

Exploring the Spaces of Aging Ls: Narratives on Inclusion-Exclusion of Older/*Tiguwang* Lesbians in Davao City, Mindanao

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ABSTRACT

Space as practice is formed by responses to rules, expectations, cultural habits, values, and other particularizing elements in locations or situations (Lefebvre, 2014). In analyzing the nature of these spaces, gender studies find a specific interest in assessing how privileged, male-centric ways of framing space and place have subordinated certain mobilities of women (Massey, 1994) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people (Butler, 2004). This means that some spaces encourage non-discriminatory, humanizing, and socially enabling principles to work; while other spaces may promote sexist, discriminatory, and unsafe locations based on the person's sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression or SOGIE (Doan, 2010) and age (Walsh et al., 2017). To identify the spaces that aging lesbians find themselves in or choose to be in, this study localizes the meaning of such spaces as either inclusive or exclusionary. Using the qualitative-case study approach (Creswell, 2014), this paper looks into the situation of

six older/*tiguwang* lesbians in Davao City to help identify their spaces/locations, and discuss how such spaces can be considered inclusive or exclusionary. In this study, aging lesbians stay in and frequent the following spaces: home, neighborhood, friends, parks, and work. In these locations, spaces are inclusive if they dispose of gendered mobilities (Massey, 1994) while spaces are exclusionary when they do not challenge, or at least question, expressions of gender-based subordination.

Keywords: Aging lesbians, social spaces, inclusive and exclusionary spaces, Davao City

INTRODUCTION

Gender-sensitive spaces form part of the broader interest in spatial justice (Kneeshaw, 2018). This perspective is also guided by the pronouncements of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 5 and 11. SDG 5 focuses on gender equality, while SDG 11 centers on the idea of creating cities for all, which aims for inclusive and participatory discussions on space-making. Both SDGs uphold the necessity of mainstreaming gender in spatial design and its concrete application.

The intent to make space-making inclusive is also a response to the observation that binary gender norms primarily design public space (Doan, 2010), which is affirmed by Irazàbel and Huerta's observation (2016) that spaces and/or environments are mainly suited to men's needs and the heteronormative family. The default male-oriented arrangement may be one reason why same-sex couples and their families are infrequently seen in public spaces (Beebeejaun, 2009) as these spaces have become habituated or conditioned by norms, practices, and behaviors that uphold heteronormative expectations. Since the claim to space is understood within the purview of gendered rights, the goal to create inclusive spaces challenges customs, expectations, and classifications that perpetuate the tyranny of men and women binary (Doan, 2010). A case study on the kinds of location and spaces that aging lesbians in a given community

or society choose to visit or avoid can be telling of how public spaces can remain gender insensitive. An inquiry on the kinds of space that they occupy can also critically foreground a society's peripheral treatment of the realities, experiences, and issues of aging lesbians.

For purposes of underscoring the importance of exploring and understanding older lesbians and their situations, and the possibility of coming up with proposed interventions, these two questions are fitting: (1) What is the nature of social spaces where older lesbians find themselves in? and (2) What makes such spaces inclusive or exclusionary? Through answering these questions, the spaces of aging lesbians in Davao City, Mindanao may be located, which, in turn, will facilitate the foregrounding of their thoughts and experiences. Through the accounts of their perceived inclusive or exclusionary spaces, recommendations are formulated to possibly address their issues/concerns.

Through an account of older lesbians' experiences of spatial inclusion and exclusion, this study seeks to put a face to this often-neglected sector of the aging population of the country's southern region, outside Metro Manila. This study also intends to describe the spaces where aging lesbians find themselves, the meanings that they attach to such spaces, and their imaginings of exclusionary and inclusive spaces. This problem statement is addressed via these objectives: (1) To identify the spaces that aging lesbians in Davao City inhabit; (2) To describe how they address or deal with issues in such spaces; (3) To discuss the meaning of inclusive and exclusionary spaces; and (4) To recommend how inclusive spaces and gendered mobilities may be achieved.

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study (Creswell, 2014) specifically locates itself at the intersection between the phenomenology of space and hermeneutics as the interpretation of meaning. The phenomenological framing magnifies the lived meaning of space, while the hermeneutical concern underscores the meaning-filled context or reality of such spaces. Such an approach is termed as hermeneutic phenomenology in Goble and Yin's (2014) account.

This paper aims to explore the meaning of inclusive or exclusionary spaces to older—*tiguwang* in Bisaya—lesbians, utilizing data gathered for a 2018 project that explored the meaning of aging to *tiguwang* lesbians in Davao City. The key informants, during a focus group discussion (FGD), generated a list of spaces they described as either inclusive or exclusionary. FGD is “a discussion in which a small group of informants (six to 12 people), guided by a facilitator or moderator, talk freely and spontaneously about themes important to the investigation,” enriching feminist research by “validating women’s experience, ... allowing women to speak for themselves and enhancing communication among women.” It promotes “a sense of solidarity and connectedness among women,” helps “raise consciousness,” and supports “women work towards empowerment.” It also enhances feminist research by “helping to test and develop feminist theory” and by “promoting interdisciplinary research” (Kintanar, 1997, p. 73).

To better make sense of the list of spaces, actual visits were conducted and additional questions were raised. The visits resembled the method of a transect walk where the informants share their thoughts as they navigate their way in the spaces that they choose to trek.

With the collated list of spaces, the participants’ descriptions of inclusive or exclusionary spaces ground the study’s hermeneutic aspect. The descriptions were their responses to this query: What will make you stay or leave a space/place? From the sharing, characteristics of exclusionary and inclusive spaces eventually emerged. The hermeneutic section also opens up the role of the critic-interpretive lens of this work through Massey’s (1994) notion of gendered space as having the capacity to condition gendered mobilities or immobility.

Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, this study interviewed six aging/older lesbians in Davao City. In this paper, aging or older lesbians refer to lesbian individuals who are already in their 50s. This parameter is supported by Choi and Meyer’s (2016) account that older LGBT adults are those who are over the age of 50, although the age category is still subject to discussion.

Davao City was selected as the study site due to its Anti-Discrimination Ordinance (2013) and its Women Development Code

(1997). With this Anti-Discrimination Ordinance in place, the study assumed that conducting in-depth interviews with informants in this city would be less difficult in contrast to doing so in sites without an inclusive frame that affords protection to LGBT community members.

As an ethical exercise, informed consent from the informants was sought. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their consent to be interviewed was obtained. Moreover, the participants were free to answer or refuse to answer questions and to discontinue the interview for any reason they deemed warranted. The informants' names are anonymized, and their stories are properly archived. The study was done over 7 months (June–December 2018) and a validation exercise with the informants was organized to help assess the data's cogency and correctness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper's critical interpretative lens utilizes Massey's (1994) understanding of space, place, and people's sense of space and place as gendered experiences reflective of the way societies and communities construct and practice gender notions and standards. As gender perspectives intersect, frame, and influence the process of locating or carving spaces, Massey also speaks of their relation to degrees of mobility—on how people's preferred routes/pathways are largely grounded on the ways fields or spaces are designed. In her account of football terraces, for instance, Massey acknowledges how such a vantage point enables her to enjoy the view, while the entering of the actual playing fields made her feel and realize that she was not welcome in such spaces.

Thinking of herself as a "space invader," Massey recognizes that spaces and places can make a person either feel subordinated or part of the privileged view. Massey reinforces such a point with her account of her experience with her male friends as they visited a museum, wherein a section contained paintings of naked women: "This was a 'space' that let me know something, and something ignominious, about what High Culture thought was my place in Society. The effect on me of being in that space/place was quite different from the effect it had on my male friends" (p. 186).

Massey's questions about a global sense of place also help locate the need to discuss how gender, subordination, and space interface: "Can't we rethink our sense of place? Is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking?" With these questions, this paper's description and reflection on what it means to locate one's self through the gendered experience of *tiguwang* lesbians in Davao City point to the need for a discursive analysis of the kinds of spaces and places which the informants in this study find themselves in. Also guided by Doan's (2010) proposed principles of inclusive gendered space, Massey's questions point to the idea of progressive or outward-looking constructions of space as notions that are hinged upon non-discriminatory, humanizing, and socially enabling principles (Doan, 2010). An example of this progressive and inclusive framing of space is its adherence to gender-fair language in its choice of words, images, and symbols. In contrast, self-enclosing and defensive treatments of space and place patronize homogenizing platforms or ideologies and are abhorrent to particularizing or pluralizing realities that tend to ward off newcomers or outsiders from becoming part of contemporary societies/communities (Massey, 2014).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Studies on the situation of aging gays and lesbians among the adult population remain scant or invisible (Cruikshank, 1991; Butler, 2004). This may have to do with the lack of interest in including sexual orientation in research, the lack of intent in specifying questions for older LGBT in statistics and surveys (Choi & Meyer, 2016), or confining gay studies to sexuality (Cook-Daniels, 1997).

In the Philippines, the marginal data on the state of older LGBT people is reflected in *Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report* (2014), which observes that sub-populations like LGBT people with disabilities, older LGBT people, and indigenous peoples within the LGBT community are often excluded or neglected. Such lack of data is contrasted to the country's LGBT-friendly atmosphere and attributed

to the seemingly conditional acceptance or tolerance of sexual minorities in various communities and social institutions. Tan (2012) remarked that older sexual minorities may end up isolated due to stereotypes. Meanwhile, Guevarra (2016) underscores the need for more studies on older gays and lesbians to identify more issues that they may be silently dealing with.

It is worth mentioning that a shelter (Home for the Golden Gays) in Manila, built in 1975 by a gay man, Justo Justo, used to serve as a retirement place for older gays and lesbians disregarded or abandoned by their own families. Unfortunately, this shelter closed in 2012 when Justo's family reclaimed the property after his death, leaving the evicted 48 members homeless (Gaardmand, 2010). Notably, no records are available regarding similar shelters in other places in the country that take care of the needs of members of the LGBT community or aging lesbians.

Virtually no study has been done concerning discussions on inclusive and exclusionary spaces for aging lesbians. However, one by Walsh et al. (2017) on domains of social exclusion of the aging population may serve as the discussion's productive entry point. The authors offer a comprehensive summary of identified domains in the analysis, which are: (1) material and financial resources (e.g., material deprivation, economic exclusion); (2) services, amenities, and mobility (e.g., exclusion from services, reduced/lack of access to services, lack of mobilities); (3) social relations (e.g., exclusion from meaningful relations, lack of social relation, and integration); (4) civic participation (e.g., exclusion from civic activities or from access to information); (5) neighborhood and community (e.g., territorial exclusion, neighborhood exclusion, crime as a possible excluding factor); and (6) socio-cultural aspects of society (e.g., symbolic exclusion, identity exclusion, and forced normative integration).

Walsh et al. (2017) indicated that in these domains, few studies were done on particularizing locations and social categorizations like gender, ethnicity, and disability and the intersection between social exclusion and aging. Consequently, it remains to be known how social exclusion affects individuals or groups based on gender, social class, ethnicity,

and sexuality. Saunders (2008) underscores the crucial role of studying social exclusion to make sense of the “individual, structural, and societal” aspects/conditions of marginalization and the need to study older people’s social exclusion in the LGBT community. From a methodological vantage point, Walsh et al. (2017) acknowledged the gap concerning mixed-method interdisciplinary work, longitudinal studies, qualitative studies, and life-course perspectives. Hence, this paper also aims to contribute to filling such gaps as the study upholds a qualitative research orientation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The succeeding pages focus on the results of the data gathered for the duration of the research. The first part discusses locating the spaces, while the second focuses on the inclusive and exclusionary spaces.

Locating the Spaces

Perling, the Traysikad Driver

At the time of the study, Perling had been a *traysikad* driver for 4 years in Barangay Leon Garcia, Davao City. A *kargador* (porter) for 8 years in Sta. Ana Wharf’s fish port which is adjacent to Magsaysay Park, and jobless thereafter, she decided to drive a *traysikad*—a coined term combining tricycle and *sikad* (to pedal)—which she was renting for PhP50/day. Living alone for 10 years, she stated that she had no plans of entering into another romantic relationship. She explained, “*Kapoy makipag-away kun dili magkasinabot*” (It is taxing whenever one gets into a fight when disagreements arise).

In Perling’s drawing, she identified the household, her friends, Magsaysay Park, and Rose Marie Street–Tomas Monteverde Avenue as the spaces where she usually stayed or spent most of her time. In crossing T. Monteverde Avenue, one could readily see Ramon Magsaysay Park, one of the city’s oldest parks that offered a view of Samal Island.

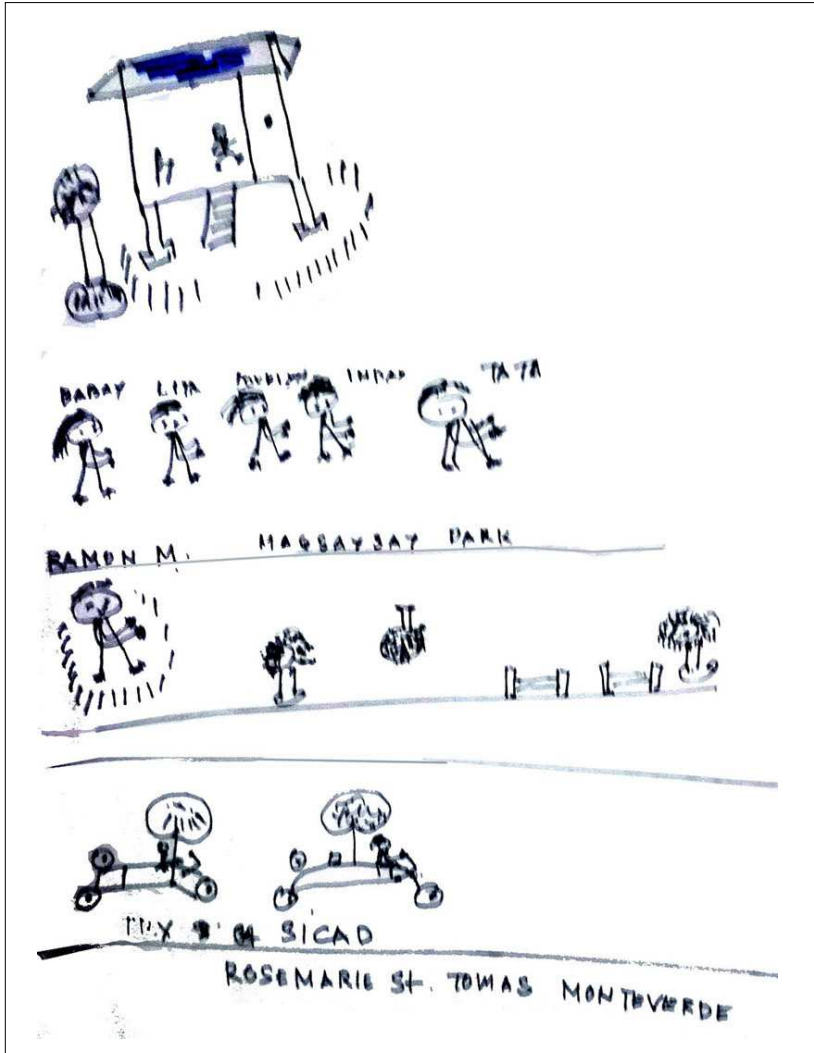


Figure 1
Spaces That Perling Frequented

Edilyn, the Muslim Lesbian

Edilyn, originally from General Santos City, was a 50-year-old Muslim resident of Barangay 25-C in Davao City. She recounted that she stopped studying when she became a high school student since the school required her to wear the school uniform for girls, which consisted of a blouse and skirt. The thought of wearing a skirt was enough to make her quit secondary education. Edilyn also revealed that she used to have huge quarrels with her late father because of her sexuality. “*Sige man gud mi away sa akua papa sa una hanggong wan a ko gaagwanta*” (I had frequent disagreements with my father until I just felt that there was no point in staying [in our house]). Her father dissuaded her from having same-sex relationships, so she decided to leave and migrate to Davao City with her partner—a person she was still with 30 years after.

In Edilyn’s drawing, she itemized the spaces she frequented: household, church, grocery store, and a friend’s house. At the time of the study, Edilyn and her partner lived with their two dogs and a cat in a house that had a *sari-sari* store. We noticed on our second visit that their house had a newly installed partition and ceiling. Edilyn proudly said that she did all the carpentry work herself. They also had an adjacent small house built by Edilyn that was being rented by a lesbian couple as well.

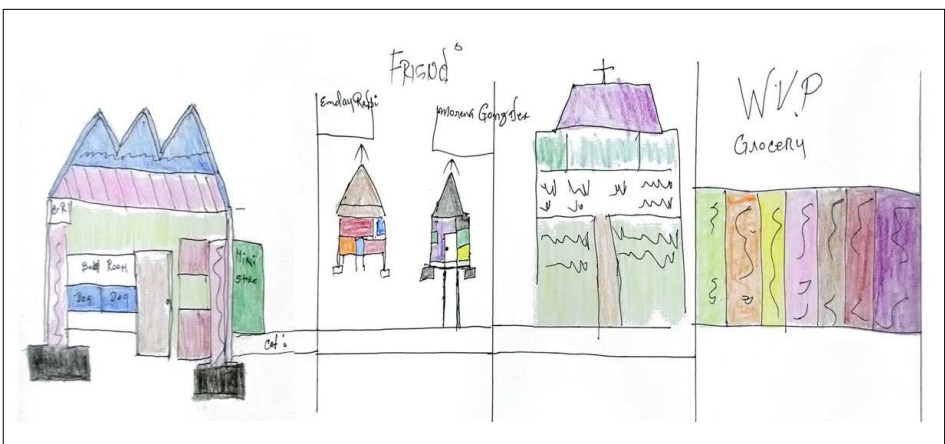


Figure 2
Spaces That Edilyn Frequented

Concerning the nearby grocery store, Edilyn—amused while sharing—pointed out that it was the only place they would go to since they needed to replenish the items/goods for their *sari-sari* store. In going to the grocery store, she recounted, “*Usahay pugson pa gani nako ako-a partner na mutabok sa dalan*” (At times, I need to persuade my partner just to cross the street). This line gave us a glimpse of her partner’s discomfort in leaving their house, which Edilyn also acknowledged and respected. Edilyn explained that her partner wanted her to stay inside the house or to be just nearby if outside. She further revealed that she had difficulty explaining to and convincing her partner to agree to Edilyn joining the FGD for the study, which was affirmed by the frequent calls she got from her partner while the discussion was ongoing.

When we left their place after our visit, Edilyn ushered us to the exit road but stopped at a nearby corner—as if indicating that such spot was the farthest point that she could go to without her partner’s knowledge or permission.

Seremy, Kap’s Assistant

Originally from Iligan City, Seremy knew even then that she wanted to live on her own, free from the disciplining gaze of her family. She shared that she would only visit Iligan on important occasions and that her mother still hoped she would return and live with them. When we met Seremy, she was working as a special assistant of the barangay captain of Barangay Leon Garcia, Davao City. Seremy felt lucky that their barangay captain had given her work and a sense of direction in her life. She shared, “*Ginatabangan na ko ni Kap sa una nga kagawad pa sya*” (*Kap* started to help me even when she was still a barangay councilor). She also recalled the instances when she transferred from one place and city to another before settling in Davao City. At the time of the study, Seremy had been living with her partner of 11 years and her partner’s two kids. Reminiscing on her frequent transfers, she was happy that she had stayed the longest in Brgy. Leon Garcia.

In Seremy’s drawing, she itemized the places where she normally spent her hours and was most familiar with: household, *tambayan* area, chapel, house of the barangay captain, a public market in Agdao, and the barangay hall of Brgy. Leon Garcia.

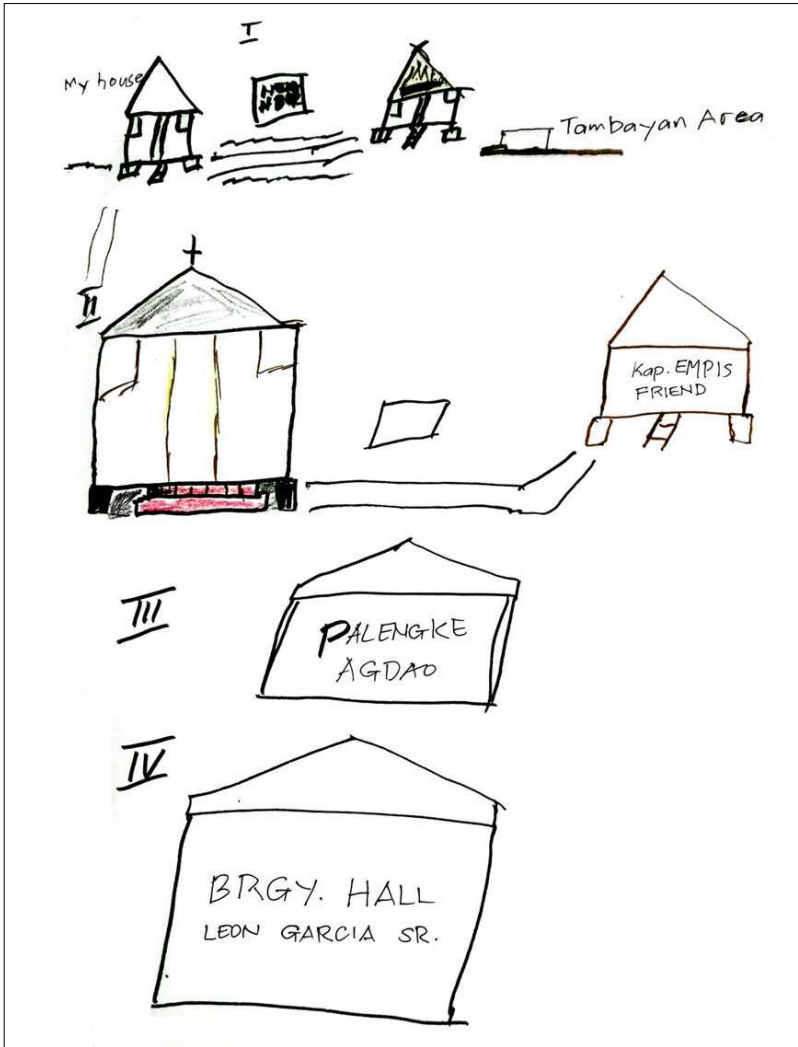


Figure 3
Spaces That Seremy Frequented

For our visit to their place, Seremy met us at the chapel area before proceeding to the house of the barangay captain. She was also with us when we went to the barangay hall for our courtesy visit to “Kap,” also a lesbian. Incidentally, it was Perling who drove us to the barangay hall in her *traysikad*.

Janet, the Carinderia Owner

Janet was 53 years old and owned a small *carinderia* (food eatery) stationed at the entrance to her house that she had been renting for 5 years. She had decided to move to Davao City 25 years earlier to live with her partner. When we interviewed her, Janet was not in a relationship but was proud and happy that she had been chatting with her dear friend who was working in another country. Janet reported that she had been a cook for 15 years by that time and that she considered her tasks easy and manageable—from the selection of ingredients to be purchased at the public market and Gaisano Mall for the food she would cook, to the slicing of the vegetables, to the actual cooking.

The drawing by Janet identified the following spaces where she allocated her time and resources: household, *carinderia*, friends, parks, market, and Gaisano Mall.

Jas, the Buy-and-Sell Person

Jas was 56 years old and had been in the buy-and-sell business for 30 years when we met her. Following a fire in a nearby barangay at that time, Jas was there selling underwear items, since she knew that these were among the basic things that people should have. In giving such an example, Jas also said, “*Kinahanglan kabalo ka unsa ang kinahanglan sa mga tawo para makabaligya ka*” (One should know what people need so you can sell and earn). This was her short yet precise tip for those who wished to be successful in the buy-and-sell scheme. Having travelled to almost all areas in Mindanao, Jas had learned how to assess if potential buyers and customers may turn out to be merely a waste of her time. As proof of her buy-and-sell skills, Jas was also approached by her neighbors whenever they wanted to sell some of their household items. In fact, while our interview was in progress, a neighbor asked her if she knew of someone who would be interested to buy her refrigerator. Jas quickly responded, “*Naa, mangita ta!*” (I am sure there will be, we will look for one!).

For Jas, the spaces she found herself staying in or frequenting included: household, friends, Magsaysay Park, and chapel. In her drawing,

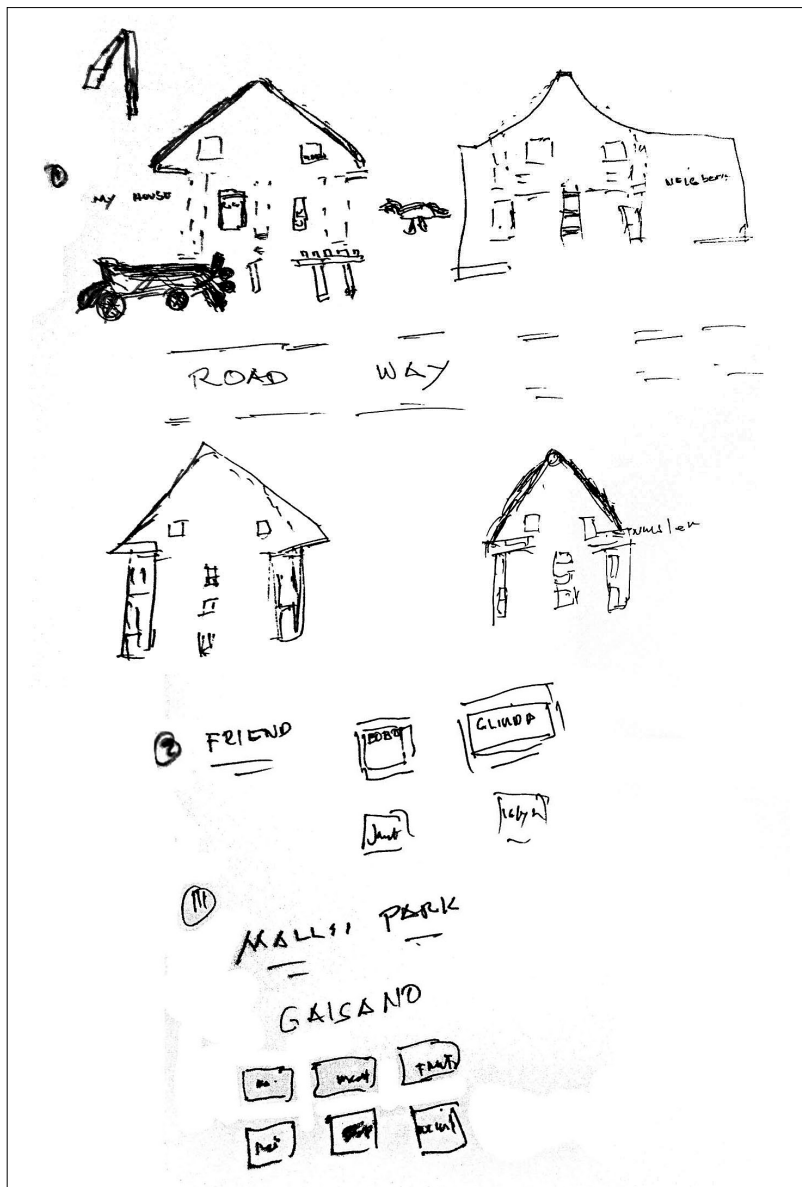


Figure 4
Spaces That Janet Frequented

Jas specified two houses: her parents' house where she had been living for 3 months since her mother injured herself; and the house where she and her partner of 25 years were residing. As shown in the drawing, the chapel at the end of the street also served as a gathering place for some of Jas's friends. Jas, however, was quick to note that she was not there to join in the prayers but to play card games in an adjacent lot.

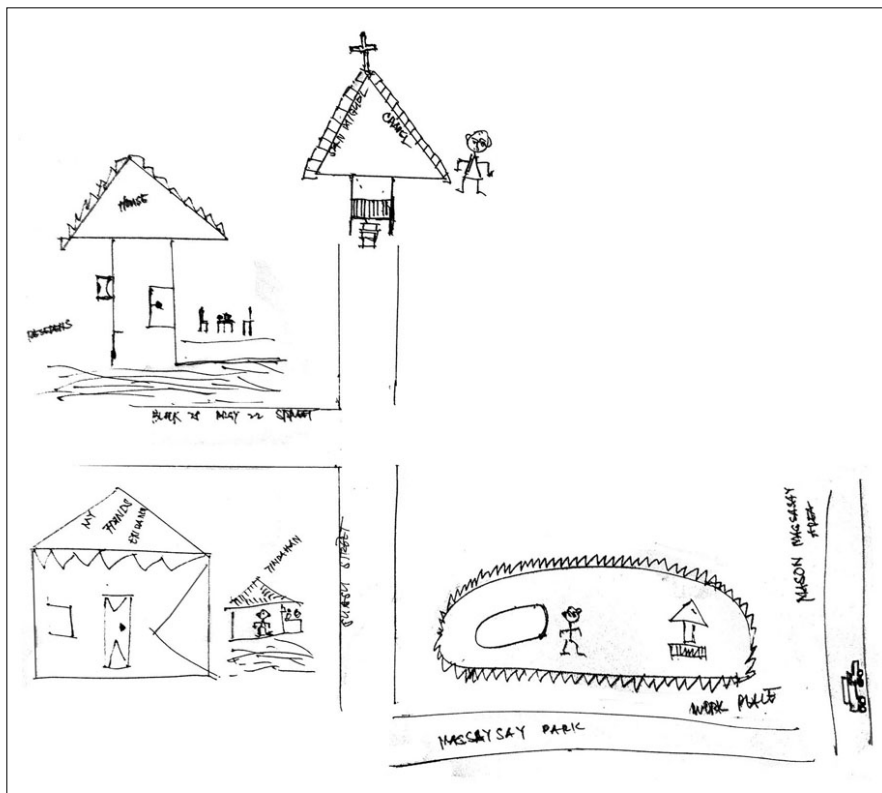


Figure 5
Spaces That Jas Frequented

Baba, the Street Vendor

Baba was 58 years old and was originally from Bansalan, Davao del Sur. She had migrated to Davao City hoping to find work or a better means of living. For 30 years, she had managed to live off and take advantage

of her work as a street vendor—selling snacks, soft drinks, bottled water, candies, etc.—from which she could earn PhP400 to sometimes PhP1,000 per day if she had a lot of customers. She had been occupying the same space to sell her goods for 15 years free of charge, since the building’s owner had given her permission to do so. She said, “*Medyo swerte ko ani nga lugar kay daghan gyud muanhi pud nako nga mupalit ug mutambay*” (I am lucky in having this space since many come to this area to buy and even stay for a while to unwind a bit). This was how Baba described her area when we visited the site at around 8:00 in the evening.

Baba’s drawing showed that she located herself in these spaces: household, market, Magsaysay Park, chapel, and sidewalk where she would vend at night. Among all the informants, Baba had a unique work schedule since she would vend along Monteverde Street from dusk until dawn. Her work schedule was also the reason why the FGD happened on a Sunday, since the following day, Monday, was her day of rest. Likewise, the other participants adjusted their schedules to make way for Baba.

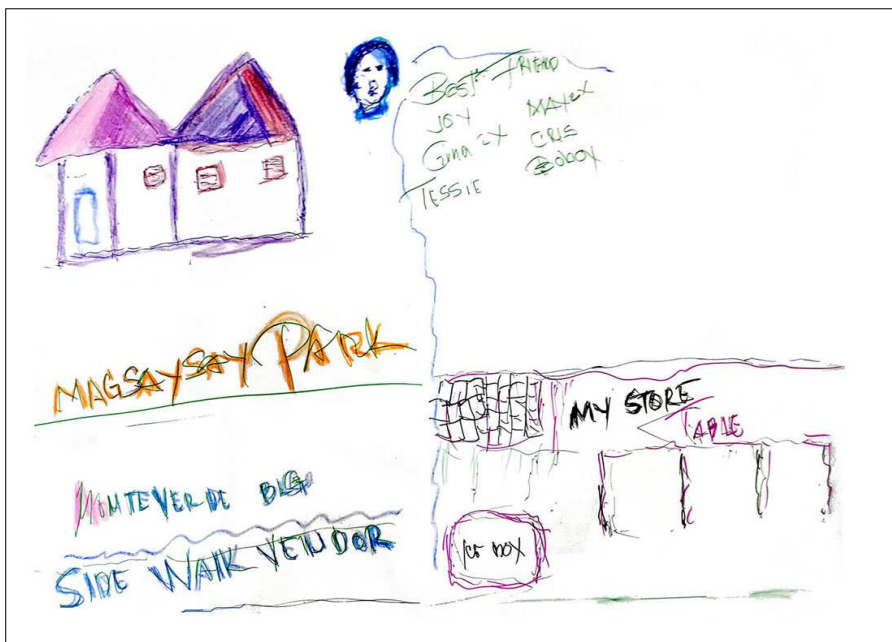


Figure 6
Spaces That Baba Frequented

To summarize, the spaces where the six informants commonly stayed or spent their time are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1
Spaces Where the Informants Stay

Spaces	Perling	Edilyn	Seremy	Janet	Jas	Baba
Household	X	X	X	X	X	X
Friends	X	X	X	X	X	X
Magsaysay Park	X		X	X	X	X
Agdao Public Market			X	X		X
House of barangay captain	X		X			
<i>Tambayan</i>			X			
<i>Sari-sari</i> store		X				
Grocery store		X				
Monteverde Street	X					X
Barangay hall			X			
Chapel		X			X	X
Gaisano Mall				X		
<i>Carinderia</i>				X		

From this list, the following spaces emerged as the common sites where the informants would linger and spend their time, namely: home or household; neighborhood (friend’s house, *tambayan*, chapel, market); with friends; park (Magsaysay Park); and workplace (barangay hall, Monteverde Street, *carinderia*, *sari-sari* store).

Inclusive and Exclusionary Spaces

After asking the participants to describe why they chose to stay in the spaces they frequented, they identified characteristics that they consider as inclusionary conditions that make their stay in a place fulfilling or rewarding. In contrast, they also described what situations or arrangements would make them decide to leave or would cause them to have difficulty living in such spaces or sites. The foregoing are shown in Table 2 to present the highlights of the FGD.

Table 2
Spaces With Inclusive and Exclusionary Characteristics

Spaces	Inclusive characteristics	Exclusionary characteristics
Home	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mag-alalay ang mga igsoon</i> (Siblings assisting each other) 2. <i>Partner na makatabang</i> (A partner who can also be of help) 3. <i>Naay pagdawat</i> (There is acceptance) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absence of security when growing old or growing old alone 2. <i>Partner na dili makatabang</i> (A partner who does not help/assist)
Neighborhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Magtinabangay</i> (Ready to help each other) 2. <i>Magtapok-tapok</i> (There are community gatherings) 3. <i>Bayanihan</i> (Unity) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the term “tomboy” instead of using the person’s name
Friends	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One can open up problems 2. Give advice 3. Real friends help, especially when the concern is health related 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not extending anything—not even time—to the person in need 2. Not caring to give advice
Park	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Dili pangutan-on kung ma’am or sir</i> (One is not asked whether one should be called as ma’am or sir) 2. Proper (not excessive) display of affection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In using the comfort room, some women ask if they are allowed to use the room 2. In entering the parks, some security guards or patrons insist that they should not pass through the women’s lane
Workplace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mas mayo kung walay muingon na “Babae diay ka?”</i> (It is better if no one will ask, “Are you a woman?”) 2. The focus is on the quality of work, not sexuality 3. <i>Walay chismis, trabaho lang</i> (No gossiping, just focus on one’s work) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making sexuality a topic of discussion

The participants do not live in a vacuum and are part of society. Their sexuality—a component of their personhood—intersects with their other social identities. Their experiences and narratives on inclusive and exclusionary spaces and the places they traverse frequently (like their homes and work-related places), infrequently (like small-size malls), or never at all (like bigger malls, hotels, bars, etc.), are, undoubtedly, dictated by their socio-economic status. From the space-use perspective, the spaces are inclusive when the area reflects affirming comments or treatments that the informants have experienced or hope to continue to experience. These are the kinds of experiences that somehow assure them a sense of worth/value, acceptance, and loyalty.

Their most inclusive places are the places they are most familiar with and comfortable in, and where they are accepted without judgment of their sexuality. The column on inclusive characteristics, for instance, underscores acceptance in all five social spaces as well as affirmation of their personhood, as part of being an older lesbian. Based on the FGD, to be accepted means downplaying their being lesbians or treating them like everyone else regardless of their SOGIE. This is where they underscore that their sense of self is not defined primarily by their sexuality, as their sexuality is just a part of who they are as persons.

Although the informants recognize and accept who they are as an existential reality, treating and reminding them that they are lesbians is felt to be demeaning. This was a point underscored repeatedly in the discussions: What they can do or hope to accomplish is not determined or solely determined by their sexuality, but by their other attributes, knowledge, and/or skills—thus, positively contributing to the group or institution they are working with and where they find or derive meaning. As persons, the informants hope to be treated simply as humans like everyone else or like heterosexual people.

Regarding the sense or meaning of home or household, what was common among the informants was that they all came from different places when they decided to migrate to Davao City and eventually settle. Among the reasons for leaving their hometown were the quest for independence and the search for better opportunities, so they could continue to work given their limited options. Common in their accounts

as well were the lack of opportunity to go to college and their financial struggles, not to mention the challenges they faced as lesbians, while studying. Among the informants, only Janet had been able to finish a two-year college course.

The desire for autonomy was evident in Seremy's and Edilyn's stories. For Baba, her move to the city gave her hope that one day she would no longer live in poverty. As migrants to a new place, the informants' experience of having a home or household also intersected with their quest for acceptance and having space that they could call their own. This point is a reminder of the quest to create one's "family of choice" (Barker et al., 2006). Leaving previous homes behind, the informants found ways to cultivate personal and/or intimate relations, and establish a home or a residence that they found a personal connection with. This made the home or household space that the informants endeavored to create into a space that they could then assert and recognize as their own. Such ownership could be the reason why, for example, Seremy continued to resist her mother's invitation to return to Iligan City. Similarly, Edilyn's certainty that she would no longer go back to General Santos was an assertion that Davao City was the place where she had physically built an abode for herself and her partner. Perling, for her part, considered the shack located at the back of a privately-owned building her home for the previous 20 years.

Janet's experience was quite different. During our visit to her place, we took notice of a small bed placed beneath the staircase just across the table where we had the interview. Since it caught our attention, she shared an incident regarding a motorcycle accident that had made it almost impossible for her to walk for 6 months. Her spinal cord was partially damaged and she had to undergo therapy. Her physical space while recuperating was constrained but not her socio-familial, inclusive space, as substantiated by the support and enduring care that her family—especially her brother—provided during the lowest point of her life, giving her strength and sustenance. At the time of the study, Janet was thankful that she had been able to recover and was back on her feet. Although still limited in her movements and unable to do all that she used to do before the accident, she was back to running her food business again.

She stressed, “*Maayo na lang naa akun utod na nitabang sa nako*” (I have a debt of gratitude to my brother who assisted me when I was almost bedridden). Janet considers her home, especially her kitchen and the *carinderia*, the space she is most comfortable in.

Their network of friends also mattered to the lives of the informants. As one or two romantic relationships would end and lasting homes and households were built, the consistent presence of friends was a common element in the narratives of the informants. Friends were seen as providing (or making up for the lack of) a safe, transparent, and secure social space where the informants also located themselves. The FGD attested to the participants’ accounts of shared memories especially with those who had been their neighbors and long-time friends for decades. The house of the barangay captain was also evidently viewed as a place of friendship, as the informants freely moved within the area as the interviews were being conducted. In this place, one could sense the shared stories and identities of many of the participants.

Within the group, it was only Janet who had a different set of friends. She also maintained a different type of romantic friendship as she had been in contact with a friend living and working abroad for a decade by that time. Her excitement while narrating about this friend was obvious, as she was quick to provide a glimpse of how they both supported and encouraged each other to deal with life’s struggles and difficulties. Since Janet was maintaining a small food business, she even offered her place as the venue for the next group discussion.

Magsaysay Park was another intersecting point in the spaces where the informants spent their time. As a public space, this area served as a respite from their other engagements. The park also functioned as a silent witness to the development of romantic relationships. Except for Edilyn, the park’s view of Samal Island, its greenery, and its accessibility to the informants’ places of residence offered a different kind of social space and meaning for the informants. The way they described Magsaysay Park, for instance, easily suggested how the area held a lot of memories for them. There was a sense of excitement and enthusiasm in their voices, and their faces beamed as if they were re-imagining the events and conversations that happened at the site. Among the informants, it was

only Edilyn who dissociated herself from the park—true to form as she had always reiterated that she was happy nestled in her abode with her longtime partner.

With regard to livelihood spaces, the informants were engaged in a variety of informal work to earn a living and provide food and sustenance to their respective families. Creating their own version of work security, the informants had different sources of income or combined at least a couple of spaces of work as they fulfilled their responsibilities: (1) as a partner in the case of Edilyn, Baba, Seremy, and Jas; (2) as an adoptive parent in the case of Baba and Jas; (3) as a family member in the case of Janet and Jas; and (4) for self-survival in the case of Perling. Although lacking in formal work-related privileges, the informants found ways to determine which types of work or options would be most effective or viable for them—given their varied situations, limiting what they may be in the eyes of others.

Perling, the *traysikad* driver, was already 58 years old at that time but was still doing physically taxing work and intended to do so for as long as her body would permit. She worked from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Mondays to Saturdays, under the rain or the scorching heat of the sun for a daily income of PhP200 to provide for her everyday needs. While waiting for passengers, she would park or station her *traysikad* on Rose Marie Street, 50 meters away from her small abode. Most of her passengers were those ferried along Tomas Monteverde Avenue, a part of Brgy. Leon Garcia where the barangay captain was her friend and also a lesbian.

Seremy, 50 years old and *Kap*'s assistant, had to make do with her meager PhP1,500/month allowance. Luckily, her partner was more financially secure and therefore able to take care of the family's bills. As *Kap*'s assistant, Seremy would just stay within the neighborhood and near the barangay hall in anticipation of *Kap*'s schedule and requests. She would normally accompany the community's highest official whenever she had an emergency meeting elsewhere. She would only go to the local public market when she needed to buy food—when *Kap* had visitors, for instance, or when her partner assigned her to do so.

Jas had to confine her business within Davao City since, at that time, she was taking care of her ailing mother, and her sick partner had suffered

a minor heart attack and needed therapy. As a result, Jas was in charge of the chores in both her own and her mother's houses. She just hoped that her small buy-and-sell business would thrive so that she could attend to her mother's and her partner's medical needs. During the interview, Jas tried to appear happy, although her face looked worried since she knew that her hands were full with two sick persons to take care of, aside from ensuring that her family's needs were met.

Janet had always considered her small food business as a reliable source of income for her and the family. After the FGD, she invited the research team to visit her place the following day—which we readily accepted. While we were eating at her place, she attended to some of her early-bird customers while at the same time apologizing for her busyness. She proudly pointed out that she had some buyers who had been loyal to her for years. "*Ang uban na customers kay gikan pa gyud na pikas barangay, murag ganahan sila sa akong luto*" (Some of my loyal customers are from another barangay. So I think they like the food that I cook and sell). Her skill in managing her space was also fascinating to see.

Baba, the street vendor, was doing her best to provide for her family, which included herself, her live-in partner of one year, her partner's two kids, and her partner's nephew. She would even try to find time to bring them to the nearby park. During our visit to her rented place, the difficulties Baba needed to deal with every day became clearer. Aside from earning a living outside conventional work hours to support five people, she was also responsible for their water supply since their rented room located on the second floor of the house had no water connection. She took it upon herself to carry at least 10 pails of water daily, which she would buy from her neighbor for PhP10/pail, for all their household needs (e.g., cooking, washing the dishes, bathing, etc.).

Evolving from the spaces of the informants' informal means of livelihood or sources of income, their worry regarding a secure future as they grew older was likewise given special attention in the FGD. This uncertainty about what lies ahead for them was something that the informants wanted to prepare for, but their current economic realities constrained them from looking far into the future. Faced with current pressing needs, the informants remained hopeful that, when difficult

situations would arise, their live-in partners and friends would be there for them. In the interviews and discussions, it was apparent that the sense of future for some of the informants did not revolve around the mainstream notion of thinking about 5 or 10 years ahead. For Perling and Baba, for instance, the future remained tied to the immediate days, weeks, or months ahead. This way of framing the future was reflective of their day-to-day struggles to meet the demands of daily existence. Moreover, thinking of their future did not even take into account what to do in the event that they fall ill or reach the time when they would no longer be capable of doing what they were currently doing. Or even if they may have been thinking about these scenarios, they simply brushed them aside since they could not do anything much about these, amidst the burdens of meeting their daily needs. The future would simply have to take care of itself.

Such affirmations were conversely validated by the characteristics of exclusionary elements in the five spaces. For the informants, to feel or experience a sense of exclusion meant having to wrestle with the way others unnecessarily highlighted their sexual orientation or sexuality in public spaces such as parks, places of work, and neighborhoods. As the informants strongly voiced their belief that certain remarks and actions are no longer needed or are unnecessary, they highlighted that other people still expected them to fit into certain stereotypes. Such was the case in the use of binary comfort rooms and when lining up for lanes that segregate men and women.

While such instances may seem trivial for others, like heterosexuals, the informants hoped that they would no longer need to explain their sexuality to others, since this is a private or personal matter after all. This is where the assumed values of heteronormative society articulate their persuasive force, which needs to be continuously checked and questioned. In addition to exclusionary remarks, the casual use of *tomboy* as a way of addressing them did not sit well with some of the informants as they took such labels as a form of insult, especially if these came from strangers or persons whom they were not close to. This was where the FGD underscored the value of using personal names rather than labels, which the informants considered as something not difficult to do or

understand. It was deemed a very sensible and doable expectation, and yet, they still found themselves dealing with such unenlightened and misguided remarks from time to time.

Exclusionary descriptions stand for actuations, comments, and situations that cause discomfort, a sense of uncertainty, and even marginalization, oppression, or discrimination. These are elements that need possible changes, solutions, or interventions that may come from the person, family members, the community, friends, people at the workplace (clients or colleagues), or the state.

Some Discursive Notes

Massey's (1994) overlapping notions of conventional subordination—concerning gendered constructions of space and place—and gendered mobility will take the privileged roles in providing a discursive reflection in interpreting the gathered descriptions from the narratives and FGD of the key informants in this study. For analysis, Massey's concept of conventional subordination will be paired with its alter state, conventional dominance; while the notion of mobility will be coupled with its negation, immobility.

The drawings and discussions of the six informants speak of conventional subordination, inclusive spaces, and exclusionary acts or remarks. In this paper, inclusive spaces stand for mobilities, while immobilities pertain to instances that condition an unnecessary need to explain, defend, or adjust to certain heteronormative expectations. The identification of the five key spaces (home, neighborhood, friends, nearby parks, and places of work) reveals realities that delimit the spaces and movements of the informants or their appreciation of such spaces/locales.

Choosing to move out of one's family of origin and building a home with a female partner in another city is a movement or transition riddled with challenges that emerged from heteronormative expectations (Johnson, 2003). Issues such as being accepted for who one is and having a safe and assuring feeling of not being judged when entering into a same-sex relationship are common threads in the accounts of the key informants. The longing for acceptance is a gendered expectation that can only come

from a society that disregards or does not value different ways of expressing one's sexuality. This is the concern that permeates the spatial stories of the informants in this study.

Perhaps, this is where the connection between acceptance and having a partner that helps provide income for the family derives its context. Will a lesbian be accepted still as she is if she can no longer fulfill the role of being the sole income earner in the family? While rejection may not have been a distant possibility in the story of Baba, Seremy's narrative disproved the link between both variables as she was living with a female partner who was earning more than she was and served as the primary breadwinner of the family. This means that Baba's account confirms the reality that there are lesbian relations that box them into the traditional male roles, particularly as income providers. On the other hand, Seremy's case suggests that relations and one's income, where the female partner is economically empowered, need not be a delimiting factor in having long-term, same-sex relationships.

Traditional stereotypes also locate the two-pronged spatial movements of the informants as either mobilities or immobilities. In public spaces such as comfort rooms and in areas that differentiate male and female visitors, immobilities happen when they are questioned if they should be using a female restroom or if they should be taking the male lane instead. Being in such positions demonstrates how the privileged, heteronormative ways of framing public spaces may put sexual minorities in often precarious situations (Fenster, 2005). Given the two scenarios, mobility—or using the female comfort room or taking the male lane—only commences after presenting some forms of justification or explanation to the inquiring person. The need to explain, which is not expected from heterosexual individuals, and the requirement to at least be brave enough to do so are needed in order for a form of mobility to commence. While the informants had generally found ways to deal with biased persons—or persons with stereotypical, discriminatory attitudes and behavior—who question their presence in some social spaces, still, the idea of having to go through such rounds of explanation conditioned their psychological forms of immobilities.

A similar scenario can be imagined in a neighborhood that does not take notice of the effects of using *tomboy* as the counterpart of a person's name. While those who have the privileged, heteronormative position do not mind the use of such terms in addressing lesbians, some of the informants prefer to be called by their names instead. Not using such name-calling labels may be taken as one of the gendered elements in an inclusivist neighborhood where there is unity (*bayanihan*), gatherings (*magtapok-tapok*), and readiness to help (*magtinabangay*). In such cases, these elements may be construed as manifestations of mobilities, while the presence and use of words that may cause offense regarding a person's sexuality can be considered as markers of immobility, as these tend to put in question the acceptance of the person as she is and her participation in the community life.

Despite the presence of conventional subordination, such a limiting presence can be challenged. In places of work, for example, the distinction between male and female, and the identification of one's sexuality as lesbian should be re-focused to one's productivity at work. This is the inclusivist reminder if one is to assess a person's productive work. In the case of Perling, for instance, the *traysikad* driver had formed a pool of loyal passengers who would also contract her services in delivering goods and items for them. Using the concept of mobility, choosing to confront questions concerning her capacity as a driver by actually providing quality service to her passengers—and doing so diligently just like the rest of the *traysikad* drivers—may be taken as Perling's way of educating her passengers and other on-lookers. Questioning conventional subordination, Perling may have transformed her *traysikad* into a vehicle that communicates hope to better gendered mobilities, and to eventually change gender-based immobilities, not to mention educate her clients, her fellow drivers, and the public in general. Riding on her *traysikad* ourselves and seeing her traverse Monteverde Street one afternoon provided a glimpse of a change in the way roads are predominantly occupied by cars, jeepneys, and buses driven largely by the male populace.

In the foregoing accounts, it is also important to highlight the intersecting role of class, gender, and age when one talks about gendered

mobility and immobility. This class difference can be recognized in the way the informants construed the future as something which was tied up to their immediate needs and struggles for survival, and the general uncertainty that revolved around the informants' sources of income. This is one interpretation of gendered immobility. At their age and given their daily toils, especially for Perling and Baba, there was no doubt that their work would one day take its toll on their physical and mental well-being, not to mention the financial burden it would cause. This class concern also takes additional merit or importance as Davao City has its Anti-discrimination Ordinance and the Women Development Code. Are there enough opportunities and support mechanisms for aging lesbians given their issues and concerns? Will they be able to access these without any problems and issues just like their heterosexual friends? These are questions which the notion of gendered mobility and immobility also needs to look into.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

This exploration of the social spaces of aging lesbians in Davao City has demonstrated the descriptive relation between space, gender, and aging. Specifically, this study has described spaces where gender and aging are peripheral or marginalized, and the characteristics of space when gender and aging are mainstreamed or are substantively acknowledged. Both descriptive relations stand as reminders of how the inhabitants in a place share in the right to influence the way spaces are designed, arranged, or re-arranged (Purcell, 2002).

Given the five spaces with which the six aging lesbians associate, a gendered space implies inclusive characteristics when it fosters accepting relations and gendered sensitivity within the home, the neighborhood, among friends, and in public spaces such as parks and places of work. This further means that aging lesbians recognize that they are accepted for who they are and that their sexuality is not treated as a constraint to the kind of relations that they will form or will have. In contrast, space is gender exclusionary when sexual orientation or gender identity is treated as trivial, as something that needs to be explained or justified, or when

used as leverage to gain something at the expense of the person's health and well-being. This is one of the situations where the need to address the stigma towards lesbians in general also locates its significance (Muyargas et al., 2016).

As the informants in this study were nearing the age of 60, the challenges they encountered and the uncertainties of their future stand as a reminder that creating gendered spaces and mobilities should also mean providing gender-responsive opportunities and services that can help them prepare for their future (Doan, 2015). With gendered space, it also means ensuring that the five spaces, namely, home, neighborhood, friends, parks, and places of work question conventional subordinations on gender, and espouse gendered spaces and mobilities. These are conceptual suggestions that further underscore the reality that older sexual minorities, such as older lesbians, have experiences that are unique to them (Butler, 2004).

Likewise, it is important to recognize and remember that the sexuality of the person does not define or sum up who they are, but rather, it is just a part of who the person is. The person who happens to be an aging lesbian also has skills, attributes, and knowledge. Just like aging heterosexual persons, they have fears, wants, and challenges to face. Unfortunately, their sexuality is an added source of stress to them—which should not be the case. Society and people have a way of setting rules and expectations from a heteronormative perspective that, many times, have become impossible to follow, hampering the development of the person due to being boxed in based on their gender orientation and sexuality, resulting in discrimination and stigma.

Furthermore, the sexuality of the person does not exist in a vacuum. It also intersects with other factors that may or may not impinge on the condition or situation they are in. Aside from age and sexuality, class and socioeconomic status, religion, education, ethnicity, race, and ability or disability are factors that could either help or constrain the person in the development of their full potentials.

Backed up by the insights and stories in this study, specific recommendations may be considered to improve the gendered mobilities of aging lesbians in particular and marginalized members of the LGBT

community in general. While not exhaustive, these may serve as a constructive starting point.

1. Organize capacity building programs/projects for the management and staff of government and privately managed spaces like parks, malls, and other public spaces to better equip them with gender-sensitive sensibilities. Examples of concrete actions are requiring all personnel to attend seminars on gender sensitivity, SOGIESC, and laws and policies concerning marginalized groups (i.e., women and girls; LGBT people, specifically older lesbians; older persons; persons with disability; and indigenous people), including discussions on Davao City's Anti-discrimination Ordinance and Women Development Code, and other similar ordinances in other parts of the country.
2. Review, revise, create, and implement clear office guidelines and policies related to Gender and Development and anti-discrimination to assess regulations and practices in such spaces that may not be gender responsive and affirmative, and thus exclusionary. This will also be an opportunity for management, decision- and policy-makers to make spaces inclusive and open to anyone, regardless of age, SOGIE, ability/disability, socioeconomic status, religion, race, cultural identity, etc.
3. Install/distribute posters, ads, and/or materials in public areas like government owned/managed spaces (e.g., parks) and privately owned/managed spaces (e.g., malls) to demonstrate that the place is a gender-friendly and inclusive space for all, regardless of sex, SOGIE, ability/disability, age, and religion. This includes signage at the entrance doors to public toilets to indicate gender inclusiveness, thus, safe for all. Establishments may also opt to construct all-gender comfort rooms. Such actions may help remind everyone—the users and administrators/personnel—to be respectful of gender differences and diversity.

4. Organize the aging LGBT people as a group as part of the representation to remind the community, municipality, or city that their issues are sector specific, and provide the needed support mechanisms. The group or members of this sector may also be provided with knowledge and skills to help them traverse life as aging lesbians and as members of the LGBT community. It is important for those who will be involved with the sector to be aware that nuances, diversity, and differences in needs, socio-economic status and position, and skills exist within this group. Examples of concrete actions are seminars on policies and laws affecting or concerning this sector, skills enhancement to help them attain economic stability and security, and programs related to social and health (e.g., mental, physical) issues that concern their overall well-being.
5. In providing measures to enhance the lives of aging lesbians and others in these marginalized groups, it is important to extend these measures to their support groups as well, friends and/or family members who may also need enlightenment and assistance on gender sensitivity.

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