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# LGBT psychology in the Philippines

Eric Julian Manalastas & Beatriz A. Torre

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*This paper presents an account of the initial developments towards an LGBT psychology in the Philippines. We situate this on critical events leading to: (1) an official policy by the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) against anti-LGBT discrimination in 2011, the first in south-east Asia; and (2) the institutionalisation in 2014 of the PAP's LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group. Organising efforts have focused in four areas: research, education, advocacy, and practice. National conferences have served as naturally occurring moments for mainstreaming and visibility within the profession. Research progress is evidenced by the publication in 2013 of a special LGBT issue of the Philippine Journal of Psychology. Education efforts have involved teaching an undergraduate elective on LGBT psychology, training of psychology teachers to integrate sexual and gender diversity, and conduct of 'LGBT Psych 101' seminars. Advocacy has focused on 'giving away' LGBT psychology through engagement with the activist community, media, and support for anti-discrimination legislation. Finally, initial work in professional practice has been around raising awareness of LGBT issues in counselling. We reflect on these initial successes and present lessons learned as well as next steps for the development of an LGBT-inclusive psychology in south-east Asia.*

**Keywords:** Philippines; professional organising; LGBT psychology.

**M**UCH CAN BE DONE within the field of psychology to advance the human rights and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, families, and communities. The Philippine case is no exception. As a developing country with a long history of colonisation under Spanish and US regimes often considered the largest predominantly conservative Roman Catholic nation in Asia, where same-sex marriage, gender identity recognition, sex work, abortion, and even heterosexual divorce remain illegal, the Philippines appears to be an unlikely environment for fostering inclusion, affirmation, and activism for gender and sexual minorities within psychology.

Despite these contextual factors, we will tell a story of the initial gains and successes made within Philippine psychology towards positive engagement of sexual orientation and gender diversity. This paper aims to provide a narrative account, based on our perspectives as insiders, on the progress and developments of an LGBT-inclusive psychology in the Philippines over the past five

years. We begin with critical events from 2009–2011 in Philippine society that led the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) to adopt a landmark policy resolution on LGBT nondiscrimination, the first of its kind by a professional mental health association in south-east Asia. A discussion of the on-going initiatives and early results building on this enabling policy platform follows, including the founding of the PAP's LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group and our work in the fourfold areas of research, education, advocacy, and practice. Finally, we conclude with lessons learned thus far as well as reflections on challenges ahead for LGBT psychology in the Philippine context.

## **The Philippine context: An LGBT-friendly country in south-east Asia?**

The Philippines is one of many archipelagic countries in maritime south-east Asia. Classified by the World Bank (2015) as a lower-middle-income economy, a quarter (25.2 per cent) of the population of 100.1 million Filipinos currently live below the national poverty threshold (defined as living on less

than PhP8,778 or GBP 131.51 per month). Filipinos, as a culture, have experienced a long history of colonial rule under Spain, spanning the 16th to the 19th century, followed by US occupation from 1898 to 1946. One of the lasting influences of the Spanish regime was in terms of religion – the Philippines, along with East Timor, remains one of two majority Roman Catholic countries in Asia, with 80.6 per cent of Filipinos belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Although the Philippine Constitution guarantees separation of state and church, public debates and legal policies on a range of social issues are often highly influenced by religious fundamentalism and Roman Catholic morality (Ruiz Austria, 2004). Same-sex marriage, gender identity recognition, sex work, and abortion are all illegal. Only in 2012 did the Philippine parliament pass a highly contested law for reproductive health, including access to contraceptives and sexuality education in primary and secondary schools, after more than a decade in the legislature and a culture war that pitted progressives and the women's movement with the local Roman Catholic bishops' hierarchy. And heterosexual divorce still remains illegal in the Philippines; the only other country that does not allow divorce is the ecclesiastical state of the Vatican.

Despite the overall social and sexual conservatism in Filipino culture (Widmer, Treas & Newcomb, 1998), the Philippines is often considered one of the more LGBT-friendly countries in south-east Asia. Despite centuries of colonial rule, same-sex sexual behaviour has never been criminalised, unlike in neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore. Indigenous constructions of gender diversity that blend same-sex sexuality and transgenderism exist and are widely known (Garcia, 2013), such as *bakla* and *bayot*, terms in the Tagalog and Bisaya languages that may refer to either same-sex attracted men, especially feminine gay men, or to male-to-female transgender individuals (Nadal & Corpus, 2013). Pride events were celebrated as early as the mid-1990s, and civil society organising

for LGBT rights and equality is alive and well (UNDP, USAID, 2014). Within this backdrop came one critical event in 2009, when a collective of LGBT Filipinos filed a petition to run for a seat in the party-list system of the legislature under the banner of a political party called Ang Ladlad (a Tagalog phrase meaning 'those who are out or openly LGBT'). Their petition was disapproved by the Commission on Elections, who, citing verses from the Catholic *Bible* as well as the *Quran*, declared that Ang Ladlad, being composed of LGBT Filipinos, advocated 'immoral doctrines' and represented a threat to 'the wellbeing of the greater number of our people, especially the youth' (Commission on Elections, 2009).

Along with other concerned Filipino psychologists, we requested that the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP), our national professional organisation, issue a public statement concerning the Commission on Elections' ruling, particularly its claim that gender and sexual minorities somehow threaten people's wellbeing, including the wellbeing of young people. The PAP refused. Officials from PAP offered regrets, citing the absence of an institutional mechanism to engage in public interest matters despite it being part of the PAP's mission statement. More internal lobbying ensued, and in February, 2010, the PAP board formally instituted its Public Interest Committee, patterned after the American Psychological Association's Public Interest Directorate, as a mechanism to address the public on matters of social justice (J.E.G. Sapla, personal communication, 24 March, 2010).

At the same time, the Supreme Court of the Philippines had taken on the case of Ang Ladlad. It eventually overturned the ruling of the Commission on Elections, paving the way for the LGBT party's participation in the May 2010 national elections. Although a public statement from PAP became moot at this point, LGBT issues had come to the attention of the Philippine's national psychology organisation in a way it never had

before. And there was a positive change within PAP's organisational structure highlighting the importance of 'psychology in the public interest' (Brewster Smith, 1990), which would be instrumental in laying the foundation for LGBT psychology in the Philippines soon thereafter.

### **Foundations: The PAP (2011) LGBT Non-discrimination Policy Resolution**

The PAP's commitment to social justice and LGBT inclusion was tested in February 2011, when a popular morning television talk show called 'Umagang Kay Ganda' ran a segment on lesbian and gay children, featuring a Filipino clinical psychologist as a guest expert. Asked how parents should respond to having a lesbian or gay child, this PAP-certified psychologist advised conversion therapy in order to achieve a 'happy family life'. The PAP received letters and calls from concerned members of the public, including a formal ethics complaint against the psychologist in question, which could not have been possible prior to 2010, the year when the PAP formulated its ethics code.

In response to this critical incident and as a way to address matters related to sexual orientation and gender diversity in a broader, more systematic way, the PAP board directed its Public Interest Committee to come up with a document that would go beyond one incident in the media. In October, 2011, the PAP board approved a landmark policy resolution on LGBT non-discrimination. The resolution was published in the *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, the flagship journal of the profession in the country, in December, 2011, and widely disseminated to PAP members nationwide, through the organisation's official mailing list and website, as well as in print form during subsequent PAP conferences. At the suggestion of LGBT advocates working with communities where (unlike in Philippine psychology as a profession), English is not a primary language used, a translation into

Tagalog was drafted and approved in November, 2014, and subsequently published online<sup>1</sup>. To date, this policy is the only official document of the PAP available in official bilingual versions, in English and in Tagalog.

The policy statement, the first of its kind by a professional mental health association in Asia, affirms the inherent dignity and equality of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, as well as their right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE). The policy also affirms that same-gender sexual orientations are a healthy, non-disordered variant of human sexuality, love, and relationships – a position made as early as 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association and supported by a global network of mental health professionals including the American Psychological Association, the British Psychological Society, and the World Health Organisation.

This policy statement also laid out a number of action steps to ensure the advancement of LGBT rights and welfare within Philippine psychology. The PAP's commitments are outlined as follows:

1. Oppose discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression;
2. Support the repeal of discriminatory laws and policies and the passage of legislation at the local and national levels that protects the rights and promotes the welfare of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions;
3. Eliminate anti-LGBT stigma and discrimination in teaching, research, psychological interventions, assessment, and other psychological programs;
4. Encourage psychological research that addresses the needs and concerns of LGBT Filipinos and their families and communities;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pap.org.ph/?ctr=page&action=resources>

5. Disseminate and apply accurate, evidence-based information about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to design interventions that foster mental health and wellbeing of LGBT Filipinos.

In order to ensure the organisation's commitments to advance LGBT rights and wellbeing, the PAP formed a partnership with the LGBT Concerns Office of the American Psychological Association's Public Interest Directorate. The APA's LGBT Concerns Office provides technical assistance and support for capacity-building and LGBT mainstreaming within PAP and in the larger Philippine psychology professional community, with the two of us (Eric Manalastas and Beatriz Torre) as co-ordinators. In 2012, the PAP became the first Asian member of the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNET), followed by the Hong Kong Psychological Society in 2013.

### **Mapping out needs and entry points within Philippine psychology**

The policy foundations in place, the two of us in collaboration with like-minded colleagues set out to work towards a particular vision of change – to build a Philippine psychology that advances LGBT human rights and wellbeing. With previous training and exposure to LGBT psychology (Eric participated in the 1st International LGBT Psychology Summer Institute at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor in 2008, while Beatriz was a participant in the second Institute in 2010), we realised that an important sub-goal to achieve our vision was to build capacity in a larger number of Filipino psychologists to engage LGBT concerns. Specifically, we identified the following needs in a preliminary scoping of the state of LGBT psychology in the Philippines:

- A visible network of Filipino researchers, practitioners, and psychology professionals engaged in LGBT psychology.

- An organisational structure to co-ordinate activities among Filipino psychologists and with external stakeholders such as media and the LGBT activist community.
- Locally contextualised, broadly accessible information resources.

To address these needs, we borrowed lessons from initiatives using the framework of gender mainstreaming and development (Daly, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005). Adapted to LGBT psychology, mainstreaming here is said to unfold in three stages, beginning with the adoption of SOGIE terminology and the language of LGBT inclusion, followed by putting in place policies related to LGBT inclusion, and finally, implementation. Mainstreaming, as an approach, refers to creating change within existing structures, processes, and practices to achieve a vision, rather than carving out entirely new spaces and perpetuate marginalisation. Mainstreaming involves closing the gap between mainstream psychology and LGBT psychology, such that LGBT lives and experiences are understood using the tools and frames of psychological science and practice and at the same time, psychology's theories, evidence base, and professional practice are transformed by knowledge contributions from LGBT voices and perspectives (Goldfried, 2001).

To implement the PAP policy, we identified four areas of activity by Filipino psychologists. These activities are: (1) research; (2) education; (3) outreach; and (4) professional practice. First, Filipino psychologists conduct research and produce new scientific knowledge related to human behaviour, affect, and cognition (Bernardo, 1997). Our flagship peer-reviewed journal, the *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, is published twice a year, in English, by the PAP. Second, Filipino psychologists teach – in higher education, in training contexts, and even in basic education (Teh, 2012). Classroom-based as well as non-traditional teaching is an important activity of many Filipino psychologists; for

some it may well be their primary professional activity. Third, outreach – which encompasses extension services to the public, policy-related activities such as legislative advocacy, and connecting to media and other platforms for public education (Estrada Claudio, 2012). Finally, professional practice – perhaps the quintessential and certainly the most direct form of service conducted by psychologists, especially those coming from subfields like clinical psychology and counselling (Carandang, 2012; Tuason et al., 2011).

Using this framework and armed with the PAP policy, we initiated LGBT inclusion efforts across these four interconnected spheres of activity. We discuss some of the initial successes along those four areas.

### **Research**

In terms of knowledge production, we identified the need for more research on Filipino LGBT lives and experiences. Since 2010, we have organised dedicated LGBT programming in the annual conferences of the PAP and of the other national association in psychology, the Pambansang Samahan sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino (PSSP), a smaller but equally active organisation dedicated to advancing indigenous and cultural psychology in the Philippines. In the 2010 PAP conference, for example, two symposium sessions carried the phrase *LGBT psychology* for the first time in their titles: ‘LGBT Psychology 1: Filipino Lesbian and Gay Identities and Relationships’ and ‘LGBT Psychology 2: Issues and Applications’ and featured three papers each. In the same year, a symposium titled ‘Sikolohiyang (Psychology) LGBT’ was part of the PSSP conference.

The goal here has been to ensure that LGBT concerns have a visible place in convention programming, where researchers, students, and psychologists can attend and hear empirical work being conducted in the Philippines about Filipino LGBT matters (Ofreneo, 2013). Whereas in the past, any paper on an LGBT topic would

have been relegated to a generic ‘gender’ or even ‘sexual behaviour’ session, now we are strengthening the practice of staking out LGBT-specific spaces and sessions in these research-related events.

Beyond conference programming, we have begun making contributions via peer-reviewed research publications. In December, 2013, a special issue of the *Philippine Journal of Psychology (PJP)* dedicated to LGBT psychology was published. In keeping with the spirit of capacity-building, we organised a two-day residential writing workshop for prospective contributors, facilitated by a former *PJP* editor. After peer review by invited international referees, the issue came out featuring nine original articles by Filipino LGBT psychologists, most of whom were publishing LGBT work for the first time. The issue included a review of Filipino LGBT psychology (Ofreneo, 2013) and eight empirical research papers on Filipino sexual prejudice and polyculturalist beliefs (Bernardo, 2013), transnegativity in the Philippines (Macapagal, 2013), gay children in conflict with the law (Villafuerte, 2013), sexual roles among Filipino gay men (Muyargas, 2013), coming out stories of Waray youth (Docena, 2013), friendships between women and gay men (Torre & Manalastas, 2013), dynamics of Filipino lesbian and gay couples (Kintanar, 2013), and media-based interventions to reduce homonegativity (Clemente, Billedo & David, 2013). The issue sold out in two months – the second time in *PJP* history – and is now on its second printing. Plans are now underway to produce a second special issue on LGBT psychology. This is scheduled to come out in 2016.

### **Education**

Psychology is a duly recognised major in universities in the Philippines, according to the Commission on Higher Education (Cue, 2015; Teh, 2012). As a popular choice among undergraduate students, psychology teaching offers an important site for LGBT inclusion as well as possible exclusion and



perpetuation of misinformation about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

There are two approaches for making LGBT topics visible in the psychology curriculum: (1) integration into existing courses; and (2) development and delivery of stand-alone courses on LGBT psychology. Initiatives by individual faculty for integration of LGBT topics in psychology courses exist in the Philippines. Teachers in public, State-run universities like the Polytechnic University of the Philippines incorporate LGBT topics in their curriculum. Individual faculty from private, Catholic universities also ensure LGBT inclusion in their courses (e.g. graduate and undergraduate seminars in gender and sexuality at the Ateneo de Manila University, a Jesuit school in Manila). At the De La Salle University Manila, junior faculty have begun to include sexual orientation and gender diversity in courses like introductory psychology and developmental psychology. Though not focusing exclusively on LGBT topics, the courses taught by these Filipino psychologists weave in LGBT concerns and examples in otherwise mainstream psychology content.

A case example of a stand-alone course is an undergraduate special topics elective first designed and taught at the University of the Philippines Diliman entitled 'LGBT Psychology'. This twice-a-week course, which was first offered in 2010 and has been available for nine semesters running, focuses exclusively on LGBT issues in psychology, including topics such as coming out and sexual development, stigma and discrimination, LGBT health, intersectionality, homoparentality, queer politics, faith and religion, and issues in conducting LGBT research (Manalastas, 2015). This course has been recently replicated in two other parts of the country, at the University of the Philippines Tacloban and at the University of the Philippines Miag-ao beginning 2014.

Outside formal classroom contexts, we developed a public education module we call 'LGBT Psych 101'. This is a flexible

training package, with common core messaging (depathologisation, anti-LGBT stigma, and minority stress), suggested learning activities, and audiovisual support materials that is suitable for delivery to a wide range of public audiences other than psychology classrooms. In May, 2013, in partnership with the Ateneo de Manila University's Social Psychology Action Research Laboratory and the University of the Philippines Centre for Women's Studies, we designed and conducted a two-day national facilitators training workshop on conducting LGBT Psych 101. The objective of this activity was to create a pool of talent of Filipino psychologists with the knowledge, skills, and efficacy to run the public education module and 'give LGBT psychology away'. Eighteen participants from 16 different universities participated, with a commitment to conduct at least two LGBT Psych 101 sessions within six months of the workshop. This strategy led to the immediate delivery of the module for diverse audiences such as the Philippine National Police, the Department of Education, parenting groups, local HIV organisations, school based counsellors, not to mention the 16 academic institutions of the trainees.

### ***Outreach***

Outside of research and teaching, psychologists can play a role in broader efforts to promote social change and wellbeing, an approach sometimes called psychology in the public interest (Brewster Smith, 1990). These can include psychology experts sharing knowledge to inform policymakers, engaging media on issues of human behaviour, and taking principled and formal stands on pressing social issues where psychological expertise, broadly defined, can contribute in debate and decision-making (Cohen, Lee & McIlwraith, 2012).

As a consequence of its LGBT-affirmative policy, the PAP sent an official letter of support in August, 2012, for a proposed ordinance on non-discrimination being debated at the council of Cebu City, the second most

populous metropolitan area in the country and an important centre of politics, trade, and culture in the southern Philippines. This was the very first time the PAP, as an institution, engaged in legislative advocacy in relation to one of its policy statements. In his sponsorship speech, the main proponent of the bill cited the PAP's policy resolution; the proposed ordinance was passed unanimously shortly thereafter.

Aside from engaging policy and political institutions, attempts have also been made to include LGBT issues in psychological forays into media. Through a column for the online news portal Interaksyon.com, Filipino LGBT psychologists have written a number of popular articles, for example, on lesbian and gay parents (Rosales Parr, 2013). One notable use of this online space was to respond to a highly circulated column piece in February, 2013, written by one local celebrity-mother on the topic of LGBT children (Bersola-Babao, 2013). The writer interviewed a clinical psychologist who, upon being asked for the appropriate response to a child who may be lesbian or gay, remarked: 'Arrest the situation. But most parents encourage the situation. Let's be moral in making the child understand the situation. We tell our child, "Anak, mali ito" [Son/daughter, this is wrong].'

The PAP immediately issued a statement contesting the view that children who are gay or lesbian are somehow inferior, affirming the position of the profession that being gay is non-pathological (PAP, 2013). A counter-piece, written by developmental psychologist and parenting researcher (Peña-Alampay, 2013), emphasising autonomy support and warmth for all children, including LGBT children, was published within days of the original piece.

### ***Professional practice***

Professional psychological practice in the Philippines is composed of three streams of interrelated activity: psychological assessment, psychotherapy, and design and delivery of counselling psychological

programmes (Cue, 2015). A number of individual psychology practitioners have begun to incorporate an LGBT-affirmative lens in their practice, especially in working with clients who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Since the 1990s, Margarita Go-Singco Holmes has pioneered sexuality-affirmative clinical practice in Philippine psychology and has written extensively on her experiences, often having been the lone voice in the field for many years (Holmes, 1993, 2005). LGBT-affirmative counselling is now being offered by individual practitioners (Ofreneo, 2010), while some have presented work on gay-affirmative therapy at the PAP conference (Kintanar & Rodriguez, 2011). Some school-based counsellors, for instance, at the University of the East and the Ramon Magsaysay (Cubao) High School, both in Manila, have also been supporting LGBT students via their institutions' guidance and counselling programmes.

Many opportunities to inform and improve psychological practice with LGBT populations exist, especially in contexts where there is a need to transform and redress silences regarding sexual and gender diversity (Nel, 2014; Tuason et al., 2011). One important avenue for future work is the development of local practice guidelines for working with LGBT people, akin to what has been established in other countries like the US (American Psychological Association, 2012) and the UK (British Psychological Society, 2012). Presently, there are no practice guidelines of any sort in Philippine psychology, though there are initiatives to develop a framework in the context of disaster mental health and psychosocial services, which may also serve as a possible entry point for LGBT inclusion in the future (McSherry et al., 2014). The absence of more general clinical practice guidelines in Philippine psychology appears to be one perceived barrier for the development of more population-specific guidelines (A.S. Alianan Jr., personal communication, 6 March, 2014), so a more integrationist approach, such as supporting the creation of



general guidelines for clinical practice and ensuring LGBT-inclusivity may be a possible first step.

Another avenue of work in this area is to investigate the prevalence of psychologists engaged in SOCE (sexual orientation change efforts), also known as conversion or reparative therapies (APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009). Little is known about the extent of this unethical practice in the Philippines, though anecdotal reports suggest that some practitioners, especially those from an anti-LGBT faith-based tradition, may be offering some form of it (Estrada Claudio, 2012; Holmes, 2005).

### **Strength in numbers**

Three years after the PAP's non-discrimination policy, we achieved a milestone in addressing the need for a visible network of Filipino researchers, practitioners, and psychology professionals engaged in LGBT psychology. In January, 2014, the PAP approved the creation of the LGBT Psychology Interest Group, the first and only official collective of psychologists and allied mental health professionals in south-east Asia working for LGBT rights and wellbeing. This organisational structure, instituted as a permanent arm of the national association, was designed to co-ordinate activities among Filipino psychologists and with external stakeholders such as media and the LGBT activist community, to fill in the gaps we identified at the beginning of our work in building capacity for Philippine LGBT psychology. And as there is no formal mechanism within PAP for monitoring progress on the commitments outlined in the 2011 policy, the special interest group, since its inception, has also acted in this capacity. Though originally a small circle – we began with 10 like-minded Filipino psychologists in our original proposal for formal recognition – we have since grown to more than 50 active members, including affiliates from other south-east Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. After a

'coming out party' in March, 2014, the special interest group, through a one-day strategic planning exercise, formalised its mission statement:

We are the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Psychology Special Interest Group of the Psychological Association of the Philippines. We build an LGBT-inclusive psychology in the Philippines by developing the capacity of psychologists and allied professionals to engage in research, education, advocacy, and practice for LGBT rights and wellbeing (Agana, 2014, p.4).

Under the banner of the special interest group and in partnership with activist colleagues, we have conducted more capacity building activities such as a teachers' workshop on supervising undergraduate LGBT research in January, 2015, and a second national facilitators' training workshop on conducting LGBT Psych 101 attended by another 18 participants in April, 2015. Aside from internal capacity building, our special interest group has also represented the profession of psychology externally in LGBT community events, such as the 2014 Pride celebration in Quezon City, and in roundtable discussions, fora, and civil society meetings related to LGBT rights advocacy organised by groups like the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, ISEAN Hivos, UNDP, and USAID.

### **Lessons learned so far**

Some lessons can be gleaned from our work in the past five years of building LGBT psychology in the Philippines. These insights are necessarily tentative and may not apply directly to the challenge of LGBT inclusion in other countries, especially contexts with highly developed professional psychology associations or extremely hostile, anti-LGBT social climates. Nonetheless the initial gains in the Philippine psychology landscape have lead us to a number of reflections that could serve as suggestions for others interested in initiating similar work. Here we discuss three.

First, assemble a core of like-minded talent. An individual, lone wolf approach is difficult to sustain. Prior to 2009, individual psychologists like Mira Ofreneo (2003) and Margarita Go-Singco Holmes (1993, 2005) had already attempted to begin conversations around homosexuality and Philippine psychology. But given the tendency in mainstream psychology to perceive LGBT issues as peripheral or too specialised (Goldfried, 2001), coming together to gather strength in diversity and in numbers greatly benefits the cause of LGBT inclusion within the profession, based on our experience from 2010 onwards. We were conducting informal side meetings for four years during the annual PAP conferences, asking individuals we knew personally to be LGBT or allies to attend, before we were able to gather enough people ready and willing to put their names on a formal request for the institution of the LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group. In hindsight, those meetings and interactions were helpful in building trust and collective readiness that we needed to move forward as a fledgling organisation (De Vita, Fleming & Twombly, 2001).

Second, obtain support and legitimacy. Support here refers to the buy-in of the relevant internal authorising body, in this case, the PAP leadership, while legitimacy refers to recognition and backing by the external community of stakeholders, such as the LGBT activist community and other LGBT psychology collectives (Moore, 2013). Both internal and external linkages are critical to achieve the objective of closing the gap between mainstream and LGBT psychologies (Goldfried, 2001). One concrete example of an activity we initiated to this end was a half-day, no-cost workshop on LGBT psychology for the administrative staff of the PAP in 2013. We ran our LGBT Psych 101 module and invited two prominent LGBT activists to tell their stories, speak about their work, and engage the PAP staff on how the LGBT community would benefit from engagements by psychologists and mental health professionals. The staff, including secretaries and

finance officers, expressed appreciation for the learning opportunity, which we later discovered was the very first time they were provided with such a professional development event. Some remarked that it was the first time they met an out transgender woman, and one staff member even took the opportunity to come out as a gay man.

Third, focus on the unique contribution of LGBT psychology to advocacy efforts. In country contexts where mental health professions are marginal and developing (World Health Organisation, 2009), even local LGBT activist communities may not make the connections between social stigma, LGBT rights, and wellbeing. LGBT psychologists can provide a language, one based on scientific research, to combat inaccurate social beliefs about LGBT people and to offer another argument – one based on the interplay of enjoyment of rights, health, and wellbeing – for political projects like non-discrimination (Morin & Rothblum, 1991). This strategy, called ‘facing’ by one LGBT psychologist leader (Pope, 2012), is important because psychology, psychiatry, and other mental health professions have long histories of being used as one of three institutional instruments of anti-LGBT stigma, alongside religion and the law. In the Philippines, local activists are now empowered to call upon psychologist voices in addressing persistent beliefs that link sexual orientation and gender diversity to pathology.

### **Next steps**

During the strategic planning exercise of the PAP’s LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group, we identified the following strategic objectives for the coming five years (Agana, 2014, p.7):

- Achieve a critical mass of members nationwide.
- Influence other PAP divisions and interest groups to be more LGBT-inclusive.
- Become the country’s foremost provider of evidence-based knowledge resources on LGBT psychology

- Gain recognition internationally for our contributions to LGBT-affirmative research, education, advocacy, and practice.

These four goals represent our aspirations as a collective in the short term. We hope to increase our numbers, in order to include more voices and perspectives, as well as our reach, to go beyond what is sometimes referred to as ‘imperial Manila’ (the observation that professional activities, opportunities, and resources often centre in urban areas, particularly in the nation’s capital). Following our approach of mainstreaming, bringing our message of inclusivity to the other divisions and interest groups is an important target, in order to avoid ghettoisation. We also aim to continue giving LGBT psychology away by creating and disseminating scientific evidence on Filipino LGBT lives and experiences towards our vision of equal rights and wellbeing for LGBT Filipinos. Finally, we wish to share our experiences, challenges, and ongoing lessons as a collective beyond the shores of our archipelago, to provide a model of how LGBT psychology can grow and flourish in a developing, postcolonial nation in the global south.

Many exciting challenges, both internal and external, lie ahead for LGBT psychology in the Philippines. Some of the challenges are the same challenges faced in Philippine psychology in general, including the scarcity of human resources particularly in the very low number of psychologists available to Filipinos, LGBT or otherwise, who need services (estimated to be only 0.14 psychologist per 100,000 citizens in the population; WHO, 2009), as well as barriers to health care delivery partly due to Asian cultural values and belief-systems that stigmatise mental health care seeking (David, 2010). Capacity building in the four key result areas continues; we want to strengthen, in particular, the practice pillar which so far has received the least attention, especially in the context of increasing state regulation of professional psychology in the Philippines

and in the ASEAN (Cue, 2015). The spectre of conversion therapy and the complexities of sexual orientation change efforts delivered in the context of faith-based or pastoral counselling locally remain and need to be confronted once and for all. Pressing intersectional issues such as gender-based violence especially among sexual and gender-minority women demand attention, and in the absence of feminist organising in Philippine psychology – there is no PAP division or special interest group on the psychology of women or gender – concerned members of our collective have been taking up the cudgels (PAP, 2014). Engagement of issues not yet part of our conversations in Philippine psychology and in LGBT rights organising in the Philippines, such as the experiences of intersex people, needs to happen. Finally, with the filing of a comprehensive mental health bill in the Philippine legislature, outreach to the other local mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, social worker, and guidance counselors will be important in the years to come.

## **Conclusion**

LGBT psychology has come to south-east Asia. Our work in mainstreaming LGBT issues in Philippine psychology – via research, education, advocacy, and practice – are in early development, but the ground work is on-going and there are initial successes to be celebrated. There is much opportunity for psychologists in the Philippines to make our profession truly advancing of the rights and wellbeing of all Filipinos, across the spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations.

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## Correspondence

**Eric Julian Manalastas** is a junior faculty member at the Department of Psychology at the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he teaches an undergraduate course in LGBT psychology. He is founding co-ordinator of the LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group of the Psychological Association of the Philippines. His research interests include homonegativity, friendships across sexual orientation, and sexual minority health.

Email: [eric.manalastas@gmail.com](mailto:eric.manalastas@gmail.com)

**Beatriz A. Torre** is a lecturer at the Department of Psychology at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She is also the co-co-ordinator of the LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group of the Psychological Association of the Philippines. Her research interests include everyday sexism and friendships across sexual orientation, as well as exercise participation and motivation.

Email: [beatriz.torre@gmail.com](mailto:beatriz.torre@gmail.com)

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