Exploring the Relation between Queerness and Globalization:
Insights from a Photo-elicitation Research Project

Ellaine Beronio

Abstract

Heteronormative assumptions in development discourse render queer experiences and their political implications largely invisible in studies of development in the Philippines. There is, however, a need to examine queerness in the context of intersecting power relations of class, sexuality, and gender. In this article, I share my experience of using the visual method of auto-driven photo-elicitation in researching the relation between queerness and globalization in the context of call center work and the globalized space of the Makati central business district (CBD). The data gathering activity involved two phases: the photography phase, where participants took pictures in response to prompts in a shooting script, and the interview phase, where participants talked at length about the photographs they had taken. The photographs and interviews were then coded to bring out patterns and relationships that describe a particular form of subjectivity, which in turn was examined within a network of discourses in discourse analysis. Upon discussing the context of the research as well as the concepts on which the data gathering method is based, I explore the usefulness of the method to research in general as well as its place in feminist research in particular.

While feminist efforts have brought the woman question to bear on the practice of development work and have directed researchers' attention to the gender structures and ideologies that

shape the lives of women in general, the same level of engagement with the problematics of non-heteronormative sexuality is yet to be achieved in the field of development studies in the Philippines. Mainstream development policy has been following a "straight path" (Bergeron2009), assuming that actors of development are heteronormative, and thus fails to specifically consider the social relations that shape queer lives. Development discourse reflects and maintains this straight path, and the experiences of queers and the questions these experiences raise, particularly questions regarding poverty and development policy, remain largely invisible in studies of development (Thoreson2011).

However, discourses of development play a role in charting the fortunes and futures of non-heteronormative individuals (Thoreson2011; Bergeron 2009). Critics of the heteronormative assumption in development discourse point out that the lack of serious engagement with the political contexts and implications of non-heteronormative experience has led to unexamined notions about queerness and the struggle for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights (Bergeron 2009; Oswin 2007). Queerness needs to be understood in the context of broad development visions and policies and the practices and relations generated by global capitalism. Furthermore, the subject must be explored using research methods that give nuance to experiences of queerness and that allow these to be regarded in the context of power relations that may not often be associated with queer sexuality, such as globalization. Researchers can explore the use of data gathering methods other than, or perhaps in conjunction with, staple methods such as the interview, focus group discussion, or survey.

In this article, I share my experience of using the visual method of auto-driven photo-elicitation in researching the relation between queerness and globalization in the context of call center work and the globalized space of the Makati central business district (CBD). The research project involved queer women call center workers, who took pictures of the business district in response to a set of prompts and whose visual and verbal accounts of their lives and environment formed the basis of a discourse analysis that teased out relations between queer subjectivity and neoliberal development. After presenting the context of the research, I elaborate on the data gathering pro-

cess and the concepts on which it is based. I also explore the possibilities presented by photo-elicitation in doing research and discuss its aptness to feminist research in general.

Globalized space and the call center industry

The Makati central business district distinguishes itself from other places in Metro Manila by approximating the appearance of first-world urban environments. These places' mix of modern corporate buildings, shopping malls, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and other entertainment centers lend the business district a cosmopolitan atmosphere. Cosmopolitanism is an attitude and a set of skills that enable individuals to come to terms with difference (Binnie et al. 2006). The concept is associated with a modern ethic of being in the world formed through an awareness of other places and cultures (Robinson 2008).

Often thought of as a characteristic of the large and vibrant cities of the first world, cosmopolitanism is also deployed in the marketing strategy of governments and business real-estate developers in promoting cities and other urban developments as good places for investments (Rushbrook 2002). By re-imagining and re-branding urban areas as modern, high-tech, and culturally diverse, governments of aspiring world cities hope to attract capital for the service, financial, and information technology sectors and to draw in affluent consumers (Rushbrook 2002). In the bid for global city (Sassen 2001) status, cosmopolitanism is seen as a key to success. Sexual identities are embodiments of difference that a cosmopolite learns to live with. As part of their strategy to promote tourism and other consumption activities, the administrators of some cities actively promote homosexual cultures and spaces. Sexual diversity, seen as a facet of multiculturalism, becomes a form of symbolic capital connoting freedom and pleasure, characteristics that make a place conducive to both business and relaxation (Rushbrook 2002). To enhance their cities' cosmopolitan image, city governments in the US, Australia, and the UK have come to encourage gay visibility and incorporated gay culture into their tourism efforts (Rushbrook 2002).

The city of Makati's current comprehensive land use plan specifically mentions the use of cosmopolitan branding as a strategy to meet the city's goals, foremost of which is the international rec-

ognition of Makati as a "global center—one among a handful in the Asia Pacific Region—that serves as a nexus of international finance, promotes international cooperation and a model of urban governance" ("Comprehensive Land Use Plan" 2013). Make It Makati, a six-year revitalization campaign that began in 2012 and spearheaded by the Ayala Corporation, is expected to expand the CBD's first-world-like space of tall corporate buildings and sprawling commercial centers to include other areas of Makati City that surround the main business and commercial district. For instance, the area along Buendia Ave, called Makati North, is now being developed as "the young and creative hub of the city" ("Makati North" n.d.) and will host "universities, museums and theaters, art galleries and studios, BPO offices, and ad agencies" ("Makati North" n.d.), while the old Sta. Ana Racetrack is being transformed into an entertainment district, "a dynamic urban hub seamlessly complementing the distinct taste for living, leisure and lifestyle of today's modern urbanites" ("Circuit Makati: A new lifestyle playground rises in Makati" 2013). Revitalization is intended to boost Makati's image, giving it an edge in the competition for investments, especially with the emergence of newer business districts, such as Bonifacio Global City.

Makati's corporate developers emphasize the city's cosmopolitan culture, which dates back to the 1960s when the area was developed by the powerful Roxas-Zobel-Ayala family of corporate magnates (Michel 2010) into the country's largest business hub. The Makati central business district's privatized development now serves as a model for the creation and management of similar urban development projects such as Eastwood City, Rockwell Center, and Bonifacio Global City (Shatkin 2005). These privatized urban areas look and feel different from surrounding districts. In contrast to poorer neighborhoods, they are cleaner, have more trees and ornamental plants, host more open spaces such as parks, and are epitomized by buildings and other structures made beautiful by modern architecture (Michel 2010; Shatkin 2005).

It is not difficult to imagine third-world cities that are competing in the global high-tech service sector adopting a cosmopolitan image. Call center work is part of this service sector, which is based on information and communication technologies highly valued in globalization (Sassen 2000). In the Philippines, the call center

industry accounts for a huge share of the revenues generated by the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry.

In 2010, for instance, call centers generated about 70 percent of BPO revenues (*2010 Annual Survey Of Philippine Business and Industry* 2010). Business process outsourcing is "the delegation of one or more IT [information technology]-intensive business processes to an external provider that, in turn, owns, administrates and manages the selected process or processes based on defined and measurable performance metrics" ("Understanding the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Industry in the Philippines" 2007). In the Philippines, its main components are call center (voice) services, back office, data transcription, animation, software development and digital content production (Bird and Ernst 2009). The Business Processing Association of the Philippines (BPAP) has declared its intention to make BPO industry revenues rival those generated by Overseas Filipino Workers (*Offshoring and Outsourcing Philippines: Roadmap 2010* 2007) and the Philippine Development Plan for the years 2011 to 2016 has identified the BPO industry as one of the country's highest growth areas (*Philippine Development Plan* 2011) that the national government intends to promote along with mining, shipbuilding, and agri-business and forest-based industries (*Philippine Development Plan* 2011).

The Makati Central business district hosts the main offices of top call center companies such as Convergys, Sykes Asia, Aegis, SPi Global Services, and Teletech (*Philippines IT-BPO Investor Primer* 2012).

Researching queerness

While the cosmopolitanized space of the Makati central business district and the call center industry may provide opportunities for LGBT community building and organizing by bringing queer people together, it is important to examine the ways that these produce and deploy queerness. The central business district and call center work are mechanisms for the generation and deployment of particular ways of being queer that shape queer subjects, and their workings bear political implications on development work, particularly in understanding the political complexities of queer organizing and mobilization.

In examining the rules, practices, and mechanisms that delimit and define queerness in call center work and the central business district, I chose as starting point queer women call center workers' own understanding of their sexuality in relation to their environment and the broader context of their lives. To get a sense of how the participants see themselves, I made use of the technique of auto-driven photo-elicitation. The data gathered through this method became the basis for a discourse analysis that related queer subjectivity to neoliberal globalization.

Auto-driven photo-elicitation

At its most basic, photo-elicitation is the use of photographs in research interviews (Prosser2008). Though the technique seems simple, it is valued for generating fluent and detail-rich responses (Banks 2001; Emmison and Smith 2000; Prosser 2008). There are several reasons for how it can do this, and they center around the use of photographs. Photographs invite interpretation, and they engage the viewer in many ways. They owe their power to their capacity to hold multiple meanings, a characteristic that semioticians call polysemy (Hall 1997). In her book on visual methodologies, Rose (2001) identifies three main sites or contexts of meaning making in regard to photographs: production, the image itself, and viewing or audiencing. One or more of these sites are activated when one looks at a photograph. Barthes (1981), accounting for different qualities of responses to a photograph, makes a distinction between *studium*, or the photograph's capacity to elicit a rational response, and *punctum*, which provokes a more emotional response that comes from one's engagement with the photograph's evocative power.

By inciting meaning making, photographs in interviews provide an "impulse to speak" (Kolb 2008, 10). Banks (2001) notes the use of photographs' ability to lessen inhibition in interviewees. With the picture acting as a "neutral third party," it removes an interviewee's "awkwardness that comes from being put on the spot" (Banks 2001, 88). It also has the effect of pushing the interviewer's presence to the background (Schwartz in Emmison and Smith 2000), allowing the interviewee's account to take center stage. The technique has thus been used in research projects

where respondents, because of age or because of the sensitive nature of the topic, may have difficulty in expressing themselves (Woodley-Baker 2009; Epstein et al. 2006; Orellana 1999; Radley and Taylor 2003). Indeed, practitioners of visual research have described photo-elicitation as empowering and thus appropriate for research projects that endeavor to be collaborative or participatory (Kolb 2008; Jenkings, Woodward and Winter 2008).

Early uses of the technique used photographs that were taken by the researcher (Banks 2001; Emmison and Smith 2000; Prosser 2008). A modified procedure makes use of photographs made by interviewees themselves. This modified technique is called auto-driven photo-elicitation (Samuels 2007) or participant photo interview (Kolb 2008). By handling the camera themselves, participants have the final say in the choice of subject and the way the subject is framed. Auto-driven photo-elicitation ensures, too, that the photographs, which the participants will have to extensively talk about in the interview, are relevant to them, perhaps in ways that the researcher, due to differences in social context and experience, may not have anticipated or be able to anticipate.

In photo-elicitation, interviews are necessarily in-depth in order to draw out responses that are able to go into the heart of what interviewees think and feel about a subject (Banks 2001; Emmison and Smith 2000; Prosser 2008). With meaning making as their focus, the interviews are unstructured or semi-structured. The open format allows the participant to lead the discussion and possibly highlight themes and issues that that had not been foreseen and yet are relevant in addressing the research objectives (Kolb 2008, Jenkings, Woodward and Winter 2008). In auto-driven photo-elicitation, because participants' own photographs are used in the interview, the participant knows each photograph very well and can explain in detail its meaning and the process of its making (Banks 2001; Emmison and Smith 2000; Prosser 2008).

Using a shooting script

Samuels (2007) stresses the benefit of having a script or set of prompts to guide participants' photography in studies that employ auto-driven photo-elicitation. In his reflection on the conduct of a series of studies that he did on the emotional meaning of

Buddhism for child novice monks in Sri Lanka, he compares two separate photo-elicitation projects he has undertaken. Both projects were auto-driven, with the children taking pictures using disposable film cameras. The only difference is that the first employed a script made up of several topics for the children to photograph, such as "an important temple activity" and "what is difficult about being a monastic," while the second relied on only one instruction: "to take 10 photographs of anything that they like (literally, anything that attracts their heart/mind)" (202). Samuels observes that while the children in the first project were able to give extensive and personal accounts of their spiritual lives, the children in the second study found it difficult to go beyond giving a casual description of their photographs' content during the interview. The second set of participants "did not perform the assignment with the degree of foresight and reflection that was required when they had a script" (202). He concludes that his decision to have children take pictures without a script proved inimical to the goals of the research, as the method turned out to be "ineffective in eliciting responses that had relevance to my research interests or to the field of Buddhist studies altogether" (202).

Suchar (1997) argues that photography in the social sciences abides by the "interrogative principle," the notion that photographs can be used to answer sociological questions. The use of a script is meant to ensure that the photographs participants take will be able to contribute to answering research questions. It gives focus to a data collection and analysis process that, since it involves the production and interpretation of numerous photographs, threatens to be overwhelming. By employing a script, a study based on photo-elicitation can hope to strike a balance between spontaneity, which allows for the unexpected, and structure, which ensures that research goals are met.

While it suits my study's purpose to give participants some degree of control during data gathering, handing them the reins completely makes it very easy for research goals to get left behind and research questions to go unanswered. A script was thus devised for this study. It consists of 11 prompts that ask each participant to respond through her own photographs. The prompts are as follows: 1) a place you feel most comfortable in; 2) a place that defines you; 3) a place that embodies success; 4) a place that embodies freedom; 5) a place that is important to you; 6) the queer-

est/gayest place in the business district; 7) an ideal place for a queer woman; 8) a place for the ideal queer woman; 9) a place that makes the business district special; 10) the ideal work place; 11) a place outside of the business district that you feel strongly corresponds to any of the previous descriptions.

The prompts were meant to encourage the participants to think not only about their ideas about sexuality, but also about their views regarding work, their lives in the business district, and the things that they value. This broad approach was also meant to facilitate analysis, because it foregrounds sexuality's relation to other discourses. While the participants' creation of their own photographs was guided by a script, the process remained auto-driven. How the participants formulated their responses was entirely up to them. They could choose what to photograph and to frame objects, places, and people the way they wanted. They got to decide what was significant in each picture and could talk about this in the interview. Each participant got to choose what to include and what to exclude in her photographs and also to decide whether her visual response to a prompt was descriptive or symbolic.

Though the participants in this study could include themselves in their photographs if they wished to, the script did not require them to do so. While photo-elicitation was used in this study to gain an understanding of how queer women call center workers see themselves, the study is also about the ways that being in globalized space might shape sexual subjectivity. Having places, rather than people, as subjects was intended to give the photographs distance from the purely personal (Banks 2001), thus making steering between the biographical and the social easier, especially during the interview. In the interviews, it was crucial that the photographs were allowed to bring out the participants' relation to their environment—to show what the central business district allows them to do or not do and what the place means to them. The script was devised in a manner that would help achieve this goal.

Implementation

The photo-elicitation itself was conducted from September 2012 to January 2013 and involved five female participants, whose ages at the time were between 30 and 40 years. All were working

for international accounts in call centers located within the Makati central business district. All identified as lesbian, with qualification with regard to gender presentation (butch, femme, androgynous, etc.). The search for participants began in late June 2012. Much time was spent searching for possible participants, owing to the difficulty of the task.

Approaching prospective participants was not easy. Sexual identity is still a sensitive and, for many, confidential matter. In addition, participating in a study specifically concerned with queer sexuality can be seen as a public admission of sexual otherness. Though queer women are present in almost every call center, recognizing one is not a straightforward matter. Gender performances vary, and to be ascertained, they require a practiced eye and a nuanced understanding of cues that are often too easy to miss. For the most part, I relied on friends and acquaintances who were working in call centers or who know people working in call centers for referrals. These friends and acquaintances, because they knew the prospective participants better, also helped introduce the study to the prospective participants, so they would not be caught unaware when I approach them.

Initially, I was able to get the contact details of nine people. Three out of the nine were identified for the pre-test, the rest for the actual data gathering. Of the three for the pre-test, only two went through with the activity. Getting people to participate in the actual data gathering presented many challenges. Working through the prompts, taking 11 to 33 photographs, and going through an interview that would last a minimum of a couple of hours required no small amount of commitment. Storms and heavy rains and flooding in Metro Manila during the months (July to December) the pretest and the early part of data gathering took place made these activities more difficult than necessary. Consequently, the pool of participants changed many times. A number of people backed out even after initially committing to the project. Other prospects had to be referred to me by participants themselves before I was able to come up, finally, with the five people who managed to complete the entire data gathering process.

Orientation of participants

Before asking for commitment, I introduced the study to the prospective participant, explaining that if she decides to join the project, she would be asked to think about her views and feelings regarding the business district and queer sexuality and express these ideas through photographs that she would have to take herself. I let the participant read the script and encourage her to ask questions. I explained that she could use any type of camera as long as it was digital and able to take clear pictures. As digital cameras are ubiquitous nowadays, access to a camera never came up as problem during the orientation sessions. I told the participant that she would be given two to three weeks to take pictures. The photographs must be taken by the participant herself or, if she wishes to be in the photograph, have someone else take the picture for her according to her instructions.

Each person willing go through the photo-elicitation project was asked to send her photographs via email as soon as she had taken them. She need not wait to finish working through the whole script before sending me her work. The photographs must be in JPEG format and each photograph's file name should be a keyword taken from the prompt to which the photograph was a response (for instance, Comfortable–1.jpg, Comfortable–2.jpg) . I gave the participant my e-mail address and phone number and reminded her that she could send me a message or call regarding any question regarding the activity.

Photography and interview

Participants did not enter the first phase at the same time. Because of difficulties in looking for prospective participants, gaps between start dates took weeks or months. In general, it took more than a week past the orientation date before I received a photograph or two via e-mail. Almost everyone took more than three weeks to complete her set of photographs.

Once all the photographs were sent, the participant and I arranged to meet for the interview. I let the participant choose the date, time, and place. The participant's work schedule and personal commitments had to be taken into account in setting the

interview date. All of them chose to do the interview after their shift at the call center. During the interview, I let the participant choose which photograph to discuss first. Almost everyone chose to go by the sequencing of the prompts in the shooting script.

In preparation for each interview, I wrote a log for each of the participant's photographs. This helped me come up with follow-up questions. Instead of printing the photographs for the interview, I used a corkboard application on my iPad to display them. The application had a zoom feature that the participants were able to use in pointing out details in the photographs. The app also made it easy to go from one photograph to another in instances where the participant felt that she needed to refer to some other photograph. Each interview took about three hours to finish. All interviews were sound recorded.

Picturing queerness in the CBD

When all photographs and interviews were secured, I began the work of identifying patterns, themes, and concepts from the data to help formulate a description of a discourse of sexuality and form of subjectivity engendered in globalized space. The technique of open coding helped make manageable the analysis of more than a hundred photographs and more than ten hours of interview material. Open coding involves "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin in Seale 2004, 302). In open coding, visual and verbal texts are examined and their parts coded, meaning labeled or indexed, in order to facilitate the discovery of patterns of similarity and difference, the creation of broader categories, and the recognition of themes. Researchers do open coding to tease out relations among different elements of the data (Kelle 2004).

The process aims to strike a balance between detail and big picture—a combination of "cosmological" (broad) and "typographical" (detailed) approaches to the analysis of photographic data (Collier & Collier 2004), allowing the "dynamic interplay between open and structured procedures" (280). Open coding, as it is a process of discovery, is marked by an open attitude that lets the data lead the investigation into possibly unexpected directions. Rather than use "preconceived, logically deduced codes in which the data are placed" (Charmaz in Kelle 2004, 315), open

coding creates codes and categories in the process of examining the data.

Analysis also involved organizing the photographs on a map using location data or geotags. Placing the photographs on a digital map helped provide a broader view of the material that brought out relationships among the photographs and provided information on how the participants organize and use space. While not the main analytical method, the activity helped in making sense of the material.

In general, participants see the Makati central business district as a space that is open to and tolerant of difference, including unconventional performances of gender and sexuality. It is interesting that many of the photographs taken in response to prompts that relate to notions of freedom and of what queer spaces are like depict public areas. The prompt "the queerest place in the business district" generated pictures of parks, notably the Ayala Triangle Park and the Greenbelt Park. The former is a tree-lined grass-covered area located at the heart of the CBD and is a popular spot for relaxation and dining among people who work in the district, while the latter is a park and promenade on the grounds of the popular Greenbelt mall. Participants Lauren and Fani say the Ayala Triangle Park is the place to go to if one wants to see queer couples (Photo Set. 1). The park's cluster of restaurants is popular with queer people who like going on lunch dates with their partners, Fani says. Another participant, Jen, describes the Ayala Triangle Park as a place of freedom, a place where people tend to mind their own business and thus a space where she feels free to act without worrying about social approval. Elaborating on her choice of photographic subject, she explains that the people who frequent the park are educated and cultured, and therefore have the good sense of not sticking their noses in other people's business: "Halos lahat ng nasa Ayala, pumupunta d'yan. 'Yung mga tao d'yan, mga sosyal, pero 'yung sosyal na open, hindi mangmang… so kahit ano'ng gawin namin d'yan—humiga kami sa grass—hindi kami pakikialaman, hindi ka titingnan nang gulat. Edukado kasi ang mga nand'yan. (*Almost everyone [working in the Ayala area] frequent the park. The people you find there have class, but they are open and not ignorant, so we can do whatever we want, we can stretch out on the grass, and they won't care, they won't look appalled.* — translation mine)."

Photo set 1

The Greenbelt Park (Photo Set 2), meanwhile, is the subject of her photograph on "the queerest place in the CBD." Jen took a picture of the coffee shops around the park, explaining that the area is a good spot for "hook-ups" and for "eyeball" encounters with prospective dates and is used for these activities mainly by queer men. Her gay male friends, she recounts in the interview, like the park because it is public and therefore safe. In a public place with many others around, one can easily walk away if one changes one's mind or begins to feel uneasy about a date, she explains. In the interview, however, Jen also clarifies that what she considers to be the queerest places in the metro are not in Makati but in the city which sits right next to it—Manila, where the gay-bar district Malate is located. Jen says while their main patrons are gay men, the gay bars in Malate open their doors to queer women as well.

The photographs lent texture to the interviews. They let me see in a more concrete manner the things that participants were trying to convey with words. It allowed me to ask specific questions about the places they were describing, because through the photographs, I could see, in a way, what they were seeing in these environments. The interviews also proved valuable, as they complicated and refined my initial interpretations of the photographs. For instance, the interview session gave Jen the chance to clarify what her photo of the Greenbelt Park depicts and what meanings the phrase "queer place" holds for her. The pictures also allowed unexpected contrasts to emerge. They suggested meanings which would not have been as palpable were photographs not used in the interview. For instance, many of the participants identified their living spaces (Photo Set 3) as areas that embodied not only comfort and but also freedom. While one would expect to have spacious and well-furnished rooms identified as comfortable spaces, the participants' photographs, however, show small apartments. Lars' photograph, for instance, depicts a dim and cramped bedroom, with a mattress, a DVD player, and a couple of plastic-encased speakers on the floor. She explains, however, that the place shown in the photograph is a place of freedom and comfort because it is her own space, and it represents the end of her dependence from her older brother, who was wont to scrutinize and comment on her activities and the friends she brought home

Photo set 2

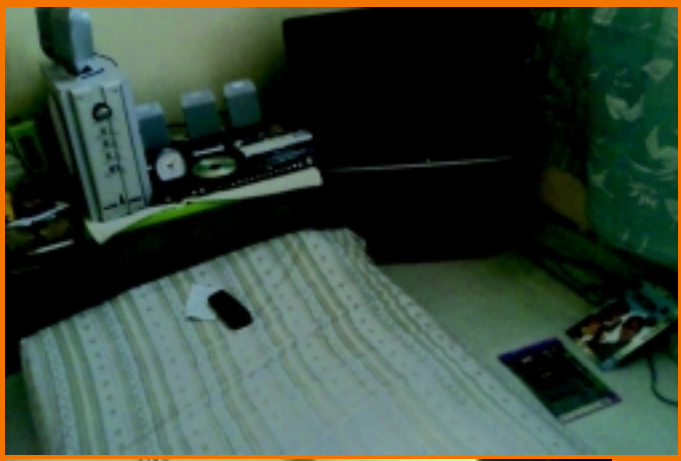

Photo set 3

from time to time when the two of them were still living under the same roof.

The potential of the photograph and interview combination became manifest in making sense of photographs that, at first glance, appeared to be clichéd images or symbols. Some participants turned in photographs of the Makati Stock Exchange (Photo Set 4) to depict success and the ideal workplace. At the outset, the meanings of these photographs seemed evident, the Stock Exchange being a well-known symbol of affluence. In the interview, however, Lars talked about her photograph of the building in terms of having just enough resources to maintain financial independence from her family. Moreover, the place represents for her financial stability, which she wants to achieve so that she can have the resources to assist relatives in financial difficulty. For Jen, the Stock Exchange represents a work environment where people are judged by their skill to compete and not by how they comport themselves according to conventional gender norms. "Hindi naman masyadong [mahigpit] d'yan. Pwede kang mag-slacks. Hindi mo kailangang mag-skirt. Walang discrimination d'yan sa stock market, kasi ang labanan d'yan utak mo saka assertiveness mong lumaban, na makuha mo 'yung stock. (*They're not as strict [in the stock market]. You can wear slacks. You don't need to wear a skirt. They don't discriminate in the stock market, because what you have going for you in there is your brain and your assertiveness in competition, in getting the stock.* —Translation mine)," she explains. The accounts generated in the interview gave nuance to the photographs.

The photographs also worked to activate shared meanings, or meanings that are well-disseminated and known within a culture. Fani's photograph (Photo Set 5) which shows part of the Manila Peninsula's facade contained nothing more than the five-star hotel's name, and yet it manages to convey the place's connotation of elegance and its high-end character. In the interview, Fani explains that the hotel is her ideal workplace because working in the hotel would allow her to be in the same space as people from "class A and B." In general, for the participants, the CBD makes it possible to have access to spaces that enable queer women to better their social status and thus disassociate themselves from the stereotypical images of queers. Jen's photograph of "the ideal

Photo set 4

Photo set 5

place for a queer woman" is the interior of the high-end exclusive bar Fiama (Photo Set 6) on Jupiter St. Highly exclusive and expensive, the place provides privacy and a sense of safety for high-profile individuals who are not "out," Jen explains in the interview. She says she chose the place because it represents for her the elevation of queer women's social standing: "Yung place ay dapat nagde-define ng success, sophistication, saka hindi lahat nakakapasok—exclusive. I mean, para sa akin, 'pag pumunta ka d'yan, edukado ka. Ganoon para sa akin ang queer. (*The place must signify success, sophistication. It doesn't let everyone in. It is exclusive. I mean, being there must mean that you are educated. That for me is what being queer means* – translation mine)."

The photographs and verbal accounts complicate the meanings given to the call center industry. While they are shown to be places of exploitation in academic literature (Soco-Carreon 2013; Hega 2007), they hold other meanings for the queer women call center workers who participated in the study. Mickey, for instance, sees her current workplace as ideal and an embodiment of her notion of success. She contrasts her current job at a large US-based multinational call center with her previous more locally oriented jobs, notably her experience working for a government agency. She characterizes the government agency as a place of "nepotism" and "crab mentality" and describes her work superiors there as condescending to homosexuals, particularly gay men. In contrast, she finds her current job rewarding because the management recognizes hard work and talent no matter the employee's sexual orientation. Lars, meanwhile describe call centers as Westernized and therefore progressive spaces, which give equal opportunity to people, even those who are advanced in years and those whose gender performance is unconventional. She says of her own experience as an applicant to her current emloyer, "Ako nga in-interview, naka-ganito ako, naka-polo, walang pakialam. Depende sa kung makakapasa ka sa exam saka sa interview. Hindi na nila tinitingnan 'yung the way you dress o ano. 'Yung results ng exam mo, 'yun [ang tinitingnan]. (*During the job interview, I was wearing this, a polo shirt. They didn't care. Getting in depends on whether you pass the exam and the in- terview. They won't look at what you're wearing or what. The exam results are what they look at.* —Translation mine)." Participants' responses suggest that working in the CBD and the call center industry provide the queer

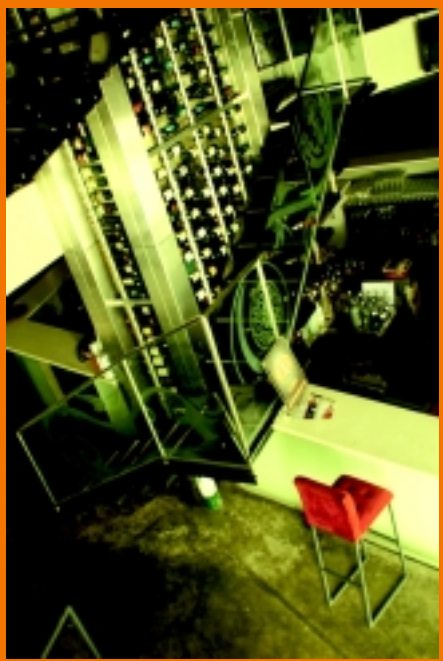

Photo set 6

person with the resources that would enable her be seen not only in terms of her sexuality. Lauren's photographs (Photo Set 7) depict places that allow her to represent her interest in art and subcultures and they show the Makati CBD as a diverse environment, a host not only to corporate buildings and malls but to art galleries and other cultural spaces as well.

Photo-elicitation brought to light small details that would likely be lost in interviews that do not make use of photographs. Many of the photographs of places that represented power and success, such as the Makati Stock Exchage and the PBCom Tower, were taken from the outside. These places were out of the queer women call center workers' reach, so to speak. Thus the photographs were taken from the perspective of the outsider. Jen was able to take pictures inside Fiama only because a security guard let her in. It was morning and all members of staff had gone home. At night, when the place was full of people, Jen would have had to pay 600 pesos to get in. Her photographs of the bar therefore show a deserted place, without the lights and the people that make the place what it is.

While photo-elicitation is able to generate detail-rich data, it is a challenging method to use. The method is particularly demanding of participants' time and requires a fairly long-term commitment from each person. In the case of this project, finding willing participants proved to be a significant challenge and the participants' atypical work schedules. The speed with which the photo-elicitation project is completed depends ultimately on how fast the participants are able produce the photographs. Researchers need to consider these challenges in order to avoid excessive delay and keep the project on schedule.

Auto-driven photo-elicitation and feminist research

In answering the question "Is there a feminist method?," feminist scholar Kim England notes that debates revolving around the question "were not really about method as such but about sexist methodologies and competing epistemologies" (England2006, 286). She goes on to say that "there is nothing inherently feminist in either quantitative or qualitative methods, but what is 'feminist' is the epistemological stance taken towards methods and the uses to which researchers put them" (England2006, 286).

Photo set 7

A critique of positivism, feminist research is an argument against positivist scholarship's claims regarding impartiality, neutrality, and the belief that "'good research' could be produced only by unbiased 'experts'" and that "facts speak for themselves" (England2006, 287) Instead, it acknowledges the situatedness and embeddedness of knowledge production. While a wide range of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, is available to feminist researchers, what makes a research project feminist is its relation to feminist struggle (Brooks and Hesse-Biber2007). It is research that is committed to "giving voice to women's lives and experiences, improving the quality and life chances and choices for women and girls, and overcoming gender inequality and oppression of women" (Brooks and Hesse-Biber2007, 4).

Because of its characteristics, photo-elicitation is not difficult to bring in line with the principles and goals of feminist research. While the androcentric assumptions of positivist research leaves out, erases, or ignores women's experiences and views, photo-elicitation allows women's experiences to become the starting point of investigation. Because participants' photographs and verbal accounts are the bedrock of auto-driven photo-elicitation, the method gives prime importance to participants' articulation of their own experiences, their feelings, their views, and the principles they live by. Photo-elicitation highlights the places, persons, things, and feelings that are significant to them as individuals, whose lives and selves are shaped by power relations that structure gender, sexuality, and class in contemporary society.

As they themselves must make the pictures that are the springboards for storytelling and explication, participants can take on the role of experts in the interviews. No one can talk about the subjects and circumstances of their photographs and give an account of their lives and selves better than they can, and as photo-elicitation's focus on the photographs helps lessen initial inhibition, participants are able to talk confidently and authoritatively. Because photo-elicitation favors in-depth accounts and because the participants themselves produce the photographs, the method allows for greater participant involvement. In a very real sense, the study becomes a collaboration between participants and the researcher. As analysis is based on participants' own photographs and verbal accounts, successful completion of the research project

is not possible with- out them. The interview serves as a venue where the researcher's initial analysis of participants' photographs are validated, questioned, and made more complex by participants' own accounts of their work. It is a space for the negotiation of meanings. In the interview sessions participants get to articulate their own interpretations, which later play a part in the researcher's own analysis.

The method also has the potential to urge change. In a photo-elicitation project where participants take photographs that have to do with their lives, thoughts, and feelings, the photography phase allows each participant to reflect on her responses to research questions. In the process, she is encouraged to ask questions, which may lead her to connect the personal to broader concerns, to recognize how different aspects of her life influence each other, and perhaps to become aware of how she is positioned within social relations. Participants' accounts potentially present a challenge to established, stereotypical, or prejudicial discourses about queer women, their lives, and their world. These accounts allow alternative discourses to emerge.

Considering all these, auto-driven photo-elicitation is a method that serves well the task of exploring the ways that the mundane, intimate, and usually taken for granted aspects of queer women's lives position individuals in relations of power that shape how they experience and understand themselves and society.

REFERENCES

2010 Annual Survey of Philippine Business and Industry. 2010. Accessed November 12, 2014.

http://web0.psa.gov.ph/old/data/sectordata/aspbi10_bpotx.html.

Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual methods in social research*. London: Sage.

Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography*. London: Macmillan.

Bergeron, Suzanne. 2009. "An Interpretive Analytics to Move Caring Labor Off the Straight Path."*Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30: 55–64.

Binnie, Jon, Julian Holloway, Steve Millington, and Craig Young, eds. 2006. *Cosmopolitan urbanism*. New York: Routledge.

Bird, Miriam and Cristoph Ernst. 2009. *Offshoring and employment in the developing world: Business process outsourcing in the Philippines*. International Labour Organization.

Brooks, Abigailand Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. 2007. "An invitation to feminist research. In *Feminist research practice: A primer*, edited by Patricia Levy and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 1–24. London: Sage.

"Circuit Makati: A new lifestyle playground rises in Makati." 2013. Accessed Feb 10, 2015. http://www.breakfastmag.com/01/18/2013/circuit-makati-a-new-lifestyle-playground-rises-in-makati/.

Comprehensive Land Use Plan. 2013. Accessed May 20, 2015. http://www.makati.gov.ph/portal/main/index.jsp?main=3&content=0&menu=0.

Emmison, Michael and Philip Smith. 2000. *Researching the Visual: Images, Objects, Contexts and Interactions in Social and Cultural Enquiry*. London: Sage.

England, Kim. 2006. "Producing feminist geographies: theory, methodologies and research strategies." In *Approaches to human geography*, edited by Stuart Aitken and Gill Valentine. 286–297. London: Sage.

Epstein, Iris, Bonnie Stevens, Patricia McKeever, and Sylvain Baruchel. 2006. "Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI): Using Photos to Elicit Children's Perspectives." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 5(3): 1–11.

Hall, Stuart. 1997. "The work of representation" In *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. 15–35. London: Sage.

Hega, Mylene. 2007."Assembly Line Workers of the 21st Century: A Glimpse Into the Lives of Customer Service Agents."*CSWCD Development Journa*l 2007.

Jenkings, Neil K., Rachel Woodward, and Trish Winter. 2008. "The Emergent Production of Analysis in Photo Elicitation: Pictures of Military Identity." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research,* 9(3), Art. 30, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0803309.

Kelle, Udo. 2004. "Theory building in qualitative research and computer programs for the management of textual data." In *Social research methods: a reader*, edited by Clive Seale. 312–317. London: Routledge.

Kolb, Bettina. 2008. "Involving, sharing, analysing—Potential of the participatory photo interview."*Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9(3), Art. 12, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0803127.

"Makati North." n.d. Accessed Feb 10, 2015. http://www.makeitmakati.com/makati-north

Michel, Boris. 2010. "Going Global, Veiling the Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila."*Philippine Studies* 58(3): 383–406.

Offshoring and Outsourcing Philippines: Roadmap 2010. 2007. Business Processing Association of the Philippines.

Orellana, Marjorie Faulstich. 1999. "Space and place in an Urban Landscape: Learning from children's views of their social worlds."*Visual Sociology* 14(1): 73–89.

Oswin, Natalie. 2007. "Producing homonormativity in neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, redistribution, and the equality project."*Signs*, 32(3): 649–669.

Philippines IT-BPO Investor Primer. 2012. Business Processing Association of the Philippines & DOST-ICT Office.

Philippine Development Plan 2011–2016. 2011. National Economic and Development Authority.

Prosser, Jon. 2008. *The darker side of visual research*. University of Manchester.

Radley, Alan, and Diane Taylor. 2003. "Images of recovery: A photo-elicitation study on the hospital ward."*Qualitative Health Research* 13(1): 77–99.

Reese, Niklas, and Joefel Soco-Carreon. 2013. "No call for action? Why there is no union (yet) in Philippine call centers."*ASEAS-Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies,* 6(1): 140–159.

Robinson, David. 2008. "Book Review: Cosmopolitan Urbanism Jon Binnie, Julian Holloway, Steve Millington and Craig Young (Eds.), 2006 Routledge: London." *Urban Studies,* 45(1): 233–234.

Rose, Gillian. 2001. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. London: Sage.

Rushbrook, Dereka. 2002. "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist."*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8(1–2): 183–206.

Samuels, Jeffrey. 2007. "When words are not enough: Eliciting children's experiences of Buddhist monastic life through photographs." In *Visual research methods: Image, society and representation*, edited by Gregory Stanczak. 197–224. London: Sage.

Sassen, Saskia. 2000. "The global city: strategic site/new frontier."*American Studies* 41(2): 79–95.

Shatkin, Gavin. 2005. "Colonial capital, modernist capital, global capital: The changing political symbolism of urban space in Metro Manila, the Philippines." *Pacific Affairs* 78(4): 577–600.

Strauss, Anselm Leonard, and Juliet M. Corbin. 2004. "Open coding." In *Social research methods: a reader*, edited by Clive Seale, 303–306. London: Routledge.

Suchar, Charles S. 1997. "Grounding Visual Sociology Research in Shooting Scripts." *Qualitative Sociology* 20(1): 33–55.

Thoreson, Ryan. 2011. "Capably Queer: Exploring the Intersections of Queerness and Poverty in the Urban Philippines." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 12(4): 493–510.

Woodley-Baker, Rochelle. 2009. "Private and public experience captured: young women capture their everyday lives and dreams through photo-narratives." *Visual Studies* 24(1): 19–35.