

# MAKING BODIES WORK

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EVERYDAY  
BODY MANAGEMENT IN URBAN MINDANAO



*Editors:*

Anita P. Hardon

Michael L. Tan

Efenita M. Taqueban

# **MAKING BODIES WORK**

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S EVERYDAY BODY MANAGEMENT IN URBAN MINDANAO**

**The 2014 UP Anthropology Field School Papers  
Cagayan de Oro**

*Editors*  
**Anita P. Hardon  
Michael L. Tan  
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Department of Anthropology  
University of the Philippines Diliman

Published by

The Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research  
University of Amsterdam  
Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, Roeterseiland Campus BC,  
1018 WV Amsterdam

Department of Anthropology  
University of the Philippines Diliman  
Pavilion 1, Room 1317, University of the Philippines, Diliman,  
Quezon City, 1101  
[www.anthro.upd.edu.ph](http://www.anthro.upd.edu.ph)

Published in Quezon City, Philippines

ISBN 978-971-95895-2-5

youth culture – chemicals – youth – urban – body - work

Cover artwork by NANU Illustration

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and institutions contributed in making the publication of this collection of papers possible.

The Anthropology Field School Batch 2014 would like to thank the following for their invaluable support: the Department of Anthropology of the University of the Philippines, Diliman; Prof. Anita Hardon and Madel Landicho of the ChemicalYouth Project; the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research-University of Amsterdam; friends, family and many others, who supported our fund-raising activities; the Xavier University Science Foundation for our home away from home in Pabayo Street; the Museo de Oro of Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan; our parents, our respondents and interlocutors, and our field director, Ma'am Mai Taqueban.

The Editors wish to thank the Department of the Anthropology of the University of the Philippines, Diliman for its leadership



and partnership in nurturing student development in fieldwork; the University of the Philippines, Diliman and the University of Amsterdam for providing the space and latitude for this publication; the European Research Council for funding the initiatives of the ChemicalYouth project, including this collection; Rolando Esteban and Carlos Tatel, who read the papers and shared their insights; Agnes Malinis and Merlita Lagahit, who helped dot the I's and cross the T's; Dennis, who did more than the layout; and the student contributors, now graduated from the university, for taking on the invitation to be earnest, open and humble in seeking to understand their fellow young people.

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## INTRODUCTION

The UP Diliman Anthropology Field School is an annual activity that allows our anthropology undergraduates to integrate the skills, and knowledge, that they've acquired, to describe and analyze different aspects of Philippine society.

In 2014, we were fortunate that the University of Amsterdam's Prof. Anita Hardon came in with a multinational project to look at the various chemicals (eg skin whiteners, cosmetics, etc.) being used by young people. The project allowed our students to do an in-depth study not just of "chemical youth" but of urban youth culture in general, in a city, Cagayan de Oro, that is at once a frontier area but also one that is rapidly reproducing aspects of Manila and older primate cities such as Cebu, even while it retains a character of its own.

This compilation of the AFS reports present several snapshots of the rapidly changing urban youth culture, or cultures, from the perspective of UP Diliman anthropology students. In the tradition of UP's anthropology department, we allow students to adopt different research paradigms to tease out contemporary issues. We see both insider perspectives since the students were all young adults themselves, as well as an outsider perspective, in the sense that many of the students were not from Mindanao, nor were they Cebuano native speakers. And while the anthropology students came mainly from the upper and middle classes, their respondents came from a wider cross-section of Cagayan de Oro, including students, radio DJs and call center workers, drivers, river guides, market vendors, tricycle drivers, gay men and transgenders. As individuals, and as a class, the students had excellent opportunities to internalize the intricacies of ethnography and cultural studies.

The research in Cagayan de Oro was crucial for the larger project, a Philippine project with several research sites (Batanes, Manila, Puerto Princesa and Cagayan de Oro) as well as an international project, with close links to our Indonesian counterparts, which also tapped university students. The global research had just started and involved "grand tour" ethnographies, asking general questions about chemicals used "head to toe", and which became the basis for more detailed interviews in the research phases that followed.

The focus on "chemicals" was important, allowing students and faculty to do anthropology in the 4-field tradition: cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology. Note that the students learned to move out of the box or boxes of the 4-field perspective, biological anthropology for example no longer limited to bones and genes but the very real world of chemicals applied to and transforming bodies. Likewise, archaeology went beyond the tradition of studying the ancient past and instead emphasized an archaeology of things in the present.

I still remember the initial meeting we had with the students to plan the field school. There was excitement, but there was also anxiety and uncertainty, the students not sure what they were getting into.



When they returned from the field, I could see they had matured as anthropologists, and as young adults, seeing, in chemicalized youth, themselves, and their milieu.

May this field school be a model for the training of future batches of anthropology students!



## ABOUT THE FIELD SCHOOL

It is also an anthropological truism that the way young people are perceived, named, and represented betrays a lot about the social and political constitution of a society.

***- Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 2005***

They arrived one afternoon all huddled in a small bus, bringing with them with their luggage and various survival kits—sleeping bags, insect repellent, sun block and a skateboard. It was the summer of 2014, the height of El Niño season in Mindanao, southern Philippines. Trooping down south was a group of students--nineteen strong aged 19 to 21 year olds. Hoping to graduate the year after, the summer was supposed to be their rite of passage, a month-long field work away from their loved ones and familiar comforts. By the end of the summer they will be closer to completing their bachelors

degree in Anthropology. For many of them, it will be their first time to be this far south in the country.

The University of the Philippines Anthropology Field School (UP AFS) is both an immersion and an internship, a program with practical exercises endeavoring the understanding of field site communities. It will be their task to survey, describe, analyze and interpret—to understand the how's and why's of local reality(ies) while living in and with communities following local rhythms, grasping idioms and moving from observation to participation; the immersive experience as paramount (perhaps more so) as learning data gathering methods. In many ways, the field school too is an attempt at conducting applied work and introducing the students to the all-too-often pragmatic considerations of doing research work--“hassles of the practice,” older colleagues would say: time constraint, specific outputs, repetitive interviews, evaluations and limited resources--the “realities” and tedious blocks that help build the descriptive account.

Like the students, I too was a student still completing my own graduate degree when appointed as the Field School Director. I hoped the summer field school would be an invitation to share with the students my own venture into the field providing not only the field school instruction and structure but also a common theme to thread our work. Taking inspiration from medical anthropology and the notion that medicines have “social lives” (Appadurai, 1995; Whyte, van der Geest, and Hardon 2002), “chemicals” became our starting point in asking questions. How do young people use chemical products in their everyday life to manage their bodies, energy, sex, moods, work, appearance and health? What effects are they seeking? What do these say about the life and time they live in? In the spirit of *analogia*, we reflected on the youth as our protagonists, narrators and guides in the city--young figures of modernity “at once highly particular and general” (Baker, et. al. 2013), different and the same. It was my hope that our inquiry would allow the students a glimpse into the lives of different groups of young people not unlike themselves, to learn from them, share with them, and in the process also learn something about themselves; the distance of an hour and a half flying across the

country collapsed during their conversations by a street corner, over street food of deep friend chicken proven or coffee.

## The Field Site

The dominant idea of a fieldwork site is often the imagined site of the anthropological other--rural, rugged and traditional. While still able to offer areas considered rural within its territorial boundaries, Cagayan de Oro is no longer rugged. The city offers various narratives of transforming trends; mostly it depicts urbanization in the Philippines. In the past two decades, the city has grown at a frantic pace trying to attain a kind of modernity. Cagayan de Oro is the bustling capital of the province of Misamis Oriental in the northern part of the island of Mindanao. It is the second largest city in the island. It is made up 80 barangays, 63 of which are classified as urban and 17 as rural. The city is nearing a tipping point, now approaching the chaos of the country's capital Metro Manila with its frenzy and density, but still regarded as "provincial," a fringe, located at the country's southern frontier. Around 600,000 people currently live in the city, five times its population of 40 years ago. In a country of one hundred million people, it is its tenth most populous city.

Mall along the national highway.





Not as much known for its natural resources, the southern port city is a crossroad and a hub for trade. The city thrives because of commerce. Commercial billboards dotting the city's main highway welcome one's arrival into the city. City officials are quick to cite that the city is hailed as the "second most competitive city in the Philippines," next only to the country's capital commercial district in Metro Manila. In local government parlance being "competitive" means the city is prime for business and investment. City officials assure that labor is cheap and plentiful, more than enough to fill the needs of the expanding service industry. Shared on social media by many locals is an article reporting the national government's ambition for the city--"Metro Cagayan de Oro 2020!"

In the 1930's, the government rhetoric was to dub Mindanao as the "Land of Promise." On this invitation and the imagined free and fertile lands, migrants flocked to the island. This constant movement of people continues to this day fueled by the ardent desire for a better life. Migration characterizes the city and continues to be its greatest agent of change. Especially among the young, migration, commonly rural to urban, has become a key livelihood strategy (Ofreneo 2013, Quisumbing and McNiver 2006, Lauby and Stark 1998).

The city is known for its colleges and universities, a hub for students from nearby municipalities and provinces. They come to the city for higher education and for work. It is no coincidence that Cagayan de Oro is a city of young people; half of its population is younger than 24.2 years (Philippine Statistics Authority 2010). The city invites by arousing aspirations of a better, more cosmopolitan future.

The city's transformations present narratives of tensions. *Divisoria*, the city's geographic center, with its park, open outdoor space and public amphitheater, is no longer the social center of town; instead the constant traffic leads to the malls. Among its neighboring provinces, Cagayan de Oro is known for its six shopping malls. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that a cityscape is a medium of hegemony. That there is a compulsion in the development of a city's landscape such that economic drivers can and do produce abstract space. In the instance of the proliferation of malls the cityscape becomes



Blackout session. Marian Carlos and Erika Navarro presenting their preliminary findings.

the locus for the “world of commodities” where, as Lefebvre explains, “within this space, the town—once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and center of historic space had disintegrated” (1991:53). As with most urbanizing towns in the Philippines, commerce has come to define the city’s success. Locals claim the city is protected from the geopolitical tensions and its violence because the city is everybody’s playground, a peaceable land of consumerism and leisure (Taqueban unpublished). Many come to the city aspiring to better their lives, however, it soon becomes apparent, as the student reports show, that not everyone will be able to claim a space.

The city downtown is characterized by frequent traffic gridlocks, crowds of people, and for this particular summer, rotational eight-hour blackouts. It was bone-dry season just a few months after the city had gone through the devastation of typhoon *Sendong* (Washi). Thousands died and over a hundred went missing from the flashflood that came one night, a few days before Christmas. Still reeling and slowly recovering, a city park was converted into an evacuation site. The summer heat crumbled the dried mud brought by the river’s onslaught on the city and turned it into thick dust.

The blackouts offered a glimpse of what was and still is being in the borderland. Against the backdrop of the modernizing frenzy of the city the island sets its limits. Batteries ran out and we were forced to work by candlelight or by flashlights. During the hot humid nights when mosquitos would venture for their feasts and their buzzing competed with the sound of *jeepneys* and *motorelas* jostling in the streets, we were all reminded that the frontier has been occupied and that, indeed, the city is an urban jungle.

## Ground Work

In building the descriptive account we turned to the phenomenological approach, recognizing that human existence unfolds “within ever-shifting horizons of temporality” that is “retained in a present moment that is feeding forward to anticipate future horizons of experience” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 88). The field school students and their interlocutors are at once “in here” and “out there” (Giddens 1996), not quite global but also not altogether local. It is in this setting of a world-in-flux—and with the “temporal” nature of youth in mind—that we turn to phenomenology to better understand the life-worlds of young people in this southern Philippine city (Taueban unpublished). “Knowing that there has always been flow, exchange, and mixture across social boundaries in human history” (Appadurai 2013, 65), the phenomenological approach allows us to capture the breadth of youth experiences in a particular setting in the contemporary global millennium and, perhaps, call attention to the often asymmetrical trajectories of young peoples’ lives, the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the frictions and possibilities that this new epoch presents them.

We situated our inquiry with young people, aged 18-25, and their chemical practices. We reflected on the chemicals they use, how and why these are used, as our way to understand the youth as modern figures. We took account of their everyday chemical practices through body mapping taking these as performances of self-making and aspiration (Hardon et. al 2013). We broadly constructed chemicals to mean any natural products such as herbs, or minerals such as alum, and manufactured chemicals such as



Daily necessities. Personal care products in sachets and canned food products are sold in a neighborhood sari-sari store.

cosmetics, body care products, pharmaceuticals, vitamins, food supplements, alcoholic and energy drinks, and nicotine products. Marcel Mauss (1934 [1973]) introduced the notion of techniques of the body, how aspects of culture are embodied or anchored in daily practices of individuals, groups, and societies, contemplating the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, and tastes. For Merleau-Ponty (2012) the body is an anchor of representations and as a ground of being-in-the-world. We take the notion that the chemical use of young people form part of their techniques of the body reflecting the larger world they live in.

Consisting half the population of the city, young people best represent its eager dreams, aspirations and struggles. Early anthropological inquiries on youth focused on life stages to capture transitions (Mead 1928, Malinowski 1929). Recent scholars interrogating modernity called attention to youth-centered interactions and inquired into youth cultural practices (Bucholtz 2002) emphasizing the “here-and-now of young people’s experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds” (2002, 532). Scholars have proposed that an exploration of bodyworks offers a vantage into one’s social life



Geotagging training by ChemicalYouth Project Leader, Prof. Anita Hardon of the University of Amsterdam-Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (UvA-AISSR).

enabling us to better understand how people navigate the social and shape the self for various purposes (Edmonds 2007, Black 2004). According to Bucholtz (2002, 534), the expanding use of ethnographic methods in medical anthropology and other fields has contributed to underscore the cultural agency of the youth.

With support from the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research's (AISSR) ChemicalYouth project, a baseline exercise dubbed in the project as the "grand tour" was conducted to inquire into the chemical lives of various groups of young people. Cagayan de Oro is one of the urban sites "toured" by the project, and the Philippines one of four countries (Indonesia, France and Netherlands). The data provided reference points for the chemical products (e.g. shampoo, soap, alcohol, etc.) that young people use, how they are used and why they are used. Initially working as researchers for the project, the field school students applied body mapping via the "head to toe" interview asking various young people about the kinds of chemicals they use, from their hair to their toenails and everything in between. The students conducted qualitative data inquiry, guided interviews, in-depth interviews



and observations with at least ten informants from each of the various groups of young people. The students' initial survey were analyzed through NVivo. Youth locales were identified through geotagging exercises. The interview guide became their take off in deepening their conversations and inquiries. What started off as a conversation about favorite brands soon extended into stories about young lives in the city. The presentations in this collection are based on three weeks of research work conducted in Cagayan de Oro.

Xylene Azurin and Xian Claver begin the collection with their report on river guides. River guides have become the visible representative of the city's main tourist attraction--river rafting. They project the city's dual character of urban life and outdoor leisure. Xylene and Xian present how the use of some chemicals and the refusal to use others reflect the all-male group's construction of masculinity; a construction that imbues the notion of the free outdoor lifestyle that is always at tension with the realities of insecure wage.

Winonna Fernando and Aliette Mesa provide an account of street life in the city through the stories of young informal "street workers"--*motorela* (motorcycle cabs) and *sikad* (bike-pedaled cabs) drivers, and street vendors. Their interlocutors share how changing chemical use mark different life stages. Their notion of *pag iya-iya* (being on one's own) mark an important transition in their struggle to survive and make a living in the increasingly congested streets of the city reflecting their ideas about health, wellness and precarity.

Chanty Arcilla and Xavier Su report on the lives of young male laborers in one of the city's wet markets where the only way they earn is by carrying (literally) a heavy load. The authors show that young laborers, greatly disadvantaged by poverty, develop social networks by joining gangs to help each other in their work. This in turn is facilitated by their shared chemical consumption.

Inquiring into the lives of young female sex workers, Ferlie Famaloan and Riskey Reyes, introduce their informants as struggling breadwinners who often have to keep their work secret from their families. The authors provide a poignant presentation

of how young sex workers see their vagina as something separate from their bodies, treating it as “capital” for “business.” The authors propose the vagina as a site of “ironical power” providing young women with much needed income but is also the object of their oppression.

Beauty, a constant of femininity, they propose, is the takeoff of Bernadette Almanzor and Luisa Narciso’s report on female workers of beauty shops and pharmacies. The beauty shops are the main source for “imitation” (fake) beauty products in the city. The authors inquired into the beauty practices of the young women and provide a worrying conclusion that in the pursuit of achieving beauty, young women with less means are at risk with the substandard products they use.

Meg Forteza, Jovee Jao and Cholo Olaguer refer to their informants as “invisible workers,” radio disc jockeys and call center agents whose work require them to be heard but not seen. The authors infer that differences in work environment, specifically the presence or absence of health benefits, influence their informants’ chemical use and health seeking behavior.

Marian Carlos and Erika Navarro’s comparative of young *bayot* and butch in the city found that both use products to embody their desired gender roles; feminine for the *bayot* and masculine for the butch. The authors learned the *bayot* exerted “greater effort” using various products to feminize, proposing that in the “repackaging” of the body to become feminine more work is required. Their work emphasizes chemical use in the assertion of gender identity.

What began as their excursion into the chemical lives of young sales ladies in department stores took Joolia Demigilio and Lian Domingo to explore the workings of a of multi-level marketing (MLM) company in the city. MLMs are fast growing enterprises in the Philippines. The authors found that a few of their initial informants are members of MLMs and regard this as “sideline” to complement their low income and insecure work contracts. Using and conflating the rhetoric of hope and wealth, MLMs are successful in enticing membership. The “products” become more than just the



Winona Fernando “hailing” an appointment for a head to toe interview.  
Photo by Aliette Mesa.

things being sold and take on the representation of the hope. The members are themselves buyers of hope as they are peddlers of it.

In the final presentation, Ina Fuentes and Ellaine Tan wrote about a familiar “other”--college students. They noted important junctures in students’ chemical lives, first initiated by spatial changes as they migrated from their rural hometowns to their new urban environment, and developmentally, as they become young adults. The authors use the various changes in the young students’ chemical practices as metaphors and markers for the students’ changing viewpoints and attitudes as they now live urban lives.

### **More than the Trouble**

In cities, young people encounter new products, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. They gain access and become audience to media images that promote trends of consumption (Nilan and Feixa 2006; Tranberg Hansen 2008), inspiring a particular kind of “imagination” (Appadurai 2004)--one that is based on the city life. Cities are sites of great divide between those who can afford the city lifestyle and those who can only watch from the sidelines



Geotagging. Ferlie Famaloan and Lian Domingo at the Indahag Sendong Relocation site. Photo by Joolia Demigillo.

(Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). In cities the lines of exclusion and marginality are sharp and delineated. For many young people, cities are akin to borderlands where they, Comaroff and Comaroff propose, “confront the contradictions of modernity as they try to make good on the millennial promise of democracy and the free market” (2005:278). Young people without the social capital of education and status are often left to deal with precarious futures. As the summer unfolded it became apparent that most of our guides in the grand tour, belying their youthful openness and joviality, live their lives in constant precarity.

The students’ reports provide us with brief narratives of young figures in the city, modern characters who live, struggle and thrive in a city that shapes them and that they too shape. In these reports we are invited to, as Hardon and Moyer (2014) recommend, “incorporate in our analytical frameworks the creative agency of the users...the particularities of local markets and care constellations, class hierarchies, social relations and family dynamics” (2014, 112).

We hope that with this collection we are able to look at young people as presenting so much more than the trouble they are often

made to stand for (Hebdige 1988). Rather, may they call attention to the troubles of our time, that their practices, often perceived as social violations, are instead taken as “agentive interventions into ongoing sociocultural change...their own acts of cultural critique and cultural production in the face of often untenable situations” (2002:353). The young figures call attention to the paradox of modernity--as they become increasingly autonomous and asserting self-expression they are also becoming more and more disenfranchised and are required to expend more to be in the city. As the city speeds toward progress they are constrained by uneasy conditions that demand creativity and tactics to achieve their aspirations.

The collection also provides some of the possibilities that scholarship on the body can offer as a site and as a takeoff toward various trajectories of social life. This collection on young people by young people hopes to set an agenda for youth scholarship that integrates their lived bodily experiences with a concern for how young people live the tensions of achieving decent living and the demands of urban living. Students of the University of the Philippines Anthropology Field School 2014 took on the batch name *Padayon*, a Bisayan word meaning “continue,” it is also the aspiration of this project that beyond the final grades already given, beyond the degree already conferred, the students’ anthropological practice can and will continue the concern and curiosity, the communing and engaging, and empathy with an other that is ultimately no different from the self.



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# HIGH FIVE: RIVER GUIDING IN CAGAYAN DE ORO RIVER

## INTRODUCTION

### From Nature to Ecotourism

The Cagayan River is a 90-kilometer-long river that traverses the provinces of Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, and Misamis Oriental in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. Its upstream watersheds are located in the Mt. Kalatungan Range in Bukidnon and its discharge point is the Macajalar Bay in Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental (Tuddao 2012). Within the geopolitical boundaries of the city, the river traverses different types of communities—from the rural Barangay Mambuaya and Barangay Lumbia, further downriver to the highly urbanized Barangay Carmen (the heart of the city), and ends between the urban Barangay Bonbon and Barangay Macabalan. With numerous rapids along its length, the river is far

from calm. Numerous landscape features like mountains, cliffs, and geological formations, as well as a diverse array of flora and fauna, can be found along the river's course. Natural events like strong typhoons can break obstacles, causing some rapids to weaken or modifying the course of the river by opening up new paths.

A group of mountaineers called the Northern Mindanao Mountaineering Society (NORMMS) started whitewater rafting in Cagayan de Oro. NORMMS is part of the Mountaineering Federation of the Philippines, Inc. (MFPI), which hosts only two activities annually. Sometime in the 1980s, finding something to do in between those two annual events, members of NORMMS trekked and eventually came upon the Cagayan River. They camped along the river, went upstream, and became curious as they saw that the river was good for rafting. Inspired by a documentary they had watched about whitewater rafting in Siberia, they decided to go rafting on the Cagayan River. Shortly after, in the 1990s, friends started joining the group and their rafting activities. They were only asked to chip in for the transportation expenses in going to the river. It soon became a regular weekend trip, and by 1995, a lot of people were joining the activity. Eight members of NORMMS chipped in and invested in a secondhand rafting boat from the United States, and the commercialization of rafting started. They began to charge people not only for the transportation to the river, but also for the rafting activity itself. Then they founded the Cagayan de Oro Whitewater Rafting Adventures (CDOWRRA).

River rafting became even more popular when then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo went rafting in May 2002. Whitewater rafting made headlines, beginning its popularity as a tourism draw for the city. CDOWRRA eventually dissolved into three different companies, and then other rafting companies started setting up in 2006.

At present, whitewater rafting is the primary tourism activity offered by the city, as designated by the One Town, One Product (OTOP) policy of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). OTOP is designed to "promote entrepreneurship and create jobs." In this program, the local chief executive of each city or municipality takes

the lead in identifying, developing, and promoting a specific local product or service, which has a competitive advantage. River rafting was selected as the main service of Cagayan de Oro because of its capacity to attract tourists. Other products, such as a popular brand of meat products, had also been proposed, but it was reasoned that if tourists would go whitewater rafting in Cagayan de Oro, they would also buy products of the city as souvenirs.

Due to intensive marketing, Cagayan de Oro has become the best-known rafting destination in the country.<sup>1</sup> Promotional materials—from posters to web pages—typically feature whitewater rafting as the city’s main attraction, with other attractions such as indigenous crafts and historical sites on the side. There are six rafting companies currently operating in the city and they have formed the Oro Association of Rafters (OAR). The function of the association is to regulate the industry, such as controlling the number of rafting companies and the prices for different rafting packages, and arrange rafting events in the city.

### **How to Build a River Guide**

In whitewater rafting, the river guides serve as the managers of the activity. The main guide sits at the back of the raft and steers the raft while giving paddling instructions to the guests, who serve as the main paddlers that propel the raft. Meanwhile, there is another guide—a photographer—riding solo or with another guide in a separate small kayak, who follows the group down the river to document the adventure. Together, the river guides facilitate the guests’ rafting experience.

To become a river guide, one should know how to swim and must be physically fit. In terms of age, one rafting company, which we will call Company A, hires only 18 years old and older, whereas another company, Company B, accepts younger teenagers to be trained as paddlers or assistants to the guides. A potential guide also has to be “accepted” by his colleagues since he will be spending a lot of time with them. At the time of the fieldwork, all the river guides in Cagayan de Oro were male.

Anyone wanting to be a river guide can express his interest in the job to the owner of the rafting company or to anyone of the company's pool of river guides. If accepted, he then becomes an assistant paddler for six months up to one year so he can observe a regular guide in action and learns the tricks of the trade. Among the things he needs to learn are paddling, rescue techniques and maneuvers that can make the trip more exciting (e.g., asking the guests to make certain formations, letting the raft surf at strategic points), and knowing how to assess the capabilities of the guests—for instance, giving paddle commands and when to take the easy course when the group includes children and middle-aged guests.

A trip down the river lasts several hours, so a potential guide must also learn how to keep the guests entertained by sharing information about the features found along the river, such as rock formations, flora and fauna, local fishing methods, and river transport systems, as well as about the history of the place, popular culture, and relevant news events. To be able to do this, he must be well-versed in different fields (such as in geology, specifically on rock formations) and should have good communication skills. Aside from giving information, a river guide needs to interact with the guests, answer their questions, and establish chemistry and teamwork in the group. It would be a plus if he can tell jokes once in a while. Most importantly, a potential guide should master the navigation of the river by familiarizing himself with the river's 20 or so<sup>2</sup> rapids and how to negotiate them—whether in high brown water where paddling is fast and easy, or in low clear water where maneuvering the raft becomes tricky because the paddles can strike the rocks at the bottom.

River guides are not considered regular employees in the sense that they have no contract with the rafting companies and they are paid on a per-trip basis, depending on the length of the course. For the shortest course, called *Beginner*, the regular guides are paid PhP400; PhP600 for a longer course, called *Advance*; and PhP1,000 for the longest course, called *Extreme*. Assistant paddlers get up to PhP250 for the *Beginner*, PhP350 for the *Advance*, and PhP500 for the *Extreme*. However, like regular employees, river guides get benefits from government agencies,<sup>3</sup> which require monthly

contributions—half is automatically deducted from their pay while their companies shoulder the other half.

Every year, river guides undergo first aid and basic life support training from the Red Cross. The company funds the training sessions. Specialized trainings are also conducted. In 2006, a one-week training session was conducted with an American trainer from the International Rafting Federation (IRF), an organization of trainers and assessors from 60 countries who draft standards for river guides. Around 20 river guides participated and were taught about the technical aspects of boat handling, customer care, giving a safety talk, making special knots to be used for emergency rescues, and the equipment necessary for every rafting trip. Only a handful of guides passed the training, prompting the rafting companies to use the certification by the IRF as a marketing tool.

The river guides classify themselves as either a city guide or a local guide. One distinction between the two is the area of residence: local guides live in the rural area called *Aura*, which is near the starting point of the Beginner course, whereas city guides live in or near the city proper.<sup>4</sup> Another difference between the two groups is their educational attainment. City guides generally have a higher educational attainment, having completed college. Local guides, on the other hand, usually have only reached high school. Local guides usually take the role of photographers, maneuvering in little kayaks to take photos of the rafts along the course of the river. City guides steer the raft, give the paddling instructions, and interact with the guests. City guides also spend more time in their company's warehouse where the rafting equipment are stored, while local guides usually go back home to their families shortly after the trip. There is no animosity though between the two groups; they can freely mingle with members of the other group.

Local guides were originally porters or farmers who underwent training to become guides. They are hired by rafting companies because of their local knowledge. They usually have lived and grown up near the river. They know the river well and are not afraid of it. The rafting companies, especially those that accept younger applicants, also want to uplift the locals' livelihood by



providing them with job opportunities. Local guides are usually hired via recommendations from other guides who live in the same neighborhood, since people in the area know the potential guide's reputation better than the employer. At first they were too shy to talk to guests, as most of them have not entered college. Gradually, however, they were trained to develop their communication skills and to think that they have authority over the guests since they are the guides and are in charge.

On the other hand, city guides are mostly from the same outdoor community. They are mostly mountaineers or enthusiasts of other sports who eventually got hooked on rafting.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### City Guides: A Subculture

We have introduced the two groups of river guides in Cagayan de Oro—the local guides and the city guides. Now we will focus on a particular group of city guides, which we will call the *River Rafter*s.

#### ***A Day in the Life of a River Rafter***

The River Rafter s worked for Company B. To see what the River Rafter s' ordinary working day was like, we followed the group one day from morning until night. At around 6:30 in the morning, we went to their company's warehouse, which was inside a gated compound with a four-door apartment, the first unit of which was leased to the guides. Those who lived in distant areas opted to stay in the apartment most days of the week while others preferred to travel from their houses to the warehouse on every working day. As we entered the compound, a large sign that read, "Welcome to River Rafter s", greeted us. Inside the compound were several benches, all made from driftwood sourced from the river. There was also an area for fighting cocks as well as a *sari-sari* store (small variety store), which the guides called their own version of a certain supermarket.

Inside the warehouse, people were already busy carrying rafts, which would be strapped to the top of the jeepney we would use, and preparing the paddles, helmets, and life vests. By around 7:15 AM, we left the warehouse to pick up the other guests for the day's trip. Then we went to the company's office so the guests could sign the company's rafting waiver and settle payments. After a 45-minute ride, we arrived at the starting point of the Beginner course. At the area were stalls of vendors selling food, rafting clothes, and souvenirs. There were also comfort rooms and dressing rooms where sometimes river guides would eat breakfast before the activity. Our belongings were left in the jeepney, which would be waiting for us at the endpoint of the course. The guides unloaded and inflated the rafts, and everyone in the team helped with the preparation; even the jeepney driver, Henry, helped the guests put on life vests and helmets and gave them paddles.

When everyone was finished preparing, the guests were gathered for an orientation. The guides for the day's morning trip were Ryan and Michael. Ryan briefed the guests on the safety features of the raft and their gear. He also explained how to hold the paddle as well as the various commands that the guests should follow. He gave

The warehouse.



detailed instructions on what the guests should do if they fell off the raft or the raft capsized.

Our first whitewater rafting experience was packed with adventure. The rapids tossed us around, but we got to swim in still parts of the river. We even got to jump off a boulder and drank fresh spring water falling from the rocks! We saw snakes, reptiles, birds, horses, goats, and people, as well as fishing rods set up to catch carp and a wooden bridge that used to be made of cement but was said to be ravaged by two strong typhoons. We also saw the zip-line-like transport system used by people from the outskirts of Bukidnon in crossing the Cagayan River to get to Cagayan de Oro. Best of all, we learned “High five”—a gesture which would start with one of our guides shouting out “High five!” every time we successfully passed a rapid or did something exciting, after which we would raise our paddles in the air, make the blades touch, and shout our guides’ company name.<sup>5</sup>

After two to three hours, we reached the endpoint of the Beginner course. We returned our gear to our guides and then we showered and changed our clothes while the guides packed up the rafts and other equipment we used. They partially deflated the rafts so that they would not burst under the heat during the trip back to the warehouse, and then strapped them again to the top of the jeepney. The guides changed their clothes without taking a shower since they could do that at the warehouse.

Michael invited us to a second rafting trip after lunch, and we said yes. We returned to the office and he took the guests’ payment for the guides. We had lunch at the restaurant owned by Company A, where most guides would usually eat. Interestingly, there was no tension among guides belonging to different companies, and we later observed that they could even go freely to each other’s warehouse. This could be because many of them were part of the same outdoor community of Cagayan de Oro and they all plied the same river, so interactions and becoming friends were inevitable.

After lunch, we rested for a while at the warehouse before the second trip. When we were ready, we proceeded to the office to



A river guide and his guests on a rafting trip.

pick up a large number of guests. We got in the jeepney and went to the river for the second time.

Our second trip was similar to the first because it was also on the Beginner course. The routine was practically the same. However, this time, we helped unload the rafts from the jeepney and inflate them in the river. We also helped the other guests put on life vests and helmets, gave them paddles, and assisted them towards the rafts for the orientation, which this time was given by another guide, Kyle.

The water level in the river was lower in the afternoon, so we saw more corals, rocks, and branches of trees in the river. The large group of guests with us brought snacks, so we stopped to eat at the spot where there was fresh spring water. Then we continued rafting on almost the same course as in the morning trip, with Michael as our only guide. The trip ended at around 5:00 in the afternoon. We changed our clothes at a resort near the endpoint of the course, and then we dropped off the guests at their hotel and returned to the office so the guides could receive their payment for the day.

From the office we went back to the warehouse where most of the guides would gather after a day of rafting. They had dinner and drank alcohol, which was part of their routine. When we got there, the other guides without afternoon trips greeted us and offered us shots of alcohol. We sat on the driftwood benches and chatted with them. Ryan told us that at night, they would usually hang out in the warehouse to relax, chill out, share stories of the day's trips, and even have intellectual and philosophical conversations. He shared about the River Rafter's' "*pa-beer*" tradition—that the guides who had two trips for the day should treat the other guides to a drink or two in the evening. Since we went rafting twice that day, we ended up treating them to several large bottles of beer.

Dinner that night was served boodle-fight style—rice, grilled fish, and *kinilaw* (raw fish prepared similar to ceviche) served on banana leaves spread out on an upturned raft. We eventually learned that they have this kind of dinner when they have guests that they like or when it was a successful day for rafting (i.e., there were many guests and many of the guides were able to go on a trip). That night, Company B's marketing manager even dropped by and gave us barbecue. We helped in preparing the *kinilaw* and learned a cool technique for opening beer bottles with a spoon. We had a great time talking with the very friendly River Rafter's. They asked various things about us and invited us to come over every day. Indeed, after that night, we came over very often, almost every other day. It was during our frequent interactions with the Rafter's in their warehouse that we got to know more about them and the river guides in general as a subculture, several aspects of which we will subsequently describe.

### **Constructions of Masculinity**

The river guides belonged to an all-male group. This could largely be due to the physical demands of the job, which required masculine strength—lifting heavy rafts, inflating them using manual pumps, and steering them in the river's turbulent rapids. The River Rafter's were between ages 20 and 40, the period when people are generally fit and vigorous.

The River Rafterers drank alcohol almost every day. They claimed that this was part of their culture. "*Kahit sinong taong taga-river, umiinom talaga. Part na ng culture*" (Everyone who is from the river really drinks. It's part of the culture), said Kyle while another guide, Bruce, said, "Normal na 'yung inuman dito. Kung ayaw mo uminom, magtago ka na lang" (Drinking is normal here. If you don't want to drink, better hide). Their way of bonding with each other and strengthening camaraderie was by drinking as well as singing and playing musical instruments together. Drinking was also their way of celebrating a good day's trip. "*Pag feeling namin, masaya kami sa trip namin, happy talaga kami lahat, iinom kami*" (When we feel happy with our trip, we drink!), said George, another guide. Their "*pa-beer*" tradition was a way of sharing income to reduce or eliminate competition.

Using products, except for alcoholic drinks, was not a common practice for the river guides. Instead of using sunblock, most members of the River Rafterers had grown their hair long for protection from the sun. Bruce explained, "*Mahaba talaga ang buhok namin for protection. Kasi 'pag outdoor, 'yung buhok mo talaga 'yung protection sa init*" (We grow our hair long for protection. When outdoors your hair is your protection from the heat). Most of the guides also used rash guards to protect their skin. They had already accepted their dark, tanned skin; in fact, they considered it a show of their manliness. However, although they did not use sunblock, they used lotion after rafting to relieve the dryness of their skin. For them, their use of lotion was just for skin protection and not for vanity. Also, they said that they use body care products only for personal hygiene. For example, some of them used bath soap for the whole body, including the hair and face. George said, "*Yung ina-apply ko sa katawan ko, parang 'yung purpose ko panglinis lang. Hindi para may effect sa mukha kasi para sa akin, kung ano ang mukha ko, 'yun na*" (My purpose for the products I apply on my body is to simply to clean myself. Not to have any other effect on my face because for me whatever my face is, that's it).

They were also not fond of taking food supplements or drinking energy drinks, which they thought they did not need as the work they do already provided them the exercise to hone their bodies. Aaron



explained, *"Pampapayat, ano lang gagawin mo eh, exercise lang pero pagpalaki ng katawan siyempre, minsan kasi 'pag rafting ikaw ang nagpa-paddle sa boat, ikaw ang nagbubuhat"* (To lose weight, just exercise. To bulk the body, when rafting we paddle the boat, we carry the load). When ill, the river guides would rather not depend on medicines and instead use the body's natural way of recovering. *"Pag nilalagnat kasi nagtutubig lang ako; tubig, tubig, tubig"* (When I have fever, I drink water; water, water, water), said Lawrence.

The River Rafter's sense of masculinity and dominance was most salient when it came to the river, where they had become the "masters." Whoever the guests might be, even if they were VIPs, once they got on the raft, their fate was in the hands of the river guides. With this heavy responsibility, the guides always took precautions to ensure the safety of their guests. They looked out for each other, especially on trips where there were elders and children, whom every guide would keep an eye on even if one were in another raft.

### **River Guiding as a Passion**

One of the strongest ties that bound the River Rafter's together and made them a very tight group was their passion for whitewater

*"Pa-beer"*





Affordable locally manufactured brandy sold in a *sar-sari* store in Aura.

rafting. As mentioned earlier, many of them had completed college so there were other job opportunities for them, but they chose to be river guides for the love of the job. Being part of Cagayan de Oro's outdoor community, they considered river guiding not only as a job but also as a fulfillment of their passion.

Many of the River Rafterers went to a prestigious university in the city where they became members of an outdoor organization that advocated environmental awareness and protection,<sup>6</sup> many of them began as mountaineers. In this paper, we will call it the Organization.

Michael joined the Organization in 2001 when he was an 18-year-old Agricultural Engineering major. There he was introduced to mountaineering and adventure racing (an outdoor activity similar to the popular television game show *Amazing Race*) and had since been hooked on the outdoor lifestyle. Eventually, he and his batchmates in the Organization formed their own group that focused on mountaineering and was no longer affiliated with the university. Sometime in 2006, while hanging out in a certain outdoor gear shop,<sup>7</sup> he and his friends found out that rafting companies in the city were hiring river guides. They decided to apply for the job. Out of



the seven batchmates who applied, five, including Michael and Kyle, went on to become river guides. “*Parang* mushroom, *bigla lang*” (It’s like a mushroom, quite sudden), Michael said of how he became a river guide. He had been a river guide for 8 years since then.

Bruce, on the other hand, said that his being a river guide was a “destiny.” Even during high school, he was already into outdoor activities. “*Magala na*” (Likes to travel), he described his younger self. When he, then a history major, joined the Organization in 2002, he got even more connected to the outdoor lifestyle due to the Organization’s activities. In 2006, he worked in the same outdoor gear shop where Michael and his friends hung out. When they heard that the rafting companies were hiring river guides, Bruce was not able to apply for the job because he could not leave his job in the shop, where he stayed for one year. Then came what he termed the “dark age” of his life in 2007, and he decided to go to Davao. There he did blue-collar jobs, such as being a mall janitor and a fast-food restaurant worker, for a year. In 2008, he went back to Cagayan de Oro. He learned that he could still apply to be a river guide. He applied and was accepted, and that started his career in river guiding.

The River Rafterers also regarded river rafting as a sport. It was just one of many other sports they were engaged in.<sup>8</sup> They aspired to hold a regular rafting competition for fellow rafters in Cagayan de Oro and, in the future, open a training school for aspiring river guides. However, they were challenged by the lack of funds.

Some local guides, however, did not consider rafting as a sport but primarily as a job—one among the limited job opportunities available in Aura. Ben, a local guide that we interviewed, told us that given a chance, he would go to Manila or Japan. When asked what he would do in Japan, he answered, “*makikipagsapalaran*” (try my fortune), but not as a river guide. Kevin, also a local guide, finished only up to grade 5 in school, so the job opportunities available to him were limited. He dreams of working and living in Metro Manila.

On the other hand, the city guides stay as river guides for the love of the job. Some had tried other jobs but ended up being pulled

back by the river. Kyle, a Development Communication graduate and also a skilled video editor, once tried working in Makati in Metro Manila in 2008. He got the job when his brother, who then worked for a big pharmaceutical company, introduced him to the director of an agricultural television show. Having done video editing since college, Kyle showed samples of the video editing he had done, after which he was asked to fly to Manila for an interview and was hired. He worked for a certain company in Makati for 11 months as an offline video editor for television broadcasts and audiovisual presentations for multinational companies. During this time, he worked really hard trying to learn all he could about video editing because he was thinking that he could use the knowledge to promote, via audiovisual media, Cagayan de Oro as a prime whitewater rafting destination not only in the Philippines but also in the world. In his opinion, the Cagayan River was a world-class river and a pride of the Philippines. Eventually, however, he felt suffocated by the workload his boss was giving him and he was no longer happy. This and reasons concerning his family made him leave his job in Makati and went back home to Cagayan de Oro. Once back, he immediately resumed being a river guide and eventually did filming and video editing on the side.

Even though they loved the job, the River Rafters dealt with the fact that it did not pay well. Although the payment per trip was above the daily minimum wage in Cagayan de Oro, which was PhP306 at the time of the fieldwork, they did not get to go rafting every day. There were 12 regular guides in their company and they were assigned a trip in rotation. So, there were days when some of them did not have trips, especially during the lean season, which was after summer. Because of this, some of them, especially those who had families to support, did other jobs. Yves, who had a 2-year-old daughter, doubled as a salesperson for dental supplies as it offered a more stable income—a basic salary plus commissions. Aside from this, even if he worked six days a week as a salesperson, he could still go rafting from time to time because the dental supplies business was his cousin's. "If not for my daughter, I won't be in it," he said of his other job while of rafting he said, "I could do this all my life." He also said that if the guides' fee was higher, he would not look for another job.

Daniel, the oldest River Rafter, had four children aged 12 to 19. Aside from being a river guide, he was also a carpenter and one of the few skilled raft repairmen in Cagayan de Oro. He was repairing rafts for three of the six rafting companies in the city. Aside from this, he was repairing boats for the Air Force and the Red Cross in other provinces, like Bukidnon and Davao. He also taught some of the younger river guides how to repair rafts, or more like the younger guides observed him and he told them what to do.

## **CONCLUSION: CONNECTIONS AND METAPHORS**

The River Rafterers are adventure seekers with great love and appreciation for nature. Their being river guides serves as an extension of their lifestyle because they get to be outdoors a lot. From observing them as a subculture and hearing their life stories, we see that their constructs of masculinity are manifested in their frequent use of some chemical products, especially alcohol, and, more importantly, in their nonuse of other chemical products (such as sunblock and food supplements). Integral to their self-image is the notion that their strong bodies and tanned skin are a natural result of their job, thus they have little need for chemical products for body care and nourishment. They are always ready to go anywhere without needing to bring anything aside from personal hygiene essentials.

The precariousness of their nonuse of chemical products for their protection may also be seen as a metaphor for the tenuousness of their employment. Even though river guides are the frontliners of Cagayan de Oro's whitewater rafting industry, they do not have a secure job. Compounding this is the fact that they often exhibit a carefree, come-what-may attitude towards many circumstances. The fact that they care little about not using sunblock to protect their skin because for them tanned skin is a sign of masculinity is analogous to the fact that they seem to care little about having no safety net when it comes to work because they love rafting. They have no employment contract so they can actually leave anytime, and if they do leave, the company can always get local guides from

Aura and train them to be their replacements. The River Rafterers are expendable, in a sense, even if their passion for rafting is not.

A very noticeable practice in their use of chemicals is their frequent alcohol drinking. Asked about the effects of this practice on their health, Bruce said, “*Di kami nagpapa-check up. Takot kami magpa-check up. Baka lumala*” (We don’t go for (medical) check up. We’re afraid to. It might get worse]. They just keep on drinking with little regard to its consequences because for them, among other reasons, it is fun. Even if the pay is small and there is no income security, they keep on working as river guides because it gives them the opportunity to go rafting and earn at the same time, which they would not be able to do anywhere else. Rafting costs a lot in terms of investment for the raft, paddles, and other gear, which the guides cannot afford on their own, so they are dependent on their company in gratifying their passion and are therefore hesitant to press their employment and payment issues to the management. They will ride the rapids for as long as they can.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Other destinations include the provinces of Kalinga, Davao, Antique, and Quezon, as listed in the website of e-Philippines, accessed December 4, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The number of rapids can change due to strong typhoons.

<sup>3</sup> PhilHealth, SSS, and Pag-IBIG

<sup>4</sup> It takes about 45 minutes to travel by jeepney from the city proper to Aura.

<sup>5</sup> The guides also say “High five!” as a form of greeting.

<sup>6</sup> This organization has been in existence since the 1990s. It also serves as a training ground for leaders since most of its activities, such as clean-up drives and tree-planting events, are handled by the students.

<sup>7</sup> This shop sells equipment for outdoor activities, such as tents, hiking sandals, backpacks, waterproof bags, and skateboards. It also serves as a *tambayan* (hangout) for the outdoor community of Cagayan de Oro.

<sup>8</sup> Their other sports included longboarding, triathlon, ultimate frisbee, wall climbing, and surfing.

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# **PAG-IYA-IYA AND CHEMICAL USE AMONG YOUNG STREET VENDORS AND *MOTORELA* AND *SIKAD* DRIVERS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

What household items do young people, particularly the street workers, commonly use? What does their use of chemical products like shampoo, toothpaste, coffee, alcohol, and cigarettes tell about their lives? The paper is the result of our fieldwork between two subgroups of young street workers, the *motorela* and *sikad* drivers and street food vendors, in Cagayan de Oro in the summer of 2014. It aims to know how they became street workers and how the use of chemicals have formed their own identities over time and the factors involved.

The workers that we interviewed were chosen randomly. They were migrant workers in the city, between 18 and 25 years old, now residents of the city, and work in the streets of Pabayo, Divisoria,



and Cogon. Our data gathering approaches involved buying food from the food vendors and literally chasing the *motorela* and *sikad* drivers. When asked about their work, our respondents from both subgroups described their jobs as strenuous. About getting their jobs, someone said, “*Walang papel na kailangan*” (No paper is needed), which meant no formal paperwork was needed to land their jobs.

Observing what they do, asking questions where necessary, swapping stories with them, and being in the places where they plied their trade enabled us to gain an understanding of their lives, particularly the chemicals that they use and how such use influences their lives.

We look at how their use of chemical products has changed over time due to different factors such as economic gain, personal satisfaction, and identity building; how they value these factors is reflected by how they look at their use of chemical products. We also aim to have a better understanding of the young workers’ existing notions about health and the body.

Our respondents’ concept of being a *binata* (young man) or a *dalaga* (young lady) is analyzed based on what they consider as signs of it or what they know defines it—not only the physical attributes but also society’s expectations and ideas of maturity, such as being able to behave like an adult, belong to a group, and build one’s identity.

### **The *Motorela* and *Sikad* Drivers**

A *motorela* or *rela* is a motorcycle with a roofed carriage-like compartment enclosing both the driver and the passengers. It can accommodate eight passengers—two can sit beside the driver at the front and six can sit at the back, three on each side of the vehicle. The regular fare is ten pesos per passenger while the student’s fare is seven pesos.

A *sikad*, a Visayan word that means “to pedal,” is a bicycle with a sidecar that has a padded seat for two persons and an umbrella that protects the passengers from the rain or the heat of the sun.



A group of *sikad* drivers waiting for their turn to accommodate people at the Cogon market.

The *sikad*, which can transport people to short distances, are usually found in terminals near markets. They are not allowed in the city's highways so the drivers usually accommodate people who live near their assigned stations and routes, such as those at the Cogon market. The regular fare in a *sikad* ranges from twenty to fifty pesos, depending on the passenger's destination. Most of the *sikad* drivers we interviewed bathed, ate, and slept at the Petron gas station located across the area where they parked their *sikad*. They did not own the *sikad* they drive, they lease the *sikad* for 1,500 pesos per month.

### The Street Vendors

In Cagayan de Oro, there is a variety of street foods available: fried food such as *chicken proven*, a deep-fried ball made with chicken meat and flour, and *puso*, cooked rice wrapped with woven dried coconut leaves, and baked goods such as banana muffin, bread, and various fruit salads. The street food vendors usually start setting up their stalls at four or five in the afternoon when students usually finish their classes and workers leave their offices, and work until three in the morning when party goers usually leave clubs and pubs.

In the pictures above, we can see what a typical street food stall at Pabayo Street looks like—attached to a bicycle is a cart containing several compartments for the food products, cooking apparatus, ingredients, and condiments. The food is “*bagong luto*” (freshly cooked), as what the Chicken Proven vendors would say as they collect the golden-brown chicken nuggets from the frying pan.

### Backstory: Finding Themselves in Cagayan de Oro

Most of the drivers and vendors are migrants from Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, and Camiguin. They felt the need to earn money to help their families with the household and educational expenses while they were still in elementary school. Before they started selling street foods, male food vendors tried working as *kargador* (porter), construction worker, or planting crops. They described their previous jobs as “*mahirap, eh*” (difficult), “*di malaki ang kita*” (the income was small), and “*walang pang-aral*” (no money for education). It was difficult to find jobs with decent pay in their hometowns because of their low educational qualifications. They felt the need to explore more job opportunities in bigger cities to be able to fend for themselves and support their families. This meant for some of them having

Street food stall along Pabayo Street.



to discontinue school and leave their families behind, “*Kailangan na humiwalay [sa kanila]*” (There was a need to be separated from our parents). The city “is the place to be” towards financial independence. It is the “new” home of poor from the provinces.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Beginnings of a Youth’s Chemical Use

One’s upbringing could have an influence on one’s choices even on the simplest things such as the products one uses every day. In this section, we will discuss how our respondents began using chemicals (e.g., beauty and body care products) and how this influenced their use of chemicals today.

For our respondents, living with their parents meant using the same products they used, especially those for personal hygiene. “*Sang gamay pa pud ko akoang mama ang ga-ligo sa akong ba*” (When I was young, my mom bathed me.) They admitted not having much choice when it came to the products they used. “*Kung ano ang binili ng nanay ko, ‘yun ang gagamitin ko.*” (Whatever my mother buys, that is what I use). Some of them shared that they used certain brands of shampoo and toothpaste “*kasi ‘yun ‘yung binibigay*” (because that is what is given); “*yun ang pinagamit ng nanay ko sa akin eh*” (my mother made me use it). Abiding by their parents’ rules and ways was expected of them since they lived under the same roof. One respondent said he started drinking late, “20 [years old] *na nagsimula kasi pagalitan kami sa aming mamay*” (I was 20 years old when I started drinking because I would be reprimanded). He started drinking only after moving out from his parents’ home.

As children, our respondents did not hesitate to take whatever was given to them because they trusted their parents or guardians. They never asked about the effectiveness or the necessity of using the products (chemical or otherwise) they were given because they believed their parents or guardians knew better. One of our respondents admitted using *gata* (coconut meat extract) on her

hair because she was told so. She reasoned, “*Hindi ko pa alam dati ‘yan eh*” (I did not know anything about it before).

Their parents who guided them throughout their childhood were the ones who advised them on which products they should use and avoid. Some of our respondents said that chemical beverages such as coffee and softdrinks should not be consumed by children “*kasi makabugo man na*” (because it could make one dumb), adding that, in general, they should not do or consume anything that could be harmful to them. Parents would usually choose “natural” products to make sure that their children would not be harmed. For example, they would not let their children use products that were said to be “too harsh” for the skin, which could result to the feeling of “*pagkasunog*” (burning sensation). One respondent said, “*Ah, yung Johnson & Johnson powder lang ang ginagamit [ko]*” (Ah, I just use the Johnson & Johnson powder).

Their parents, who they viewed as role models, influenced them on their use of chemical products. “*Nag-yosi sila, kaya ako rin mag-yosi*” (They smoke, so I smoke too). As they started having their preferences on chemical products and brands, their notions of propriety had shaped their present attitudes towards chemicals. “*Ngayon, di na ako mag-gatas, kasi pambata lang ‘yun*” (Now, I do not drink milk anymore because that is only for children). This implies that they are more likely to shadow their parents’ chemical use because they have seen how the latter have used chemical products and what products they use and not use as well as their ideals on cleanliness, health, and the body.

### **“Pag-iyaya-iyaya”: Separation and Self-Journey**

The physical changes on the body become more obvious as one grows older. These changes signal that they have to assume new roles. They meet different people and face new realities. Their world does not revolve around playing in the streets anymore. The streets have become a working place where they sweat because of *paningkamot* (hard work) as they start a new life. They have had difficult times but gained autonomy as to how they would rather live their lives. It is time for *pag-iyaya-iyaya*.

Most of our respondents shared with us the concept of *pag-iya-iya* (self-journey towards separation from parents or guardians), wherein one feels ready to take on the course of life alone-- to be independent. "*Dako na, handa na*" (Old enough; ready already). The transformation from a child to a grownup implies being, knowing, and doing as adults would. They have to learn the ways of adulthood, and this somehow also changes their perception of certain life situations and habits.

Applying *diskarte* on how they should shape their future becomes crucial to our respondents as they grow older. It becomes their motto in life. For the young men, *diskarte* refers to the idea of devising a strategy in dealing with a certain situation or problem, crucial as they become more independent from their parents' support. With their own *diskarte*, they would eventually get around the different challenges ahead of them. Their agency on deciding what to do in different situations becomes more evident. Their excitement and eagerness to explore the world out there though might challenge the authority and influence of their parents.

### Youth Subculture: "Sabay-sabay" and Self-Perception

Being migrants from other provinces and undergoing *pag-iya-iya*, most of our respondents shared that they needed to belong to a *barkada* (a group of friends). The *barkada* is composed mostly of their co-workers. The *barkada* help them cope with life in a new environment, including finding work, "making it" in the city, and being happy. "*Masaya; enjoy lang lahat kapag jamming*" (We are happy; we enjoy jamming with each other). Being surrounded by peers also means keeping an open mind—listening to different opinions and being exposed to the practices of the group.

Being together often as *barkada* exposes them to each other's chemical use. When asked why they smoke, one said, "*Sabay ako sa barkada*" (I just go along with my friends). *Sabay-sabay* ("to go along", "to go with the flow") explains how and why they smoke and drink. "*Hayahay ba*" (It is relaxing/comforting); "*Mataas ang isip, parang walang problema*" (You get a high, and it seems like you do not have problems). Drinking is fun with the *barkada*. One



said, “*Mag inom ka lang ng inom tsaka merong imagination ba, na*” (You just keep drinking, and then it seems like you are imagining). The camaraderie and fun memories they have drinking with the barkada strengthens friendship. When asked why drinking is fun, one said, “*Kasi lasing na*” (Because we are already drunk).

They are aware of the bad effects of smoking and drinking alcohol to one’s health, including “*Mabilis kang tatanda*” (You will age quickly.) However, for them, cigarettes and alcohol did not only make them feel high but also strengthened friendships. They also believe that smoking and drinking alcohol could make a person feel dominant: “*Parang siga*” (Like a tough guy).

The barkada also influences the individual’s choice and use of chemical products, including the idea of what is *tsada* (attractive, pleasant). When asked why they use colognes, styling gels, and other *pampa-tsada* products, they said, “*Gamit din ng mga ka-uban ko*” (My companions also use them) or “*Nakuha sa barkada*” (I learned them from my friends), adding that they would sometimes share products with anyone in their barkada whose supplies had run out.

A sense of *ulaw* (Bisaya, “embarrassment,” “shame”) also influences the use of chemical products. The sense of *ulaw* is associated with awareness of changes in the body as one grows up. Acquiring new habits and awareness of the body became primary concerns. Did they start changing products? Did they try other options apart from what their parents made them use? Seeing themselves as more mature and wiser, how did they go about caring for their own bodies? The young street workers are in the stage when they start to consider the opinions of other people in deciding what chemical products to choose. But before we delve further into this, let us first understand the context of the transition they are experiencing.

### **Chicken Proven: Work Experiences of a Street Vendor**

The street vendors we interviewed either were hired by an employer and paid with a fixed rate per day or owned the goods



Empty bottles of energy drink and local rum and cans of milk collected near the *sikad* terminal.

they were selling. They had the knowledge and experience in making and selling street foods. Chicken proven (Lubos 2014) vendors underwent seminars on sanitation and food safety conducted by the health office of the city. They were told to keep their stands clean at all times to avoid contamination and making the customers sick. They prepare clean, cheap, and tasty food. They were particular about the temperature of the oil they used for frying and the spiciness of the sauce, especially for Muslim customers.

The street vendors swap stories with customers to establish vendor-*suki* relationship. A *suki* is a frequent customer. They talked about their families, work experiences, including their love life, in order to build rapport. They cracked jokes, made faces, and called each other funny names to get along with the *suki*. They also had to befriend the *bossings*, the police and traffic enforcers, in the area. They do not impede traffic, especially in crowded areas like markets; if they do, they transfer to another place so as not to get in trouble with the *bossings*. They obey the rules or else they would suffer the consequences of their actions.





Customers trying out the chicken proven.

Working round the clock made them very tired. To deal with this, they had to employ strategies that included taking energy drinks.

### **“Padyak”, “Broom-Broom”: Work Experiences of Sikad Drivers**

The sikad drivers have found a new place to call home in the city. “Nakatira ako dun sa may Petron” (I live at Petron), one said. Petron is a gas station near the sikad terminal. There was a number of household items in the place: some clothes were on the fence to dry; a basin with some clothes, plates, a few unwashed mugs and spoons; and small bed propped against the fence. Cigarette butts and empty bottles of liquor littered the place. In front of a nearby sari-sari (convenience store), there is space for people to sit and talk, and for shade. This is the ‘home’ where the sikad drivers retire after a hard day’s work to bond, rest, and sleep.

Most sikad drivers work more than twelve hours a day. They would start in the morning and end at around ten in the evening, which was the city curfew. During daytime, they would park their sikad at the designated terminal in the market where they would exchange everyday stories while waiting for passengers. They do not only

have to deal with the heat and traffic, but also had to be careful about driving so as not to disappoint their passengers and get complaints from them.

Street vendors and the drivers have to interact with their customers. *Pakikisama* (Tagalog, camaraderie) was at play; pleasing other people in order to be accepted by them. According to them, they needed to be always mindful of their clients' different preferences and sensitive to their reactions to their actions.

Different people have different preferences. They have to deal with the demands of the passengers. Some passengers sometimes reprimanded sikad drivers for the way they drove. According to one of our informants, old people would usually ask them to go slow while relatively younger passengers would ask them to go faster. According to some of our informants, there were people who looked down on them because they were "just" drivers, which embarrassed them and lowered their self-esteem. There were also passengers who shouted at them and looked at them disdainfully.

### **Chemicals as Oil and the Body as a Machine**

The most basic chemical products that drivers and vendor used for their daily grooming regimen included soap, shampoo, deodorant, and toothpaste. Our respondents used certain brands of beauty and body care products for different reasons—hygiene, aesthetics, and economy.

#### **Hygiene**

Safeguard and Silka were the common brands of bath soap that our respondents used. Many street vendors particularly chose Safeguard because, "it kills 99.9% of germs." They even recited the soap brand's slogan and stressed the importance of being clean, especially when establishing trust with street food buyers. "*Pag nakita [nilang] malinis ka, bibili sila. Pagkain pa naman nila ang hawak mo*" (When they see that you are clean, they will buy. You are handling the food they will eat).

Silka Papaya soap was more commonly used by sikad drivers because of the popular belief that it could get rid of one's pimples and make one's complexion fairer. Using it made them feel confident, attract more customers, and earn more. Before they shifted to these brands of bath soap, our respondents used different cleansing products, including Surf, a detergent powder and Tide, a detergent bar. They replaced these detergents with bath soaps because, "*parang nasusunog ang balat*" (the skin seems to be burn). The burning sensation intensified whenever they used the detergents, they said, especially as their skins were exposed to the heat of the sun practically every day.

Drivers consumed different beverages containing chemicals in order to deal with fatigue, pain, and other physical stresses brought about by their job. The most common of these beverages were energy drinks and caffeinated drinks. Whenever they felt tired, they drank Cobra energy drink to keep them awake and quench their thirst. "*Pampaliksi ba*" (It is an energizer), one said. Cobra could also make one "*kusgan*" (strong) and "aggressive," as one put it--drivers must not be scared to go out on a busy road. Having this perception about energy drinks made them consume such products. Like many consumers around the world, they take the product for its purported benefits, without understanding of its risks (Aljaloud 2016).

The deodorant was as important as energy drinks. Drivers and vendors used deodorant, particularly the brand Rexona. It was their solution to body odor: passengers never complained about how they smelled. They put on deodorant before going to work. They once used *tawas* (alum), as recommended by their parents, before they shifted to branded deodorants.

### **Aesthetics**

In caring for their hair, drivers and vendors used such shampoo brands as Palmolive, Head n' Shoulders, Guard, and Clear. According to them, these products made the hair soft, shiny, free of dandruff, and fragrant. These effects made them feel and look tsada in the job. Before using these brands, they had tried a variety of other brands but discontinued most of them because they did not have

the desired effects. Some shampoo brands caused dandruff. Using a wrong brand and exposure to dust could make one feel uneasy and dirty.

Some drivers and vendors used toothpaste to clean and whiten their teeth. Some preferred Close-up, while others liked Colgate. They cleaned and whitened the teeth with toothpaste "*para tsada*" (in order to look attractive), stressing that dirty teeth and bad breath would not do them any good, especially when talking to customers or passengers.

### **Economy**

Some drivers and vendors preferred hair care brands that are "*mas matipid*" (more economical) like Rejoice. They also liked the cool and comfortable feeling they would get whenever they used Rejoice shampoo, which helped them deal with the heat. Before they shifted to using shampoo, they used Tide or Surf detergent bars because these were cheap: they used the same products for personal hygiene and for washing their clothes.

Many drivers and vendors considered the use of colognes or perfumes good for the job. They had to look and smell clean at all times because they interacted closely with customers the whole day every day. They preferred products that were fragrant to mask bad odor, make them feel fresh, clean, and confident, and attract customers. Perfumes, colognes, and other fragrant chemical products were included in their list of necessities, along with food, rent for sikad, fuel, etc.

### **"Tsada": Aesthetics and the Teenage Body**

Drivers and vendors used chemical products not only to make them feel clean and fit to work but also to look good. Many of them would buy extra body care products for aesthetic reasons. These reasons became more important as they grew up.

One female vendor used Safeguard when she was a kid but shifted to Silka Papaya soap when she became dalaga. She reasoned that, according to her mother, kids should use soaps that would protect

them from germs, but grown-ups should use papaya soaps like Silka “*para lami tanaw-on*” (to look good), implying that as one grew older, one must become more concerned with one’s physical appearance.

Styling gel was also important to males. The product made them look tsada, thus attracting more customers and girls. “*Para mu-duol ang chicks*” (to attract girls), as one had put it, while telling us how he met his girlfriend who was his passenger.

## CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

When asked how they feel about their present situation, some of them said, “*Okay na, kontento na*” (It is okay, I am content), while others aspired to be taxi drivers, policemen, office workers, etc. In general, they described these jobs as not only “better” but also “*mas hayahay*” (more lax) and “*mas malinis*” (cleaner). One sikad driver wanted to be a taxicab driver because for him it was a “cleaner job.” One street vendor wanted to earn a college degree and be an office worker in the future. To be a soldier was the dream of another respondent because he wanted to hold a gun. Most of them reasoned that “*kasi malinis yung trabaho*” (because the work is clean) and that it was “*mas hayahay*”. Having worked long hours in the busy, dusty, and very humid streets where heat, sweat, and body pain is their usual condition, the idea of a “clean job” is one wherein one did not have to be physically exhausted to earn a decent amount of money. The idea that a better job is a cleaner job suggest a connection between a condition of the body that work produces. For example, driving a taxi is better and cleaner because one is less exposed to the sun and dust that causes one to feel dirty and smell bad. This is interesting because it contradicts the view that self-identity is not derived from work but from consumption as suggested by Tomlinson (1991, cited in Hancock et al 2000).

The body, as capital, is a “money-producing machine” (Shilling, 1991) that has to be looked after and maintained. The use of different chemicals as “essential oils” to maintain one’s body to

cope with the demands of one's work becomes a life-long necessity. The drivers and vendors could be using the same products for many more years because, "*yun ang nakasanayan [namin]*" (we've become used to them). Their "chemical life", though, could change because the special needs of the body shifts through time, and they could be living different lives. Nonetheless, chemical use is as much an effect of product branding (Danesi 2013) as it is by culture in that culture influences banding (Gosh et al 2016).

One's attitude towards chemical products depends on whatever the product works to one's advantage. The dynamicity and adaptability of chemical use show how chemical products can be a part of traditions, beliefs, perceptions, life situations, and agency. It is as well an effect of product branding that aims to and succeeds in creating a "'code' of latent meanings for the product that the consumer can grasp either consciously or unconsciously" (Danesi 2013, 175). The drivers and vendors would pass on to their future children what their parents taught them about chemicals. They would teach their children what they had learned from their parents because for them it is the right thing to do. Quite interestingly, one driver would not allow his children to smoke even if he does because his parents never wanted him to do so.

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# REINVENTING THE BUTCH AND SCULPTING THE *BAYOT*

## INTRODUCTION

### A Rose is a Rose by Any Other Name

In the story, “The Little Prince,” we learn that a rose can never be *just* a rose no matter how it may look like all the others in a bed of roses. There will always be something in it that would make it unique, for example, its petal count or the number of thorns that it has. The same can be said for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders—popularly referred to as LGBT—with their diverse yet distinct identities. However, there seems to be no settled name when collectively referring to the group. To have a better handle in facilitating the discussion, it is important that we first make an attempt at revealing localized contexts and nuances of the terms used in Cagayan de Oro City when referring to transgender men and



women as a subgroup. We believe that it is only after establishing this that we can truly move on and speak about their construction and maintenance of identities.

To do this, we adopt the approach of Garcia-Dungo (1995) in her conceptual framework for teaching an introductory course on gender. Her approach puts a premium on “recognizing the routine acts, habits and predispositions that characterize the ongoing relation between the sexes and other gender orientations towards upholding a more humane and liberating environment for the personal growth of individuals in the society” (Garcia-Dungo 1995, 179). It is through this emphasis on the everyday life from which indigenous meanings can be analyzed and extracted. This is parallel with our objective since the term ‘transgender’ can be a bit dicey and might not fit into the local meaning-making negotiation due to its very Westernized roots as also pointed out by Tan (2005). Merriam-Webster (2014) dictionary defines transgender as “a person who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that differs from the one which corresponds to the person’s sex at birth.” Although the term is sometimes used as a gloss to include transsexuals, cross-dressers, and drag queens/kings, a distinction between transgender and transsexual has to be made in that not all transgenders desire to change their sexual anatomy, unlike transsexuals who have had or intend to have irreversible changes done to their bodies through medical interventions (GLAAD, n.d.). We observe the same confusion in one of our conversations with Boom and his live-in partner Mai-mai. When asked whether the term *transgender* could be used to refer to them, the two were a bit puzzled because all the while they thought *transgender* and *transsexual* were synonymous. However, when we clarified the meaning of each term, they explained that the term *transgender* is not usually used in CDO. Instead, most, if not all, would use the term *butch*.

Boom and Mai-mai explain that there are two kinds of butches: the “soft butch,” who behaves and dresses up like a typical woman; and the “hard butch,” who dresses like a male and, as much as possible, takes on masculine work. Oshen, a 23-year-old fast food attendant, prefers to be referred to as “butch” because, according to him, it

tones down the negative connotations associated with the term tomboy that is used to describe females who assume the roles of the opposite sex. Interestingly, however, one of our respondents who works as a stall keeper in a mall in Cogon Market got his nickname “Tom” from the term and seems to be okay with it. Kyle, our youngest informant at age 17, chose the term *lesbian* to refer to himself. Asked to elaborate on his understanding of the term, his only explanation was that it is the English equivalent of tomboy. Day Anne, a 27-year-old traffic aide, only likes to be called “Les” from the word lesbian because hearing the whole word “stings” him no matter how much he kept referring to himself as “*lalaking-lalaki*” (manly). Then there is Nestle who works at his family’s beauty salon and who does not want any label because he believes that calling a person by his name is enough. He confides, “*Masakit kasi, eh [na may mga label pa para sa tao]*” (It is painful that we have to label people).

For our study, we focused on the male-to-female transgender subgroup. When asked the question, “*Paano niyo kina-classify ang sarili niyo?*” (How do you classify yourselves?), our respondents in the male-to-female transgender subgroup gave straightforward responses and experience-based insights. On the other hand, our respondents in the female-to-male transgender subgroup did not give direct responses to the same question. Our assumption is that, despite their gender identity as transmen, they are still in touch with their feminine side.

Unlike Boom, Mai-mai and other respondents, the male-to-female transgender subgroup seems to be aware of the meaning transgender, though they do not often use it to refer to themselves. Thus, we would like to explore and reveal the meanings of the local terms *bayot*, *bakla*, and *bading*, instead of dwelling on the western concept of a transgender.

Initially, we thought that it would be more interesting to explore how the term bayot is used since this is the local term used in CDO to refer to a person who acts like or assumes the roles of the opposite sex. We had the opportunity to observe how the term is used by transgenders themselves and by the people around them.

Our first encounter was with Myka and Ryza, both all-around beauticians in a parlor at Cogon Market. The day we saw them, they were both wearing revealing tank tops, flesh-hugging bottoms, and bright-colored rouge to complement their hair dyed blond. They stood out as they walked among the plainly dressed crowd at the marketplace. As hoots and catcalls were made in their direction, we heard a group of men repeatedly call out to them, “*Bayot! Bayot!*” The two transwomen only dismissed the teasing by rolling their eyes at the men and, with pouting lips, playfully muttered, “Hmp, boys!”

Children in the city also understand the meaning of the word. We observed this on two occasions. The first time, while we were looking for one of our respondents at a certain neighborhood, we chanced upon a young girl on the streets and asked her if she knew where we could find Dodong. Since we did not know his surname, we could only describe him as being effeminate. She tagged along as we continued to walk and would ask those we met, in Bisaya, if they had seen Dodong (whom we would later find out was known in the area as Blue). As she asked around, we heard her use the term bayot to refer to Dodong, with no hint of discrimination in her tone. The second time we heard a child use the term, we were looking for another respondent and happened to meet at a *karinderya* (eatery) a transwoman who tried to help us find the person we were looking for. As we were walking through an alley, she patted the head of a little boy about four years old and carelessly treading near a canal. When the boy looked up and saw the transwoman, he blurted out, “Bayot!” From these two instances, we can perhaps glean that gender constructs are formed and embedded at a young age. Furthermore, for our second encounter, the boy exhibited heteronormativity and acted upon this. This resulted in an unwanted negative social consequence—discrimination—whether he was aware of it or not.

The transwoman whom we had met in the *karinderya* used the term bayot quite casually to refer to other transwomen, as if it is the only rightful term to use. However, a group of transwomen friends Pink, Violet, and Blue do not want to be called bayot. For them, “It’s (the use of the term) awkward” and people sometimes ridicule them by

saying, “*Bayot-salot!*” (*salot* meaning jinx). Instead, Pink and Blue strongly agree with Violet who says, “*Mas maganda pag tinatawag kaming ‘babae’*” (It’s better when we are called ‘woman’).

The three are also okay when the term *bakla* is used to refer to them, as it sounds more *sosyal* (“classy”), admits Violet who worked in Metro Manila for two years. This notion could be in line with how transgenders are received in Metro Manila, as also perpetuated and maintained by the mass media. Corpuz (2010) looks at this matter at greater lengths in his attempt to examine the Philippine mass media’s discourse on homosexuality through a reading of Vergara’s famous graphic novel *Ang Kagilas-gilas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni Zsazsa Zaturannah*. In his essay, he cited Garcia’s comment on the false public acceptance of the *bakla* (Corpuz 2010, 158), and quotes him stating that these characteristics are “allowed only in certain social classes and within certain acceptable contexts” (Garcia 2004, 13). Corpuz expands on this with an example, citing that this can be observed in “today’s famous *bakla* personalities on television such as Vice Ganda, John Lapus, and Chokoleit,” (Corpuz 2010, 158) who, according to him, “capitalize on their identities and bodies to generate comedic laughter, creating the illusion that their popularity is proof of acceptability of gays in general” (Corpuz 2010, 158). In any case, the latter cannot be discredited as it still offers a strong and even positive reason as to why Violet would associate being *sosyal* with the term *bakla*.

The term *bading* exudes awkwardness for some of the transgenders. We even saw a salon owner wince when we used the term. Pink, Blue, and Violet also had the same reaction. From these encounters, we are sure never to refer to transgenders again as *bading*.

It seems that, for both subgroups, the speaker’s tone when saying the terms is important. They can easily tell if someone is ridiculing them, or is just *naglalambing* (showing affection). Among themselves, however, there does not seem to be a strict internal protocol as to which term to use. Just the same, the term does not matter as long as the person using it has no intention to mock or disrespect the person he/she is addressing.

Given this background, we will be using the terms butch and bayot to refer to the female-to-male and male-to-female transgenders, respectively, because the members of the subgroups themselves commonly use the terms and, it seems the terms do not really have much negative connotation attached to them. Furthermore, the use of these terms does not lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding as the use of the term transgender does, perhaps because the latter has not yet entered the local mainstream's lexicon.

### **Boom: A Coming-Out Story**

*"Natamaan kasi kami ng kidlat ng kuya ko"* (Lighting hit me and my older brother), says Boom the first time he told us his story of coming out. Boom, a butch, is one of two siblings; his brother is a bayot. He recounts his father's frustration that both of his children were not "normal." Boom's brother came out to their father one night while in the middle of a heated argument. Frightened by the sight of his brother being beaten up as he cried, *"Oo, bakla ako!"* (Yes, I am gay!). Boom sought refuge inside his makeshift *balikbayan* box playhouse; the realization hit him that he would be receiving the same treatment if and when he decides to come out to his father.

Boom giggles as he tells us about Wendy, his first crush in kindergarten. Despite being repeatedly told by his parents to act as a girl should, he could not help but be attracted to Wendy. Growing up, he endured the pain of being bullied by his classmates because of the way he carried himself. He also had to deal with the occasional show of disapproval from his classmates' parents who told their daughters to keep away from him. Hurt by the treatment of some people, he would deny the taunts of those who called him a tomboy; he also denied how he truly felt. He had a fling with a boy when he was in grade school but, as expected, it did not last long. He laughs as he recalls that the reason for their break-up was that he loved basketball and gave it more time than he did the boy. He remembers how the boy would get mad at him for playing basketball because sports are "not meant for girls." In the end, with Boom choosing basketball over his "fling," the boy realized that he was not attracted to boys.

Though now sure of his gender identity, Boom could not embody it yet. He felt that he did not have enough support from his parents, especially after seeing what had happened to his brother. Little by little, however, he began to express himself. At the start, he would secretly buy men's cologne that he would hide from his mother. Then he started wearing clothes—loose shirts paired with fitted pants or khakis—to hid the natural curves of his body. His ultimate expression, however, was when he was in his second year of college and had his hair cut really short. His mother's initial reaction was: "*Para kang bugoy sa kanto!*" (You look like a hooligan on the street!)

In the years that followed, Boom no longer took pains to hide his gender identity, even to his father. For one, his partner Mai-mai was already living with him at his parents' house. His father thought of their relationship as "abnormal" and a "sin against God." One night his drunken father asked to him to tell Mai-mai to leave the house. But the two stayed their ground, fought for their love, and worked hard to prove that there was nothing wrong with their relationship and with being gay.

Today, Boom continues to live through every day's battles, embracing his gender identity to the fullest, while molding himself into an individual who is worthy of respect and acceptance from society.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Embodying and Performing

Identities are constructed and maintained from one person to another. In this paper, we will study the themes that emerge from the way the butch and the bayot reinvent and sculpt their bodies to personify the script of the gender that they want to embody in order to "legitimize" their claim to the gender.

Judith Butler (1990) argues that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively

constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). In part, this is the script, or more specifically the sociocultural construct that perpetuates the performance of what is considered to be feminine and/or masculine. On the other hand, Henry Rubin (2003) goes beyond performativity and highlights the “relationship between sexed bodies and gendered identities” in constructing, articulating, and representing the self. Alexander (2005, 69) in *Transgender Rhetorics: (Re)Composing Narratives of the Gendered Body* marries these two gender ideas and construes that in fact, it is actually “the literal crafting of the body to meet certain ‘ideal types’ of gender ‘performance.’”

While doing the survey on the chemical use of our respondents, we encountered different themes that emerged from their experiences of using chemical products. This enabled us to highlight the materiality of the embodiment that Alexander (2005) has been talking about. We feel that focusing on the materiality makes the abstract more concrete in a sense that we are better able to grasp the idea of transforming into and becoming the “other gender.”

Freshness and coolness in chemical products are themes that are cited by our respondents crossing over to masculinity. Our assumption initially tells us that, since most of the chemical products marketed for men often contain a cooling agent, it is not surprising to learn that the butch also use these products because they want to imbibe the masculinity that their gender script expects from them. It is also possible that the products have inscriptions that signal the kind of work men must have to fit into the masculine and, to an extent, macho mold. The cooling agent in these products could even communicate to the users of the products that the work men do is difficult and the cooling agent provides some refreshing relief from the work. These themes are reinforced by advertisements on various media and raise our respondents’ expectations of the products’ efficacy. Among the shampoos with cooling agents that our respondents use are Clear for men and Head and Shoulders. Yenzkie, a gasoline station attendant who is always exposed to the sun, says that Head and Shoulders shampoo helps keep his scalp not only cool but also dandruff-free.



Cleanliness is another theme. Our respondents have jobs that involve much manual work; they find that deodorants are helpful in minimizing their perspiration and in preventing body odor. PJ, another gasoline station attendant, applies deodorant before going to work keeps another bottle of deodorant in his bag “just in case” he starts to smell while still at work. He tells us that he uses Avon Feeling Fresh because it prevents body odor, making him feel “fresh *na* fresh” (really fresh). Tom, a warehouse *kargador* (porter), always keeps a bottle of rubbing alcohol in his pocket to rid his hands of dust from carrying loads of goods to and from his employer’s warehouse.

Our respondents also use other products that help them look more masculine. Hair styling agents such as gel and wax allow them to look hip and stylish while keeping them cool from the constant heat that they experience in their workplace. PJ uses Bench clay dough to style his hair and keep it away from his face and allow the air to cool him.

Taking performativity and embodiment as two sides of the same coin, we see from the butches’ choice and use of products that their preparations for work are among the ways they reinvent their body to fit their idea of how men should look and act. The values of practicality and aesthetics are also evident in their product preferences. When they buy chemical products that are labeled “for men,” they proclaim their desire to be identified as men. At the same time, they perceive that the products allow them to reinforce their performance as males as they carry out their work, which are mostly confined to jobs that are traditionally considered as masculine, such as gasoline station attendant, *kargador*, and traffic enforcer. PJ shares that he used to work as a saleslady in a grocery store. He said he quit because the store’s management did not allow the workers to chat with each other while at work. The same policy is applied at his current job so we are inclined to think that it was not the grocery store’s policy that led him to look for another job, but that he prefers his current masculine job to his saleslady post.

West and Zimmerman (1987) developed their theory of “doing gender” to account for the reproduction of gender through

interaction. But a critique to this is whether it is also possible to undo gender since enabling so can further the feminist project of dismantling gender inequality as always typified in a workplace setting (Deutsch, 2007; Connell, 2010). In 2005, however, West and Zimmerman said that gender can never be “undone,” but may instead be “redone.” In our discussion, we highlight the doing of gender in light of how the materiality of the embodiment is parallel with the performance aspect all in the name of gender identities. In the transformation process, is it possible that there also exists an undoing of gender? Perhaps the only phenomenon that can be linked to this based on our interviews with our butch respondents is that they maintain their use of feminine deodorant, often Rexona Pink, because they are already *hiyang* (fit) to the product. However, this may also be more attuned to the redoing of gender or what West and Zimmerman (2009) would put as the stretching and altering of norms associated with a particular gender. Connell (2010) translates the redoing of gender into “adopting a hybrid gender style” (42), something which we observed in two of our butch respondents: Oshen, who uses Avon lipstick to keep his lips red because he thinks this is pleasing to the eyes; and Kyle, who uses nail polish on his toes because he simply enjoys staring at the

Body care products (lotion, deodorant, cologne, whitening soap) for sale in a small *sari-sari* community store.



vibrant colors of his nails and has been accustomed to putting on polish on them. However, we feel that Kyle retains this expression of femininity as his anchor if ever he decides to “undo his gender.” Although he cross-dresses and likes to date women, he believes that he will someday revert to acting female because for him, “*Wala naman kasing nagtatagal na ganyan* [butch]” (No one really stays this way [butch]). Thus, in his case, the undoing of gender may be possible after all. But for both instances, we see how gender norms are overwritten to allow for the self-concept to still manifest itself.

The doing or embodiment of gender among the bayot seems to be a more complex, and often even painful, process, where the concepts of *gwapa* (beautiful) and ‘feminine’ become the bayots’ focus in establishing and maintaining their gender identities. Being *gwapa* involves reaching a certain level of beauty that they mainly associate with actresses like Marian Rivera and Anne Curtis, and femininity or the state of being *babaeng-babae* (truly woman) involves the alteration of their body from being muscular and hard to being soft and lean. They do this not only to please themselves but also their partners.

Most of our bayot respondents work in hair salons and beauty shops, places where the services offered are for the attainment of beauty. They apply makeup to their faces, put polish on their nails, and style their hair with hair color and hair straightening agents. This way, they themselves become the beautiful end products of the salons where they work. This shows that the bayots’ need to be beautiful is not only exemplified but also maintained through their work. However, there are a few exceptions: Blue, who works as a salesperson at a mall; and Daryl, who is training to become a teacher. As much as these two bayots would love to grow their hair long and put on makeup, their workplace could only allow them to beautify themselves at most through less masculine hair styles and a few strokes of eyeliner.

The desire to look beautiful and attractive is shared by all our bayot respondents regardless of their work. They also have the same concept of what is beautiful and attractive: skin that is smooth, white, and well-moisturized; smooth, long, manageable,

and straight hair that frames their “fresh,” fair, smooth, oil-free, and pimple-free face; and lips that are colored either pink or red. They use different chemical products to sculpt their bodies and transform these into their ideal beautiful selves to be *gwapa*.

Kim, a nineteen-year-old all-around beautician, uses Silka papaya soap to have fairer skin; while Alexa, her twenty-year-old coworker, uses Silka papaya lotion to keep her skin smooth and moisturized. Violet, a nurse assistant in a public health center, takes Myra 400 E vitamins because she believes that vitamin E makes the skin fair and beautiful. Blue uses Top Gel soap on her face to prevent oiliness, while Ryza uses astringent to keep her face smooth and pimple-free. To maintain her smooth and fair skin, Daryl, a university student majoring in education, keeps her face moisturized by using Pond’s toner and Myra E moisturizer. At night, Daryl also applies L’Oreal serum on her face to dry up her pimples. Added to her regimen is her application of Pond’s Age Miracle cream to prevent skin aging (even though she is only twenty-four years old).

Myka, sporting long bleached hair, says that she uses Pantene Pro-V to strengthen her hair and make it “*bagsak na bagsak*” (stick-straight). After washing her hair of shampoo, Blue uses Creamsilk conditioner to make it smooth and shiny. In addition to using shampoo and conditioner, Violet uses Varvon hair keratin treatment every day to make her hair shiny and easy to manage.

Alexa uses Ever Bilena red matte lipstick to look sexy and more attractive, while her friend Kim uses Ever Bilena pink lipstick for a “complete package.” Ryza thinks her Avon lipstick makes her *gwapa*.

Chemicals help the bayots attain their idea of a beautiful self, yet for them being beautiful is not enough: they have to be both beautiful *and* feminine. Eight of the nine bayots that we surveyed admitted that they use oral contraceptive pills to help transform their physique toward becoming *babaeng-babae*. The estrogen content of these pills is responsible for the development of the sexual and reproductive characteristics of the female body. Eight of the nine bayots that we interviewed expressed that their initial motive for taking pills is for them to grow breasts.



Hormone therapy for male to female. <https://translyf.wordpress.com/2015/01/page/3/> (retrieved November 2017).

Oral contraceptive pills are intended to prevent fertilization in females. Ideally, a doctor or similar medical practitioner should prescribe these pills. Diaz-Bugayong, an obstetrician-gynecologist, says that, after she has prescribed contraceptive pills to a patient, she monitors their short-term effects on the patient. This is so she can determine whether or not to let the patient continue using the pills or prescribe another kind. Our bayot respondents who take the pills however do not observe the same caution. Worse, even though some of them are aware of the risks from self-medication, they would take up to six pills a day to “speed up” the process that would give them their desired results. Alexa, influenced by her friends, drinks Trust pills and claims that this makes her muscles leaner, her arms softer, her breasts bigger, and her skin lighter. Kim, also influenced by her friends to use Trust pills, claims that the pills are “*nakakababae*” (feminizing) She has also experienced the same effects that Kim has had. Anthon takes Althea pills and claims that they help to make her slimmer while making her skin lighter and smoother.

The bayots believe that the pills help them attain their ideal body and make them more feminine and womanlike. This, in turn, raises

their self-esteem based on their belief that only by becoming womanlike can they please their lovers. Zaira started taking Micropills to “grow” breasts for her partner, “*para may mahawakan ‘yung boyfriend ko*” (So my boyfriend can have [breasts] to fondle). Violet even claims that their men notice when they fail to take their pills. Whenever she is with her bayot friends, she observes that men like to touch their skin because it feels extraordinarily soft and smooth.

The pills, however, cause some short-term side effects that include dizziness, excessive drying of the skin, and weight gain. Studies show that long-term effects may include breast cancer (see Brinton et al. [1995]; Marchbanks et al. [2002]); myocardial infarction (Tanis et al. [2001]); impairment of other hormonal productions (Parr et al. [1987]); and blockage in the liver, together with increase of water content in the organs (Estler [1984]). Although these studies were tested initially for and on women, Diaz-Bugayong confirms that it is likely that males are also susceptible to the same risks. Despite knowing about the side effects of pills, bayots who aspire to become feminine continue to take them.

The bayots believe that having bigger *patotoy* (breasts) is enough but for different reasons. Daryl says that a sex change is a “super-duper sin,” and that the need to have a vagina is only important to bayots who make a living as prostitutes. She also thinks sex may no longer be as pleasurable once the body has been through major medical intervention. Myka wants to be a “*tunay na babae*” (real woman) but does not want her genitals changed because she sees this as unnatural and could disrupt the natural rhythms of her body’s excretory system. Blue has been discouraged by her family against pursuing such a surgery for fear that people will only find more reasons to discriminate against her. And Violet thinks that if she cannot respect herself enough to be content with what she has been given, then she cannot expect others to respect her too. Gender rhetoric of composing and understanding oneself according to socially inflected labels stigmatizes and reifies (Alexander 2005) the way the individual views his/her gendered-body with personal identities. Butches also accept their bodies as such, and the possibility of a sex change never occurred to them. Tom even



concluded the interview by stressing, “*Ah, hindi. Wala talaga. Wala talaga akong plano diyan*” (Ah, no. None at all. No plan at all for that).

In regard to hygiene, only two out of the ten respondents use feminine wash. Oshen, who seems to be meticulous about genital hygiene, saying, “*Kumportable ang feeling, parang feel na feel mo*” (I feel comfortable [about being clean]). Nineteen-year-old Sam-sam, with his happy-go-lucky personality, started using feminine wash because of his girlfriend’s suggestion. Asked to elaborate on this, Sam-sam and his girlfriend just laughed.

The bayots use feminine wash or toothpaste to clean their genitalia. Although all the bayot respondents dream of becoming babaeng-babae, only Anthon feels the need to use feminine wash to clean her genitals. Out of curiosity at seeing her mother’s bottle of pH Care feminine wash, she started using the product when she was only fourteen years old and continues to do so because she feels it keeps her genitalia “free from any foul smell.” Ryza and Zaira keep their genitals clean using toothpaste. Ryza uses Colgate toothpaste especially after sex with her partner, who also follows the same regimen. She explains, “*Yung toothpaste para kasi matanggal yung dumi, tapos masarap sa pakiramdam mo, maanghang kasi siya.*” (Toothpaste removes the dirt and it feels good to use it...It has this minty effect). Zaira uses toothpaste for cleaning mainly for the “tingling sensation” that she feels when applying it on her genitals.

The “special” use of chemicals on the genitals could be broken down into three dynamics: (1) relating to personal care and hygiene; (2) relating to self-pleasure; and (3) relating to intimacy with partners.

## **Bodies and Spaces**

Daryl provides us with insights on how her being in an urban setting gives her more access to chemicals and services for sculpting her body into her gendered-ideal self. With a laugh, she suggests that it might be more fun and interesting to carry out the Chemical Youth survey in her hometown of Camiguin, because of the “funny ways” the folks there beautify themselves, ranging from the use of Tsin



Tsan Tsu, a Chinese product, to folk medicine and home remedies. She finds this amusing because, according to her, “*May Silka naman, bakit kailangan pa magdikdik ng dahon ng papaya?*” (With Silka available, why would you still have to grind papaya leaves?). However, products such as Silka, Tsin Tsan Tsu, etc., are available to those with the money to buy them, she included, but not to the poor. Those with less purchasing power like Ching-Ching and Yenzkie, both butch, these products may be hard on their budget. Other transgenders may have the money to buy products but may still find it hard to buy those that they want, e.g. Bench cologne for men, because these are not yet available in their hometowns.

Cities could be more accommodating to transgenders by creating queer spaces (Crawford 2008). Citing Deleuze and Guattari, Crawford (2008) comes to the conclusion that transpeople must continue to navigate through this “imperceptible” sphere and must not see this as an incapacity to migrate to urban centers on their behalf, but rather as a means of locating their own “rural styles of transgender and the very different affects and lives” (141). This is starting taking place in Cagayan de Oro as exemplified by the experience of the pro-LGBT bar “Tiboom” that Boom manages. Boom proudly states that the opening of the bar is a first in CDO. The bar serves as a venue where butches, lesbians, and straight women mingle and catch up with each other on their lives and where they interact, exchange ideas, and have fun. The bar also provides them with a haven from discrimination due to its exclusivity. They eat, drink, laugh, and party in the bar, without fear of being judged and discriminated. The bar is a reassuring symbol that, despite public scrutiny transgender women have a place in which they belong, as the quotes of empowerment painted on the bar’s walls remind them.

Tiboom is a radical move because Cagayan de Oro is still largely rural, with most of its land (33.27%) still used for agriculture (Cagayan de Oro City Planning and Development Office 2012). It is still a *probinsiya* (province) in the sense that most of the people still adhere to traditional values and are not as liberal as people in the highly urbanized areas of Manila. It is also a melting pot of people from the rural areas. Tiboom is a manifestations of the development of imperceptibility among rural transgenders. It symbolizes that they



Tiboom's Boozepub, the only one of its kind in the city.

can no longer be kept hidden in the dark for long. Still, one needs to be reminded that “although the country has gained the reputation of being tolerant of gays..., some lesbian couples still consider themselves stigmatized in the Philippines” (Lam 2010, n.p.).

## CONCLUSION

The butch and the bayot embrace the traditional gender roles and stereotypes of the gender they want to embody and at the same time deconstruct these social constructs that exist. A man is expected to be simple, not vain, active, and cool. The embodiment of this stereotype allows butches to reinvent themselves and become *lalaking-lalaki*. This manifests in the way butches' minimal use of chemical products or in their use of products labeled for men, and in the way they “repackage” their bodies and express themselves so they stand out from other people with the same gender identity. They use what is already available, their bodies, and present these differently in a way not expected from them but without adding much to their bodies.

A woman, on the other hand, must always be beautiful and sexy. The bayots who want to become gwapa and babaeng-babae sculpt their bodies and achieve their ideal beautiful selves by using several chemical products, even if this means they have to take some risks with their health. The bayot's act of sculpting herself goes beyond merely transforming and repackaging what is already present in her body; rather, it involves her goal of achieving a certain image, "*magmukhang artista*" (look like an actress) through the addition of components not present in her body, particularly larger breasts. The bayots exert more effort than the butches to change their bodies with the aid of chemical products. This takes us back to the gender idea that being and becoming a woman is not easy.

Though the butches and bayot share many similarities, the individual has his/her own identity, one that can be an agency for constructing, articulating, and representing gender. Thus, they share the same desires and aspirations, the individual is distinct in his/her embodiment of the gendered individual that he/she would like to be.

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## ***PUKE ANG PUHUNAN***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cagayan de Oro has a thriving sex trade. An estimated 500 registered sex workers find employment in the city's bars, pubs, and clubs. They report to the City's Health Clinic for regular checkups and related services. Unregistered workers include those who do "extra service" (Managbanag 2013). Locals and tourists pick up sex workers at certain locations in the city, including spas, hotels, and lodging houses. A couple of streets have also gained a reputation as places where workers congregate. On the Internet, one can also access forums that list places in CDO where one could easily solicit

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Note: The names of our informants and those of establishments cited in the paper have been changed. *Puke ang Puhunan* is Tagalog and translates to "vagina is capital."

sex for a fee. The city's sex trade continues to thrive despite laws declaring all forms of prostitution, pimping, and brothel ownership illegal.

The police intensified the campaign against human trafficking in Cagayan de Oro and Davao del Sur in 2011. Two Swedes and their Filipino accomplices running a cybersex den in Cagayan de Oro were arrested in a raid. The police rescued seventeen minor sex workers during the raid in the city.

Sex workers may be streetwalkers, *masahistas* (masseuse), Guest Relations Officers (GRO), *casa*-based or those who work in an establishment, or someone who entertains seamen as their ships dock at the city port. Streetwalkers cruise for customers along roads, flagging down motorists and presenting themselves to those who express interest in their services. They usually work with pimps. Our study focuses only on streetwalkers.

We befriended Kuya Boy, a security guard who was also a male sex worker and pimp. Kuya Boy became our guide throughout the data-gathering phase of the research. He helped us find young women willing to participate in the research as well as set the schedules

Waiting through the night.





with the interviews with them. We interviewed sex workers who frequented Venus and Cattleya Streets only as suggested by Kuya Boy.

We interviewed sex workers aged eighteen to twenty-five years old. We use *sex worker* to refer to a biological female who exchanges sex for money. It is synonymous with streetwalker (Abaya 1997).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Sex Trade "Route"

Pimps (referred to as *bugaw* or *mamasang*) facilitate the contacts between streetwalkers and customers. They help customers find the streetwalkers that they prefer, which depend on age, appearance, weight, and other traits. They negotiate the price, with prices ranging from PhP500 to PhP1,800 per customer, and collect the payment as soon as the agreement is reached. Thereafter the customers can take the streetwalkers to their vehicles, home or motels that they frequent.

Pimps receive ten to twenty-five percent of the price, while the streetwalkers get to keep 75 to 90 percent. Streetwalkers work with two or more pimps. They can themselves act as pimps by suggesting streetwalkers that the customers prefer and earn from the transactions pimps do. Occasionally, streetwalkers themselves find customers. They prefer this in order to keep the money all for themselves and to avoid conflicts with the pimps over price, or due to misunderstandings regarding payment shares.

Streetwalkers do not compete with each other for customers. Tensions, however, arise when "veteran" streetwalkers in an area bully newcomers. However, these conflicts are resolved eventually, and the sex workers end up sharing the area. They developed into a community where everyone knows everyone over time.

## Their Voices: Narratives of Sex Workers

*Oo, marumi man sa mata ng marami, pero this is an easy way na proteksyunan yung gutom...Sa krisis ng panahon ngayon, hindi kailangan makapili ng trabaho, di ba? So mahirap siya. 'Di madali yung ganitong trabaho pero ma-fo-force ka dahil sa krisis ng buhay. Di ka makakapili kasi di ka naman humahawak ng ballpen.*

(Yes, my work may be degrading to most, but this is an easy way to protect one's self from hunger...With the crisis these days, you cannot afford to choose jobs, right? So, it's hard. This kind of work is not easy but you are forced to take it to survive. You can't choose jobs because you can't even hold a ballpen.)

- Sophia, 21

Sophia is 21 years old but looks older. She grew up in General Santos City but left when she was sixteen on the encouragement of her peers. She found herself in Cagayan de Oro and has lived in the city ever since. She has not gone back to her hometown since. Before becoming a sex worker, she took on several jobs: dishwasher, laundry washer, and assistant cook. She went back to school to take up cosmetology. She adds,

*Actually sa dami ng mga work na pinasukan ko, eto lang yung work na 'di ko talaga, I mean, ine-expect sa sarili ko. Then hindi ko talaga siya gusto. Pero na-fo-force ako dahil kelangan mong tumayo sa sarili mong paa, 'di ba? Kasi kapag ganito, dayo ka, palagay natin magtrabaho ka ng formal work like mga saleslady. I mean di ako makukumbinsi ng ganyang sweldo. Kasi like palagay natin nasa 3,000 lang yung monthly mo, (at gagastos ka para sa) bahay, pagkain, tapos pamasaha, ano na lang yung matitira sa 'yo, 'di ba?*

(Of all the jobs I've tried, this is the only one I didn't expect myself to try. I really don't like it. But I feel like I'm forced to, because you have to stand on your own, right? Because

if you're in this situation, you're not a native of the place, and say, you try formal work like that of a saleslady. I mean I wouldn't be satisfied with their salary. Let's say, you earn 3,000 a month (and you have to pay for) housing, food, and transportation, what would be left for you?)

Most sex workers did not finish college. They are, however, literate, having finished elementary (Abaya 1997) or dropped out while in high school.

Streetwalkers are a diverse group. According to Sophia, "*May kakilala talaga ako na mayaman, maganda, maputi, at may pinag-aralan pero bakit dito ang bagsak?*" (I know someone who is rich, beautiful, fair-skinned, and educated, but why did she end up here?). She also told us of a part-time streetwalker who is in college. Sex trade is a faster way to earn, without the stress of school or office work.

*Minsan kinakabahan, minsan hindi.*

(I sometimes get nervous, other times I don't.)

- Christine, 18

Kuya Boy introduced us to Christine, who we first hesitated to interview because she looked so much younger than her age. Before becoming a streetwalker she tried working as a nanny and as a cook's assistant. She has worked since she was 15. Christine lives in a boarding house with her boyfriend of four months who is a male sex worker. She told us she recently had a miscarriage.

Christine ran away from home because she could not stand her stepfather. She joined the trade upon hearing about it from her friends. She has been in the job for only three weeks. She reasons that she was forced to do so "*sa hirap ng buhay, walang makain, ganun*" (due to life's difficulties, with nothing to eat).

*"Ngayon, di na ako nakapagpatuloy sa pag-aaral. Pinag-aaral ko kasi ang apat na pamangkin... dahil sa hirap ng buhay tsaka tinamaan kasi kami ng bagyong Sendong."*

(Now, I can't continue my schooling because I support the schooling of my four nephews and nieces... because life is difficult and we were also hit by typhoon Sendong.)

- Jyra, 20

Jyra is in the trade to support the education of her nieces and nephews, the children of an unemployed aunt with whom she lives. She started walking the streets after Typhoon Sendong hit her hometown in 2011. Sendong ruined everything that her family owned. With her youthful features and tomboyish attire, it is hard to imagine what she does for a living. Not having the necessary education and skills to do other jobs, she said she has no choice other than the sex trade if she is to help sustain her family.

*"Pero sa isip ko parang gusto kong tumigil sa trabahong ito. Naghihintay na lang ako na makahanap ako ng lalaking may trabaho."*

(But in my mind, I want this job to end. I'm just waiting to find a man who has a job. )

- Tata, 18

Tata's initiation into the sex trade was through a friend's deception. In need of money, she approached a friend for help. Her friend sold her to a customer, without her knowledge. She carried on because she desperately needed the money. She went to Manila and worked as a "domestic" for a month after this. However, because her boss was stingy and did not give her a fair wage, she went back to Cagayan de Oro and became a streetwalker.

*"Na ano din, naiilang din. Kaya nga ako nagtatago eh baka may makakilala. Tsaka minsan lang ako dito."*

(I am also uncomfortable. That's why I hide, because someone might recognize me. And I'm seldom here.)

- Nenen, 19

Nenen is a part-time streetwalker in that she only walks the streets a few days in a month. Her parents, boyfriend, friends, and six-year-old son do not know that she is a streetwalker. She positions her chair so that her back is against the passing traffic and holds a fan to cover her face. What they know is that she has a day job as a house help. This is also the situation of many in the sex trade (Abaya 1997).

### ***Their Reasons***

Two reasons push women to enter the sex trade. Poverty is one (Anonuevo, cited in Abaya 1997); the other is the loss of a woman's "sexual purity" (Abaya 1997). Tata, a rape victim, felt that she had "given away" or been "robbed" of her virginity, so she resorted to let men have sex with her for a fee. Many victims of rape do not report the crimes committed against them to the authorities usually from fear or shame. According to Tracy et al. (2012), victims suffer from guilt, disassociation, and self-blame. These likely contributed to Tata's rationalizing her reasons for joining the sex trade. The need to help the family, the desire to improve one's lot in life, the influence of peers, and other personal choices, motivated others to join the trade (Conaco, cited in Abaya 1997).

### ***The Requisites for Sex Work***

*"Di mo naman kelangan mag-makeup pa at pa-show. Kasi dito dapat simple lang, dito kasi kapag over-make-up ka, ni-lo-look down ka kaagad. Yun talaga yung kadalasang nakikita ng tao, overdressed, overmake-up. Then overacting? Ayokong ma-judge ako kaya eto, hanggang simple lang ako. Kasi kapag na-overacting yung mga kilos mo, pagbabantayan ka ng mga tao dito."*

(You don't need to put on make-up or (fix yourself for) a show. Here, you have to be simple because if you're overly made-up here, people will immediately look down on you. That's really what people usually see: overdressed, over made-up. Then overacting? I don't want to be judged that's

why I keep things simple. Because if you're overacting, the people here will really keep an eye on you.)

- Sophia, 21

The concept of *puta* (whore, slut) is associated with being *magaslaw* (one who calls attention to herself by being loud). With this idea in mind, streetwalkers prefer to be simple so that people would not associate them with sex work. This means not putting on heavy makeup, which is also associated with being *puta*. Supporting her young child, Sophia would rather save her money than buy makeup. Instead, she puts on powder and lipstick borrowed from friends. She argues that having a personality and healthy genitals are more important than makeup in the sex trade.

Most agree that it is best not to look the part for their job. Christine says, "*Hindi ako nagme-makeup. OA na din kapag may makeup ka pa sa gabi, hindi naman makikita ng tao*" (I don't use makeup. It's overacting to put on makeup especially at night when no one will see it). Makeup makes her itch. Lydill adds saying, "*Kahit 'di бага kami naka-makeup, (basta) 'yung ugali mo mabait*" (It does not matter if you're not made up, as long as you're nice). She puts on her best nail polish, though, saying, "*Kapag merong importanteng alis tulad ng kapag meron sa barko, mga customers (na) foreigner, mga Chinese*" (When there are important events, such as when there are ships arriving, or we have customers who are foreigners, Chinese).

Keya, twenty-four years old, says, "*Nag-gaganito* (referring to makeup) *lang ako kapag nandito na ako sa syudad*" (I only wear makeup when I'm in the city). She minds what her neighbors in her hometown would think about her. Her family does not know that for the past eight months she has been working as a "highway engineer," as she calls her profession. "*Kapag naka-ganun ka* (referring to makeup), *ikaw lang ang tinitingnan. Di sila sanay*" (If you put on makeup, everyone will stare at you. They are not used to it). Her brother calls her a *demonyo* (demon) in jest when she applies an eyeliner. She does not borrow things from others nor let them use her things out of fear of contracting illness. She says, "*Kapag ganito ang trabaho mo, kanya-kanya. Ano 'yun pang-iwas*

*hawa. Dapat ano, care sa katawan mo*" (In this line of work, you have to use your own stuff to avoid contracting disease. You should care for your body).

Streetwalkers pay less attention to how they look while on the job. They use Safeguard, advertised as a medicated soap, as *pantanggal* germs (germ remover). However, they prefer Silka Papaya products for fairer skin. Tata says,

*"Bagay kasi sa katawan ko. Dati maitim ako, tapos na-ano (pumuti)... Oo. May iba kasing customer namimili, gusto nila maputi."*

(It suits my body. I just to have darker skin, now it's fairer... Some customers are choosy. They want someone who is fair-skinned.)

## The Vagina As Capital

*"Ay, actually it's (the vagina) that is very important (part of) your body kasi yan lang ang kapital mo sa ganitong trabaho. Kapag di mo dinepensahan tsaka hinayaan mong masira, talo ka."*

(Actually it's the vagina that is very the important part of your body because it is your capital in this job. If you do not care for it and allow it to get sick, you lose.)

- Sophia, 21

## Care for the Capital

Customers usually "examine" the vagina of a streetwalker the first time they meet to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD). A vagina that looks good and smells clean is healthy, while one with kulugo (warts) is not. Customers, though, differ in what they want. *"Gusto ng customer yung ano, basta yung sa iba, gusto maputi. Yung iba gusto nila yung walang buhok"* ([Some] customers prefer vaginas that are fair-skinned. Some go for vaginas that are shaved), says Jyra. She does not shave the area surrounding her



vagina. Some get on with their business anyway, she says, while others do not because, "*hindi tumitigas yung sa kanila*" (they cannot have an erection).

Keya regards her work as a "business." She has had two miscarriages, and on both times she underwent *raspa* (dilation and curettage). She told us her vagina now looks "*pangit*" (ugly), but that it used to be pinkish before the pregnancies. She would rather be working another job.

The best *kasi ang vagina e, kasi marami (siyang gamit), kung gusto mo magka-anak or gusto mo mag-sex.*

(The vagina is the best because it has a lot of uses, if you want a child or if you want to have sex.)

—Nenen, 19

What is a beautiful vagina? According Christine, it is "*Maputi at medyo matambok (ang magandang vagina). Pangit ang payat na vagina. Oo, importante ang makinis at magandang vagina para maganda rin tingnan, gaya ng katawan mo, makinis*" (A beautiful vagina is fair-skinned and quite fleshy. A skinny vagina is ugly. Yes, it is important to have a smooth and beautiful vagina that is nice to look at and, like the rest of the body, is flawless). She adds, "*Mas importante sa akin ang amoy kaysa itsura kasi kahit pangit ako, at least mabango yung akin, walang mabaho*" (To me, the vagina's smell is more important than how it looks because at least, even though I may be ugly, my vagina smells nice, and does not have a foul smell).

Men are particular with the smell of the vagina. The customer would notice it, if not the streetwalker's boyfriend would. Nenen, says, "*Yung amoy, example, 'yung customer sasabihin, 'Ano ba, ang baho mo naman.' Kung hindi (ang customer ang magsasabi), 'yung boyfriend mo naman (ang magsasabi)*" (The smell, for example, your customer would tell you, 'You smell awful.' If it is not your customer, your boyfriend would). Tata agrees to this, saying, "*Hindi ako nagsha-shave kasi makati. Mas importante ang amoy kasi pag*

*ginamit ka ng customer tapos pag mabaho ang sa iyo, magrereklamo, magagalit yung customer” (I do not shave because it is itchy. It is more important to smell nice because when the customer uses you and your vagina smells awful, he will complain, he will get angry).*

How the vagina smells is more important than how it looks. Tata explains she also fears that her friends will talk about it behind her back (*“pagtsismisan ka”*). They are concerned about what their customers and co-workers think about their vaginas. A repulsive vagina is *malansa* (smells like fish). Bem stresses the importance of a fresh-smelling vagina, saying,

*Kasi sa iba, basta mabait ka, kahit ano (itsura) ng katawan o mukha mo, basta mabait ka, walang problema sa kanila. Importante sa kanila ang hindi mabaho.*

(To others, as long as you are nice, they do not mind how your body or face looks. What is important to them is that you do not smell bad.)

Streetwalkers keep their vaginas clean always. Nenen’s routine involves washing her vagina three times a day. She says,

Her back against the passing traffic. Photo by Meg Forteza.



*"Hinuhugasan, three times, eh, sa umaga, hapon, at gabi, para walang amoy"* (I wash my vagina three times a day, morning, afternoon, and evening, to keep it from smelling awful). Sophia washes her vagina more thoroughly than any part of her body, and she is not particular with any brand of feminine wash. She says, *"Hinuhugasan nang mas maayos"* (I wash my vagina thoroughly). Occasionally she also shaves her genital area.

Streetwalkers visit the City Health Office every Monday for checkup and cleaning. The government encourages them to go for regular checkup, which is free, and provides them with free condoms. Bem emphasizes the importance of checkups, saying,

*Every week kami pumupunta sa City Health. Magpapalinis. Kasi sa ganitong trabaho, di mo mamalayan na kunwari siya may sakit o ano. Kahit gwapo siya o malinis yung katawan niya, di mo malalaman kung may sakit na pala siya.*

(We go to City Health weekly for cleaning. Because with in this job, you will never know if your customer has an STD or something else. Even if he is handsome or looks clean, you cannot be sure he is clear of any disease.)

A vaginal wash like pH Care Feminine Wash is popular among sex workers. Jyra uses pH Care after every sexual intercourse with a customer, and every time she showers. Tata makes it a point to wash with the same product every time she urinates. She and Christine attest that, given their limited finances, they prioritize buying a vaginal wash over body and facial soap. She reasons, *"Mas uunahin ko yung vagina kasi ung mukha malilinis mo naman yan kahit pahiran lang"* (I give priority to my vagina because the face can be cleaned even by just wiping). She uses it parsimoniously (*"tinitipid ko"*). She uses it whenever her vagina smells foul even after she has washed it with Safeguard. She changes her underwear every time it is stained with vaginal discharges. Lydill uses the less popular sulfur soap as suggested to her by her friends, *"Para hindi ano, para hindi maano, matalaban, para yung germs mawala"* (For defense against germs), she says. Keya uses toothpaste to keep it



pH Care advert posted on pH Care Philippines Facebook account.  
<https://web.facebook.com/phcarephilippines/> (Retrieved January 2018).

fresh (“*para presko*”) and to avoid itchiness. Streetwalkers invest on the vagina because, as Christine says,

*“Yung vagina pinagkakakitaan rin, kahit minsan nakakahiya pag narinig sa lugar ninyo... basta sa pagsisipag lang may pagkakakitaan ka”*

(The vagina can help you make money, even though it is embarrassing if people hear about it [your type of work]... As long as you are industrious, you will find ways to earn with your vagina.).

Streetwalkers believe that the vagina could be ruined (*masisira*). The inability to reach orgasm, vaginal bleeding, the presence of pus, and infertility are symptoms of a *sirang* (broken) *puke* (vagina). To keep the vagina in its proper condition, streetwalkers have it cleaned (*pinalinis*) at the City Health clinic. Christine told us she had her vagina cleaned at the clinic out of fear of contracting disease. Tata accepts only Filipino customers in the belief that foreigners are infected with STDs.

## Protection

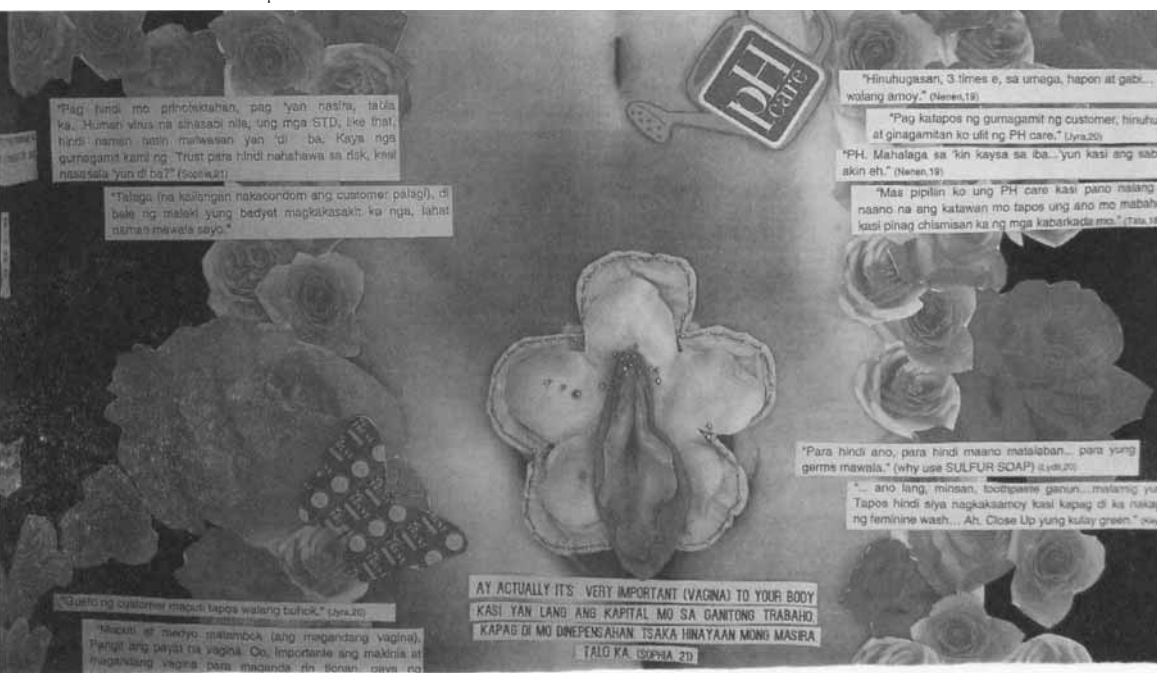
Streetwalkers refuse sex to customers without condoms even if this would mean a loss of income. Since customers may not have condoms, they see to it that they have a supply of condoms from the City Health clinic or they buy them from drug stores. Sophia says,

*Talaga kailangan naka-condom ang customer palagi! Di bale ng malaki yung badyet... Pag magkakasakit ka naman, lahat naman mawala sa yo!*

(The customer really needs to use a condom always! Never mind if he has a bigger budget... (It will cost more if) you get sick and lose everything!)

Sophia emphasizes the importance of using condoms for “defense” against pregnancy. She believes that the “element of the man” is “*nasasala*” (filtered) and prevents pregnancy “*pag ginagamit ka*” (when you are used). Streetwalkers do not use condoms with their live-in partners. Keya says, “*Ay hindi... Magagalit yun pag-ano. (Kasi) parang customer mo na rin siya!*” (No... He will get mad if I do that. It is as if I treat him like a customer!). Abaya (1997) shows that some streetwalkers use condoms with their lovers or husbands.

Authors’ panel exhibit, Palma Hall, UP, Diliman. October 2014.



However, Heise and Elias (1995) show that while they encourage their clients to use condoms, streetwalkers were unwilling to use condoms with their partners. It appears that men and women alike are more willing to use condoms in casual relationships than with stable partners to signify intimacy. Pullum et. al. (1999) show that in the sub Saharan region condoms are considered aggressive, accusatory, and associated with untrustworthiness.

Tata lives with her boyfriend, she engages in unprotected sex with him. She is anxious about getting pregnant because she not prepared to have a family. On the suggestion of her *barkada* (peers), she takes antibiotics after having sex with her boyfriend to prevent pregnancy. She does this "*para mailabas ang dumi ng lalaki*" (to get rid of the 'dirty element' from the man). According to Abaya (1997), sex workers attribute STDs to a combination of dirt (*sari-saring dumi*). Bem takes medicine and contraceptive pills to prevent pregnancy. She explains, "*dahil sa trabaho, mahirap magkaanak ng marami, mahirap ang buhay.*" (Because of my job, it's difficult to have a lot of children. Life is difficult). Sophia takes contraceptive pills regularly to prevent pregnancy.

## CONCLUSION

Sex workers are skilled workers (Macintosh 1994). Prostitution is "*Trabaho lang ito*" (This is just work). Distancing themselves from their work, sex workers see what do they with their bodies as just means to earn a living. Radical feminists find this problematic in that prostitution feeds into patriarchy. However, sex work feminists insist that prostitution empower women, enabling them to express themselves in the profession and provide for themselves (Davidson 2002). The body and its use in prostitution constitute a streetworker's capital ( Locke 1993; Braverman 1999).

While being nice and looking great are important, the vagina remains the capital of streetwalkers. Ambivalent towards looking good, they apply as little makeup as possible so as not to be identified as puta.



Sex with customers is a reproductive act (Dykes 2009) and, therefore, exposes streetwalkers to unwanted pregnancies. Regular checkup, cleaning, condom use, and other prophylactic practices, prevent pregnancy. While they do not risk pregnancy and STDs from sex with customers by using condom, streetwalkers risk pregnancy with their long-term partners because by not using condoms they regard the act as being more meaningful and intimate.

Some streetwalkers consider the vagina as something detached from the body, while others consider it a part of the body from which pleasure is derived. They try to avoid unwanted pregnancy by using condoms until they are ready to have children. Moreover, streetwalkers try to avoid unwanted pregnancies by taking antibiotics, using vaginal wash, going on regular medical checkups, and other contraceptive substances and practices, to keep themselves at work always.

Streetwalkers invest on the vagina as capital by keeping it always fresh, clean, healthy, and looking good. How it smells, which is indicative of its health, is more important than how the vagina looks. Furthermore, they try to keep the vagina well maintained to keep it from getting 'ruined,' which could put them out of work.

Keeping the vagina in good condition attracts customers. It is the subject of surveillance not only by the streetwalkers themselves, but also by the customers and their long-term partners. The notions of a beautiful vagina reinforces the exploitation of the body, hence a site of oppression (Braun and Kitzinger, 2001).

The vagina is a site of the ironies of power (Witig 1992). It has the power to dictate sexuality and gender. It has the power to create opportunities for income. But it may also be a site for weakness, as the vagina may be used as a medium to objectify, commodify, use, control, abuse, and oppress women in this penis-driven society. The use of chemicals to maintain the vagina in good condition for business only commodifies the vagina further.



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# THE YOUNG MALE LABORERS OF IMPERATA MARKET

## INTRODUCTION

The Imperata Market, the largest market in Cagayan de Oro (CDO), occupies four blocks. It is one of the busiest places in the city. It is convenient to market goers because most public utility transports pass through it. The market is housed in a two-story building. On the first floor, one will find an array of items—from meat and fish, rice, and sugar to electronic gadgets and second-hand clothes. On the second floor are stalls that sell fruits and vegetables, and different specialty shops ranging from beauty parlors to blacksmiths. The

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*Acknowledgements:* We would like to extend our outmost thanks to our key informants: James P., Alexander M., Orlyns T., MG, Banjo, Jason, and Noel who willingly shared with us their time and imparted chapters of their lives to us for this study. The names of places and the informants have been changed to ensure confidentiality and the safety of the informants.

group that we studied, composed of young porters and manual laborers called “*strikers*,” operate on the second floor. In the market, the term *striker* is interchangeably used and understood to mean laborer. Most of our respondents are second-generation laborers; their families have been in the city from the time of their grandparents.

The study is a preliminary excursion into the lives of the strikers. The strikers are organized into gangs for mutual help and defense. There are a number of these gangs at Imperata Market such as the two allied gangs, the Mga Batang Mercado (MBM) and Alpha Zeta Upsilon (AZU). Besides participant observation, we interviewed some members of the MBM and AZU for the paper, as well as conducted focused group discussions with them. We admit to a number of shortcomings that kept us from giving the study more depth for two reasons. First, we were not able to get firsthand corroborative information on the strikers from the Association of Laborers (AOL) and other groups in the area. Second, we were not able to know the families of the strikers, so we do not have information about their family histories.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Strikers

A laborer is someone who does a task that is asked of him for a fee. Laborers are indispensable because of the different tasks that have to be done in the market. Laborers who grew up in the market regard it their home turf. From the age of seven or eight, they were already part of the market’s work force usually asked to do various chores. They could not think of going to school because putting food on the table was their priority.

People at the Imperata Market choose laborers at random to do one task or another; buying or fetch things such as cigarettes, drinks, and snacks for shopkeepers; sweeping the floors and stairs of the market area; carrying baskets and other load for market goers; and

the push carts of fruits, fish and other goods for the market vendors. These tasks are done for a pittance, usually around PhP5.00 for a task.

Male and female children engage in running errands up to their teens. The number of young female laborers dwindles as they grow older. They move on to do other jobs, such as selling fruits and vegetables, working at the beauty parlors at the marketplace, etc. Others are lured into prostitution. One striker says,

*Yung mga ibang bata na babae edad na seven to thirteen years old, nagbebenta ng cellophane na dalawang piso ang isa pero ang tunay na presyo nito ay isang piso. Minsan pag nakikita nila na may babaeng maraming buhat na paninda, inaalok nila na sila na ang magbuhat para kumita. Kapag nabigyan ng 5 pesos, okay na sa kanila.*

(The kids and females, aged seven to thirteen years old, sell cellophane for two pesos each. They earn one peso for each. And when they see a woman carrying a lot of load they offer to help her carry for a bit of money. When they're given five pesos that's already alright for them.)

As the boys get older the work that is asked of them gets heavier. A striker in his teens will begin carrying sacks of rice and baskets of goods weighing up to over a hundred kilograms. "Fourteen years old, *binubuhat mga 110 kilos. Ang iba talaga malakas. Ang iba hanggang 60 [hanggang] 70 kilos lang*" (A fourteen year old carries around 110 kilos. There are those who are really strong. Some can only carry around 60 to 70 kilos), says one striker.

### Family Lives

The strikers do what they can to help provide for their families. Whatever little money they earn goes to the family. Some of them were able to study until secondary school, but most either had no formal education or reached only elementary school. Poverty is the main reason why they could not continue their education. Their

families could not afford to send them to school, and they had to work to help their families. According to one striker,

*Simula noong bata pa kami, dito na kami. Para magkaroon ng pera, nagla-labor kami. [Kailangang] maghanap kami ng paraan para magkapera kami. Walang ibang paraan na mahanap kami, pagla-labor lang talaga kasi hindi kami matanggap sa trabaho. Alam mo na, maraming hinahanap [sa nag-a-apply]. Mababa ang pinag-aralan, [kaya] labor lang talaga.*

(We've been here since we were small. We do labor work to earn money. We look for ways to have money but there's usually no other way but to become laborers. We won't qualify for a job. You know how it is, there's usually a lot of requirements to get a job. My education is low, so this is all I can do.)

By the time they reach their teens, they are already on their own. They can no longer expect their parents to provide them with what they need. They have to earn the money for their food, personal hygiene products, and other things even if they live with

*Kargadors in Imperata market.*



their families. At such a young age, they are already expected to contribute to the family income.

As early as the age of fourteen, some strikers already start raising their own families. They make the transition from child laborers to heads of families as they become “husbands” and fathers at an early age. As one striker says,

*Ang mga laborer talaga, makulit. Kapag may dumadaan na babae, kinukulit namin eh. Kaya may mga siyota talaga kami. Ako suki ko, yung anak niya, niligawan ko. Kadalasan, seventeen or eighteen years old nag-aasawa. Minsan, may 14 years old. Kapag nabuntis, live-in na sila sa bahay.*

(Laborers are naughty. When a girl walks by we usually kid her. We have girlfriends. My suki's daughter--I courted her. By seventeen or eighteen we're married. There's even a 14 years old. If they get someone pregnant, they live-in, they live together.)

Live-in arrangements are more common among them because they cannot afford the fees that come with marriage ceremonies, and they are too young to marry under secular and canon laws.





They may stay with their parents or live separately from them depending on their resources. “Live-in *lang kami. Wala din kasing pera pangkasal*” (We just live-in together. Because we don’t have money for a wedding), one said.

## **AOL and the Strikers: Codes, Work, and Tension**

A day of work for the strikers begins at around two in the morning when the first wave of market goers arrives. They approach shoppers and offer to help carry their purchases to the *motorelas* (Regidor et al 1999) and jeeps. In return, they are paid a small amount. One striker says,

*Madaling araw, mga two AM kasi doon madaming bumibili. Hindi ko alam kung bakit [dumarating sila ng ganoong oras]. Tapos matatapos ako ng seven [hanggang] nine AM. Tapos pahinga na yun, pero yung iba, patuloy lang sila. Babalik ka lang sa taas, tapos mag-aantay ka lang kung may tapos nang mamili, (ibibigay nila (mga namimili) sa ‘yo ang kanilang pinamili] tapos sasabihin nila, ‘Antayin mo na lang ako sa baba.’ Kasi may tiwala sila sa ‘yo.*

*Habang nag-aantay kami, umiikot-ikot kami sa fruits section baka may mamimili na maraming karga, tapos sasabihin namin kung puwedeng kami na ang magkarga. Minsan, papayag. Minsan, hindi dahil kaya na daw nila kargahin. Lalapitan mo talaga yun, huwag kang mahihiya. Tapos dun kayo sa baba mag-aantay kayo ng jeep na sasakyan niya.*

*Yung mga truck ng saging, madalas darating ng five hanggang six AM. Paminsan hindi dumarating. One hour madalas, tapos na yung [laman ng] isang buong truck [nababa na].*

(Dawn time, around 2AM, because that’s when most people arrive to market. I finish at around 7AM to 9AM. And then I rest. Others just get on with the work. You go up, you wait until someone finishes their shopping then they call you. I just wait. They trust you, you see.

While waiting for our customers, we usually go around the fruits section--there might be someone with a huge load. We offer our services, sometimes they take it. Others would say they can manage. You take their load and you wait with them until they get on the jeepney.

Trucks, usually carrying bananas, arrive at around 5 to 6AM. One hour is usually all it takes for us to haul all the load.)

An important actor in a striker's life is the *suki*, a regular customer. A striker can have *suki* by approaching customers and asking to carrying their things regularly, thus forming some familiarity with the customers' needs.

Young strikers assume the established relationship with their fathers' *suki*. The usual pattern involves children helping their fathers in the market and gets to know the *suki* in the process. They establish themselves as trustworthy and efficient as their fathers. When they could no longer do heavy tasks, the fathers make their sons do the tasks. Thus,

*Yung araw-araw mo siya nakikita, tapos familiar na siya sa mukha mo, tapos ikaw na yung lagi niya pinipili. Depende din kasi yun kung magaling ka mag-conversation sa kanila at nagugustuhan nila yun; may tiwala sila sa 'yo. Pinagkakatiwalaan ka na nila. Minsan nga sinasabi na nila na, 'Ikaw na yung maghatid niyan sa puwesto namin.' Kasi pinagkakatiwalaan ka na nila. Ayun, every day mo na siya makikita. Yung iba, namamana nila ang suki ng tatay nila.*

(You see him/her everyday, they became familiar with your face and they choose you. It also depends if you're good at having a conversation, they like that. They trust you. Sometimes they even ask me to take the goods directly to their place. That's trust. Others inherit their father's *suki*.)

After attending to the early market goers, the strikers wait for the shipment of goods to arrive at around five in the morning.

The AOL is composed of laborers with government permits, identification cards, and uniforms. They are the “legitimate” laborers, “*Mag-aabang ka lang talaga kasi may kalaban ka, yong AOL*” (You need to be alert because you have an enemy, the AOL), a striker said.

To differentiate themselves from the AOL, the young laborers of Imperata Market call themselves “strikers”. The strikers and AOL have different unwritten rules: *Ang Patakarang Striker* (The Code of Strikers); and *Ang Patakarang AOL* (The Code of The Code of AOL), respectively. These unwritten rules were formed by the group members themselves. The members of the AOL enjoy certain advantages over the strikers and therefore earn more. Among the rules that give the AOL group a significant advantage over the strikers are the following:

1. They get first pick at the shipments/deliveries, so they get to pick the more generous tippers. As these tippers get to know them, they become the latter’s suki;
2. A maximum of three laborers can take on a shipment/delivery, thus the large tip from the shipment is divided among the three resulting to more tips;
3. They respect a first-come, first-served basis, but this does not apply to the strikers. Even if the strikers get to the big tippers first, the AOL group members make the strikers leave because they are the legal ones; and
4. Only the AOL members can use the *kariton* (pushcarts), while the strikers have no access to these.

A striker confides that:

*Ang mga AOL, nasa baba; ang mga Striker, nasa itaas—kasi bawal sa ibaba ang mga Striker (Strikers are not allowed on the ground floor). Pero pag gabi na nasa baba na lahat kasi bawal na ang tao sa taas.*

*Sila [AOL], may minimum. Dapat Php20-Php40 bawat sako. Kami, walang minimum. Kahit magkano, ok lang sa amin. Minsan, may magpapabuhat ng hanggang Divisoria, hindi kami magrereklamo, kinakaya na lang namin.*

*Buwaya talaga ang mga AOL, eh. Madamot. Kapag Striker, walang kariton. Kapag marami na yung karga namin, humihiram kami ng kariton tapos binibigyan na lang namin sila [AOL] ng pera.*

*Darating din yung araw na mawawala kami kasi striker lang kami, eh. Wala kaming permit. Yung matitira na lang talaga dito yung mga AOL; yung mga may kariton. Kami kasi kargador lang kami, eh. Pero yung iba kasi dito, mas gusto nila yung buhat (mga Strikers), mas mabilis kasi, eh. Pero kung masyado na marami, hindi na talaga pwede kasi hindi na namin kaya, eh.*

(AOL are on the ground floor, Strikers are on the second floor. But at night no one is allowed to go up.

AOL have a minimum--Ph20-40 for every sack. We don't have a minimum. However much is ok with us. One time, someone asked for his load to be carried all the way to Divisoria [around 2km away from the market]. We didn't complain. We just did it.

The day will come when we will be gone because we're just strikers. We don't have the permit. And only AOL will remain, the ones with the pushcarts. Us, we're just kargadors. Others just like to do the carrying, it's faster. But when the load gets too much, we won't be able to [and the ones with the pushcarts will get the job].)

The strikers comply with these rules because they do not want to have trouble with the authorities and they feel disadvantaged by their limited education. However, because of the AOL's bullying, they often get into arguments with the group. The striker feel oppressed by the AOL and regard the AOL as their common foe, creating a strong sense of unity among themselves. "*Para kayong [mga AOL] hindi tao. Hindi kayo marunong tumingin sa kapwa-tao*" (You're not human. You don't know how to regard your fellow being), a striker says about the AOL members.

Strikers do not discriminate and seem to observe an egalitarian system among themselves. They observe the golden rule: treat your neighbor as your equal and lend a helping hand whenever you can. Young and old work together as equals, with no one insisting on being called *kuya* (older brother). They refer to each other by their nicknames. They do not discriminate according to age, older ones lend helping hands to the younger laborers trying to take on more tasks. They do not discriminate in terms of gender as well, as Marvin, an openly gay striker, attests.

*Walang malalaking edad (matanda) dito, eh, o walang kuya. Lahat naman dito pantay-pantay. Kahit na bata, may dalang isang sako ng bigas, tutulungan namin tapos bibigay namin yung pera. Ganito talaga dito, tulong-tulong kasi, kahit bata man siya, hindi siya makakasali sa inyo, tulungan mo na lang. Striker din siya, striker din ako, tulungan mo na lang. Yun 'yung patakaran namin dito. Patakaran talaga dito: Walang naaapi. Ayaw namin ng nang-aapi.*

(No one is senior here. We're all equal. Even the very young carrying a sack of rice, we'll help him, we'll give him money. That's the way it is here. We help each other, even the kid, even if he's not part of us, you just help him. He's also a striker. I'm a striker. That's the rule: no one gets lorded over. And we don't lord over anyone.)

According to Woodburn, "authority is the very essence of social organization." This describes the condition of the strikers. Woodburn adds,

I have chosen to use the term egalitarian' to describe these societies of near-equals because the term directly suggests that the 'equality' that is present is not neutral, the mere absence of inequality or hierarchy, but is asserted. The term equality, from which egalitarian is derived, was introduced into English with its present meaning in a poem by Tennyson in 1864 to suggest politically assertive equality of the French variety. Even today egalitarian carries with it echoes of revolution, of fervor for equality in opposition to

elaborate structures of inequality. But politically assertive egalitarianism is, of course, not found only in hierarchical systems under challenge and in their successor regimes. It is equally characteristic of many systems without direct experience of elaborate instituted hierarchy. Yet it may still seem surprising at first that equality should be asserted in certain very simply organized contemporary hunting and gathering societies which I am going to talk about, and in which, one might think, equality would simply be taken for granted.

In these societies equalities of power, equalities of wealth and equalities of prestige or rank are not merely sought but are, with certain limited exceptions, genuinely realized" (Woodburn 1982, p. 87).

We were skeptical about the strikers' claim that they look out for one another and help each other, including giving up opportunities to get a tip from a customer. But we saw this demonstrated when one of the older strikers helped an eleven-year-old striker with his load, and gave the full tip to the child. We were able to observe a kind of camaraderie where the strikers treat their fellow members--young or old, male or female, straight or gay--with mutual respect. We witnessed how they got along with each other based on their declaration, "*Lahat tayo, pare-parehong tao lang. Kumakain, humihinga, pareho lang*" (We're all the same, we're all human beings. We eat, we breathe just the same).

While tension between the strikers and the AOL is evident, they manage to work together at the market without clashing. The need to make a living and survive often outweighing and trumping petty quarrels, "*Paminsan nag-aaway kasi matatapang kami [Strikers]. Hindi kami nagpapa-api*" (Sometimes a fight breaks out because we're brave. We won't allow ourselves to be beaten). As one striker says,

*Minsan nagkakaroon ng away between sa mga laborer dahil sa unahan sa mga customer na namamalengke. Oo, wala kaming karapatan na magkarga sa merkado (market), pero wala naman*

*silang karapatan na kunan kami ng hanapbuhay sa merkado kasi 'yun lang ang hanapbuhay namin para makakain ang pamilya namin, eh. Sabi ko sa kanila, pantay-pantay lang para makakain sila at makakain di kami kasi maliit lang ang kita namin, eh.*

*Mga customer na madadamot talaga, limang piso lang binibigay nila sa amin kasi hindi naman sila naaawa. Yung ibang mga AOL, hindi naman nila tatanggapin yung maliit na sahod. Kung limang piso lang ibibigay sa kanila, ibibigay na lang nila yung buhat sa mga Striker. Kaya yung mga Striker, papayag na lang kasi pera din yun eh, sayang din. Mas gusto nila [mga nagpapabuhay] ang Striker kasi gusto nila ang madali. Kumbaga, sa madali, maliit lang ang hinihingi namin. Ang mga AOL, malaki ang mga hinihingi. Tsaka kung makabuhay ang AOL, tinatapon lang. Kami, iniingatan namin ang gamit na dinadala namin para hindi ma-damage kaya yan ang gusto nila sa amin.*

(A fight sometimes breaks out between laborers because of competition over getting a customer. Yes, we don't have the right to be porters in the market, but they also don't have the right to deprive us of livelihood in the market. It's where and how we earn a living. That's how we feed our families. I told them we should all be equal so they can feed their families and we can feed ours too. We already earn so little.)

To become a part of the AOL, one needs to pay Php500.00 for registration and processing, plus additional fees for barangay and police clearances. Then they have to wait for their permits to be processed that takes up six to twelve months. One striker says, *"Wala kaming pera, eh. Kulang pa nga yung kinikita namin dito sa araw-araw, eh. Ang ibang Striker dito, may pamilya na; kulang pa nga sa pambili ng gatas"* (We don't have money. What we earn in a day is not enough. Other Stikers have families; what they earn is not even enough to buy milk for their children).

AOL members spend money on uniform and ID. They have legal rights to work at the market and receive higher tips. However, the



strikers are ambivalent about applying for AOL membership. One striker says,

*Para sa akin, kung umabot man sa time na hindi makakalabor ang mga Striker, yun na siguro yung time na magiging AOL din kami kasi wala kaming ibang ikakabuhay.*

*Puwede kung may mauutangan kami ng pera, yun ipapa-AOL namin para mabayaran din namin pag nagkapera na kami kasi mahirap ang buhay. Eh kung wala lang talagang AOL-AOL diyan, kahit mag-away kami, hindi kami mag-AOL kasi limang daan iyan. Saan mo hahanapin yan? One week lang makikita mo yang perang limang daan tapos isasayang mo lang? Wala pa kayong panigurado kung makukuha ka kaya hindi kami sumali ng AOL.*

(When the time comes when Strikers can no longer be laborers, that's probably the time when I'll have to turn AOL. We won't have any other way to make a living.

It's possible if there's someone who can lend us the money for AOL membership. Life is difficult. If only there wasn't any of that AOL. That's five hundred pesos, where will you find it? That's a week of work and you just waste it? And you're not assured of getting accepted, so don't join the AOL.)

## Gang Life

Poverty hardens a person's character. According to Shapiro (n.d.),

Unlike westerners who value individualism, Filipinos are usually collectivists. They identify with their families, regional affiliations, and peer groups.

Pinoys are seldom seen alone and are usually found in clusters especially in public places. Time spent with friends and peers also serves as a time-out from the pressures of family obligations (n.p.).



Gang signs.

Gangs give member a sense of belonging (Pacheco 2010). Pacheco explains,

Feeling wanted and loved, giving and receiving love are essential expressions for a gang member, as for everyone in society. This is most evident in the way they commonly refer to the gang as their 'family.' Being part of a gang gives them a sense of belonging, of pride and honor. They feel they are accounted for and that they are contributing to something bigger than themselves. They also receive guidance, shelter and money. The gang becomes the member's sole source of survival, a surrogate or replacement family that provides positive reinforcement, direction, focus and a sense of purpose, which develops into a strong sense of blind commitment and loyalty. In exchange for the false sense of security and love, this new 'family' expects its members to accept all its philosophies and rules and willingly participate in violent actions and crimes for the survival of the gang (2010, 20-21).

As a group of friends living in similar circumstances gets larger and larger, they either form their own gang or merge with an



already established one. Within their gang, the powerless become empowered. At Imperata Market, the strikers, together with other impoverished groups, help each other survive by joining gangs because it is better to be part of a gang or two than not be a member of any gang and get killed. One striker says,

*Kapag ikaw ang nakita nila, papatayin ka nila. Nagpapatayan kaya hindi mo matatawag na biro iyan.*

(If they see you, they'll kill you. People get killed so it's not a joke.)

An individual can join two or more allied gangs to increase his/her chances of survival. Hunt and Laidler (n.d.) explain in "Alcohol and Violence in the Lives of Gang Members" how violence is used within and outside the gangs becoming part of the their daily ordeal, even their norm. Hunt and Laidler (n.d.) add,

Violence is endemic to gang life. [I]t is the 'currency of life; within gangs, so much so that it can be taken as normative behavior. Violence within gang life includes both intra-gang

violence—for example, ritualistically violent initiations—and inter-gang violence—for example, turf battles (n.p.).

Gangs have different names, insignias, ideals, and hierarchies. They have territories, allies, build their reputations, and are feared and respected.

The Imperata Market is home to two gangs: MBM or Mga Batang Mercado and Rondure (Mindanaw Group). During the day, gang members are nameless invisible wage-slaves. At night, they are the kings of the streets. The MBM is composed of younger male strikers. They are the new gang on the rise. A member says, *“Bagong grupo ang MBM kaya nagpasiklab kami laban sa MB88, kaya’t dun kami nakilala at kinatakutan dahil kami ang nang-una.”*

The Method Black (MB88) trace their origin to Manila. The MBM fought with the MB88. When news spread that the number of MBM members was increasing, the MB88 began stalking the Imperata Market. The MBM struck first. They drove the MB88 away, so their reputation increased and more strikers joined the gang. MBM regard the gang in the following words:

*Gabi-gabi ang away. Kaming mga barkada, masaya lang kami kapag may away kasi isa-isa [nagkakaisa] kami eh. Marami kami; mga 200 kami... may mga AOL din kaming kasama.*

*Natatapakan ng MBM ang mga ibang grupo kaya nakikipag-away. Gusto ng ibang grupo na lumuhod ang mga MBM sa kanila at sumali sa kanilang grupo. May mga namamatay talaga; kapatid ni James, isang miyembro ng MBM, nasaksak. Ayaw na ng iba matulog sa labas ng Imperata dahil baka pag gising nila nasa langit na sila.*

(Every night there’s a fight. My group of friends are excited when there’s a fight, we bond together. There’s a lot of us, 200... we also have AOL members joining us sometimes.

MBM usurps other groups that’s why a fight breaks out. The other groups want MBM to kneel and join them. Someone

usually dies. James' brother was a member of MBM, he was stabbed. A lot of boys don't want to sleep outside the market because they might wake up in heaven.)

The MBM counts among its allies the AZU. Among its rivals are Deaf Tones, a gang from the Visayas, and Mozes. No description of the latter gang was given. The Rondure is composed of the older laborers of Imperata, "*Mga tatay na*" (They're dads), a young striker says about its members.

Another gang has the same name with the Bloods and the Crips, an African-American gang based in the United States. It is not clear if the Bloods and the Crips in the United States actually have factions in the Philippines, or if the local gang only named themselves after the American gang. Strikers describe them as "*mayayaman*" (rich), "*young iba, negosyante*" (businessmen) and "*walang magawa sa buhay*" (have nothing better to do in life). The Crips are the toughest rivals because many of the members are trained in martial arts and use weapons such as knives, guns, and samurai. Each considers two different markets in the city as their territory. Strikers describe the Crips, saying,

*Malakas na kalaban ng MBM [ang Crips] dahil maraming karate na miyembro.*

*Pinakamahirap na nakalaban ng MBM [ang Crips] dahil may mga samurai [swords] sila... Muntik nang matalo [ang MBM] pero maraming kaibigang Muslim [ang MBM].*

(MBM's strong opponent is the Crips--they have a lot of members who know karate. They have samurais...The MBMs were almost beaten once, but they have a lot of Muslim friends who come to their aid.)

The MBM do not practice hazing. Says one member, "*Wala kaming hazing kasi para sa amin, ano naman makukuha ng kasama mo 'pag siya nasaktan. Para sa amin lang, kung gusto [mo] sumali, sumama ka lang sa meeting.*" James, a gang member, and his group of friends

once formed another group. Their main goal was to catch snatchers at the market. It was a risky undertaking because the snatchers were armed. Several times James was wounded when he went after the snatchers. Initially, other laborers did not want to be friends with James, but did so later and James eventually found like-minded company. Today he is part of the strikers and has been saving up for his future family. A member says of James,

*Nagbago [si James] lang dahil sa amin. Malaki ang pinagbago niyan. Ayan nagla-laborer na rin siya, at iniipon niya yung pera niya.*

*Binugbog yan dati, barumbado kasi. Ang bangis niyan dati. Dati nga, ayoko iyan kaibiganin. Mga 12 o 13 years old siya noon. Binugbog niya yung mga snatcher.*

*Kapag mag nang-i-i-snatch kasi tumatakbo sa itaas (the second floor of Imperata Market), pag may nahahanap [na snatcher], kami ang nadadawit kaya, kung minsan, kung may tumatakbo hinahabol namin tapos binubugbog namin.*

*Sinabihan namin siya na 'wag na siya mambugbog. Nadala na lang siya sa mga kaibigan niya. Nakita kasi niya kung paano siya pinapahalagahan [ng mga 'to]. Napag-isip-isip din siguro niya na tumatanda din siya, na ganoon pala dapat pinahahalagahan ang buhay. Kaya ayun bumait siya.*

(James changed because of us. He changed a lot. Now he works as a laborer and saves his money. He was beaten up before. He was wild. I didn't want to be his friend. He was 12 or 13 years old. He beat up a snatcher. When someone snatches something they usually run to our floor and we become suspects. So when someone runs, we run after him and beat him up.

We told James not to beat up anyone. He got caught up with the wrong crowd. He probably also realized he's not getting any younger. That's how you value life. So, he started to calm down and be a good guy.)

In a way James' group formed a sort of vigilante group that aimed to "cleanup" the market. Vigilantism is not a new social phenomenon in Mindanao. Many vigilante-type groups emerged during the Marcos dictatorship, and most of them were located in the southern part of the Philippines, particularly operating in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. According to May's (1992) work, "Vigilantes in the Philippines," he explains,

As in the past, some probably joined vigilante groups because, as the post-1986 euphoria dissipated, they believed that vigilantes represented the winning side (p.61).

### **Coping Mechanisms and Machismo**

The stresses of life at the market are overwhelming as the strikers work to provide for their families and survive the day without getting stabbed or shot by rival gang members. These have led them to develop ways to cope with the stresses.

One coping mechanism is by smoking. Many of the strikers learned to smoke at a young age, most from their fathers and other older laborers. The smell of cigarette smoke masks the market's stench and makes it more bearable. They believe smoking helps the food settle in the stomach faster, so they are able to get back to work right away. A full stomach not only makes them feel sluggish, they also find it difficult to lift heavy loads. Smoking also helps them relax as they pass the time when there are not too many customers in the market.

Another way of coping is by drinking. After a long day's work, the strikers have to get as much sleep as they can to prepare them for work the next day. To fall asleep quickly, and they often have a few beers or shots of cheap rum or brandy to help them sleep, *"...umiinom din para magpaantok at makatulog nang maaga dahil maaga pa [gigising] bukas"* (we drink to get sleepy, in order sleep early because tomorrow is another early day).

On some days, when they are able to earn a little more, they get together after work and "chip-in" a couple of pesos for a drinking



session. They prefer “hard” liquor like Tanduay Rhum or Emperador Light to beer because liquor is cheaper. These sessions are important celebrations that happen only once or twice a month. It breaks the monotony of their everyday lives. According to one striker,

*Iniinom namin ang Emperador at Tanduay kasi kaunti lang ang pera naming, eh. Pag sa Red Horse [beer] lang kami, hindi kami tatamaan, eh. Kaya doon lang kami sa maliliit [shots]. Kahit mahal, at least tatamaan kami.*

(We drink Emperador and Tanduay because we don’t have much money. When we have Red Horse [a brand of beer], we don’t get a hit, takes a while to get drunk. So, we go for the little shots, even if it costs a bit more, we get the hit.)

Hunt and Laidler (n.d.) explain that the intake of alcohol plays an important role in the lives of gang members,

Because drinking is an integral and regular part of socializing within gang life, as the table illustrates, drinking works as a social lubricant, or social glue, to maintain not only the cohesion and social solidarity of the gang but also to affirm masculinity and male togetherness. Comparisons across the different ethnic gangs, however, suggest that drinking affirms masculinity in culturally defined ways. Existing research on Latino gangs suggests that drinking plays a key role in the creation of a ‘macho’ identity (n. p.).

The strikers engage in gang-related activities. The main part of their daily routine during the day involves doing menial tasks for a pittance. However, at night, they are respected and feared characters. They portray the image of strength and masculinity by being in a gang.

This machismo characteristic of youth gangs displays how men view themselves within the group and how they show that they have the power. The idea of “*Lalaki ako*” (“I am a man”) that is present within gangs conveys an interpretation of the high status of males within the group.



This high regard provides an array of mental scripts among members, which defines how men must think and act and must be respected (Acaba 2012, 2).

### A Different Type

Banjo gave us a more in-depth look into his life. He does not drink, smoke, or do any form of drugs. While most strikers barely made it to fifth grade, Banjo put himself through most of high school. Moreover, he values fidelity. He says,

*Iniisip ko nga, 'Bakit ba ako barumbado noong bata ako? Bakit ba ako ganun?' Ngayon lang ako tumino, noong tumanda na ako.*

*Siguro kung pinagpatuloy ko lang yung pag-aaral ko, uunlad ako. Kaso mahirap lang talaga ang buhay eh, kayod ka lang talaga ng kayod. Mula first year hanggang third year, ako lang nagpa-aral sa sarili ko. Sa lola lang kasi ako lumaki. Tapos nung fourth year lumipat na ako dito sa CDO, kay papa. Akala ko kasi matutulungan niya ako mag-aral ng fourth year.*

*Gigising ako ng madaling araw (2 AM), tapos titigil ako [sa pag-labor] ng 6 AM. Tapos makakauwi ako ng 7 AM, maliligo pa. Aabot ako sa paaralan nang 7:30 AM—hindi na ako papapasukin ng guard. Sometimes nga yung pader, tinatalon ko na lang yung pader para makapasok ako.*

*Pero dumating yung panahon na fourth year na ako noon, kailangan ko ng pera pangbayad—humingi ako ng pera sa tatay ko; wala din siya maibigay. Sinubukan kong ipunin, pero di ko din kaya ipunin. Kinabukasan meron na naman, yung Cadet uniform namin. Yung papa ko, hindi naman nagbibigay. Ano magagawa ko? Quit na lang.*

*Marami nga nasasayangan sa 'kin kasi mataas ang grades ko, sabi ng mga teacher.*

(I asked myself why was I such an ass when I was young. I only calmed down now that I'm older. Maybe if I just did my best in school, I'd prosper. But life's really hard. I sent myself to school from first year to third year high school, working a lot. I lived with my grandmother then. I came here to the city to live with my father. I thought he could help me with school.

I'd get woken up at 2AM, work as laborer until 6AM. Get home at 7AM. Get to school at 730AM--the guard won't let me in anymore. I'd sometimes jump over the fence just to get in. But it all came to an end point. I was in fourth year. I needed money for something for school. I asked my father for it but he couldn't give me any. I tried to work and save for it. But then another requirement came, our Cadet uniform. My father couldn't give me anything. I couldn't keep up with the expenses. What else could I do but quit. My teachers thought it was too bad because I had good grades.)

When asked about his views about bringing up children, he says,

*Para sa akin, nandiyan din yan sa mga magulang eh, kung paano mo sila inalagaan, paano mo sila tinuturing. Basta para sa akin depende din sa magulang iyan. At masabi ko lang na sana lang matulad yung anak ko sa akin. Ako, kahit wala akong ama, wala akong ina, pero bakit hindi ako marunong manigarilyo, bakit hindi ako marunong mag-inom, bakit wala akong bisyo? Kasi iniisip ko kung paano umunlad ako in the future.*

*Depende rin talaga sa takbo ng bata yan. Kasi wala akong ama. Wala akong ina na mag-guide sa akin, kaya sarili ko na lang nagbibigay ng guidance sa akin.*

(I think a lot of it has something to do with the parents, how they care for, how they regard their children. I hope my kids turn out like me. Even if I really didn't have the support of my parents I didn't pick up smoking, I don't

drink, I don't have any vices. I think about how I can better my future.

It all depends on how the kid goes. I didn't really have a father. I didn't have a mother to guide me, I only had myself to depend on. I give myself my own guidance.)

With regard to vice, he says,

*Para sa akin, ang pagsigarilyo at pag-inom, may dahilan 'yan. Ang pag-inom, ano bang mapuntahan mo diyan? Hospital o sementeryo. Ang dahilan ko rin sa paninigarilyo. Ayaw ko kasi makita yung apoy ng sigarilyo kasi tingin ko sa apoy, impiyerno. Parang dala-dala ko sa sarili ko yung apoy. Bakit ba nila dala-dala yung apoy? Isa pa, nakakasakit din yan sa бага eh, di ba. Parang din nila sinasabi na sila na sa sarili nila ang nagbibigay ng sakit sa katawan. Tingin ko kasi talaga sa sigarilyo, para kang nagdadala ng impiyerno sa buhay mo.*

(There's usually a reason to smoking or drinking. Where does it take you? To the hospital or the cemetery. I don't like to see the fire in the cigarette. It reminds me of the fires of hell. It's like if I smoke I carry that fire with me. Why do they bring the fire with them? It hurts the lungs too. It's as if they're asking for their bodies to get sick. I look at cigarettes as bringing hell into your life.)

### The Children, The Future

Because he comes from a dysfunctional family, Banjo is loyal to his live-in partner and wants to keep his family together. He does not want his children to follow the footsteps of his parents. He says,

*Simula pa noong bata pa ako, pinapangako ko na talaga na ayaw kong maging katulad ko ang anak ko.*

*Pinapangako ko sa sarili ko na, kung ako magkakaroon ng asawa, hindi ko itutulad sa pamilya ko kasi yung pamilya*

*ko, nagkahiwalay-hiwalay. Hindi ko alam kung bakit, kaya naisip ko na kung magka-asawa ako, ayoko na kami'y magkahiwalay, at kung magkaanak ako ayokong maranas niya yung naranasan ko ngayon. Gagawin ko lahat kahit mahirap yun. Kahit pagod na pagod, kakayanin ko basta para sa kanya.*

(Ever since I was small I swore to myself that my children won't have to go through what I did. I promised myself that when I have my own family, it won't be like mine. My family's broken up. I don't know but when I get married I don't want it not to work out or for my children to go through what I'm going through now. I'll do everything even if it's difficult. Even when it's exhausting I'll do it for them.)

Like everyone else, Jason wants a better life for his children. Jason became a laborer because he had little education. And he does not want this to happen to his children. He says,

*Para sa akin hindi, kasi kaya nagla-labor ako, wala akong pinag-aralan kaya ayokong magaya yung anak ko sa akin. Gusto ko yung maganda yung trabaho niya paglaki. Lahat naman ng tao hindi gustong ganito ang patunguhan ng anak, 'di ba?*

(I'm doing this kind of work because I have no education. I don't want my children to be like me. I want them to have good jobs when they grow up. No one wants their children to end up like this, right?)

James is still single, but he looks forward to having children. He wants only one thing for his children – education – so that they will have a better life. He says,

*Kunyari ako, kung may anak na ako, [may pangarap ako para sa kanya]. Lahat naman ng magulang may pangarap para sa anak nila, 'di ba? Hindi naman masamang mangarap. Isa*

*lang naman ang gusto ko sa buhay. Pag may [mga] anak na ako, gusto ko makatapos sila ng pag-aaral.*

(Let's say I have a child, I have a dream for my child. All parents have dreams for their children, right? It's never wrong to have a dream. I only want one thing in life. When I have children I want them to finish school.)

## CONCLUSION

We pass by people like our young Imperata Market laborers every day, and we see them only when we need their services. Otherwise, they are invisible and silent.

We recommend that further studies be made about these young men and that suggest appropriate programs for them, mainly on educational and livelihood, to prepare them for a better future. In this way, they will not just be "extra hands" in the market, but may be given a helping hand so they can develop into more productive citizens who can have better lives and contribute more to society. We hope that through the information we gathered, we have given the strikers of Imperata Market a voice.

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# INVISIBLE WORKERS: RADIO DJS AND CALL CENTER AGENTS

## INTRODUCTION

### **Invisible Workers**

The telecommunications industry is a major industry in the Philippines. Although it generates billions of pesos in revenue year after year, the industry remains 'invisible' – not known to many Filipinos across the country. The business process outsourcing (BPO) that includes call centers and media companies constitute a significant sector of the industry. Companies have taken advantage of the booming industry by establishing telecommunications infrastructure in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. They employ workers whose work schedules are drastically different from those of regular office workers.



For our paper, we interviewed call center agents and radio disc jockeys (DJs), 18 to 25 years of age, in Cagayan de Oro on their regular use of chemicals. We observed that : (1) they perform active voice work; (2) they work irregular hours; and (3) they make extended use of telecommunications platforms, relying on technology to make their voices heard while they remain largely unseen by their listeners.

Careers in call centers and radio stations are among those that are sought after by young adults in the country nowadays. New college graduates are attracted to work in Internet-enabled call centers because the starting salaries they offer are higher than those given by other industries. Jobs in radio stations are equally popular because of the chance to communicate with a local audience, often perceived to offer glamor and prestige.

### **Radio and the Internet in the Philippines: an Overview**

Philippine radio began<sup>1</sup> in the 1920s, when American businessmen launched it as a commercial enterprise that promoted consumer goods to Filipinos. During the first few decades after its introduction to the local scene, radio broadcasts played music, variety shows, comedy skits, and short newscasts to Filipino listeners. The English language, western music, and American accents dominated the Philippine airwaves. Jazz and ballads were standard listening fare.

Soon, radio had become a popular platform and companies started buying airtime, the time during which a radio broadcast is on air, to promote or advertise their products or services. Radio started to make profit from the advertising rates that it charged. Aggressive advertising promoted not only products and services but also lifestyle practices such as drinking, smoking, and driving flashy automobiles. In addition to western music, radio executives introduced programs that included Filipino music such as the *kundiman* manned by Filipino disc jockeys then called *announcers*. After the Second World War,<sup>2</sup> radio broadcasting started to focus more attention on information and education in a bid to make the programs more relevant and not just entertaining. Around this time, development broadcasting started gaining ground in the

Philippines, where broadcasting had pursued a commercial thrust<sup>3</sup> that made it unique among other East Asian countries, where electronic media are controlled and operated by the government. The free enterprise environment in the country made local broadcasting flourish, but the same environment made it difficult to produce and broadcast public service and development-oriented programs.

In 1994, commercial Internet was introduced<sup>4</sup> to the country, when Mozcom began its operation as an internet service provider (ISP). Filipino subscribers were now able to connect with the rest of the world online. Nationwide coverage was achieved in July 1997, when dial-up access points were set in all the regions of the country. Years later, ISPs like Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT) and Bayantel would introduce Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) and broadband services for homes and businesses.

In recent years, firms from other countries decided to hire services offshore with cost reduction as a main driver. A recent survey cited by the Asian Development Bank Institute<sup>5</sup> indicates that the importance of other drivers is increasing, including access to qualified personnel, the need to have business process redesign, and increased speed to market (Shepherd and Pasadilla 2012). Internet mediates for these drivers, making wider communication reach, international transactions, and faster logistics possible. Business processes such as customer service, account management, and telemarketing<sup>6</sup> are relegated to call center agents, allowing outsourcing companies to focus their attention on other essential business concerns.

The Philippines, India, and some countries in South America are common destinations for low-cost outsourcing. The Philippines, in particular, remains a popular choice because labor costs in the country are a fraction of those in more affluent countries.<sup>7</sup>

Call center operations are essentially run using high-speed Internet connections,<sup>8</sup> making the Internet an essential part of the work of call center agents. However, call centers are known for imposing certain restrictions on website use, such as restricted or limited

access to certain websites and social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Restrictions are meant to curb nonrevenue-generating and time-consuming Internet use.

Radio stations, on the other hand, impose other kinds of restrictions guided by local conventions. Guests in one station, for instance, are officially not allowed to stay in disc jockey booths while DJs are on board, speaking to their audience. DJs are also tasked to curb Internet use while on board. Such restrictions are meant to regulate the behavior of DJs and maintain decorum in the radio stations.

Call centers and radio stations already have certain regulations that structure their operations and check on the behavior of their employees. To these, a layer of regulations is normally added for Internet use because Internet use can compete for the time and attention of employees.

## METHODOLOGY

Radio disc jockeys and call center agents were interviewed with the help of a survey form to gather data on their personal backgrounds, job information, and chemical product use. Code names were given for anonymity. Body maps for men and women were included in the survey forms to make the process of relating the names of chemical products to particular body parts easier for both interviewer and informant. Brand names of products were asked to be mentioned. Informants were asked to account for their chemical product use in the morning, afternoon, and evening, as well as products used on weekends and on special occasions. Such details were gathered to enrich discussion on contexts in which chemical products are used.

Informants were also asked to account for their motivations in using products and for their reasons and experiences with discontinued products. Such a discussion allowed researchers to see why certain products are used, why certain products were discontinued, and what bodily effects had led to discontinued use. Speculative

questions related to chemical products were asked towards the end of the interview to bring discussions to a proper close.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

With the developments on the use of radios, television sets, mobile phones, computers, and the Internet over the past century, Filipinos have been spending a lot of time on media that provide information, entertainment, and services. Despite the media's accessibility to the people, the workers involved in voice work for these different media are rarely seen. Who are they? What are their working conditions like? What do they value?

### **Radio Disc Jockeys**

Radio disc jockeys reported monthly salaries that range from PhP4,000 to PhP7,000. They live with their families. They have no health benefits because they are contractual employees. Because they have no health insurance, they or their families need to shoulder their own medical expenses. Some of them invest on vitamins and supplements to maintain good health as a preventive measure against illness. Their radio stations require annual health check-ups, and the DJs shoulder the cost.

DJs work different shifts during the day: some work early morning shifts, while others work late at night. The radio station administration determines the schedules for the different DJs, and DJs are normally given anywhere between two to four hours of work in a day. This makes DJ work hours highly irregular, compared to those of other forms of professional work. DJs end up having more hours to devote to other activities. Only on occasion is a DJ given a double shift to cover for the absence of a co-worker or to fill up a schedule.

Sugar is a nineteen-year old DJ. She is from Cagayan de Oro and is currently pursuing a college degree. Two years ago, she stopped schooling to take on a part-time job. Before landing her present



"DJ" at work.

job, she worked as an office secretary, as an in-house DJ for a local shopping center, and as a clothing store employee. When she joined the radio station as a disc jockey she signed a contract and was placed on probationary status for six months. Eventually, from a budding DJ she became a "regular" employee of the station.

Sugar usually renders two hours of on-board duty on a daily basis, but sometimes she is asked to do four hours. On the side, she also hosts wedding and birthday events. She enjoys her job because it is "chill," leisurely, and she has a passion for communication.

Caring for their voice is an important concern for DJs, especially for those who take on hosting stints outside of their radio work. Sugar drinks more water these days. She used to take a lot of soda, but she had to stop the habit to avoid damaging her voice with the soda's sugar and is often served cold. She takes Strepsils orange lozenges to soothe her voice or when she feels that she is beginning to lose it. She does this a lot, especially when doing such gigs as dance parties, discos, and concerts that strains her voice. These gigs take a toll on her voice, mind, and body, and she is aware that she has to take care of herself, including her voice.

DJ Pops R gargles with Bactidol to soothe his throat when he feels that his voice weakens or becomes croaky. DJs like Pops R use Bactidol and Strepsils, as they intended to alleviate sore throat and mouth and throat infections.

In addition to caring for their voice, DJs are must remain healthy to maintain high energy at work. A DJ who does not sound lively and lacks pep would fail to keep the audience interested with what he/she does. Thus, DJs have to ensure that their voices project energy as they address their audience and, in a sense, perform. DJ Sugar tells us, “*Yung job namin kasi kailangan na energetic ka talaga*” (In our job you need to be really energetic).

Coffee appears to be a highly preferred commodity, most of whom take it with sugar and creamer. They mentioned several coffee blends such as creamy latte, cappuccino, 3-in-1, and brewed coffee; not one of the informants mentioned decaffeinated coffee. Among the reasons they cited for why they drink coffee are to avoid being sleepy on the job and having an “addiction” to it.

The DJs also take energy drinks but, compared to coffee, to a lesser extent. DJ Sugar cites Cobra and Extra Joss as “super energy drinks.” Pops R mentions Cobra and Red Bull as being effective in “giving the feeling of caffeine,” although he says that sometimes their effect wears off. Lori, on the other hand, does not take any beverage for energy, except for coffee. DJ Sugar Berry does not take either coffee or energy drinks. Among the call center agents interviewed, no one uses energy drinks. Instead, they take soda drinks, juices, and water as beverages.

Having loads of energy becomes more important when DJs host functions outside of their radio stations. Compared to radio listeners, the audiences and crowds at these gatherings demand more from the DJs’ performances. Other than their voice, DJs use their bodies to give the audience the performance they expect from a host. Oftentimes, DJs host these events after a hard day’s work at the station, so they have to summon whatever “left-over” energy they have. Sugar takes Enervon tablets for energy. When he feels tired and stressed out, Pops R takes Stresstabs because of its

“calming effect on the nerves.” Revicon has a similar effect on him. Lori takes Stresstabs when she feels that her body is “*bagsak na bagsak*” (really down).

Contractual DJs at Lori’s station are not required to have annual medical check-ups. The management deducts from their salaries their monthly contributions to Philhealth. Philhealth paid Lori’s hospital bills when she was hospitalized for amoebiasis after eating a contaminated cassava cake.

Contractual DJs pay for their own health insurance, “*sarili mo nang* initiative” (on your own initiative), Pops R says. He is fortunate that he is covered by his father’s health benefits as an employee at the general hospital in the city. In contrast, regular employees enjoy health benefits and regular office hours. Pops R is required to report for work for three hours a day. However, a recent decision by the station director requires talents to work on different shifts for six hours a day.

Maintaining a pleasant appearance is important to DJs. As Lori says it, they should “look pleasant always.” Sugar maintains a presentable appearance because “you don’t know when visitors will arrive [at the station],” she says. “*May darating na i-interview sa ‘yo or may mga celebrities na pupunta dito*” (There are people who come to interview you or celebrities who come over to the station), she adds. Her radio station has a dress code that requires them “to wear formal clothes from Mondays to Fridays, although this has not yet been fully implemented,” Lori says.

Makeup is a commonly used cosmetic among female DJs. Sugar does not like wearing it, but she has to because the station requires it. She has become accustomed to it that she wears makeup even on Sundays. Lori wears light makeup for events, when she goes out with friends, and when she goes to church. She cannot leave the house without putting on lipstick because it “adds character.” She looks pale without it.

DJs use a variety of cosmetics, such as foundation, concealer, face powder, brow pencil, eyeliner, and lipstick, based on a trial and



error method. Sugar considers HBC “a wonderful brand.” Her friends, mother, and sister also use HBC because it is an excellent brand. She uses Maybelline face powder because it does not cause whiteheads compared to other brands she has used. Lori prefers Avon lipstick first and Revlon next.

Male DJs use fewer cosmetics compared to women. In addition to deodorant, lotion, and body soap, they also use hair wax to look good. Pops R uses Bench Fix hair wax because it is “cool,” for “*pogi* points,” and for sex appeal.

### Call Center Agents

The salaries of call center agents range from PhP8,000.00 to PhP10,000.00 per month. They work on eight-hour shifts daily, and they live with co-workers. The company provides them health insurance, pays their annual check-ups, and reimburses their medical expenses.

Some call center agents work the graveyard shifts because their clients live in such countries as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia that have time zones that differ from the Philippines.’

Call center agents taking a break.





Only during their days off do they get a rest from their nocturnal schedules. However, many do not sleep much during the day because of altered sleep habits. They still “stay up,” attending to other tasks or just enjoy daytime.

Kevin is a twenty-one year old call center agent. He was born in Palawan although his family is from Bukidnon. He lives with his only sister. He started working when he was eighteen year old at another call center, which he left after over two years for a much needed rest. Before going back to work as a call center agent, he tried farming, handling fish and livestock, and sales and marketing.

Kevin considers toothpaste important. He is “not much of a looker,” so he needs to have nice teeth. He makes sure to brush his teeth after every meal, to prevent his cavities from getting worse and to avoid another painful and expensive tooth extraction. At the time he had the tooth extracted, he had just resigned from his job and no longer had company-paid health benefits so he had to shoulder the cost of the extraction. He feels that he cannot yet afford the cost of another tooth extraction.

Typical street stall selling cigarettes, candies and other snacks.





Convenient store refrigerators filled mostly with alcoholic drinks.

Socialization in order to bond with friends and make new friends involves the use of chemicals.

Kevin smokes occasionally. He asks for cigarettes from friends or buys them and shares them with friends too. He prefers Lucky Strike or Fortune Lights, although he also tries those with “heavier” flavor. He learned to smoke from his father and the different cigarette brands from his friends. He used to believe that smoking makes him last longer when drinking with friends.

Jen is twenty-five years old and has been smoking since she was sixteen. She smokes Marlboro Red, although she used to smoke Winston. Most times she buys her cigarettes, but at other times she asks from friends. She learned smoking from friends, saying, “*Kasi I was with a circle na smokers. I tried, tapos kapag nagsusulat. Ewan, nahawa ako sa kanila*” (I was with a circle of smokers. I tried. And then when I write. I got influenced by them). She smokes five to ten sticks a day, sometimes more. She usually smokes before and after her work, after her meals, and during her breaks. She finds it hard to stop the habit, saying, “I just can’t let go of it anymore.”

More call center agents drink than smoke. Kevin takes Red Horse beer and Emperador Light brandy, the same drinks that Nikki takes. Jen takes Emperador too because *"Kasi yun ang gusto nila"* (That's what they like, referring to her friends). They drink to bond with coworkers and in particular to men, to boost their confidence. They socialize through drinking. Jen says that she drinks to bond with friends. Kevin says that he has no particular reason to drink, but he does it because his friends do it. "You never really like how it (the alcohol) tastes," he says.

Female call centers agents are free to wear makeup or not because the companies where they work do not require makeup. Nevertheless, they use cosmetics to create a good impression to coworkers. They compare brands and compliment each other's look. Lipstick is popular. Jen puts on face powder and lipstick before coming to work. She used Avon and Ever Bilena lipsticks before she shifted to LOL. Nikki wears lipstick and eyeliner at work but not on weekends. *"Nag-eyliner ako last Tuesday, tsaka mascara. Kagabi lang hindi, kasi brownout kahapon"* (I on eyeliner last Tuesday. And also mascara. Yesterday I didn't because we had a brownout anyway), Jen says.

Men use cologne, deodorant, and bath soap to feel fresh and clean and to look good. Some, though, use more products than the others. Kevin uses Vaseline for Men facial wash because "he wants to look better" like its endorser Jericho Rosales. Kevin uses Gripps hair wax because it smells good. He used to be a "fan" of Axe Apollo deodorant before he shifted to Rexona because his armpits "did not smell that bad" when he tried the product.

## CONCLUSION

Though invisible to their clients, DJs and call center agents use chemical products for different reasons. DJs take products in order to take good care of their voice as well as use cosmetics to look pleasing always because important persons visit the station anytime. In contrast, agents use cosmetics to create a good

impression on coworkers, feel fresh and clean. They smoke and drink to bond with coworkers and make new friends.

The work lives of radio DJs and call center agents are affected by their chemical use in contrasting ways. While radio DJs use chemical products as a means to improve their health condition and looks and thereby help promote their professional capability, call center agents are driven by personal pressure to fit in within the social dynamic in their workplace. The chemical lives of the two groups of workers focus on different areas of human experience: those of the DJs enhance their performance while those of the call center agents serve as anchors in their social interactions with their colleagues.

The company cultures in the radio stations and call centers also affect the habits and practices of their workers. DJs in a radio station are pressured to perform, so they maintain their body condition and energy through the use of chemicals. DJs are also pressured to look pleasant always, among the women to wear makeup while men have to maintain a pleasant appearance. Agents in a call center work within groups in crowded environments. Group opinion within the call center starts to matter on things like what brands to drink and which cigarettes can be shared.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> (DZRH, “DZRH History”) This historical account narrates a timeline of significant events in the 90-year history of commercial radio in the Philippines. It talks about the beginnings of Philippine radio as an enterprise introduced by American businessmen and ends abruptly with a discussion on how Martial Law affected radio in the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> (Medija, Brian Dexter, “Philippine Radio Broadcasting—A Report”) This report is a historical discussion on radio broadcasting in the Philippines. It talks about how early radio programs in the Philippines were mainly for entertainment and how radio broadcasting changed after the Second World War. Radio broadcasts after the Second World War started focusing on information and education to bring relevance to radio, marking the early beginnings of development broadcasting in the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup> (Tuazon, Ramon, “Philippine Television: That’s Entertainment”) This article is a historical discussion on the early beginnings of Philippine television and Philippine broadcasting. It identifies a commercial thrust within Philippine broadcasting, where it has freer reign over broadcast content compared to other East Asian countries. The commercial environment of Philippine broadcasting, however, makes it difficult for media to produce and broadcast public service and development-oriented programs.

<sup>4</sup> (Mozcom, “Corporate Profile”) This is the corporate profile of Mozcom, the first commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) in Philippine Internet history. It discusses its beginnings as a commercial provider: being established in 1994, setting up first nationwide coverage in June 1997 with dial up access points in all Philippine regions, and establishing the first international roaming service in 1998 in partnership with iPass.

<sup>5</sup> (Shepherd, Ben, and Gloria Pasadilla, “Services as a New Engine of Growth for ASEAN, the People’s Republic of China, and India”) This is a report by Ben Shepherd and Gloria Pasadilla on services as a new engine for growth for ASEAN, The People’s Republic of China, and India. This report, prepared for the Asian Development Bank,

identifies Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) as an important export earner in Asian economies such as India and the Philippines. In this report, results of a survey of firms are cited as a summary, cost reduction remains a dominant driver for the decision to offshore labor, but the importance of other drivers is increasing, including access to qualified labor, a need to have business process redesign, and increased speed to market.

<sup>6</sup> (Globalsky, “Call Center Industry in the Philippines”) This online article is a brief summary of the call center industry in the Philippines. It identifies two categories of call centers: inbound and outbound. It also identifies the three types of accounts that Philippine call centers handle: telemarketing, customer service, and technical support. It makes an implicit claim that Philippine telemarketing belongs to the inbound category.

<sup>7</sup> (Remote Staff Blog, “Why Businesses Are Outsourcing Call Centers to the Philippines”) This Australian blog article discusses the trend of outsourcing call centers in developing countries such as the Philippines, India, and a number of South American countries. It claims that the Philippines is a top choice for outsourcing labor because companies that outsource Philippine labor are able to make savings on labor costs. The article also claims that such companies can pay outsourced staff 30% of what they would pay to local staff for labor.

<sup>8</sup> (Palacios, Michael, “Internet in the Philippines: 20 years since”) This Rappler article by Philippine web pioneer Michael Palacios discusses the changes that Internet brought to the Philippines. He makes the claim that the entire BPO industry in the Philippines is essentially Internet-enabled.

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# **TOWARDS GWAPA: BEAUTY CAPITAL AMONG PHARMACY AND BEAUTY SHOP WORKERS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The quest for beauty may be traced back to our evolution—in the way we prefer certain traits in mates for the selective advantage that they give to offsprings (Grammer et. al., 2003). The mechanisms in sexual selection—mate competition and mate choice—involve preferences for certain traits in mates that would lead to more healthy offspring. As in the past, features “that are known to be reliable health and fertility indicators” (Grammer et. al. 2003, 388) are highlighted or emphasized through cosmetics.

Archaeological evidence show that prehistoric groups in the Philippines had beauty practices. These practices may be categorized into temporary and permanent adornments. Temporary adornment refers to jewelry such as earrings, pendants,

bracelets, and rings, while permanent adornment refers to bodily modifications such as cranial reformation, gold decoration for teeth, and tattooing. Besides conforming to the standards of beauty, early Filipinos used both temporary and permanent adornments to reflect special qualities, rank, or social status. In some groups body mutilation is a ritual that endows status on an individual. Other meanings that may be attached to adornment include endowment of magical qualities and curing of physical defects (Salcedo 1998, 231–241).

Colonialism influenced representations of feminine beauty in the Philippines. The portrayal of women and the evaluation of their beauty reflected the political and class relations between the colonizers and the colonized. Upper-class women, particularly the mestizas, were attractive because they were as refined as women in Western society. In contrast, poor women were regarded as counterparts of the male rebels. Their “hateful,” “scowling,” “ugly” faces reflected their “low civilization.” Rebelliousness and low civility suggested the need for the imperialists to pacify them through arms and develop “a modern nation” (Thompson 2013). In the wider global context, the “myth of colorism” (Kerr 2005, 271) shows that lighter skin is more preferred.

Capitalism and globalization have changed how we see beauty today. Countries such as France and USA are the producers of leading brands of cosmetics worldwide. Local cosmetic industries have patterned their production after them. Technological breakthroughs contributed to the huge increase in the types of products and choices (Jones 2010).

According to Rodilla (2009), “more than two million units of skin-lightening soap are sold annually in the Philippines.” A survey of the use of skin-lightening soap “revealed that, among its informants in the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines reported the highest rate of usage” (63). This phenomenon can be attributed to the notion that “skin color is an indicator of social class.” Lighter skin suggests that one is a member of the upper class who are mostly “light-skinned mixed-race Filipinos” (67). A beautiful Filipina has “extremely pale skin, straight jet-black hair, and large, double-lidded, almond-

shaped eyes” (64). This suggests the “valorization of East Asian beauty” (64) as well as Western notions of beauty.

These notions of what is beautiful can be concretized by looking at the beauty industry, according to Rondilla, “The beauty industry profits from the idea that one’s class has a particular look, and that look can be purchased” (2009, 68). Skin color has become a status marker, and through the use of skin lightening or whitening products one’s status can be “changed.” Through advertisements the industry emphasizes these notions, create need and demand, and provide the supply and profit from it (66). Lighter skin has become a significant symbolic capital in the workplace (Glenn 2008). Female workers are judged on the bases of efficiency and attractiveness, which are considered important in sales and marketing. Lighter-skinned Filipinas are seen as modern and socially mobile and more likely to be hired and promoted.

For our focus, we conducted our research among the beauty shops found in the city’s main wet market complex and pharmacies. The beauty shops are mostly open-air stores selling beauty products on wholesale basis. Usually owned by a Chinese businessmen, they sell imitations of high end and low end brands of popular perfumes,

A young worker in a beauty shop.





Several pharmacies within the same vicinity at Cogon Market.

lotions, shampoos, and slimming agents. Beauty shop workers serve double roles as both stockers and salespeople, they are in charge of storing, arranging the display, inventory, and selling.

Some pharmacies can also be found in the market complexes. Most of our respondents came from Cogon and Divisoria, while one came from another area. In Cogon Market the pharmacies are found near each other, usually one store apart and directly across each other. Divisoria, on the other hand, is located in the city center, close to a university. The same set up exists, although there are more pharmacies there than in Cogon.

Despite the number of pharmacies concentrated in a single area and considering the number of pharmacies in the city, each pharmacy we visited had many customers. It was difficult to request for interviews because the pharmacy workers were busy entertaining customers, often called in and out of the stockrooms, and their work ended late in the day. So we interviewed them at work despite the inconvenience and disruptions. The CCTV installed in the pharmacies influenced the conduct of the interview. They made our informants and us conscious of the length of the interviews. We conducted the interviews as briefly as possible so as not to

compromise the quality of work of the pharmacy workers or get them into trouble with their supervisor.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### "Farmacia"

Jackie is single (unmarried), lives with her family, and has a boyfriend. She is a pharmacy (farmacia) assistant in Cogon Market, and she earns a minimum of Php326 per day, or approximately Php7,900 a month. It is her sole source of income. Jackie is not required to wear makeup, except for lipstick. "*Pangit tignan 'pag walang lipstick*" (One isn't pleasing to look at without lipstick), she says. However, she uses other makeup products, such as face powder, blush-on, and liquid eyeliner, to look more pleasing. It makes her feel more confident when she attends to customers. Not wearing makeup makes her worry about how her customers see her. She buys makeup products from her sister who is a dealer of Avon cosmetics.

Jackie uses Silka green papaya lotion to smoothen her skin. She also takes ferrous pills and vitamin E, two generic products by manufactured by United Home, a pharmaceutical company, for "*dagdag lakas, lakas ng loob*" (added strength and confidence). She tends to choose products based on recommendations of friends, acquaintances and sales agents. She shares these products with her family when she has "proven and tested" their effectiveness.

Like Jackie, Risa is single, lives with her family, and has a boyfriend. She is a pharmacy assistant in Divisoria, and she earns Php12,000 a month. She makes additional income from her "loading" business, she sells credits and prepaid cards used for mobile phones. She earns an additional amount of up to Php500 a week or Php1,000 a month. She finished her Pharmacy course in Bohol, took review classes for two months, passed the licensure examinations in 2010 and came home to Cagayan de Oro to work.



Some of the skin-whitening products sold in a pharmacy.

Risa buys most of the body products that she uses such as soaps and body lotions from her mother, who has a “networking business” and is an Avon dealer. In the past she used different brands such as Dove whitening soap, but has replaced these with products purchased from her mother which, according to her, work the same. She has also stopped using Pond’s facial wash because she had more pimple breakouts while using the product. Although she is not required to wear makeup at work, she puts on makeup to look and feel presentable. She uses Avon press powder, lipstick, blush-on, eyeshadow, and eyebrow liner. She puts on makeup in the morning, which she retouches at midday and in the evening. She thinks makeup boosts her confidence and has a positive effect on her relations with her customers. She adds that if she could afford to buy the more expensive make-up, she would.

Risa takes vitamin E capsules when she feels stressed. She refrains from taking it regularly because, according to her, it causes her to gain weight. Risa applies lotion in the morning and reapplies throughout the day to avoid having “scaly” skin. Lotion moisturizes her skin and protects it from the sun, she says. She takes Glutta capsules and Glutta-lite because they are effective in whitening her



skin. These products have a side effect, though, she said, her skin darkens when exposed to the sun.

MM is single and lives with her family. She finished a two-year assistant pharmacy course under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). She plans to take up medicine and hopes to work abroad. She currently works as an assistant in a pharmacy in Capistrano Street, where she earns less than PhP10,000 per month.

MM uses Palmolive shampoo for its fragrance. She finds it ineffective in making her hair “strong and shiny” as advertised. She uses Skin White lotion partly for skin lightening, but primarily to smoothen her skin. She uses Pond’s facial cream and Eskinol skin cleanser. She finds both effective in preventing pimple breakouts. She started using RDL cleanser but discontinued it because it caused her skin to redden. The most important product for her is the bath soap. In the past she used Safeguard but switched to Skin White when she saw its advertisements. She also used a different brand of shampoo but switched to Palmolive because its fragrance lasted the “whole day long.”

MM believes that “just enough” make up enhances natural beauty – the “*beauty ng Filipina*” (Filipina beauty). The pharmacy where she works requires its female workers to wear makeup but does not strictly enforce the policy. The pharmacy has no air conditioning, and the sweat caused by the heat and the task of cleaning the pharmacy makes it impractical for the female workers to put on much makeup, she explained. She uses Careline lipstick and Pond’s powder because they do not irritate her skin unlike other brands that she had tried.

LA started her internship with a popular nationwide pharmacy chain before continuing with a locally-owned one at Cogon Market. She is in her third year of her studies in pharmacy at the local university. She does not have any income, but receives an allowance from her parents. Some of the body products that she uses come from Amway, of which her mother is a member.



While on her internship, her instructor told her that interns are required to put on lipstick so they will not look pale. She wears Amway lipstick but does not wear or use any other cosmetic products because, she told us, she does not know how to apply them. Still, she thinks that she would look more pleasing if she puts on makeup. She said that she may eventually wear more makeup or use other cosmetic products if this would be required wherever she is employed in the future.

Wearing make up is like “adding the ideal to the real” (Power 1990). Makeup becomes an added capital, and is perceived to increase returns in terms of customer service. Chemical use is geared more towards a social and performative purpose. However, according to an interview conducted with a pharmacy manager, when they lack time to fix themselves through the day, they can “sacrifice” the ideal image of wearing full makeup, to prioritize attending to the customers.

### **“Gwapa”**

Daniela is a salesgirl at Graceful Beauty Shop. Being new in the shop, she earns only PHP1,650.00 for the thirty days that she works. She will become a regular employee after six months and earn a regular salary that is twice of what she receives at present. She uses Kojic acid soap that her cousin recommended because it has been “proven and tested.” It whitens the skin, clears out dark spots and pimple scars. She uses it because she wants to become fairer. She cannot do without it, saying, “*Pinapagalitan (ko) talaga ang lola ko ‘pag nawawala (ito)*” (I scold my grandmother when I can’t find it).

Daniella uses Palmolive shampoo to moisturize her hair and to remove split ends. She applies Verdant keratin conditioner on her hair five to ten minutes before washing it off to avoid dry, damaged, and falling hair. She buys the products from the beauty shop where she works. She uses Avon lotion but prefers Milk Lotion. Avon moisturizes but does not whiten the skin. She uses Johnson’s face powder, MAC imitation lipstick and eyebrow pencils that she buys at the beauty shop. She also sometimes uses eyeliners that are “made in China,” which she also buys from the shop, for

*“pampadagdag ng paganda”* (to enhance my beauty). She does this because, according to her, at the end of the day her face can look “haggard” or tired and stressed. When pressed for her reasons for using makeup, she said that she and her fellow shop workers work in “cosmetology” and sell beauty products, so they also need to look beautiful. She started using makeup when she began working in the beauty shop, although she has been using face powder since her days as a student. She puts on makeup before she starts work in the morning, then retouches it in the middle of her workday.

Rea is a single mother who has been working at Graceful Beauty Shop in Cogon Market for two years. She earns around PhP4,000 a month. She uses Palmolive Damage Repair shampoo because it makes her hair “beautiful, bouncy, and smell good.” Her boyfriend attests to this, she said. She uses two soaps, Silka Papaya and Maxi Peel. She rubs some of Silka Papaya soap onto a towel, scrubs her skin with the towel, and rinses off. She has been using Silka Papaya since her teens because it whitens her skin. After Silka Papaya, she uses Maxi Peel body soap on her face and then on her body. She learned about Maxi Peel’s whitening effect from advertisements. She uses the two soaps because *“di (ako) kuntento*

Products used by one of the beauty shop workers: lipstick, lip gloss, eye-shadow palette, eyeliner, powder and cologne.



*sa isang sabon*" (I am not content with using just one kind of soap). After a bath she applies Moist lotion, a product that is also "made in China" and is "truly moisturizing," according to its label. She also applies Milk lotion, which is "made in Thailand." She explains that it is supposed to whiten as it moisturizes the skin. She has a discount from the shop where she works, so she gets most of her products from there.

Rea uses blush-on, eyebrow pencil, and lipstick. When she is not sure of where the products sold in the shop are from, she tells her customers they are "made in China." She has been using make up since she started working at the shop last year. She used to be a sales girl and was not required to put on make up. She took it upon herself to wear make up to prove to her customers that her products are "effective." According to her, she will continue to use the same products to avoid allergies caused by other products as this has happened to her in the past.

Girlie is single and lives with her family. She is a sales girl at a beauty supply shop where she earns PhP6,000 per month. She uses Silka body soap because she finds it "okay" for her skin despite the slight tingling feeling on her skin when she is out in the sun. She is required to wear make-up at work. She uses Skin White cream foundation, Johnson's face powder, mascara, eyebrow pencil, blush-on, and lipstick for her everyday makeup. She does not remember the brands of the eyebrow pencil, blush-on, and lipstick that she uses. She used Ever Bilena beauty cream before but found the brand expensive, so she switched to Skin White.

Girlie considers facial cream most important because, "*pangit kasi tingnan ang mukha 'pag wala*" (The face looks ugly without it). Besides facial cream, she also considers products for personal hygiene important. She also feels that in the future, she would be using more products "*pampatanggal ng wrinkles*" (to remove wrinkles).

Jana is a working student. She is a sales girl at Mommy's Beauty Supply along Pabayo Street where she earns PhP4,000 a month. She attends classes after work to a degree in Business Administration.

Jana uses Safeguard soap because its has “antibacterial properties.” She is “exposed *buong araw*” (exposed all day), so she needs to feel clean. “*Sa ibang sabon, nangangati ako*” (Other soap brands make me feel itchy), so she feels that she cannot do without Safeguard. She uses mentholated Head and Shoulders shampoo because it makes her scalp feel good. She prefers Watson’s lotion for its whitening and moisturizing effect on her skin, and Avon deodorant because it does not cause the darkening of her underarm skin. She uses Top Gel vitamin E to further whiten her skin, although “*mabaho ang dating (nito)*” (it smells bad) and makes her skin feel rough. She uses Avon lipstick because other brands make her lips feel dry, “feeling (*ko*) *parang may chemical*” (I feel other brands have chemical), she says. She applies makeup in the morning and retouches her lipstick before leaving work in the afternoon. She puts on makeup only for “daily use” at work and does not consider them a “must” in life.

## CONCLUSION

Environment, accessibility, effectiveness, and knowledge influence the choice and use of chemicals among pharmacy assistants and sales girls working in beauty shops.

Environment refers to the workplace, the home, and the conditions therein, particularly the heat and pollution.

Accessibility refers to the availability and affordability of the products. It includes the places where they buy the products, usually the place where they work and those sold through direct marketing, and the prices of the products.

Effectiveness refers to the efficacy of the products based on experience. Allergic reactions to the products are explained away in favor of the desired effects, especially the whitening of the skin. The tingling feeling on the skin caused by the use a product is proof that it is ‘working,’ and in other cases still not a deterrent to stop their use.

Knowledge refers to the level of awareness and information about the effects of the product on the body based on experience and other sources. Use or disuse of a product is based on observations of the effects of the product on the body, especially the skin, such as allergic reactions to it through time. Information about a product, including contraindications, and opinions from others who tried the product enhances experiential knowledge.

The desired effect of using a product is more important than its adverse effects: thus, beauty first before safety and health. An in-depth study of uncertified beauty products is recommended to safeguard the rights of the consumers to safe products. The study may inform the Food and Drug Administration towards the regulation of unsafe beauty drugs that proliferate in the market.

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# SELLING HOPES, MARKETING DREAMS

## INTRODUCTION

Network marketing is the system of selling by a network of people linked in a pyramid-like structure that enables a member of the network to earn money every time he/she brings someone into the structure. The earnings of the member depends on the number of people that he/she recruits and the revenues these people contribute to the business.

Network marketing companies open their main office in Metro Manila, then they put up branches in other areas of the country. An exception to this is Victorious and Wealthy International Corporation (BE#1): its main office is in Cagayan de Oro.

Two MLM companies that operate in the city through their branches are Royalé Cagayan de Oro and UNO. Together with BE#1, their presence suggests that MLM is a flourishing business sector in the city. BE#1 International was established in June of 2013 when Marcos Aguinaldo, a resident of Cagayan de Oro, who was part owner of another networking corporation, left the latter to start his own company. From an office in Makati City, BE#1 International moved to establish its main office in Cagayan de Oro. Its products are manufactured by Gloom Incorporated, a company owned by a co-owner of BE#1. Gloom also provides products for other companies in the Philippines.

Our study focuses on BE#1. It tries to explore the phenomenon of network marketing, why it thrives in Cagayan de Oro, and its influence on the people of the city. We conducted interviews with MLM agents, key officers in the company, and “mentors” in the company. Many of those who engage in MLM are students. Members work either on full-time, or part-time basis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The World of Networking

The members of BE#1 are called “*up-lines*” and “*down-lines*.” Pretend you were invited to join the company. The person who invited you is one of your *up-lines*, together with all the people who are up-lines of your immediate up-line. When you have become a member and invite other people to join the company, the people you have invited are your *down-lines*. The people who are your immediate down-line recruit others to join the company; their recruits also become part of your down-lines. The youngest members are eighteen years old and the oldest are in their early forties. The leaders are in their late thirties or early forties.

More experienced members become mentors or role models who conduct orientations to new recruits and train members to become mentors and leaders. Some members frequent the office. During



Food supplements, vitamins, and energy drinks. "Gift for the masses."

trainings, they mix in with the audience, answer the speaker's questions, or shout their agreement with the speaker whenever he/she makes a good point.

A BE#1 agent can earn in four ways: (1) selling the company's beauty products and health drinks; (2) earn products worth PHP600.00 for every person they invite who joins the company; (3) Match-Sales Bonus for every pair of invites; and (4) 3% rebates for every down-line they recruit.

### **The Process**

Like other MLM companies, BE#1 invites people to join them through spoken invitations and advertisements.

Members invite first those they refer to as "warm people," i.e., their family, friends, and others who trust them. They have a better chance of receiving a "warm" reception from these people. This shows that kinship and friendship are important recruitment criteria. John rationalizes this by saying, *"Syempre, gugustuhin niyo bang mauna kumita ang hindi niyo kilala?"* They next invite

those they refer to as “cold people” or those who are not personally known to the members.

Many are invited to join the company but only few join the orientation. Members have to resort to *diskarte* (tactic) to make invites attend the orientation. The most important *diskarte* involves inviting family members and friends out for food or drinks and promising freebies, which is most often also food.

The second type of invitation is through posterage or the use of advertisements, usually flyers, brochures, posters, banners, etc. These materials banner “Urgent Hiring” for various jobs as well as provide the company’s contact details, and “interview dates.” They are distributed or strategically posted along busy roads, outside schools and offices to attract interested parties. Lured by the prospects of employment, people either call the contact numbers or go directly to the office for “interviews.” However, instead of an HR office, they are treated as guests and ushered into a room where others are “guests” are seated. The leaders and leaders-in-training give the “guests” the “open mind” talk which is a sort of pre-orientation. The talk makes it clear to them that the company offers business opportunities and not employment. BE#1 does not consider the strategy a kind of deception. Besides, a member said, attendance in an orientation does not necessarily lead to membership. Bella, a BE#1 says, “It’s up to them if they will join or not [...] it’s not good to force people.”

The leaders or would-be leaders give the orientation only to guests who opt to stay. The orientation gives the guests in-depth information about what members do, how they earn, and how much they earn. The orientation focuses on how one can reach one’s dreams with BE#1 rather than about the company’s products.

Some guests find the orientation helpful. With an initial “pay-in” of “as low as” PhP2,150.00, the guest is inducted into the company. Products worth PhP2,000.00 are given to the new member to use or dispose as he/she wishes. Membership privileges include an office to visit, “Buy1 Take1,” a secret handshake, and a community to call their own. New members are then referred to as “leaders-in-the-

making” and on their way to success depending on their diskarte, with the company guiding them every step of the way.

### **Not your usual traditional business**

MLM is distinct from two other types of businesses, namely, traditional business and franchising. Traditional businesses are profit-oriented, ranging from small-scale *sari-sari* stores (small neighborhood stores) to big establishments such as banks and malls. The profits from these businesses are huge, but they also require huge investments and the probability of bankruptcy is high. Franchising is grounded on cooperative agreement whereby one party uses a company’s brand name, trademark, products, and services for a fee. It also requires huge capital that MLM members do not have in the first place.

One major advantage of MLM is that it requires little capital, which could be as low as P300.00 for initial membership fee, but the returns are great. The concept is similar to but distinguished from network-based marketing that “takes advantage of links between consumers to increase sales” (Hill, Provost and Volinsky 2006). MLM networkers work for themselves, and not for a boss or employer. “Don’t settle [at being an] employee, go for business [which is BE#1 International],” John tells the recruits. Like the *negosyante* (businessmen), they can have more choices in life. He explains further,

*Hindi mo nalalaman iisa lang yung sweldo [sa pagiging empleyado]... ang dami mong effort, time na ginugol mo sa trabaho mo pero... [y]ung company mismo yung kumikita. Dito sa networking, tayo ang kumikita. [...] kami yung boss, kami yung makakapili ng lugar kung saan kami magtatayo, kung kailan kaming oras pupunta dito, kasi yung effort namin nakasalalay sa income namin.*

### **The power of language**

Language plays an important role in MLM. It is maximized during orientation, recruitment, and training. Members greet each other



The Royale company sells beauty products such as soap and lotion. They also sell food supplements, coffee, energy drinks and home care products.

“Good morning!” regardless of the time of day, because “morning” implies a brighter future that they aspire to achieve through the company. The speaker greets the guests this way and asks them to respond the same way to set the tone that the activity is about empowerment to achieve dreams and goals.

During orientations, the speakers use jargons from economics, such as net profit, sales, balances, and relate these to MLM. They provide calculations of what a member can earn as networker. They encourage questions from the audience but would cut-off anyone from answering them. All these to project their “expertise.” To subliminally assert their ‘correctness,’ they would ask, “*O tama ba ako?*” (Am I right?). The same things would be repeated during every orientation--verbatim and said in the same manner.

The use of language becomes more important during the recruitment stage, which involves more talk between the audience, speakers, and leaders. The audience breaks up into small groups and a speaker would be assigned to each group. The speakers try to probe into the guest’s family, personality, and financial status. They

would ask, “*Hirap ka ba sa buhay mo ngayon? Anu-ano ang iyong mga pangangailangan?*” (Are you struggling with your life now? What are the things that you need?). A participant would usually share his/her woes and financial difficulties. The speakers would say, “*Ang kahirapan ay hindi mo kasalanan [kung nandiyan na ito] pagkapanganak sa ‘yo. Kasalanan ito kapag nanatili kang mahirap hanggang sa iyong kamatayan*” (It is not a sin if you were born poor. But it is a sin if you remain poor until you die). Then they would start asking about the guest’s’ parents, jobs, and situation, and follow this up with a remark, “*Kasalanan ng iyong magulang kaya hindi pa rin kayo nakakaraos. Gagayahin mo ba sila o gagawa ka ng paraan? Tama ba sinasabi ko?*” (It is your parents’ fault that you still experience financial difficulties. Will you be like them or will you do something to get out of these difficulties? Am I right?). They conclude the session by showing how MLM can provide the guests the solution to the financial problems they are facing.

Once a guest has decided to join the company, he/she can go to free training sessions conducted by the speakers to mold him/her into an ideal BE#1 networker. The trainings include the BE#1 Primer, Speakership, and values and character formation. They focus on networking strategies, responsibilities, and goals of an ideal networker. They are mindful of the stigma that MLM has. Thus, they choose the terms that they use to avoid those that already have negative connotations. Although “invite” and “recruit” refer to the same thing, they prefer former because the latter has negative connotations.

### **Threads of evangelism**

Most BE#1 members are young adults who used to be employed in sales or related fields. They come from the low to middle economic classes, and several of them suffered from the effects of Typhoon Sendong that struck Cagayan de Oro in 2011. The idea that they could get rich if they become networkers motivated them to join BE#1.

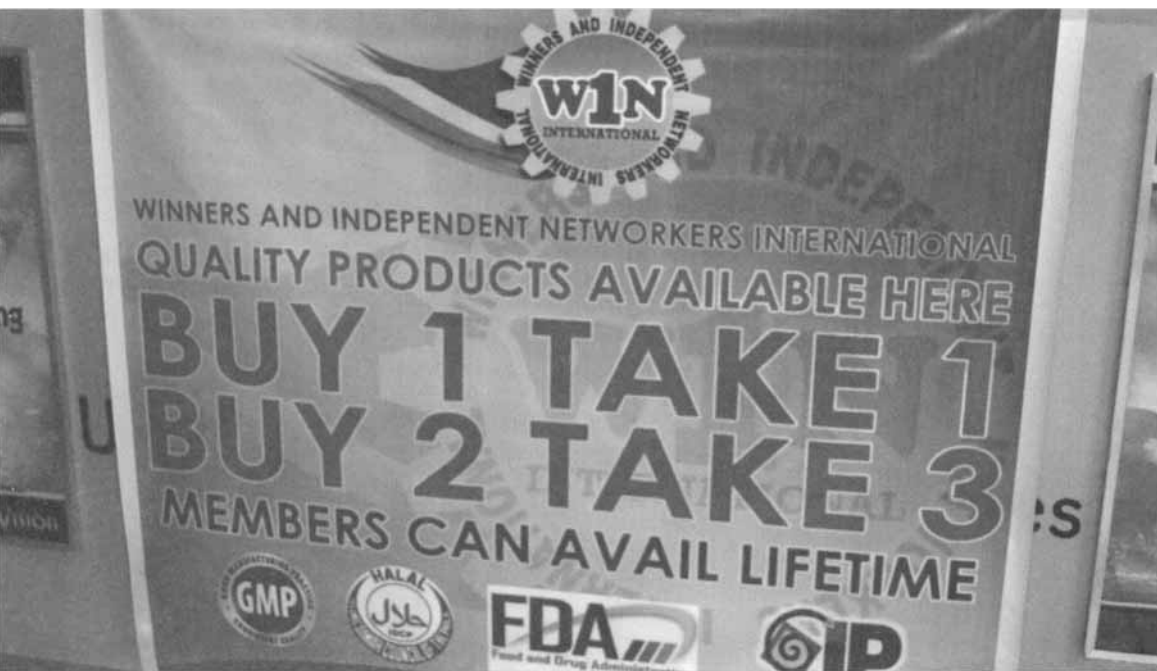
No BE#1 networker has earned more than what they earned in their old jobs. They believe, though, that they will reap the great



profits promised to them soon. Their involvement reflect this: they are always at the office; they greet each other “Good morning” any time of the day; they hang around the different sessions; and they serve as an affirming audience by shouting “Yes!” and “Power!” during orientations. Bhatakarya and Mehta (2000) explain this as “contradiction of minimal pay and such huge involvement,” they propose that network marketing organizations build on religion, calling them “quasi-religions” or even more extreme, “cults.” Networkers are driven not by any form of “mind control” or religion, but rather by the social output of working in a group, and that what keeps them together is the “social satisfaction” achieved by the community they build.

Religion plays a role in network marketing culture at BE#1. Being “centered on God” is an important element of BE#1 culture. The speakers relate the concepts discussed in their lectures with verses from the Christian Bible. Jeremiah 29:11 is the most quoted verse: “For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” It is quoted to support a statement from “Big Bro” Aguinaldo: “The path to prosperity is set for us by God and it is our duty to follow it out of

One MLM’s advertising banner emphasizes membership advantage and product certifications.





our poverty.” Mentors reinforce this during prayer meetings held every Wednesday and Friday. Members share their insights about the Bible before trainings and meetings to keep the group’s team spirit alive, strong and lively. Only by putting God first can one find success, “Earn more money, earn more friends, but above all, first find faith in God and everything will be given,” Caesar, a BE#1 leader and mentor, says.

Leaders and mentors conduct the orientations and trainings for free. *“Wala kaming natatanggap sa kumpanya. Ang gusto lang namin ay makatulong sa iba”* (We do not receive anything from the company; we just want to help others), says Caesar. They do this to develop their personality and to help other people help themselves. Motivated members share the belief that networking is a way out of poverty. One night, we encountered a BE#1 member sitting with a group of people on a street corner; when we asked why he was there, he replied that he was telling the group about the benefits of networking. Thus, network marketing is like evangelism in that it inspires networkers to go on a mission to “save” people from their old, non-leader type selves and from their financial difficulties.

### **Business as instrument of self-molding**

The path to success depends entirely on a person’s business strategy. At BE#1, however, there are specific models, behaviors, and outlooks that members must imbibe to set one on the path toward becoming a successful businessperson. Although the BE#1 member is responsible for his/her personal growth, whether in a spiritual, emotional, or financial sense, he/she is required to undergo training to develop his/her personality and be “molded into a leader.” It is this training that all members hold in high regard.

### ***The trainings***

Members consider the trainings that BE#1 provide them their greatest advantage. The trainings are perceived to be more than the pay-in and membership fee combined. Aizza believes that *“Kahit wala na yung products, sa trainings pa lang bawing-bawi ka na.”* (Even without the products, the trainings already compensate [for your fee]). The development of the personality of a leader and

“winner” achieved through training is considered more important, while the products are just means for earning money. For leaders like Bella, trainings are valuable because they make members effective businesspeople and develop in them the confidence to conduct trainings themselves. She says, *“Importante yung training [...] para siyang education para sa mga taong sasali sa negosyo kasi hindi naman lahat pinanganak na negosyante”* (The trainings are important. It’s an education for people who want to do business, because not everyone is born a businessman).

The basic trainings have titles such as “8 Ways to Earn” and “10-Finger Approach.” These are conducted for first-timers. The first topic is also taken up during orientations, with the second topic occasionally also included in the sessions. The topics concentrate on teaching the members on how to sell the company’s products, how to invite people to the company, together with lessons on business, economics, life in general, and how to reach one’s dreams. The slogan, “Don’t let negative people steal your dreams” is about handling rejection from prospective recruits. “Business *mo ‘to, sarili mo ‘to, trabahuin mo*” (This is your own business, you have to work [hard] at it).

The business mantra of the BE#1 leaders goes, *“Ibaba [mo] ang pride, itaas ang pangarap”* (Lower your pride, raise your aspiration), and is about handling rejection. They also like to quote John Maxwell’s principle: “The goal is more important than the rule.” The members are meant to interpret this to mean that no matter the limitations that are set for them now, no matter the rules given, these should not be deterrents towards achieving their dreams.

Several other concepts regarding personality development are taught to develop “speakership.” One must learn to speak to people properly to catch, command and sustain their attention. Good sales talk is an important skill to be able to sell and entice others to join the company. Each member is encouraged to speak out at lectures and trainings because, *“Walang naging top earner sa BE#1 na hindi speaker”* (No one gets to be a top earner at BE#1 without [first] being a [good] speaker). The trainings make a member “BE#1ner” for life.

### ***The team spirit***

BE#1 members show a high regard for team support and team spirit. The familiarity that the members develop with each other evolves into friendship and camaraderie. This, in turn, cultivates a sense of community, at which point the members are to truly believe that they are in the company to help not only their loved ones but everyone else--following the example of the Good Samaritan in the Bible. Exclamations of "Yes!", "*Tama!*", "Power!" to express agreement with a point a co-member makes during a training manifest team spirit.

This team support is something BE#1 dealers are proud of. It is something that they have not fully experienced in the companies that they had joined before, they attest. According to Bella, it is the culture of support, help, unity, and solidarity that sets BE#1 apart from other companies and makes it an ideal company.

## **CONCLUSION: NETWORKING AND PHILIPPINE SOCIETY**

The struggle to survive in a fast-paced, competitive, demanding, and neo-liberal society is partly about how much money one makes.

When a BE#1 speaker asks the audience, "*Ano ba ang dreams and goals ninyo sa buhay?*" (What are your dreams and goals in life?), almost everyone in the audience shouts the same words: "*Pera!*" (Money!), "*Bahay!*" (House!), "*Kotse!*" (Car!). This happens at every session. When the speaker asked us about our ultimate dream, one of us answered "*Masayang pamilya*" (A happy family"). The speaker paused for a minute before saying, "*Hindi. Gusto mo ay maging milyonaryo, di ba? Kasi hindi magiging masaya pamilya mo kung wala kang maigagasta para sa kanila*" (No, your dream is to become a millionaire, right? Because you cannot have a happy family if you do not have money to spend on them).

Networking is based on the idea that money is the answer to every financial woe and that accumulating money must be everyone's goal in life. BE#1 International aims to provide the means to

attaining that goal. People with financial difficulties only need to sell products, invite others to join the company, and in the process get the help they need: this is BE#1's formula that assures success and happiness.

Cagayan de Oro is a magnet to migrants, especially those from the rural areas of Mindanao. This is why the city has become a melting pot of people from all walks of life. However, in reality, what the city offers are mostly contractual and blue-collar jobs for those who seek work. Compounding the situation is contractualization, which does not entitle workers to full-time, tenure, and social benefits. Low wages, long working hours, and monotonous work contribute to difficulty and disenchantment with their jobs. BE#1 believes that it offers something better than this. Its formula for success maybe stated as follows: sell BE#1 products; recruit other people into the company; and BE#1 will help members all the way. As Caesar says, "*Sa pagiging empleyado para kang factory worker na paulit-ulit [ang] mga ginagawa tapos gigising ka nang maaga kahit hindi mo kagustuhan pero gagawin kasi kailangan*" (As an employee, you are like a factory worker repeatedly doing the same things. You have to wake up early even if you hate to, but do so because you have to). John adds, saying, "*Kahit mag-overwork ka, hindi ka rerewardan sa pag-overtime na iyon*" (Even if you work overtime, you will not be rewarded). The members agree that the employer-employee relationship and underemployment are unfair.

A striking metaphor maybe drawn from the talk of a speaker in one of the orientations, he likened poverty to prison, BE#1 to a lawyer, and BE#1 products as bail. One can do something with his/her situation, he insisted, "*Hindi masama na maipanganak kang mahirap pero hindi na maganda kung sa iyong pagkamatay mo ay mahirap ka pa rin.*" (It is not bad to be born poor, but it is not alright to also die poor). BE#1 is one's salvation from poverty.

John says that BE#1 is "selling hopes" and not products. MLM, however, is as exploitative as any business: the owners of the company control the business, make decisions, and earn more than the networkers. It feeds into the consumerist values of capitalism

and exploits networkers even more by making them recruit new members for greater profits to the company.

MLM operates like the traditional business model that it criticizes. It is hierarchical: the owners and “uplines” earn a lot more than the “downlines.” The members work long hours, they do not have tenure, and they do not have social benefits. The idea that BE#1 is salvation from poverty masks, subtly, the inherently exploitative nature of MLM.

BE#1 presents itself as a new business model that has a salvific aim – to deliver its members out of poverty. Sell BE#1 products, recruit new members, and leave all else to the company is what BE#1 considers its surefire formula for success. BE#1 operates like a cult whose members are poor as ever but remain loyal to the company. Such loyalty, though, is due to the satisfaction the members derive from having a community that they help create (Bhatakarya and Mehta 2000), and from the notion that soon, someday, they too will earn much and escape poverty.

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# CHEMICAL TRANSITIONS: PRODUCT-USE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

## INTRODUCTION

There are fifteen colleges and universities in Cagayan de Oro, and all of them are located in urban barangays. One is a public university (SUC), nine are private nonsectarian (PN), and five are private sectarian (PS). The total college population in Cagayan de Oro for school year (SY) 2011–2012 was 43,391 (CHED Region 10). This is so far the highest number of student enrollees in Region 10. Influx of students from neighboring provinces, cities, and municipalities contributed to the number of tertiary student enrollees in CDO.

Schools in Cagayan de Oro provide more course choices than other schools in Mindanao besides Davao City. It is for this reason that the city has become the best place for college students from nearby

provinces. Moreover, the presence of relatives and friends in the city help make the rural-urban transition easy.

The paper deals with the stories of transition of college students in Cagayan de Oro from the provinces. The transition occurs in two stages: a movement from the rural to urban life and a progression from elementary or high school to college. Wirth (1939) defined the many characteristics of urban areas that are still significant today, such as the density of the area that leads to the diversification and specialization of many habits. These habits intermingle with customs from “back home” (from the provinces--the rural area), and students decide according to what is deemed acceptable to their newfound peers, what do they keep, modify and completely change about themselves. Using interviews and geotagging, the paper probes into how the use of chemical products marks such transitions. Most of the college students who participated in the research are second generation migrants: they are children of migrants who met, married, and settled in the city. Life in the city makes them adapt to lifestyles that accompany the transitions that they undergo in life, including the use of chemical products.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Rafky (1971) defines *socialization* as “the process whereby the objective, i.e., external and coercive world of social objects, norms, values, institutions, and legitimations, become subjectively real to the individual.” The self molds himself/herself into the socially acceptable modes of thinking and behavior through the intervention of parents, peers, and institutions (Clausen 1968). In regard the goal of socialization, Warren says,

The goal of the socialization process is an individual who identifies with other people or situations. This is a result of the child’s interjecting or absorbing the environment or personality of others into . . . [his] own psyche to the extent of reacting to external events as though they were internal ones (143).



Selfhood is thus the “product of reflected appraisals” (Rafky 1971). Blumer (1966) adds,

The self bends around and perceives, feels and literally observes itself as if it were an external object. Because the individual can, in this manner, make himself the object of his own actions, he is able to indicate or ‘designate things to himself—his wants, his pains, his goals, objects around him the presence of others, their actions, their expected actions, or whatnot.

The narratives of students show how the use of chemicals becomes part of their socialization into urban society.

### **Life and Change, An Overview**

Students regard college differently. Milo asserts that college is hard, but a necessary sacrifice for a better future. Yen enjoys the freedom that she has as a college student. Hermie feels the same way, saying, “*Nung nag-college na kasi ako, parang mas free na ako gumala nang mas matagal kasi nung high school, pagkatapos ng klase uwi agad*” (I am more free to stay out in college, while in high school I had to go home immediately after class). However, they feel responsible for the independence their parents give them.

School work and out of school activities cause stress. Because of this, some students take vitamins and energy drinks to help them cope with stress. A typical university student for example has 27 units or about 9 subjects or class every semester, with each class lasting for at least an hour. Students do their requirements even during breaks, sometimes forgoing lunch to finish various requirements. This leaves little time for personal care. Some of the students also hold positions in their university student councils, perform duties as student assistants, and pursue part-time work or enterprise. Oftentimes, to keep up with all their academic requirements they stay up through night missing on sleep. They have to juggle and come up with different ways to cope with the stress. Some resort to taking vitamins and energy drinks to invigorate them. Others listen

to music or hang out with friends for a sense of balance before plunging back to their schoolwork.

### ***Migrant Stories: Urban-Urban And Urban-Rural Transitions***

Zobi is from Zamboanga City. Life in the city was not as easy as she thought. Her first problem was language. She spoke Chavacano, a Spanish creole, not Bisaya, the lingua franca of Cagayan de Oro. She had a hard time communicating with her classmates. Oftentimes, they would talk to her only in Bisaya. She could not use Tagalog because Cagayanons prefer Bisaya. She had to learn Bisaya.

Ties with kin are urbanizing agents in helping students find their bearings in the city. Living with an older sister helped Zobi adjust to life in the city. She had to make some adjustments. She had to be more sociable, patient, and independent. She relates, "*Mas naging independent ako. Mas marami akong natutunan sa life*" (I became more independent. I have learned more about life). She and her sister plan the menu and cook their own food, which is different from their life in Zamboanga. She says, "*Sa Zamboanga, donya ka talaga. Sila mag-isip ng pagkain na iluluto then kakainin mo nalang unless kung mag-ask sila kung ano ang gusto mo*" (I did not work in

Sari-sari store located in front of a university, conveniently located to cater to students' needs from food, body products to "loading" phone credit.



Zamboanga. Other people cook and prepare your food unless you state your preference). She had to learn how to take the jeepney and use money wisely or else she would go broke before her parents send her allowance for the next month.

Zobi is now free to buy what she wants. She explores brands and products that are new to her and suit her taste such as for her soap and shampoo, “*Mas marami akong ginagamit na products dito at mas nakaka-choose ako kung anong products yung gusto ko. Kasi sa Zambo mom ko yung bumibili,*” she says (I use more products here, and I choose what I want. In Zamboanga it was my mom who bought me things).

Ning is a Talaandig from Little Baguio, a village in Mirayon, Talakag, Bukidnon. People in Little Baguio do not use deodorant because of the cold. In Cagayan de Oro, she had to put on *tawas* (alum) for deodorant as advised by her father. Ning lives with her aunt and cousins, but her mother visits her on weekends to buy her things. She observed what her aunt and cousins used and tried taking energy drink, Cobra, and liquor on some occasions.

Ning learned to wear makeup in Cagayan de Oro, something, which is uncommon in her hometown. According to her, the overall thinking of people in Bukidnon is still conservative when compared to that of people in the city. Ning is a networker (she is a member of a multi-level marketing company), and among the cosmetic brands that she endorses are Avon, Maybelline, SunDance, and Super Plus. She has to look good to serve as a “walking advertisement” for her products. She says, “*Parang multo*” ([I] look like a ghost [without makeup]), and she is “*Patay kapag walang lipstick*” ([I] look dead without lipstick). Her coworkers are not used to seeing her without lipstick. Her mother tells her that “*Ano bayan, andami mong pintados sa mukha!*” (You’ve got a lot of paintwork on your face!).

## Phases of Change in the Youth

### *The Development of the Body*

Culture enables us to adapt to any ecological niche (Boughney 1971). Culture affects adolescents at the onset of puberty. Consider

for example *menarche*, the time when a girl begins her menstrual cycle (Chen 2002). Yen considered herself as “*dalaga na*” (already a woman) when she had her menarche and started using feminine wash. Funky body odor and body hair signal that the body is maturing. The body undergoes changes as it grows old, particularly the onset of body odor and body hair and change in voice tone. His father told Choi that deodorant is “*para sa mga binata ‘yan*” (for grown men). He realized that he was already binata when he started to smell and put on deodorant to mask the odor. Hermie noticed that, “*yung boses biglang nag-iba, [at] may buhok na sa kili-kili*” (The voice changed [and] I now had hair in my armpit). The physical changes affect the social. Boys begin to smell at the onset of puberty, and girls talk about this. Francis recalls that, “*Pinagtatawanan nila. Tapos pag-uusapan nila, magbubulungan sila, ‘Ang baho nya!’ So sinabi ko talaga sa sarili ko na ayokong mapag-usapan. Naging conscious na talaga ako sa amoy ko*” (My female classmates laughed at guys who smelled. They talked about them in whispers. I did not want to be talked about because of my odor. It made me conscious of my smell). So he used cologne and body spray to prevent people talking about his smell.

### ***The Development of Relationships***

College life attests to changes in social relations. As they mature, college students become less affected by the opinion of others about them. Yen says, “In high school, it mattered a lot what other people said, *pero pagka-college, hindi na. Dahil sa college, iba talaga ang environment mo, yung mga people na ma-encounter mo. Dapat kasi flexible ka especially kapag magbabago yung environment mo*” (What other people said that mattered in high school did not in college anymore. The environment and the people that you meet in college are different. You have to be flexible when your environment changes).

Many students explore “relationships” when in college by trying to attract the opposite sex for a relationship. Francis and Kin had their first relationships with girls in college because they already had the confidence to do so.



A variety of soaps to choose from.

Women give their boyfriends cosmetics for gifts. Francis's girlfriend gave him Avon lip balm and Bench cologne. Hermie's former girlfriend gave him Bench cologne, which he discontinued after their break-up because he is not used to using the product. He says, "*Binigyan kasi ako ng girlfriend ko, sayang naman kung hindi ko gamitin*" (My girlfriend gave me [Bench cologne], so I used it rather than waste it). This act reinforces relationship as mediated by a material exchange; in this case a chemical product. This "practice" evokes a certain expectation for those in a romantic relationship to mutually act in a certain way to show they reciprocate the "expressions of love."

### ***Resistance to Parental Control***

Parents exercise strong influence not only their children's choice of courses in college but also on their use of products. This conflicts with the college students' claims for independent decisions about their bodies, especially in regard the choice of products.

Some parents, however, could still be 'controlling' over their children in college, which could be a source of conflict (David 1940; Coleman 61; Sherif and Sherif 65; Smith 52). Parents continue to tell them the time they should sleep or the vitamins to take. Her



One of the many convenient stores, open 24 hours, found around the city.

mother makes Mom take iron pills that she describes as “*parang metal*. [*Ano*] *ba yan! Ang nasty talaga. Nakakaloka*” (Something that tastes like metal. It is really nasty. It drives me crazy).

Nex did not like the Avon deodorant that his mother, a regional manager of Avon, wanted him to use. He secretly shifted to Axe. However, one day, he left the deodorant in the company car used by his mother. She was furious about it when her co-worker found the product in the car and brought the matter to the attention of the management of Avon. She threw the product away, and Nex has been using Avon deodorant since then to show his loyalty to the company. He can only use other products that Avon does not sell.

Choi, a son of an OFW in Qatar, is a working student: he is a laborer at the pier and studies at the same time. He started smoking cigarette and cannabis when he was only eleven years old. He attributes his use of these substances to his being an OFW child. He says, “*Kung nandito yung tatay ko hindi sana ako magbibisyo tulad ng marijuana, hindi mag aatsa ang grades ko noong high school, hindi sana ako mag-girlfriend*” (If only my father were here I would not be acquiring vices like marijuana, my grades would not be low, and I would not have had a girlfriend yet).



## To Perform and Relax

### ***Chemicals for performance***

There seems to be a connection between chemical use and degree pursued in college. Mom relates that on the advice of their professors, Education majors put on blush-on and lipstick when they do practice teaching to “look pretty,” and cologne to smell fresh and clean.

Information Technology students take care of their eyes. Kin cleans his face with Eskinol facial cleanser instead of water before he sleeps. He argues that the best way to care for one’s eyes is by getting enough sleep.

Jai takes Visionex, a vitamin supplement for better eyesight, on an irregular basis.

Enzo has degree in Nursing and is pursuing a second degree in Physical Therapy. Medical students have to be alert at all time, so he takes coffee to keep his mind awake. He adds, “I take a lot of energy drinks too.” He smokes, a habit that he picked up in high school due to peer pressure. He smokes more now than before to relieve stress.

### ***Chemicals for relaxation***

Students try to relax by hanging out with classmates and friends in restaurants, coffee and tea shops, snack hubs, and *sari-sari* stores. Sari-sari stores are convenient places for them, where they can easily buy snacks, cigarettes, and energy drinks, and also soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, mouthwash, sanitary pads, etc.

## Vices and Students

Two views about vice among the youth contend. One view states that the youth easily succumb to vices such as smoking and drinking that “compromise their values.” Another view argues that vices are the youth’s ways of socialization as they deal with the complexities of life.



Cigarette stash. For sale in a minimart adjacent a university.

### ***Spatiality and Availability of Vices to the Youth***

The Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003 stipulates that it is forbidden to make tobacco products available within a hundred meters where eighteen years old and below are. It also stipulates a fine of PhP10,000.00 for first offenders and PhP50,000.00 for second offenders. This, however, has not deterred sari-sari stores in nearby schools from selling cigarettes, energy drinks, and alcoholic beverages.

Students try to go around the law by taking their uniforms off and wear “civilian clothes” to buy cigarettes and alcoholic drinks from sari-sari stores. Besides, night life for students has changed since the election of new local government officials. In the past, students parked their cars at the Rotunda, a popular spot in the city for young people, with their windows open and loud music booming. These cars served as “makeshift bars,” where they drinking liquor bought at sari-sari stores. Students now drink at convenience stores like Cham’s, 24 Shoppe, and Happy Tee Convenience Store. These stores set up tables and chairs on the streets in the evenings for the drinking public.



### **Positive and Negative Consequences of Vices**

Opinions about drinking vary. Many emphasize its negative consequences, such as getting a hangover, doing something that one regrets later, and feeling sick (Jarvinen 2007). Others believe it is 'normal' for teenagers to experiment with drinking alcohol, while some endorse it for fun. Most students, though, would rather try out drinking than smoking. They tried alcohol for the first time in high school mostly out of curiosity and due to peer pressure. Kin says, "*Hindi ako nag-smoke, sabi kasi nila pagna-try mo na raw yung smoking mahirap ka nang makalabas.*" (I do not smoke because they say it is difficult to quit it).

### **Sociality of Vices**

Most adolescents are likely to adopt adult behaviors as they transition to adulthood despite the undesirable consequences of these behaviors. Interestingly, 'trying' out how alcoholic drinks taste starts during parties involving family members. Yen says, "High school... *pero yung try-try lang, but kasama yung Papa ko*" (I learned drinking alcohol in high school, but I first tried it with my father).

It appears that learning a vice such as smoking is part of primary socialization that happens in the home (Conrad, cited in Chloe and Raymundo 2001). The availability of cigarettes at home, parents acting as models for smoking and drinking behavior, and consequently, parents lacking credibility as advocates for nonsmoking or nondrinking make this possible (Choe and Raymundo 2001). Kin relates that his father was strict about him drinking but relaxed a bit when he reached college.

Students drink and smoke for camaraderie with peers. Peers establish that substance use is normal, and they purvey the idea that use of these substances will increase their social acceptance and give them a feeling of "belonging" to a sought-after group. As how Choi puts it, "*Pa-cool, pasikat pag nagyosi*" (It is cool, smoking is about showing off). It is imitative behavior. Yen says, "*Nagso-smoke silang [classmates] lahat, so nag-smoke na rin ako*" (All my classmates smoked, so I did too). He said he had to smoke while drinking because smoking becomes a "chaser" to the shot of drink, "*Nakakadiri daw pag umiinom ng walang smoking,*" adds Yen (They



Happy Tee on Corrales Street brings out tables and chairs at night to create a makeshift bar.

say that drinking without smoking is disgusting). Drinking leads to smoking, vice versa (Chloe and Raymundo 2001).

Risk-taking behavior among the youth is consistent with the problem behavior theory (Chloe and Raymundo 2001). Indicators such as strong religiosity, being in school, living in the parental home, and being born in rural areas protect the youth from risk-taking behavior. Learning how to smoke and drink happen in social events such as parties. It completes the mood of sociality, of bonding with the other participants. Milo shares, saying, “*Twice lang ako uminom nung high school pero hindi ako nalasing*. I drank because my cousins invited me together with relatives *sa fiesta*” (I twice drank in high school but I didn’t get drunk).

## CONCLUSION

In their work, “The Evolutionary Significance of Adolescent Initiation Ceremonies,” Schlegel and Barry (1980) observed that industrial societies do not hold initiation ceremonies, writing,

“Adolescence per se does not lead to particular kinds of socially important affiliations—these are made through marriage or by induction into special interest or status groups.” On the other hand, in mid-range societies where there is most likely an agricultural and farming background there is a regard for transitional ceremonies. Coming from the mainly agricultural areas into the urban, there is often a clash between what is regarded as important back at home and what it takes to adjust in the city. The city influences the socialization of youth in CDO.

The chemical experiences of students in a city vary and are without obvious pattern, yet if one looks closely at the practices, one can see how migration, socialization and being in the urban setting thread into the tapestry of their experiences. The movement from rural-urban produces an often conflicting interface that highlights the glaring disparity between the ecology of their socialization, influence of kin versus peers, and how young people can provide a picture of the conflicting and topsy-turvy choices that young people make as they transition in life.

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**Winonna Ysabel B. Fernando** currently works in a development consulting NGO delivering sustainable solutions to communities in the South and Southeast Asian regions. She also serves as a research and evaluation consultant for international NGOs working on various disaster risk management and emergency preparedness projects. She graduated *magna cum laude*.

**Mary Grace A. Forteza** is currently working in the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), particularly through User Experience (UX) and Service Design. She intends to pursue a master's degree related to HCI. She continues her interest in photography, specializing in portraits and cats. She graduated *cum laude*.

**Katherine Ina B. Fuentes** works in the information technology industry as a Customer Success Associate bridging the cultures of expert technical developers and users. She hopes to earn a master's degree in Digital Anthropology and an MBA. She graduated *cum laude*.

**Jovee Nicole A. Jao** is currently working as a Market Research Executive for Nielsen Philippines. She aspires to open a restaurant chain. She graduated *cum laude*.

**Aliette Alyssa R. Mesa** is enrolled in medical school. She hopes to help implement health programs that integrate the social sciences and medicine to better address community health problems. She was the Chairperson of the UP Anthropology Society (2014-2015). She graduated *cum laude*.

**Luisa Mariel A. Narciso** works as a program assistant in a regional network of Asian organizations working on debt, tax justice, and climate justice initiatives. She hopes to pursue a master's degree in Applied Anthropology, with a focus on feminist anthropology. She was the Batch Head for the UP Anthropology Field School 2014. She graduated *magna cum laude*.

**Erika Joy M. Navarro** worked in market research in the business district of Ortigas before moving to Quezon City to work for the Department of Agriculture. She currently oversees scholarship grants. She graduated *cum laude*.

**Pocholo Lorenzo R. Olaguer** is on a break after working with a corporate governance company. He is now studying to speak German and intends to finish a second degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management. He graduated *cum laude*.



**Sherisse Dianne H. Reyes** is a host for a children's educational show on television. She also regularly hosts and performs at various events. She hopes to pass on the love for the stage by teaching theater to children and young people. She graduated *magna cum laude*.

**Xavier Francis W. Su** is a student supervisor at his high school alma mater, Xavier School in San Juan. Working in the formation of young men, his goals include promoting and protecting the LGBT community, eradication of bullying, breaking conservative Chinese-Filipino cultural barriers, raising awareness for mental health and introducing feminism to the students. He graduated *cum laude*.

**Ellaine Rose S. Tan** is enrolled in the college of law. She hopes to someday combine her anthropological and legal knowledge to aid women and children against domestic violence, and to promote justice and truth. She graduated *magna cum laude*.

UP Anthropology Field School, summer 2014, Pabayo St., Cagayan de Oro City. *Padayon*.



