

Aging in the Narratives of Older/*Tiguwang* Lesbians in Davao City, Mindanao

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Abstract

What does it mean to grow old for older/*tiguwang* lesbians? In this study, seven key informants from Davao City were interviewed and two focus group discussions were organized to allow the participants to provide in-depth descriptions of their experiences and perspective concerning aging. The interview questions were informed by the life course perspective of Dewilde (2003). The unfolding themes were critically analyzed following Meyer's minority stress perspective (2003). Privileging the assumptions of a narrative-constructivist qualitative method (Creswell, 2014), this study holds that the older/*tiguwang* lesbians construe aging as an intersection of perspectives, issues, responsibilities, and capacities. Such intersections are gleaned in the following meanings of aging: (1) as reflective of class difference – as a privilege given the demands of everyday struggles especially those who are tied to the daily grind of work, and as a possibility that demands preparation for some who can save, or have more than one source of income, (2) the process of creating/living with a family of choice, (3) having to bear the responsibility of taking care of one's parents, (4) as a two-pronged experience of settling in a place, and cultivating resilience

in confronting emerging issues, and (5) as a demonstration of agency as creators of their lived worlds.

Keywords: aging, older/*tiguwang* lesbians, narratives, Davao City

Introduction

Studies on the experiences and situations of aging gay men and lesbians remain peripheral to gender issues and discourse (Calasanti, 2003). Cruikshank (1991), for instance, considers the elder LGBT population as an invisible sector. While research on the aging sector in general has steadily increased, especially from the health studies and economics perspectives, particularizing realities such as gender, ethnicity, and disability are often overlooked (Walsh et al, 2017). In the Philippines, similar academic neglect is made, since there are very few studies done on the elder LGBT (Espinoza, 2014; Guevarra, 2016). This lack resonates with the general observation that when one talks of LGBT individuals, issues on sexuality, identity, and health often take the center stage (Espinoza, 2014). Concerns related to gerontology, including care and social protection among older sexual minorities specifically LGBT people, remain at the margins (Choi & Meyer, 2016). Where are the older LGBT Filipinos? How are they faring or living in our society? These are questions that need attention and reflection, since experiences among members of particular groups of people, and within a specific sector are diverse and depend upon social, contextual, and historical factors (Choi & Meyer, 2016). Hence, this study hopes to contribute to this gap guided by the desire to mainstream questions on aging lesbians, and invite other researchers to go into LGBT concerns, particularly of older lesbians.

For this study, an important take-off point is the 2014 Philippine country report, *Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report* published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This account holds that sub-populations in LGBT community, such as LGBT people with disabilities, senior LGBT people, and indigenous peoples,

remain excluded or neglected. Such a scenario is no different from studies on aging lesbians in the Philippines in comparison to older heterosexual women or even the older gays. It is also important to note that in Manila, a shelter—named *Home for the Golden Gays*, used to serve as a retirement place for older gays and lesbians who were disregarded or abandoned by their families (Heifetz, 2017). According to Heifetz (2017), it was built in 1975 by Justo Justo, a gay man. The place unfortunately closed in 2012 after Justo's death, leaving its 48 members homeless. However, no record of similar shelter or structures in other places in the country were made or are available to take care of the needs of aging gay men and lesbians. This begs the question, "Is the situation of aging lesbians, particularly in Mindanao, discussed at all?" Hence, the following questions are in order: (1) Where are the aging lesbians in the community or society? and (2) How do they make sense of and experience aging? With these queries, the situations of aging lesbians in Davao City, Mindanao may be located and facilitate the foregrounding of their thoughts, accounts, and experiences as they experience, and anticipate aging. Through their stories, recommendations may also be formulated to possibly address issues or concerns.

Hoping to account for the experiences of older/*tiguwang* lesbians and their anticipation of aging as a social process, this study seeks to put a local face to this oft-neglected sector within the aging population (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006) in the southern part of the country by articulating their stories, questions, and reflections on what it means to survive as well as to live well. Thus, this study intends to describe the situations where aging lesbians find themselves in, the meanings that they attached to their situations and experiences, and their image or version of what it means to age or grow old. This problem statement is unpacked via the following objectives: (1) To describe the situation of aging lesbians in Davao City; (2) To describe how aging lesbians regard their present situations and construe the future; (3) To discuss the meaning of such situations and anticipations of the future; and (4) To recommend how some issues surrounding older/*tiguwang* lesbians can be approached or possibly addressed.

Methodology

In this study, the qualitative narrative approach (Creswell, 2014) is the privileged methodological frame. For the tools, a combination of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and field visits were conducted in Davao City. This site is selected given the researchers' access to key organizations in the place which in turn helped them identify key and prospective informants in the study. Moreover, the Anti-discrimination Ordinance of the city approved in 2013 provides a contextual assumption that the presence of LGBT individuals in the city is at least acknowledged and/or protected by the LGU, which this study considered as contributory to the possibility of having access to key informants in the area. Likewise, the existence of Davao City's Women Development Code (City Ordinance No. 5004) approved in 1997 recognizes the equal rights of women and men as well as the important role and contribution of women in development.

The research and interview questions were also framed according to the life course perspective of Dewilde (2003), which zeroed in on the combination of life events, transitions, and passages. In this research, such moments/phases are captured via questions on migration, coming-out stories, struggles with their sexuality, and turning points/decisions in their life as they age. Such questions are formulated to help make sense of their journey to where they are right now, how such journey intersects with their sexuality, and as contextual background to their current priorities, situations, and concerns as they live and age in Davao City.

In the focus group discussion, the results of the interview are more nuanced. By asking each of the participants to draw the spaces that they find themselves in, the life course perspective on their current situation, how they envision the future, and aspects which they were unable to share during the one-on-one interview are articulated. Parts of their stories are also filled-in by the other informants, especially that they are close friends, or neighbors for decades. The FGD exercise, thus, allowed the group to cross-check, deepen, and even validate the stories shared by the key informants. In this paper, however, their output on the spaces that they identify with will not be explored but will be deepened in another article.

In selecting the informants, the purposive and snowball sampling was put to use until the study was able to get the commitment and consent of seven aging lesbians in Davao City to participate. By aging lesbians, this study limited the meaning of the term to individuals who are already in their 50s. Initially, the study wanted to gather informants who are senior citizens—legally defined as someone who is 60 years old and above— but the difficulty in finding one forced the research team to lower the age to 50 years. From the pool of informants, the age range is 50 to 58 years old. This age range is also treated as the age definition in Choi and Meyer's (2016) "LGBT Aging: A Review of Research Findings, Needs, and Policy Implications," while the question on who is part of the aging category for LGBT is problematized in Krekula's (2007) exploration on the intersection of age and gender. More specifically, Krekula's work questions the assumptions surrounding age and the concept and experience of who is elder/elderly in a society.

In the conduct of the interview, it is important to mention that two informants allowed the interview only if a familiar face or a friend was within sight while the interview ensued. This was their requirement even if the interview was done within their household or community. The informants later explained that they wanted such arrangement to ensure that they felt safe while the interview proceeded. Such worries, however, were no longer present during the focus group discussions as the discussions provided a sense of group/community as the sharing developed. The worry also dissipated as both informants realized the value of their participation in the study.

For the theoretical limitation, the central concepts of the life course perspective of Dewilde (2003) as events, transition, and passage is used in framing the narrative oriented questions of the study. By providing the frame, the minority stress perspective of Meyer (2003) also comes in as the gender and critical lens of the study as it underscores that sexual and gender minorities are exposed to unique stress related to stigma, concealment, and prejudice. Thus, the combined frame of Dewilde (2003) and the gender focus of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) serves as the theoretical bias, which consequently grounds the narrative-interpretive lens of this project.

In order to meet ethical research standards, consent from the informants was sought and a validation exercise was conducted. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their consent to be interviewed were obtained. Moreover, the participants were free to answer or not answer questions and to discontinue the interview for any reason they deem to do so. The names of the informants are anonymized, and the stories of the aging lesbians are properly archived. The study was done for 7 months from June to December 2018.

Theoretical Framework

The central concepts of the life course perspective of Dewilde (2003) as events, transition, and passage is used as one of the two theoretical frames in this study. Noting that the life course perspective is an amalgam of interrelated concepts (Utz & Nordmeyer, 2007), and Elder's (1998) foundational discussion of the life course perspective as made up of interdependent life trajectories as events and transitions, this paper makes use of Dewilde's approach to the life course perspective through her description of its central concepts as events, transitions, and passage (Dewilde, 2003). These are her descriptions of the three key concepts of the life course perspective: (1) transition stands for changes between one and another position; (2) events are occurrences that may not be automatically be considered as social; and, (3) passages or trajectories are accretions of transitions that result in a new life stage. Hence, it is the combined use of these three central concepts that distinguish this paper's approach to the other approaches to the life course perspective as specified by Dewilde (2003): as life course perspective of Elder, as continental institutional approach, and her notion of the political economy of the life course.

By providing the frame, the minority stress theory of Meyer (2003) serves to provide the gender lens of the study. The frame is engendered by the theory as it underscores the situation of sexual and gender minorities as they are exposed to unique forms of stress which are related to stigma and prejudice. Meyer (2003) continues that such stressors can cause adverse effects on health which can be taken to mean as either or

a combination of stress related to mental, physical, or social health. Moreover, the minority stress theory accommodates the intersection between gender and aging given that the aging sector, in general, has been a minority interest in research and policy considerations.

Thus, the combined central concepts of Dewilde in a life course perspective (2003) and the gender focus of the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) which intersects with the aging sector serve as the theoretical frame of this study. As the privileged lens, the theoretical frame consequently grounds the interpretive discussion of the narratives of older lesbians as they give their accounts on what it means to age, survive, and live well. It is also important to note that the stories will not be dissociated in terms of events, transitions, and passages in the life of the key informants. True to the spirit of the integrative narrative approach, the stories are taken as a set of organically linked accounts, or as a network of meanings belonging to a field of context. The distinctions in the life course perspective as events, transitions, and passages are only used as heuristic or exploratory tools.

Review of Related Literature

Studies on the intersection between aging and older lesbians are extensively summarized in Lindesay's 2005 book, *Gay and Lesbian Aging: Research and Future Directions*. Majority of these studies were done in the U.S. In the book, the editors present what has been done on researches on older gays and lesbians, and condensed such efforts into six themes and social issues, namely: (1) family ties, (2) intimate relationships, (3) friendship, (4) community, (5) generativity, and (6) aging well. What follows is a summary of topics, interests, or concepts explored in each of the six themes.

(1) The theme 'family ties' pertains to the study on gay men and older lesbians in the context of the family. Some of the more specific interests under this theme include (a) the conservative stance that there is mutual exclusivity between homosexuality and family, (b) the liberal stance which supports legal and the social right to form legal union for same sex couples (Dean, 1994, as cited in Lindesay, 2005), (c) family

responses to homosexual parents, the dynamics in the household of same sex couples (Bozett, 1987, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), issues concerning the rearing of children, social support system, and different motives for having children or not having one (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), and (d) the dynamics of coming out stories in families (Vacha, 1985, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), and how families negotiate the information, and how such information affects family relationships (Murphy, 1989, as cited in Lindsay, 2005).

(2) On researches done on intimate relationships, focus has been given to these concerns: (a) on the meaning and nature of partnerships which cover experiences and standards on partner selection (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), issues of power and conflict in relationships (Reilly & Lynch, 1990, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), valuation of affection (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), choices in relation to monogamous/non-monogamous relationships, romantic relationship, and unrequited romantic relationships (Huyck, 2001, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), (b) on expressing sexuality among aging gay men and lesbians, the notion that aging, older persons as sexually undesirable (Schlesinger, 1985, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), older gay men perceived as sexual perverts (Kelly, 1999, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), (c) lived social realities of old lesbians and gay men and (d) definitions of same sex couple (Berger, 1990, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), including definitions of being single (Nardi, 1999, as cited in Lindsay, 2005).

(3) Friendship is also treated as an object of research inquiry. More specifically, topics under this theme explored and discussed with these aspects: (a) influence of friendship to well-being, role and meaning of friendships in older gay men and lesbians, the relation of friendship to health, psychological well-being, and in dealing with stigma (Grossman, D'Augeli, & Hershberger, 2000, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), and (b) the meaning of families of choice (Weston, 1991, as cited in Lindsay, 2005) such as friends as family, and role of friendships in the life of older gay men and lesbians.

(4) For Community or/and community life, researches were done on the following concerns: (a) the gay territory (Weston, 1991, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), the boundary of gay worlds (Hoffman, 1968, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), gay districts, and communities associated with aging gay men and lesbians such as bars, taverns, and clubs, (b) end of life rituals (Kastenbaum, 2001, as cited in Lindsay, 2005) such as grief (Deck & Folta, 1989), intimate relationships, classes of grievors, disenfranchised deaths, exclusion from traditional rituals (Maybury, 1995, as cited in Lindsay, 2005) for HIV-caused deaths (Bay Area Reporter, 1995, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), and the development of rituals and remembrances, obituaries.

(5) Generativity is the other research category which yielded these research concerns: (a) multiple manifestations of generativity (Isay, 1996, as cited in Lindsay, 2005) such as immortality projects (Yalom, 1989 as cited in Lindsay, 2005), co-parenting, childbearing and rearing, bonds between old gay men and lesbians, and animals as family members (Sable, 1995 as cited in Lindsay, 2005), (b) career choices such as artistic pursuits (Henry, 2000, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), mentoring, and creativity, and (c) involvement in political activism as forms of participation in creating social change, including famous LGBT parades.

(6) Aging well is the other theme that has gained the attention of researchers. For this category, the focus was given to (a) aging in terms of decline and loss (Rowe & Kahn, 1987, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), (b) distinction between usual and successful aging (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), (c) preparations for aging, and crises of aging of older gay men and lesbians (Friend, 1991, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), and (d) studies on time and context on the historical period and quality/kind of life of gay men and lesbians as they live in certain epochs (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995, as cited in Lindsay, 2005), which looks into the generally uncharted lives as junctures between history and biography.

In the Philippines, studies on older sexual minorities are scant (Tan, 2012, as cited in Guevarra, 2016). This is also observed by the 2014 Philippine country report, *Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report*, but at the same time noting that sub-populations within the LGBT community like people with disabilities, senior citizens, and indigenous peoples are often excluded or neglected. The lack of data may be attributed

to the reality that sexual minorities or sexuality outside heteronormativity remain conditionally tolerated or are never accepted at all, preventing them from disclosing for fear of possible negative repercussions (Kimmel, 2014, as cited in Guevarra, 2016). Despite such setbacks, there is a noteworthy effort in taking the challenge of studying older/*tiguwang* lesbians in the country. This pertains to Guevarra's (2016) article, "Life Satisfaction Among Older Filipino Sexual Minorities and Their Experiences of Support," which studied the situation of five self-identified gay men and five lesbians, two of which were self-identified, while the other three did not identify with the lesbian label but described their romantic attraction with the same sex. These informants were grouped under the category of sexual minorities. In this study, Guevarra analyzed the relation between aging, lack of familial support, and the stigma associated with sexual identities and gender orientation. Such conditions were described to be more difficult in an ageist culture, which is evidenced in the society's almost non-regard to the presence and needs of aging sexual minorities in the country. In contrast to Guevarra's approach, the present study focuses on the specific experiences of lesbians themselves with growing old and the way they construct/frame aging.

Results and Discussions

A. Narratives

Gen-Gen: Retiring in a Home-for-the-Aged. This is the plan of Gen-Gen (58 years old) and Hilda (50 years old) once they reach their senior years. While they still have the energy to work in a canteen in a university in Davao City, they already see themselves living and retiring in the facility. The couple have three scenarios in mind: (1) if both of them live beyond 60, they will enroll themselves in a home-for-the-aged and still try to work in the institution so their stay will be free-of-charge; (2) if one of them dies earlier, the surviving partner will sell their properties and use the money to stay in the facility; and (3) build a home-for-the-aged facility with three of Gen-Gen's siblings who are also single/do not have their own families. With these plans, it seems that Gen-Gen has already made up her mind and has found solace in such possibilities.

But how did she end up committing to such a plan? In her narrative, two accounts/descriptions can somehow help provide the context: (1) Gen-Gen shared that she does not own anything at all since she has decided to name their house-and-lot to her partner, Hilda. She specified that if she dies ahead of her partner, the decision is her way of ensuring that no member of her family will have any legal basis to get the house-and-lot from her partner. Thus, her death will still mean providing something for her partner, since one plan is to sell the house and use the money to pay off her stay in a home-for-the-aged facility; and, (2) she is convinced that having children, or taking care of a nephew/niece provides no guarantee that somebody will be taking care of them as they grow old. She observes, “*Sa panahon karun, kung wala kay kwarta wala nay mukuan sa imo. Imo man gud na makita karun. Ipasa pasa lang ka. Sipa sipaan nalang ka. Adto nalang lagi ka sa home*” (Today, if you do not have enough money, no one will take care of you. You will just be transferring from one of your relative’s house to another. It is better to stay put and settle in the home-for-the-aged). Perhaps the third reason why Gen is resolved with the idea of settling in a home-for-the-aged facility was her experience when she was taking care of her mother before her passing. She had to be with her full-time: “*Akong mama nagkasakit pud ako juy nagbantay sa akaong mama. Nagkasakit sya hangtud sya namatay kami jud nag uban nagauli lang ko Sunday.*” (I took care of my mother when she was sick until her death. I stayed with her and I only go home to our house with my partner on Sundays). In Gen’s mind, a parent cannot expect their child to take care of them when they grow old or become sick; it is only due to a son’s or daughter’s character that she/he will take care of her/his parents.

Because she has worked in different companies, specifically in businesses associated with car parts and service centers, Gen has been immersed in the entrepreneurial world. It is also in such a context where she met her partner of 30 years. Now, she makes use of her skills in her small food-canteen business.

Dandan: Working Hard for a Family of Five. While she supports her partner with two kids, and a nephew who is living with them, Dandan (58 years old) finds fulfillment in seeing how her role as the family’s

breadwinner has made her closer to the kids, especially the eldest son, of her partner. She remarked: “*Kana iyang eldest niya dili mubawag sa akoa*” (Her eldest always accompanies me, he does not want to be away from me). This is something which she is always reminded of each time the kids call her “Dada” which is a derivative of “Daddy”. She was beaming with joy and pride when asked how she is called by her “adopted” kids. Dandan, who works as a street vendor in front of Magsaysay Park in Davao City, does not mind her lesbian friends’ remarks that she is working too hard just to provide for her partner and her kids. They are in agreement that Dandan is getting old, and that she should already slow down.

Although she is being pressed-on by her friends, Dandan just smiles and disregards her friends’ observations. Dandan reminds them that she cannot just disown the kids and tell her partner to leave. Despite her sense of responsibility to her family, she also confided about the difficulty she consistently deals with her work: “*Gamay ra ko ug tulog sa isa ka, kanang murag paminaw nako murag tulo ra ka oras akong tulog unya maninda napud pagkagabii. Kapoy kaayo oi kay ako man tanan. Akong kaipon di baya to matulog ra baya to.*” (I usually lack sleep—around three hours only, then I am off to work again. This work is also very difficult, since I do not have anybody to assist me. My partner is also just sleeping in the house).

Given the way Dandan handles the pressure of working hard for the family of five, some of her close lesbian friends are keen on their criticisms. She cites, “*Ah miingon lagi akong barkada nga di ko magsilbi ug ning-ana nga kinabuhi oi. Sobraan ra daw kaayo ko kamaayo*” (My friends tell me that the way I support my new family will eventually not work for me. They said that I have been too good to them). When asked about her thoughts on turning 60 years old, Dandan had no qualms in saying that it is something that she does not worry about. She said, “*Kanang magplano pa inig katiguwang na unsay buhaton, wala naman na sa akoang kuan, ang akoa lang nga naa pa koy kusog maningkamot, maningkamot gyud ko*” (Growing old is something that one does not plan. It does not matter to me. As long as I have the strength to work, I will just strive or work hard to earn a living).

Percie: Surviving as a Traysikad Driver. Percie earns money as a *traysikad* driver. She does not mind whenever some of her passengers get surprised that she is not a man. Being the only woman in a group of *traysikad* drivers in a corner near Rose Pharmacy in Agdao, Davao City, Percie has adjusted to such a situation, the astonishment, and the queries. She has even experienced getting sidelined, since a few passengers would not want to ride in her *traysikad* for the simple reason that the driver is a woman. Some passengers, however, are concerned that she is still doing hard work at her age: “*Tug-anan ko, 58 na. Sila, ‘kaya pa diay nimo?’ Kaya pa nako oi.*” (I tell them my age, and the passengers will ask if I can still pedal and drive. I tell them that I can still do it). However, her concern now is the searing heat that she needs to endure almost every day: “*Init lagi, pero pahuway sa oi. Maugtas lagi ka sa init. Dili ka maugtas magsakay ug pasahero ba, maugtas ka sa init ba. Kay init gyud kaayo kay ang hungaw pa sa simento. Lagom gyud kayo.*” (It can be very hot at times. One does not get worn-out with the passengers, but the searing heat can be physically draining especially with the heat from the pavements. My skin has turned dark).

Since Percie has become used to living alone, she no longer sees herself in a relationship. She quips: “*Ako dili nako anang live-live in mi surrender nako. Mao na ako dugay na sab ko nagbiya nako anang babae ron. Wala oi gikapoy nako oi. Di man gyud na maatoa.*” (I have surrendered the idea of living with a woman. I have grown tired of it. Your partner will never be yours as well forever). She is now more attuned to herself, her needs, and especially her body. She is noticing how she is getting old. “*Ang ako lang dili lang jud nato abusaran atong lawas. Kay ako 58 naman jud ko pero kaya pa man nako nuon.*” (We should no longer abuse our bodies, especially that I am already 58 years old, although I still feel that I can still work.) So, after a day’s work, Percie follows this simple routine as her way of keeping her legs and feet healthy: “*Kanang gikan ka, for example, gikan ko ug drayb buntag. Pag uli nimo mga sobra arte ba, manghimasa, dili na pwede.*” (After working the whole day, I will never wash my feet, it should never be done).

As part of the interview, we also went to the actual house of Percie. She led us to her makeshift house, which has no electricity and water.

She has very few belongings, and pointed at the three stray cats that live in her small area. Since she lived alone, she shared that she used to work for somebody for a stretch which included SSS contributions. In her visit to the office, she lamented that her contributions only reached 53 months. She knew that she needed a total of ten years of SSS contributions, so she has accepted the reality that she will never have a pension once she turns 60 years old. “*Sayang man, kung mamatay man ko akong madawat burial nalang. Wala gani koy beneficiary. Dili man maka claim akong maguwang, burial lang akong madawat.*” (When I die, I can only receive burial assistance. I cannot claim what I have contributed to SSS.)

Percie has no plans of asking help from her siblings: “*O naglisud sad. Ngano mangayo man ko ug tabang nga naa man koy pangita. Pangayuan pa nako sya nga mao ra iyang saligan pension sa iyang bana, iyang mga anak ako nagtapok sa ilaha.*” (They are also having difficult lives. My sister is just depending on her husband’s pension and she also needs to feed her kids.)

She envisions a future with her *traysikad* and hopes that she will still have the health to continue. She notes, “*Syempre akong isipon nga tagaan ko ug maayong lawas sa Ginoo. Samtang kaya nako kayahon nako. May nang sikad kay makapahuway huway man ka.*” (My prayer is for God to grant me strength so I can continue driving. Driving a *traysikad* is also good for me, since I can rest in-between while waiting for my turn to ferry the passengers.)

Serning: Sidekick of Kapitan. Serning proudly shared that many girls had a crush on her since she was a known runner-athlete in her high school days. While this is a fond memory that made her smile a bit in the interview, it seemed that before her stay in Barangay Mason, her life has been one of constant running and departures. After high school, she insisted on living on her own despite the disapproval of her mother: “*Murag gusto na nako ba nga maging independent gani ko kay dili ko gusto nga naa lang koy bisyu manigarilyo masuko mana sya. Mihawa na dayun ko.*” (I wanted to be independent. When I smoke, I was always reprimanded, so I tried to find ways to leave the house).

From Iligan City, she went to Davao City to try her luck. Due to her desire to assert independence, such desire was affirmed when in 1989, Serning had a chance to work in a mall in Davao City. The work, however, ended one year later after she disagreed with a regular employee. In her words, “*Na renew ko ka isa unya pagka sunod kana laging dako nang ulo daghan. Naa sad koy batasan nga dili ko gusto nga suguon gani Di man ko musogot*” (I was renewed again but after the six month-contract I somehow became arrogant. I had this big-headed attitude when somebody orders me to do something). With her family still looking for her, she still managed to live on her own transferring from one place to another. She recounts, “*Unya balhin ug puyo Isla Verde, Piyapi, hangtud last gyud diri gyud ko*” (I always moved from one place to another, in Isla Verde, Piyapi, until I settled here in this Barangay Mason).

At the age of 50, Serning has finally learned to settle in a place. It is in Barangay Mason where she found a sense of place and space after she met the current barangay captain in the area. When “*Kap*” was still a barangay *kagawad* (councilor), Serning was made to do errands, accompany her in various political engagements, and eventually became a personal assistant: “*Mao dayun ganahan nako diri tungod kang Kap ug kagawad pa sya sa una. Uban ubanon pud ko niya.*” (When she was still a barangay *kagawad*, she would invite me to join her in her engagements). Since she is now working for a local politician, Serning still goes to places, but now, her travels are under the guidance of their barangay captain. It is important to note here that the barangay captain is also a lesbian and has a partner of her own.

Serning also eventually found a partner in the same barangay and they are renting in one of the barangay captain’s apartments. When asked about her future as she is now in her 50s, Serning does not mind not having a permanent job as long she is working for the barangay captain: “*Wala man jud ko nag huna ug unsay kuan nga umaabot ang akoa karun, basta happy ko sa akong kuan karun, mao ra na akoa ba.*” (I do not think about the future too much. As long as I am happy now, that is what is most important.). When she has health concerns, she now turns to her siblings for assistance and to the barangay captain as well. Serning, however, laments that she has not continued her SSS contributions. Since

she used to work in a mall, she has not made any contributions or did any follow-up on the possibility of completing the number of months/years so she can have a pension when she turns 60.

Jenjen: Taking Care of Nanay. Upon reaching the age of 56, Jen decided to stop drinking but continues to smoke. She observed that she has started to feel differently with her physical health. As a vendor of different items in various places in Mindanao, Jen shared that she has mastered the craft of selling items. In the barangay where she lives, her neighbors approach her whenever they have plans of selling some of their appliances and furniture. She is the go-to person if you want your items to be easily sold. With vending, she has traveled to different places: “*Ang lugar tanan, Visayas. Abot mi ug Basilan. Sa batan-on pa ko. Mga line of 20s ana. Didto naa pud koy balay sa Diwal-wal.*” (I have been to so many places. I even reached Basilan, and Diwal-wal where I used to have a house in my 20s). Despite her busy schedule, Jen decided to stop working to take care of her mother. It has been four months since she stayed in their house: “*Sa pagkakaran ako may nag-atiman sa akong mama kay nasunog man iyang bukton nabuthan sa buten.*” (As of now, I am the one taking care of my mother after she had a serious burn on her arm from an explosion while using butane). They also frequent the hospital since her mother keeps on complaining from pain. Since she stopped vending her items, she began to feel some discomfort in her eyes. She also recognizes that she is no longer strong: “*Kay kani akong pangidaron mga bukog na ba, dili na kuan na sya ba. Kung sa kahoy pa, padung na pagabok ba.*” (As we age, the bones start to get brittle. Like a plank of wood, it starts to become fragile).

Since Jen is now taking care of her mother full-time, she keeps reminding her mother that the red scar on her mother’s shoulder should not be a source of shame. Whenever she sees her mother blankly staring at the wall, she worries that her mother might have resigned to her condition: “*Ayaw na sige ug kaulaw ma oi kay edaran naka. Mag sige sya ug tutuk ba, sa seventy-nine niya nga edad, maguol sya nya byuda pa gyud. Dugay na sya na byuda oi 25 years na.*” (Do not worry Ma. She keeps on staring the wall, worrying and she is 79 years old, also a widow for 25 years).

While conducting the interview, Jen took a few breaks just to check if her mother was asleep inside their house. From afar, we also saw her

mother sleeping with her grandson. Jen shared that after our interview, she will need to soak the clothes of her mother, which she will wash the day after. She added that she practically takes care of all the household chores. “*Murag ana, daghan oi. Akoy manlapaso gani.*” (I have many tasks in the house; I even scrub the floor). After the validation exercise for this research, Jen shared that her long-time partner recently had a heart attack and is currently suffering from a partial paralysis, a debilitating condition. Jen expressed that she now has two persons to take care of.

Edna: Stay-at-home Partner. Edna has been in a relationship with her partner for 30 years now. Their relationship started in Dadiangas (General Santos City). They are currently living in Isla Verde, Davao City—“*Mao na ni akon payag diri gyud mi*” (This is my small house; this is where I stay). In her house, Edna has a small-store which is run by her partner. She has long abandoned her vices and spends lesser time with her closest friends. When asked why there was a radical change in her lifestyle, Edna explained that, ever since a person tried to kill her in a place near their house, she has become very careful in dealing with other people. After the suspect was imprisoned, Edna became more circumspect of her choices: “*O, mitigbas sya diretso nga walay break. Pagtigbas niya sa akoa maygani nakabantay ko kay nagkaon man ko, akong mata didto nagtan-aw sa iyaha sa mga palibot ana.*” (He just approached me and tried to swat a dagger, and I was alert enough to avoid his attack). She adds, “*Pagtungtung nako ug singkwenta natalawan nako. Mahadlok nako magpaibot ngipon. Kay ang akong kabuhi misaka na sa akong kutokuto. Hadlok nako mugawas labi na panahon sa gabii, naa sa highway, dili ko.*” (When I reached the age of 50, I started to become fearful of things— getting my tooth extracted, going out at night, reaching the highway). With these dispositions, Edna has found more reasons to stay in the house and somehow confine herself to her immediate surroundings in Isla Verde. As a Muslim, Edna hopes that Allah will grant her more years. In this sense, Edna thinks of growing old as a gift.

Edna also proudly shared that she has an adopted son with her partner. They both are not worried about growing old: “*Sa ako kung mag edad man ko ug sixty to seventy so naa nakoy panagang nga ginagmay nga panilbian naa pud masugo sab.*” (If I reach the age of 60 to 70, I still

have somebody whom I can approach and help us). Edna is convinced that their grandson is good-natured, and that he will always find time to visit them and assist them if ever they will need help or assistance.

Jona: Proven Family Support. Jona used to serve the barangay as a *kagawad* (councilor). After one term, she ran again but failed to land a seat. The loss, however, did not dissuade her from venturing into other things. Today, she is managing a *carenderia* or an eatery stationed at the entrance of their rented house. She cooks Ilonggo dishes of which she is most adept in cooking since she hails from Iloilo City. Right after the interview, she prepared *batchoy* for us so that we can taste her specialty. As the interview proceeded, we noticed a bed made of wood placed just beside the dining table where we had the interview. Immediately, Jona recounted that she used to be bedridden after she had a vehicular accident. Since she suffered from a spinal injury, she was advised by the doctor to limit her movements, and if possible, to lie down for months until her body recuperates. Jona shared that she was unable to walk for six months: “*Mga one year and a half na, fractured ang likod ko kay nabanggaan ko sa motor. So sa awa sa Dios naa ra gyud sila sa likod ko. Six months ko dili ka lakad. Tapos sila gyud nagalinis sa ako sila kapatid ko na lalaki. Six months ko, nag bawod gani ang spine ko. Basta nag kuan sa likod.*” (About one and a half years ago, I had a fractured spine after I was hit by a motorcycle. My younger brother took good care of me, since I was unable to take care of myself). While she was remembering how her brother attended to her needs, Jona felt overwhelmed by his brother’s love and support. This crucial and difficult part of her life convinced Jona that there is no need for her to worry about her future when she grows old. She knows in her heart that her brother and family will be there for her: “*Ang kapatid ko so dili man siguro kami pabayaan. Kay one-time nadisgrasya ko sila man gyud ang nag alaga sa ako sa ospital.*” (I think my family will not abandon me because, at one point, they took care of me when I had an accident).

The support that Jona’s family has accorded to her made her decide to focus on her family. She takes care of her nephews and her nieces. She notes, “*Syempre depende sa pagdala mo kay kung mabait ka alangan na pabayaan ka nila. Syempre nakita man nila kung ano kami paano ko sila*

gialagaan.” (Of course, it depends on how you take care of them. If you treat them well, they will also take care of you). It is this notion of goodness which Jona wants to cultivate and extend to her family. She is convinced that from the age of 53 onwards, she will always have her family with her in both happy and challenging times. After looking back at her experience when she was down-and-out because of her spinal injury, Jona is convinced that her family will never abandon her.

B. Unfolding Themes

A Partner in One’s Old Age. The future does not look intimidating for Edna and Gen- Gen since they envision a future with their long-time partners. Edna has been living life and meeting its challenges with her partner of three decades. Gen-Gen also exudes a similar optimism for the future as she has outlined specific plans with her partner of ten years, which they have both discussed thoroughly. For both Edna and Gen-Gen, growing old can be considered as a concept intertwined with a future life lived with their long-time partners.

From the narratives, it is clear that the informants with long-term future plans are also the ones with reliable sources of income. They can fall back on their incomes for a certain period of time for resources like their food, shelter, and health needs. For instance, Gen-Gen and her partner manage two small food stalls in a university canteen and are thinking of expanding their outlets in a soon-to-be-opened mall in the same district. Meanwhile, Edna, together with her partner of 30 years, is proud to have a small store, a second house with boarders, and another small business engagement in the community. Both Gen-Gen and Edna are preparing and planning, not only for their current needs, but also for their future.

A Steady Source of Income. In contrast, Dandan is more focused on her immediate future given that she is still learning to live and adjust with her partner of one year. What is unique about Dandan’s situation is the presence of her partners’ two kids. These kids also live with them and have become part of Dandan’s responsibility. With such a set-up, it is Dandan’s friends—Edna, Serning, and Percie, who reiterated their worry that Dandan’s future and health may be at stake. They observed that almost all of her efforts are geared towards the survival of her family.

Imagining the future also proved to be difficult for Percie, since she has been living on her own for the past five years. Working as the only lesbian *traysikad* driver, her only intent now is to work and have enough cash for her needs, particularly her daily basic needs. She used to have long-term relationships but she reached the point where she found it best to live on her own. When asked if there is a person who can help her in times of need, she immediately uttered the name of the Barangay Captain in their area who, like Percie, is a lesbian. For Dandan and Percie, their immediate concerns are more on providing their immediate needs rather than the future. Although they may be thinking or are worried of what lies ahead for them in the coming years, for them, the future will take care of itself. Their fervent hope is that their bodies could still keep up with the challenges and be able to continue doing what they are doing now.

Taking Care of Parents & Partner. Since Jen, at present, is taking care of her mother, she has accepted the responsibility well, not daring to even slightly complain. She also has the same caring stance toward her long-time partner who recently suffered from a heart attack and is partially debilitated. Though Jen has two persons under her care, she does not blame anyone—her siblings, or even her partner, for the troubles she is now facing. With courage, Jen continues to find ways to earn a living. This is perhaps the context why she was hesitant to be interviewed at first thinking that she might be apprehended by local authorities for no clear reason, and no one will eventually take care of her mother and/or her work will be disrupted or discontinued. Hence, questions and anticipations of the future as one grows old did not significantly figure in Jen's head. At present, she has many concerns and responsibilities to deal with. Looking at the future for Jen may be taken to mean as exerting all efforts towards the present so that she can guarantee the survival of her mother and her partner. Gen-Gen also carried the responsibility of taking care of her sick mother wholeheartedly. Although her mother already passed on, she still remembered how no one in the family volunteered to be their mother's caretaker. With such silence, she stepped in and embraced the task. She realized that even having your kids will not guarantee that they will take care of you in old age.

Migrating to a City. From the narratives, a common experience is the transfer from an area in Mindanao or the Visayas and eventually moving and settling in Davao City. This movement is true for Dandan, Serning, Jona, and Edna. From these groups, it is Serning, Dandan, and Edna who were explicit in their intent to leave their homes so that they can be on their own. For Jona, it was because of her partner that she decided to move to Davao City and stayed even when their relationship ended. The account of Edna was the most radical as her separation from her parents meant cutting ties with them after realizing that her father will not accept her for who she was, a lesbian. For Serning, it was the nagging of her mother over her identity, her habits, and her relationship with a female partner that made her think and decide that it is better to leave and be on her own than stay with her mother. The same experience also allowed Dandan to move to Davao although her decision was more motivated by the possibility of having better economic opportunities in Davao City.

C. Some Issues and Critical Remarks

Using the events, transition, and passage as heuristic tools in generating narrative descriptions (Dewilde, 2003) as the take-off point, the minority stress perspective (Meyer, 2003) is invoked as the lens in identifying issues that can be reflectively observed in the four unfolding themes from the study.

For the first theme, ***A Partner in One's Old Age***, a gendered minority issue centers on the possibility of living alone, or growing old with no certainty of having partners in the future. This theme is reflected in the accounts of Percie, Serning, and Dandan. However, it is important to note that their accounts also speak of a sense or meaning of family that includes living in a community where they are accepted in the barangay where they are part of. In the case of the informants, having a Barangay Captain, who is also an older lesbian just like them, made them feel that they have somebody to approach to especially in times of need. However, this situation requires more attention in case the Barangay Captain is replaced by somebody who does not consider them part of the family or, if the Barangay Captain is no longer available

to assist. This is where the problem of a support system (e.g., social and economic) for older lesbians come in, and the reality of extended versions of a family composed of individuals who are accepting of LGBT sexual orientation, gains attention.

In further analyzing the theme, other underlying gendered issues are also wanting of attention: (a) The need to revisit the concept and reality of “family of choice” in contrast to traditional notions of family (Barker, Herdt, & De Vries, 2006), and between prejudice and acceptance as facilitating factors for the creation and maintenance of a “family of choice”, and (b) The implicit role and influence of patriarchal heteronormative norms in framing lesbian relationships. A case in point is the specific way the informants structure the role of the breadwinner as part of the masculine identity.

For the second theme, *A Steady Source of Income*, a key struggle in engaging informal work such as street vending or driving a rented trike revolves around having a financial resource to address daily needs of the individuals and provide for the family. This is a matter which concerns Percie and Dandan. Among the informants, they are the ones who are economically challenged especially with the absence of alternative and more stable sources of income. At the age of 58, Percie confesses that she only has scant savings. Dandan also has to contend with the needs of her big family—a female partner, the partner’s two kids, and a relative. Given this economic struggle, what economic options are available for older lesbians once their capacities to earn are challenged by health or physical conditions? Moreover, this question underscores the following interrelated gendered issues: (a) constraints of educational attainment of lesbians concerning economic opportunities, (b) lacking in options for older lesbians who do not have savings or who will not be receiving any pension at the age of 60, and (c) other class-based issues that are also regulative of the way the informants look at lesbian relationships.

The third theme on gendered minority issue or concern pertains to the responsibility of taking care of old and/or sick parents. This specific issue is related to the question on: who exactly is responsible for looking

after the old and/or sick parents since they could not look after themselves anymore? In the case of Jen and Gen-Gen, the responsibility has befallen upon their shoulders. While Gen-Gen's mother already passed on, Gen-Gen shared that she was the default caretaker of their parents, since she did not have her own family. This situation affirms the traditional sense or definition of a family. In the case of Jen, she has to take care of her mother and her partner who needs physical therapy after a serious heart attack/condition. Is this responsibility built around the prejudice that lesbian's «family of choice» is optional, does not exist since she is legally single, not a family (by the traditional definition), or not considered as lasting as that of a heterosexual couple? Undoubtedly, the traditional view persists: Jen and Gen-Gen are responsible for their respective families because they are single, lesbian, and considered without a family of their own. On the contrary, they actually have their own family of choice. A possible underlying or related issue would be that familial expectations assign lesbians as default caretakers for their sick and old parents. Not having traditional families as the basis for taking care of parents may be based on some form of internalized prejudice (Herek, 2004; Meyer, 2003).

The fourth theme, migrating to Davao City, concerns one's choice to move out of the house (of their family of origin) and live in another place to be on their own. The choice to leave as soon as they could is influenced by their discomfort of having to deal with patriarchal and heteronormative expectations/norms from the member(s) of their family of origin. This alternative provides them with a break or an end to the incidence of tensions and conflict. This experience was more pronounced in the narratives of Serning, Percie, Dandan, and Jona. Furthermore, a possible underlying related issue the significance of moving out of the family house. Leaving the immediate family may be a reaction of the individuals to situations wherein their sexuality is subjected to unfavorable situations, or they are forced to make a heteronormative compromise (Johnson, 2003).

Concluding Insights

What does it mean to grow old for aging lesbians? How do such notions of growing old intersect with their concerns/issues? Based on the seven narratives, the following are descriptions of what it means to grow old:

(1) Growing old and its unfolding circumstances are concerns which four of the informants do not directly think of or problematize. Knowing that there are several day-to-day needs, concerns, and problems to take care of, thinking about old age is taken to mean as thinking deep into the future, which they do not want to imagine, prepare for, or consider. Deeply rooted in the challenges of meeting the immediate needs of the family, the primary wish of this group of informants is to have a healthy body that will allow them to continue with whatever they are currently doing so they can still provide for themselves and the family. This is where the fear of the future also lurks as they mention—at times, that physical health is the only condition needed so that their current situation will at least not become more difficult for them and their family. From a more critical vantage point, this is where growing old is clearly demonstrated as a class-based struggle. The daily grind which characterizes the everyday life of the working class somehow casts doubt on the capacity of older persons to sustain labor intensive routines. The class issue somehow explains why physical health is treated as a necessary condition so one could imagine how the future may unfold and look like. This is especially true for sexual minorities with little or non-existent resources to fall back on—with their family (of choice or of origin) or alone—particularly in case something unexpected happens.

(2) Conversely, thinking about old age means preparing for the difficult times ahead. This may be the case for the three informants who are economically stable, which in the narratives, refer to having more than one economic option. This part is where the usual elements associated with getting old—having ample savings, a few possessions which can be sold in times of crisis, are underscored coupled with a plan on how to go about life in the future. Thus, it re-affirms the point about how aging and the future are boxed within the discourse of class struggle and issues.

(3) Growing old also means having one's family of choice (Barker, Herdt, & De Vries, 2006), a circle of close friends, or being with people who can provide a sense of acceptance in the community. This scenario is most visible to the three informants who live in a barangay whose barangay captain is also a lesbian in her 50s. Living in such a community, where the head is a lesbian public figure, means becoming visible without fear or apprehension—as far as one's sexuality is concerned. In this case, politics serves its role in acknowledging or somehow mainstreaming the presence of sexual minorities in a community and even protecting or advocating for their concerns as human beings with rights, needs, and aspirations like everyone else. Aside from the role of political figures in making social spaces more inclusive for aging lesbians, it is crucial to underscore here how patriarchal, heteronormative standards frame lesbian relationships. Hence, this question is in order: Is lesbian relationship, based on the narratives of the informants, mirrors patriarchal, heteronormative arrangement, practices, or norms?

(4) When one lives close to one's parents, growing old means taking on the responsibility of taking care of one's parents. While nobody from the group expects that somebody will take care of them when they grow old, the informants who are living in proximity to their parents are almost required by their families of origin to be the one to sacrifice and make adjustments for their parents' well-being. This expectation may be related to the perception that these lesbians are still "single" with no responsibilities or no one to worry about except themselves, even though they (the informants) have formed their own family of choice. This issue also raises the questions on the cultural, legal, and emotional recognition and acceptance of the diversity of families (e.g., is the partner recognize as part of the family or merely identified as a friend; those who are into same sex relations, even if living for decades, may not be legal spouse in documents).

(5) Settling in one place is another aspect of what it means to grow old. This decision may be coupled with the informants' concern with declining physical capacities. As the informants narrate some of their adventures and misadventures, or the places that they have visited, reaching the age of 50 has influenced their decision on the place, house,

and barangay where they could at least settle. The idea of settling down is analogous to the idea of forced migration where an individual is forced to leave certain places due to lack of opportunities. They have eventually decided to find ways to survive and outlive certain challenges or constraints that they have encountered in their journey.

(6) Upon closer inspection, the meanings of growing old and the issues that older/*tiguwang* lesbians struggle with can be considered proofs of the interaction between structure and agency. This interaction means that given certain situations, there are negative or negating structures that impinge upon individuals that dispose/force people to exercise their agencies as active interpreters of their lived worlds (Russell, 2007). This meaning of aging can speak of the informants' capacities to construct realities in their terms. It also goes against the dictate of the society, which continues to impose patriarchal, heteronormative, traditional, and constricting views. This capacity, however, should not be trivialized as a form of resilience. This understanding should remain critically grounded and engaged with the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that aging lesbians are confronting as humans who just happen to be lesbians.

Given the foregoing meanings of aging and its intersecting issues, this paper ends with the hope that the participants' voices and contributions to the narratives of communities are accounted for, their spaces are less isolated, and their 'silent' issues are recognized as real concerns that need solutions or interventions (Brown, 2009).

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