level of interpretation or as exemplified by

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<sup>25</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to enter into a debate about the rights and wrongs of pornography, but rather to discuss how Western stylised pornography had impacted on the identities of the study participants.

Angelo, was enacted during a casual sexual encounter or when dating. The other issue here as revealed by the participants themselves, was that “you don’t fuck your friends,” which as already mentioned was considered to constitute “lesbianism.”

Middle-class status was also an important issue because it meant that the participants had the means to gain access to sexual materials (particularly from the West) that would not be so readily available to the lower-classes, and the reality of overseas travel had also contributed to a deepening of knowledge of gay sexuality and lifestyles. Internet access had also been a contributing factor to the sharing of knowledge gained from outside the local realm of experience

Pao revealed how the teachings of the Catholic Church were responsible for the internal conflicts he was experiencing over his sexuality, however pornography had provided an exterior visual stimuli of gay sexual activity and homoeroticism that was portrayed as a pleasurable experience and therefore to be enjoyed, rather than something immoral and evil and therefore to be derided, feared and avoided. This was illustrated by the fact that his fears had not prevented him from privately viewing and discussing pornographic materials with his friends, a point highlighted by Manalansan (2000, p. 192) when he concludes that “Among Filipino Catholics, it is possible to “split” or to separate acts and behaviour from professed religious and moral beliefs.” This is an important issue to consider, given the familial and educational backgrounds of the study participants. During the course of his interview Danny was asked how he had personally reconciled his religious ideals and being gay, to which he replied:

That’s a good question! Honestly I really don’t – I deliberately don’t think about it. Because it’s hard to reconcile – it’s really hard. From what I was brought up to believe and what you know, and the balance that you’re really asking, and what I know they still believe in. They’re in clash or in conflict with what is practiced. And because my stand is I don’t make it an issue. I don’t even connect it or attach it to my religiosity or to my religion or to my faith. Maybe that’s one of the reasons why I’m really not interested or that – you know – into the active gay sex lifestyle. Maybe, I dunno [reflecting]. Maybe there’s still that Catholic schoolgirl in me telling me that hey, it’s bad. I don’t think so [laughs]. Maybe I’m really the person that’s not that horny [laughs], or sensual, I dunno. But don’t know if it’s that conscious, but I don’t really attach the religious ideals to it. I make it a point to separate it. **“So maybe you can protect who you are?”** Yeah, correct. Exactly that. I consciously – or I have this shield between the two. Just to keep them both.

Exactly how the study participants negotiated their religious selves with their gendered and sexual selves will be given greater attention within the next category of

the study. The study findings have suggested however, that on the physical level, personal religious beliefs and ideals played a pivotal role in how the participant's dealt with the conflicts and tensions that existed between their religious selves and their sexual selves. On a metaphysical and spiritual level, there was a definite connectedness between spirituality and sexuality which leads to the conclusion that although the two forces are distinct from each other they remain interconnected. What is important to consider at this juncture are the transformatory effects that sexualised Western imagery, performances, and homoeroticism have had in reshaping the participants' own sexual and gender comportment. In the West, sexual identity is treated as a phenomenon that is an individual concern. Considering oneself gay or homosexual, or being considered by others to fit this description is usually predicated on an individual's sexual object choice (Coleman, 1987; De Cecco & Shively, 1984; Plummer, 1992; Weeks, 1991) rather than on a system based on shared gender comportment as exemplified by the participants in this study. As Ben declared earlier, there is no sexual epiphany for Filipinos as there is for Westerners, who by virtue of their sexual attraction to other males self-identify as gay or homosexual. Further, the decision to declare to oneself that "I am gay" is usually predicated on some form of sexual activity or experimentation, which leads to identification as gay/homosexual. (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Macdonald, 1996; Troiden, 1989). Since Filipinos do not define themselves by their sexuality it is not necessary to engage in physical sexual activity in order to establish that they are indeed gay/homosexual. The fact that the participants shared, discussed and embraced the "gay" coded discursive and visual signifiers found in the pornographic materials was sufficient for them to justify and identify themselves as also being gay. Just as the gendering of themselves as effeminate *bakla* occurred from the outside (from their *labás*) inwards (to their *loób*), and consequently shaped and enacted through their *kabaklaan*, so too was their incorporation of "gay" similarly inscribed through the external medium of pornography.

The other issue to consider is the participants' moral and religious ideals, because as long as they remained celibate and "virgins," they were not breaking the edict of the Catholic Church in relation to homosexuality which is to "punish the sin not the sinner." What will become evident in the next category of the study is how the growth and development of the participants' *kabaklaan* during their school lives occurred in tandem with their religious and spiritual development, particularly as they all had undergone the teachings of the Filipino Catholic Education System. The

participants’ religious and spiritual selves had therefore informed on how they shaped and transformed their gendered and sexual selves. It was only as they grew older and gained more life experience outside of the parameters of school and family life that some of the participants engaged in sexual activities and relationships, and this was after the realisation that gay relationships were not only possible, but desirable. The following model has been constructed to highlight the Catholic Church’s official position in relation to gender and homosexuality

### Cultural Model

<b>Abstinence</b> (tolerance)	<b>Practice</b> (rejection)
<u>Gender Based</u> – falls in with the essentialist ethos of Catholic doctrine in the Philippine cultural context	<u>Sex Based</u> – sodomy is a sin and goes against Church doctrine

The study has also shown that for the participants identifying as gay was not only inscribed at the level of sexuality and desire, but also meant engaging with Western gay-focused consumerism, identities, and lifestyles. When reflecting on the colonial and postcolonial experiences of Filipinos with Spain and the United States Manalansan (2000, p. 192) quotes the Filipino writer Nick Joaquin as commenting “more than three hundred years in the convent [with Spain] and thirty years of Hollywood [with the United States].”

While pornography played a key role in shaping the participants’ concepts of gay sexuality and homoeroticism, the study findings revealed that it was Western representations of gay-identified people in relationships that also played a part in reshaping the participants’ thinking about being *bakla*. Ben indicated that Western television shows and movies have challenged the traditional Filipino ideas that a gay man is by nature effeminate (*pusong babae*) by showing gay men as “straight-acting,” or as acting like *lalake* (real men). Pao also agreed that the Hollywood image and portrayal of gay characters as “straight-acting” is influencing a change in the ways that gay-identifying Filipinos see themselves and are seen by the general public, and this was reflected in his comments that “The colonial mentality is still there. What Hollywood dictates, the Philippines follows. So right now gays in America are being portrayed as that – as straight looking, straight-acting people. They are the lead actors and confident because Hollywood changed the image of a gay.” Pao concludes that



Filipino middle-class gay men have also adapted the Hollywood image of the “straight-acting” gay man and so de-feminised their own appearance “...in the sense that we don’t colour our hair anymore. We don’t wear [coloured] contact lenses. We don’t wear dress up in drag anymore. We look like the typical yuppie – young urban professionals.” Angelo was also of the opinion that Western thought, fashion and education has “invaded” the Philippines and influenced how gay [middle-class] males as well as heterosexual males and females see themselves. In this regard he makes the point that Filipinos are more likely to turn to the fashion houses of Paris, New York or Milan, than to the fashion styles coming out of Manila or Cebu. Angelo gave the most political response to the issue of Western influences when he stratified movie representations of American gay men by class (the example being the American gay-oriented movie “To Wong Foo”), comparing a transsexual lower-class character to the Filipino *parlorista*. For Angelo, Western television programmes such as “Queer as Folk” and “Will and Grace” had political merit in that the characters portrayed were strong and respected as opposed to the Filipino notion of the *bakla* as weak and powerless. It can be seen then, how class begins to show itself as a defining principle in structuring the ways in which gender and sexuality are being experienced by the current study group of middle-class participants.

The structural relationship between class and gender in MM was described by Angelo as a three-tiered hierarchical structure of gendered relationships that are loosely based on notions of public perception and physical appearance and comportment. At the top is the “straight-acting gay” who does not display any visible signs of feminine or effeminate behaviours or mannerisms. This type of person generally comes from the middle to upper-classes, and has had extensive exposure to Western ways of thinking and acting in terms of gay sexualities and lifestyles. In the centre position is generally the middle to lower middle-class *bakla/gay/homosexual* who also has had exposure to aspects of Western sexuality and lifestyle, but who is regarded as effeminate, but not overtly so. At the bottom of the tier is the lower-class *bakla* or *parlorista* who may choose to openly dress like a woman, but more importantly behaves in an overtly effeminate manner. The emphasis that Alfonso places on gender comportment over cross-dressing as a woman is an important distinction, and will be discussed in the final category of the chapter. It is a crucial issue in determining acceptance or rejection (as a cross-dresser) by the participants that is hierarchically based on factors of education, physical appearance and comportment. It is useful to reproduce Angelo’s quotation here

to highlight the class-based differences outlined between the *parloristas* and his own middle-class group of friends. He comments:

I guess because in the Philippines, unlike let's say in America where hairdressers are like in these really big parlours and stuff like that – here in the Philippines, beauticians are a bit more quote-unquote cheap. I guess because they can be found in every rural village – everywhere. And they tend to be viewed by the majority as cheap I guess even if they are in bigger salons like in the malls. But I guess – they're being stereotyped. These beauticians are being stereotyped for that and for being umm queens basically – for being drag queens basically. But the thing – the thing you see, with my group – Ben and Benjie – our group is sort of like, in between. Because I know there is also that divide with – between the queens and the straight-acting gays. In the Philippines, I think that's sort of a very, very – that divide is obvious, especially if you go to places like Malate where it's the world of straight-acting guys. The thing with me and I guess with most of my friends, it's sort of different for us. We're sort of in-between, you know. We're not really the type who'd be super-straight-acting or to the point of being closeted. But we're also not – because it's obvious that we do show effeminate characteristics also – but at the same time, on the other hand, we're not going around in normal days anyway in skirts or stuff like that.

Alfonso's statement not only reveals how class informs on issues of gender difference, but also how gender also links together the lower and middle-class *bakla* through the commonality of effeminacy. This may be an important socio-political factor to consider when issues of political activism and bi-partisan solidarity are given consideration.

Alfonso concludes that his mindset has become liberalised and “quite Westernised,” which he attributes to his educational and class background. He explains that “straight-acting gays” usually come from class A, B, and C, which he defines as the middle to upper classes, and their status as “straight-acting” reflecting their exposure to international media. Angelo expands on this by saying that this group has been increasingly exposed to concepts, studies and education that has come from abroad. He explains further that class D and E are more localised in their knowledge because of their lack of exposure to Western ways of conceptualising sexuality, so they have more traditional ideas on homosexuality. This according to Alfonso, contributes to the class divide which he elaborates is “a straight-acting versus feminine kind of gay divide.” Once again Alfonso alludes to class difference that is based upon gender compartment, but concludes by saying that the issue is quite complicated and that while class differences do exist, the classes remain intertwined.

When discussing models of class structure in the Philippines, Turner (1995) suggests there has been a recent revitalisation of the stratification approach that has a strong affirmation of a middle-class within the Philippines. This, he argues, is the result of an opinion poll industry that is led by the highly influential Social Weather Stations which is organised under the umbrella of the Marketing and Opinion Research Society of the Philippines (MORES). He concludes:

The A-B-C-D-E class system is the convention of this industry, where classes A and B comprise rich households, Class C is the middle-class, Class D is composed of the moderately poor, and class E consists of the very poor. Such classes are acknowledged as socio-economic status groups which are identified on consumption....[The new stratification studies]...enables researchers to identify “middle-class” opinions and values....One current strand of middle-class awareness and assertiveness can be seen in the revitalization or invention and assertion of middle-class values....The dominant paradigm has been that distinctive Philippine values account for distinctive patterns of Philippine behaviour...[and]...in the post-Marcos years there has been an explicit link made between particular values and the middle-class by elements of that class (pp. 91-95).

The study findings have indicated that middle-class economic status, religiosity and education were primary sources of experience inscribed at the core of each participant's *loób* and therefore contributed towards the shaping of their personal values and behaviours and had influence over the participant's codes of conduct and responses and reactions to the outside world. The issue of what is considered by participants to be appropriate social behaviour and gender comportment for **themselves** “as *bakla*”, was a recurrent theme closely linked to shared perceptions of class-identity and patterns of social and cultural learning. Mulder (1997) suggests that identity-sharing is a normal occurrence within the lives and relationships of Filipinos. He ascertains that a sense of belonging, rootedness, identity, emotional support and security are all to be found in deeply-felt relationships. It is the often highly emotive nature of these ties that can lead to identity-sharing, where there is direct participation in each other's *loób* (inner being), giving service to the widespread idea that people who are very close to each other can easily empathise. Bulatao (cited in Mulder, 1997, p. 20) views this kind of relationship as one of dependence, and concludes that “Filipinos are parts of groups and have a group-dependent identity, and thus the basic unit of society is not the individual but the closed group.”

When viewed from this perspective, gender can be seen to represent the common ground that Pao was discussing in the beginning of this chapter because it

links together commonalities in gender experience, ideation, comportment and identity within the contextual framework of the friendship group. The study findings showed how these key elements of gender were informed upon by the ethical and moral knowledge, values and guiding principles gained from participation within the family, the school and education system, and the Church.

In order to gain a deeper cultural understanding of the formation of the social attitudes, values, beliefs and principles espoused by the participants, it would be helpful to bring attention to the inner dynamics and manifestations of “self,” that are explained by the Filipino theoretical concept of *kaloóban* and some of the underlying assumptions and principles on which it is based. The following explanations of *kaloóban* are to be found in Jocano (2001, pp. 98-111).

The term *kaloóban* is derived from the root word *loób*, meaning “inside.” It is also used to refer to disposition, will, volition, feeling, and emotional assessment of external events....As a concept, *kaloóban* consists of the basic assumptions, premises, and postulates of the larger society that we have internalized as our own in the process of growing up as part of our feelings and guiding principles in our participation in community affairs as adults.

Once internalized, assumptions, premises, and postulates serve as blueprints of behaviour that tell us, among others, what counts and what does not, what is proper and what is not. They are the rules that govern our life. We do things because we consider them rational, right, and acceptable. It is only rarely that we act on impulse.

Metaphorically, *kaloóban* means “entering into other persons’ inner systems of symbols and meanings, and sharing with them the understanding of the surrounding world.” The converse is also true – i.e., we allow others to enter our *kaloóban* and share with them our understanding of the surrounding world.

This mutual involvement and togetherness is indicated by the prefix *ka-*....We mutually share “our inner feelings, evaluation of events, and understanding of the situation we are in.” It is through this mutual sharing that our actions and ideals are properly communicated to and understood by others and our personalities are formed. If we do not share with other people our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, we are labelled as *makasarili* (selfish), a bad trait.

*Kaloóban* is thus also used to refer to our “inner understanding,” about social realities in the environment. It is what takes place inside us as we confront these external realities. It is through the enactment in our observable behaviour of our inner understanding and knowing that we develop a personality of our own, our *sarili* [self].... *Kaloóban* functions as the internal code of meanings that enables a person to define the parameters of *sarili*....

When applied as a tool of analysis in the present study, *kaloóban* needs to be understood alongside another Filipino concept of “self,” which is *hiya*. Literally translated, *hiya* means “shame,” however according to Bulatao (1964), the meaning can also include “shyness,” “timidity,” “embarrassment,” and “sensitivity.” It is defined by Lynch (cited in Roces & Roces, 1986, p. 34) as “the uncomfortable feeling that accompanies awareness of being, in a socially unacceptable position, or performing a socially unacceptable action.” The socialist-anthropologist Mary Hollnsteiner (Roces & Roces, 1986, p. 35) defines *hiya* as “a sense of social propriety, as a preventive it makes for conformity to community norms. When one violates such a norm he [or she] ordinarily feels a deep sense of shame, a realisation of having failed to live up to the standards of society. To call a Filipino *walang-hiya* or ‘shameless’ is to wound him [or her] seriously.” When discussing the concept, Roces & Roces (1986) suggest that *hiya* can be understood to be a controlling mechanism in Filipino society. They comment:

A person’s behaviour is restricted by a sense of *hiya* while public behaviour is censured or approved of, by *hiya*. One’s self esteem goes up and down, depending on the value you place on your own *hiya* in public. To be ridiculed in public, or to be censured openly, or to fail to do what is expected of one, is to suffer *hiya*, a loss of self-esteem. Inversely, not to feel one has acted improperly, to continue to behave in a manner disapproved of by the community, is to be without *hiya*, and this label automatically results in withdrawal of acceptance within one’s group, if not the entire community. A Filipino who loses group support from his kinsmen is a social outcast, a very unhappy person. The Westerner who values individualism and non-conformism may find this meaningless because his behaviour is controlled more by individual sense of guilt and less by group censure (p. 34).

When unpacking *kaloóban* and *hiya* specifically in relation to affectations of gender, a degree of clarity can be gained from understanding the arguably tentative social position that as adults the study participants occupy within the wider Filipino community, and the tensions and conflict they have experienced as a consequence of growing up within the conservative social institutions through which they have learned and internalised the basic assumptions, premises and postulates of their society and culture while simultaneously establishing their own identities as middle-class urban *bakla* citizens. Pao revealed how he had experienced inner conflict over his own effeminacy because of the sensationalism and negative stereotypes of *bakla* presented in the Filipino television and movie industry that inferred societal disapproval of *bakla*, and it is suggested that these depictions were at least partly responsible for generating Pao’s feelings of *hiya* and low self-esteem.

It is not surprising, then, that the friendship group had provided the participants with a shared sense of rootedness, identity, emotional support and security to which Mulder has referred. Likewise, the friendship group has been responsible for the development of their *kabaklaan* through the mutual and performative reciprocity and sharing of inner thoughts, feelings and understandings (as outlined by Jocano) of what self-identifying as *bakla* means, and then actively projecting these inner thoughts, feelings and meanings into the public arena in the form of gender comportment.

Exactly how the participants negotiate and enact their gender comportment in public can be better understood if attention is given to how the concept of *hiya* can be related to their public profile as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. Benjie revealed in a quotation appearing earlier in the study how during his earlier high school years he had experienced *hiya* as a result of being publicly rebuked for appearing dressed as *bakla*. Accepting the assumption that one's sense of self-esteem and social propriety are dependant on the approval or disapproval of others in the wider community through public actions, then the disapproval and distancing by the participants from the stereotyped manners and behaviours associated with the *parlorista bakla* begins to gain greater clarity of understanding. Further, when attention is focused on the participants' own personal values together with the assumptions and guiding principles of *kaloóban*, it can be seen how the internalisation of middle-class ideas, values and beliefs learned from family, school and Church have become the blueprints of social propriety. Since however, being *bakla/gay/homosexual* arguably places the participants in a potentially unacceptable position within their community, the risk of experiencing *hiya*, particularly during their years at high school, was omnipresent outside of the "safe" parameters of the friendship group, and this social effect had been responsible for the participants' inner feelings of fear, anxiety, conflict and tension as they tried to navigate and negotiate a pathway between these two conflicting elements within their *loób*. As Jocano (2001, p. 169) argues "...when the loób is disturbed by anxiety or fear, life is also disturbed. When it is peaceful, life is also peaceful." How then did the participants negotiate the possible slippages from acceptance to censure while making their way in Philippine society? The way ahead for the participants was through galvanising together as a group and pursuing high academic performance and achievement.

### ***Category Three: The Catholic Education System and the Development of Identity and Group Solidarity***

A recurring theme that permeates much of the study is the sustaining and supportive role that the friendship group has played in the ongoing social and personal development and change incurred by each of the study participants. The study findings have shown how the formation of the group occurred during the period that the participants attended private middle-class Catholic schools and how the group had provided them with the safety and security they needed in order to feel comfortable in expressing themselves, which had included experimentation during their high school years with gender behaviour and performance. In this context, the group provided a safe space in which to participate and engage with one another as *bakla* while acting as a buffer against potential peer group abuse including homophobia. The findings also revealed that being supported and feeling safe inside of the group structure had engendered the group members with a sense of self-esteem and agency that had allowed for personal and academic growth, development and achievement within the Catholic education system. This is not to argue that other students did not also feel the need or desire to join or form peer groups within the school setting. Indeed, being a part of a *barkada* has been shown to be integral to Filipino social and community life. As previously mentioned, the group participants joined together because of a shared gender interest and commonality in being *bakla*. This had meant that during their school lives the participants often had different experiences from many of their peers, and it is the description of these experiences that is the focus of discussion and analysis in this category of the chapter.

What was of particular interest when focussing on the participant's high school years was the comparatively large numbers of *bakla* students within the Catholic education system. Ben revealed that one-quarter of his section was *bakla*, and Angelo (whose batch was one year ahead of Ben's) mentioned how one-fifth of his section was also *bakla*. The participants themselves could forward no real explanation for these figures. The most obvious possibility is that it can be put down to the sheer density of urban population in MM, so there is the likelihood of finding a larger number of the population who are *bakla*. Another possibility is that the high school attended is an all-male private school therefore the figures are likely to be higher than in a co-educational public school (public schools are all co-educational in the Philippines). Another suggestion is that alternative models and patterns of gender, gay sexualities and gay

lifestyles from the West have had a liberalising affect within the mainstream stratum of Filipino society. It could be assumed that just as Westerners over time have experienced changes and developments in how gay and lesbian people have been presented and represented by the mass media, so too have the Filipino public been exposed to these Westernised developments. This could help to explain how succeeding batches and generations of *bakla/gay/homosexual* school students have experienced the necessary degree of “tolerance” to have been able to be more “out” and visible than preceding generations of students within the conservative corridors of the Catholic education structure. The ability to be “visible” within the school environment was evidenced by the participants’ own descriptions of their actions and behaviours in the school yard and the classroom, particularly towards their latter years at high school. The participants discussed how generally they had not been harassed or bullied at school as a result of their status as a group or in relation to their own effete actions or behaviours. The only exception appeared to be Manuel who revealed that he had had been picked on by his peers because of the way he spoke and acted. It appeared however, that earlier generations of gay students at the school had experienced serious forms of physical abuse. Ferdi alluded to the fact that during discussions with Brother Santos (who had taught at the school for a great number of years) it was revealed that in the 1980’s gay students had experienced persecution by their peers, and this had involved the removal of their underwear which was then placed on a tree in the school yard with the intention of shaming the individual involved. Ferdi felt that the situation for gay students had improved in more recent times, but suggested that his group were tolerated rather than being openly accepted by peers and teachers alike. Ben recounted how effeminate students would have their cosmetics confiscated as a punishment enacted out of a school rule evoking “conduct unbecoming a gentleman,” and Pao discussed how gay students had received instruction from the Jesuit brothers that homosexuality was wrong. Similarly, Ben discussed how he and others had been called to the principal’s office to be lectured on the dangers of “going down the path of homosexuality,” and this had occurred as a result of their names having been put on a list of “suspected” gay students by one of the Jesuit teachers. He was consequently threatened that if he did not desist from these behaviours his parents would be informed. It can be seen therefore how self-expression did come with a risk factor attached, but it appears it was a price the participants were willing to pay largely because of the unconditional acceptance, safety, support and friendship that the group had provided, particularly during their developmental years at high school. Put simply, they were all *bakla* together. Angelo



made a salient point when he discussed how at times the group members had felt afraid, suppressed and marginalised, and these pressures had created a need by the participants to define their own gender and sexuality. The irony underlying the participants' discussions about their experiences and encounters with the Catholic education system is that the moralising anti-homosexual discourse and arguments presented to them, together with the actions by the Jesuit brothers to punish them for their effeminacy actually had the effect of making the participants more determined to redefine themselves as *bakla/gay/homosexual* Catholics, thereby increasing their levels of self-worth and self-esteem. Angelo in fact described their effeminate group activities and discourse (including the use of *swardspeak*) at high school as "liberating."

The findings have shown that in order to deflect and minimise the risk of detection or condemnation by their families, peers, or teachers for being considered effeminate, the participants used high academic achievement as a means towards gaining the social and societal respect they desired, and in the process building their own self-confidence through the negation of the stereotypes associated with being *bakla*. Personal achievement is linked to economic success in the Philippines, and therefore held in particularly high regard. Parents feel extremely proud if their son or daughter is successful because it means they can contribute to the financial security and upkeep of the family. Middle-class families stress self-reliance, achievement, and industriousness as primary goals and objectives for their sons and daughters (Cannell, 1999; Medina, 1991; Mulder, 1997), and so excelling in education is a means of making this happen and therefore a way toward gaining the respect and admiration of parents, peers, teachers and society at large. Danny, for example, indicated that their status as honours class students meant they had gained the respect of others within the wider school community, so were not negatively stereotyped and shunned as *bakla*. Benjie, although not an honours student, revealed how he also had worked hard to receive a top leadership award from his university, and how he wanted to show significant others that being *bakla* did not simply equate to the gender stereotype. Manuel described how he enjoyed being "teacher's pet," because it provided him with a positive affirmation of his gender and sexuality. For Pao, a fear of being ostracised by his peers had led him to focus on scholastic achievement, which acted as a social shield and defence mechanism to gloss over his effeminacy with parents, peers and teachers. High achievement by the participants can therefore be seen as a critical factor in establishing affable social relations within the school community and environment, thereby engendering the

support and approval of their parents, peers and teachers. Scholastic achievement also meant that the participants were in considerable competition with the other non-*bakla* students, and the findings have shown that successes by the participants were often regarded as personal milestones in proving that *bakla* students were not only as intelligent as the others, but could also excel and become academically successful within the school structure. In so doing, the participants were also building their own self-esteem and inner strength as persons of reliability, virtue and moral fortitude. In short, achievement was an attribute used by the participants to countermand or at least cushion negative stereotyping and the impact of being labelled as *bakla*. Further, academic achievement had provided the participants with group status as *bakla* members of the honours class within their high school batch, and personal status as industrious and dutiful sons within their familial settings. As a result several of the participants mentioned how they either felt more relaxed or secure within their school environment or felt more comfortable and at ease at home with their families.

In a recent newspaper article appearing in the Philippine Daily Inquirer a former Supreme Court Justice generated controversy through his scathing attacks on Filipino “homosexuals.” Quotations taken from the article have been included here because of its relevance to many of the issues discussed thus far in the study. It particularly highlights the “machismo” gender viewpoint and position that remains a part of conservative Filipino society, along with the gender assumptions that are associated with being considered *lalake* (male), *babae* (female), or *pusong babae* (being labelled as *bakla*, gay, or homosexual). He comments:

It seems that the present society has developed a new sense of values that have rejected our religious people’s traditional ideas of propriety and morality on the pretext of “being modern” and “broad-minded...”The change in the popular attitude toward homosexuals is not particular to the Philippines. It has become an international trend even in the so-called sophisticated regions with more liberal concepts than in our comparatively conservative society....Queer people – that’s the sarcastic name for them – have come out of the closet where before they carefully concealed their condition. The permissive belief now is that homosexuals belong to a separate third sex with equal rights as male and female persons instead of just an illicit in-between gender that is neither here nor there.

When I was studying in the Legarda Elementary School in Manila during the late 1930’s, the big student population had only one, just one homosexual...In the whole district of Sampaloc where I lived, there was only one homosexual who roamed the streets peddling “kalamay” and “puto” and other treats for snacks. He provided diversion to his genial customers and did not mind their

familiar amiable teasing. I think he actually enjoyed being a “binabae” (effeminate)... Now homosexuals are everywhere, coming at first in timorous and eventually alarming and audacious number. Beauty salons now are served mostly by gay attendants including effeminate bearded hairdressers to whom male barbers have lost many of their macho customers....

And the schools are now fertile ground for the gay invasion. Walking along the University belt one day, I passed by a group of boys chattering among themselves, with one of them exclaiming seriously, “Aalis na ako. Magpapasuso pa ako!” (“I’m leaving. I still have to breastfeed!”) That pansy would have been mauled in the school where my five sons (all machos) studied during the ‘70s when all the students were certifiably masculine. Now many of its pupils are gay, and I don’t mean happy. I suppose they have been influenced by such shows as “Brokeback Mountain,” our own “Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros” (both of which won awards). “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” and that talk program of Ellen Degeneres, an admitted lesbian....Let us be warned against the gay population, which is per se a compromise between the strong and the weak and therefore only somewhat and not the absolute of either of the two qualities. (Cruz, 2006)

An argument presented in this study has been that the study participants reconfigured their public gender image and profile so as not to go beyond the boundaries of public acceptability and propriety. How then does that match with the visibility they had shown within their high school environment? There are several issues to consider in this regard. It is worth restating here that the family is the primary social institution within Filipino society and by virtue of its institutional nature is linked to other social institutions including the economic, the political, the religious and the educational (Cannell, 1999; Jocano, 1998; Medina, 1991; Mulder, 1997; Roces & Roces, 1986). In particular, Mulder (1997) points out the importance and intimate nature of family and family relationships in Philippine society, and how they constitute the source of meaningful existence, identity and fulfilment. He argues further that Catholicism and the practice of religious ritual have also become part of the meaningful existence and fulfilment of the everyday family life of middle-class Filipinos, and in this way religion has become family-centred. He argues that:

The predominant religious mentality is very similar to the positive mentality guiding family life. Religion legitimises and sanctifies familial relationships. Its symbols strengthen and express the private morally binding realms of life. This family-centeredness of religious experience...is nothing new. What is new here is the reduction of the way familial and religious relationships are thought of to one and the same mentality....

It is suggested this form of family centeredness of religion has meant that religion and the family have become “dovetailed” together in producing a community-based discursive regime used to ratify and validate a system of middle-class moral codes, beliefs, values and behaviours that are passed on to succeeding generations of middle-class young people growing up in Philippine urban society. As Jocano concludes:

The onset of adolescence is another stage in the life cycle during which the individual is further socialized to the various roles he has to play as an adult. His incorporation as a growing member into the world of adults is crystallized in his observance of the various beliefs and practices accepted as legitimate, proper, and moral. As soon as he acquires social status, he performs a corresponding role, such that what he used to do in the past, he can no longer do; nor will he be allowed by society to play the roles for which no rite of passage has yet been legitimized as acceptable or appropriate (1998, p. 119).

Further, these patterns and processes of socialisation occur irrespective of whether the young person is spending time at home, at school, or at Church. The censoring by social institutions of inappropriate beliefs or behaviours has been shown to utilise *hiya* as a tool for bringing about conformity to community norms and expectations, however it is suggested that the degree and intensity of censoring of socially unacceptable thinking and behaviour actually changes with age, and it is out of consideration for these changes that the public comportment of the study participants also changed from a more overt expression of effeminacy during high school and into their college years, to a more conservative public configuration after having left their school days behind. Medina (1991) suggests that the Filipino adolescent is socialised into the values, beliefs and expectations set down by their family and community, and in the case of males, is shown a greater degree of leniency while growing up, particularly if the young man strays from these community norms rather than when they reach adulthood, at which point the expectations, beliefs and values of both family and community are expected to have been learned. Jocano (1998, p. 123) concurs, attesting that “To upbraid a young man in public is considered unnecessary and wrong.”

The issue of participant visibility as opposed to a lack of visibility “as adults” can further be explained by considering the social positioning of the *parlorista bakla* within Filipino society. Tan (2001a) for example, concludes that in view of the high public profile that *parloristas* have in Philippine society there is a common misconception, particularly by Western researchers, that they are publicly tolerated or

even accepted. He suggests, however, that such an interpretation is inaccurate because “acceptance” is conditional on the *bakla* remaining confined to certain lower status occupations and fulfilling the stereotype of *pusong babae*, or as the village entertainer or as the passive sexual partner with a *lalake* (a “real” man). This viewpoint has further credibility when attention is focused on the street vendor that Cruz discussed in his newspaper article. Here the vendor is described by Cruz in a congenial (although patronising) manner as effeminate but inoffensive because his identity and role as a *binabae* is seen to fit his lower-class station in life. However when a middle-class (and most probably Catholic) student is seen to display effeminacy by way of the “breastfeeding” comment, this engenders a violent reaction from Cruz, presumably because effeminate behaviour is unacceptable and should not be tolerated from educated upper-classed Filipino males. When discussing the issue of tolerance of homosexual and transgendered men in Thailand, Jackson & Sullivan (1999) have concluded that tolerance is provisional, and that while there is anti-homosexual censoring in Thailand, it does not take the form of Western sanctions based on legal or religious edicts. Rather, sanctions involve the withholding of approval instead of forcing a person to desist from what is considered to be inappropriate behaviour. Further, these sanctions come into play when such behaviours become publicly visible or made explicit through discourse. However, if the homosexual “man” or “woman” conforms to “normal” patterns of gender behaviour, he or she will generally escape sanctions. This appears very similar to how the public behaviours of lower-class *bakla* are tolerated under certain situations and circumstances while being publicly censured in others, and how the withholding of approval is used in much the same way as *hiya* in bringing about conformity in gender role enactment. When consideration is given to the participants of this study it can be seen how they do not fit the same “selection criteria” as their lower-class counterparts in terms of their economic, educational, employment, and social position, and it can be imagined how their visibility as overtly effeminate but well-dressed and educated middle-class young men of economic means could receive hostile reactions from within the middle-class public arenas of MM. In an article published in the Philippine Daily Enquirer Michael Tan also berates the middle-class “gays,” but this, according to Tan, is because of their class-based attitudes towards the lower-class *bakla*. He comments:

Upper-class Filipino homosexuals often discriminate against lower-class “bakla,” accusing them of propagating negative stereotypes of the “screaming faggot.” As far as I am concerned, the sashaying cross-dressing bakla and the

gruff tibo [butch female or tomboy] are the original gay liberationists in the Philippines, bold enough to go public and challenge gender boundaries (2001b).

While it is not the purpose of this study to engage in a debate about sexual politics in the Philippines, it is important to interpret some of the social factors which underpin the study of gender and sexuality, and a consideration of the impact of class is one such factor. After an examination of the research studies investigating transvestism and homosexuality in the Philippines conducted by Hart (1968) and Whitam & Mathy (1986) (the Western studies alluded to earlier by Tan) it became apparent that the kinds of gender-based class characteristics and distinctions discussed in the current study were absent from their analysis, and so there tended to be a homogenisation of gender nonconformity and difference. The studies also revealed a misinterpretation by the researchers of the provisional nature of tolerance, which requires an understanding of the localised class-aligned issues and structures of gender difference on which tolerance and censure in the Philippines are based. In the final category of this chapter the role that class plays in gender differentiation will be given further attention; however in the preceding discussions it can be seen how the study participants cannot simply be assumed to be “conservative middle-class snobs.” It has been shown that there are underlying reasons that influenced their attitudes and beliefs toward gender and sexuality, and this worldview needs to be taken into account when discussing the middle-class populations of *bakla/gay/homosexuals* who reside in MM.

While the Catholic education system provided the vehicle through which participants could publicly profile their individual abilities within their group as *bakla*, it also provided opportunistic social settings in the form of religious high school retreats, whereby middle-class *bakla* students could gather together privately, and engage in collaborative social discourse and gender performance “as *bakla*.” In particular, DWTL was the catalyst for bringing the complete group of participants together, and the experience was viewed by the group as a kind of spiritually engendered epiphany that had lead participants to use the forum as a setting in which to “come out” as *bakla* to themselves and to significant others.

As reported in the findings chapter, DWTL<sup>26</sup> was seen as the most important religious event in the participants’ high school lives. This was not simply because it was

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<sup>26</sup> Further information on Days with the Lord can be retrieved using the following web links:  
<http://ayson.ph/dwtl/history/dwtl.history.html>  
<http://ayson.ph/dwtl/communities/dwtl.communities.html>

regarded by the student community, their teachers, and their families as a rite of passage from high school to adult life, but had provided a welcoming social setting in which Alfonso, Benjie and Ferdi met the other study participants. Once again there is a degree of irony here, because it would not have been the intention of the school hierarchy to have created a social environment in which *bakla* students could either meet or make new friends, or provided the opportunity for those who already knew each other to bond together and become closer as friends. Although there was of course opportunities for the *bakla* students to befriend each other during normal school hours and routines, they had not had the opportunity to spend an extended period of time together. *The happy room* had provided the necessary safe and secure physical space to allow for the kind of spiritual and emotional epiphany discussed by the participants. During the three day long retreat (DWTL began on a Friday and ended on a Sunday) *the happy room* was the place where the *bakla* students slept and socialised together in an atmosphere of fun and congeniality. Knowledge of its existence had been passed down orally from one generation of students to the next, and had become an unpublicised though integral part of the retreat experience for each succeeding cohort of *baklas*.

As friend, mentor, and coordinator of DWTL, Brother Santos had played an important role in the lives of all of the participants during their high school lives and was held in high esteem by all of the participants. It is suggested that through his advocacy and acceptance of the school's *bakla* students he demonstrated an alternative moral and religious viewpoint on homosexuality (by virtue of his status as a Jesuit), and for the participants this moral standpoint was coming from both a respected senior adult member of their school community as well as a member of the clergy. Benjie for example, mentioned how Brother Santos had shown support where other faculty members had been discriminatory, describing them as "dream stealers." By showing positive support, Brother Santos had significantly contributed to the participants becoming more self-accepting of themselves both from a moral standpoint as Catholics of virtue within their community and over time as self-affirming *bakla*.

Coming out of the closet is a Western conceptual model usually associated with sexual identity and issues related to a person's self-esteem and self-affirmation when considering themselves to be gay or lesbian (Cass, 1984; Schneider, 1989). Before comparisons can be made between Western conceptualisations, ideologies and discourses that explain "coming out" and the experiences discussed by the study participants, there are significant historical considerations that first need to be explored

in order to gain a better understanding of how the participant's have constructed their own identities as *bakla*/gay/homosexual when compared with similar friendship groups in other cultures and societies.

The Western model of “coming out” has over time become somewhat universalised as the identity blueprint and theoretical framework of understanding used to explore and explain the social lives and experiences of gays and lesbians (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1982, 1987; Dank, 1971; De Cecco & Shively, 1984; Herdt, 1989; Humphreys, 1972). “Coming out” of the closet was born out of the Stonewall riots in New York in the late 1960's which signified the emergence of a gay social consciousness directed towards social change and reform. The formation of the gay liberation movement during this historical period encouraged gays and lesbians to unite as a community, and so the concept of “coming out of the closet” was first realised (Greenberg, 1988; Macdonald, 1996). In this context, “coming out” was seen as a public act of political consciousness and pride in being gay or lesbian.

Over the past few decades in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic there has been significant change from the act of “coming out” as a politically motivated endeavour to becoming a public health issue (examples here are (Dowsett, 1994; Edwards, 1992; Feldman, 1989; Goodfellow, 1993). The reclassification of “coming out” within the discourse of public health is given clarity in an article written by Peter Keogh that appears in a recent HIV/AIDS education journal. He concludes:

The last thirty years has seen the increasing codification of the concept ‘coming out.’ The recent codification of coming out within a discourse of risk has made it amenable to social interventions. That is, gay social care agencies (statutory and voluntary) have alighted on coming out as gradual, mediated, and intrinsically risky. Statutory funding of youth services and HIV health promotion for gay men has led to the emergence of social support groups for young gay men and lesbians focused on the drama of ‘coming out.’ Re-cast with a health and social care framework, coming out becomes imbued with the imperatives of self actualisation and personal development for health (the hallmark of current health promotion praxis – see (Peterson & Lupton, 1996). Young gay men and lesbians are now exhorted to take part in ‘identity work’ (Holt & Griffen, 1999) with the aim of establishing an ‘authentic’ gay identity. Gaining an authentic gay self is defined as a struggle or a job of work rather than a natural occurrence. It is gained through self-reflection and experience and is a personal responsibility intrinsically connected to the production of a healthy self (Holt & Griffen, 1999). In other words, for gay men at least, ‘coming out’ is redefined as a health seeking behaviour and overall, we see the concept transformed from a personal act of political significance to a health imperative (2002, p. 4).



The change from “coming out” as an act of individual and group polity and solidarity to being categorised as a public health issue highlights as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the social roles, relationships and interplay that exists between the individual, local social structures and global processes .in transforming the ways that sexual identity, sexual activity, and sexual behaviours are being conceptualised, categorised and in terms of health imperatives, how they are being targeted. As Parker (1999, p. 228) elucidates:

Particularly during the late 1980’s and early ‘90’s, as monolithic notions of gay and lesbian communities in societies such as the United States have begun to give way to a fuller understanding of diversity and difference even in very specific, localized social and geographical settings, the stark differences that once seemed to separate life in the industrialized west from that in other social and cultural settings appear to have dissolved into a far more diffuse interplay of images and diversity. The roots of such diversity, as well as the axes of difference, are multiple – linked, in particular, to the growing visibility of gay and lesbian subcultures in different ethnic communities as well as to a growing recognition of class differences cross-cutting the once placid portrait of gay life that has often been produced and reproduced in mainstream culture as well as in many self-representations of lesbian and gay cultures. Clearly, the impact of AIDS has been profound, transforming communities, uncovering differences, and demanding the creation of new social institutions and emotional responses.

“Coming out” is regarded as somewhat of a cultural marker in discourses that surround sexual politics in the Philippines. It is an issue taken up by (Garcia, 1996; Johnson, 1997; Tan, 1995, 2001a) in their subsequent discussions about cultural relations of class, gender, sexuality and identity. In these discussions the middle-class are viewed as “closeted” and therefore covert and invisible. These viewpoints are generally held in contradistinction with the lower-class *parlorista bakla* populations who are regarded as “visible and out,” however it is suggested this is more to do with their physical appearance and behaviour than aligning themselves with a liberationist ideology and appearing in public as political activists.

The public health sector also makes reference to the connection between social stigma, “coming out,” and “invisible” MSM populations in the Philippines. In their 2002 HIV/AIDS country profile report the Health Action Information Network (HAIN) concluded that:

...MSM have retreated into the “shadow” populations to avoid the stigma of coming out to their family and work colleagues. There is strong stigmatization, including cases of discrimination, harassment and outright physical violence against homosexuals. Moreover, religious attitudes labelling homosexual acts as

“sinful” perpetuate this stigma against homosexuals....Sexual relationships of many MSM tend to be anonymous and casual because of the need to keep their identities hidden. This is done to avoid shame or social stigma. Living in the “shadows” hinders MSM access to HIV/AIDS information, education and treatment (p. 10).

The Department of Health in the Philippines operates surveillance programs that monitor particular population groups considered “at risk” of HIV infection and together with female sex workers and injecting drug users this includes men who have sex with men (MSM). As Tan (2001a) points out, the identity category MSM was borrowed from Western public health discourse, and questions the validity of the term, particularly when applied to *parloristas* who identify as *pusong babae*. He concludes that “...attempts have been made to fit the *bakla* into the category of transsexual, again for “targeted interventions,” but this term is again tenuous and inaccurate” (p. 134). In terms of this study, the participant’s identification as *bakla/gay/homosexual* would also not fit in to Western categories of gender and sexual identity, and thus fall outside the boundaries of publicly recognised non-mainstream sexualities.

It can be seen then, that a “call to arms” to participate in gay political activism in the Philippines by coming out of the closet is paradigmatically framed within the discursive regimes of Western public health and gay political ideology. What needs to be considered is the relevance and social value of positioning Western sexual politics and public health discourse within the cultural setting of the Philippines. It is not the purpose here to debate the importance of political activism in the act of “coming out.” Indeed, as long as homophobia and oppression exist for non-mainstream sexualities there is a definite need for strong political mobilisation. The point to be made is that the change of focus from “coming out” as a personal act of political consciousness to an issue requiring public health attention represents a refocussing and placement of the act within the ideological and contextual framework of the Western-oriented public health sector, and this has ramifications when such discourses are applied cross-culturally. Traditionally, the public health sector has drawn from bio-medical discourses when designing public health promotions, and formulating policies and health strategies, and so “coming out” as outlined by Keogh (2002), has become part of a discourse of risk with interventionist strategies designed with the ultimate outcome for young gays and lesbians of acquiring an “authentic” adult gay sexual identity.

The process of “coming out” for the participants was based on gender ideation and gender identity and not on sexuality and sexual identity. Further, “coming out” for

the participants was not an individual process of attaining an adult gay identity, but rather took place within the safety and security of the friendship group whereby the various members “came out” to each other during high school. When discussing “coming out” and gay friendship networks, Peter Nardi notes that:

Gay sexuality and friendship networks...are experienced as a realm of freedom and pleasure outside the severe constraints of the other part's of one's life. Especially for many gay men just coming out, finding a group or clique of gay friends with whom they are free to test out, explore, and develop a sense of being gay has been likened to a rite of passage. Coming out to natal family, coworkers, or other straight people is optional, but to accept being gay (at least simulating pride and rejecting shame) in the company of other gay men is as much a sign of adulthood as paternity is in other cultures.

“Coming out” is not just declaring to heterosexuals that one is gay; it has historically also been about joining a network of friends and acquaintances, that is, of gay people like oneself. Gay men in my study regularly emphasized how similar they were to their friends and how important this homophily of shared values, status, and interests was for their identity and self-esteem (1999, p. 166).

It is clear that there are similarities in purpose and experience between the current study participants and the participants involved in the Nardi study. The Philippine friendship group and supporting network also afforded a safe and secure environment away from a potentially hostile world where the group members felt free to express themselves and as a group share in gender experimentation and performance. A significant difference however, is that forming or joining a friendship group or network usually occurs after an individual has self-identified as gay and joins together with others who have similarly come to that conclusion. The participants in the current study had established at least the core of the current friendship group from a very young age at grade school, and so for quite a large and significant part of their lives had gone through similar experiences together, for example DWTL represents a culturally distinctive event and experience in the participant's lives.

It becomes clear, then, that social relations can be understood as a crucial factor in determining how sexual categories and identities are constructed, understood, lived and experienced by the members of groups, networks and collectives to which they align themselves and form allegiances. According to Nardi:

...friendships serve a dual purpose of connecting individuals, at the micro level of interpersonal relationships, to others who are perceived to be – and who often

are – similar to themselves, while simultaneously linking people, at the macro level of other gay men and lesbians who potentially reflect more racial, class, age, and gender diversity than most people’s friendship networks do (1999, p. 166)

While there was a real possibility of risk when “coming out” to significant others outside of the friendship group, there was in fact no risk involved between the group members because it was their feelings and notions of effeminacy that brought them together in the first place. In the study “coming out” during religious retreats was an action engaged in by the participants, and it is suggested this had occurred because the camaraderie and *barkada* atmosphere generated at these events had produced feelings of elation and delight in forging interpersonal relationships as one large *bakla* family. This heightened emotional state, together with the spiritual nature and purpose of the retreat (to affirm their relationship with God), had produced the emotional and spiritually epiphany necessary to engender the participants “coming out” to themselves as *bakla* and to significant others within their group. Ben’s own experiences as reported in the findings chapter of the study were particularly revealing of the potential risks involved, particularly with the negative reactions and responses he received from his parents. These reactions ratify the earlier discussions regarding the power and potency of *hiya* in censoring and controlling behaviour and comportment in public extended to Ben’s parents. His mother had expressed feelings of concern for him if he were to “become gay,” and his father was concerned for the family reputation if he appeared in public dressed as a *bakla*. Similarly, the participants’ teachers had tried to isolate the pockets of gay students thought to be “at risk” of becoming *bakla/gay/homosexual*, and by so doing, hoped to “nip it in the bud.” Such beliefs also tend to confirm the cultural view that homosexuality is like a disease in that it is contagious and can therefore be spread from one to the other. Again, there is a common perception present that gender and (homo) sexuality can be directly and negatively linked to biology. This view is in agreement with Tan (1995, p. 89) when he concludes that “Parents explain their sons being *bakla* as resulting from going around with other *bakla*. *Bakla* is *nakakahawa*, contagious, an interesting conflation of concepts of danger and contagion.” The findings did show however, that the participant’s ability to “come out” to each other as a group during high school had made them emotionally stronger in spite of experiencing some negativity along the way, and this was shown by their increased levels of self-worth, self-esteem and their tenacity in considering themselves *bakla/gay/homosexual*.

#### *Category Four: Affections of Class over Gender and Identity*

It has been argued throughout this chapter that class has played a crucial role in the panoply of social and cultural factors responsible for the changes undertaken by participants in reshaping and redefining themselves as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. What will now be considered is how class has played a defining role in structuring gender relations, and in determining how gender difference is identified, stratified and given expression by the study participants. The study has shown that class has influenced discursive patterns and constructions of social identity and meaning made visible through the participant's own interpretations and use of the argot *swardspeak*. It is however, not the intention here to provide an extensive description and analysis of *swardspeak*. Rather, the focus will remain on highlighting how gay lingo is in itself classed by virtue of the social and historical contexts in which it has been created, and in the constructed meanings given to it by the participants themselves. As Foronda (1981, p. 21) elaborates "The Filipino is by large a talking, rather than a writing individual," and it is argued that the group's own development and use of *swardspeak* is culturally in keeping with the Filipino tradition of oral storytelling, manifest through the descriptive and colourful use of the argot. The study findings revealed that *swardspeak* was not regarded by the participants as a primary factor in defining group identity. It did however, provide a discursive medium through which the group members could codify language so as to engage in creatively and often wittily reflecting or recounting past and more recent experiences, events or happenings in the group's history (for example, from their high school days), or as a means of sexualising language for the purpose of injecting allure, humour, or sarcasm (or some combination thereof) into the conversation, or simply to provide a feminising gloss and argot for having fun together as a *barkada* of intimate *bakla* friends. Over time, the group had developed their own particular version and variation of *swardspeak* they have named *vakler* (a corruption of the term *bakla*) which is based on the use of Tagalog, English, and Spanish, though it can also be flavoured and influenced by other languages such as Japanese or French to provide a more "exotic" and nuanced sound and texture. *Vakler* never remains static because it is constantly and often spontaneously being re-thought, revised and reinvented by the participants to reflect new and changing life events and experiences, and so can be considered a sociolect rather than a dialect. As Garcia (1996, p. 90) concludes:

To talk about *swardspeak* as if it were as identifiable and actual language would be to miss the point. From the way the studies on it go, and from my own experience with it, *swardspeak* is less an actual language than a linguistic feature that is *built* upon language (in this case, either Tagalog-Filipino or Cebuano-Filipino), whose signifieds remain more or less constant, even as the signifiers vary: *swardspeak* is certainly nearly always loaded with sexual terms, as (homosexual) sex is the one reality gays are obviously most obsessed with. Other than sex, the other concerns which *swardspeak* apparently addresses are identity and the outing of someone whom the swardspeaker thinks is “one of the tribe.”

This form of extemporisation was also noted in an early study of *swardspeak* conducted by Donn and Harriet Hart (1990) in Cebu City and Dumaguete City (both cities are to be found within the central Visayan region of the Philippines) where Cebuano was the spoken language. The primary purpose of the study was to collect information on *swardspeak* and then to construct a vocabulary list of the most popular words that arose out of the study. The researchers used ten informants including students, beauticians and government employees to pass out a *swardspeak* vocabulary list to twenty five others, checking for variations in use and popularity. They concluded that the argot was being constantly revised and recirculated over and over again at the discretion of its users. During the course of the study the researchers found that a class-based gender divide exists similar to that between the lower-class and middle to upper-class *bakla* in MM. The researchers suggest that although *bayut* and *sward* were seen to hold the same linguistic meaning, there existed a social divide within the *bayut* population itself. In the Visayan cities the difference was between the *bayut* (cross-dressing effeminate males similar to the lower-class *bakla* of the northern region) and the *sward*. The term *sward* (a term the researchers claim came into use in the region in the late 1960's to early 1970's) was used to denote those *bayut* who consider themselves to be upper-class, educated and refined as opposed to those *bayut* who “swish their hips, dress in a more colourful fashion, wear more makeup, and tend to advertise their “bayut-ness.” They concluded that “A social stratification appears, then, to exist between *sward* and *bayut*. A *sward* can associate with a *bayut* fairly easily but not vice versa; *swards* are upper-class and *bayuts* are lower-class” (1990, p. 28).

The similarities between the *bayut* and the *sward* from the Visayan region and the *bakla* and the current study group of middle-class participants from MM would suggest that class is a significant factor in contributing to the social divisions that exist in urban homosexual population groups within the Philippines. The primary task of the Hart & Hart study was however to investigate the use of *swardspeak*, and while the

study did show that class was a factor in determining the social stratification within the gendered *bayut* populations in Cebu and Dumaguete City, it did not consider how *swardspeak* itself is discursively classed in terms of influencing the social meanings that the bayut and the *swards* themselves brought to the lingo. This would have allowed for a better understanding of how gender is being defined, articulated and experienced through the use of language. The researchers did produce a vocabulary list of *swardspeak* terms, and it can be argued that there is merit in providing a written account of *swardspeak* in order to gain some understanding of the usage and meanings associated with the various words, terms and phrases, and thereby obtaining some kind of outsider “feel” for its use (this study also produced a *vakler* vocabulary list for this purpose). However the construction of a vocabulary list is subject to a number of limitations and restrictions, and is therefore rather limited in what it can provide. For example, Hart & Hart refer to *swardspeak* as a language; however this is inaccurate because as Garcia has noted, and as shown in the findings of the current study, *swardspeak* actually incorporates itself into language and is constantly in a state of flux and change as new situations and experiences present themselves. *Swardspeak* cannot therefore be considered monolingual. As the current study has shown, the participants have created their own *vakler* version of *swardspeak*, and this was mentioned by the participants as indicative of other similar middle-class groups that exist throughout MM. Finally, other factors that influence the meanings, content and use of *swardspeak* were shown to include urban location and of course class status.

The current study has shown that the participants’ own particularised version of *swardspeak* had grown and developed from learning and copying *swardspeak* words, terms and phrases they heard at high school. As the friendship group proceeded to grow and develop, *swardspeak* became an integral part of closed group conversations, and the vernacular eventually evolved into *vakler* as the group members began to experiment with their *kabaklaan* and continued to develop and share life experiences and events together. Gay lingo thus appears as important to the group members in that it constitutes something special that they as a group possess that others do not have, and this appeared to contribute to a strengthening of group bonds between the members. *Vakler* was, apart from anything else, a strong vehicle for self-expression and gender performance by the study participants. This is an interesting aspect of shared group identity, because the discursive gender performance aspect of *vakler* (the employment of high-pitched, loud, effeminate, fast spoken and nuanced vocal words and sounds) together with the wrist

flapping, sashaying, and head flitting body performance had allowed the participants the opportunity to physically demonstrate and reinforce with each other their “aliqueness” as *bakla* by exhibiting their *kabaklaan* through gender performance, and in so doing, allude to the close bonds they share as a group. As Benjie himself noted “We understand our minds, our hearts through gay language.”

A final point of discussion is to consider how the shared meanings and expressions that the participants have attached to *vaklerspeak* are indicative of their own self-identification as intelligent, middle-class, educated and socially adept *bakla/gay/homosexual* people. In the findings chapter Angelo provided examples of how *swardspeak* is classed in such a way as to reinforce social divisions between the lower-class *parlorista bakla* and the upper-class gays. It was explained how territory and location define the social and physical spaces largely occupied by the various classed groups, and this contributes to the differing contextual meanings, content and variations inherent in *swardspeak*. Ferdi discussed how class-related differences between his middle-class group of friends and the *parloristas* were reflected through the different conceptualisations and meanings that both groups bring to their own versions of gay lingo, and how this can often create confusion if overheard by members of one or the other group. A similar discursive class-based anomaly is seen to exist between the *kotis* and the *hijras* in northern India. Hall (2005) notes that an English-speaking gay identity has developed in the urban areas of India that rejects the transgendered stance that has traditionally been associated with the *hijra*, perceiving such ventures into femininity as markers of lower-class sexuality. She comments:

Because *kotis* occupy an intermediate class position between *hijras* on the one side and gays and lesbians on the other, their linguistic parodies of the bawdy Hindi speaking hijra and the prudish English-speaking patron serve as a commentary on the ever-growing tension between older and newer queer identities in urban India, themselves divided along lines of class as well as language....Hindi and English, as languages infused with class associations, have accordingly become symbolic of these identity distinctions, with the use of English indexing a cosmopolitan gay sexuality and the use of Hindi a more transgender sexuality. But whereas gay men view the use of Hindi as sexually backward, *kotis* view the use of English as overly modest. They invoke this ideological conflict in their *hijra*-acting performances, projecting the tension between lower-and upper-class sexualities onto the linguistic personae of *Hijra* and patron. The resulting polarization creates a space for the emergence of an alternative identity that is neither bawdy (like *hijras*) nor prudish (like gays and lesbians) but irrefutably *koti* (p. 127).



While language and class position were viewed by the participants as social markers of *swardspeak*, educational background and knowledge were other important considerations because they influenced the content of *swardspeak* conversations and consequently the social and linguistic meanings expressed and shared between the group members. Class and gender can therefore be seen to be inextricably linked to the participant's performative and creative use of *swardspeak* thereby facilitating the expression by the group members of themselves as *bakla*. It was apparent that when the group members engaged in *swardspeak*, the identity being enacted was *bakla* and it is suggested the reason for this occurrence is because this cultural and localised style of communication was shared between the participants themselves, and involved spontaneous gender performativity and extemporisation. Being gay and homosexual appeared to be more about Western oriented identity values and lifestyle issues. Taken at this local level of experience it can be seen how gender transformation has not involved a negation of effeminacy in favour of global norms of gender and sexuality. Rather, there has been a selective embracement of aspects of Western gay culture and lifestyle that fitted the requirements of the participants own needs and wants at the local level. The point is that although the participants have incorporated particular elements of Western style and influence in transforming their identity as *bakla*, the enactment and placement of their identity as *bakla/gay/homosexual* still remains firmly rooted within middle-class Filipino life. This issue of class is given further attention by Kimura (2003) when writing about the middle-classes in the Philippines. The author makes the distinction between "middle-class" and "middle-classes" to indicate the social stratum of the former as pertaining to Western society, and the latter as used to connote "...the distinctive complex and compound social classes that are emerging in Asian countries" (p. 264).

The issue of how gender variance is defined is quite a contentious one, so before discussing the participants' own subjective positions on the issue it would be useful to examine how academics, writers, and social researchers have approached gender variance within the context of the Philippines. When considering the political ramifications of the relationship between class and gender Tolentino (2000, p. 327) concludes that:

For this essay, transvestite is defined as working class gay cross-dressing or gay transgenering to designate the subcultural sphere where power is imbibed in gender and class terms. I use this term instead of transgender because of the overt impediment of female sexuality in the present transvestite's discourse.

Neil Garcia (1996, p. 82) advocates the use of the terms transvestite and cross-dressing to refer to the *bakla*, which he states is a reflection of the dominant ideological perspective on gender and sexuality. He comments:

Perhaps I need to clarify that I use the terms cross-dressing and transvestism interchangeably, and that my assumption here is that sartorial codes for the male and female genders are still clearly established along certain culturally palpable lines....Cross-dressing, or sartorial gender crosscoding, is therefore a person's donning-on of clothes – and other accessorial apparel – which are supposed to be worn only by the opposite sex. Transvestism in this specific usage must likewise not be confused with male fetishitic transvestophilia, or the sublimated erotic fantasy of wearing articles of female clothing...My purpose in employing this concept of sartorial gender-bending focuses simply on: 1) the act of cross-dressing, and not on the more psychological inflections of the thing; 2) and also simply pointing out the coinciding of dress codes that define gender identity, with the dominant view on homosexuality as inversion.

Michael Tan (2001b, p. 2) takes exception to the use of the Western term *transgendered* to describe traditional *bakla* because he feels it does not accurately reflect the local experiences of this group of people. He comments:

Transsexuals are people who believe they were born in a wrong body and need to have their sex changed [however].... somewhere along the road, the word “transgendered” popped up not only to accommodate transsexuals but the many other gender categories which were being “discovered” in non-Western societies and which did not quite fit into the Western definitions of “lesbian,” “gay” and “bisexual.” The Philippino [author's spelling] *bakla* was one such category.

In his ethnographic study “Beauty and Power: Transgendering and Cultural Transformation in the Southern Philippines,” Mark Johnson (1997) addresses this issue in his research of the transgender Tausug male *bantu/gay* from Jolo in the island of Sulu in the Southern Philippines. In his research Johnson points towards the gender variant and unfixed cultural position of the *bantut*, and suggests that they occupy a space that cannot be readily placed into already established gender categories. He clarifies this position by concluding that the term gay as it is understood in Britain and the United States is not the same as it is in the Philippines. He comments “Thus, when not speaking about the *gay/bantut* directly, I have used the term transgender or transgendering to try and capture as far as possible the various transformations which the *gay/bantut* represent and which are involved in the projects they articulate” (p. 37). Johnson points out that in mainstream discourse a *bantut* is regarded as an effeminate acting adolescent or young man whose speech and body movements are soft or effeminate (*malunuk*), and who are seen to epitomise beauty and style. He concludes that the *bantut* self-identify as

“*gays*,” (the italics used by the author to differentiate them from Western conceptualisations of gay identity) reflects their local imaginings of America. He states:

This imagined American *gay* universe is not about a shared homosexual identity and solidarity with *gay* Americans....Rather, America and American love provide the conceptual space as well as much of the vocabulary for the articulation of locally defined (yet locally unrealizable) gay transgenderal identities (p. 207).

While Johnson’s study provides a detailed understanding of how Tausug transgenderism and transgender formation are seen to be inscribed within local discourses and cultural configurations, the study would have been strengthened if class had been acknowledged in the analysis in terms of revealing how society and culture are stratified in the Southern Philippines. This might have given some indication of the relative social ranking and positioning of the *bantut/gay* compared with other social groups in Jolo. For example, Johnson mentions how some *gays* enjoy a “superior economic position” because of their employment status as beauticians and thus hold a position of power over the impoverished young men on whom they spend their money. In addition, they can also afford to possess commodities “...everything from Marlboro cigarettes to Adidas sportswear” and are seen to “embody ...the same qualities of otherness...that men say they are after in these relationships” (p. 209). These insights would tend to suggest the existence of some type of class-based divisions, not just between the poorer young men with whom the *gays* have a relationship, but also between the *bantut/gays* themselves (as existed between the *bayut* and *sward* in the Hart & Hart study), however this is never spelled out.

The abovementioned studies have shown there is considerable disagreement and debate over Western influenced identity-based discourse and terminology and the social, political and cultural ramifications of its use at the local level of cultural experience. What can however be concluded from the Philippine studies discussed is that there are similarities between the traditional Tagalog *bakla* from the predominantly Catholic MM; the Cebuano *bayut* (or *bayot*) from the central Visayan region; and the Muslim Tausug *bantut/gay* from the Southern Philippines<sup>27</sup>. Whether the term of expression used is transvestite, transgender, or cross-dresser, the common conceptual thread linking these groups together within the Philippine context is self-representation as *pusing babae* – a man with a woman’s heart. Another similarity that the *bakla*, *bayut*

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<sup>27</sup> The following link can be used to access a map of the various regions that constitute the Philippines:

and *bantut* share is that they can generally be linked to employment positions as hairdressers, beauticians, and work in the fashion industry (Tom Boellstorff, 2004; Cannell, 1999; Garcia, 1996; D. Hart & Hart, 1990; Peter A. Jackson & Cook, 1999; Johnson, 1997; Tan, 1995; Tolentino, 2000). Traditionally, this is how the *bakla/bayut/bantut* have identified themselves and been identified within the regional communities, towns and villages in which they live. However Tan (2001a) argues that, there is a new middle-class emerging from within Filipino society which can be attributed to a recent period of rapid economic change due to more liberalised economic policies resulting in an increase of foreign investments, deregulation, and privatisation. He concludes that “The country’s economic and political past are important factors that influence Filipino sexual cultures” (p. 120). Kimura (2003) defines the Philippine middle-classes according to occupation and prestige, and in this context divides them into three types:

...the “new middle-class” which consists of professional and technical workers on the one hand, and wage-and-salary-earning administrators, executives, and managers on the other hand; the “marginal middle-class” which refers to wage-and-salary-earning clerical workers; and the “old middle-class” composed of non-professional, non-technical self-employed workers other than those in the informal sector and the primary industries, as well as employers outside the primary industries except for those holding administrative, executive, and managerial position (p. 265).

The study participants’ various occupations as call-centre employees, high school teacher, television executive, and bank manager would, according to Kimura and Tan, place them within the strata of the emerging “new middle-classes” and therefore in a higher ranked and more socially “prestigious” and economically expedient position than that of the *parlorista bakla*. How then, do the study participants make sense of the tensions that exist between localised significations and representations that characterise the *bakla*, and their own self-ascribed identity and affiliations as *bakla/gay/homosexual*? Common ground does exist between the two groups, which is that they both share a “cultural heritage” of gender effeminacy as *bakla*. There were however social divisions as a consequence of the participants’ higher economic status and prestige as educated members of the middle-class and this social stratification had meant that the kinds of social interactions, experiences and affiliations were different for the participants when compared with those of the *parloristas*. It is of particular interest that a number of the participants had joined the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender gay activist group UP

*Babaylan* while at university and had been exposed to learning about Western categories and discourses including transsexualism, transvestism and transgenderism. It appeared that none of the participants considered these terms within the local context, particularly in their references to being *bakla*. Rather, they used the concept of *pusong babae* as a personal referent and as a representation for the *parloristas* to whom they had been discussing. This would suggest that they had not considered the traditional *bakla* in this way because these particular definitions and explanations simply did not make sense and fit within their own understanding or conceptualisation of being *bakla*.

The study has revealed that while affectations of class have figured prominently in the ways the study participants have defined and represented themselves as members of a middle-class *bakla/gay/homosexual* group in MM, it arguably has also been responsible for the emergence of another gender variant type of middle-class *bakla* persons who are not only accepted by the current study participants, but who inhabit the same social spaces and are part of the same friendship group network to which the study participants belong. “Gina,” “Maria,” and “Ricki” are three cross-dressing friends of the study participants who had also attended the same high school as the participants and who self-identify as *bakla*. Gina currently works with Danny in television as a producer/writer, Maria is an events coordinator, and operates the family events management business (organising events such as weddings, social gatherings and the like) and has been in a relationship with a “straight” male for five years, and Ricki is currently overseas in the United States modelling and trying to make it in the pop music industry. As co-participants in the friendship group, no distinction was made between themselves and the other participants, and it was explained by Ben, Danny and Angelo that they were all *bakla* together, and so the issue did not arise. Gina, Maria and Ricki (when still in MM) did not “hang out” together as a specific cross-dressing *bakla* group of friends. Rather, the common bond was made through their shared middle-class status and educational involvement with the other study participants, and so they did not find a need to identify and galvanise together as cross-dressers. Instead their middle-class status and background had provided them with the economic and social means by which they could become upwardly mobile within the various social and cultural spaces they inhabited within MM. This is unlike the *parlorista bakla* who share the same social spaces through their employment as hairdressers and beauticians. As Johnson (1997, p. 147) concludes “...gays resist their marginalized status, redeploying the language of

family and siblingship within the beauty parlours as a means of asserting their kinship with other transgendered or feminine-identified men.”

It can therefore be seen how class again provides a window of opportunity in revealing the ways in which gender is constantly being reshaped, reinterpreted and transformed at the subjective level of localised experience. When attention focused on the different responses given by the study participants in regard to their own class status and that of the *parlorista bakla*, the issues that arose were education, comportment, style and beauty. The study findings revealed these were the criteria on which the *parloristas* were judged by the participants and by which they also judged themselves and the cross-dressing members of their own friendship network. As discussed earlier in this chapter, comportment was a key issue in the participants’ profiling of their social propriety, and was tied to the concept of *hiya* – the social censuring of inappropriate public behaviour through the shaming of an individual. While it has been shown that the study participants had generally “conformed” to conventional expectations of gender comportment, *parloristas* in their view had not. The findings revealed that *parloristas* were regarded by the participants as “drag queens,” poorly educated and socially bereft, and because of these factors were viewed as loud, ignorant and lacking in social graces. This is an interesting outcome, and different from the outcome in Mark Johnson’s study in the Southern Philippines where he found “...a strong correlation between the discourse of education and style, so that men and women who regard themselves as educated may be more likely to celebrate the *bantut* as purveyors of beauty” (Johnson, 1997, p. 165). An explanation for this variance is that the population group to which he was referring were middle to upper-class heterosexual Filipinos who as Johnson points out, were regular customers at the salons and beauty parlours staffed and operated by *bantut* hairdressers and beauticians. In this social setting they reinforce norms of masculinity and femininity through the services they provided to both men and women. Johnson also makes the point that the paradox surrounding both *bantut* and *bakla* is that while they are revered for being purveyors of beauty and style they are also ascribed the label of deviant and vulgar. This, according to Johnson, can be attributed to discourses of vulgarity and refinement (or respectability) simply being transformations of the formal distinction drawn between overt and covert *gays*. Johnson also ties in the notions of “overt” and “covert” with “coming out” or in the Philippine context *magladlad ng kapa* (unfurling one’s cape). Here he argues that:

'Coming out' is mainly confined to lower-class *gays*, who, because of their occupation as parlour workers, wear 'gayness' on their skin. When 'upper-class' gays come out, it articulates and is articulated in terms of a much different sensibility, that of legitimate, high-brow cultural art and individual intellectual expression, which is opposed to the vulgar *gays*, who lack manners, have little education, etc (p. 169).

As this study has already shown, class has played an important role in the complex issues surrounding the issues of visibility and invisibility of the study participants. For this group of middle-class participants at least, "coming out" (whether coming out to each other or to significant others including family members) was also an extremely emotional and complex issue for the participants involved, particularly in the context of family and kin, which in no way can be aligned with "high-brow cultural art and individual intellectual expression." Rather, "coming out" was a deeply emotional experience, aligned with the spiritual and metaphysical level of the participant's own sense of self.

To gain a clearer understanding of why the participants define themselves and others as they do, it is useful to return to the Filipino concepts of shame and censure. In Filipino culture when a person expresses a flagrant disregard for societal norms it is regarded as the opposite of *hiya*, which is *walang-hiya* meaning "shameless" (Roces & Roces, 1986) and can be defined as "...a recklessness regarding the social expectations of society, an inconsideration for the feelings of others, [and] an absence of sensitivity to the censures of authority or society" (Bulatao, 1964, p. 430). It was the general consensus of the study participants that because *parloristas* were excessive in their public displays of loud, crass behaviour, and garish in their dress sense and make-up, they were on the receiving end of public scorn and ridicule. Instead of feeling shame, the *parloristas* flaunted themselves in such a manner that it was regarded as "shameless." It was precisely because of such behaviours that the participants at times referred to the *parloristas* as being "thick skinned," poorly educated, and thus lacking in appropriate style and social graces. In comparison, Gina, Maria and Ricki were seen as intelligent, educated and possessing the necessary social graces, style and beauty to make the physical transformation from a man to a woman. As far as the participants were concerned, they were the legitimate and real manifestations of *pusong babae*. It is particularly insightful to look at how Ferdi views these issues. He acknowledges the tensions between the *parloristas* and the middle-class gays when he comments that his group would publicly scorn the *parloristas* by adversely commenting on their appearance and demeanour, and likewise the *parloristas* would treat his group as being

pretentious because of the comportment *they* imbue as well spoken, educated middle-class gays. He then alludes to differences between his own group of *bakla/gay/homosexual* friends, their middle-class *bakla* friends, and the *parloristas*. Here Ferdi mentions that in private it is acceptable for himself and his friends to engage in cross-dressing because they are not transgressing the gender norms of appropriate public dress codes and behaviour, however it was considered perfectly acceptable for Gina, Maria or Ricki to go about their public and private business “as women” because they have all of the social, intellectual and physical accoutrements required to be accepted within the status quo of the wider community. *Parloristas*, for all of the reasons already mentioned did not (according to Ferdi and the other participants) have the wherewithal to “pull it off” successfully. The issue of beauty and style is a significant one, not just for the *bakla*, but is endemic within Filipino society generally. According to the participants, Filipinos are “beauty obsessed,” and follow Western styles and trends of beauty and beauty enhancement. It is certainly true that there are an unlimited range of beauty products and aids available in the shops and malls within MM that sell a supply of skin whitening soaps, creams, lotions and other beauty products to enhance the appearance of both women and men. For those that can afford it there are a variety of skin and body treatments available from dermatologists as well as plastic surgeons for the purpose of enhancing appearance and beauty. One of the most common are treatments to lighten skin colour or remove blemishes, and to have facial and other body surgery that, for example, would give a person a more aquiline and Western shaped nose, a face lift to tighten the skin, or lip enhancement surgery to produce a more slim look, or eye surgery to “Westernise” the look and shape of the eye. As Ben explained earlier, a Filipino beauty ideal is the *mestiza* (a naturally fair skinned woman) and a *mestizo* (a naturally fair skinned man). It was explained that a *mestiza* or a *mestizo* is usually the result of having a parent who is most likely a Westerner, meaning someone of a light or lighter complexion than an indigenous Filipino. According to Ben, to be considered a *mestiza* or *mestizo* in the Philippines requires that the person has fair skin, doe-shaped eyes and a non-Filipino – aquiline shaped nose. The participants themselves had been using beauty products and experimenting with makeup since their high school days. Several of the participants who were members of the GLBT university organisation UP *Babaylan* had at different times during their university careers, cross-dressed in the organisation’s annual revue show “Androgyny.” Pao mentioned that he uses papaya soap and an assortment of creams to lighten his skin tone. Alfonso had his hair chemically straightened and lightened in order to obtain a more “Western” look



rather than the spiky dark look of Asian hair. Several of the participants mentioned that at various times they have plucked their eyebrows to gain a more “defined” line over their eyes, and have at times used “minimal” makeup and foundation cream, to give themselves a deeper glow and blush to their complexion in order to appear more “good looking.” Having dress sense and style was also important to the participants, particularly when going out socially together. Shopping at the many large malls in MM for the latest “look” or fashion is something all of the participants said they enjoyed.

There is a tendency here to simply dismiss such notions as pure vanity and frivolity, however as Jocano (2001) acknowledges, there is an aesthetic dimension to the Filipino worldview, and an understanding of this aesthetic tends to bring the participants’ own behaviours and interpretations of style and beauty into a clearer and more understandable perspective. Jocano concludes that:

Supporting the normative dimension of Filipino worldview is the way objects, events, and ideas are appreciated, evaluated, incorporated into one’s own values, and imbibed as internal images of external realities. It is best expressed in the Filipino concept of *Gandá*.

*Gandá*...represents “the sum total of *katángian* (traits) associated with anything – material or nonmaterial – that give the highest pleasure to the senses.” It is prominently manifested in physical appearance (*ayos*) and social character (*ugali*). These two referents complement each other to produce a pleasant experience. Behaviourally, even if a person has a pleasing appearance but his/her character (*ugali*) is not, he/she is not *magandá* (beautiful). The converse is also true. *Gandá* is a totality and not a mere aspect of a social, intellectual, and material reality.

*Gandá* is further seen as *katauhan* (personality). Sometimes the term *sarili* (physical self/self) is used to describe the totality of appearance associated with *gandá* in a person. The face, the body, and the character are not seen as separate entities but as complementing units that combine to form an expression of *gandá*. It is the collectivity that matters, not the individual unit or aspect of it.

The collectivity of *katauhan*, as an aesthetic judgement, is based on the relationship between a person’s physical attributes and his character – *mukhá* (face), *katawán* (body, especially the trunk), and *ugali* (character). The central points of attention on the *mukhá* (face) are the *pisngí* (cheeks), *ilóng* (nose), and *matá* (eyes). The cheeks are appraised as *magandá* if they are symmetrically shaped, free from pimples and scars, and rosy in colour. The nose must be *matangos* (aquiline). The eyes must have the following characteristics: *mapungay* (doe-eyed), *maluningning* (bright; sparkling), and *malalantik ang mga pilikmatá* (long eyelashes). Also included in the *mukhá* are the lips or *bibíg*, which ought to be *manipis* (thin) and *namúmulá-mulá* (reddish) (pp. 135-142).

The following diagram outlining the different categories of *Gandá* is taken from (Jocano, 2001, p. 137).

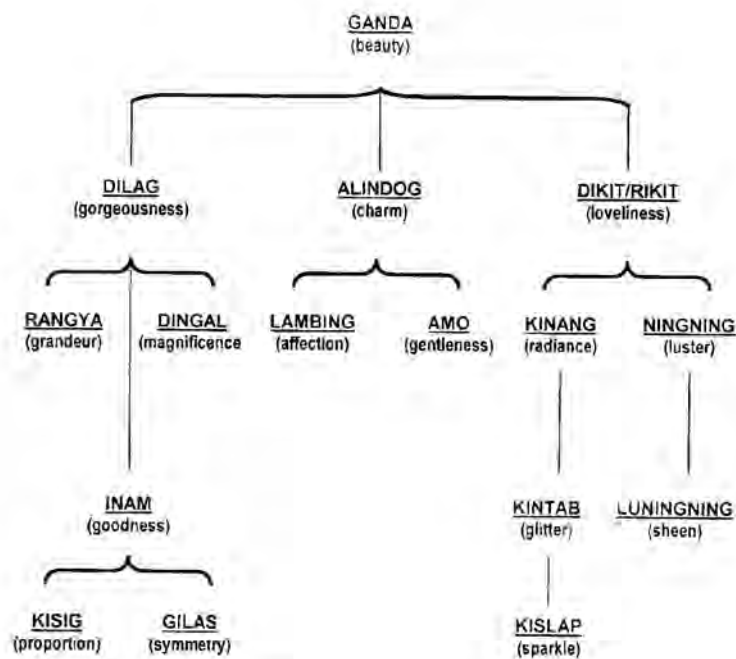


Figure 4. The different categories of *Gandá*

It can be seen that the aesthetic of “beauty” when understood through the concept of *gandá*, takes on new meanings as physical appearance and social character are intrinsically linked in determining how a person presents to the outside world. Just as other societal values become part of a person’s *loób*, values regarding social standards of physical appearance and comportment considered as ideals for women and men, are internalised along with societal values regarding gender propriety, therefore gender and beauty become connected as part of the external representation of self. In this way, beauty together with gender can be seen to be defined along the lines of social class with such representations thus becoming an integral part of the individual’s shared worldview.

This understanding goes a considerable way in explaining the attitudes, interpretations and values given by the participants in relation to their own sense of social comportment and propriety and that of others including the *parloristas*. It explains why the study participants do not characterise the *parloristas* as *magandá* (beautiful) but rather as *pangit* (ugly), because they are seen to parody rather than

comply with the aesthetics reflected in *gandá*. This view was highlighted by Ferdi when he was discussing how the mass media are largely responsible for affirming and presenting idealised perceptions and constructions of beauty as a social reality. In order to highlight these points it is useful to revisit Ferdi's comments when he said:

We can appreciate beauty in whatever form. And secondary to that would be the gay – the innate liking of dressing up, and then the whole idea of contests, costumes – everything. It also sets a standard by which we also judge other people. Fellow gays as well. So let's say between Maria and Gina – between them and a *parlorista*. We tend to distinguish as well. Because these ones fit what we see on TV. Hey, you approximately look what we saw. Yeah, I saw a while ago if you observed, I told you hey – this one looks like Gina (Ferdie was referring to a beauty pageant we were watching earlier on television). Because we associate it already. You could rarely say that hey this person looks like the one doing my hair in the parlour. If I would say that, that would be an insult.

At this point it should be noted that the current study is not dealing with the issue of beauty contests as does for example, the study by Johnson (1997). Firstly, this is because it is not the purpose of this study to do so and secondly the study focuses on the everyday life experiences of the participants. Beauty contests while being regular events in the Philippines are specialised in that the subjects often go to great lengths to “dress up” for the occasions. *Parloristas* who dress up on these social occasions are more likely to follow the expectations of the general public in terms of presenting an idealised presentation of feminine beauty and therefore not accurately represent the everyday social situations and experiences that the participants were describing when discussing the *parloristas*.

When attention is given to the interrelatedness of gender, beauty and class, a feature to consider is the social positioning of Gina, Maria, and Ricki within the world of work. Although this is not a central aspect of the study, their ability to succeed in their respective employment while presenting “as women” is something that has relevance and should be discussed. If the concept of *gandá* is evoked, it is possible to see how idealised societal representations and expectations of femininity are legitimised and the notion of *pusong babae* is rationalised when Gina, Maria and Ricki present themselves to the outside world including the world of work. It is suggested here that because they did not step outside the boundaries of normative and socially acceptable physical feminine appearance and comportment, it seemed they had not experienced great difficulty in gaining acceptance within the work force. This would appear in contradistinction to the lower-class *bakla* who are tolerated as long as they remain

within their respective roles as hairdressers, beauticians or employed within the fashion industry. It can be argued therefore, that the maintenance of the current status of normative gender relations in MM has meant a censuring of the lower-class *bakla* which is manifest in the ways that class status has been used to stratify the social orders by bestowing a degree of economic and social privilege on those who conform to its tenets while economically and socially censuring those who do not comply with the accepted and institutionalised protocols of gendered social propriety. This point leads to a questioning of what happens if you are a middle-class *bakla* and do not meet the necessary requirements physical or otherwise, to present as being feminine and *malambot* (soft and refined) and thus be able to “pass” as a woman. The question was particularly framed with a focus on the world of work and employment. There were several different explanations and scenarios given by the participants in response to this hypothetical question. One was that if the person really presented as a woman, no-one would pick the difference unless they were informed, and even if they were told in all likelihood it would be accepted because they did not appear as “offensive” to the senses and sensibilities of the other workers. This comment came however, with a provision that the person would be accepted in gender terms because they looked like a woman, but they could not display any overt forms of sexual expression towards male employees, because they would instantly be regarded by the “real” women as a threat to their womanhood, and would incur the anger of the male employees because they had “made a pass” at them. Another response is that if the person’s physical appearance did not align with that of a “real” woman, they would not be employed in the first place. Yet another response was that employment opportunities for middle-class *bakla* are also restricted to certain types of jobs and careers such as those undertaken by Gina, Maria and Ricki. It was mentioned that a middle-class cross-dressing *bakla* would not be able to gain employment in high profile areas such as politics, education, or the corporate business world. A final point raised was that *bakla* persons are sensitised to the normative standards and ideals pertaining to beauty and femininity within their communities, and therefore would tend not to cross-dress in certain social situations (including the work environment) where it was deemed inappropriate to do so. Of course these interpretations and explanations though based on the participants’ personal knowledge and experiences are generalisations. In real life scenarios the circumstances would need to be considered on a person-to-person basis, therefore further research is needed to investigate these issues.

In terms of the experiences of Gina, Maria, and Ricki, a cautionary note should therefore be given because they may not reflect the experiences of others who self-identify as middle-class *bakla*. This being said, given that other middle-class *bakla* exist within the same social matrix of extended friendship networks in which the current study participants inhabit, it is likely that similarities would exist.

As has been argued elsewhere, relations of gender and class are never static, and are constantly being reinvented, redefined and transformed at the local level of experience. Johnson (1997) for example, reveals how the *bantut* are engaging in a process of self-transformation by challenging other *gays* regarding their beauticians' qualifications, emphasising the need to possess a college degree, concluding that "Even for uneducated *gays* to have at least one person working in or associated with the parlour who was studying or who had completed a college education was extremely significant" (p. 159). Although the differences between the participants and the *parloristas* were often a focus of attention, it is the connections between the two that also needs to be recognised. What is important to acknowledge is that although divisions exist between the two groups, this was viewed as an unfortunate consequence for the *parloristas* of coming from a poor family and having a poor financial and economic position within Filipino society. Differences forged between the two groups can therefore be seen as class-driven rather than based on any intrinsic gender difference. It was the case that the participants discussed how their effeminacy was something that they share and have in common with *parloristas* as they do with their own middle-class *bakla* friends. Effeminacy can therefore be understood as a kind of gendered linchpin, connecting the lower and middle-classes of *bakla* together, particularly with respect to the cross-dressing aspect of being *bakla*. When consideration is given to Michael Tan's earlier claim that the new emerging middle-class in the Philippines is also influencing the development of sexual cultures, then it would appear that class is the cultural variable affecting how effeminacy-as-identity is being experienced, transformed, and expressed. The further incorporation and integration by the participants of *gay* and *homosexual* together with their *bakla* identity of effeminacy is a transformative feature that differentiates the group participants from both the *parloristas* and their own middle-class cross-dressing friends. When discussing the transformative nature of gender, Judith Butler (1990) argues that gender is neither innate nor a pre-social given. Rather, it is socially constructed and embedded in social relations of power that are responsible for establishing the fixed societal norms and

patterns of sex and gender roles and identities for women and men. Instead of accepting the notion that gender relations in society are intertwined in a binary that distinctly divides men and women and constructs their gender in a fixed and stable way, Butler argues for a fluidity of individual identity that opens up possibilities for personal choice, experimentation, and gender performance. These performances are open to flux and change over time and within different contextual and cultural situations. She concludes that “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). In other words, gender is viewed as performance, and what is performed is dependent on the context of the performance rather than gender appearing as a ready formed global and universal identity.

If credence is given to this argument, then certain points of conjecture can be made regarding the participants’ identities as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. For example, when collecting their viewpoints on the connections between beauty and cross-dressing as *bakla*, it seemed logical to consider why the study participants had not gone down a similar path as their cross-dressing middle-class friends, especially when thinking about how they also had experimented with makeup and engaged in cross-dressing during their high school years. There are several explanations posited as to why the participants changed direction in their gender expression and development which could be summarised as an outcome of the participants’ own subjectively determined responses to issues of class, status and socioeconomic position. One suggestion is that feelings of fear, guilt or shame may have prevented the participants from identifying as cross-dressing *bakla*. It can be recalled how it was Ben’s experience that his father was not so concerned with the fact that he was *gay*, but that he might cross-dress that was considered more threatening and shameful. Another suggestion is that the participants may not have considered themselves to be beautiful enough to legitimately pass as “real” women in public, and so could not with any degree of sincerity and confidence identify as cross-dressers along with their friends Gina, Maria and Ricki. It was mentioned that Chris (one of the current extended friendship group members) used to cross-dress when engaging in *rampa* (a *vakler* term for “boy hunting”), but gave this up because he felt he was too skinny and did not have the necessary bone structure to look beautiful enough and thus be convincing as a girl. A final suggestion is it could simply be that the participants were content in publicly presenting as a male and therefore did not feel a need or desire to cross-dress. When discussing younger members of the

middle-class cross-dressers in the 1990's, Tan (2001a) suggests that groups such as gay university students would cross-dress as a militant and “queer” focused political activism that was aligned with Western gay/queer liberational politics. This was not a finding of the current study. The cross-dressing undertaken by the participants either as participating members in the UP *Babaylan* revue performances or in their private lives was viewed by the participants themselves as an expression (and as an opportunity to express) their identity as *bakla* rather than as a visual representation of their alignment and affiliation with gay sexual politics.

It is forwarded that a possible explanation as to why the study participants now identify as *bakla/gay/homosexual* is that they were seeking an identity framework in which they could retain the effeminate gendered aspects of being *bakla* while feeling comfortable and confident in expressing their (*homo*) *sexuality* and erotic desires as *gay* males. Further, this kind of reshaping and transformation of *bakla* identity meant that the participants were able to engage in “slippages” between the various facets of their gendered and sexualised selves. Thus, as Alfonso has alluded, they could become privately more “versatile” and entertain the notion of being *pusong babae* in one situation, while being more sexually assertive (and insertive) in another. Identifying as *bakla/gay/homosexual* also meant the participants could engage in slippages when entertaining *paglaruan ang mundo* (“playing with the world”) as part of their performative and *bakla* identified selves that included cross-dressing and the use of *vaklerspeak*. Simultaneously, as *gay* males they were also able to present a non-feminised public profile and presence that was socially acceptable and respectful while maintaining a *gay* identified persona, thus allowing them greater social mobility and freedom to move about the metropolis “as *gays*.” One final point is that identifying as middle-class *gays* allowed the participants the hedonistic experience of interacting with facets of Westernised gay lifestyle including fashion shopping and accessorising to obtain the latest “gay look,” and this could extend to the inclusion of hair styling and personal grooming (for example, toe and fingernail colouring and decoration or the wearing of earrings and studs).

What can be concluded is that the participants moved from a position in which the form and structure of the referent identity of *bakla* had not completely aligned with their particular needs, wants and desires, and so they had engaged in creatively transforming and reshaping their identities (made possible through their exposure to Western alternatives), to meet these requirements, thereby reconstituting and

reconstructing themselves as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. What has also become evident is that it was not simply a matter of reconstructing themselves as some kind of Filipino version of a globalised gay or homosexually identified male. Rather, the participants had created the fluid and multi-faceted indigenous identity of *bakla/gay/homosexual* to accommodate and bring expression to their specific needs and desires, enacted within the various social spaces and cultural settings that form part of the society and community in which they live and love.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored urban gay life in the Philippines by focussing on a long-term friendship group of young middle-class *bakla/gay/homosexual* identified Filipino males who live in MM. In the process of undertaking the study close contact was made with the participating group members by “hanging out” with them whenever possible as they went about their everyday lives. The research was concerned with discovering how gender and sexuality were being articulated and shaped at the local level of cultural experience in order to gain deeper and more insightful knowledge and understanding about gender diversity in the region. A key feature in both the theoretical and ideological approaches taken in data analysis and in discussing the findings of the study has been to consider where possible the inclusion of Filipino theoretical perspectives and approaches that deal with cultural phenomenon at the local levels of experience. This study achieved greater clarity and depth of analysis through the use of Filipino theoretical perspectives. This has provided valuable insights and understandings of the participants’ individual and collective viewpoints and conceptualisations. By engaging with Filipino theory and other relevant literary texts and materials, the study has been able to present a research project that is Philippine focused rather than coming from a purely Western paradigmatic perspective. The inclusion of Western texts and research studies has been used in supporting the analysis and findings of the research rather than dictating how the data would be framed and analysed.

In the beginning of his book “Philippine Gay Culture,” Garcia (1996, p. 4) poses two questions:

1. What are the male homosexual identities that constitute Philippine gay culture?
2. Why is there no gay liberation movement in the Philippines?

He explains that:

I had been one to wonder why no unified, continuous effort to organize might be observed among gays of my generation. This query led me to inquire into just who the gays were who constituted my generation, and it serendipitously

dawned on me that conflict exists amongst the very ranks of metropolitan gays, who are really a various terrain of people whose inability to liberate themselves from homophobic oppression is not only because they have internalized it, but also because real forces in their lives, almost inseparable from who they think they are, make such alliances and allo-identifications virtually impossible. When I began work on this project, it appeared that this had been the situation for some time now (p. 4).

In his conclusion, Garcia posits that it is the crisis of “coming out” and transvestophobia that are obstacles preventing political activism and gay liberation from taking place in the Philippines. He concludes:

Any history of Philippine gay culture is at most apparent history to the degree that only those male homosexuals who have come out and become markedly *bakla* are represented in it. The class conflict between homosexuals who are “out” and “in” the closet has in the main been responsible for the failure, if not the absence, of a truly formed and visible gay community (1996, p. 334).

Using Latin American examples of such conflicts Garcia proceeds to argue that:

...the difficulties of maintaining a gay organization in a cultural milieu in which effeminate and/or cross-dressing homosexuals may be observed to harbour the same hatred toward macho-looking gays that the local *swards* and gays of the seventies and up to now have had for the *silahis*, closet queens, and Men who have Sex with Men, or MSM (and as always, the same holds true the other way around) (1996, p. 334)

Garcia concedes however, that the “in/out” and “covert/overt” class-divided binary needs some revision, and concludes:

Recently, I have been rethinking the binary of covert/overt (and its more politically incorrect version, respectable/vulgar) and have attempted to reconsider the terms of each. Perhaps the qualifier *selectively* for the first term and *completely* for the second will recast the entire structure into a newer, less harsh and not-so-absolute light. A consequence of this would be there may no longer be a clear distinction between gays who are inside the closet or covert, and outside it or overt, for both kinds of homosexuals are actually already overt, or “out,” only one is selectively so, while the other is more completely out (1996, p. 337).

It is considered that the conclusions of the current research study can most effectively be elicited by responding to the abovementioned questions, points, and issues raised by Garcia.

On the question of male “homosexual” identities in the Philippines this study has established the existence of a generation of young middle-class men who currently identify as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. A key finding of the study was the existence of a social matrix of interconnected middle-class *bakla* friendship groups or circles of friends in which the participants’ own friendship group was located. The study has shown that it was due to the continuity and structural cohesion of the *bakla* friendship group and its extended support network that the young men were able to build a social space for themselves and their friends within MM, and the organising principle responsible for this collective enterprise was gender. Fundamental to the research was gaining an understanding of the social and cultural functionality of this micro-network of young men who of themselves identify generically as *bakla* while entertaining variances that include gay, homosexual and cross-dresser, and who live within the macro-spaces of urban mainstream Philippine society. In order for the friendship group to maintain its ability to function as a socially cohesive and bonded physical and emotional support unit it had conceptually drawn on the primary units of sociocultural life in the Philippines including the family and the peer group *barkada*, to achieve this purpose. The ability of the friendship group to exist as a unitary intentional family in tandem with each of the group member’s biological families and as part of a larger and holistic friendship and support network has meant that this social system of friendships and relationships is able to function as a nebulous and largely self-sufficient and covert middle-class “micro-community” that operates with a high degree of autonomy within the mainstream culture of MM. The study has shown that the capacity for the friendship group and its extended support network to meet the needs, goals, and aspirations of its members has guaranteed its longevity and sustainability as the primary means for “gay” social interaction.

A conclusion reached in this study is that the process of “coming out” in the West and the process of engagement by the participants in *paglaldad ng kapa* (the act of unfurling one’s cape) within Philippine culture are qualitatively different from each other. In Western culture a young man usually “comes out” to himself “as gay” before contemplating “coming out” to others (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Coleman, 1982; Macdonald, 1996), however this study has shown that instead of reaching the self-realised conclusion that as an individual you might be gay or that you are gay (an inside to outside process), the process for the participants was reversed. It was from the comments made to them by their friends and peers that the participants gained an

awareness of being *bakla*, and they internalised these identity postulates as part of their *loób* (identifying as *pusong babae*), which was outwardly reflected by engaging in effete mimicry and gender performance as *bakla* within the safety and structure of their friendship group.

A significant outcome of the study has been to reveal the ways in which the participants have creatively deployed and adapted the collectivist paradigm to meet their particular needs. In Western cultures and societies, the act of “coming out” can mean a transition from a state of loneliness and isolation to one of potential happiness and fulfilment by making and establishing new friendships and relationships through accessing the wider gay community network (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Coleman, 1982, 1987; Macdonald, 1996). This was a step that the study participants ultimately did not have to make because they already had an established group of friends who through time grew to include an extended friendship network, and as such fulfilled the purposes of providing a structure of emotional and physical support and a forum for socialising and forming and entering into personal and intimate relationships. The study has shown how the participants had also creatively deployed the Internet as a source for advancing group intercommunications by expanding their abilities to socially network in virtual time and space. Put simply, the friendship group and its matrix of social networks performed many of the roles and functions that are to be found within gay communities and gay interest groups that flourish in the West. It is a conclusion of this study that one of the reasons why there is no unified gay activist movement or community present in the Philippines is because of the existence of similar social friendship networks within MM. Overt activism may thus appear as fragmented because there is no perceived need by the members of these “micro-communities” to participate in public political programmes and events designed to bring about widespread social change and reform.

An important conclusion reached in the study was the participants were not only able to sustain themselves and their friendship group within the potentially hostile environment of school and society generally, but had the ability to creatively adapt their surroundings in order to meet their needs, wants and desires. By doing so the participants had created their own structured social space in which they could explore their gender and sexuality. This was achieved through a collective physical and cognitive process of growth and development that had included the performance and shaping of their *kabaklaan*. The ability of the participants to organise as a friendship group and create an environment that had allowed them the space to “come out” to each

other as a collective and identify as *bakla*; to be able to continue to develop and fine-tune their *kabaklaan* through the experience of shared gender performance; and the ability to reshape and transform their identities to the point where they currently identify as *bakla/gay/homosexual* did not occur in social isolation.

The study has shown that it was as a result of attending middle-class Catholic all-male grade and high schools that the ability of the group to exist as a functional and sustained social unit became a reality. The Catholic education system had provided the long-term institutional structure and setting that had facilitated regular contact between the study participants. The closeness and bonds formed amongst the participants were not only a result of the commonality of being *bakla*, but were also forged out of their shared life experiences together, particularly during their high school years. It was also during their teenage years at high school that the participants were most “visible” in public as a consequence of their overt gender experimentation and performativity, and this process had included learning *swardspeak* from other students and reshaping the argot into their own variation which the participants call *vakler*.

The Catholic education system of teaching had reflected the conservative ethos of the Catholic Church, and so the school’s teachings on homosexuality as a sin (a sexual rather than a gender-based viewpoint) were at odds with the participants’ own feelings of effeminacy. The resulting discordance had motivated the participants to actively seek to define their gendered and sexual selves, firstly as *bakla*, and then eventually to self-define themselves as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. DWTL – under the auspice of the Catholic education system – was a religious retreat held in particularly high regard and emotionally treasured by all of the participants because it was during this experience they had identified and “come out” to each other as *bakla*, and in so doing had openly affirmed their identity to themselves and as a group. The “happy room” was shown to have played a significant role in this endeavour because it provided the physical space and welcoming environment that had enabled succeeding generations of *bakla* students including the study participants to come together in a safe and secure social setting. A primary purpose of the retreat was for students to affirm their loving relationship with God, and so an open affirmation and declaration of who they were to themselves, their friends and to God had allowed them the opportunity to bring together conflicting elements of their religion and sexuality in a spirit of harmony and reconciliation. The resulting religious epiphany was considered by the participants to be a personal reconciliation with God.

The study showed that it was out of feelings of fear, suppression and marginalisation resulting from anti-homosexual discourses, religious arguments, and punishments directed towards the participants at high school that had increased their determination to redefine themselves in a self-affirming and positive way. This they had achieved by exploring Western representations of homosexuality and homoeroticism including the private viewing of gay erotica and the more general public portrayals of Western gay culture, sexuality and lifestyle, made accessible through overseas (mainly American) movies and television programmes. Although the Catholic education system espoused an anti-homosexual discourse and had discouraged participants from becoming “homosexuals” it also provided the institutional means through which the participants could gain respect and admiration from their family, peers and teachers. This was accomplished by bonding together as academic high performers and achievers, which minimised or reduced the potential for experiencing *hiya* (shame) as a result of any castigatory or homophobic reactions or responses at school and in the wider general community.

An important contribution of this study towards understanding gender and sexual variance from a local cultural perspective was to provide an analysis and theoretical explanation for the study participants’ manifestation of *kabaklaan*. Traditionally, *kabaklaan* (derived from *bakla*) has generally been understood as meaning effeminacy or as expressing oneself in an effeminate manner. There is no Western equivalent of the term, although the descriptive term “queen” or “acting queeny” is sometimes used to characterise an effeminate male, or “queens” to characterise a group of effeminate males. A fundamental cultural difference revealed in this study is that *kabaklaan* is a shared effete characteristic of gender cognition which is physically manifest through behavioural expression and collectively developed by the participants’ engagement in repetitious gender mimicry and gender performance. The study has shown that “coming out” to each other within the experiential context of the friendship group had created a social environment amenable to the development and expression of *kabaklaan* as a representative characteristic of gender growth and development. In view of the fact that the participants had continued to expand and reshape their identities as *bakla/gay/homosexual*, it became necessary to reinterpret and expand the meanings of *kabaklaan* to include “gay” and “homosexual” in order to more accurately portray the meanings given by the participants to their gendered and sexual

selves. *Kabaklaan*, then, was defined in the study to mean “gayness,” of which effeminacy is seen to form a congruent and integral part.

Social class was shown to be an issue that featured strongly in the study, and was a key factor in structuring the ways in which gender was enacted and articulated by the study participants and how it had affected relations between the participants’ own middle-class group and the lower-class *parlorista bakla* in terms of tensions and conflicts that existed between the two groups. The research had revealed there is a clearly defined class-based system of social relations operating in the Philippines, and a recent development has been the emergence of a socially mobile and economically stable and functional middle-class. Neil Garcia was quoted earlier in this chapter as concluding that class-based conflicts and hostilities exist in Philippine gay culture because of the failure by the “respectable” upper-class gays to publicly come out of the closet and become “visible,” and because the upper-classes considered the lower-class *bakla* to be “vulgar.” These issues had received considerable attention in the study, and a conclusion reached was that participant “invisibility” within mainstream public life was an outcome of complex sociocultural issues and characteristics rather than the result of class-based snobbery.

The study found that from a very young age the participants were socialised into the conduct and behaviour that was thought of as suitable for young Filipino males. For those in mainstream society who were seen to transgress the boundaries of gender propriety the label given was *bakla* – an identity imbued with negative and derogatory connotations of effeminacy and considered to be *pusong babae* (like a girl). One conclusion reached in the study as to why the participants chose to remain publicly “invisible” was because of the cultural embodiment and enactment of the concept of *hiya* (shame) as a social deterrent and means of socially controlling behaviour deemed publicly inappropriate. It was a finding of the study that middle-class economic status, religiosity and education were primary sources of experience inscribed at the core of each participant’s *loób*, and had contributed towards the shaping of personal attitudes, values, beliefs and guiding moral principles. Subsequently, it was these personal attributes that had influenced the participants’ codes of conduct and responses and reactions to the outside world. The signification of these middle-class characteristics and social values included the participants’ codes of appropriate public propriety and social comportment which extended to include considerations of appropriate displays of gender comportment and behaviour (both as individuals and as a group) within the

public sphere. A fear of being socially shamed was shown as a reason for the participants' invisibility in public. The study revealed that shame occurred as a result of considering the damage and injury to their public profile and position in the local community as well as the harm to their family's social character and standing that being "out" in public would cause if they behaved like lower-class *parlorista bakla*. It was not directed inwardly by participants as a result of feeling personal shame or guilt about being *bakla/gay/homosexual*.

A conclusion reached in this study that common ground did exist between the study participants and their *parlorista* counterparts as a result of sharing a "cultural heritage" of gender effeminacy as *bakla*. Differences between the two groups were seen to be class-based and associated with the participants' higher social and economic status that included the gaining of a high quality education from a private middle-class Catholic school. An outcome reached in the study was that although differences existed between the *parlorista bakla* and the study participants, they were class-driven rather than based on any intrinsic gender difference. The use by the participants of their particularised *swardspeak* argot *vakler* was a way in which to entertain the self-expression and performance of their *kabaklaan* through engagement in group discourse. Its use was also a means by which the participants could allude to the close bonds they developed out of the life experiences and events they shared together. Other similar middle-class groups existed within MM that also had their own variations of *swardspeak*. Class related differences in the life situations and life experiences between the lower-class *parlorista bakla* and the participants own group of middle-class friends were discursively reinforced and signified by the differing conceptualisations and meanings attached to each group's respective versions and variations of gay lingo. Territory and location had defined the social and physical spaces that the groups largely occupied, and this had contributed to the differing contextual meanings, content and variations found in *swardspeak*.

The participants had transformed elements of Western gay cultural identity when engaging in their processes of expanding and reshaping themselves as *bakla* rather than accepting Western tenets unconditionally. This was made clear when the participants engaged in *vaklerspeak* although the lingo was peppered with cross-cultural references and language nuances including English, the discursive identity enacted was expressed and performed as Filipino *bakla*. Identifying as gay or homosexual was more expressly directed towards identity values and lifestyle issues, therefore gender transformation



had not involved a negation of effeminacy in favour of global norms of gender and sexual expression. The point is that while the participants had incorporated particular elements of Western style and influence in transforming their identity as *bakla*, the enactment and placement of their identity as *bakla/gay/homosexual* still remained firmly rooted within middle-class Filipino cultural life.

An unexpected outcome of the study was to discover middle-class cross-dressing *bakla* within the friendship group and extended friendship network occupied by the study participants. As co-participants of the friendship group no distinction was made between the participants and their cross-dressing friends, and it was explained that they were all *bakla* together. The acceptance expressed towards these particular individuals as part of the friendship network was based on a commonality of middle-class status, education and upbringing. As middle-class *bakla* they would socialise and “hang out” with the study participants and their network friends which was also a reason why they did not feel the need or desire to galvanise and identify together as a particularised group of cross-dressers. The friendship formed with the participants also validates a key argument forwarded in the study which is that differences between the study group and the *parlorista bakla* are based on class rather than on any intrinsic gender difference.

It was concluded that the study participants identified education, comportment, style and beauty as issues that divided and separated themselves from the *parlorista bakla*. Participants used these criteria to inform their negative judgements about *parloristas*, and participants also used these criteria to positively affirm themselves and their cross-dressing *bakla* friends. The display of appropriate behaviour and comportment in the public realm were issues of social propriety taken seriously by the participants and were closely associated with the omnipresent threat of experiencing *hiya* as a result of being publicly “outed,” ridiculed or chastised. As a consequence the participants generally “conformed” to conventional expectations of gender comportment in public which made them largely invisible to the general population. By comparison, the *parloristas* heightened visibility resulting from their “larger than life” profile in public was regarded as *walang-hiya* (shameless) by the study participants by virtue of their apparent insensitivity towards the tenets of “appropriate” conventions of public behaviour and comportment, and were considered as being “thick skinned,” poorly educated, and thus lacking in appropriate style and social graces.

Beauty was an important aesthetic feature in the participants' worldview and everyday life, and through evoking the Filipino concept of *gandá*, the attitudes, interpretations and values given by the participants in terms of their own sense of social comportment and propriety and that of others including the *parloristas* could be explained. The aesthetic of "beauty" when understood through the concept of *gandá*, takes on new meanings as physical appearance and social character are intrinsically linked in determining how a person presents to the outside world. Just as other societal values become part of a person's *loób*, values regarding social standards of physical appearance and comportment considered as ideals for women and men, are internalised along with societal values regarding gender propriety, therefore gender and beauty become connected as part of the external representation of self. In this way, beauty together with gender was defined along the lines of social class with such representations thus becoming an integral part of the individual's shared worldview. It was concluded that the study participants did not characterise the *parloristas* as *magandá* (beautiful) but rather as *pangit* (ugly) because they were seen to parody rather than comply with the aesthetics reflected in *gandá*. This was why cross-dressing friends of the participants were viewed as intelligent, educated and possessing the necessary social graces, style and beauty to make the physical transformation from a man to a woman, and were regarded by the participants as the real and legitimate manifestations of *pusong babae*. Although the study has uncovered class-aligned differences between the participants, their middle-class *bakla* friends and the lower-class *parlorista bakla*, effeminacy remains as a kind of gendered linchpin, connecting the lower and middle-classes of *bakla* together, particularly with respect to the cross-dressing aspect of being *bakla*.

When consideration is given to the claim that the new emerging middle-class in the Philippines is also influencing the development of sexual cultures (Tan, 2001a), then it would appear that class is the cultural variable affecting how effeminacy-as-identity is being experienced, transformed, and expressed. A significant outcome of the study has been to reveal changes taking place in the ways that gender and sexuality are currently being explored, reshaped, transformed and negotiated within the social strata of middle-class Filipino life. What can be concluded is that the participants of this study moved from a position in which the form and structure of the referent identity of *bakla* had not completely aligned with their particular needs, wants and desires, and so they had engaged in creatively transforming and reshaping their identities (made possible through

their exposure to Western alternatives), to meet these requirements, thereby reconstituting and reconstructing themselves as *bakla/gay/homosexual*. The purpose of this endeavour was to create an identity framework in which they could retain the effeminate and gendered aspects of being *bakla* while feeling comfortable and confident in expressing their (*homo*) *sexuality* and erotic desires as *gay* males. Further, this kind of reshaping and transformation of *bakla* identity meant that the participants were able to engage in “slippages” between the various facets of their gendered and sexual selves. They could become privately more “versatile” and entertain the notion of being *pusong babae* in one situation, while being more sexually assertive (and insertive) in another. Identifying as *bakla/gay/homosexual* also meant the participants could engage in slippages when entertaining *paglaruan ang mundo* (“playing with the world”) as part of their performative and *bakla* identified selves that included cross-dressing and the use of *vaklerspeak*. Simultaneously, as *gay* males they were also able to present a non-feminised public profile and presence that was socially acceptable and respectful while maintaining a *gay* identified persona, thus allowing them greater social mobility and freedom to move about the metropolis “as *gays*.” This further incorporation and integration by the participants of *gay* and *homosexual* together with their *bakla* identity of effeminacy is a transformative feature that differentiates the study participants from both the lower-class *parlorista bakla* and their own middle-class cross-dressing *bakla* friends. When discussing the real and complex ways in which lesbians and gay men live and experience their lives, queer theorist Kristen G. Esterberg (1996, p. 206) argues that that “To speak about sexual identity – lesbian identity, or gay identity – implies a unity that betrays the very real differences (of race, class, style, sexual practice) embodied by individuals in diverse social locations.” A key conclusion reached in this study is that the participants did not simply reconstruct themselves as some kind of Filipino version of a globalised gay or homosexually identified male. Rather, the participants had created the fluid and multi-faceted indigenous identity of *bakla/gay/homosexual* to accommodate and bring expression to their specific needs and desires.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions for Research***

Although this study makes an important contribution to the understanding of gender and sexuality in the Philippines there are some limitations. The study was restricted to eliciting the experiences of males only. Research into the experiences of lesbian women would undoubtedly be qualitatively different from that of males, especially when consideration is given to the cultural position of women within the

family and the extended family network. It is suggested that studies researching the lives and experiences of lesbian women would provide a more extensive knowledge-base and theoretical understanding of how gender and sexuality are being experienced and negotiated in the region.

The study did not include homosexual or gender variant Filipino males from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Issues of gender and sexuality that hold special relevance for these particular groups of people has not been considered in this study. For example, Baytan (2000, p. 392) writes that:

Because of the absence of data on Chinese Filipino homosexuals, it was necessary to conduct an exploratory study in order to be able to begin to theorise processes of self-understanding and identity formation. Previous work (Baytan, 1998) focused on Chinese Filipino male homosexuals' sexual self-identification, in particular on their choice of the term 'gay' to name themselves in contrast to other local identities such as *bakla* and *pua iyam*. Here the focus will be on the ethnic identification of Chinese Filipino male homosexuals.

The study concentrated on one generation of Filipino males, and so researching the life stories and experiences of homosexual and gender variant males from other generations would be helpful in determining how age is a factor in determining the salient issues and important life experiences for different generations of Filipino men. Tan (2001a, p. 130) discusses the changing life situations of older gay Filipino men and comments:

Generational differences are also strong in creating divisions within "the community." Few Filipino gay men over the age of 30 continue to go out. They seem to disappear, eventually marrying women and setting up families or retiring to a semi-celibate life...

This study represents the experiences of young males who are currently aged in their mid-20's and have commented that the group will remain together into old age, hence the declaration by one of the participants that "boyfriends may come and go but friends remain forever." Although the friendship group has remained as a cohesive unit of close friends together with the extended network of friends, it can only receive speculation as to the longevity and quality of the friendships and relationships. It is also unknown if similar groups of males from earlier generations have maintained close bonds of friendship over time. A longitudinal study that examines other friendship groups and friendship networks with the purpose of discovering how the friendships and relationships persist over time would provide a greater understanding about the nature

of these close relations and bonds. One recommendation is that future research is needed to examine such friendships over time by following the same individuals over several years and sampling various friendship circles at different points across their life course.

Other studies might also focus on the regional and rural areas of the Philippines. Studies of this kind could reveal differences in the life situations and experiences of homosexual and gender variant males from various geographical locations, and uncover the structures and patterns of social diversity as well as movements between regional locations and urban capital areas.

The study purposefully focused on researching middle-class participants only. Considerable attention was given to the gender relations between the study participants and the lower-class *parlorista bakla*. An ethnographic study focussing on the lives and experiences of *parlorista bakla* in MM would provide a deeper understanding and bring another perspective in understanding how relations of gender and sexuality in the region are being articulated and negotiated. Other young people from upper-class Filipino families often spend extended periods of time overseas receiving a Western education, and therefore the ways in which they negotiate and express their gender and sexuality might be significantly different to how the study participants express and have transformed identities of *bakla*, *gay* and *homosexual*. Studies that investigate how other gender and sexually variant groups deal with gender and sexual difference would contribute towards providing a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the ways in which non-mainstream sexualities are being expressed, experienced, and negotiated, and would provide an opportunity for examining contemporary relations of gender and sexuality within the social, economic and political frameworks of Philippine society.



The study consisted of eight participants who represented one circle of friends within the social matrix of friendship circles participating in the larger and more extensive support network. The advantage of conducting a small ethnographic study of this type is in the ability of the study to elicit deep, rich and meaningful data through close observation and by interviewing the participants and collecting their life stories. A larger study that was inclusive of participants sampled from several other friendship groups within the participants' own network or other similar network of middle-class friends has the potential to significantly extend the range of issues and experiences presented in the current study.

An important outcome of the study is that “coming out” in the Philippines was both a culturally and contextually different experience than “coming out” in the West, where it has become a public health issue. Attention has already been given to the inappropriateness and inherent inaccuracies incurred by Western public health discourse when applying static and unchanging categories of gender and sexual identity cross-culturally. It is suggested that future public health research and intervention initiatives, strategies, programmes and policies targeting non-mainstream sexualities and gender variant population groups in the Philippines would benefit considerably by rethinking and refocussing their research attention on the local gender and sexually variant minority population groups, and how they live and experience their lives.

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Letter of Support from UP Babaylan

 <p>1992</p>	<p>University of the Philippines <i>Babaylan</i></p>
<p><b>Executive Committee</b> A.Y. 2002-2003</p>	<p>December 2002</p>
<p><b>Benjie D.C. Zabala</b> Punong Babaylan (0620)2925384</p>	<p><b>Mr. Ronald Macdonald</b> Northern Territory University Australia</p>
<p><b>Eva Aurora D. Caluog</b> Pangalawang Punong Babaylan (0916)494.1190</p>	<p>Dear Sir:</p>
<p><b>Alden Roi D. Copuyoc</b> Kalihim (0916)717.8293</p>	<p>Rainbow Greetings!</p>
<p><b>Dennis L. Uy</b> Ingat-Yaman (0919)685.7314</p>	<p>The University of the Philippines Babaylan, the leading gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender student organization, has been actively involved in the LGBT movement for the past decade and still pursuant of the realization of a humane, just, and progressive society.</p>
<p><b>Paul Jason Y. Ng</b> Puno, Education &amp; Publication Committee (0916)810.2275</p>	<p>It is in this regard that we are extending our support to your research about gay culture here in the Philippines. We are willing to provide materials and interviews related to your study. We believe that this research would prove beneficial to both parties, especially to our advocacy.</p>
<p><b>Jet S.P. Evangelista</b> Puno, Membership Committee (0916)622.8515</p>	<p>Thank you and more power!</p>
<p><b>Dennis T. Mendoza</b> Puno, Special Projects Committee (0917)479.9309</p>	<p> Benjie D.C. Zabala Punong Babaylan</p>
<p><b>Joseph Patrick B. Guimba</b> Puno, Special Projects Committee (0916)915.6869</p>	
<p><b>Advisors</b></p>	
<p><b>Mike Tan, M.D.</b> Professor, Department of Anthropology College of Social Sciences and Philosophy</p>	
<p><b>Patrick Flores, PhD.</b> Chair, Department of Art Studies College of Arts and Letters</p>	
<p>West Wing, Palma Hall University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City</p>	
<p>upbabaylan@hotmail.com</p>	



## PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

**PROJECT:** A Study of Sexuality and Gender in Metro Manila

**CHIEF INVESTIGATOR:** Ronald Macdonald

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** You are invited to help in this study by allowing me to tape-record your thoughts, feelings and experiences about issues of sexuality. This is very important because it will help social researchers to have a better understanding of sexuality based issues from a personal viewpoint.

**WHAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF YOU?** If you decide to take part in this research you will be invited to attend an interview session which will be tape-recorded. You will be asked to respond to a number of questions about sexuality, and asked to talk about your own stories and experiences.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE INTERVIEW?**

- During the interview session, you can refuse to answer any questions asked of you.
- You have the right to ask the tape-recorder to be turned off at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw consent at any time of the research study.
- You have the right to request that any information provided by you be destroyed.
- If you do not want your voice to be tape-recorded, a pen and notepaper will be used.
- Your confidentiality will be honoured at all times.
- If you would prefer to have some other person present during the interview, we can arrange this prior to the interview date.

- You have the right to choose where the interview is held, and this will be arranged prior to the interview date.
- I would request that you allow approximately one and three quarter hours for the interview, which would include fifteen minutes to explain the interview procedures to you.
- After the first interview I may contact you by sending a text message to your cell phone to arrange for a brief telephone interview. The purpose of this interview is to clarify, verify or expanding on issues and points discussed in the first interview session.
- The phone interview will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

**OWNERSHIP OF THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT:**

The thoughts and ideas you had before taking part in the project will remain yours. The thoughts and ideas expressed in the project results will be jointly owned by all of the people that took part in the project.

**DISCOMFORTS:**

There are no special risks associated with this project.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

- You will not be required to identify yourself on the tape-recording of your interview.
- A pseudonym will be used to guarantee no one will be able to identify you.
- The only list of real names will be kept by me for the purpose of contacting study participants, and will be kept in a locked drawer at my university office.

The only persons to have access to audiotapes, personal diaries and journals, transcriptions or computer discs is the researcher and the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, through the permission of the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Business and Arts. After the completion of the project, all of the original materials collected from the study will be stored for a period of 5 years under lock and key in a special storage room situated at the Faculty of law, Business and Arts at the Northern Territory University in Darwin, Australia. After this time all materials will be destroyed unless additional consent is given.

**PERSONS TO CONTACT**

If you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher, Ron Macdonald by telephone on [REDACTED] (cell phone) or (02) [REDACTED]

If there is an emergency or if you have any concerns before commencing, during, or after the completion of the project, you are invited to contact Ms Hemali Seneviratne (the Executive Officer of the Northern Territory University Human Ethics Committee) on 0061889467064. The Executive Officer can pass on any concerns to appropriate officers within the University.



## CONSENT FORM

I.....of.....

**Hereby consent** to participate in a study to be undertaken by Ronald Macdonald of Northern Territory University, and I understand that the purpose of the study is:

To allow my thoughts, feelings and experiences about issues of sexuality to be recorded by the chief investigator.

**I acknowledge that:**

- My confidentiality will be guaranteed throughout the entire research project
- This will be achieved in accordance with the confidentiality statements outlined in the Plain Language Statement that I have read prior to giving my consent to participate in this project.
- I understand that any personal information, knowledge and perspective will remain the property of the participant.

Signature.....Date:.....

## Appendix 4:

### **LIFE STORY FOCUS GUIDE**

Areas of focus might include:

- Family
- School and Education
- Religion
- Work/Economic Situation
- Friendship Network
- The Happy Room
- Swardspeak
- Social Life
- Sexuality and Relationships
- Health Issues

Excerpt from Ferdi's Interview on Dating and the Extended Friendship Network

**"And I guess you would feel more comfortable disclosing to them."** Yes. **"I hope you don't mind me raising this, and tell me if you don't want to talk about it, but before Manuel's party we were sitting at Starbucks. And it seemed to me that there was like a conference with your friends. Ben said to me before that in the Philippines you don't fuck your friends."** Oh yeah [laughs]. **"And it seemed to be also a kind of code of conduct?"** Yes, if I may say so, it's a code of conduct, and it's an unwritten rule you should not fuck your friends. You don't sleep with them – you sleep with them, meaning sleep, but beyond that it's something abhorred I think. **"And that goes to the extent of trying to seduce a boyfriend of a friend?"** Oh yes! That's also considered something of a no-no. For example, you like the boyfriend of your friend – you go about seducing him in one way or the other – well even if that guy would go with you and bite the bait. Something like that, on your part, because you're the friend of his boyfriend you wouldn't want it to proceed further. It would still be a matter of – because I'm the friend, and it's not the right thing to do. **"And has that ever happened?"** No, never. As far as I know, no. In fact – no. **"The reason I asked is because I was wondering what would happen to that person. Would that person be kicked out of the group?"** Not really kicked out. If that would happen, there would still be understandings from both parties that okay, let me hear your side. Let me hear your side first. What made you do it? And then we would listen to our side. And then we would come to a compromise that's okay, that this would be the right thing to do. And this should not be the right thing to do. It's not really a formal, like you would be kicked out, because we've been through hard times and good times – the very definition of a friend – but if that would ever happen, the most you could ever get would be a reprimand. You should not do that. Never do that again.

**"If that did happen, and if you were interested in somebody like that, and had very strong feelings, would you talk to the group about it or would you keep quiet?"** It depends. Personally if that happens to me, honestly I may think about it first before saying to my friends. Definitely they would know in one ear or the other eventually, but for the present I might not talk about it first. I may have to go through this myself and see for myself the consequences. And then if something had happens to me, then that's the time I divulge. And chances are if that happens, friends will just react to this effect – something like "why did you tell us this late? We could have done something about it" – something like that. So again the most you can have is advice.

**"And would there be any other rules or regulations written or unwritten that the group would consider?"** Well yes...there might be some ways by which the group would go – because definitely, inevitably, there would be someone who would have a different opinion from the others, and then this group would say this, this person said otherwise. So really it would all boil down to you – how you would decide to go about it. Because if that would be the last resort that happens – it's really up to you. Friends will tell you the most that we can do is advise you. But it's still your decision. You still hold your cards.

**“And how would you go about meeting guys?”** Meaning? **“How would you go about meeting other guys?”** Oh. For example, this happens – based on experience – this happens more from my friends outside the group. Like, hey do you know of somebody you can...you know I’m quite lonely right now, I need somebody to have a date. And then somebody will come over saying we are common friends of this. And chances are this person doesn’t come from the group, because if he comes from the group chances are I already know him beforehand. We’re really a small group – a small knitted group – that already know each other. As friends we more or less know the people who hang out with the other one. So if you go for a date you really have to ask another person whose friend you totally don’t know yet.

**“So going outside the group – who are you talking about?”** Uhhhh my female friends – my straight female friends. **“Ones that would know gay guys?”** Yeah, and sometimes also, my gay friends – my other gay friends who will be – I’ll try to explain this. Who, I don’t know much – well they are my friends as well, but whom I don’t know much compared to say Ben, Alfonso, Benjie. I dunno – probably also because we have already known each other that well over the years that it would be too – well personally I would be ashamed too much. You have to ask him hey – give me a date. And it would be more up for an element of surprise. Hey, I met this guy and I really don’t know the guy.

**“And so you feel ashamed to go up to one of your group and say ‘look, can you set me up?’”** That’s right. **“When you said you might feel ashamed about it, do you mean going to say Alfonso or Benjie and saying ‘set me up with a guy?’”** Yeah, yeah. Personally I would be more ashamed to ask let’s say Ben or Alfonso or Benjie for any dates from them. Because chances are who ever they know I also know. Also I have already more or less seen the person. So for me I would be ashamed, and at the same time it would be better for me to have the element of suspense right. Okay, I will introduce you to a person whom you haven’t met in any way.

**“And these people you say you go outside the group to talk to – they are also part of a group?”** **“They are involved with another group of gay guys?”** Uhuh, yeah. **“And so it would be like your group, and you know somebody from that group?”** Yeah, sort of branching out, yeah. **“Its very nebulous.”** Yes, exactly, exactly, if you would like to term it that. For example now – let’s say Benjie has – he studied in UST – for college. What was his course? Medical technology. So he would know friends who are also gays from his university. And through Benjie we would get to know these groups. So they become part of the group eventually. So right now okay, when I have a birthday, I wouldn’t just invite my own group. But the different friends of the different groups, which the other persons know. Probably because of work – because of course we already have different work situations. Because of work – because of different universities.

**“So that’s how you actually would get to know people?”** Oh yes, from other groups. **“So with other groups it would be through mutual friends, through work who would be the catalyst?”** Exactly, exactly. That...we’re not really much a closely knit group I should say. Because we can accommodate – no, but the more the merrier. We can accommodate a group from here – from there – different situations – from different

places. As long as they're gay of course. **"And you're not likely to just walk into a bar and pick a guy – just go to Malate, walk into a bar and pick up a guy?"** That's Alfonso's philosophy [laughs]. For some of us that's their philosophy, yes. But for me...mmhh...nah. **"And would that be dependent on what you want? I mean for example, if you really wanted to have a relationship you would do as you do. If you just wanted sex for the night you would go pick a guy up?"** Yes, sex for the night – that would be fine with me – I can live with that. I can just go to Malate and pick up a guy and have sex and get over it. But in terms of relationships I'm more of the idealistic one, being this guy would eventually be my boyfriend with somebody who was set up or I've met through different circumstances. And I would really like more if I entered the relationship with a person I didn't meet under dubious circumstances. Some of our friends do. And we don't prevent them from doing that. Go ahead – no problem – this is a democratic country. Go ahead and do it. Personally, I don't need other people to do that. I'm sorry; I don't think I have the guts to do that. It's not my regular habit. I mean my weekly habit of going out to a bar. I don't stay home at the weekend. I would stay at another person's home and enjoy.

**"So you think that – in your opinion they would be after more of a relationship focus than purely sex focused?"** It depends – case basis. Like for some the concern right now is to have relationship focus rather than fuck around. And for some, tired of having sex with just anybody, would rather settle down. I cannot confine gays – especially of my group – especially in our group – in this kind of mind set. It's case to case basis really.

**"And with the net, would that be used for meeting guys? I'm talking of Manila itself. So would the net be used for talking on chat lines?"** Chat lines? Yes! In fact I also meet other guys through chat. I've failed to tell you this a while ago that I also meet other guys through the chat room. That itself was a given activity which I also got from Alfonso. He used to chat before in college, and I had no idea about that, so he just talked me into it, so I gave it a try – its sort of hooking – you get into the habit, then naturally you get to meet a lot of guys through the chat rooms. But of course you have to practice a certain restraint and a sort of caution, because these are guys you really don't know and it might be dangerous, but then again so far, luckily, I haven't encountered anybody yet. **"And so you can meet a guy on the chat line for sex?"** Yes [laughs]. And I think eighty five percent of people in the chat rooms – they would just look for sex, and the conversation would go a long long long long but the bottom line is going out and having sex.

**"If you were looking for a relationship your more likely to do it through an extended friendship network" Oh yes! "Than trying to look for a relationship through chat?"** Oh yes! Definitely! I would say that right now, based on experience, I used to think I can find relationship which had – of course its a case to case basis, I'm not generalising everybody, I'm not generalising situations, but based on my assessment of the chat rooms, the chat rooms where I chat, it may be - it might be pretty hard for you to really screen. Because these would be people who would be more – who would really be concerned about their look – with how others look – therefore they are just after sex. So the judgment might be wrong, but as far as I can see if you want to have a relationship it



would be more useful to have it through network friends. Because at least your friends would recommend you to somebody not – would recommend you to somebody trustworthy – somebody reliable. So rather than the chat room, where you don't really know these people. But then it worked for me in several instances [laughs]. I had relationships with people I met in the chat. And I have to be more or less fair in saying it worked really well. But nowadays I feel that it would be better for me to find relationships within – within at least the friends I know.

## Appendix 6:

### Excerpt from Ben's Interview on SwardSpeak

**"When did you first start picking up gay lingo?"** Oh, high school. 'Cause ummh – primarily from show business like gay gossip columnists would be a source, or TV shows like entertainment news, talk shows, that sort of thing – *chika* was one – I think the first word and the most used word in high school. *Chika* means it's a joke – just kidding. So it was why we – just being sarcastic and we love cracking jokes – *chika* – the most used word. But there's – there are lots of other words. *Chaka*, which means ugly. 'Cause the thing with *swardSpeak* is words aren't set. And ummh you get so many variations or as you call them corruptions. So a word can be – they have many variations not only in terms of how you say it, or the pronunciation, even how you spell it, but the actual form of the word changes. Not just sometimes, but usually changes. Changes over time – it changes because of other groups – like you get informed about new words. 'Cause new words are forming all the time so it's a very fluid flexible lingo.

**"And how would you accept or reject a word that comes in?"** Just through use. Something like if it sticks it sticks. **"And what are some of the things that would make it stick? Why would a word stick and another word won't?"** If other people would use that word. So it's a general acceptance of a word. Yeah, 'cause I remember one time Alfonso was inventing a word, and he said he wanted to use it and see if it would stick. So Alfonso and I were using it but it didn't really catch on. So it's gotta be something very catchy. Something contagious. **"Cause there are no parameters to it?"** No, you can't – there are no – there's no criteria for it. You can't really tell.

**"So *swardSpeak* would be used in a mixture of Tagalog, English and *SwardSpeak*?"** Yes. But – 'cause *swardSpeak* – yeah 'cause they could be formed from Tagalog words and they could be from English words as well, but its also – for English words its by association. **"How do you mean by association?"** Ummh – what's an example – ummh – I'm not sure, ummh – 'cause when we talk in *swardSpeak* we don't speak in English and then have *swardSpeak* words. We converse in Tagalog with *swardSpeak* words. But with uh – I guess for English there would be – maybe an American celebrity – an American celebrity's name would be used as a *vakler* word or a *swardSpeak* word to mean something else, something like that. But it is through word association.

**"And it wouldn't be a corruption of English based on English words that don't translate to Filipino, so when you're not speaking in *swardSpeak* and then you hear certain English words used – is it because there's no direct translation?"** Sometimes, but sometimes it's just for the hell of it – it's just for the added flavour or added flare. **So it wouldn't just be a corruption of the English words that don't translate into Tagalog?"** Yeah, it's not- it's not that all the time, but it can be. **"It can?"** It can. There are no real rules to it 'cause English words are – words – normal words – English or Filipino words are corrupted into gayspeak by adding prefixes and suffixes.

**"Would there be a difference between 'queenifying' an English word and giving it a *swardSpeak* feel or connotation?"** Ummhh – because it goes hand-in-hand. **"Queenifying"** it means that you're making it into a *swardSpeak* word, and making it a

*swardspeak* word would mean that you're "queenifying" it. So they go hand-in-hand. For example, Kylie Minogue – Kylie Minogue is used as a suffix. It doesn't mean anything but it's added onto a word. To any word, just to make it colourful or just to confuse [laughs], or just to be funny. "So it wouldn't have any...." No real meaning, "No real meaning. It's just a feel of the...." It would be just for the feel of it, or the flavour of it or it's by association, or it's by actual meaning that's corrupted or something like that.

**"So they'd be a large degree of spontaneity attached to it as well as contextually?"**

Yeah, and in the delivery of it. Yeah, it's very contextual, so it depends on – to make words – spur of the moment – depends on what you're talking about and it's very spontaneous. And you get to understand and know words by context clues. Of course you could have the other person explain it to you, but basically it's on a wave length thing. If you're on the same wave length then you're understanding each other and there's no need for explanation. You'd pick up what the other person means by using that word – *vakler* word – *swardspeak* word, even if it's unfamiliar to you, even if it's new to you, you just pick up on it.

**"So you started in high school – picking up just a few words." A few words. "And other people in – which would become your group were doing it, so you would talk to each other using those words?"** Mmhhmm, Yes. **"That were very much your words? Or initially you were importing – you didn't actually start?"** No we didn't start making our own words. **"You imported them?"** Imported them.

**"As you were saying, from the entertainment industry primarily?"** Yeah, and from other gay people. **"So how did that develop? Say taking in a time line - in high school you started to use imported *swardspeak* words – can you just explain to me how that progressed up to what you call *vakler* – your particular speak?"** Well we don't have a – 'cause I don't think anyone can really claim to create a word, and so no one would really know where the word comes, and much of the stuff that we come up with is it's because they're private jokes or they're "in" jokes so we'd have words for that. That would be the stuff that we've created – the original – original content because it's based on stuff we've experienced or memories or – so that would be the original stuff. But for general conversation, would be words coined by gay showbiz writers or used by other gay groups. 'Cause high school then go to college, you get to know more gay people. They would speak it differently or they'd speak different words or write it differently. **"So you're saying that because...."** Where everyone – everyone's informing each other.

**"And is it that sort of extended friendship network thing that people that you're in contact with through your friendship network – they have contacts with people in other friendship networks, and that's how the words are...?"** Yeah, everyone's getting into sharing speak. **"And is the entertainment industry still a factor in how that's created now?"** Yeah. **"You still pick things up from entertainment?"** Yeah. **"So who would create that?"** Writers – show biz writers. **"Gay writers?"** Yeah, but then again ummhh – you could be friends with one of the gay writers, so he could be taking stuff that's ummhh – that's ummhh – used in the group and then ummhh – putting it into

mainstream by broadcasting it. **“And there’s not a problem with that? People wouldn’t feel that they’ve been plagiarised?”** Ah no. ‘Cause as I say no one can really claim to own that – there’s no copy write and of course there are two ways about it. It’s being used by other or more people. On the one hand it could loose its novelty, so you could stop using it altogether. On the other hand, it’s – it’s good ‘cause more people will understand – that sort of thing. So double edged.

**“So wasn’t it – the original concept was that mainstream couldn’t understand? That straight people couldn’t understand?”** Yeah, but now straight people are getting into it as well. Females – you know, fag hags – but yeah ‘cause it sounds funny – it sounds fun – it sounds colourful – just by the sound of it even if you don’t understand a single word. But it was – well anyway for our group, we use it primarily ummhh so that our straight class mates wouldn’t understand – understand us. ‘Cause we would be talking about them. We would be gossiping so – to prevent others from knowing what you’re talking about even if they’re eavesdropping.

**“So that built up a vocabulary of *swardspak*? Built up through high school into college?”** Yes. ‘Cause you get informed by other people. **“So the idea is still to be covert so other people can’t understand what you’re talking about?”** Yeah, I think that will always be a function. **“But it’s not an exclusive function?”** No its not. **“And how does that help define say a group identity?”** I suppose you could look at it this way if it’s – if the words are still unknown then it serves the function of being covert. But when it’s known in the mainstream then the only purpose it serves is to be funny and colourful and witty and gay. **“And that’s still okay?”** Yeah, that’s still okay. **“So I was gonna say there are certain words that your group would use exclusively?”** Exclusive to us? I suppose, yeah. Yeah. ‘cause those are words based – those are words formed based on high school experiences – common experiences. **“And each group would have that? That same sort of a basis?”** Yeah, I would think so. ‘Cause we have a – it’s like in English. Lets say this personality did something or – so that personality’s thing is attached to an event or an act and then in English you’d say I did a Monica Lewinsky, so something like that occurs in *swardspak* as well ummh like – ‘cause we had a librarian in high school ummh we called her *Ate Jo* – *ate* meaning older sister – a sign of respect for older people – and someone caught her picking her nose and sticking her booger under the table in the library. So *Ate Jo* became a *vakler* word for picking your nose. So its something like that that I was saying – I did the Monica Lewinsky – something like that. So then of course other people wouldn’t know what we mean by saying I caught an *Ate Jo*, ‘cause they wouldn’t be privy to the experience. **“But you could say that in Tagalog or English?”** Ummh, that’s how it was said – “I caught an *Ate Jo*.” In English but its queenified English – “I cauuuggghht an *Ate Jo*!” – something like that. And you could spell caught as “KOWT,” thereby queenifying it, thereby making it *swardspak* so yeah.

**“So the word *vakler* you use – and that’s...”** *vakler* – that’s... **“Could you explain *vakler* to me?”** It came from someone in high school I think. As far as I remember. It’s a variation of the word *vakla*. *vakla*, *veyklah*, *vakla*, *veyklah* or something, then *vakler* **“And that’s for your particular group?”** I couldn’t say that its exclusive to our group.

but all I can say is that's the word we use in our group to substitute *bakla*. "So would you call it *vaklerspeak* or just *vakler*?" Ummh, both. "You use *vakler* when you're talking to friends?" Yeah. "And that's just – but that's just to say it could mean gay?" It could mean a person or it could mean both. The language – or it could mean the group, so yeah gay [laughs] basically. It's our word for gay.

"How important would *gayspeak* or *vakler* be to your group? Defining it as a group, as a gay group? Is that a consideration? Do you think it matters?" Ummh, 'cause no-one really thinks about it, we just do it, we just use it. "But is it a sort of gay pride thing to do – that you can – that you do?" No, I don't think so. I don't think it's an armour – weapon you wield – that pride. "No, but I mean it's a sense of identity – a sense of sharing – something that maybe others don't have?" A small thing? "No, not a small thing, but just something that helps define who you are I suppose as gay people." Well generally speaking as a gay person – 'cause its *gayspeak*, so as a group – It's not really norm – I don't think anyone perceives it as a strict strong bonded group. But yeah, its more of a group of friends – casual – so its not that pride thing. We are one group – we're solid. It's also a solidarity thing. "But it must have some sort of impact or ramifications?" I guess it affirms what we share. 'Cause I mean ummh we talk the same way with other gay people although you use slightly different words but your talking the same way, so its not exclusive to just this one group. So I don't see how we can be perceived as ummh – as ummhh – an exclusivity thing with the group.

"Would it allow you a means of expression that might otherwise not happen? Does it give you another palette, another vocabulary to use so that you can express yourself in *gayspeak* in ways you could not otherwise express yourself?" Ummh, in terms of *gayspeak* it's not to clarify or it's – *gayspeak* wasn't thought about by the need to fill in the gaps of expression. It was created I think for – maybe for secrecy, primarily – for secrecy, and then for colour. So its not that we would cease to be – we would cease to identify ourselves as a group of people that speak the same language – *vakler*.

"Is it primarily used for humour – humour context?" Yeah. "You wouldn't use..." It's either being humorous or being bitchy, but it's a gay bitchy gay humour. "But its seems to me it's not maliciously bitchy? You're not actually being evil – evil and nasty – seriously evil and nasty" It's sarcastic. That's why *gayspeak* is largely for colour – for gay colour. Something that wouldn't be because ummh we needed to express something that we can't express in normal language.

"And what about – you met somebody, and you're conversing in *swardspeak* and there were words that you didn't know. How would that work?" Either you pick it – pick up the meaning through context or if you really cant make out what the other person is saying you ask so the person will explain, 'cause that's happened to me, ummh – there was this gay guy from Citibank at Benjie's party last year, and he said a gay word and it means a blow job or anal sex, but it wasn't something I'd heard before so I had to ask him what he meant, and then he clarified it. You generally got the gist of what he was saying anyway. So there would be instances of miscommunication, misunderstanding,

but it's easily corrected and its not – I don't think it would be a thing to hinder communication between gay people.

**“So would it also have sexual connotations, I mean....?”** People are used to talking about sex. **“So how big a part of *gayspeak* would sexual usage be?”** I couldn't say but – I can't say that it's a part of *gayspeak* but – or even – 'cause gay people love talking about sex so inevitably – it inevitably comes up using *gayspeak*. I think there was one gay academic writer who said that the most number of gay words – gay word variations – occurs for I think the word ugly and for sex so it gives you an insight to *gayspeak*. So there are so many gay words for – to mean sex and to mean ugliness – whether it's humorous or serious ugliness.

**“So it would be easy to – easy for you to decide not to use it. It just doesn't – at times it just doesn't slip up in certain company – come out speaking in *gayspeak* terms. Well I mean, like if you're home you'd be watching a movie or something and get excited and without thinking you'd blurt out...”** Well, that could happen. 'Cause there – specially when you're in an excited state – 'cause *gayspeak* is best said when you are excited. So yeah, 'cause it's a very – it's driven by excited states of emotion. Yeah, that could happen.

**“Anything else you'd like to say about *gayspeak* before we close? Anything you think I haven't covered? Anything you'd like to say?”** 'Cause it's not a – I guess for the *gayspeak* user, it's not really so complicated that – it's not something that you sit down – where you sit down and think about words. 'Cause it's – what *gayspeak* isn't is – it's not contrived. So it's spontaneous and its fluid so it's something that just happens – something that people just speak.

**“So it's passed on to oral tradition? And to write it is not really the real purpose, is it? It's actually used in line with...”** Yeah, with words, it's hard to write. Although of course when you're writing to someone, you're using the same tone maybe as how you talk to that person. You'd write it in *gayspeak*, but it's really for speaking, not for writing. **“Okay, thank you very much.”** You're welcome.

## ***Vakler* Vocabulary**

Note: S and Z are interchangeable

H can be inserted before or after vowels for a more affected sound

*Vakler* is derived from *Bakla*. The word formation is derived thus: *Bakla*, leading to *Vakla*, leading to *Veyklah*, leading to *Vakler/Vakleur* (for a more French sound).

***Anda/Datung***: meaning money

***Andaluz/Andalucia/Pureza***: meaning poor

***Aura/Awra***: meaning to get yourself noticed or to parade yourself.

***Baboo/Babush/Babayola/Babayoo***: meaning good-bye, bye-bye

***Bongga/Bongzi/Bongacious***: meaning fabulous

***Borlog/Bolog/Sholog***: derived from the Tagalog word *Tulog* meaning sleep; same meaning

***Borta***: means buffed, well-built or muscled

***Bruthra***: brother

***Buffra***: boyfriend

***Chaka/Chax/Chapter/Chammy/Chummie***: means ugly or horrible or unpleasant or undesirable

***Chika/Chez/Chiz/Cheez/Cheese/Charing/Char/Ching/Choz/Echos/Echoz***: means a joke or just kidding.

***Chimax/Chika/Chiz/Cheez/e/Chuva***: meaning gossip, news

***Crayola***: to cry

***Dax/Dakota***: derived from the Visayan word *Dako* which means big; meaning a big penis

***Dirti/Dirty***: dirty or gross or obscene or lewd

***Duty Free/Jutes***: derived from the Visayan word *Dyutay* which means small; meaning a small penis

***Erna***: meaning shit or something undesirable

**Essa/Sowz/Sowzy:** derived from the Tagalog word *Sosyal* meaning upper-class or classy or having good/expensive taste; same meaning

**Fez/Fahz:** face

**Flez:** meaning please or “*please*” or “*oh please*” (“queenified” inflection)

**Forty-eight years/Fifty Golden Years:** meaning someone or something’s taking a long-time

**Futhra/Futhers:** father

**Garido/Jaguar:** from the Tagalog/Spanish word *Guwardiya/Guardia* meaning guard; means a security guard

**Guffra:** girlfriend

**Hada/Hala/Hads:** meaning blowjob

**Hagard/Hagardous:** meaning tired or exhausted or harassing

**Hellewr/Haloo/Ola:** Hello!

**Jowa/Kyowa/Nyowa:** meaning boyfriend/girlfriend, partner, lover

**Kari Lang (Lang is Tagalog for “only”):** meaning it’s alright/its okay/whatever (the expression not the word).

**Kebs/Quebs/Que Ber/Dedma/Deadma** – meaning to ignore or it doesn’t matter.

**Kangkang/Kingking/Bongkang:** meaning sexual intercourse

**Keri/Kerri/Kari/Kahri:** derived from the word carry. It means something good/nice/cute/okay. It is an affirmative word.

**Kimbo/Bona:** anal sex

**Kohrak/Korek/Tru:** correct, true, yup

**Laps/Lapez/Lafez/Lafung:** to eat

**Luz/Lost:** something bad happening

**Ma-anda:** meaning rich

**Mahogany/Mahoma/Majoho/Homalyn:** meaning unpleasant or foul-smelling



**Mashoray/Makyoray/Taruz:** derived from the Tagalog word *Mataray* meaning bitchy; meaning bitchy or bitchin' or fabulous (can be meant positively or negatively)

**Merlie/Muher:** a girl, woman, female

**Muthra/Muthers:** mother

**Nota/Notes/Notril:** penis

**Orwag/Shorwag/Borwag:** call, ring-up

**Pa-Girl/Pa-Gurl/Pa-Gehl:** meaning to act in a feminine/feminised/effeminate way

**Pa-Man/Pa-Mahn/Pa-Mhin:** meaning something derogatory or its put on. To pretend you're "straight acting", or to put on a "butch" facade

**Papa:** meaning a boyfriend or a desirable male

**Rampa:** meaning "to go boy hunting" or "to mince" or "to strut your stuff" (sashay), for example to walk like a model on a catwalk

**Senz/Syt:** to sense or to experience to see or to look at

**Shivoli/Tivoli/Tibo/Tibam:** meaning lesbian

**Shonga/Bonga/Bona/Bonaroo:** meaning stupid

**Shorap/Kyorap/Nyarap/Nyarapae:** derived from the Tagalog word *Masarap* meaning delicious; same meaning; yummy (can be used for persons or things)

**Sistra:** sister

**Suryal:** surreal or strange or weird

**Tom/ Tom Jones:** derived from the Tagalog word *Gutom* meaning hunger or hungry; same meaning

**Tsugi/Tsugs/Chugs/Krug:** meaning defeated or beaten or killed

**Whin/Winner/Hapi:** something good happening

**Wiz/Wit/Waz:** meaning none, no, not

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