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Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Oxford Department of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House (QEH), University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK
Tel. +44 (0)1865 271915, Fax +44 (0)1865 281801, ophi@qeh.ox.ac.uk, <http://www.ophi.org.uk>

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The Pink Streak in a Grey Market: Queerness and Poverty in the Urban Philippines

By Ryan Thoreson

ABSTRACT:

In spite of a greater emphasis on identity and intersectionality in the sociology of development, there is still a dearth of empirical scholarship exploring the ways that the experience of poverty is shaped by sexual difference or “queerness” in a broader sex/gender system. In this paper, I explore the ways that queerness and poverty inflect each other in the urban Philippines. I suggest that being queer affects the ways that low-income Filipinos experience poverty and that idioms of poverty and status inflect the way that queerness itself is understood in the country. Ultimately, I suggest that the sociology of development can benefit from a greater attention to those who are marginalised by dominant systems of sex, gender, sexuality, and kinship, and that queer theorists can similarly benefit from a greater understanding of socioeconomic diversity in global theorising.

KEYWORDS: development studies, gender, globalisation, human rights, the Philippines, poverty, queerness, sexuality, urban sociology

QUEERNESS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES:

In the past twenty years, development studies have shifted from an emphasis on women in development (WID) to a broader focus on gender and development (GAD) (Jolly 2000, p. 79). Sociologists of development seem to have reached a consensus that gender affects development by shaping the options available to women, men, and those who do not fit themselves within a binary model of gender, both through visible forms of exclusion and violence and more subtle forms of normative policing that make particular options virtually unthinkable. The explicit and implicit effects of gender not only affect the material resources that people enjoy, but also affect their symbolic position within a society and ability to enjoy the full range of human capabilities outlined by development scholars (Nussbaum 1999; Nussbaum and Sen 1993). Globalisation continues to generate anxieties about gender, sexuality, and kinship and sparks fierce defences of particular arrangements as metonymic substitutes for a culture in its entirety (Nussbaum 1999, p. 15-16; Abu-Lughod 2002; Hoad 1999, p. 561).

Sexuality – like gender – profoundly affects development and the freedoms of people living in poverty. Firstly, placing sexuality below food, water, shelter, security, and other human needs is misleading. Sexuality is inextricably linked to the level of agency that individuals possess; those who are queer often find their access to these goods severely limited. Regardless of whether sexuality and pleasure are considered “basic” needs, “they have echoes in every aspect of life and should be considered in the development agenda” (Armas 2007, p. 8). Moreover, queerness can be the catalyst for a further cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation. When queer workers are met with hostility in schooling and the workplace, their exile into the grey market often raises the risk that they will be subject to illness, violence, or poverty, which quickly compound each other in damning ways (Armas 2007, p. 12). Without paying closer attention to the

specific experiences of queer people living in poverty, these immediate and cyclical effects are unlikely to emerge in surveys of development programs.

Yet despite calls from a number of authors to “queer” development studies, there has been a surprising dearth of empirical research on the intersection of poverty or development programs with queerness, or even “the way in which people who have minority sexual identities figure in relation to their communities, households, or families” (Jolly 2000, p. 86). Thus far, “not a single Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has included sexual rights as part of a coherent strategy against poverty related to human rights [and] the UN Millennium Development Goals do not specifically mention sexual and reproductive health and rights” (Armas 2007, p. 19). As Susie Jolly suggests, “[d]evelopment policy and practice have tended to avoid discussions of sexuality, beyond debates on population and, more recently, HIV and AIDS,” citing fears of cultural imperialism and a reluctance to intrude into the more intimate aspects of individual lives (Jolly 2000, p. 81). As a result, few development practitioners consciously focus on remedies for the kinds of social and economic marginalisation that queerness often generates.

In this study, I look at the specific experiences of low-income queer populations in the Philippines, noting both how poverty and queerness mutually influence each other and why development programs should be adjusted to address the specific issues that queer populations face. I suggest that a capabilities approach might emphasise how the ability to exercise sexual freedoms can enable other forms of agency, and vice versa. If this seems intuitive, it is worth stressing that there is scant empirical research on the ways in which queer or non-normative sexualities affect the experience of living in poverty, and there is little cross-cultural research on which to base development programmes.

METHODOLOGY:

While development efforts in the Philippines have taken a variety of avenues, few (if any) of these have prioritised the needs of queer individuals when seeking to promote development in the country as a whole. To fill this gap, this project sought to foreground the qualitative, lived experiences of queer subjects living in poverty in the Philippines. From July to September 2009, I conducted field research with low-income queer informants in Pasay City, a neighborhood on the southern edge of Metro Manila. The survey used the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative’s (OPHI) survey on the five “missing dimensions of poverty” (OPHI 2007) – employment (Lugo 2007), agency and empowerment (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007), safety and security (Diprose 2007), going about without shame (Reyles 2007), and psychological and subjective wellbeing (Samman 2007) – as a basic template. A module on gender and sexuality was added at the beginning, and the questionnaire itself was shortened in the name of practicality to produce an 81 question survey that drew on a variety of yes or no questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. Participants were encouraged to add details or expand upon any of their answers that they felt required elaboration.

My research was conducted in 4 of the 201 *barangays*, or the smallest units of local governance. To find participants, I worked with the City Planning and Development Office and Community Development Office in Pasay City, who linked me to volunteers who could accompany me to their *barangay* and identify interviewees. The research achieved a sample of 32 interviews of an estimated 647 households with “third sex”

inhabitants as estimated by the 2005 Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) data. In that survey, the ratio of gay members to lesbian members was 2:1, with 65.8% of “third sex” members being identified by the head of the household as “gay,” and 34.2% of that group being identified as “lesbian.” To get a variety of perspectives from Manila, I also interviewed a number of low-income queer informants in the Makati, Marikina, and Quezon City neighborhoods. To include a sampling from elsewhere in the country, I spent a week outside of Manila interviewing low-income informants in a rural *barangay* just outside of Cebu in the Visayas and informants from Iligan City in Mindanao, who traveled to Cagayan de Oro for the interviews after a series of raids by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front made travel to Iligan City inadvisable.

This yielded a total of 80 low-income queer informants – in addition to the 32 from Pasay City, I interviewed 30 informants in Makati, Marikina, and Quezon City, 9 outside Cebu, and 9 in Cagayan de Oro. The ages of the respondents ranged from 15 to 77, with a mean age of 27.31 years. The relative youthfulness of the sample is most likely due to the snowball sampling technique. I conducted the survey primarily in English, although an interpreter was on hand at every interview to translate into Tagalog if necessary, and each interviewee was given a copy of the survey in Tagalog to reference during the interviews.

FINDINGS:

The questionnaire suggested that interventions that foreground the missing dimensions of poverty may be especially useful for illuminating the structural and the affective dimensions of the poverty experienced by marginalised groups.

Queerness carries strong connotations in the Philippines as a result of tradition and popular depictions alike, and these connotations inflect the ways that queer subjects are understood and treated accordingly. These understandings are gendered, especially for the ideal types of the *bakla* and *tomboy*. The *bakla* are thought to be tragically ill-fated in their search for true love but often seen as sexually voracious and opportunistic. The *tomboy* is socially coded according to gendered performance; those *tomboys* who present a masculine exteriority are often treated as males, while those who present a feminine exteriority are often dismissed as misguided or not actually queer. Economically, the popular depiction of queer subjects in the Philippines foregrounds their productiveness as hard workers with cosmopolitan tastes. For the *bakla*, this involves a special aptitude at transformation, especially in the realms of beauty and aesthetics. In contrast, the *tomboy* are considered to be skilled in more traditionally masculine (and solitary) arenas as security guards or bus and tricycle drivers. While many of the professional stereotypes align with gendered norms in a way that would be familiar to many in the West, there are distinctions that affect development policy in specific and often unpredictable ways.

Meaning and Value:

One of the most expansive of OPHI’s missing dimensions of poverty is the presence of meaning and value in respondents’ lives. The answers to this question are useful in coloring the rest of the data set, since respondent’s views of employment, empowerment, safety and security, and dignity and self-respect were often closely related to the level of meaning and value they ascribed to their own lives.

Firstly, respondents were asked to rate statements as true, partially true, or false:

[TABLE 1]

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that they felt free to express themselves and exercise agency in their own lives, but these numbers decreased slightly on those items on the questionnaire that required the care, compliments, and cooperation of others around them.

Secondly, respondents were asked to rank their levels of satisfaction with the following as satisfied, semi-satisfied, or not satisfied:

[TABLE 2]

On a four-point scale of happiness, 17 respondents considered themselves “very happy,” 36 respondents considered themselves “rather happy,” 15 respondents considered themselves “not very happy,” and 3 respondents considered themselves “not at all happy.” On these items in the section, the most unsatisfying parts of queer respondents’ lives seemed to be education, income and work. Notably, the material benefits of income and work (for example, food, health, and housing) were *not* seen as dissatisfying, suggesting that income and work cannot be *solely* evaluated in terms of their ability to provide material security. Respondents were lukewarm about their education, neighbourhood, and life in general, supporting the evidence elsewhere on the survey that low-income queer subjects primarily suffer from a lack of dignity, respect, and status from those around them that can only be partially remedied by the accumulation of material wealth and redistribution to kin and social networks.

Employment:

The data from the study suggests that the stereotypical ideals of queerness are circumscribed considerably in practice. In the low-income populations I surveyed, only 37 of the 80 respondents were employed, doing business, or working in the six months leading up to the survey. For those who were working, income levels ranged from PhP 125 per week to PhP 5000 per week, with a mean of PhP 1514.28 per week for the 35 who could roughly calculate a weekly income. The benefits of that income were also tenuous. Of the 37 of 80 informants who were employed, doing business, or working, only 26 had stable income, and only 11 had any kind of benefits – like healthcare, a pension, or insurance – through their employer. Only 11 of the 37 employed informants worked in the stereotypical professions of the *bakla* and *tomboy*. The disjuncture with stereotypical expectations of what queer work entails did not diminish satisfaction with employment. Of those who were employed, 26 expressed satisfaction with their work, 3 expressed partial satisfaction, and 8 expressed dissatisfaction.

The unemployment rate in the low-income queer populations I surveyed was significantly higher than the unemployment (and underemployment) rate of the Philippines in its entirety. In the period immediately after I conducted my fieldwork, the National Statistics Office (NSO) placed the national unemployment rate at a moderate 7.7 percent, although a more accurate figure could be calculated by combining this with the 18.2 percent who are considered “underemployed” (NSO 2009). For the National Capital

Region (NCR) that includes Manila, these figures are 14.0 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively (NSO 2009). In the populations I surveyed, 53.75% were unemployed and virtually all respondents were underemployed or held tenuous employment. The 43 unemployed respondents cited a variety of reasons for their lack of work – and although many of these are reflected in unemployment data across the Philippines, informants anecdotally emphasised the barrier that being queer posed to securing stable, long-term employment. One category was searching for employment or otherwise occupied with professional development, with 12 looking for work but unable to find any, 9 still studying, 3 interning or volunteering, and 1 recently graduating from a university. Others were waiting for work that they considered appropriate; in this category, 3 had just resigned, and 2 could not find work that interested them. A third category had run into logistical difficulties, with individuals unable to find work that was wheelchair accessible, encountering problems with paperwork, trying to be a performer but not making money, waiting to return to a province, or waiting to go abroad. While many respondents cared financially for family members, a fourth category included two individuals who had taken on full-time caretaking roles for a niece and nephew and a terminally ill parent. Finally, a small minority had no plans to work – only 3 preferred not to work at all, and 3 were retired.

In keeping with a stereotypical reputation for diligence, both employed and unemployed informants expressed a strong desire to devote a greater portion of their time to wage-earning activities. When asked if they would like to be working less or more, 61 respondents said they would like more work, 3 were content with their current arrangement, and 16 respondents said they would like less work.

In the Philippines, where outmigration eases unemployment rates and remittances regularly infuse the economy with liquid assets, the specter of migration loomed large for many low-income Filipinos. Few actually migrated, citing the structural and personal barriers that prevented them from working as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). Only 4 respondents had worked abroad as an OFW. Of the 76 respondents who had not, 54 expressed a willingness to work abroad, while 22 indicated they would not be interested. For those who stayed – especially those who would not consider going in the future – the most common reasons for staying in the Philippines were the lack of opportunities or money to go abroad, a family or partner in the Philippines, a commitment to present employment, and youth or inexperience.

Empowerment:

The tenuous position of the *bakla* in the job market and sociocultural system at large is reflected in their self-perception and the degree of control they feel over their own lives. When asked abstractly about control over their everyday lives, 48 felt they had total control, 24 felt they had partial control, and 8 felt they had no control. This was mirrored by informants' (unprompted) answers when asked to identify who has the most power to *improve* their quality of life. On this item, 49 independently identified themselves, 13 identified parents, siblings, or family, 5 identified God, 5 identified the government, 3 identified themselves and God, 2 identified themselves and their families, 1 identified society, 1 identified a younger generation of Filipinos, and 1 young lesbian cheekily identified Angelica Mendes. Nonetheless, 40 informants considered themselves

better off than their neighbors with regard to their socioeconomic position, while 23 considered themselves about average, 12 said they were worse off, and 5 were unsure.

Questions about agency and capability were often couched in terms of informants' roles in their living situation. Respondents often lived in small, densely populated domiciles and neighborhoods, with a mean of 6.69 members – who were almost exclusively members of their extended kin group – per household. Notably, this did not necessarily curtail the ability of respondents to explore sexuality or form relationships. Indeed, 59 respondents said they had enough privacy and personal space, while 21 said they did not. The closeness of living quarters also did not prevent queer respondents from cultivating long-term relationships, as 45 of the 80 respondents had been in partnerships or relationships ranging from a month to 36 years.

When asked to identify their primary contribution to the household, 36 respondents said chores (cleaning, laundry, washing dishes, caring for plants, etc.), 24 said giving money or paying the bills, 14 said both chores and money, and 6 said they contribute nothing. When asked why they make this contribution, 33 said they like to or want to, 32 said it was their responsibility, 9 said they were forced to, and 6 didn't contribute anything. When asked about specific roles within the household, 32 of the 80 respondents indicated that they helped determine their household's budget, but 51 of the 80 had a say in the distribution of household labour and chores and virtually every informant strongly indicated that they felt free to make decisions concerning their own health and well-being, political, religious, and social relationships, and safety.

The centrality of queer people to family and neighborhood economies is something that is ignored in many development programs. In economic surveys and research, the exclusive focus on heads of households (usually understood to be patriarchs or matriarchs) ignores the pivotal role that queer members of the family often play in the Philippines. In addition to their present responsibilities, respondents reported being expected to eventually pay for schooling for their brothers and sisters (and often, their cousins, nieces, and nephews), to take care of their parents, and to buy homes for their extended families. While a small portion of the respondents in this sample were primary breadwinners, the employed respondents reliably contributed money to the household, and many respondents – employed or unemployed – were a ready source of household labour. Although queer individuals are arguably indispensable in family and neighborhood economies, they are typically ignored in schemes that focus on parents of children who are understood to be the primary breadwinners or caregivers for nuclear family units. Given that many of the respondents were career-oriented, do not plan to raise children, and support their extended families, development efforts could benefit considerably from supporting queer workers and developing the skills they already use in the marketplace.

Aside from their empowerment within the household unit as it exists, informants were asked to identify three things they would change about their life. When asked this question, informants tended to identify three glaring (and usually, reasonably realistic) problems that they would ameliorate. If anything, what was notable was the inability of many respondents to think of three things at all. When asked what three things they would change in a perfect world to improve their quality of life, only 47 respondents were able to come up with three things, while 8 would only change two things, 19 would only change one thing, and 6 respondents were unable to think of anything to change.

(Of those 33 who couldn't think of three things they'd change, only 13 later said that they were 'satisfied' with their life and considered themselves 'very happy.')

The answers were stable job or profession (19), money (17), acceptance, equality, or non-discrimination (17), change gender/sexuality (10), change the government (10), preserving/restoring family (8), finish studies (8), find love or romance (6), end corruption (5), self-improvement (4), money/status for family (4), clean up environment (4), change 'social, economic, and political situation' (4), go abroad (3), own house (3), start a family or have kids (3), freedom from poverty (3), peace (3), provide for education, health, and welfare of people (3), relationships (2), happiness (2), helping family (2), end poverty (2), to be rich (2), to get respect (2), longevity, fame, status, food, medicine, exercise, clothes, reincarnation, benefits, prosperity of the past, to have a better house, to bring back dead brother, to spread information about HIV/AIDS, 'to be complete,' to shake colonial mentality, religion, improve accountability, independence, less criticism in the world, to have free time, less strict parents, acceptance from family, be understood, money for social causes, to be settled, to make Filipinos more disciplined, to change attitude of Filipinos, to improve social life, to be able to walk.

Although many of the things informants wished to change were outside their control – for example, ending corruption, cleaning up the environment, or achieving peace – others were so unremarkable and achievable that they were almost banal in their normality. While the *bakla* in particular are often considered obsessed with status, beauty, and romance, many of the actual fears and dreams of the *bakla* and other queer subjects I interviewed were virtually identical to those that might be identified by the population at large. The findings suggest that development programs seeking to bolster empowerment must tackle the public and private spheres alike. On one hand, the queer movement's concerns with rights and visibility in the Philippines can facilitate queer subjects' access to the material and symbolic resources that would enable them to chart their own life courses. On the other, it is worth stressing that these are not always the immediate concerns of those who are marginalised and feel they lack agency within the smaller level of the household, and any empowerment of queer subjects living in poverty must also address the lack of control that comes from material or symbolic deprivation as a result of poverty and homophobia in one's immediate environs.

When asked about their goals in life, informants' answers included a career or work (30), finishing studies (14), helping family (11), having children or starting a family (10), romance (9), being rich (8), migrating abroad (5), having a good income (4), being healthy (4), being self-reliant (3), better housing (2), to own a house (2), longevity (2), happiness or peace (2), helping others (2), being a good person, peace, changing appearance, gaining acceptance from family, being "successful," traveling around the world, being respected, "to be complete," to own a car, to be an Olympian, to be gay president of the Philippines, to be on the cover of Cosmo or FHM, and to give their mother a grandchild. 2 respondents said "nothing," and 2 were unsure.

Many respondents had a difficult time thinking of realistic short to medium term goals, and gave answers like "to be a millionaire" or "to be the first gay president of the Philippines" instead of "to have spending money" or "to run for political office." While the things they would directly change about their lives seemed directly affected by immediacy and necessity, the infinite possibilities of these abstract goals pointed to a creativity and imaginative capacity to transcend the immediacy of circumstantial

constraints. Although short to medium term desires were banal and often difficult to generate in any way that would be meaningfully realistic, informants were able to articulate long-term goals that demonstrated creativity and imagination, if not a degree of hope for upward mobility and the exercise of unrealised potential.

Safety and Security:

A third area that is often addressed by queer activists but overlooked in quantitative analyses of poverty is safety and security. When the 80 respondents were asked about crimes committed over the past year, 44 were victims of jokes, harassment, or threats on the street, 25 were victims of theft or robbery, 20 were victims of physical assault, 5 were victims of sexual assault or rape, 4 were victims of attempted murder, 4 were victims of blackmail or harassment by police. Nonetheless, 56 respondents felt safe in their neighborhood, 3 did sometimes, 20 did not, and 1 was unsure. Similarly, 56 respondents felt comfortable going to the police, 24 did not.

In general, questions on the topic generated mixed feelings of optimism and pessimism about the security of the neighborhood as a whole. In total, 42 respondents felt their neighborhood was getting safer, 23 felt it was getting more dangerous, 9 observed no change, 3 said it depends on the time and area, and 3 were unsure. Nonetheless, this did not translate into feelings of personal endangerment, and those who indicated that the neighborhood was becoming less safe often felt safe around those they knew and trusted. This distinction – the difference between the communities and neighborhoods where a person was “known” and the threatening places where the person was not – was a recurring theme in discussions of bodily security and dignity and self-respect.

Dignity and Self-Respect:

The gulf between how people perceived they were treated and the complaints that emerged over the course of the interview also suggests that development programs can be adjusted to compensate for mistreatment that may be normalised by society at large.

When asked directly about their treatment at the hands of others, informants seemed largely satisfied by their place in the community and the respect they received. When asked if they are treated with respect, 60 respondents said yes, 18 said sometimes, and only 2 said no. When asked if they were treated unfairly, the results were much less clear – 27 respondents said yes, 22 said sometimes, and 31 said no. Overwhelmingly, respondents said that their friends, family, and others who know them well treat them with respect, while strangers give them little respect and treat them unfairly. When asked which groups make them feel accepted, comfortable, and welcome, the answers were overwhelmingly focused on those in their immediate environs – friends (33), family (26), other gays/lesbians/bisexuals (18), neighborhood (18), religion (7), coworkers (6), civic groups (5), a senior center for elderly gays (3), fellow volunteers, a dance troupe, sex workers, radio group, Akbayan, classmates, professors, teammates, choreography students, an organisation working on disability issues, a person’s “clan,” texting partners, and blue bars. Only 1 respondent was unsure.

Like acts of harassment and violence, discrimination was mostly reported outside of one’s own *barangay*. While family, friends, and faith communities were mostly supportive of gays and lesbians as individuals, they often expressed disapproval of gays and lesbians in the abstract. The result is that one’s own *barangay* felt safe and secure to

many informants, who nonetheless felt discouraged from seeking employment or public services outside of the *barangay*, where they are not known and face discrimination.

Moreover, the respect that informants suggested they received was later qualified by items about the differential treatment they received on the basis of their sexuality or gender presentation. When asked if they had been discriminated against recently, 35 respondents said yes, while 45 respondents said no. In the vast majority of cases, the culprits were strangers on the street – and discrimination tended to be worst for gays who do not look beautiful and feminine, and lesbians who do not look butch or masculine. Respondents reported intense pressure to meet expectations of what a queer person should be – if they are gay, they feel pressured to be flawlessly beautiful, and if they are lesbian, they feel pressured to show machismo.

The self-consciousness that informants felt about their gendered performance emerged with force when they were asked to identify what makes them ashamed, embarrassed, or self-conscious. On this item, informants repeatedly pointed to gendered appearances or behaviors for which they were publicly targeted, including gender or sexuality (16), being teased and “discriminated” on the street (18), physical appearance (5), a lack of romantic success (3), poverty or lack of resources (2), being disrespected (2), personality flaws (2), lack of self-control, family issues, slipping up in public, shyness, “scandals,” and criticism by other people. 24 said “nothing,” 3 were unsure, and 1 preferred not to answer.

The things that countered that negativity and made informants feel proud or capable fell along both axes – they often had to do with successful gendered performances, but also tended to require affirmation or validation from other parties. Respondents’ answers included talents (singing, dancing, being a beautician, writing, drawing, etc.) (21), being praised, trusted, or respected by others (12), a supportive or close-knit family (10), being gay, lesbian, or bisexual (9), attitude or personality (6), being educated or intelligent (5), work (5), being themselves (4), looking feminine or beautiful (3), their past or youth (3), competing in pageants (2), ability to cheer up others (2), being helpful (2), religion (2), independence (2), being a breadwinner (2), friends (2), being a “survivor” or withstanding discrimination, ability to work with diverse people, neighbors, not giving parents problems, being a missionary, ability to work with diverse people, thoughtfulness toward friends and family, fear of God, being a ‘total package, all in one,’ a boyfriend, being friendly, and being polite. 1 said “nothing,” and 1 was unsure.

While economic analyses rarely foreground dignity and self-respect in their findings, this section seemed to be the most closely linked to people’s satisfaction with their lives and livelihoods. Many informants felt comfortable with the respect they received from others, but as they contextualised their responses, they appeared to gain the most self-respect and dignity from those pursuits that they considered appropriate to their gender identity and that were recognised and praised by others. It was endeavors that met both of these conditions that they found the most empowering and worthwhile, a trend that is worth noting by practitioners who seek to increase queer inclusion in the workforce.

QUEERING DEVELOPMENT STUDIES:

The results of the survey indicated that development work can be adjusted in a number of directions to better account for – and serve – those queer subjects who are often vital players in neighborhood and household economies.

A major lesson that emerges from the adoption of OPHI's missing dimensions of poverty and a greater focus on the lived experiences of multiply marginalised groups is that development efforts must be sensitive to the meanings and values that are attached to different forms of wage-earning work. For low-income queer individuals in the Philippines, the importance of work transcended the pragmatic need to earn a wage for survival's sake and was deeply affected by the cultural expectations placed upon queer populations. As suggested by responses to questions in multiple modules, the queer respondents who were most likely to be attacked, harassed, or put down were those who were either outside the neighborhood where people "knew" them *or* those gay or *bakla* individuals who were insufficiently feminine and lesbian or *tomboy* who were insufficiently masculine. The threat of violence is not always a corollary of a failure to perform the role ascribed to one's genital sex, but – for queer individuals – is often a result of a failure to be *sufficiently queer* and intelligible as such. What informants repeatedly worried about in interviews and private conversations alike were the small markers of bodily sex – the timbre of one's voice, protrusion of one's breasts, or a muscle on one's forearm – that might puncture the cultivated performance of masculinity or femininity that *tomboys* and *bakla* individuals have been historically expected to deliver. If development policy is to provide job outlets for these individuals – and, by extension, the families they financially support – these must account for the danger that many queer individuals face in distant, unfamiliar environments and jobs that imperil or negate their gender identity and therefore put them in danger.

One aspect that emerges strongly places queer subjects squarely within the ambit of development efforts more generally – the biggest anxieties for the group were unemployment and underemployment, especially insofar as these inhibited their ability to provide for others and find socially meaningful ways to spend their time. Development programs should counter these as best as possible, providing a range of jobs to queer workers whose may support a wide network of kin and dependents who are just as reliant on their wages as a spouse or child might be. Many of those who have left school and training programs have cultivated talents – like singing, dancing, and performing – that can be tapped for citywide fiestas and festivals. Others develop skills in design, cooking, writing, computer programming, customer service and support, etc., and should be encouraged to re-enroll in school or enroll in job training programs to develop those skills.

DEVELOPING QUEER THEORY:

Studying the experiential dimensions of queerness and poverty in non-Western contexts also offers those empirical perspectives that are often lamentably absent from the unqualified assertions of mainstream queer theory in the West. At a glance, two of these are apparent in the data from the Philippines.

The first is that queers in the Philippines are popularly seen as productive – and not necessarily consuming – subjects. Marxist academics in the West offer nuanced and insightful analyses of the way that capitalism facilitates or co-opts queerness, and theories like global queering have deftly suggested that such a relationship between

commercialisation and queerness is, in many ways, a truly global phenomenon (D’Emilio 1983, p. 104-105; Binnie 2004, p. 57-62; Altman 1996). Nonetheless, this diffusion of materialism and consumer-based identity is far from total, and the Philippines gives strong evidence that different forms of queerness may be coded quite differently in this regard. While informants in the Philippines certainly highlighted the ways that queerness is constructed through the external markers of femininity – clothes, makeup, taste, etc. – that the *bakla* use to cultivate a gendered identity, their roles in the community and the way they spoke of their own self worth frequently returned to the idea of the queer subject as a hard-working and economically productive member of the household and community at large. To the extent that “gay” was often defined in relation to *bakla* as a more cosmopolitan or worldly form of queerness, different forms of queerness also carried starkly different connotations that have implications for queer theory and development studies alike. Both disciplines should take notice of the productive role that queer subjects are supposed to play whether they are supported in these endeavors or not, and realise that the disjuncture between community expectations and institutional support can generate real strain on individuals and families.

Secondly, queers in the Philippines frequently identified the domestic sphere as a place of safety and security to an extent that is rarely found in dominant narratives of queer freedom in the West (Gopinath 2002, p. 154-155; Weston 1991). While queer narratives in the West tend to identify the domestic sphere as a space of silence or invisibility and the public sphere as a space of freedom and self-expression, it is precisely the domestic space which queer adults in the Philippines often identified with a sense of belonging and safety. If development practitioners and queer activists alike are to create better job opportunities for queer individuals, simply banning discrimination and presuming independence from kin is unlikely to be enough. In a system where queer individuals often find safety in the domestic sphere and remain embedded in its extended relationships long after they reach adulthood, the creation of proximate jobs that recognise the supportive role these individuals play in their communities and kin networks should be paramount.

CONCLUSION:

To the extent that development scholars already recognise the role gender plays in shaping the experience of poverty, there is a tremendous amount of theoretical and empirical justification for further research on those who are considered sexually “queer.” By paying attention to OPHI’s “missing dimensions of poverty,” my research suggests that queerness affects employment, empowerment, dignity and self-respect, safety and security, and meaning and value in the lives of low-income Filipinos. Although development programs can benefit from recognising the impact of this marginalisation on queer individuals and the families and communities they often support, queer theorists and activists can also benefit from recognising the ways that poverty shapes the demands and needs of low-income queer subjects. From that recognition, the only interventions that seem likely to truly address the complex marginalisation of low-income queer Filipinos are those that foreground and promote locally-recognisable “rights” to dignity and respect.

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TABLE 1: MEANING AND VALUE

	TRUE	PARTIALLY	FALSE	UNSURE
"I know what makes my life meaningful."	70	7	3	0
"I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life."	69	4	7	0
"I generally feel free to express my ideas and opinions."	65	11	3	1
"I feel like I can pretty much be myself in daily situations."	64	12	4	0
"People I know tell me I am competent at what I do."	61	13	6	0
"Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do."	66	9	5	0
"Often, I feel very capable."	62	15	3	0
"I usually get along well with people I meet."	60	11	9	0
"I'm friends with the people I regularly interact with."	67	6	7	0
"People in my life care about me."	55	18	7	0

TABLE 2: SATISFACTION LEVELS

	SATISFIED	SEMI-	UNSATISFIED	UNSURE
Family	72	3	5	0
Food	69	9	2	0
Friends	60	13	7	0
Health	60	12	7	1
Ability to help others	57	19	3	1
Spiritual, religious, or philosophical beliefs	53	15	12	0
Housing	50	22	8	0
Physical safety	48	20	12	0
Your life, generally	40	21	19	0
Neighborhood	38	20	22	0
Education	37	19	24	0
Work	28	25	27	0
Income	21	21	38	0