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ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN 330

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Some of the Formations of Queer Asian Pacific American Politics

From a human relationship perspective, the process through which each party agreed upon, with respect to “who is who,” is known as identity negotiation. It is this process that people set expectation of each other; establishing an invisible bondage that holds relationships together. A similar process also exists in social setting where people of different ethnicities and sexual orientation negotiate their identities to establish their socio-political power in the society. This paper explores how Asian Pacific Americans negotiate their political identity through social activities.

Historically, the Asian Pacific American gay and lesbian movement started sometime in October 1979 when the First National Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference in Washington, D.C., and the First National March for Gay and Lesbian Rights took place. Before this time, social issues involving sexism, misogyny, and homophobia were masked out by cultural nationalist movements, and were either politically ignored or unchallenged. The need to come out to present their identity stemmed from the fact that they, the Asian Pacific American gays and lesbians, including transgenders, were invisibly marginalized by both mainstream gay community and Asian American communities. A “safe space” in which queer Asian Pacific Americans can possibly build political and cultural identities must be created to enable them to integrate their queer, colored, and gendered selves (Aguirre and Lio, p. 7).

According to many Asian Pacific Islander American gays and lesbians (including bisexuals and transgenders), coming out was tremendously difficult because of lacking of awareness of the people of similar identities. Additionally, the media and theater only depicted white gays and lesbians, created confusions and delayed the coming-out process among Asian Pacific American gays and lesbians further. Coupling with a lack of visibility, racism and language barriers, the coming-out process experienced by ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN gays and lesbians occurred with intensified challenges.

To date there are many organizations supporting the ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals, and transgenders. Since 1965, an influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America arrived in Los Angeles area and its vicinity, making Los Angeles a new capital of immigrants surpassing New York to a large extent. As a result, there was a proliferation of ethnic queer supporting groups concentrated around the Los Angeles region (Masequesmay, p. 194). Initially, there was an Asian Pacific Islander (API) queer organization to support Asian panethnic groups in the mid-1990. Later on, queer Asian Americans wanted to create their ethnic-specific support groups. Consequently, support groups such as LGBT Pilipinos, Barangay, Chinese Rainbow Association, South Asian LGBT, Trikone, Gay Vietnamese Alliance, LAAPIS, Vietnamese lesbians, bisexual women, and female-to-male transgenders, ô-Môi emerged.

The supporting groups, since their formations, achieved remarkable milestones. For examples, the API queer organization participated in advisory board to advise California governor and legislature on issues affecting its community. The Trikone group, although its contribution was mainly in India, helped overturn the 2009 Delhi High Court's decision on going back to Indian's penal code section 377 against Indian's domestic LGBT groups.

Despite the gay pride parades the Asian LGBT groups did in major cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco along side the mainstream LGBT groups, their identities within their own communities remain invisible. Homophobia remains rooted in Asian Pacific American communities because of “saving face” practice, which is similar to “don’t ask, don’t tell” treatments to US military LGBT members. Their sexual orientation was not often spoken about, either at home or between community members and friends. The struggle for their identities continues. The politics game still plays on as “Lambda vowed to be more sensitive regarding issues that affect people of color. But when Tom Stoddard resigned from his position as executive director, they hired another white man, despite our (the ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN LGBT folks) lobbying efforts for a person of color or a woman” (Yoshikawa, Q & A, p. 55). The efforts to avoid reproduction of oppression in the ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN communities thus far had little effect. Over time, perhaps a couple more generations down the road there may be better signs of acceptance for LGBT identity in Asian American communities. May be it will never change because of the deeply rooted patriarchal system the previous generations Asian Americans had been exposed to. May be it does not matter at all whether the Asian American communities will proudly accept their LGBT members or not. Mean while, the negotiation for Asian Pacific American LGBT identities had only gained some small political grounds.

Works Cited

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