



# Changing Sexual Identities in the Philippines

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Studies on Filipino families and child-rearing practices make references to the differences in the socialization of young boys and girls and to the different roles assumed by women and men in the family and community (Go, 1992; Medina, 1991; Jocano, 1978). As in most other countries, these differences are in line with the traditional distinctions made in the characteristics, activities and roles attributed/assigned to women and men.

Hence, references are made to the strict/restrictive upbringing of Filipino girls (i.e., not allowed to be staying out late or to be away from home) when compared to boys who are given greater freedom to be with friends and do more as they wish. Filipino girls also grow up learning or imbibing the expectation that as females they are to be soft and mild-mannered, and beautify themselves, be obedient and serve their families, not get into fights or otherwise not to act like boys. Filipino boys, on the other hand, grow up learning that members of their sex must be assertive or aggressive, strong, brave and forceful and also not act the way girls do. But while such traditional notions or ideals of what is male/masculine and what is female/feminine remain in the Philippines (as these do in most other societies), it has become increasingly difficult to refer to any one kind or standard of masculinity or femininity given today's accelerated pace of social change and the increasing socioeconomic differentiation within societies. The latter heightens consciousness of existing differences in ethnicities, social classes, religious backgrounds and beliefs, rural-urban residence, age groups and so

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forth. These (sub)cultures exert an influence on gender-role definitions and on the ideals of masculinity and femininity and therefore, on the formation of self- and sexual identities. Consequently, some have proposed the notion of multiple masculinities or femininities (White, 2000; Connell, 1997) to capture ongoing changes and the increasing diversity of societal views regarding sex and gender attributes, roles and relationships.

## II. CHANGING FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IDENTITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Focusing first on the notion of femininity, one notes that this has been undergoing significant changes as a result of the historical changes in women's roles and the women's movement (or feminism). In the Philippines over the last 50 years or so, national statistics reveal narrowing gaps in the educational statuses of the sexes, not only in terms of educational attainment or levels but also in educational fields. There is far more gender-crossing in educational fields today than previously observed with women entering traditionally male fields like medicine, law and engineering and men entering traditionally female fields like teaching and nursing (NCRFW and ADB, 1995). In the area of employment too, female employment has been growing faster than male employment reflecting in part the increasing demand for female workers in today's economy (Lim, 2001). And, while female wage rates remain lower than men's wage rates, women's entry in the labor force has eroded the earlier complex of ideals surrounding women's role as homemakers. Hence, many of today's girls and young women are growing up in homes where both mothers and fathers are working and with less consciousness of the sex-typing of educational fields, trades/occupations and activities and roles that existed in earlier periods.

This is not to say that Filipino girls and young women today are all "modern." Although changing educational, employment and economic opportunities do translate to changing values that impinge on women's self- and sexual identities, it is also true that the so-called "modern" views on sex and gender roles co-exist with more traditional ones. It is the tension between them that young Filipino women deal and grapple with as they evolve their own self-definitions and identities.

Turning next to today's emerging masculinities, the few studies on men and men's roles have similarly looked into the impact of historical socioeconomic changes and the women's movement on men's sense of their masculinity or maleness. Noting how changes in African colonial economies and subsequent decolonization processes weakened men's roles as the warrior-protectors of their tribes/local communities and also as the breadwinners of families, Safilios-Rothschild (1997) has argued that modernization tends to leave men with little replacement for their traditional roles in society. It is to be noted that these traditional "gendered" roles of men (as protectors and breadwinners) were institutionalized in patriarchal structures that gave them more power and privilege than women. But, as women increasingly came to share in the work and activities traditionally reserved for the opposite sex, men

began to lose their higher status and favored position over women.

Not a few studies therefore, have argued that the lack of alternative social constructions or definitions to men's traditional roles has had the effect of "downgrading" men, even as change and modernization expanded women's roles and spheres of activities beyond the family and home (Cornwall and White, 2000; Connell, 1997). While admittedly, the expansion in women's roles has "overburdened" them, this has not downgraded their sense of what they can accomplish and do whereas men have had more difficulties crossing over and assuming roles/activities in the domestic sphere while losing their dominance and control in economic and community-wide activities. Studies reveal that this loss of power and dominance on the part of men has prompted not a few of them to turn abusive and violent towards women and children (Chant, 2001).

In turn, the women's movement, in its fight for gender equality, has expectedly taken issue with the continuing patriarchal relations in modern societies and with the violence perpetrated by men against women. By drawing attention to these issues (or by focusing on patriarchy), feminism and the women's movement have reinforced the social image/construction of men as not only exercising power over women, but as oppressing and victimizing women. And, while the weight of evidence indeed shows that violent acts like murder and rape and other criminal offenses are committed more by men than women, the stereotypical images of men constructed by feminism tend to ignore the fact that the majority of men are not oppressors and violators of women (Connell, 1997). It is in this sense that the women's movement has been criticized as contributing to sex-typing and the stereotypical thinking of men as oppressors (and conversely, of women as victims), and hindering the development of new or alternative social constructions of men's roles. But, as with young women, the social influences arising from the erosion of the traditional division of labor between the sexes and the advance of the women's movement are impinging on the consciousness of young men and on the formation of their self- and sexual identities.

### III. HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITIES

If prevailing social constructions of femininity and masculinity are changing, so too is the popular notion that those born male or female are necessarily heterosexual (attracted only to others of the opposite sex). Throughout much of human history, social structures have been such that men and women could only be conceived of as heterosexual beings, while the notion of homosexual males and females (or of men and women being attracted to their own kind) was strongly resisted on social, religious and other grounds. Homosexual relations were seen as serving no larger social purpose in most societies, which viewed male and female unions (typically within marriages) as necessary for human reproduction, and the family units arising from such unions as the building blocks of social life. This view was further reinforced by religious teachings, which saw homosexual relations not only as a social aberration, but a

violation of natural and divine law and therefore, a sinful state.

The increasing dissociation of sex from reproduction, however, and the loosening of sexual codes and morals with modernization have also brought about greater social acceptance of homosexuality as a state of life and of homosexuals, even as significant proportions of the general public may remain homophobic (in much the same way that while many men remain chauvinistic and continue to cling to their macho images, many too, are altering their self-definitions of maleness). Social change processes, therefore, have not only heightened consciousness of the wide range of characteristics and personality traits that exist within each of the female and male sex categories but of the diversity of sexual identities beyond the dichotomous female and male construction of sex and its underlying assumption of heterosexuality. There is now wider recognition of homosexual states and even bisexual states and hence, also of the changeability or fluidity of sexual identities. New advances in science, moreover, have opened up possibilities for transexual change, enabling homosexual males to become more completely female through sex change operations that transform their bodies into those of women. While occurrences like these would have shocked or revolted many of the population years back, this is less so today as accounts of sex changes and transexual operations by some prominent personalities (such as the respected economist Donald McCloskey, whose book on his sex-identity change is as well-received as his writings on economics; she is now Deirdre McCloskey) are paving the way for newer social constructions of sexual identities.

The Kinsey Report, the first large-scale survey on sexual behavior and practices undertaken in the United States in the 1930s, showed that tendencies associated with homosexuality were not uncommon among the survey's male respondents, with 37 percent admitting being attracted to fellow males sometime during their life (Beiber et al, 1962). The Young Adult Fertility Survey in the Philippines on the other hand, indicates some evidence of homosexuality among sampled males. It revealed that although 84% of men who have premarital sex had experienced it with female partners only, the remaining 16% however had experienced it with female but sometimes male (4.9%) partners, with equally male and female (0.4%) partners, with mostly male but sometimes female (0.1%) partners, and with male partners only (0.5%) (Raymundo et. al, 1999:155). It is not entirely clear whether there has been a real increase in the incidence of homosexuality among men and women or whether the impression that they are increasing owes to the liberalization of sex norms and hence, to the increased reporting of homosexuals. But, in the study of self- and sexual identities, the increased reporting itself is significant as this suggests that more homosexuals today are finding it easier to arrive at and admit to definitions of themselves as homosexuals. This also allows us a better understanding of the formation of homosexual self-definitions among both the male and female populations.

But since the issue remains somewhat sensitive, and given its complexity, few systematic studies have been done on homosexuals and homosexuality in the country. Knowledge on

the topic derives largely from literary portrayals and journalistic and autobiographical accounts, and from the information and advocacy work of the movements for gay and lesbian rights. For this paper, a limited number of key informant interviews were undertaken with nine homosexual males and eight homosexual females. The questions asked in the interviews focused on four themes, namely (1) on their being or becoming homosexuals, their experiences in self- and sexual identity formation; (2) their present and past sexual relationships and their views and expectations of their sexual partners and relationships; (3) their sexual health; and (4) their own aspirations, ambitions and life goals. All the informants are Metro Manila residents whose ages range from 20 to 28 for the homosexual males and 23 to 30 for the homosexuals females. None of the key informants come from the very poor or the very rich classes but from ordinary states that the youth commonly find themselves in — e.g., as students or as the new or younger members of the labor force.

#### IV. HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITIES AMONG FILIPINO MALES

Homosexuals among the youth are exposed to the same socialization processes on gender-appropriate roles, attributes and behavior as their heterosexual counterparts. Unlike the latter however, who grapple with and need to locate themselves within that range of traditional to contemporary (or modern) role constructions of their being male or female, the homosexual youth has a far more difficult time arriving at a definition of the self and of his/her own sexuality. The numerous contradictions that surround adolescence are compounded in the case of the homosexual youth who has to deal with close to irreconcilable differences between his/her gender orientations and preferences on the one hand, and his/her being physically male or female on the other. Additionally, the homosexual youth must deal with the disapproval of significant others and society at large regarding homosexuality. This leaves them with little of the emotional and moral support sorely needed by adolescents in building their self-worth and arriving at a definition of themselves vis-a-vis other individuals in general, and heterosexual males and females in particular.

Recalling their own experiences, some of our homosexual male key informants mention arriving at a definition of themselves as homosexuals later in their childhood (over 10 years old), although almost all admit sensing a foreshadowing of their being gay much earlier. They distinctly recall incidents that made them aware of their "sex difference," e.g., being attracted to their male classmates as early as Grade I; preferring the company of girl-playmates rather than boy-playmates (and hence playing with dolls rather than with guns); or having already soft and feminine facial/bodily features and displaying shyness and effeminate tendencies even as a small kid.

While the study of Zarco and Badua (1985) on the determinants of homosexuality in the Philippines shows the saliency of children's association with homosexuals as a factor in

homosexual identity formation, the key informant interviews show only three out of nine who remember growing up among homosexuals. But even the three respondents feel that they were born homosexual with two attributing their homosexuality to genetics since they have homosexual cousins on the paternal and maternal sides of their families. It is interesting to note that with the exception of one key informant who feels that nurture may had more to do with his homosexuality than nature, all others are convinced (after having given this much thought) that they were born homosexuals. Elaborating on this conviction, one says that "...as God's creation, gays are born biologically. I did not intend to be like this nor did I push myself to act this way. I was compelled by my innermost feeling...my real me;" while another says that "Nature itself is open to it (homosexuality)" but it is "the environment or people that abhor this;" while still another feels somewhat slighted that the same assumptions of normalcy or "natural-ness" extended to heterosexuals are not extended to homosexuals. (He notes for example that researchers seldom ask heterosexuals why or how they became heterosexuals but these questions are always asked of homosexuals.)

While some of the informants do not completely disregard the influence of social and environmental factors in homosexual identity formation, they feel that the importance of such factors as one's association with other homosexuals lies not so much in the self-identity formation process itself, but more in the support that this gives to "...a person born homosexual to act as such" and "... to come out in the open" with his sexuality. Another one explains that he does not discount the possible effects of an "unhappy childhood" or "having been subjected to early sexual abuse" or "having a strong mother (for homosexual males) or a distant father (for homosexual females)" on one's becoming a homosexual, but that in his case, he does not attribute his being gay to having been sexually abused as a child (which he was), because he says "I know I was gay even before that experience (of abuse)."

From their own accounts, evolving or developing a concept of the self was a tough and traumatic experience. Our homosexual male informants admit to living with unresolved internal conflicts while growing up caused by their desire or longing to be female, but having to act like the male that they were not. Carrying this pretense eroded their sense of personal authenticity or integrity. They also talk about longing for the respect, approval and acceptance of their loved ones in the family — fathers, mothers and siblings but who generally, and sometimes violently, disapproved of their being gay. Hence, they speak of feelings of frustration all around, with themselves trying to please family members but who, in turn could not help feeling let down or shamed by their homosexuality. Not a few informants moreover, report having been taunted, teased and bullied by friends and classmates, while the more religious informants mention being ridden with guilt. One informant from the lower class felt that his having been born poor and gay was a "double curse" and that he "was convinced then that I couldn't get out of my economic status had I allowed the expression of my sexuality."

As might be expected, fathers and brothers are seen as the most rejecting of homosexual males while mothers and sisters try to be kind although they are clearly saddened by the informants' homosexuality. On the whole, families tend to deal with the homosexuality of a member by ignoring or not talking about this. Friends, peers and colleagues at work on the other hand, are reported by the informants to be more accepting of their homosexuality.

Now in their early or mid-adulthood (20+ to 30+), our key informants have come to terms with their homosexual state and claim that they are generally comfortable with this. Five out of the nine, however, continue to be cautious about revealing their homosexuality to others, choosing to do so only with a few select friends, colleagues and family members, whereas the four others are more open about their state or do not attempt to hide this. For the most part, they have learned to brush aside intrusive questions about their sexuality (one says he is "... tired of being asked why I wasn't born like your ordinary Juan"), and most admit to being bothered at times by the chauvinistic and homophobic reactions around them. Given their problems and difficulties in conforming with conventional gender role expectations, some also find themselves occasionally wishing they were born "straight" rather than gay.

Regarding sexual relationships, only one of the nine informants has never had a relationship and does not seem eager to have one, partly because he believes in lasting commitments, and also because he thinks that homosexual relationships cannot last. Two others have had one homosexual relationship each in the past but are with no partners at present. All the other informants have had several ("too many to mention" in the words of one) relationships. Three admit to having not only many liaisons in the past, but having two or three concurrent relationships at present. Two have had several relationships previously and one at present; and one remaining informant says that he does not have a partner at present but has had as many as six previous relationships. Some informants admit to being promiscuous, and while more of them are exclusively homosexual, two mention having had girlfriends and heterosexual relationships in the past.

Elaborating on the seeming lack of fidelity and commitment in homosexual male relationships, one informant attributes this to the Filipino homosexual males' preference for heterosexual (in fact, macho) males or to the prevalence of the "gay-straight relationship" in the Philippines as against the "gay-gay relationship." (This suggests that Filipino homosexual males are very much influenced by the prevailing social constructions of male-female romances and relationships). According to the informants, their relationships with "straight" men cannot last because their straight male partners will eventually choose real women over themselves. Describing some of their previous relationships and their break-ups, homosexual males speak of either having been taken advantaged of by their straight partners; or being left behind by their partners because according to the latter, they cannot bear a child or because they cannot marry. The homosexual male informants are only too familiar with scenarios and excuses such as these that none really expect fidelity or commitment in what some of them term a

*bakla* - man relationship.

On the issue of whether homosexuals should have the right to get married, some informants say this is not really necessary for the reasons mentioned above (i.e., the dominant "gay-guy" form of partnership common in the country is not meant to last). The informants, however, are generally supportive of homosexual marriage rights in the case of mutually homosexual (gay-gay) relationships, and as a matter of bestowing equal rights and recognition to homosexuality or "gayhood" (as is done to "manhood" or "womanhood") and acknowledging the diversity in sexual identities.

Despite their history of and propensity for several sexual relationships, most informants do not see themselves as particularly vulnerable to STDs and HIV-AIDS. Only three of the nine informants admit to being at some risk of these diseases. All report, however, that they have not yet been sick of any of these and only two informants know of other homosexual friends who were sick of *tulo* and *kuto* (and who immediately sought medical attention for their condition).

For the most part, the reason informants say they feel safe from STDs and HIV-AIDS is because they do not engage in anal sex but do oral sex instead. Moreover, they claim to be very selective of their partners, choosing those who are clean, with some education, and whom they know well enough. Some cite being monogamous within each relationship that they have, or using the condom as an additional protection against their catching such diseases. By and large, therefore, our homosexual male informants see themselves as engaging in safe sexual practices and hence, not particularly at risk to STDs and HIV-AIDS.

On their life goals and ambitions, our young homosexual male informants are not unlike other young adults in aspiring for stable and good paying jobs. Most seem to have a clear direction of what they want to be and feel that what they are currently doing (studying or working) is slowly and steadily bringing them to where they want to be in life, which is to be financially independent and recognized for the work that they do.

Interestingly, with the exception of one informant who had once aspired to become a priest, all the others do not see their homosexuality as a hindrance or constraint to their educational and employment ambitions. Those who feel that they did not have as much education as they wished or pursue the specific course that they wanted attribute this either to their family's poverty (i.e., family could not afford the fees for medical school) or to a mismatch with their own performance and aptitudes (i.e., informant was not very good in math). Not a few in fact feel that their homosexuality has been a plus factor in their jobs and in their determination to work hard and succeed in life. Knowing that he will not have a spouse and children of his own, one says that he needs to build up his savings and aim for financial security because he does not want to be dependent on others. Another says that while his family's lack of resources prevented him from studying further, his being homosexual



has predisposed him to go to libraries and to read a lot, which has led him to become a writer himself. He adds that homosexuals tend to be creative because they are more in touch with their feelings and emotions. Perhaps for the same reasons and not coincidentally, two other informants are also considering careers in writing themselves. Still another informant who now works as a Junior Manager of a business concern attributes his success on the job to his good public relations, flexibility and adaptability, which in his view are easily developed among homosexual men. Among the informants too, are those who attribute much of the success that they have attained to date (at school or at work) to their desire to prove to their parents and others that, contrary to the belief that homosexuals will get nowhere in life ("*walang patutunguhan*"), they can be their own persons and become independent and successful in their chosen careers or areas of work.

Finally, it is largely in relation to the wish that homosexuals be recognized as capable of doing whatever straight men and women can do that some informants feel that equal education and employment measures and other affirmative action for gays are useful (and not so much because they themselves suffered from discriminatory practices in school or at work). Equal rights and equal opportunity measures help send out the message that gays can perform the same tasks and do these just as well as other men and women. But our homosexual male informants concur that underlying the movement for gay rights is the need of homosexuals for social acceptance as normal human beings. They know that this is not legislated easily, but can only come with changes in the way society thinks of and relates with homosexuals.

## V. HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITIES AMONG FILIPINO WOMEN

Not unlike their male counterparts, our homosexual female informants say that they had sensed their homosexuality in their early years, but came to label their being/feelings as such only later in their mid-or late teens, finally acknowledging their lesbianism when they found a partner from among other homosexual females. In general, they recall that as children, they detested being dressed up like a girl and the games and toys associated with girls. Some recall being fond of or attracted to other girls from early on, with one saying she used to steal kisses from girl classmates in grade school.

Similar to the experience of gays, our homosexual female informants grew up with much frustration and lingering internal conflicts. They speak of their confusion of not knowing what they are: some felt they were not normal; others wanted so much to have a male body but were frustrated about being a girl; and there are those who wished they had been born "straight" or "a real female" to reduce the confusion in their sexuality and identities.

Additionally, they had to deal with the objection and disapproval of their families over their being "tomboys" or lesbians. But their narratives about this difficulty in their lives do not appear as harsh and are less violent than the accounts of gay homosexuals. One might

conclude that society in general may be less homophobic towards lesbians than towards gays. Reflecting society's gender norms, parents, siblings and family members may continue to treat lesbian relations as females, whereas gays are treated more harshly to force them to act as boys. At later ages too, lesbians are perceived as being relatively low-key as compared to gays who are stereotyped as rowdy and loud and inviting the scorn of others. On the whole, while homosexual female informants say they had to contend with the strong opposition of their families to their homosexuality, none speak of experiencing abusive treatment or violence. At the most, parents and siblings are reported as being disappointed and saddened but eventually accepting of the informants' homosexual state, with some mothers still expressing hope that their daughters will get married and have children or believing that their daughter's attachment to other females is but a phase that they will outgrow in the future. The informants likewise report that friends and peers at work are not hostile towards them, although they admit to select the people to whom they confide and reveal their sexual identity.

The accounts of homosexual female key informants also suggest a difference in the views of gay homosexuals and lesbian homosexuals on the formation of their self- and sexual identities. Whereas our homosexual male informants tend to think that they were born homosexuals (and tend likewise to be exclusively homosexual), more of the lesbian key informants think of their homosexuality as a matter of choice, which in turn, accords well with the fact that more of them too (six of eight), admit to having had bisexual experiences. Except for two informants, all the others have had boyfriends or male lovers in the past, with one saying that she has a part-time male lover at present in addition to maintaining a relationship with a lesbian friend. Probably because of their bisexual experiences, lesbians conceive of one's sexuality as not a fixed state but a fluid state that is subject to individual choice. They claim that at this point in their lives they have chosen to be homosexuals and while they feel that they will probably remain so, they are not entirely closed to the possibility that they may meet a man they would like to have a relationship with.

Consistent with their views and experiences as bisexuals, our lesbian informants are not too passionate on extending marriage rights to homosexuals with some saying they themselves do not like to get married, while others think that marriage is just an unnecessary rite. And while they aspire for fidelity in their relationships, fidelity is seen as faithfulness to one's partner at a given time. Some also add that agreements between lesbian partners vary — from those agreeing to so-called “open relationships” to those agreeing on some form of commitment towards each other. With the exception of one informant who has had only one homosexual relationship (her current one), it should also be noted that all others have had between two to six lesbian relationships to date in addition to the male lovers that many of them have had. With regards to the extension of marriage rights to homosexuals, therefore, this is seen by the informants as part of the rights advocacy for homosexuals (i.e., what is extended to homosexuals), although like their gay counterparts, lesbians feel that the more

fundamental issue in their lives is the equal recognition of their sexual identity and their equal treatment with heterosexuals.

Compared with their gay counterparts, our homosexual female informants do not see themselves as at risk to STDs and HIV-AIDS. None of them has ever contracted ailments of this nature, although two report having had urinary tract infections from using panty liners or sanitary napkins. With only one exception (who knows of a friend who was sick of STD), all the others know of no one suffering from these diseases. They are also of the opinion that promiscuity underlies much of the incidence of STDs and HIV-AIDS. In their view, therefore, these diseases have little to do with being male or female or heterosexual or homosexual.

Because they do not see themselves as promiscuous, the lesbian informants say they are not at risk of sex-related illnesses. Most also add that the sexual practices of homosexual females do not involve sexual intercourse or anal sex and that for the most part, these are limited to kissing, hugging, fingering, petting and embracing which do not make them as vulnerable to sex diseases as heterosexuals and male homosexuals. The informants further add that they are very particular about cleanliness and are quite choosy in selecting their partners.

On their life goals and ambitions, our lesbian informants are one with the gays in aspiring for good jobs and financial stability. At this point in their life, they feel that they are headed to where they would want to be. Although two of the eight informants had aspired as children to traditionally male trades and occupations (one to become an engineer or a pilot, and the other, to be a policewoman), they eventually became something else, but not so much because their homosexuality constrained them from pursuing their ambitions. The one who aspired to become an engineer or pilot says that it was her family's lack of money that prevented her from pursuing further training in these fields (she completed high school only and now works at a factory). The other, who wanted to be a policewoman, eventually went to college to become an accountant. In brief, given the circumstances of their families and their own inclinations, our lesbian respondents generally feel that they were not disadvantaged or discriminated on education-wise because of their homosexuality.

Most also report that their sexuality has not been an issue in their current place of work (although here it should be noted that a number of them are not entirely out in the open about their being lesbians) and that they have not been discriminated on because of this. However, one mentions that she was dismissed from a previous job because she had a relationship with the niece of the employer. Another says that she would have liked to work as a domestic helper abroad but knowing that employers prefer real women for this job, she decided not to pursue her application for this job. One other informant says that while she herself has not personally experienced discrimination at work, she mentions that employers do have their biases and not a few of them would prefer hiring non-homosexual workers.

The lesbian informants agree that there are homosexual rights issues to be addressed by society, the more basic of which is the recognition, respect and acceptance of their sexual difference from heterosexual males and females. They emphasize that they are not asking for special protection or treatment, but to be treated equally and normally as other individuals.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Since individuals are born either male or female, and since prevailing social constructions on gender follow this sex dichotomy, the dominant forms of sexual identities are those of being female and feminine and male and masculine, and with the further underlying assumption that males and females are heterosexual beings. Social constructions on sex and gender however, like other social norms, traditions and institutions change over time, influenced as they are by other ongoing changes and developments in society.

It is well known that modernization processes and various social movements have altered traditional gender norms and role-expectations and are affecting men's and women's self-images and sexual identities in different ways. For women, these forces have had the effect of expanding their roles beyond the traditional confines of home and family and enabling them to enter many trades and fields of activities previously reserved for men. Consequently, emerging notions of femininity among today's young women reflect less and less of the earlier restrictions imposed on their gender and more and more of their emerging equality with men. Modernization, on the other hand, has not really provided men with other alternatives to their traditional patriarchal and breadwinner roles in society, and hence, there are fewer men who have been able to cross-over the gender divide and assume some of women's traditional roles. Nonetheless, the changed roles of women today are forcing a rethinking of the earlier notions of masculinity away from the rigidly sex-typed *macho* images of earlier periods. Such rethinking too, is evident in the self- and sexual identity formation processes among today's younger men.

Ongoing changes are not only changing the standards of masculinity and femininity and reducing the stereotyping of male and female traits and roles, but are also liberalizing the views on homosexuality and facilitating the admission of homosexual identities among women and men. Despite this liberalization, however, accounts of homosexual male and female youth reveal difficult demands that homosexuality makes on one's personal character. Whereas heterosexual adolescents grapple with locating themselves within the traditional to modern and changing definitions of their sexes/genders, the homosexual youth struggle with more complex challenges posed by their biological sex and sexual preferences and by society's contrary expectations of their gender. But the fact that homosexuals are increasingly defining themselves as such is also indicative of the growing recognition of sexual differences beyond the dominant heterosexual male and female identities. Aside from heterosexual and

homosexual identities among males and females, emerging notions of sexual differences or diversity include bisexuality as well as other distinctions in sexual partnerships and relations (i.e., “gay and guy” or “gay and gay” relationships and so forth).

Overall, while today’s youth face greater conflicts and challenges in evolving a definition of the self, it would seem that the greater number are able to hurdle these and emerge with sufficiently integrated personalities. Admittedly, not all of the youth are as strong or successful in negotiating the transition to adulthood. Those falling in this category would include those with a low self-esteem or those with unclear or unstable definitions of themselves (indicating a failure in self- and sexual identity formation). The bullying, taunting and unkind treatment accorded homosexuals in particular and children and the youth generally render them vulnerable to problems of low self-esteem, which in turn may push the youth to dysfunctional, addictive and other problematic behavior. It is largely in this sense that the social acceptance of homosexuals and respecting the dignity of the youth are important to ensure the development of healthy self-constructs within themselves.

On matters of sexual health, the accounts of key informants suggest that the fears regarding risky sexual behavior among homosexual males and females may be exaggerated or unfounded. Although they admit to several relationships, the Filipino homosexual youth generally have only one partner at a time and their sexual practices do not involve anal sex (among gays) or sexual intercourse (among lesbians). They are also aware of the danger of STDs and HIV-AIDS and are conscious about protecting themselves from these diseases. Finally, ongoing change that brings us closer to egalitarian ideals – i.e., the equal recognition and treatment of individuals regardless of their gender and sexual preferences – should augur well for the youth’s sexual health. This should reduce the incidence of sexual abuses and violence between partners and promote greater honesty and caring in relationships.

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