

# Modernizing Frontier

Chemical Transformations of  
Young People's Minds and Bodies  
in Puerto Princesa



*Editors*

Anita P. Hardon  
Michael L. Tan

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# **Introduction: Youth and Chemicals in a Modernizing Frontier**

**Anita P. Hardon and Michael L. Tan**

Palawan is a land of promise, and of paradox.

On maps, it appears on the edge of the Philippines, isolated. Indeed, it is a kind of last frontier. Its population remained tiny for centuries, the government offering homestead land in the 1950s practically for free to attract migrants from outside. The Palawan State University was established by law in 1965, but did not become operational until 1972. A commercial airport did not exist until the 1980s, and for many years, flights were limited.

Yet Palawan is one of the oldest sites of human habitation in the Philippines with the famous Tabon Cave human fossils. The oldest bone fragment here has been dated to be about 47,000 years old. We know, too, that trade with China goes back several centuries.

Today, Palawan seems to be making up for lost time with new commercial investments pouring in at breakneck speed. In particular, outsiders have rediscovered its potentials around logging, mining, fisheries, and tourism.

This has caused concern among individuals and civil society organizations who want sustainable development, and they see the commercial developments mainly as extractive, not just of natural resources but of the human. There is very cheap labor available. And when potential investors marvel about cheap land, they are actually talking about displacing earlier settlers, including indigenous people (IP), from their lands.

A subtle but still insidious aspect of the exploitation of human resources is a transformation of the very concept of human development. Using the rhetoric of modernity, residents in Palawan are reorienting the way they view themselves as well as their families and friends. The value of a human being now hinges on how they look, and the desired appearance is defined from the outside, as we see in this anthology of research reports coming from the Chemical Youth project of the University of Amsterdam and the University of the Philippines Diliman.

We read about the importance of fair skin as a projection of cleanliness, of high social status (meaning someone not engaged in manual labor and therefore not exposed to the sun). We read of how “femininity” is defined around body contours, and cosmetics, and how hormones are used by male-to-female transgenders. We go beyond the visual, reading about the importance of controlling or enhancing body odors among tour guides, who interestingly are especially concerned about the bad odor management of their foreign customers, using car perfumes to keep their work manageable; and we learn how difficult it is for security guards to stay alert during their long shifts—energy drinks and cigarettes help them perform their duties.

All these transformations through what the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault has called “technologies of the self” are as paradoxical as Palawan. On the surface, the products—which are technologies—seem to be mainly in the realm of the self but are, in reality, pushed, through marketing, from the outside, in contexts of inequality and exploitative labour relations. Personal aspirations are not personal but are for predefined standards of modernity, related to work-related demands and expectations. The self must be made presentable to the tourist, to the customers in malls, and to those who may threaten the properties that young people protect.

It is not surprising that these transformations become problematic for the “self.” The skin whiteners, the hormones, the body deodorants, and the energy drinks are expensive and can distort budgetary priorities. The money for tonic drinks, for example, could well go into more nutritious food.

The tragedy, too, is that many of the products used are doubtful in terms of safety and efficacy. Even the energy drinks have much too high levels of caffeine that can cause cardiac palpitations. Cosmetics and skin whiteners imported from China and unregistered with the Food and Drug Administration may contain toxic chemicals like mercury. But even registered skin whiteners can be problematic, their so-called “skin-whitening effect” coming about because they take away the upper layers of the skin, leaving behind a red glow (seen as “whitening”) which is actually inflammation. The whitened skin fails to protect against the sun, leading to adverse effects such as black spots.

Ultimately though, the problems come with the very definition of the self. As the reports show, young people use the chemicals with some ambivalence, knowing how expensive they are and experiencing some of the undesirable side effects. There is, too, doubt about whether what they are doing is indeed “good,” captured by how IP women will put on cosmetics only when they’re away from home and about to go to work. The cosmetics have to be removed before they return home because they are not socially acceptable.

The research reports are not for Palawan alone. It must make us more critical and discerning as we revisit concepts of development and exploitation, modernity and tradition, self and community. The chemicals, in many ways, are like the products used in precolonial barter trade. For the Chinese, the beeswax and the sea cucumbers, for the inhabitants of Palawan, the ceramics, represented faraway lands. To have those products gave prestige.

Today, the skin whiteners and tonic drinks and other chemicals described in this anthology represent modernity with promises not just of a more attractive self, but of better jobs, a better life.

We are proud to have worked with the Palawan State University, and the people of Palawan, to gather powerful narratives that will now

challenge the outside, the purveyors of modernity, to be more critical and discerning, the chemicals now to be seen not just as stuff applied to the biological body, but as powerful shapers of social bodies.



## **Context: Palawan and Puerto Princesa Then and Now**

**Michael Angelo A. Doblado**

### **Palawan**

Palawan, the Philippines' biggest province and considered as the country's "last frontier," has undergone tremendous and rapid changes in the past fifty years. Sparsely populated at the start of the 1940s, it has a total land area of 1,789,655 hectares, half of which is covered by large tracts of forestlands containing vast reserves of mineral and precious metal deposits, extensive coastal and marine sanctuaries teeming with rich aquatic resources, and natural geological formations preserved in their breathtaking pristine states—the most powerful magnets for socioeconomic development mechanisms.

Traditionally, Palawan's economy was anchored on basic agriculture and fishing. Rice production involved mainly wetland rice cultivation along the flat but narrow strip of arable land that stretched north to south of the mainland; while swidden or "slash and burn" farming was practiced by its original inhabitants, such as the Tagbanuwas, Palawēños, Molbogs, and Panimusan, on patches of farmlands found along the hills and sides of the mountains. This subsistence-level rice production was augmented by foraging and hunting; backyard gardening for vegetables, fruits, and

root crops; and basic livestock and poultry raising. Fish, the alternate major source of protein, was abundantly available from the rivers, coasts, and seas. The Christian north, the Spanish colonial stronghold which included Puerto Princesa and Aborlan, traded with Luzon and Visayas through the old northern territories of Paragua (now Palawan), like El Nido and Taytay, and with the large island groups of Busuanga, Calamianes, Cuyo, and Agutaya. Down Palawan's southern wing, exchanges of goods and products were initially facilitated by the seafaring Moslem merchants plying extensively the Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Balabac areas connected to the old trade routes of northern Malaysia at the turn of the 19th century. Trade expanded under the American period with the coming of wayfaring Christian merchants and, later, of Christian families migrating from Mindanao and Visayas establishing primary settlements dotting the coasts of Brooke's Point in the east, and Rizal and Quezon in the west.

Migration to Palawan was affected by and connected to the various socioeconomic and political events that took place at the national level. People slowly trickled into Paragua with the Spaniards' policy of attracting landless indios from the more populous provinces and islands to relocate in the province. The thin, steady flow of people began when the Americans—after establishing the Iwahig Prison and Penal Colony in 1904—expanded their grip southward, and, hoping to raise taxes and spur development, declared large tracts of government land and timberland as alienable and disposable under the Homestead Act. The Agutaynens and Cagayanons, led by the Cuyunons, leapfrogged from their islands and began their southward advance on the mainland, clearing lands, staking their claim, and forming settlements along Taytay, Roxas, and north and south of Puerto Princesa, which became the core of the first barrios that evolved into the first towns of Palawan. Driven by different historical forces, subsequent decades saw pouring in successive waves of people from all over the Philippines: peasant farmers and their families during the national rural resettlement initiated by the Philippine government in the 1950s, landless folks seeking better opportunities pushed by the agrarian unrest in Luzon and Visayas in the 1960s, and entire families escaping the bloody conflicts in Mindanao fueled by its separatist movements in the 1970s. In 1980, a refugee center was established inside the Philippine Air Force base reservation to give temporary sanctuary to the boat people escaping the ravages of the Vietnam War, leaving a cultural mark made

evident by the numerous food stalls serving French bread (*bánh mì*) and Vietnamese rice noodles (*pho*).

Tourism in the early '80s was not yet a major source of revenue in the province, but it started to gain momentum. Spearheaded by an army of adventurous European and American backpackers, tourists discovered, explored, and trekked the province. News about a remote, rugged, and unspoiled paradise—with sandy beaches, mangrove forests, and placid, crystal clear blue-green lakes, inlets, coves, and secret lagoons scattered among Palawan's hundreds of islands—spread first by word of mouth.

EDSA and its resulting national political reconfiguration brought a new breed of local leadership that provided an assertive, fresh, and innovative alternative. A youthful Joel Reyes assumed the governorship upon the demise of Salvador Socrates, who was a commanding personality in Palawan's old politics; and the colorful character hoodlum-turned-Christian Edward S. Hagedorn challenged Puerto Princesa's longest-serving mayor, Felixberto Oliveros. Reyes and Hagedorn did not only aggressively pursue their own development agenda combined with the implementation of various major infrastructure projects, but they also fully realized the potential of tourism as a major industry, and set out to actively promote their respective turfs, eventually bringing Palawan to the national attention.

The old perceptions and negative mental pictures of the province—being a malaria-infested territory, an isolated jungle prison for hardened criminals, the last Moslem stronghold of the country, a place for lepers, and the domain of several tribes still living in the stone age—were deconstructed to give way to a much better and rosier image of Palawan. This was a direct result of sustained and increased national and international media attention.

Palawan today has become many things to a lot of people—a wide-open frontier area to finally own a piece of land, an environmental heaven waiting to be experienced, a welcome refuge from the noise and pollution of Manila and other urban cities, one of the best provinces in terms of potential for pioneering many businesses, and a land of a thousand opportunities. These images are created and fueled by the ever-increasing media hype promising an unspoiled, lush, tropical paradise of sun, surf, and sand. At the very center of this dynamic convergence between the

intensifying pace of economic development, the ever-increasing tourism boom and its resulting capital infusion, and the steady, unabated flow of external and internal migration is the city of Puerto Princesa.

### **Puerto Princesa**

Puerto Princesa today is a far cry from the old, sleepy municipality it once was more than a century ago. The once dusty, potholed asphalt road became the concrete main artery of the *poblacion*, branching outwards beyond the city limits and serving as the national highway that connects northern and southern mainland Palawan. The tall acacia trees lining both sides of the lengthy road eventually gave way to many single-storey, mid-rise, and high-rise buildings, renting and leasing out office/business spaces to commercial banks; an assortment of shops, boutiques, and potpourri stores; courier companies; beauty parlors and health spas; 24-hour fast-food franchises; karaoke and entertainment bars; manpower service providers; and trading/mercantile businesses.

In 1992, Mayor Edward S. Hagedorn—the chief architect of this social and economic transformation—assumed his first of what would eventually be five terms of office. He made agriculture and tourism, rooted on environmental protection, the twin platforms of his economic agenda. The promise of becoming the cleanest and greenest, most environmentally responsible, and business-friendly city paid off and spurred further investment, growth, and migration. In 1999, the city's first Jollibee franchise, a typical barometer of urban development in the country, opened the first of what would be three branches in the city. Believing that greater political and fiscal autonomy would further accelerate Puerto Princesa's progress, Mayor Hagedorn actively lobbied and campaigned to have it converted into a highly urbanized city (HUC). On March 26, 2007, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Proclamation No. 1264 declaring Puerto Princesa as an HUC; this was ratified by a plebiscite held in July of that year.

The St. Paul Subterranean National River, or more famously known as the Puerto Princesa Underground River—the flagship of the country's tourism industry and Puerto Princesa's consistent top revenue earner—grabbed the international spotlight when it was declared as one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature in 2011. Mayor Hagedorn was able to rally the city and the province to actively promote and vote for the inclusion

of the Underground River in the said search. Hagedorn's political clout was made evident when no less than President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III toured the Underground River and promoted it nationally. The resulting increase in the volume of local and foreign tourists visiting the city created a virtual ripple effect on the entire local economic and social structure.

The boom of the city's tourism industry created a sense of urgency to fast-track the expansion and upgrade of the Puerto Princesa City International Airport to be able to cope with the number of flights being served every day, which increased from 11 flights in 2011 to 20 flights in 2012 and 2013, as reported by former City Tourism Officer Rebecca Labit. This did not include the new set of demands that the proposed direct international flights from Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia would bring once these became operational. With the entry of foreign players, like Tigerair and Zestair, competition among the budget airlines became fierce, and this created cheaper flights guaranteeing additional fare discounts if tickets were bought three to six months in advance of the scheduled trip. The worldwide exposure coupled with rock bottom plane fares (both domestic and international) guaranteed greater connection to other parts of the country and to the world. In a similar fashion, the seaport was renovated and expanded to handle the logistical requirements of the international luxury cruise Liners that had been bringing more affluent guests since these ships started calling to port almost every month in 2015.

Based on the numbers provided by the City Tourism Office, there were 268,942 domestic and foreign tourists reported in 2009; 417,593 in 2010; 515,148 in 2011; and 654,033 in 2012. More than half or 68% of these arrivals in 2012 indicated pleasure/vacation as their purpose of visit. The latest figures posted 700,000 arrivals in 2014. Tourism therefore brought with it the multiplier effect—initial gains in one business is translated into a windfall of investments, growth, and new opportunities for the other industries, like the service sector and the wholesale/retail market.

The service sector met a huge demand for guest accommodations—more buildings were required to cater to the needs of the increasing number of local and foreign tourists visiting the city. The Puerto Island Resort and Spa, a high-end Balinese-inspired resort was put up along the coast of a barangay located across the airport. Hotel Centro, a similar large hotel in Bgy. San Pedro, opened in 2010; while the chic Canvass Boutique

Hotel in Bgy. San Miguel opened in 2012. Along Rizal Avenue, the city’s main street, the Best Western Plus Ivywall Hotel of the famous American Best Western chain of hotels opened in 2016; while a Korean hotel put up in the hills of Santa Monica began catering to its own target clientele. Citystate Asturias Hotel was acquired and managed by Manila’s CityLand/CityState companies; while the Fersal Hotel Group—known for its affordable, elegant, and business-class amenities—opened its branch in front of the airport to cater to traveling businessmen, company executives, and real estate brokers/prospectors. Equally important to note was the proliferation of a great number of homegrown, small, and family-owned guesthouses, pensions, and inns that sprouted along the city’s interior/feeder roads and its residential areas in barangays, wanting a slice of the local tourism business pie. Table 1 shows the number of accommodation establishments (AEs) in the city from 2011 to 2013.

Table 1. The number of accommodations (establishments and rooms) in Puerto Princesa City from 2011 to 2013		
Year	Number of AEs	Number of Rooms
2011	99	1,864
2012	173	2,981
2013	214	4,822

Source: City Tourism Office, 2013

In the hope of creating more tourist spots, the city government welcomed new investments, like the Astoria Palawan resort hotel, which would sport a water theme park—the first in Palawan to sport a water theme park. Located in Brgy. San Rafael just 50 kilometers north of the city, Astoria Palawan held its soft opening in May 2014. A similar business is awaiting construction in Brgy. Mangingisda, which is south of the city.

The night entertainment business is in full swing with more KTV and sing-along bars opening on both sides of the street going to the airport. Expatriates own some of these bars, which employ guest relations officers (GROs). The Tiki Resto Bar and E-Republik Resto Bar feature show bands recruited from Manila to play month-long gigs.

Another sector that has gained from the tourism industry boom is the trading sector. The city government recognizes the wholesale and retail businesses as among the prime movers of the city’s economic activities.

Table 2 shows the market shares of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the different economic sectors of Puerto Princesa City in 2005.

Table 2. Market shares (by sectors) of small and medium enterprises in Puerto Princesa City in 2005	
Sector	Market Share
Service	48%
Trading	46%
Manufacturing	5%
Agri-based/others	1%
Total	100%

Source: Permits and Licensing Division, Office of the City Mayor, Puerto Princesa City, 2005

According to a Philippine Information Agency (PIA) MIMAROPA report, a total of 4,832 firms registered with DTI-Palawan in 2014, which was about 10.3 percent higher than the 2013 figure. 58.5 percent of those that registered in 2014 were in the service sector, while those in the wholesale/retail trade comprised 34.5 percent. The registered firms generated 8,962 new jobs. Table 3 shows the investments of SMEs in the different economic sectors of Puerto Princesa City in 2014.

Table 3. Investments (by sector) of small and medium enterprises in Puerto Princesa City in 2014	
Sector	Investment (Php)
Service	814 million
Trading	150 million
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishery	25 million
Manufacturing	21.5 million
Total	1.010 Billion

Source: Philippine Information Agency IV-B, 2014

Based on the figures shown in tables 2 and 3, in a period of almost 10 years, there was only a slight variation in the trend—the service sector still dominated the local enterprises, followed by the trading sector; agriculture and its complementary industries surged, albeit slightly ahead of manufacturing. This reflects the reality that either of the two bottom-ranked sectors had been neglected or their growth had been stifled by other issues such as strict environmental regulations.

The New City Commercial Complex (NCCC), built in 1991, modernized the trading sector by being the first supermarket/mall in Puerto Princesa. NCCC hoped to maintain its share of the wholesale and retail market by opening satellite wholesale grocery outlets/stores in Brgy. San Jose and Brgy. San Manuel. This was a confident move by the NCCC in spite of the entry of new industry players, like the Robinson's Place Palawan that opened in May 24, 2012; and the SM HyperMart near the old City Market area, which would start operating sometime in 2017. Interestingly, San Jose and San Manuel, formerly categorized as rural barangays, are now developing into suburban enclaves of the middle- and upper-class residents of Puerto Princesa, similar to San Juan and Quezon City of Metro Manila.

Those who cannot afford the branded goods of the bigger commercial malls may shop at the Unitop Mall and the Chinatown Mall (both located on different sides of the Old Puerto Princesa Market), which offer cheap, generic, China-made replicas of a variety of products ranging from clothes, shoes, toiletries, perfumes, lotions, and beauty products, to kitchenware, textiles, appliances, tools, and hardware supplies. The retail market reflects an emerging economic overlap and ongoing transition. The domain of the traditional Moslem market stall operators, *sari-sari* stores owners, and itinerant street vendors/hawkers are now in competition with the new and upcoming mid-level malls offering mass-produced, cheaper goods.

A recent retailing phenomenon was the establishment of the multilevel marketing structures. It started in the 1980s with the direct selling of Avon beauty products, Corningware glassware, and Tupperware plastic food storage containers. Then the same method was used by the first companies selling health products and food supplements, like Herbalife and Forever Living, which sold spirulina and coconut oil. In the 2000s, the floodgates opened for a combination of direct selling, pyramiding, and networking, pushing products of companies like Royale, Vita Plus, Aim Global, CF Wellness, My SuperSavers, Seven Stars, Realtek, and Paleco, among others.

The surge of investments in the city created whole new sets of manpower requirements peculiar to the demands of the local tourism industry and wholesale and retail industry. The tourism industry needs front desk receptionists and secretaries, office personnel, tour guides, van operators-drivers, housekeeping and cleaning staffs, chefs and cooks, waiters, artists

and entertainers, tour and ticket reservation agents, security guards/watchmen, among others. The wholesale and retail industry—the malls, supermarkets, groceries, product outlets, specialty and brand shops, boutiques, and so forth—needs management trainees, brand managers, store managers, promodisers, stall vendors, salespersons, salesclerks, among others.

In a community undergoing rapid development, educational institutions need to be attuned to these changes and design new curricula and programs that will benefit the local economy. Puerto Princesa has long been the educational and cultural hub of the province and, very recently, of the MIMAROPA Region (IV-B). It boasts two state universities: the Palawan State University (PSU), which offers courses on hospitality and tourism with an internship program; and the Western Philippines University (WPU), which offers courses on agriculture and agribusiness. The city also has private universities, like the Holy Trinity University (HTU), which has engineering, nursing, and business degree programs; and several specialized schools, such as the STI and AMA colleges, which cater to those inclined towards information technology. The increasing volume of enrollment in the schools, particularly in PSU (being the biggest school), shows a continuing upward trend. More and more students are coming in not only from the different towns of Palawan but also from Manila, Cebu, and Mindanao, as well as from other countries, like Africa and India, because of PSU's petroleum engineering program. A great number of the students are children of migrants from Manila and other provinces, as well as the seasonal youth migrants from the barrios going to the city to study.

Not everything related to the tourism boom presents a rosy picture. A significant downside is the inability of the city to equitably distribute the fruits of the local economy's growth for the last five years to all its sectors. Even the local government, in its 2013-2016 Comprehensive Development Plan, identified several social and economic development challenges it faced, and these included the following:

1. *High population growth and unequal population distribution.* Puerto Princesa reported a population growth rate higher than the national level—a result of continuous and increasing internal migration that might pose a threat to the ecosystem and the environment.

2. *Poverty.* According to Mayor Lucilo Bayron, Puerto Princesa posted the highest incidence of poverty (15.5%) among all the highly urbanized cities of Luzon. One-half of the rural residents and one-third of the urban residents of the city fell under the poverty line. Fifteen percent (15%) of the households in the city did not have their own homes.
3. *Widespread unemployment and underemployment.* Unemployment stood at 4%, lower than the provincial level of 7%; but the city posted that 41% of those employed had indeterminate sources of income, while 51% had low-level salaries because of rampant violations of labor regulations.
4. *A continuing pattern of low-level investments in the agriculture and manufacturing/processing sectors.* The promise of ecotourism and agricultural development as the economic foundation of the city was put aside in favor of tourism.
5. *Food insecurity and insufficiency.* The focus on tourism had left behind the food production sector. The individual, small rice farm lot owners; basic backyard vegetable planters; and small-scale livestock, poultry, and swine raisers still composed the bulk of those that supplied the needs of the city.

The resulting multiplier effect of tourism and migration and the rapid shift from traditional to modern market economy bring to Puerto Princesa not only economic growth but also a changing set of modernizing cosmopolitan urban values. This is reflected by the growing demands for new consumer products, like the beauty products sold through the new retail mechanisms, such as direct selling, multi-level or network marketing, the pyramid scheme, and their combinations.

Puerto Princesa, with its booming tourism industry and changing sales industry, has become the microcosm of the market economy at the national level. The other municipalities of Palawan can look at what is happening now to Puerto Princesa as a possible blueprint for the commercialization of the local town economies and tourism-based migrations while keeping in mind its possible drawbacks on their own communities.

# 1 **Chemical Lives of Sex Workers**

**Alvie Bergado Timbancaya**

## **INTRODUCTION**

People strive to be attractive to others despite the cross-cultural variations in aesthetics or definitions of what beauty is. Toward this end, they have developed numerous practices and strategies to become noticeable to others, including, in contemporary times, the regular use of beauty products that contain chemical ingredients. Indeed, “individuals purchase lifestyles and identities largely by acquiring products aimed at their bodies” (Mascia-Lees 2010).

This paper focuses on the chemical use of young sex workers, both females and males, in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. It examines what products they use most frequently, what they use them for, and what their effects are, both desired and adverse. Additionally, the paper seeks to shed light on how the youth in Puerto Princesa today perceive beauty.

Many young people from the far-flung municipalities of Palawan go to Puerto Princesa, the province’s capital, to try their luck in landing a high-earning job. But life in the city is hard, and many young people end up

working in the informal economy where sex work, compared to other employment prospects, is highly lucrative.

This research reveals how both women and men, despite their meager incomes, make great efforts and, sometimes, sacrifices to acquire beauty products. A similar study in eastern Indonesia found sex workers there using a range of cosmetic products to lighten their complexions, as well as psychoactive substances for them to feel more confident when approaching clients (Idrus et al. 2013). While numerous studies have focused on the factors that lead young people into prostitution and why they continue doing such work, few studies have focused on their use of chemicals while on the job. For our participants, using cosmetics and chemicals was a part of their daily routine—they felt they needed to look beautiful to charm potential clients.

The City of Puerto Princesa is booming due to tourism, with both local and international tourists flocking to the area to enjoy its natural beauty and the recreational opportunities here. Puerto Princesa is also the site of the *Balikatan* (which literally means “shoulder to shoulder”) exercises involving the Filipino and American militaries. American soldiers can be seen frequenting the city’s many bars.

Puerto Princesa has a growing number of hotels, pension houses, and apartelles catering to tourists, with numerous clubs and bars opening alongside them. The city already boasts numerous karaoke bars where guests can dine, drink, and sing, and where men can invite the girls working in the bar to sit with them. If clients want to take the girls out for more intimate activities, they only have to pay the bar fine, ranging from PhP1,500 to PhP3,500, depending on the kind of bar they are working in. Karaoke bars normally hire girls as young as 18, but also accept women in their 30s. Low-end bars generally have at least a dozen girls working in them, while high-end bars hire more girls. Female freelance sex workers also wait for customers on the streets; transactions sometimes take place through handlers or pimps. The male part-time sex workers whom we interviewed had regular daytime jobs and were contacted by clients via text messages.

## METHODS

Our informants were young workers aged between 18 and 24; 11 were karaoke girls (working at bars), four were female freelance sex workers (usually waiting on street corners), and four were male part-time sex workers (who all had regular day jobs). Most of the karaoke girls we interviewed admitted providing sexual services. They included girls working at high-end bars where security was tight and which catered to a clientele of politicians, businessmen, and other well-to-do personalities; and girls from low-end bars where the ambiance was more breezy and which catered to a clientele of market vendors, construction workers, and less affluent people. The freelance sex workers plied their trade on the sidewalks and advertised their services through former clients and tricycle drivers. Tricycle drivers played a key role in the city's sex trade, taking clients to women and earning commissions from both the women and the motels.

Most of our female sex worker informants had children; only one was single and did not have a child. One karaoke girl was a widow as was one female freelance sex worker. Three girls from the low-end bars were in lesbian relationships. The girls working at the high-end bars were recruited from other provinces in the Philippines and housed by the club owners. The girls working at the low-end bars could choose to stay at their own places or live in the bar with the other girls. The four male part-timers were all single and lived with their parents and had regular day jobs.

We provided our informants with information sheets describing the purpose of our research. Sometimes we read the information sheets to them, but more often, they read them by themselves. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the transcripts, we used short nicknames for our informants to ensure their anonymity.

To gather data, we did in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. In the interviews, we asked the participants what chemicals they used regularly "from head to toe," what they were seeking to achieve with their use of chemicals, the advantages and disadvantages of products on the market, how much of their earnings went to beauty products and other work-facilitating chemicals, and what influenced

their use of specific products. We also asked about more general themes such as their aspirations in life.

Most of the interviews took place at the participants' workplaces; for the male part-time sex workers, this meant the public market where they had their day jobs. These places were not only the most convenient interview venues for our informants, but these also allowed them to feel more at ease while sharing their experiences of chemical use.

Aside from our primary informants, we interviewed also several key informants, including bar owners, security guards, and handlers (pimps). The focus groups delved deeper into themes and issues that emerged during the individual interviews. To encourage discussion, we began by placing popular products in view. In one low-end bar, we conducted a focus group discussion with three karaoke girls. The male part-timers were more difficult to gather due to their daytime jobs.

We were able to witness numerous karaoke nights through participant observations. On some nights, usually on weekends, there were special presentations like sexy dancing and pole dancing, wherein the girls made extra efforts to groom themselves.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Informants' Life Stories and How They Improved Their Appearances**

The interviews gave us a glimpse of the experiences and aspirations of the karaoke girls and sex workers who participated in our study. The participants had different stories of how they came to be involved in prostitution. Some were recruited by agents, while others had experienced situations wherein they needed to earn money fast; but all of them emphasized that they hoped for a better future at work and with their families.

Kaye, a 22-year-old karaoke girl, had been working at a low-end bar for more than eight months. She did not finish high school because she got pregnant when she was a teenager. She had two sons, both under 5 years old, who stayed with her parents in a village in Puerto Princesa and

whom she would only see once or twice a week. Kaye lost her husband in an accident and had to find a job to support her children. She initially applied as a waitress at the bar but later worked as a karaoke girl after realizing that she could earn much more by doing the latter.

The girls who worked at the low-end bars would gather outside their workplaces to entice customers inside. Once inside, a client would buy drinks for the karaoke girl sitting with him. After singing and drinking, the client could decide whether he wanted sexual services as well.

How much the girls earned, at the least, whether they worked at a low-end bar or a high-end bar, depended on the number of drinks their clients bought them. A karaoke girl working at a low-end bar earned around PhP70 for each drink she consumed, while a girl working at a high-end bar earned around PhP100 for each drink she had.

While working at the bar, Kaye stayed with the owner, who provided her and the other girls with room and board. Kaye earned PhP70 for every ladies drink she consumed. She would earn an average of PhP140 per night and more if the customer was willing to pay the bar fine to take her out for a couple of hours.

Our informants needed to keep themselves attractive in order to have more clients. The majority of them, both females and males, used skin-whitening products to lighten their complexions. The female sex workers even used layers of whiteners to speed up the skin-lightening process.

Kaye regularly used Silka Papaya soap to lighten her complexion. After having tried different soaps, she found her skin to be *hiyang* with the said soap brand, which meant that the product was effective for her skin. She also used Yoko Pearl Cream twice a day to lighten and moisturize her face after washing it with papaya soap. She claimed that she had sensitive skin, which was why she was careful about the



Silka papaya soap was one of the more popular papaya soaps used by the karaoke girls. It was reported to whiten the skin and leave a good smell on the body.

products she used on her skin, especially on her face. She always looked for a product's "hiyang factor."

Ella, a 23-year-old karaoke girl who worked at a high-end karaoke bar, was born and raised in Laguna, a province in Luzon. She was recruited by an agent who brought her to Puerto Princesa to work as a karaoke girl, with her full knowledge. Ella was single and did not have children. She lived in the bar with girls from other provinces and received a PhP50 daily food allowance. She was tall and had brown skin. Although she aspired to have fairer skin in her younger years, she found out, at work, that having dark skin could also have advantages. Working at a bar patronized by a diverse clientele, she was often chosen by foreign guests from the pool of available girls.

Ella earned PhP100 for every ladies drink that she consumed. She would earn extra, as much as PhP1,500, if the costumer took her out for sex. The bar fine was about PhP3,500, and the bar collected PhP2,000 from it as a commission. The girls from the high-end bars were well-prepped, wearing make-up and sexy, revealing clothes and high heels. When clients wanted to choose their companions for the night, the girls would walk on a ramp (like fashion models) so the clients can give them a better look.

To improve her appearance, Ella spent money on chemical hair treatments, like rebonding, which made her hair silky, straight, and noticeably shiny. Rebonding was usually done in salons and costs between PhP1,000 and PhP2,000, depending on hair length. She also thought that having larger breasts would make her more attractive; so she tried taking hormonal pills, which she believed made her breasts "improve a little." But she stopped using the pills as she could not always afford them. Although she did not invest much time and resources in skin whitening, she still believed that girls who had fair skin were more beautiful. As Mascia-Lees (2010) maintains, "The relationships of skin color to ideas of beauty and self-worth continue to be important ones for many people."

Mhay, a 20-year-old karaoke girl working at a low-end bar, used Skinwhite Cleanser and Maxipeel Body Scrub on her body whenever she took a bath, which was twice a day. After bathing, she would apply Silka Whitening Hand and Body Lotion. To clean her face, she would wash it with Pond's Whitening Facial Scrub, wipe it with Eskinol Lightening Toner to remove the residue of cosmetics, and apply Pond's Whitening

Facial Cream. When she lived in Manila, she used a glutathione-based soap to lighten her skin; but she had to stop using it when she started living in Puerto Princesa because couldn't find in the city the particular brand she used in Manila. Her impressive chemical routine was just one example of how karaoke girls paid too much attention to getting whiter skin.

Among the four male sex worker informants, three used Manis, a locally produced papaya-based soap, to whiten their faces and bodies. All four of them, even the female sex workers, believed they got more customers when their skins got fairer. Twenty-year-old Biboy, when asked why he wanted to have fairer skin, answered "*para mas guwapo*" [to be more handsome].



Most of the male sex workers used the locally available papaya soap, Manis. They believed that having fairer skin made them more handsome, and it was the key to attracting more customers.

Biboy earned PhP250 at his daytime job at the public market, where he usually wore his worn-out but still comfortable working shirt. As a sex worker wearing trendy clothes and perfume, he gained PhP150 per client. His transition from a sweaty-looking utility guy at the market to a sharp-looking male at night revealed the lengths to which men could go to groom themselves for sex work. Although he was only a part-time sex worker, he felt that he must invest greater efforts into looking attractive for his clients. According to Mascia-Lees (2010), "Women and men distinguish themselves by the products they buy, items that are supposed to reflect 'who they really are.'"

Our informants equated beauty and attractiveness with being presentable, which more often than not meant having a light complexion. They stressed that girls who were fair-skinned got picked first by clients in the bar, which we witnessed firsthand. White or fair skin is associated with being clean, pleasing, and noticeable. As Mhay stated, "*Ma-attract 'yung maputi talaga*" [The fair-skinned are really more attractive]. According to our female informants, girls with fair skin were more attractive to Filipino guests, while girls with darker complexions appealed more to foreign clients. Unfortunately for the dark-skinned girls, the majority

of the clientele were locals from the city, especially in the low-end bars. The situation in some of the high-end bars was more fluid, with the prevalence of foreign guests in their clientele. DeMello (2014) argues in her introduction to *Body Studies* that one of the major theoretical understandings of the body has to do with the idea that the body is marked by culture and society. She states, “Anthropologist Terence Turner coined the term ‘social skin’ to refer to the ways in which social categories become the symbolic stage on which the dramas of society are engaged.”

Nineteen-year-old Apple worked at a low-end bar. She earned a commission of Php70 per drink and about Php500 for sex. Her skin-whitening technique involved taking Myra E softgel capsules (a vitamin E supplement for whiter and smoother skin) twice a day. Being a Muslim, she rarely used topical products, especially if they were not *halal* (ritually fit for use according to Islamic law). Instead, she ingested oral vitamin supplements that could be bought in any pharmacy in the city. Her choice of products was influenced by both her religious beliefs and advertising, particularly the endorsement of Myra E capsules by a famous actress who had fair and smooth skin. As Mascia-Lees (2010) claims, “Media images of ideal beauty are so ubiquitous in the world today that they exert a powerful normalizing and homogenizing effect.”

### **Consuming Chemical Products to Earn a Living**

All karaoke girls drank alcohol because their income depended on how many drinks they consumed. The more ladies drinks they ordered, the more they earned. Aiko, 22 years old, worked at a high-end bar that hired a beautician to help the girls prepare at night, whom they paid on a monthly basis. Aiko aimed to return to school someday to study petroleum engineering at a local state university, and she had started saving money for tuition and other things she would need in school. She could consume as many as 20 bottles of San Miguel Light Beer per night. The light beer that the bar served contained 5% alcohol, and 20 bottles a night meant a terrible hangover the next morning. Aiko dealt with a hangover by taking a bath and drinking lots of water until the headache went away.

Ria, a 24-year-old freelance sex worker, ran away from home due to conflicts with her mother and got involved in prostitution when she was 18. Because she had no income, she began working at the bar. But staying

out late and drinking alcohol every night was too much for her body. She said, “*Kahit naman nung nasa bar ako, ang iniinom ko ‘rumcoke’; dinadaya ako ng may-ari, kunwari rumcoke pero walang rum, Coke lang*” [Even when I was in the bar, where I usually drank ‘rumcoke,’ the owner would trick me by giving me a drink without rum, only Coke]. Although she and the owner were complicit in fooling customers with such a pretend-cocktail, Ria decided to leave the club to become a freelance sex worker. She continued with sex work, even though she was pregnant at that time. The man she was involved with turned out to be married to another woman. Ria stayed in a boarding house and made every effort to earn money to sustain her and her coming baby’s needs by using her femininity as a commodity.

Estelle was a mother of four boys and was recruited in Laguna. She and her husband separated years ago. She left her children in her province so she could work in Puerto Princesa. She worked at a high-end bar where she got a cut of PhP100 per ladies drink. She would drink everything that was offered to her by a client as this was how she earned money. She said, “*Hanggat kaya pa ng katawan, inom lang nang inom*” [As long as my body can still take it, I just drink and drink]. Being the family’s breadwinner, she had little choice but to endure the hardships of being a karaoke girl: “*Kahit ano, para sa mga anak ko*” [Anything, for my children].

Twenty-year-old part-time sex worker JR confessed that there were moments when he had to drink Tanduay Rum, which could be easily bought from *sari-sari* stores, to be able to work. At the age of 17, he became involved in the sex trade when his friends, who were also involved in sex work, convinced him to do it on the side to earn extra money for his cellphone load, shopping, and dating girls. He had a daytime job at the public market, wherein he earned PhP200 per day. Through sex work, he would earn PhP200 to PhP250 per “booking,” the term used by gay men for engaging the services of a male prostitute.

Princess just turned 19 years old and is the mother of a five-month-old baby girl, who is cared for by her lesbian lover. At the age of 17, she began working at a bar in El Nido (a municipality in northern Palawan which had become a local and international tourist destination) and learnt how to drink and smoke there. She moved to Puerto Princesa in search of a better life. She worked at a low-end bar where she earned a minimum of PhP70 per night and up to PhP1,000 if a customer took her out. As

a karaoke girl, smoking was an important part of her job—it kept her awake through the night, especially when the club was full. She smoked while drinking to counter the effects of alcohol. On a regular day, she would smoke eight Marlboro Red cigarettes but could smoke a whole pack in a single drinking session. She said she could down as many as 15 bottles of beer a night when she smoked. Many of our informants likewise combatted the effects of one substance with the use of another. Princess used nicotine as a stimulant to combat the effects of alcohol, which is a depressant.

### **Using Chemicals for Contraception**

The karaoke girls, female freelancers, and male part-timers had different practices in using contraceptives. Aris, a widow with two children in her mid-20s, had nothing left to support her children when her husband died of a heart disease. Another freelance sex worker recruited her with the allure of easy money. Aris claimed that she had tried every contraceptive pill available on the market, from the cheapest to the most expensive. She used to take Diane Pills, which cost about PhP560 for a month's supply, because they also enhanced the texture of her skin and hair. But when her children were born, she had to settle for the cheapest pills she could afford as she had to economize her unstable income. At the time of this research, she was living with a partner who had a daytime job and knew nothing about her doing sex work, which was why she was reluctant at first to be interviewed. She occasionally sneaked out to work on the streets. She earned PhP500 to PhP700 per night and usually went out to look for clients three to four times a week. She would then buy the contraceptive pills that she could afford with her earnings.

Jing, a 23-year-old freelance sex worker, used a different contraceptive method. She was then in a relationship with a tricycle driver who was the father of her eight-month-old baby. She took contraceptive pills only when she had clients to attend to. She would buy Trust contraceptive pills for less than PhP50 and take them irregularly to stretch her finances. She earned between PhP500 and PhP1,000 per night as a sex worker and prioritized buying necessities for her baby. She knew that the way she took contraceptive pills was wrong but said that she would continue using them that way as her other priorities were more pressing. She remained a sex worker because what her partner earned was not enough to provide for their needs.

While female sex workers worried so much about getting pregnant, male sex workers couldn't care less about impregnating their female customers because, according to them, that would be the women's problem, not theirs. They also did not report using condoms when their customers were gay men.

Some sex workers protected themselves from getting pregnant by taking contraceptive pills regularly. Others, for financial reasons, relegated the need to prevent pregnancy as secondary to providing for their family's primary needs. They just relied on their clients' use of condoms, which were readily available in stores for less than ₱10 each. Jen, a karaoke girl working at a low-end bar, mentioned that she had an argument once with a client because he didn't want to use a condom; she insisted that he use one as she wasn't using any other contraceptive. Her statement, "*Kung mahina ka, talo ka talaga*" [If you are weak, you lose], confirms how sex workers must stand up for their own health and safety. The female sex workers were normally prepared with their own condoms, but only some were confident enough to insist that their clients use them.

### Using Chemicals for Genital Hygiene

Genital hygiene was very important for sex workers as it would reduce their chances of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases. Knowing this, the city government of Puerto Princesa monitored the health of the girls working at the karaoke bars. Every second Tuesday of the month, the girls would go to the city health clinic to be tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. They had a yellow card that showed whether they were disease-free or not.

All of the female sex workers (karaoke girls and freelancers) used vaginal hygiene washes to clean their private areas each day. They said that they felt cleaner whenever they used a feminine wash. They also believed that it prevented them from getting infectious genital diseases. Some of them though used feminine washes more often than they were supposed to. Ria, a freelance sex worker, said, "*Kada ihi talaga, gumagamit ako non*" [Every time I pee, I use it]. All of the female sex workers were aware of the need to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and thought that the frequent use of a vaginal wash would protect them. The most common feminine washes used by sex workers were Lactacyd Feminine Wash and pH Care. These washes came in different varieties,

including those with antibacterial properties and those mixed with glutathione, which helped whiten the groin area. When the girls were with their clients in the motels, though, they used whatever soap was available.

The hygiene practices of the male part-timers were very different. They did not use masculine washes (which were recently introduced on the market) or any other chemicals. They only washed their genitals with water after intercourse. They paid less attention to their sexual health and seemed to ignore the possibility of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases from their clients.

## CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

Puerto Princesa has an increasing number of karaoke girls and sex workers who cater to tourists, local men, and American soldiers who regularly visit for the Balikatan exercises. Though sex work is officially illegal, it has been condoned for so long as it is not visible. We interviewed women who worked in high- and low-end karaoke bars as well as men and women who worked outside these establishments as freelance sex workers. Officially, the karaoke girls did not engage in sex work, but their clients could take them out if they paid a bar fee. In order to be chosen by clients, both male and female sex workers used several topical and oral products to increase their attractiveness. For women, being attractive generally meant having fair skin and a slim body. Male sex workers, on the other hand, wanted to have 'abs' to attract other men.

The girls in the karaoke bars were recruited from different parts of the country and were told that they would be working in a bar where the clientele were mostly men. They earned commissions by the number of drinks that their clients bought for them. Most of the girls lived on the bars' premises, and lodging was free. The high-end bar where we did our fieldwork even offered their girls a meager daily allowance for food. However, the bars did not provide the girls with beauty products or condoms or other contraceptives, although one bar provided a make-up artist who the girls must pay on a monthly basis.

The women used many different products to have shiny hair and smooth and fair skin, and to smell good. They spent a big part of their income

on beauty products, which they considered a form of investment, to attract more clients. For the women who had children, though, they would rather keep the money for their children, so they economized the products they bought in order to provide for their families.

The women working at the bars must drink alcohol to earn an income, but this posed a threat to their health and well-being. Some tried to avoid drinking alcohol by asking the barman not to put liquor in their drinks. Some countered the effects of alcohol by using other substances, while others turned to freelance sex work to have more control over their alcohol intake.

Numerous studies (e.g., Thorpe et al. 1997; Ford et al. 1999; Joesoef et al. 2000; Basuki et al. 2002; Davies et al. 2003; Magnani et al. 2010; Silitonga et al. 2011) describe the high risks of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections through unprotected sex, and although the women in this study knew they were risking pregnancy and diseases, they did not consistently use condoms. This was partly due to financial reasons, as they must purchase condoms and other contraceptives with their own money. Many prioritized beauty products instead in order to attract clients in a competitive environment—all bars had many women working for them, and clients could choose. Many female sex workers would leave it up to their clients to use condoms because “they are the clients, and they are the ones paying.”

All of the women we interviewed, however, used feminine washes. These products are believed to serve multiple purposes—to make the vagina clean and smell good and to protect them against infection. Some of our informants used these washes several times a day. In reality, however, the frequent use of vaginal washes was likely to put them at a higher risk of infection as their natural defense against infections was weakened (Hilber et al. 2010).

With the help of the city government, the girls from the karaoke bars underwent monthly checkups to ensure that they were free of sexually transmitted diseases. They needed to be medically cleared before they were allowed to work at any bar. Freelance sex workers, however, were not monitored because they did not need to secure any clearance to work on the streets.

The male sex workers we interviewed, catering to both women and gay men, considered their job as just a sideline. Most of them did not have children to look after and seemed to spend less money on products to be attractive. They said that they were just doing the sex work to have a little more income for leisure, dating, and their cellphone load. But, like the women, they ran the risks of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases as they did not use condoms consistently while at work.



# **Amoy-Turista: Being Presentable Among Palawan Tour Guides**

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**Ian Anthony Davatos**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Smell is powerful. Odours affect us on a physical, psychological, and social level. For the most part, however, we breathe in the aromas which surround us without being consciously aware of their importance to us. (Classen et al. 1994, 1)

This study is about tour guides, the rich and varied ways in which they give importance to smell, and how these affect their choices of chemical products to use. It also describes the layers of smells that are important to tour guides and shows how essential smell is to their identity.

### **The Importance of Smell: A Brief History**

It may not be that obvious, but our olfactory sense, or sense of smell, plays a vital role in our sensory lives. Given that fact, it is surprising that smell is the least valued, and the least researched, of all the senses (Synnott 1993, 183). We are not usually conscious of our olfactory experiences until something enters our nose and surprises or bothers us. Also, when our faculty of smell is impaired for some reason, we begin to realize the

essential role olfaction plays in our sense of well-being (Classen et al. 1994, 1).

History is replete with examples of cultures that were sensitive to their olfactory experiences. Two of the societies that placed paramount importance on smell were ancient Greece and Rome. Scholars have claimed that these societies were not simply content to douse themselves with one strong scent or another, but they had a highly developed sense of olfactory aesthetics (Classen et al. 1994, 17). Ancient writers vividly described the scents of their cities, households, banquets, theatre stages, and even the smell of battle. Ancient Romans were not even content with the natural odors of foods that they sprinkled perfume on their dishes (Classen et al. 1994, 22).

However, when Christianity emerged, perfumes took on negative associations. Incense was used by Greeks and Romans to purify a conquered town of the contaminating odors of the enemy's blood (Classen et al. 1994, 39), but it was later condemned because of its link with idolatry, with Church Father Origen calling it "food for demons." (Classen et al. 1994, 22). However, there was also what was called the "odor of sanctity" for the early Christians. Priests were considered fragrant, being among the aroma of Christ, as mentioned in the Bible (Cor. 2:15). They were also literally associated with good smell because priests wore rose garlands during feast days (Classen et al. 1994, 52). In contrast, the smell of burning flesh signaled the presence of evil. In fact, the purpose of burning traitors, together with witches and heretics, was not only to destroy their bodies but to make known their crimes to society by the repugnant smell of their burning flesh (Classen et al. 1994, 54).

Filipinos are known to take a bath every day, sometimes even twice during the hot season. Ask any Filipino whether he or she could go out in public without taking a bath, and he or she will most likely answer "No." But interestingly, that was not the culture of the past. Bathing was considered more as a sensual pastime rather than an essential means to clean oneself (Classen et al. 1994, 70). While bathing is now generally considered necessary to rid oneself of bad bacteria that may cause diseases, past cultures—which were understandably unaware of the presence of bacteria—thought of water as a cause of physical corruption. They believed that as the body became soft and moist, it was made vulnerable

to unhealthy agents (Classen et al. 1994, 70). However, during the 18th and early 19th centuries, there came an olfactory revolution that sought to revitalize people's appreciation of smell. Segregation of waste became a paramount concern. By the 20th century, manufacturing and distributing perfumes had become a multi-million business (Synnott 1994, 182).

### **The Importance of Smell to Filipinos**

In order to understand the importance of smell to the Filipino society, a brief overview of the many ways smell is talked about may be helpful. "*Amoy-turista*," for example, is an adjective that has many meanings. It may be used to suggest that a person looks and moves like a tourist, a kind of sophistication. Literally speaking, it refers to the pleasant smell of a tourist or traveler. The existence of such a term implies that the olfactory sense can help people describe and give meaning to things. Compared to the other senses, the sense of smell is often underrated, and yet the world would be a bland place without it.

The Filipino language has varied ways of describing or identifying smells, and this implies that smell is very important in the Filipino culture. The term *amoy*, combined with other words, can be used both as an adjective and as a verb with many distinct meanings. For instance, the term *nangangamoy-away* means that there is an impending conflict. *Amoy-lupa* is a pejorative term for being old. Filipino terms for various smells, some used in idiomatic expressions, can also have different meanings. For example, the term *mabango*, which literally means fragrant, carries a different meaning when used in politics. When somebody says "*Mabango ang pangalan niyan*," the speaker means that people think highly of the person he or she is referring to; that is why, when candidates for an election are doing some publicity, they are said to be engaging in "*pagpapabango*," which means they are establishing a positive image to the people. Traditionally, politicians generally have a negative image, which is described as *mabaho* (foul-smelling).

Filipino terms that refer to specific odors are wide-ranging. Table 1 lists a few examples of such terms.

Table 1. Some Filipino terms for specific odors	
1. <i>Mabango</i>	Pleasant-smelling
2. <i>Mabaho/mabantot</i>	Foul-smelling
3. <i>Mapanghi</i>	Smelling of urine
4. <i>Masangsang</i>	Smelling of blood
5. <i>Malansa</i>	Smelling of fish
6. <i>Mahalimuyak</i>	Smelling of flowers
7. <i>Maasim</i>	How the human body smells when exposed to the sun
8. <i>Maanghit</i>	How unclean armpits smell
9. <i>Umaalingasaw</i>	Emitting a strong, foul smell

Except for the last, all the terms above are adjectives with the prefix *ma-*, which is the most common form of Filipino modifiers. *Amoy* can be added to the name of almost anything that has a distinct smell in order to describe that smell. (Tan 2005).

Looking at the popular culture in the country, we can see that there are many products endorsed primarily for their distinct and good smells. An example is Palmolive shampoo, which is advertised with the tagline “*bangong* Palmolive” (the Palmolive fragrance). The advertisement’s song, with its feel-good melody and catchy lyrics that vividly emphasize the product’s advantage being a very fragrant shampoo, makes the commercial one of the more memorable ones. As the lyrics cheerfully say, “Palmolive keeps my hair so fragrant, and now I never worry in the morning, noon, and evening. I’m always feeling fresh, hair *ay mabango*, long-lasting, *bangong* Palmolive.” Interestingly, the commercial does not emphasize the straightness or shininess of the hair after using the shampoo, a common strategy of all the other brands, but simply focuses on its unique ability to make one’s hair very fragrant. Even the model does not have exceedingly straight and shiny hair, eschewing the computer-generated effects used in other ads. The purpose of the commercial is to show how fragrant hair attracts people.

While not surprising in its focus on scent, one brand of air freshener is known for its provocative commercials. In one, famous actress Gretchen Barreto was blindfolded and led into a public toilet where everything, from the sinks to the toilet bowls, was filled with dirt. The air freshener was sprayed all over the place, and the actress was asked to describe what the place might look like. She described it as a place where it was like “being in a perfume store.” She added, “This reminds me of spring and

fall, fresh and clean.” Taking aside the effectiveness of the product, the way the actress described the smell was so precise and colorful that it might make one conclude that Filipinos, in general, are highly sensitive to their olfactory environment, and that certain companies capitalize on this fact.

Of course, it would not be a complete picture without mentioning how important perfumes are to Filipinos’ personal grooming. Joel Cruz, the man behind the perfume brand *Aficionado Germany*, has taken advantage of this remarkable Filipino passion for good smell, and it has brought him the sweet smell of success, as some commentators would say. Even fabric softeners sold in the country capitalize on Filipinos’ passion for perfumes. Their commercials emphasize their products’ smells as something comparable to the most expensive perfumes but a thousand times cheaper.

### **Scent and Tourism**

Palawan has recently taken center stage in Philippine tourism. After having been chosen as one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature, the Underground River has brought Puerto Princesa, the only city in Palawan, international fame. With its pristine white beaches and big green trees, Palawan has been dubbed “World’s Best Island” in 2013 and 2016 by international magazine *Travel and Leisure* and one of the best islands in Asia according to the website *TripAdvisor*.

Ten years ago, Puerto Princesa only attracted 120,674 tourists according to the City Tourism Office (CTO). By 2014, the figure had grown to 692,982, and by mid-2014, the number had already reached 418,064, and this covered only the number of visitors from January to June. With this boom in tourism, the CTO, together with some of the local communities, has developed what are called “community-based sustainable tourism (CBST) projects” in which natural panoramas, like riverbanks with colonies of fireflies and dolphins swimming in the deep blue sea, have been recently opened for the public to enjoy. There are also cultural sites being developed, like the Batak Visitor Center Cultural Village, which showcases the cultures of the major indigenous groups in the city, including their ethnic crafts and products. These projects do not only entertain guests from different parts of the world but also provide livelihood for the natives and locals and support their small businesses.

As Puerto Princesa continues to attract tourists, the number of tour guides in the city grows, competing with those in Manila, Cebu, and Bohol. The CTO (2013) reports that in 2013 Puerto Princesa had a total of 164 licensed tour guides (see table 2).

Table 2. Number of tourism-related and tourism-oriented establishments in Puerto Princesa (2008–2013)						
SERVICE/ESTABLISHMENT	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
TRAVEL & TOUR	19	58	61	72	123	246
Dolphin watching	-	-	-	2	1	2
TOUR GUIDING	95	115	143	134	207	164
ACCOMMODATION	90	81	90	107	155	199
Hotel	3	10	7	10	12	15
Resort	4	11	14	12	13	16
Inn	21	13	25	29	32	40
Pension house	62	47	44	56	98	127
TRANSPORTATION	22	158	153	74	208	379
Van/Coaster	-	132	116	41	161	329
Airtoda	22	26	37	33	47	50
Motorized boat	85	109	109	84	108	153
Hobbai	40	59	59	32	41	85
Sabang Sea Ferry	45	50	50	50	65	66
RESTAURANT	41	84	68	84	100	135
OTHER ESTABLISHMENTS	20	35	55	99	138	290
Ticketing office	-	-	-	15	43	123
Souvenir shop	20	28	41	63	49	92
Spa and wellness center	-	4	8	8	9	17
Diving services shop	-	3	6	6	11	18
Gasoline station	-	-	-	-	8	15
Special interest shop	-	-	-	6	17	22
Convention center	-	-	-	-	-	3
TOTAL	372	640	679	654	1,039	1,565

This table shows that the number of establishments and services in Puerto Princesa are generally increasing in response to the growing number of tourists who visit every year. With this in mind, the CTO has extended its training for tour guides. In 2010, the complete training for guides—from the in-house lessons to the field training—lasted for one month, according to Ms. Imelda Yayen, the Tourism City Officer II and officer-in-charge of CTO’s Standards and Services Division. But by 2013, the in-house training alone lasted for 21 days. The main reason for this,

according to Yayen, was primarily the growing tourism industry of the city. “Establishments are multiplying fast; many more destinations are being developed, and so, we have so much to offer for the tourists,” she said. Yayen also noted that the competition to attract tourists was fierce not only at the national level but also at the global level. Also, since the city wants to provide excellent services, one of its priorities is a rigorous training for those on its frontline, the tour guides. Yayen added, though, that undergoing the 21-day in-house training would not guarantee that one would become an accredited tour guide. The Department of Tourism (DOT) assessor will evaluate each of the trainees to see if they have developed the right communication skills and are sufficiently armed with information to be a city tour guide. Yayen stated, “Everything would be examined, so that when they start guiding they all have the weapons needed to become an excellent tour guide.”

Indeed, as the frontliners of the tourism industry, tour guides must be knowledgeable enough to inform tourists about destinations they are visiting and be presentable enough to please and even entertain them. Tour guides are representatives of a place and its people. They must embody the beauty that their destinations represent. Puerto Princesa is known as a clean and green city, thus tour guides must also be clean and presentable. The training module even alludes to personal grooming and hygiene in terms of “social etiquette and graces.” When asked why there was no separate section for personal grooming and hygiene in the module, one tourism officer answered that those things seemed impractical to be discussed in a class, and that they are things aspiring tour guides should already know at the start. While not explicitly stated or included in the guides’ curriculum, the information I unearthed clearly showed that tour guides, tour agencies, and the CTO all unanimously considered “being presentable” important, specifically in terms of smell.

Ed was the owner of Sanctuary Travel and Tours, operating since 1997, and, at the time of the research, the president of the Association of Travel Operators in Palawan (ATOP). Having been in the industry for many years, he was concerned mainly with how the prospective tour guides handled and carried themselves, how they dressed, and their overall personality “because,” he said, “the knowledge, the facts, and the figures can be studied.”

Abet, the owner of Travelwise Travel and Tours, conceded that, if given the choice, “anyone would want a tour guide who is either handsome or beautiful, and tall.” But he also stressed that good looks were not the ultimate standard. “Our tourists base their judgments on the excellence of the tour guide: Is he a comedian? Is he reliable?” he said, pointing out the other qualities he was looking for. He explained, “Because if we’re going to base [our judgment] on physical appearance, there are times when the tour guides are beautiful or handsome, but their service is poor. So it’s still better to base [our judgment] on the work, not on the physical appearance.”



The tour guides are encouraged to use baby powder on their faces to avoid having oily-looking faces, which is a sign of not being fresh and well-groomed.

While physical appearance counts, what really matters is how tour guides dress and care for their hygiene over the course of a working day. Ann, a tour guide and one of my informants, pointed out that, to be presentable, tour guides must be well-groomed and wear good clothes and formal shoes; they must also know how to talk with guests. Xio, also my informant, stated that being presentable meant wearing a collared shirt rather than a tank top, and shoes rather than sandals. Another informant, Kring, advised her colleagues “to put on some baby

powder and foundation so that you will not look oily; and all throughout the day, you should retouch.”

The tour guides’ emphasis on good physical appearance and grooming is expected in a job like theirs which requires one to connect and relate to all kinds of people who have different personalities and expectations. Full-fledged city tour guides organize tours for people from many different countries, from China to the United States to Middle Eastern countries. Some have had the opportunity to serve high-profile people, such as well-known actors and models. One such guide, Rocky, was even mentioned in a CNN writer’s blog because of his excellent service. Rocky described

his experience as “being so lucky to have been the tour guide.” Luck may have played a part, but meeting distinguished people is expected in a job that requires one to meet new people of all stripes every day.

As knowledgeable and flexible as they may be, the tour guides of Puerto Princesa face different kinds of challenges each day. Since they have to guide people with different personalities, backgrounds, and nationalities, they need to develop personalities that are patient and sensitive as well as presentable. As a tour guide, one guide noted, you must be able to handle “elite people like ambassadors, secretaries, senators, and other [guests in high positions].” In the course of my interviews with tour guides, an unexpected theme emerged out of the idea of being presentable: the importance of smell. This study explores the role of smell in being a presentable tour guide and in the tour guides’ choice of chemical products.

## Context

Puerto Princesa City has never been so vibrant. Hotels and other accommodations are springing up everywhere, while once rugged roads are paved for the comfort of travelers. Festivities unique to the city, such as the *Pista Yang Kagueban (Feast of the Forest)*, have recently been receiving national attention, while natural spots and other potential tourist destinations have been developed to complement the increasing influx of tourists.

This study focuses on a group of 20 city tour guides who lead the usual tours offered by the city: city tour, Honda Bay tour, and Underground River tour. All 20 tour guides are licensed by the city government. Most have been in the industry for more than two years and have decided to do tour guiding as a full-time job.

The occupation of tour guides has been professionalized. Before, anyone who could speak basic English could be a tour guide, regardless of age, knowledge, and educational attainment. But now, the city requires that tour guides be college graduates, speak fluent English, and undergo rigorous training by the City Tourism Office. In 2010, an in-house part of the training for aspiring city tour guides (I was one of them) lasted for five days. By 2012, the training had been extended to one month.

The CTO gives a course module that includes communication skills and customer relations training. Aspiring tour guides are also trained to manage crisis situations and do basic first aid in emergency situations. The general subject knowledge taught includes Philippine history and folklore, with emphasis on Palawan, environmental concerns, cultural products and festivals, heritage sites, and relevant laws like those about immigration and caring for the environment. Interestingly, there is also a subject entitled “Protocol, Etiquette, and Social Graces,” which includes basic training on personal hygiene and good grooming. In a focus group discussion, I asked whether the CTO was giving enough time and training for personal hygiene and grooming, and most tour guides said yes. Tin, a young female tour guide, said, “It’s already taught at home, and up to elementary level, it’s reinforced. So it’s up to you, how you care for your hygiene.” Ena, a nursing graduate, disagreed and said that she had encountered tour guides who smelled bad, and that the CTO should call their attention so that they could do something about their smell. She related that she and her classmates, who were nursing students, undressed in front of their professor and raised their arms so the he could check if they had body odor. Any student found to have it was informed and expected to address the problem. Ena thought that a similar mechanism should be imposed on tour guides.

With regard to the tour guides’ chemical use, the rapidly increasing number of shops (including the new upscale Robinson’s mall), along with TV advertising, has been having a great deal of influence on the guides’ choice of products. Most use certain chemical products because they have seen them on TV commercials or because they are endorsed by TV personalities they like. Tour guides purchase these products at shopping malls or at the nearest *sari-sari* stores, where the brands they want are available. Some choose products based on the recommendations of friends; results of use, however, matter more than friends’ recommendations. If they get the results they want, and most of them do, they stick to the product; if not, they switch to something else. Other influencing factors are family and colleagues.

Although Puerto Princesa has one of the greatest numbers of tourists in the Philippines, the city’s tourism industry still has some low seasons over the course of a year. One tour guide, Gil, pointed out that in September 2014, he only had four tours for the whole month due to national events and typhoons that affected tourism in the whole country. The typical low

season for Palawan tourism is during the rainy months (June-September). The typical peak season starts in November when the Christmas season begins, and ends by June when summer is ending. The tour guides are aware that it is always possible for them to be out of work for a long time, which pushes them to either save or engage in part-time businesses. Some tour guides take advantage of the peak season and conduct as many as 25 tours a month, with only five days of rest, in order to save for the low season. Others engage in businesses—selling different kinds of products, such as soaps.

## **METHODS**

The study was carried out between December 2013 and October 2014 as part of the Chemical Youth Project, which was spearheaded by Prof. Anita Hardon of the University of Amsterdam and Prof. Michael Tan of the University of the Philippines Diliman. I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with 10 male and 10 female tour guides, all of whom were in their 20s except for two, who were in their early 30s (see table 3).

I also conducted interviews with five key informants, who were owners or representatives of travel agencies, and held two focus group discussions to explore and deepen the initial data. One focus group included three openly gay young men, while the other included three women and two men. I also interviewed one representative from the CTO who was directly involved in training and hiring city tour guides. To be able to provide a larger picture of tourism in the city, I acquired statistics, reports, and city ordinances from the CTO and the Sanggunian Office.

This study does not attempt to draw a representative picture of tour guides in Puerto Princesa. It only focuses on the subjective experiences of the tour guides whom I interviewed regarding their work and the chemical products that are important to their job.

As I have formerly worked as a tour guide myself, both in the city and in the Palawan Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Center, I was able to contact friends and former colleagues who were already licensed city tour guides. I also used snowball sampling, relying on the referrals of the tour guides I knew personally. To protect their privacy, I informed my informants that all their personal information and everything that they

**Table 3. The tour guides' sociodemographic background and the chemical products they used**

Sociodemographic Information						Chemical Products Used			
Name	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Living Arrangement	Monthly Income in Pesos	Shampoo	Soap	Deodorant	Perfume
Dyan	F	24	Single Parent	With family	16K	L'Oreal	Dove, Palmanis	Silka white	Victoria's Secret, David Off, Gucci
MKM	F	21	Single	With family	8K	Rejoice	Palmolive	Did not use	Victoria's Secret
Gie	F	25	Single	With family	8K	Dove	Dove	Did not use	Baby Bench
Bet	F	27	Single	With family	16K	Head & Shoulders	Safeguard	Rexona Deo-lotion	Johnson's Cologne
Ena	F	27	Single	With family	13K	Pantene	Safeguard Beige	Did not use	Baby cologne
Kring	F	23	Single	With family	10K	Palmolive	Johnson & Johnson's	Did not use	Victoria's Secret
Alphie	F	22	Single	Alone	15K	Head & Shoulders	Johnson's Body Wash	Nivea	Victoria's Secret, Oxygen
Ann	F	29	Single	With partner	35K	Palmolive	Safeguard, Kojic, Dove	Nivea	Victoria's Secret
Tin	F	23	Single	With family	12K	Sunsilk violet	Dove Body Wash	Did not use	Charm
Val	F	22	Single	With partner	15K	Palmolive	Silka Papaya	Tawas powder	Bench
Gil	M	30	Single	With family	20K	Clear	Kojic	Nivea	Aficionado
Mon	M	25	Single	With family	15K	Dove	Dove	Black Suede	Bench
Roj	M	26	Single	Alone	30K	Vaseline	Irish Spring, Belo for Men	Dove for Men	Penshoppe, Bench
Vim	M	32	Married	With family	20K	Did not use	Dove	Not mentioned	Aficionado F4
Xio	M	26	Single	With family	15K	Gard	Dove	Endurance	Oxygen
Fid	M	25	Single	With family	20K	Clear	Safeguard	Rexona	Ferrari
Ron	M	23	Single	With Partner	15K	Clear	Safeguard	Nivea	Calvin Klein
Jay	M	27	Single	With family	15K	Head & Shoulders	Safeguard	Did not use	Boss
Jake	M	26	Single	With family	16K	Head & Shoulders	Safeguard	Did not use	
Eco	M	25	Single	With family	15K	Head & Shoulders	Safeguard	Nivea for Men	Static, Bench, Avon

disclosed would be kept totally confidential. I also asked them to use aliases to conceal their identities. In order to deepen the context of this study, I also interviewed one official representative from the CTO, who discussed the office's plans and the changes that they would implement, especially in connection with the training and development of tour guides. I also had short impromptu interviews with foreign tourists, wherein I asked them about their experiences with their tour guides or with Filipinos in general, including how they smelled.

## **RESULTS**

More than half of the tour guides did not study tourism as their major in college. Some of them had degrees in accountancy, Philippine studies, secondary education, and even nursing. Most of them were single at the time of this study; only one out of the 20 was married. At least three were living with their partners, while two were living alone. But most still lived with their families, with their parents being strong influences in terms of their use of chemicals. One tour guide, Beth, attributed her initial choices of products to her mother. "It's my mother who managed what to use during our childhood; it's not our choice to make," she said. But she added that she was able to make her own choices later. "When we got to be adolescents, that's when we started to choose our own brands," she stated.

### **The Chemical Lives of Tour Guides**

From the interview and focus group transcripts, a striking theme emerges as being a key component in the lives of Palawan tour guides—the importance of smell in being presentable. The tour guides assert that a "presentable" guide smells good, does not smell bad, does not have bad breath, and does not smell of beer. The way to achieve a good smell is bathing and brushing one's teeth after every meal.

#### ***Using Soap to Smell Good***

Safeguard was the most common brand of bath soap used by my informants. It has been in the Philippines since 1966. Their commercials focus on the soap's strengths as a germicide and a very long-lasting soap.

Ron, one of my informants, wanted Safeguard because its smell lasted longer than that of the former brand he used, which was Palmolive. Palmolive, according to him, “smells good at first but not when it’s already small, unlike Safeguard which still has a good smell even when it’s very small.”

Mon, who had a degree in secondary education, had the same perception of Safeguard. At the time of the interview, Mon was using Dove soap but only because he was not able to find a Safeguard soap in their house, and there was an available Dove soap in his room. When asked which he would choose between the two, he unhesitatingly answered Safeguard. “I like the smell of Safeguard White more; it smells good when used on the body,” he said. Additionally, he noted that Safeguard was cheaper, and he had been using it since he was a kid. He chose Safeguard primarily because it made him smell good, which, for him, indicated that it did its job—to kill germs—as portrayed in TV commercials. “When I feel that I smell good, I also feel that the germs are less,” he said.

In contrast to Mon’s perception of Safeguard’s smell, Kring did not want Safeguard precisely because of its smell. “I don’t like the smell of Safeguard because it reminds me of the smell after you crap, that kind of smell,” she commented. Jake and Eco both used another brand of soap but liked Safeguard more because they felt fresh after using it; and Eco said he felt really clean after a bath. Ena was convinced of Safeguard’s guarantee of being 99.9% germ-free. She said, “I kind of noticed it also, that I don’t easily get contaminated with other diseases. When somebody sneezes, I don’t get affected.” She proudly said that she would recommend Safeguard to others, especially those who had kids. She added, “We now have a practice of washing hands before and after eating, which we do to avoid getting sick.”

The tour guides also used other brands of soaps. Ian, one of the participants in a focus group, shared that he used to use Olay but switched to Safeguard due to practical reasons. He said that since he was often on the sea, in El Nido and Honda Bay, he wanted a soap that could protect him from rashes more than just moisturized his skin, which what Olay only did.

Val, an accounting graduate, was proud to use Silka Papaya as her body soap. Although she was told that this soap had whitening ingredients, she

was convinced that it was not true and kept using it primarily because it was very good-smelling.

Gil, also an accounting graduate, used Kojic soap. He liked it because of its effect on his body's smell. He stated, "Even if I sweat, my body does not produce a bad smell." He also said that, as his business since 2010, he had been selling Kojic soap to many people, including his fellow tour guides and former co-workers, and to different business establishments in the city.

The tour guides considered the smell of soap as their "basic smell." Rocky saw soap as the fundamental ingredient for a basically good-smelling body. He said that if you used a fragrant soap, you no longer needed to put anything more on your skin; the smell of the soap was enough. Ian expressed that using a good-smelling soap enabled him to identify himself as clean. Ena chose a soap based on its smell and how long it lasted on her skin. She used Safeguard Beige because, according to her, "its smell lasts on my skin; it would take hours before the smell is gone."

### ***To Deodorize or Not?***

Since body odor is a universal concern, deodorants can be expected to play a great part in the chemical lives of tour guides, especially because they are professionals interacting with the public. The nature of their work exposes them to the sun the whole day, making them susceptible to sweat and body odor. Fid, who liked to travel, used Rexona deodorant because of its antiperspirant quality as, he admitted, it would be a huge problem if he sweat and smelled bad during tours. He also liked that brand because he did not have any allergic reaction to it and it did not darken his underarms.

Mon used Black Suede, even if it stained his shirts, because it kept him smelling good all day. Val's deodorant was powdered *tawas*, a cheap alum-based product used traditionally as a deodorant. She had tried other brands but did not like them because either they stuck on her underarms and were hard to wash off, or they took long to dry. She needed a deodorant that dried fast and was effective because, as tour guides, she said, they were "always on the go"; thus, she stuck to *tawas* because it had both qualities. Cris, a mother and a participant in one of the focus groups, had the same sentiment as Val's on using *tawas*.

Eco liked his deodorant because it did not stain his clothes. It seemed very important to him because when asked if he were to live alone on an island and could bring only one personal hygiene product with him, he interestingly answered deodorant. He explained that if one would be alone, he or she would not need shampoo or toothpaste, which implied that, when alone, he would rather have smelly hair and bad breath than body odor.

Xio, a nursing graduate, used High Endurance deodorant, which he primarily used to avoid having body odor. He said that he had tried other brands but the smell of his underarms always overpowered the smell of the deodorant; then he found High Endurance, which successfully prevented body odor.

Rocky used Nivea Sport primarily for its good smell. He did not like the smell of the other brands he had tried.

In the course of the study, seven tour guides revealed that they were not using any deodorant. Gie, who was pregnant then, said that “it’s normal for the underarm to sweat. It’s only natural for those who use deodorants to sweat because I’ve seen some myself, even if some are telling otherwise. I also thought that I don’t have body odor, so I don’t think I have to use it. I think it’s only for those who do have body odor.” MKM and Kring expressed the same sentiment.

Tin previously used a deodorant but stopped because of her doctor’s recommendations. She explained, “Before, I used to use one but my body was not *hiyang* [compatible with] and so I had body odor. But if your body is not prone to body odor, it’s better not to use anything at all.”

Ena also didn’t hesitate to admit that she had not felt the need to use a deodorant as she knew that she had not smelled bad at any time of any day. In fact, she trained in taekwondo and took two-hour lessons inside a gym in the afternoon on that day, after which she was really sweaty, and yet, she said, “I still smell beautiful.” Moreover, according to her, when she was not giving tours, she would not take a bath for two days, and yet she would still not smell bad; and that was something she was very proud of. When asked about her secret—why she would not smell bad despite not taking a bath—she said it could be proper bathing.

Jay, whose pastime on his days off was basketball, also had no problem with not using any deodorant at all. He was quite confident because he had no experience of co-players complaining about his smell, and he attributed this to the fact that he took a bath every day. One culprit, in his opinion, for body odor was eating too much spicy foods. He admitted to eating chili but only with *chao long*, a sweet and spicy Vietnamese dish with rice noodles and meat.

Jake also said that he did not use deodorants because he was tidy, a quality which he believed kept him smelling clean. It seems then that the mantra of these seven tour guides is that you don't need to use a deodorant as long as you don't smell bad.

The tour guides' giving importance to not smelling bad is also reflected in their complaints about their guests—that many of them did smell bad and seemed not concerned about their body odor at all. A couple of tourist guides said that, when they were in a van with guests that smelled, they would get rid of the bad smell by opening a window and saying that they just wanted some fresh air.

### ***Smell as an Identity***

Smell is important to everyone, and in the case of my tour guide informants, it's one of the defining factors in choosing what products they will use. While soaps are important in killing germs and smelling clean, and deodorants are used to prevent body odor, perfumes seem to be highly valued when it comes to smelling good. They seem to be an important component in defining one's identity in terms of smell. This is shown by the interesting ways that perfumes have been branded over the years.

It was not surprising then that all of my 20 informants used colognes or perfumes to smell good. MKM, who worked at the Palawan Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Center, used the same brand of shampoo, lotion, and baby powder because they all smelled good. She then described the perfume she used (given to her by her older sister) as "very good-smelling. The smell lasts very long."

Ann looked at a product's smell as essential in choosing and being loyal to a particular brand. She liked her shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, and



Perfumes and colognes, like the one shown above, are essential to the tour guides' everyday lives. They believe that smelling good gives them confidence in facing tourists and doing their jobs. It also masks the unpleasant smell that some tourists have.

baby powder because they all smelled good. She had five kinds of perfume—she bought some of them, while the others were gifts.

Rain mixed her perfumes to create a new kind of smell. She also sprayed them many times throughout the day—"morning, break, afternoon, and before sleep, [a] total of four [times]." She described her most favorite perfume as "*masarap amoyin*" [very pleasant to smell].

Gil used an Aficionado perfume which he liked because its fragrance was long-lasting and it was very affordable. His former brand was Penshoppe, but its smell only lasted for four hours; unlike Aficionado which lasted the whole day. Ian and Rocky also used Aficionado perfumes.

Rocky, who had never changed his brand of perfume, described his perfume's smell as "smooth." Ian also enjoyed Aficionado perfumes because they are cheap and yet they can compete with more expensive brands. He said, "Imagine 24 hours have passed and the smell still sticks to your shirt, or to your skin." He jokingly added that he could even still smell it when he's removing dirt (*libag*) from his body.

Alphie used different perfumes for different events. She used her Victoria's Secret perfume, which was given to her, only on certain occasions like "when there's a party in which 'girly outfit' is the theme." On regular days, like when she's doing tours, her brand of perfume was Oxygen. She said that Oxygen was just right for her kind of job. She explained, "When you use a very strong perfume and it mixes with your sweat, it produces an unpleasant smell. I choose Oxygen because its smell is cool. It is not

too strong.” A similar point was made by Mon, who tried Aficionado but found it too strong.

Roj, who had been a tour guide since 2010, had a very specific reason why he used Bench and Penshoppe perfumes: he did not want to wear a very strong scent while working. According to him, “strong scents are prohibited at work. It’s a no-no if your scent is stronger than the guests’, so you should only use baby colognes.”

Vim, the oldest male tour guide I interviewed, first used Bench 8 but later switched to Aficionado with this funny reason: “The guests always tell me that my perfume reminds them of their high school days and also of their broken hearts, so I changed brands. I turned to Aficionado because it came out just recently.” When I asked about the guests’ reactions to his new perfume, he said that it was too strong for them, but “it’s better because if you’re sweating, it will overpower the smell of your sweat.” It was interesting that Roj and Vim had contrasting views about the consequence of using a perfume with a very strong scent.

Kring stated that she was not into perfumes and instead used Victoria’s Secret lotion to smell good. Eco, when asked about what product he would want anybody to give him, answered perfume, specifically Ferrari, which, according to him, cost about PhP3,000. When asked if he would buy it if he had the money, he said no because for him it was too much of a luxury. While Ferrari was still just a dream for Eco, it was a dream come true for Fid. He agreed that it was very expensive in the Philippines; so, when he got the opportunity to be in Singapore and found it there, he grabbed the chance and bought it for less than PhP2,000.

Tin couldn’t stand having the same scent over and over again so she used different perfumes to smell different every day.

Perfumes are indeed important to tour guides. Perhaps because of their mysterious nature in evoking pleasant emotions and associations, perfumes serve many functions. For some tour guides, perfumes help build their confidence, especially when in front of guests, because the scents somehow suggest something good about their personalities.

## CONCLUSION

From the insights gleaned above, there seem to be layers of smells that are important for to tour guides. Their “basic smell” lies with the kind of soap that they use. It basically means that regardless whether they put on perfume or not, what is important is that they use a soap that makes them smell good every day or at least protect them from smelling sweaty, which is a natural consequence of being exposed to the sun the whole day. Soaps give them the sense of being well-groomed.

Next to soap is deodorant. If soap is the tour guides’ basic aid for smelling good, deodorant is their main support for not smelling bad. We all know that the most fundamental role of deodorant is to prevent body odor, and with the nature of the job that tour guides have, it is imperative to use an effective deodorant which removes that odor. Unlike most office jobs, whose nature is working in an air-conditioned room and sitting almost the whole working time, tour guiding is a job that necessitates exposing oneself to sun and sweat, and fundamentally involves walking, climbing, and using most of one’s muscles to show certain landscapes and move or carry certain objects. It is therefore not surprising that deodorants play an important role in the daily lives of tour guides. However, we learned that there were some who didn’t use any deodorant primarily because their bodies did not emit bad odors that might be offensive to others, most especially to their guests.

The last and most personally revealing layer of smell is perfume. Some tour guides even experimented with different perfumes, tried combining them, in order to come up with a scent that personally suited each of them. Perfumes then may be seen as an expression of one’s personality, and it is interesting to note that there were tour guides who used different perfumes for different occasions, which may be analogous to the changing dynamics of one’s personality, constantly adjusting to adapt to certain kinds of people.



## **Pampa-alert: Security Guards' Use of Chemicals**

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**Leo Andrew Diego**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **On Being a Security Guard**

Security guards are an omnipresent feature of contemporary Philippine society. We see them everywhere - in schools, malls, banks and other big establishments where people frequent.

A blog detailing the roles and responsibilities of a security guard states the following:

Security guards are crime, threat and risk prevention officers assigned to protect specific people and property. This may include detecting some of the same offenses that would cause a peace officer to act. If a law is violated, police are required to pursue and seize the suspect. This is not primarily the role of the security guard, whose duty is to inform the closest police station of the incident. The security guard's concern is to protect persons

and prevent damage or destruction to property. Prevention is the key word.<sup>1</sup>

In the Philippines today, security work is often perceived as “*trabahong pang-tamad*” [a trade for lax people]. Many people believe that security guards just stand there, not thinking, all day at their posts. For example, Roland, a middle-aged security guard who works at a bank, always hears that being a security guard is a job for a bystander because you will not only just stand and walk at your post, but you can also sleep if no one is watching. He said that, because of this, some people from his neighborhood would say that when you apply for a job, being a security guard must be your last choice.

In contrast to popular perceptions, being a security guard is often a stressful and challenging job (Bohle 1989). Ric, a security guard at a mall, stated the following about his job: Guards must be conscious of everything that is happening in their vicinity at all times. They must constantly be reading the body language and facial expressions of the people around them. Their minds must always be aware of what is to be done in case of unexpected trouble. They must be observant at all times.

The greatest challenge reported by security guards is maintaining their alertness. This challenge has to do with long and irregular working hours. If a guard consistently works during the day, that is a stable schedule. But working schedules can change with little or no notice. Three guards often share a single post; each of them has to have a shift of eight consecutive hours. But actual working hours often depend on the availability of one's colleagues assigned to the same post.

Among the common plights of being a security guard in Puerto Princesa is fighting off *antok* (sleepiness) and being *puyat* (deprived of sleep). In the study of psychosocial work environments, stress is usually associated with self-reports of poor sleep (Akerstedt et al. 2011). “[Sleep-deprived people] can call on cognitive resources they have that they normally don't need to use to do a certain task. That allows them to perform reasonably well, but they still don't perform at normal levels,” says researcher Sean P.A. Drummond, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry at the University

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blog.damognigeria.com/6-essential-roles-and-responsibilities-of-security-guards/> 7/11/14



The picture above shows a security guard checking the body and belongings of a mall customer before letting her inside the establishment.

of California, San Diego, and the VA (Veterans Affairs) San Diego Healthcare System.

The American Cancer Society made a survey of more than one million people and they included several questions related to sleep habits. They found out that men 30 years old or older who slept less than four hours per night were 2.8 times more likely to die within six years than those who slept seven to eight hours per night. Adult men sleeping more than 10 hours per night had higher death rates (1.8) than normal sleepers (Kaplan & Saddock 2000).

Despite the stress involved, being a security guard is not a well-paid job. Most guards earn the minimum wage of PhP280 per day, or approximately PhP8,000 per month. Many must pay rent to a boarding house, which in Puerto Princesa amounts to at least PhP1,500 to PhP2,000, excluding water and electricity. Most guards commute to work (spending PhP20 daily for fare) and pay for their lunch (PhP50). Their monthly expenses for basic needs and transportation thus amount to between PhP3,000 and PhP5,000. Their job as guards is their only source of income. Most

support families and other dependents in the face of the rising costs of basic necessities, such as rice, fish, and gasoline. Many thus fall into debt, and live in a perpetual struggle to pay their bills and promissory notes. The precarious economic situation of most security guards means that they are dependent on keeping their jobs. Any absence from work means that they lose pay. Furthermore, there is this fear of being caught sleeping on the job, which could result in an instant dismissal. Many security guards thus resort to chemical stimulants, which they call “*pampa-alert*,” their term for something that can be used to foster alertness. Alertness, according to the Oxford dictionary, is the state of active attention through high sensory awareness, such as being watchful and prompt to meet dangers or emergencies, or being quick to perceive and act. The main aim of this research is to examine how security guards in Puerto Princessa turn to chemical stimulants in order to achieve and maintain alertness.

### **The Informants’ Profiles**

The informants of this study included 21 security guards who were residents of Puerto Princessa City, Palawan. Fifteen of the participants were men above 25 years old, while six were women who were 28 years old and older. The majority of the participants entered into the security industry because of their lack of college degrees; most of them were high school graduates (see table 1). Most of them also were financially supporting their families and other dependents.

Security guards in the country do not choose where they work. Banks, department stores, malls, state universities, and pawnshops--institutions that are booming in terms of net profit and growth--eventually demand many guards for security reasons regardless of their ages, civil statuses, educational attainments, or family situations. When hiring security guards, though, there are certain guidelines to be followed pursuant to Republic Act No. 1547 under Section 5:

Section 5. *Qualifications Required.* No person shall be employed as security guard or watchman or private detective unless he is: (a) a Filipino citizen; (b) a high school graduate; (c) physically and mentally fit; (d) not less than 21 nor more than 50 years of age; (e) at least 5 feet and 4 inches in height; and (f) suffering none of the disqualifications provided for in the preceding section.

Table 1. Sociodemographic backgrounds of security guards in Puerto Prinsesa

Code Name	Post Assignment	Sex	Civil Status	Educational Attainment	Living Arrangement	Duty Shift	Monthly Income in Pesos
Joker	Bank	Male	Married	College undergraduate	Living with family	Day	6,500
Jerry	Bank	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living alone	Day	8,000
Mantal	Bank	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living with partner	Day	8,000
Roland	Bank	Male	Married	Civil engineering undergraduate	Living with family	Day	6,320
Ric	Department store	Male	Single	College undergraduate	Living with partner and son	Night	7,000
Bryan	Department store	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living alone	Day and night (reliever)	6,000
Netz	Department store	Female	Single	High school graduate	Living with partner	Day	8,000
Juls	Drugstore	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living with family	Night	6,000
Chris	Drugstore	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living with family	Day	6,600
Ged	Hotel	Male	Single	Vocational course (electrical wiring) graduate	Living with elder brother and sister	Night	8,000
Charm	University	Female	Married	High school graduate	Living with family	Day and night (reliever)	9,000
Salad	University	Female (Lesbian)	Single	High school graduate	Living alone	Day	9,000
Ann	University	Female	Single	High school graduate	Separated from husband	Day	9,000
Toto	University	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living alone	Night	7,000
Jim	University	Male	Single	College graduate (BSBA in Mindanao)	Living with uncle	Night	7,000
Jacky	Mall	Female	Married	College undergraduate (midwifery)	Living with family	Day	6,000
Vicky	Mall	Female	Married	College undergraduate (financial management)	Living with family	Day	5,000
Allan	Pawnshop	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living with family	Day	8,000
Mag'z	Pawnshop	Male	Single	High school graduate	Living with partner	Day	8,000

These requirements must be met to become a security guard. Other agencies, though, have lower height requirements; they accept those who are five feet tall and taller. Furthermore, according to my key informants (supervisors at security training centers and security agencies), there were only two security training centers in Palawan: Mirza 7 and Dimerger. These two centers ensured that guards meet the requirements to get a security license from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), which was renewable every six months. According to my informants, they were strict in implementing the dress code and presentable haircut, frequently conducting unannounced inspections, and were giving trainees briefings on the rules and proper etiquette that a guard must follow while at his or her post. The security agencies routinely conducted unannounced visits to check if the security guards were presentable and alert. According to one of the supervisors I interviewed, guards who were caught sleeping while on duty were given a one-week suspension as part of the punishment and disciplinary action. He said that if they were not alert and ready during inspection time, it signified that they were not concerned about their jobs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The security guards interviewed for this study worked at pawnshops, banks, department stores, hotels, and schools. Work circumstances differed at these sites. The pawnshops demanded a high level of security as money was transferred here and must be protected. Security guards here were bound to follow a no-sitting policy while on duty. Thus, alertness was a crucial thing to be considered every minute. As guards, they had to check the body language of customers, give forms to be filled out, and make sure that no trouble would transpire.

Banks also involved high-risk security for the same reason—money matters. Working in a bank was full of tension, especially for guards who worked in armored vans. With their lives at stake, guards should pay utmost attention to every movement in their surroundings.

On the university campus, the work of security guards was very different. With its almost 20,000 students, Palawan State University was the largest tertiary educational institution in the province. This meant that security played a vital role at this place. Almost every day, as per their supervisors'

instruction, security guards at the main gate checked that students had proper identification: no ID, no entry. This policy was strictly implemented. Security guards also regulated traffic on the campus.

Generally, to be alert is to be aware of anything in the vicinity. Troubles and crimes may come along at any time. In this manner, the guards' lives are at stake and at risk, and they are expected to protect people and the establishment for which they are responsible. This is radically opposite to the common perception that the job is stress-free.

Most security guards are men, and the majority of guards are on duty at night. Some security agencies say that female guards are not allowed to be on duty during the night hours, because, they say, female guards are not on a par with male guards in terms of alertness and self-defense. But still, female guards are often found at the entrances of department stores and malls, to name a few. Vergie, a female security guard at Robinson's Mall, said that she could not see any reason that made female guards different from male guards during duty hours. Furthermore, she added, sometimes women were more vigilant, whereas men always slept when they felt that no one was around.

### **The Guards' Stories of Being Presentable**

Nearly all of my informants asserted that being presentable and being in "attention mode" helped them be "switched on." One's personal grooming at work was seen to be a necessary aspect of a security job. Being in proper attire gave more confidence and authority to the guards over guests regardless of the guests' profiles. The majority of the guards agreed that when they were in uniform, they felt more alert and confident to sustain their work.

"Aside from wearing the proper attire, my being clean and presentable are my investments in my work every day." These were the powerful words spoken by Ged, a security guard who used to work at a hotel. Ged, among all of my informants, stood out as a paragon of presentability. He shared that he could not leave his boarding house without having made himself presentable. He described his morning ritual in detail--from praying as he woke up (for two to four minutes to give thanks to his Creator), brushing his teeth, taking a bath for five to fifteen minutes, shaving his mustache and beard, to putting on deodorant after shower.



This picture shows the typical uniform worn by security guards. Some agencies check the guards every morning to make sure that they are wearing their complete attire.

He added that after his shift ended (11 pm), he always did his evening rituals, which was making his body clean, sometimes taking a bath if he wished.

Agustin, a guard supervisor, shared his experiences of implementing rules and regulations. His rise to the supervisory rank was full of struggles, having started as a neophyte guard who always worked the graveyard shift at Shoe Mart (now SM Mall). He shared that there was a “seniority culture” in this field: those who were already working and serving for more than a year or two were always given the opportunity to work a more comfortable schedule (day shift), and particularly at hotels and department stores. When he was a neophyte, he worked at banks and schools at night for twelve consecutive months. In spite of the challenges of his job, he kidded, “*Hindi puwede sa amin ang may mahabang buhok kasi, una sa lahat, kumbaga, ang gupit natin ang ating crown of beauty*” [We cannot have long hair because, first of all, as they say, our haircut is our crown of beauty].

Agustin was chosen as “security guard of the year” for his exemplary deportment on duty. One of his exemplary achievements was his apprehension of a thief who stole PhP200,000 from the pawnshop he was working for. This legacy helped him climb the ladder and become a supervisor. Moreover, he shared that because he started from the “grassroots” (lowest rank), he could communicate with his colleagues in such a manner that they would not be upset whenever he inspected them. He always told jokes and adopted a “cool approach” in order to lead people. According to him, his colleagues followed him out of respect rather than out of fear of punishment, which would just create lies. They obeyed him and were presentable and alert all the time. He said that he always reminded them of the fact that they had loved ones who were dependent on them and would be hungry if they lost their jobs. He also shared, “Now that I am a supervisor, of course my actions are different from those of a typical guard. When we are conducting inspections, what we first notice is proper grooming and proper uniforms.”

All the guards I interviewed were fond of looking “*malinis*” (neat and clean). Almost all the guards stated that social media and advertisements influenced their use of products like shampoo, powder, toothpaste, deodorant, gel, soap, and perfume. Almost half of them said that all these personal hygiene products were available at the nearest *sari-sari* stores while the other half said that they bought them at the Drugman department store. All of them wanted to be always presentable in their workplaces, and they claimed that they were *hiyang* (compatible) with the feeling of being fresh (no bad odor, smelling good) and ultimately being confident and ready for their tasks when they used these chemical products.

### **On Being Alert**

Fourteen of the security guards I interviewed drank instant coffee to keep themselves awake, and 10 of them drank energy drinks to stay alert. In fact, feeling sleepy (*inaantok*) was a major theme in the interviews. My informants learned about different products, techniques, and dosages to stay awake by word of mouth (*mga sabi-sabi at kuwento*), particularly from their peers.

Based on a research conducted by Myers (2000), security guards used different types of chemical stimulants (see table 2).

Table 2. Stimulants used by security guards according to Myers's research			
Drug	Type	Pleasurable Effects	Adverse Effects
Nicotine	Stimulant	Increased alertness and wakefulness	Heart disease, cancer
Caffeine	Stimulant	Increased alertness and wakefulness	Anxiety, restlessness, and high possibility of insomnia
Methamphetamine	Stimulant	Euphoria, alertness, energy	Irritability, insomnia, hypertension, seizures
Ecstasy, Viagra, and cocaine (Fly High)	Stimulant	Emotional elevation, alertness	Overheating, dehydration, depressed mood

This table shows different stimulants and their pleasurable and adverse effects. Yet, contrary to Myers’s findings, the majority of my informants said that they did not experience nor suffered from any adverse effects upon taking *pampa*-alert products like the ones listed in the table. They shared that their health was their biggest investment in their careers.

A wide range of products are sold in sari-sari stores, market stalls, and department stores, and are advertised on TV, social media, and the internet. Advertisements play a strong role in the consumption of different products that boost alertness. While the majority of my informants said that they were influenced by television advertising, some claimed that they were mainly influenced by their peers. Using such products can help fulfill their curiosity as well as their need to be seen as “*astig*” (tough) by their colleagues. Furthermore, my informants admitted that they did not consult with health professionals prior to using *pampa*-alert products. This supports other studies’ findings that much knowledge derives from self-experimentation (Winter 2009, 2012).

In today’s fast-paced lives, people demand to feel robust in order to keep up with their schedules and lifestyles, and they feel that they need some support in doing so. Table 3 shows an overview of the most commonly used products by my informants working at different sites. These stimulants could be bought from sari-sari stores and the Drugman department store.

**Table 3. Common products and ways used by security guards in Puerto Princesa to stay awake and alert and to relieve stress**

Informant			Pampa-alert Products and Stress Reliever Used				
Name	Post	Sex	Energy Drink	Cigarette	Coffee	Other Drinks/ Substances	Others
Joker	Bank	Male	Cobra energy drink during night duty, Bacus during the day	Fortune White cigarettes, 1 pack per week	Nescafe 3-in-1 coffee	Marijuana and shabu (methamphetamine), used occasionally	Walking if he had no money to buy any energy drinks
Jerry	Bank	Male	Cobra on duty	Nonsmoker	Great Taste coffee (no side effects)		Walking, playing basketball after duty
Mantal	Bank	Male	Cobra almost every day	Nonsmoker	Great Taste (no side effects)		Not walking, just sitting and standing at the post; playing basketball after duty
Roland	Bank	Male	Not using energy drinks	2 packs per day	Nescafe 3-in-1	Marijuana and shabu (used occasionally), water	Standing and walking around the post
Ric	Department store	Male	Cobra, Sting, Red Bull, Extra Joss every week	2 packs of Fortune every other day	Kopiko Brown coffee every day	Emperador brandy (drank occasionally to relieve stress after night shift)	Sitting, standing, and sleeping after duty and classes
Bryan	Department store	Male	Cobra during the day	Nonsmoker	Nescafe 3-in-1, thrice a day	Drinking San Miguel Light beer (drank occasionally to relieve stress and be alert)	Walking around his post if he had no money to buy Cobra
Netz	Department store	Female	Cobra during the day	2 cigarettes per day	Great Taste twice a day	Water	Standing and walking around her post
Ged	Hotel	Male		Nonsmoker	Kopiko Brown twice a day	Mineral water	Walking and standing at the post
Charm	University	Female	Cobra during night duty	Nonsmoker	Creamy latte-flavored coffee twice a day	Emperador (drank occasionally especially on weekends with husband to relieve stress)	Walking, but sometimes not effective
Ems	University	Female	Cobra during day shift	Nonsmoker	San Miguel coffee twice a day		Sleeping after duty, walking and roving (walking around the post for inspection)

**Table 3 (continued). Common products and ways used by security guards in Puerto Princesa to stay awake and alert and to relieve stress**

Informant			Pampa-alert Products and Stress Reliever Used				
Name	Post	Sex	Energy Drink	Cigarette	Coffee	Other Drinks/ Substances	Others
Salad	University	Female	Cobra during night duty	2 cigarettes per day	Great Taste twice a day	Emperador (drank occasionally to relieve stress after night duty)	Jogging every morning at a sports complex for 20-30 minutes
Ann	University	Female	Cobra during the day	Nonsmoker	Great Taste every morning	Water	Sleeping after duty
Jacky	Mall	Female	Not using energy drinks	Nonsmoker	Kopiko Brown every morning	Water	Walking (and singing) moderately
Vicky	Mall	Female	Not using energy drinks	Half-pack a day	Great Taste every morning before duty	Water	Walking around
Allan	Pawnshop	Male	Cobra every other night	Winston, 3 cigarettes a day	Great Taste	Playing basketball during free hours	Walking around the post
Mag'z	Pawnshop	Male	Cobra every night duty	Nonsmoker	Not drinking coffee	Tanduy Light rum (drank occasionally to relieve stress after night duty)	Walking around the post

The security guards' desire to maintain their alertness and effectiveness at work drove them to be dependent on chemical stimulants, which they said they were *hiyang* with. More than half of the informants, though, did not smoke because they wanted to be healthy. The guards' motivation for using stimulants appears to be both psychological and physiological in nature. Some of them used energy drinks and coffee to keep themselves alert, while others used them to be able to sleep. If they had no available financial resources for chemical stimulants, they just relied on natural methods. Almost all of them said that walking and roving are effective measures to escape sleepiness.

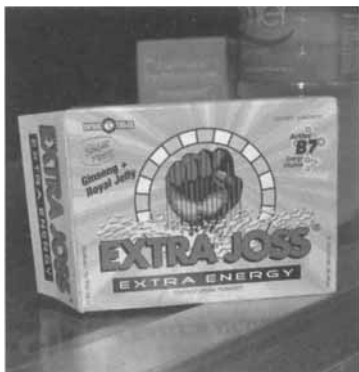
### **The Energy Drinkers' Stories**

On stimulants, Silverman and colleagues (1992) state,

People use these substances to stay awake, lose weight, or boost mood or athletic performance. This category of chemical stimulants also includes energy drinks, amphetamines, and the even more powerful cocaine, Ecstasy, and methamphetamine ('speed'). All strong stimulants increase heart and breathing rates and cause pupils to dilate, appetite to diminish (because blood sugar increases), and energy and self-confidence to rise. And, as with other drugs, the benefits of stimulants come with a price. These substances can be addictive and may induce an aftermath crash into fatigue, headaches, irritability, and depression.

Bryan, a 25-year-old security guard at a department store, used Cobra energy drink because he believed that it could safeguard him from sleepiness. He said it also helped that he believed in what the product could do. He experienced being wide awake after drinking Cobra and convincing himself that he should not fall asleep. But there were also times when he couldn't help falling asleep even after taking the drink.

Magz, a 25-year-old guard at a pawnshop, used Extra Joss for satisfaction and curiosity once in a while. He said, "I can only buy Extra Joss energy drink if there is an excess from my salary. Sometimes I do it once every other month. If I am not on duty, I also get normal sleep. But then, if I am at work, I find it hard to sleep because of its effectiveness."



Extra Joss and Cobra were both mentioned by the guards as among the energy drinks that they took to stay alert, especially during long night duties. Photos taken by Ralph Pulanco.

Ric, a 26-year-old department store guard, believed that Cobra was some kind of an alertness booster and memory enhancer, keeping his common sense alive. He said it felt like he had just woken up after eight hours of sleep. Furthermore, he drank Cobra to keep himself awake while he studied for an exam, which he did while on duty at night and studying as a second-year student of elementary education at Fullbright College during the day. That was how Cobra shaped and affected his day-to-day activities. He shared that he also used other energy drinks, such as Extra Joss and Red Bull, but they did not affect him as expected. His choice then was Cobra. He also shared that oftentimes when he was done with work, he could not sleep because of the effect of Cobra, but he still managed to attend his classes all day. When he was asked how he found time to rest, he said that he always managed to sleep for four hours. For him, "*Pasanayan lang naman 'yan*" [You just have to get used to it]. It is one manifestation of his utilitarian attitude towards Cobra. He did not mind its expensiveness (PhP25 per bottle); as long as it worked for him, he would use it.

Netz, a female security guard at a mall, also claimed that she used Cobra energy drink just to get rid of any sleepiness that might put her work in jeopardy—if she would be caught sleeping or not watching out for any impending trouble and danger at her post. For her, Cobra was "*panlaban sa puyat*" [something that can enable one to get through the night without sleep]. However, a negative effect of using Cobra happened to Charm, a female guard in a university. She explained that after a few months of drinking it, she suffered from a urinary tract infection. When she stopped using Cobra, she just walked around her post in order to avoid feeling sleepy while on duty at night.

Aside from Cobra, Sting, another energy drink, also enabled the guards to stay focused and alert. Allan, a 24-year-old pawnshop guard, said, "My favorite energy drink is Sting, which has *malunggay* [moringa] flavor. It is so sweet and continuously liberates me from sleepiness whenever I am on duty in the afternoon. The hot weather contributes to my being sleepy. But then, because I need to be alert every second, I always drink before and after duty at noon."

Salad, a female guard in a university, also used Sting with *malunggay* flavor. She drank it especially when she worked as a reliever during the night shift. She admitted she was influenced by advertisements and bought the drink herself. She said, "*Yon lang talaga hindi ka lang makatulog 'pag iniinom mo*" [Only, you will find it hard to sleep once you drink it]. She wanted to recommend it to those who had heavy work, especially at night.

In contrast, Jerry, a 29-year-old bank guard, suffered stomach pains from drinking Sting. A series of medical checkups confirmed that it was ulcer. He had stopped taking the drink and discouraged others from using it. According to him, Sting included formalin, a solution that is used as an antiseptic, disinfectant, and preservative.

In addition to Charm's urinary tract infection and Jerry's ulcer, Ann, a female guard who worked at a university's administration building, said that her urine became reddish after a few months of drinking Cobra. She refrained from using it after that negative experience. She then became more independent of energy drink consumption. She arranged her schedule in a way that she could take an ample rest to revive herself from the tiring and stressful work during the graveyard shift.

Bryan shared that when he had no money for an energy drink and he needed to be on duty at the department store where he worked, "I always find a way to take a walk in my area of responsibility just to maintain my alertness."

### **The Smokers' Stories**

Nicotine, like other addictive drugs, is not only mood-altering but is also reinforcing. Smoking delivers its hit of nicotine within seven seconds,

triggering the release of epinephrine and norepinephrine, which in turn diminish appetite and boost alertness and mental efficiency (Myers 2000).

Only a minority of the security guards said that they smoked. Puerto Princesa City then had an active anti-smoking policy. On the university campus and in many other open-air spaces, smoking was forbidden.

Ric, a 26-year-old guard at a department store, smoked to stay alert and believed that 99% of security guards smoked. He said that he smoked because it was an imperative for security guards. By this statement, he was declaring that if you were a security guard and you were not a smoker, then you did not belong. This statement suggests he had a need to belong and a fear of being out of place at the same time. His former brand was Philip Morris, an expensive brand; then he resorted to a cheaper brand, Fortune White, when he had his first baby. His use of Fortune came about through the attractive flyers posted on every sari-sari store near his boarding house. What made him “addicted” to Fortune was its menthol taste. But, despite its menthol taste, he would get a headache and feel weak if he consumed more cigarettes than he used to smoke. Yet, he smoked often almost every night. He said that if he did not smoke, he would suffer from headaches and sometimes salivated. His use of cigarettes was shaped by his environment, specifically by his peers during his teenage days, and then by his colleagues in his present workplace. Smoking cigarettes had always motivated and helped him to stay focused and alert during his night duty.

In contrast, Allan, a pawnshop guard, shared that his habit of smoking Fortune Red was not really for alertness but for relaxation and “trip” (when he felt like smoking) only. He said he smoked Winston cigarettes three times a day, one before his duty, one after duty, and one after dinner. He smoked to pass the time.

Roland, a 34-year-old bank guard, said, “Once *na ako ay nagte-take ng sigarilyo, nabubuhay ang aking natutulog na dugo* [Whenever I smoke, I feel awake and alive).” For Jerry, a 29-year-old bank guard, smoking just to stay alert is a big no-no. He was emphatically against smoking, saying that cigarette smoking was a vice that he would not try. “You gain nothing from it but sickness. My father died from lung cancer because of it. He was a chain smoker,” he said.

Legally speaking, the city government of Puerto Princesa had implemented then a radical anti-smoking program. In fact, pursuant to City Ordinance No. 278, which established a clean air program and appropriating funds, smoking was strictly prohibited inside public buildings and all enclosed public places, including public vehicles and other means of transportation, and in any enclosed area outside of one's private residence, private place of work, or any duly designated smoking area.

### **The Coffee Drinkers' Stories**

In his book on stimulants, Myers (2000) states,

Caffeine, the world's most widely consumed psychoactive substance, can now be found not only in coffee, tea, and soda but also in fruit juices, mints, energy drinks, bars, and gels—and even in soap. Coffees and teas vary in their caffeine content, with a cup of drip coffee surprisingly having more caffeine than a shot of espresso, and teas having less. A mild dose of caffeine typically lasts three or four hours, which—if taken in the evening—may be long enough to impair sleep. Like other drugs, caffeine used regularly and in heavy doses produces tolerance: Its stimulating effects lessen. And discontinuing heavy caffeine intake often produces withdrawal symptoms, including fatigue and headache.

Great Taste, Nescafe 3-in-1, Bacus, and Kopiko Brown were the coffee brands mentioned by the guards I interviewed. For some of them, drinking coffee not only maintained their alertness despite their long hours of duty but also provided them an opportunity to enjoy the taste of coffee. Charm, a university guard, shared that she drank Energen (milk with oatmeal) in chocolate flavor, sometimes Nescafe 3-in-1 coffee. But her favorite was Energen because it was also the favorite of her father, who obviously had influenced her choice. She used Energen as a substitute for rice because of its oatmeal content, while she drank Nescafe to stay alert during her night duty. She said that the two beverages had no side effects, thus recommended both to others.

Mantal, a pawnshop guard somehow believed that coffee had a slimming effect when he said, "*Sabi nila nakaka-burn daw ito ng 5% fat sa katawan*" [They say it can burn 5% of the body fats]. He added, "'Yong Kopiko

*lang din na brown masarap kasi*" [Only Kopiko Brown, as it really tastes good].

Vicky, a mall guard, was a huge fan of Great Taste coffee. She frequently drank this coffee, sometimes four to five times a day, and especially when she was on duty. She always had only this coffee for breakfast instead of a heavy meal. She felt contented and full whenever she consumed this coffee. However, after a few months of taking it, she got a urinary tract infection, which, according to her doctor, was caused by her drinking coffee.

The dangers of caffeine intake were also observed by Joker, a bank guard. He used to drink Bacus coffee, which contained a high dose of caffeine. Pointing out its negative effect on him, he said, "Bacus caused my heart to palpitate, meaning I experienced irregular heartbeat rates and I felt nervous and could not determine where it was coming from."

### **The Illegal Drug Users' Stories**

"*Damo*" is a Filipino word used as a code for marijuana, which is considered illegal in the Philippines for its addictiveness.

Marijuana consists of the leaves and flowers of the hemp plant, which for 5,000 years has been cultivated for its fiber. Whether smoked or eaten, marijuana's major active ingredient, THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), produces a mix of effects. (Smoking marijuana gets the drug into the brain in about seven seconds, producing a greater effect than does eating the drug, which causes its peak concentration to be reached at a slower, unpredictable rate.) Like alcohol, marijuana relaxes, disinhibits, and may produce a euphoric high. But marijuana is also a mild hallucinogen, amplifying sensitivity to colors, sounds, tastes, and smells. And unlike alcohol, which the body eliminates within hours, THC and its byproducts linger in the body for a month or more. Thus, contrary to the usual tolerance phenomenon, regular users may achieve a high with smaller amounts of the drug than occasional users would need to get the same effect. (Myers 2000)

Curiosity and the need to be always awake and focused during work were the reasons that triggered Joker to use marijuana. He first tried marijuana out of curiosity and a need to belong and impress a high-school friend when he was 18 years old. He began using it by way of *patikim-tikim* [trying a little once in a while]. But at the time of the research, he said, he was responsibly using it to stay alert while on duty. When he was asked about his *shabu* (methamphetamine) intake, he said that he had tried it but did not come to the point that he had become addicted to it. He said that although it was good for staying alert, it should not be taken regularly because it would harm the user. He just used it occasionally, when he needed to serve as a shift reliever, meaning he had to be at his post almost twenty-two hours in a day. But he seldom served as a reliever, which was why, according to him, he was not addicted to shabu. He also shared that there was a popular drug called Fly High which could also be used to stay alert and was effective in sexual intercourse, for more stamina. He said that this drug was a combination of methamphetamine, Viagra, and Ecstasy, and could be bought for around PhP1,500 to PhP3,000 per tablet. He also shared that, according to a news report on TV, Fly High reached the country through a Chinese businessman who had been caught in the act of selling this drug. When asked about the effect of the drug, Joker responded, "For three to four days you will not feel hungry, your being awake is continuous, your awareness will be active, you are unstoppable, and you have more stamina for sex."

Rolando, a 34-year-old bank guard, also used marijuana to boost his alertness on the graveyard shift as well as when he would go out to eat after his work. He stated that his marijuana use started when he was 16 years old because of his curiosity on what effects it might have on him. He did not use it every day, only about once a week, whenever he served as a reliever (as in the case of Joker). It cost him around PhP50 per "stick" (like a cigarette), a form that was used to avoid being caught by the authorities. But then, he noticed its negative effect--the smoke always gave him "bad trips." He also noticed that some of his friends who were also taking marijuana always wanted to make trouble. But, according to him, "it depends upon what you think before you use marijuana. It depends upon your mindset. If you think you have to be alert, then you will be alert. But if you think you want to retaliate on someone for the harm he had inflicted on you, then most likely you will be in trouble." Often, he did not know the person who sold him marijuana. When I asked him if he was willing to recommend marijuana to others, he said he

did not want to because “some of my friends lost their sanity and others suffered from the feeling of being lost.”

In Rolando’s case, balancing the risks and benefits of marijuana was very challenging. It proved that marijuana must only be taken in certain situations, such as when you are on the graveyard shift, wherein you must stay awake and alert. The same intention pushed him to also use methamphetamine before he worked at the bank. He was not at work when he tried shabu, which then cost about PhP300 per gram. He used aluminum foil and a lighter to heat the foil and then enjoyed the intake of the smoke coming from the foil. According to him, it made him stay focused and feel refreshed as he drove a shuttle when he worked as a driver. All the feelings of tiredness, sleepiness, and stress were reversed with shabu, according to Roland. However, the consequences of using it were that he began stealing and was consequently sent to jail without bail. He shared, furthermore, that he had one friend who died from a car crash because the effect of shabu ended before he reached his destination, causing him to lose his consciousness.

Roland’s environment, which was composed of his colleagues who also used shabu in order to maintain alertness, influenced him to take it. This is similar to a study that found people using methamphetamine as some sort of *pampagilas*, or performance enhancer (Lasco 2013). But then, the harmful effects seemed to be taken for granted. For Roland and his friends, they used this drug without thinking of the consequences aside from staying alert.

### **The Vitamin Users’ Stories**

Ged, a 25-year-old hostel guard, used vitamins not only to achieve alertness but also to be energetic. He said that he used Revicon Forte because it made him healthier and it gave him extra energy. In addition, using Revicon Forte was economically wise because it was cheaper than other brands. When asked about the effects of Revicon, he said, “I observed that in my body, before, I was slim; but when I used Revicon, I noticed that my muscles in my abs and arms became bigger and in shape.”

Ric also tried to explain about the side effects of some vitamins, especially those of Enervon C. He shared that he used to take Enervon C to stay alert during his night shift. He used to take it almost every day but stopped

taking it when he noticed that it weakened his body and gave him severe headaches, which led to anemia. So, he substituted Enervon C with Revicon Forte, and his strength was revived. He also took ferasulphate to cure his anemia. Aside from recovering from his headaches and weakness, he felt a cleansing effect from taking Revicon. He observed that his previous yellowish urine restored to its normal color. They say that the urine turns yellow when one takes vitamin supplements because toxins go with the urine as it is eliminated from the body.

Ric's claim was supported by Vicky, a mall guard, who explained about the negative effects of this vitamin supplement on her. She had used Enervon C for about three years, and its effect was opposite to what she expected. Instead of becoming stronger while on duty, she felt so weak and always wanted to sleep. She eventually stopped taking it because it was affecting her performance while on the graveyard shift, which was from 10 pm to 7 am.

Another mall guard, 40-year-old Jacky, took a vitamin supplement from a company called Forever Living. She claimed that sometimes when she and her colleagues worked the night shift, they took the said supplement in order to boost their resistance and stay alert. For her, this vitamin supplement had proven to be safe and effective for maintaining alertness.

### **Enhancing Stamina**

Some of my informants took vitamin supplements to boost their stamina and alertness at work, and the two main brands they used were Enervon C and Revicon Forte (see table 4).

This table shows that a minority of my informants believed that taking vitamins on a regular basis boosted their energy and health and thus enabled them to be more reliable in their jobs. In times that they felt weak, vitamins were their remedy. However, the majority of my informants strongly believed that they could survive their jobs by just being natural, that is, without the aid of any vitamin supplements and other *pampa-alert* products. According to Myers (2000), a person's health beliefs are mainly influenced by one's family orientation, the environment, and the societal standards of health awareness.

Table 4. The vitamin supplement brands mainly used by security guards in Puerto Princesa				
Informant			Vitamin Supplement Used/Dosage	
Code Name	Post	Sex	Enervon C	Revicon Forte
Joker	Banks	Male	Nonuser	1 tablet per day
Jerry	Banks	Male	1 tablet per day	
Mantal	Banks	Male	Nonuser	1 tablet per day
Roland	Banks	Male	Nonuser	Nonuser
Ric	Department stores	Male	1 tablet per day	Nonuser/
Bryan	Department stores	Male	Nonuser	1 tablet per day
Netz	Department stores	Female	Nonuser	Nonuser
Ged	Hotel	Male	1 tablet per day	User
Charm	University	Female	1 tablet per day	User
Salad	University	Female	Nonuser	Nonuser
Ann	University	Female	Nonuser	1 tablet per day
Jacky	Mall	Female	Nonuser	Nonuser
Vicky	Mall	Female	1 tablet per day	Nonuser
Allan	Pawnshop	Male	Nonuser	1 tablet per day
Mag'z	Pawnshop	Male	1 tablet per day	Nonuser

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study suggest that, in a highly urbanized city like Puerto Princesa, chemical products that support or generate alertness are treated as indispensable commodities by many security guards. Though some people say that working as a security guard is a job for the lazy (*trabahong pantamad*), this study shows that their work is very challenging. They, in fact, exert an effort to condition their minds to be alert and to use products that can make them stay alert, such as coffee and energy drinks, and even illegal drugs. Some guards also use vitamin supplements to increase their stamina. This adherence to chemical stimulants is anchored in the Filipino principle “*Bawal magkasakit*,” which means that our bodies are our main asset and investment to survive and thrive; thus, we should take care of them so we won’t get sick.

Almost all of the guards claimed that TV advertisements were the primary influence in their use of personal hygiene products like shampoo, powder, toothpaste, deodorant, gel, soap, and perfume, and *pampa*-alert products like energy drinks, vitamins, and cigarettes. Their desire to become presentable and alert in their workplaces drove them to use these products. As a result, most of them became *hiyang* with the products they

were using, especially the chemical stimulants. As some of them were seriously affected by the negative effects of stimulants—such as suffering from ulcers or urinary tract infections—they managed to stay “on the go” through natural stimulation, such as walking and proper exercise.

The main reason security guards used chemical stimulants was their occupational needs. This research revealed that most of the security guards had difficulty staying focused during the graveyard shift; thus, they used stimulants.

It must be noted that energy drinks are nowadays highly in demand, particularly the brand Cobra. The phenomenological perspectives about its use proved that Cobra can be used for multiple reasons. First and foremost, it is used for maintaining alertness at high-risk places like banks, pawnshops, and universities. Secondly, security guards on the graveyard shift drink Cobra to avoid sleepiness while at their posts. In addition to using energy drinks, smoking is another way to maintain alertness at work, especially during night shifts. Though smoking was banned in public places, many informants still smoked, believing that it could help them stay alert.

Most of what the security guards did to their bodies were self-experimentation—looking for products that their bodies would be hiyang with to enable them to achieve what they needed—to stay awake and alert to be able to perform their jobs well. Aside from self-experimentation, they relied on recommendations from peers on the best products to use rather than on consultations with health professionals. Other reasons for their use of chemical stimulants were satisfaction of curiosity and their need to become ‘astig’ in the eyes of their colleagues.

In spite of their hope of achieving a good record and a long-term career, the security guards’ long working hours and schedules often led to sleep deprivation, which causes fatigue and impairs concentration, creativity, and communication. By having uncovered the situations in which security guards consume energy drinks, nicotine, caffeine, marijuana, and even methamphetamine, this research should serve as an eye-opener and a call, not only for the guards to reduce their use of chemical stimulants but also for the Department of Health to formulate and implement programs that would give proper information about the harmful effects of chemical stimulants to the body. Furthermore, there should be a drug

test for security guards in order to protect and preserve their health, which ultimately affects their job. Otherwise, they cannot execute their required functions. Ultimately, this research shows that while chemical stimulants may seem necessary in the security guards' job, their effects are temporary and create a greater risk to the health of the users.

# **4 The Use of Chemical Products by Market Vendors in Puerto Princesa, Palawan**

**Alvie Bergado Timbancaya**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Puerto Princesa is a booming city in Palawan. Malls, hotels, resorts, department stores, and small retail stores are being built everywhere in the city. People are migrating to this city because they think it is a promising place. But despite this, the locals are staying and still promote the simplicity of life here. The public market is still the primary source of basic daily necessities. Pork, fish, vegetables, fruits, and other commodities are available all day in the market. This is where most people go to buy what they need in their households. Fresh products and dry goods are all easy to find in the market. Owners of stores in the market usually hire people to help them in selling their goods. These helpers, or vendors, are usually young females.

Vendors in the market start their day before the sun rises and work until late at night. They have to be in the market before the customers come in and must prepare all the goods they will sell for the day. They work more than eight hours per day and are paid PHP200 for a day's labor. They can take short restroom breaks, but they usually eat at the store while vending.

## On Making Oneself Attractive

Even if these vendors work in the wet market—where the surroundings are far from being glamorous, pleasant, or attractive as in the malls and air-conditioned department stores—they still put much effort into looking attractive for the customers to notice them and buy the goods they are selling. In order to look attractive, they use many different chemical-based products, which are mainly for the skin, face, and hair since they are the first things noticed on a person. There are sets of products available on the market that are specially made for the said parts of the body. There are products for skin whitening, face smoothening, and for making hair silkier and longer. Vendors see these products on TV commercials every day, and, thinking they could be effective on them, they decide to use some of the popular products.

Among the many beauty products used today, the skin whitening products are the most popular because a lot of young people aspire to have fair skin. The majority of them are students and young professionals, who tend to choose the most affordable products available on the market. Beauty products are commonly seen endorsed by popular and attractive personalities in advertisements on billboards, TV, and in magazines. Because of this, many young people are tempted to purchase and try the endorsed products. They probably believe that when a product is recommended by celebrities, it is so effective on them that they announce it publicly, and that there is a great chance that the product may also be effective on other users. People nowadays use products based on their popularity, affordability, and effectivity. If a certain product has these three qualities, there is a big chance that it will be patronized by many consumers.

The way of life in Puerto Princesa has changed. People here, even those who don't earn much, spend most of their hard-earned salaries on chemical products that enhance beauty. Previous research has shown that here in the Philippines, many believe that people who are fair-skinned are more attractive than those who are brown- or dark-skinned. This is why skin whitening products here sell like hotcakes, especially to the youth. They want to be fair-skinned because they desire to be attractive.

## **On Staying Awake**

The market usually has a busy and smelly atmosphere, but people still prefer to go to this place because they find a wide variety of products here and they believe that they get the freshest and cheapest goods here. There are so many stalls in the market, and these stalls are basically manned by vendors. Stall owners usually leave the selling to the vendors, while they manage the sales. Vendors are often overworked and are required to stay awake for the entire day. In marketplaces, transactions are often fast-paced; thus, vendors should be always alert in order to attend to as many customers as possible. To be able to do their job well, they drink coffee or energy drinks to stay awake and alert.

In this study, five vendors were interviewed about their use of chemical products. All of them did not finish high school due to financial problems. They were interviewed in the marketplace where they worked.

## **RESULTS**

### **To Be Fair Is to Be Beautiful**

The majority of Filipinos are naturally brown-skinned. However, many believe that individuals who are fair-skinned stand out in a crowd of dark-skinned people; thus, they use skin whitening products to have fairer skin. Akay, who worked as a public market vendor, used Silka Whitening Herbal Soap to have fair skin. She stayed in a boarding house where she paid PhP800 per month for the rent. She set aside a part of her salary for beauty products. Aside from whitening soaps, she also used whitening creams and lotions to whiten her skin fast.

Like Akay, fellow market vendors Vilma and May also used whitening soaps. When asked why, they gave the same answer: to have fair skin and become pretty and more attractive to people. The three vendors earned less than the minimum wage in Puerto Princesa and used a large part of their incomes for beauty products, specifically skin whitening products. May lived with her family, so she had more money for beauty products. Already fair-skinned, she claimed that the whitening products she was using were effective on her skin, while Akay and Vilma, who were naturally brown-skinned, thought that they had become fairer but were still not

satisfied with their skin colors. Most of them used different whitening products simultaneously to speed up skin lightening and sometimes still tried out other products that might help them in achieving their goal. Though none of them had undergone any skin lightening treatments like bleaching, peeling, and the like, they expressed interest in trying them if they had the resources. Although there were a lot of skin whitening products and treatments, the respondents made no effort in whitening their underarms because, according to them, their arms were always covered anyway.



Some of the informants tried using stronger whiteners such as this exfoliating product in order to see faster results.

Silka, Pond's, and Skinwhite were among the common brands of beauty products that the participants used for whitening their skin. The products they used were in the form of creams, soaps, lotions, and toners, which were priced at PhP30 to PhP80 each. Considering the vendors' incomes, these products would take a big part of their salaries if they would use them regularly.

In Demello's study in 2014, she said that people of color had been compared to animals since the colonial era and certainly since the African slave trade emerged in the 17th century.

This could be the reason brown-

skinned individuals sometimes felt insecure of their color and aspired to have a lighter complexion.

### **Staying Awake with Caffeine**

In the buy-and-sell business, there is little or no chance to take a nap or have a break. Products in the market are sold by vendors, who are employees of business owners and basically serve as store helpers. Vendors are expected to stay awake the whole time the store is open for business so as not to miss any customers. The participants shared that, in order to stay

awake, they drank coffee and energy drinks, especially at midday. Most of them drank Nescafe coffee, which had many instant coffee variants, and Sting energy drink. These drinks were always available in the market and were very affordable. Sometimes, the vendors bought coffee in sachets only because they believed doing so was more economical. Each sachet cost only Php10, which could make one cup of coffee.

Akay learned to drink coffee from her parents and started drinking coffee when she was 10 years old. Vilma and May started drinking coffee only when they were employed as vendors because they felt the need to be always awake. All the participants agreed that coffee and energy drinks were effective stimulants, so they would continue to drink them. The majority of them consumed one to two cups of coffee in a day.

### **Hair Matters**

All the participants had long hair, and three of them had their hair rebonded. Rebonding is a hair treatment wherein strong chemicals are applied to the hair to make it straight and shiny. It costs between Php800 and Php3,000 depending on the length of the hair. Many Filipino women who have frizzy and curly hair avail of this treatment because they believe it makes their hair attractive. Rebonding takes about 4 to 8 hours of hair ironing, washing, chemical curing (in three stages), washing and ironing again, and blow drying. In this treatment, the hair seems to take a very harmful course, yet vendors Vilma, Neneng, and May had their hair go through the process. Rebonding could go wrong and may cause hair brittleness, or worse, hair loss. But since there are many salons that offer this hair treatment, many women still find it safe to try the procedure.

Filipinos' preferences on hair style, color, and cut vary, but most women want long, black, straight, and shiny hair. Thus, aside from trying hair rebonding, the participants also used shampoo and conditioner to enhance the texture of their hair. They mentioned that they considered smell and affordability in buying hair care products. In many TV commercials, shampoos are said to clean the hair to remove free radicals, while conditioners make the hair soft and shiny. There are also shampoos that are said to promote hair growth and lessen hair breakage, and this is the kind of shampoo that seems to be in demand to many young girls as they want to grow their hair long. In the Filipino culture, generally, women like having long hair, while men keep their hair short.

Palmolive, Pantene, Cream Silk, Sunsilk, and Rejoice were some of the brands of shampoo and conditioner that the participants used to beautify their hair. Since the vendors did not earn much, they could not have their hair rebonded regularly. A rebonded hair may stay straight and shiny for six to eight months, but after that, the hair will grow frizzy and curly again. Some of the participants said that, once in a while, they just used hair gloss to coat their mane to tame its frizziness and manage the curls.

### **Limited Resources**

Among the five participants, only 18-year-old Jing had not had hair bonding and did not put much effort into skin whitening. The reason was that she sent most of her money to her family, who lived in a far municipality. She went to Puerto Princesa to work so that she could support her parents and send her siblings to school, which she felt obliged to do, being the eldest child. When asked if she wanted to have fair skin, she answered “yes” but also said that she did not always have extra money for skin whitening products. She also mentioned that she also wanted to have her hair rebonded but could not afford it as a large part of her salary went to her family.

### **The Negative Effects of Chemical Products**

The participants enjoyed the positive effects of the chemical products they were using, but these products also had negative effects. For example, the participants felt that they needed to continue using skin whitening products for a long time for them to achieve the skin tone that they desired. Also, using such products prevented them from staying under the sun because it might take longer to lighten their complexions if they did so. People who use skin whitening products are advised not to expose themselves to UV rays because it could damage their skin.

With regard to their coffee intake, the respondents’ tolerance to caffeine seemed to have risen because they drank coffee every day. From one cup a day, it increased to two or more cups daily. They also took energy drinks to lengthen the effect of coffee. Energy drinks also contain caffeine, and that is why it is effective, too, in keeping the user feel awake and energized.

Most of the respondents found it difficult to maintain rebonded hair because when their hair grew, their natural hair would reappear. So, to

retain the silkiness and softness of their hair, they needed to use more hair care products, which they could not afford to buy regularly.

## CONCLUSION

The participants welcomed the idea of skin whitening and aspired to have fairer skin because they believed that it made them look more beautiful; and even with limited resources, they still embraced the idea. Skin whitening products were sold everywhere and most of them were affordable, which was why most of the respondents were able to try them and became hooked on using them.

All of the participants drank coffee and energy drinks to stay awake while at work. They usually felt sleepy at midday because they went to their workplaces very early. Since they could purchase coffee in sachets, they could afford to drink a cup or more daily.

The participants also put much effort into beautifying their hair because they believed that it could make them more attractive. They used many products on their hair to make it longer, straighter, and noticeably shiny.

The chemical products that the respondents used had positive effects, but they also had negative effects. One negative effect was that they needed to continue using skin whitening products for a long time to achieve the skin color they desired. Another was that they needed to use more hair care products to maintain the look of their rebonded hair. Also, their caffeine intake continued to rise as their tolerance for it increased.





## **Pampapogi/Pampaganda: Achieving Desired Gender Identities**

**Floralice Basco Rengel-Josol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Pogi* and *maganda* are Filipino terms that both mean “good-looking.” The difference between them is that *pogi* refers to a handsome male, while *maganda* refers to a beautiful female. *Pampapogi* and *pampaganda* are terms used to refer to anything that an individual practices or uses to enhance his or her looks. Normally, males use *pampapogi* to enhance their handsomeness, while females use *pampaganda* to enhance their beauty. In the study conducted, there was a switch in the said practice—the males used *pampaganda*, while the females used *pampapogi*.

Individuals’ desired gender identities and the processes of transitioning into what they want to become differ depending on how they wish to live and express their preferences. Gender transitioning could be a simple process or a complex one. It may involve simple actions like adopting the typical appearance of the desired gender identity—male or female—through changes in clothing and grooming, and/or adopting a new name or alias. It may also involve more complex actions, such as changing sex designation on identity documents (if possible) and/or undergoing hormonal therapy or other medical procedures that modify one’s body

to conform with his/her desired gender identity (American Psychological Association [APA]). To achieve their desired gender identities, people alter or wish to alter their bodies through hormonal therapy, surgeries, and other means. Quoting from the website of the APA, “*genderqueer* is a term that some people use to identify their gender[s] as falling outside the binary constructs of ‘male’ and ‘female.’” They may define their genders as falling somewhere in a continuum between male and female, or wholly different from these genders. They may also want to be referred to using pronouns that are neither masculine nor feminine, such as “*zie*” instead of *he* or *she*, or “*hir*” instead of *his* or *her*.

Awareness of gender identity may come at any age. As the APA explained in their website,

According to current scientific and professional understanding, the core attractions that form the basis for adult sexual orientation typically emerge between middle childhood and early adolescence. These patterns of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction may arise without any prior sexual experience. People can be celibate and still know their sexual orientation—be it lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.

For some of them, feelings of being different or wishing that their genders were not their assigned sexes at birth started when they were kids. Exploring and experiencing gender-nonconforming attitudes and behaviors come at any phase in life. “Not fitting in” with others of the same sex is how they describe what they feel.

Being an academician, the researcher is constantly exposed to dealing with young students of different genders—male, female, gay, and lesbian. She observes that nowadays students are more demonstrative or expressive of what they feel and desire. It is common to see gays portraying girls and lesbians portraying boys in many institutions of any society, although their manners of expressions vary. In relation to this, the researcher delved into a deep analysis of the use of chemical products by gays and lesbians (sometimes referred to in this study as “transgender girls” and “transgender boys,” respectively) and the manners by and degrees to which they express or alter their persons, hence the investigation on this particular theme.

## CONTEXT

### Puerto Princesa—A Safe Home

Puerto Princesa, just like other cities, is a safe home not only for the locals and the tourists but also for transgender persons. As the city develops, there are also changes on the society's views or outlook on many facets of life, including homosexuality. The time when homosexuals were frowned upon can still be traced in the city—the very young ones may still be objects of talks and bullying—but the presence of homosexuals in the society is generally tolerated. Transgender persons, men and women alike, come out in the open even in big public spaces, such as in the newly opened mall or in the downtown areas. But, in high schools and universities, cross-dressing is generally not permitted because of the requirement to wear the school uniform on all days except Wednesdays and Saturdays (wash days).

Because Puerto Princesa is a developing city, the people here are exposed to the different forms of media and the use of modern technology. Young people are able to express their gender identities through their chosen attires, hairstyles, names, mannerisms, and other physical presentations, without punishment or ridicule. Hence, transgender youth are discernible, or can easily be spotted, anywhere in the city. Any researcher will not have difficulty in finding them. The challenge is how to approach and persuade them to be interviewed.

### The Informants

The aim of this research is to interview young men who identify themselves as *bakla* [gay] and young women who identify themselves as *tomboy* or *tibo* [lesbian]. Seven of the interviewed gays were members of the Palawan Sining Dance Troupe, which was composed of students of the Palawan State University. Three other gays were contacted along the main recreation area of Puerto Princesa. One lesbian was met in McDonald's and introduced her nine lesbian friends; and all ten of them were interviewed. Upon learning of the nature and objectives of the interview, the more they felt comfortable answering the questions they were asked. They even helped find or refer prospective participants, calling up friends who were also self-identified as gays or lesbians. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were asked to use aliases. The lesbians

used male, female, and gender-neutral names. Of the 10 gays, only one chose a female's name, while the rest used feminine aliases. They also generally called themselves *tomboy*, *tibo*, or *tiboom*, or *bakla*, *beki*, or *beks*.

Nine of the lesbian informants were taking up criminology, all aspiring to become either a policeman or a fireman. Apart from having this goal, they liked being criminology students because they could dress up the way they liked, according to their desired gender identity. One lesbian was a graduate of a tour guiding course, a vocational course in TESDA. All 10 of them were into sports—basketball, football, volleyball, etc. Some of them were varsity players who were always selected to compete for their college during inter-collegiate meets. Four of the ten lesbians had motorcycles of their own, which they used as a means of transportation.

The university dance troupe, which seven of the ten gay informants were members of, had been recruiting new members annually since it started in 2003. When performing with the dance troupe, the gays were expected to dance as males and were not allowed to wear heavy makeup. According to the dance troupe director, the key informant for the gay participants, since their second year as a group, it had been their practice to hold three get-togethers for all its members every year—an acquaintance party in August, a Christmas party in December, and a send-off party for the graduating members in March. The acquaintance party was an avenue for all the members to get to know each other and to welcome the new members. In the Christmas party, one of the highlights was a beauty pageant they called “Mutya ng SPD” wherein the candidates were all boys, while the female members did the legwork. No male members were spared from joining the contest. It is safe to assume then that the seven gay dancers involved in the study had experienced joining a beauty contest once or more in their lives. When asked what the event was for, the director simply said that it was just for fun.

According to the key informant, all the dancers were required to put on makeup for their performances so that they would look good on the stage, especially when the shows were done at night. Without makeup and with all the lights focused on the performers, they would look dull and plain. He made it a point, however, that the makeup put on the women and the men were different; that is, the women's was heavier and in darker shades than the men's. He also stressed that each member had to buy his/her own complete set of cosmetics, which consisted of the

following: foundation, blush-on, pressed powder, eye shadow, lipstick, eyeliner, and mascara for the women; and foundation, pressed powder, and lipstick for the men.

The key informant also said that each of the dancers received a small allowance every time they had a performance outside the university.

Only 13 of the 20 participants knew their families' incomes, the average of which was PhP82,461.00 or US\$1,963.36, which belonged to the average income group.

## **METHODS**

The field research took place in Puerto Princesa City, the capital of Palawan. Data were gathered through interviews, which were done in December 2013 and April 2014. A total of 20 participants, who were all transgender youth (10 gays and 10 lesbians), were interviewed. The majority of the participants were students enrolled in either of the two state universities in Palawan—the Palawan State University and Western Philippines University. Aside from the students, an out-of-school youth and three working gays were interviewed. Snowball sampling had been an effective technique in getting more interviewees. The first participant found and interviewed, who was a lesbian, referred her friends to be participants too. Prior to the interview, the consent of each participant was sought.

In finding prospective lesbian respondents, the researcher, with her husband, looked in places where the target youth were frequently seen. After more than two hours, they found three tomboys in a university. The researcher explained to them the nature and objective of the research, and they agreed to be interviewed the very next day in a pizza parlor. All the other lesbian respondents were also found on the university campus.

The first three gays interviewed were found in three different ways: search in a mall, house visit, and a respondent's referral. The remaining seven gay participants were members of the Palawan Sining Dance Troupe and were referred by the group's director, who served as the key informant for these participants.

The identities of the participants were protected by using a code name for each of them. The interviews were done conversationally to put each of them at ease. To make sure that the interviews would be smooth-flowing and free of possible eavesdropping, the venues for the interviews were carefully selected: private areas in a pizza parlor and a mall, a respondent's house, vacant classrooms, and an empty office (with the permission of the office head). The dance troupe director was interviewed in his office. Interviews were done in the morning, afternoon, and early evening as requested by the interviewees.

A focus group discussion was conducted for each group of participants. Of the 10 participants in each group, only six gays and five lesbians came. Those who were not able to come begged off because of work, classes, and prior appointments.

NVivo 10 was used in the analysis of the data gathered. Themes were first identified for the coding scheme. Nodes were identified and narrowed down to the main products which gave the respondents the outcomes they desired according to their preferred gender identities. NVivo facilitated further analysis of the themes identified.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Participants' Profiles**

There were a total of 20 participants, half of which were transgender boys (lesbians) and the other half were transgender girls (gays).

Almost all the participants belonged to the age bracket 18 to 25. One participant was 17 years old at the time of the interview but had turned 18 two months thereafter.

Of the 20 participants, 15 were college students (two of them were also working), four were working full-time, and one was neither studying nor working. The studying lesbian participants were taking up criminology. Of the seven gay participants who belonged to the university dance troupe, six were studying and one was working.

All the participants were unmarried, but two of the lesbians lived with their partners. Twelve lived with their families or siblings, one lived with friends, and the rest lived in a boarding house.

Two participants were adopted when they were children. One of them had known his biological family; hence, he acknowledged 13 siblings from his two families.

The two tables that follow show the participants' profiles.

Code Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Whom Living With	Birth Order	No. of Siblings	Religion	Occupation
Astig	20	Third year college	Family	Second	4	Roman Catholic	Student
Ginoo	19	Third year college	Family	Eldest	4	Born-again Christian	Student
Tikas	19	Vocational course graduate	Family	First	0	Born-again Christian	Businesswoman
Kisig	20	Third year college	Sister	Youngest	5	Roman Catholic	Student
Simpatico	21	Second year college	None	Youngest	6	Roman Catholic	Student
Guwapo	17	Second year college	Family & partner	Fourth	5	Alliance	Student
Brusko	19	Third year college	None	Third	5	Roman Catholic	Student
Macho	21	Third year college	Family	Third	8	Roman Catholic	Student
Pogi	18	Second year college	Partner	Second	1	Roman Catholic	Student
Masculado	20	Second year college	Siblings	Youngest	2	Roman Catholic	Student

Table 2. Transgender Girls (Gays)							
Code Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Whom Living With	Birth Order	No. of Siblings	Religion	Occupation
Guwapa	19	Fourth year college	Family	Youngest	13	Roman Catholic	Student
Simpatica	20	Third year college	None	Third	4	Islam	Student
Pustura	18	Second year college	Family	Youngest	3	Roman Catholic	Student
Queenie	19	First year college	Family	Third	4	Roman Catholic	None
Ganda	23	College graduate	Family	Second	4	Roman Catholic	Senior sales representative
Binibini	21	Fourth year college	Family	Eldest	2	Roman Catholic	Call center agent
Mestiza	24	College graduate	Friends	Eldest	4	Roman Catholic	Government employee
Artista	19	Third year college	None	Fourth	4	Roman Catholic	Hotel staff (summer job)
Sexy	20	Fourth year college	Sister	Third	4	Roman Catholic	Student aide, makeup artist, costume maker, dance instructor
Cutie	18	Second year college	None	Youngest	4	Roman Catholic	Student

**Products Used by the Informants**

Overall, findings suggest that lesbian participants mainly used chemical products to modify their hair, while gay participants used a variety of products to feminize their bodies. Both groups used lotions and soaps to whiten their skin. Modifying one’s body, though, seems to be done more by the gay informants.

***Skin Care Products***

Both gay and lesbian participants used a variety of skin care products: soap, facial wash, astringent, facial scrub, lotion, cream, and moisturizer. They used these products to clean their bodies and faces, prevent skin dryness or moisturize their skin, prevent or remove pimples, smell good, and whiten their skin, among others.

**Pogi** used Silka soap on her face and body twice a day because of its good smell. She used it because it was the soap found in their bathroom as it was the soap used by her family.

**Ginoo** lived with her grandparents. Her grandfather was a vendor, while her grandmother was an overseas contract worker. She was one of the transgender boys who owned a motorcycle. She wanted to have fair skin, and that was why she used Master Eskinol for men twice daily. She learned about the product from her mother and had been using it since she was in high school. She said she would recommend Master Eskinol to those who wanted to have fair skin. She had also tried Uni-whitening soap on her face and body. To get rid of her pimples, she used benzoyl peroxide ointment; but prior to using this, she had tried a *malunggay* soap, which helped dry her pimples, and shark oil, which she disliked because it caused her skin to peel.

**Tikas**, another lesbian who owned a motorcycle, stressed that when buying any product, the smell was her primary consideration. In contrast to Ginoo who used a men's product for her face, Tikas used facial products for women. To clean her face, she used Master with Glutha thrice a day whenever she was at home, and twice a day whenever she was outside and could not go home for lunch. The effect of this product on her face was instant—her skin smoothened and whitened. She discovered this product at a drugstore; she read its contents and decided to try it. She even recommended it to her friends. She had also tried Maxi Peel, which also whitened her skin; but since she was riding the motorcycle and was often exposed to the sun, it was "*mahapdi sa mukha*" [it stung my face]. She also used SkinWhite liquid foundation on her face thrice a day whenever she was out of their house. It gave her skin a silky glow. She never applied it whenever she stayed at home. She learned about the product from her mother, who was also using it.

**Kisig**, a fair-skinned lesbian who wanted to be a fireman, had been using Silka soap on her face thrice a day since she was in high school. She also used it on her body back then. When she became a college student, she started using Dove soap on her body. She used two different soaps to assess which of the two had a faster whitening effect. She said she had very fair skin when she was young, and she would like to regain that fairness. She added that her skin darkened when she started high school. When asked why she wanted to be fair-skinned again, she said it was

because it would be “*agaw-pansin*” [attention-catching] to be so, and she wanted to look attractive to both girls and boys. Aside from the soaps she was using, she also used a whitening lotion not just to whiten her skin but also to prevent skin dryness.



This facial cream not only promises whiter skin but is also said to remove dark spots and blemishes. The informants used this to achieve a clear, soft, and fair face.

*Simpatico*, the most beautiful among the lesbians interviewed, used Pond's cream to remove the dark spots on her face, which she learned from a television advertisement. She believed that she would look better without the dark spots on her face. When asked why she was concerned about those blemishes when she was projecting a boy image, she said that even boys nowadays were using creams on their faces. Since she was 18 years old, she had been using Silka soap twice a day on her face and body to smoothen and whiten her skin. She wanted to be fair-skinned “*para iwas hikay*” [so as not to

become ugly]. She said Silka soap was better than Eskinol, and she had been recommending it to others.

*Guwapo* was another lesbian who used Kojie soap to whiten her face. When asked why she wanted to make her face fair, she said, “*nakasanayan lang*” [had gotten used to it]). She believed that the soap was effective. However, she complained that the first time she used it, her face became itchy and *mahapdi* [with a stinging pain]. On her body, she used Palmolive soap twice a day to make her smell good and feel fresh. When asked why she chose Palmolive, she said that it was the soap always bought by her sister.

*Brusko* had been using Pond's facial wash thrice a day since she enrolled in college. A TV ad made her believe that it was good for oily face and for removing pimples, and it indeed helped in reducing her pimples. On her body, she used Dove white soap because her aunt told her that it was

good—it would not make her skin dry even if she did not use lotion. She said she believed that every person should aspire to look good and have smooth skin regardless of his/her gender.

**Macho** used Manis soap (a Palawan-manufactured whitening soap made by Muslim women) from the time she was in high school until college. She learned about this soap from her mother, who became fair-skinned using it. She believed that her mother was “*hiyang*” [compatible] with Manis soap because, unlike them (Macho and the other members of their family), her mother had not had pimples since she started using it. Macho had to stop using the soap because while she was still using it, she got pimples on her face, and her skin got irritated like she was having a skin allergy. She replaced it with Safeguard soap, which she used for her whole body because it smelled good and she felt clean and confident whenever she used it. Her body lotion was a Personal Collection product, which her mother bought from an agent of the said brand. This lotion, which she had been using every day, kept her skin moisturized, soft, and somehow light-colored. However, since she was often exposed to the sun, she did not think her skin really became fair even with the use of the whitening lotion. She previously used SkinWhite lotion, which she learned about through her mother and a TV ad, but stopped using it as her mother replaced it because it was expensive.

**Masculado** had been using Safeguard soap twice a day since she was a child. She said that it usually freshened her up, but sometimes her skin would get irritated when she used it.

**Cutie** was one of the gay dancers who had smooth skin. Since he was in second year high school, he had been using Pond’s facial wash twice daily, and his face had smoothened. He learned about the product from his friends who had smooth skin at the time he had pimples. When he first used the facial wash, he got blackheads on his nose, which he pricked at first but ignored later on because he thought they were insignificant compared to the good effect Pond’s was having on his skin. Besides, he believed that he was not “*hiyang*” with the other products he had tried. On his body, he had been using Safeguard bath soap since he was a kid. He liked Safeguard because he learned from a TV ad that it could kill 99% of the germs in the body. Also, it made him feel fresh, especially when it was sunny, and it removed his body odor. When he was in first year high school, he used Nivea lotion to moisturize his skin as recommended

by his friends, who had fair and smooth skin. He stopped using it when his skin darkened and because it was costly. He replaced it with Jergens lotion, which he liked so much because it was very effective—it made his skin smooth and fairer. He used it only until he was in third year high school because his uncle abroad had stopped supplying them with it, and it was expensive in the local stores. His only complaint about Jergens lotion was that it made the hairs on his skin longer. The latest brand of lotion that he used was Vaseline, which he also found to be good. But, he still preferred Jergens lotion notwithstanding the fast-growing hairs on his skin, especially on his legs.

***Binibini***, a big and tall gay, had been using Master Facial Scrub for men since 2012. He used it thrice a day on his oily face to prevent acne. Although it indeed prevented acne, the product seemed too strong because his face always felt “mahapdi” whenever he used it. Nevertheless, he would still recommend Master Facial Scrub to those who were prone to having acne or pimples. He used Dove soap to moisturize his skin, which he believed had become dry because he was not eating well and was just taking many vitamin supplements. As recommended by his co-workers, he used Myra-E lotion with SPF on his arms and legs twice a day to moisturize and regenerate his skin, especially that he always slept late. He considered it costlier compared to other lotions, but its quality compensated for its price. He also used SkinWhite lotion to be fair-skinned, which he had wanted since he was in high school because he had the darkest skin in his class. (Nobody dared to tell him about his color until he had a quarrel with his best friend, who called him “*baluga*” [black] through a text message.) However, he discontinued using Skin White when he realized that its whitening effect only worked when he was not exposed to the sun; and when he exposed himself to the sun while using it, the more his skin darkened. So, he replaced SkinWhite lotion with SSS Avon lotion, which was also a whitening product. For his bath soap, he tried using Safeguard but had to stop because, although the soap was anti-bacterial, it made his skin dry and “*nagsawa [siya] sa amoy*” [he got tired of its smell].

***Ganda*** used Pond’s facial wash twice a day. Before he used it, he had tried Nivea Facial Scrub, which he discontinued using because somebody told him that it would make his facial skin thinner. He switched to Pond’s because of teen celebrity Julia Barretto who endorsed the product in a TV ad. He also used Pond’s facial cleanser, which helped dry his pimples but

made his face oily; thus, he would not recommend it to others. He also tried Maxi-Peel exfoliant soap because he saw Marian Rivera, his movie idol, endorse it on TV. After using it for six months, he stopped because he developed an allergy to it. He said it was “*mahapdi sa balat*” [it stung the skin] as the skin peeled, and it caused skin irritation, dryness, and small rashes. He replaced the product with Belo whitening soap, which he used on his body. He tried it because of its endorsers—singers and actresses Sarah Geronimo and Toni Gonzaga. Besides, according to him, Belo was an established brand of beauty products. He tried it also because he thought it could help him have an even, light skin tone, and it did. As a bonus, it made his skin very smooth. The soap was costly, but it was worth the price, according to him. He said he would highly recommend it to his friends and other people.

*Queenie*, like Ganda, used the pink Pond’s facial wash (in sachets) twice a day when he started college. He tried it because he saw it being used by his mother, who then bought a sachet for him. It was effective in removing his pimples but was costly, and the price changed every time he bought it; thus, he would not recommend it to others. Another product he used on his face was Myra-E cream, which he learned about from a TV ad. At first, it made his face smooth, but later, small pus-filled pimples developed on his face. Those pimples made him ugly, so he stopped using the cream, saying he was not *hiyang* with it. When bathing, he had been using Palmolive soap thrice a day since he was in college. He also learned about the product from a TV ad. He liked the soap’s smell, but, when he just started using it, his skin got irritated and developed rashes. He continued using it, though, until all its adverse effects disappeared. He had also previously used Nivea soap but had stopped using it because it made his skin dry and sticky, and its after-bath smell did not last long.

*Pustura*, another gay dancer, had been using Silka soap on his body every day since he was in fourth year high school. He learned about the product from his family and friends. His mother, who patronized the product first, bought it for him when he told her that he wanted to have fair skin. When asked why he wanted so, he said it could be because of his insecurities being naturally “*kayumanggi*” [brown-skinned] and because he believed that being fair-skinned was beautiful. He was proud to recommend Silka soap to other people to the extent of saying “*hindi tayo mapapahiya sa tao*” [it won’t be a shame to share it with other people] because it had given him the effect that he wanted. He emphasized,

though, that he did not use Silka soap on his face, only on his body. He used only water in cleaning his face for fear of getting pimples, like when he used Safeguard soap, wherein he got “*butlig-butlig*” [pimples] after 30 minutes. His mother told him that he was allergic to the soap, so he stopped using it as he was afraid of having an ugly, pimply face. From then on, he had not been using anything but water on his face. He did not mind if his face was darker than his body as long as it was free of blemishes caused by pimples. He had also tried Safeguard white soap, which he first saw in a TV ad when he was in the elementary school; but he discontinued using it because it smelled bad. To moisturize his skin, he had been using Avon lotion (in a bottle) every day since he was in college. He had previously used Jergens lotion, but since his mother became an Avon dealer, they had switched to Avon because of the discounts they got. Having very sensitive skin, he wanted it to be fairer and flawless as he was fond of wearing shorts.

*Simpatica* used Pond’s facial wash, which he learned about from his family, specifically his older brother. After using it for two years, he developed pimples and got more whiteheads; so he discontinued using it and replaced it with Clean and Clear, which he thought suited him. He used it in cleaning his face, especially in removing makeup. It removed the pimples and oil on his face. For his daily morning and evening baths, he used Safeguard soap, which he claimed helped solve his pimple problem. To moisturize his skin, he had been using SkinWhite lotion three times a day since 2011. He said his friends were right because it indeed prevented his skin from becoming dry and it had a whitening agent, which he also needed.

*Mestiza*, was the handsomest among the transgender boy informants. He was a head-turner because of his good looks and stature. He washed his face with Safeguard soap, which he considered hypoallergenic and mild. He also used Myra-E facial lotion, which he preferred because of its whitening effect despite its being costly. He used it twice a day along with Vaseline lotion, which he applied on his body to make his skin fairer. He had to use both at the same time so that his skin tone from face to legs would be even. He saw Vaseline lotion in a TV ad and his friends told him that it was effective, making his skin peel to whiten it. Although it was a bit costly, he would still recommend it to others because of its instant whitening effect. Another whitening product he used was Kojic soap. Since he used it on his body twice or thrice a day, he felt that he needed to whiten his face also. It was important to him to have fair skin

because he was fashionable and loved to dress up; and he believed that if he had fair skin, many clothes would suit him. It took a while before he saw the whitening effect of Kojic soap, and it made him feel hot and perspire a lot; and sometimes, his skin felt itchy. Nevertheless, he would still recommend Kojic soap to those who wanted to have fair skin. Unlike the other users of Kojic soap, he did not use it on his face because it was harsh to the skin. He had been using all these whitening products, which he did not know whether they were for men or for women, since April 2014. Their dance troupe had a sports fest then, which got them to be exposed to the sun too much and have darker skin. From then on, he had been regularly using whitening products, which he observed worked through skin peeling. He still used them even after he had already attained the skin color he desired.

**Artista** used Eskinol Baby Face facial cleanser with calamansi extract in the morning and evening every day. It was recommended by a friend who wanted to help him get rid of his pimples. He claimed that it removed not only his pimples but also his wrinkles and scars, and he would recommend it to other people. For bathing, he had been using the pink Safeguard soap since he was in the elementary grades because he always felt clean whenever he used it. He chose the pink one because of its good smell. He tried using the green soap, but his skin felt sticky and dry after using it. He also used a papaya soap, which was a whitening soap. To moisturize his skin, he had been using the red Myra-E lotion twice a day—before going out of the house and before going to bed—since he went to college. It was recommended by his sister and girlfriends, who bought it for him. He used the lotion to prevent his skin from getting dry and to whiten it because he believed that the dark-skinned lacked appeal, while the fair-skinned looked clean and attractive. He said, though, that he had not achieved the fairness he desired even if he used Myra-E lotion because his outdoor activities, such as playing and swimming, made his skin remain dark.

**Guwapa** used Safeguard soap and Silka soap on both his face and body. He started using Safeguard when he was in the elementary grades and had continued using it because “*nakasanayan na*” [had gotten used to it], and it moisturized his skin. He discovered Silka when he was in third year college and had been using it since then. He preferred Silka over Safeguard because the former was more effective in removing his pimples; but he considered both as harsh soaps because they both irritated his eyes, although Safeguard was harsher for him.

**Sexy** previously used Pond's but stopped using it when his face became "ugly." He said it could be because the effectiveness of such products was "*pahiyangan*" [dependent on their compatibility with the user]. Wanting to be fair-skinned in order to attract boys, he switched to the blue Belo whitening soap, which he learned about from a TV commercial. He believed that it was effective in lightening his very dark skin. He chose products like Belo soap, which had an extraordinarily good smell or "*pangsosyal na amoy*" [elegant smell] but were affordable and effective. Aside from Belo soap, he also used Safeguard soap to keep his body free from germs. It was his practice to use the two soaps—Safeguard first and then Belo—for two different purposes whenever he took a bath. He liked to be "*amoy ligo, hindi amoy pabango*" [smells fresh from the shower and not smells of perfume]. To moisturize his skin, he used SSS Avon lotion for two years but stopped using it because he felt sticky when it was dusty, and he felt hot too. Since then, he had not been using lotion anymore.

### ***Products for Smelling Good and Feeling Fresh and Clean***

Deodorants, colognes, perfumes, feminine washes, foot powders, and alcohols were among the products used by the gay and lesbian participants to smell good and feel fresh and clean. Although they used toothpastes along with these products, their use is not included in the discussion because toothpaste brand preferences are not gender-specific.

Since she was in high school, **Pogi** had kept herself smelling good every day by using Rexona roll-on deodorant for women, which he learned about from her family. **Ginoo** had been using Rexona deodorant for men since she was a high school freshman. She took a bath twice a day but applied deodorant only after her morning bath, which she did to prevent body odor. She preferred Rexona deodorant for men, which was introduced by her friends, over the deodorant for women because the former smelled better. **Kisig** used SkinWhite deodorant to whiten her armpits because it was endorsed by her movie star idol, Kim Chiu, whom she liked so much that she would like to either be as beautiful as her or have a girlfriend as beautiful as her. Kisig also used Sassy perfume.

Rexona was also **Simpatico's** brand of deodorant, but he used either the one for men or the one for women, whichever was available at the store; although she preferred the one for men because it was stronger, smelled better, and kept her armpits dry longer. She applied it twice a day—after

her morning and evening baths. She learned about the product from a TV ad. To smell even better, which she learned from her friends, she had been using cologne twice a day since she was 14 years old. She liked the feeling of smelling good, especially when people noticed it. To keep herself clean, she had been using ethyl alcohol five times a day since she was 18 years old. She was using an anti-bacterial alcohol which she saw on TV being endorsed by movie stars.

Every morning since she was in college, *Guwapo* had been using Rexona deodorant for women, which she bought in sachets from drugstores, because she liked its smell. She said she would not buy a product that was devoid of smell. It was her friends who recommended Rexona, which she used to prevent body odor and would recommend to anyone who had body odor. To make herself smell even better, she used PH Care feminine wash, which she learned from her sister. She used it from the time she was in high school until college but had discontinued using it because her sister had stopped buying it.

*Brusko* had been using Nivea deodorant for men twice a day since she was in high school. She learned about the product from a TV ad. Whenever she used it, she felt confident that she would not smell bad. To her, it would be a shame if she would come to school with bad odor as she believed that one's grooming was a reflection of her personality. However, Nivea deodorant made her armpits wet, but she still used it because she had gotten used to it and it was affordable. She would recommend it to others.

*Macho* had been using Rexona deodorant for women since she was in high school. She would apply it after taking a bath, except in the evening when she had nothing else to do but sleep. It was her mother who usually bought it for her, although she would sometimes buy it herself from a department store or a *sari-sari* store. She considered it affordable. She learned about it from a TV ad; her mother and friends also recommended it to her. She claimed that Rexona smelled good, and whenever she used it, she felt confident that she would not smell bad. Whenever she felt that she smelled of sweat, she would use Bench body spray for men, which she started using when she was in college and had always brought with her since then. She got the idea of using the product, which she bought from a Bench store, from a TV ad and her friends. She preferred the spray for

men because she believed it suited her, being a lesbian. She felt confident dealing with people whenever she used it.

Since college, **Masculado** had been using Axe deodorant, which was for men. She learned about it from her friends and was able to buy it from any drugstore. She liked it because of its smell, and she believed it made her smell good. She used it twice a day, although it sometimes irritated her skin, especially when she perspired a lot. Despite this and the product's being costly, she still preferred it over other deodorants. Aside from body odor, she was also concerned about the smell of her feet. To make sure that they did not smell and to prevent athlete's foot as well, she used Tawas foot powder, which she chose because it was very cheap.

**Cutie** used Rexona deodorant for women, which he learned about from his family, specifically his sister. He used it for just one year—when she was in grade 3 until grade 4—because his underarms darkened, although they were dry and smelled so good. After using Rexona, he did not use any other deodorants and just washed his armpits with Safeguard soap to prevent body odor. To smell fragrant, he used different brands of cologne. Whenever he wanted to buy a cologne from a department store, he used the testers to choose the one with the best smell. He had been using cologne, which he applied twice a day, since he was in the elementary grades. It was his friends who introduced it to him. He liked using cologne because it made a difference in his presence whenever he was with friends or other people. The only thing he did not like about it was the stains it left on his clothes.

**Binibini** used Bench Performance perfume once every day to smell good. He could get it from any Bench store, but he preferred buying it from the Bench outlet at Robinson's. He learned about the product from a TV ad. He said that he loved trying new things, and the perfume's name, Performance, caught his interest. When he first used it, he expected his co-office workers to tell him that he smelled good, but he did not want to recommend it to them or to others because he did not want them to smell like him.

**Ganda** used Nivea deodorant every day because it was recommended by his friends. He liked it because it did not stain his clothes, kept his armpits dry, and if ever he perspired, he did not smell very bad unlike when he used other deodorants.

**Pustura** had been using Rexona deodorant for women every day since he was in first year college. He preferred it because it had a milder smell compared to the one for men. He had been using it to smell good since a friend suggested it when he asked for advice. When he first used it, his armpits darkened but, after some time, regained their original color. He once tried not using anything on his underarms, but he perspired a lot and had body odor. Another product that made him feel fresh was PH Care feminine wash. Among the 20 participants, he was one of the only two who used the product.

**Simpatica** used Nivea roll-on deodorant for men once a day, which kept his underarms dry even when he danced. He learned about it from his siblings, most of whom used it. It was a little costly, but he still liked it.

**Mestiza** used Nivea deodorant spray for men once a day. He learned about it from a TV ad. Because of his active lifestyle, he needed an antiperspirant like the Nivea deodorants. He preferred the spray, although it was more expensive, because the roll-on, lotion, and stick stained his clothes.

To prevent body odor, **Artista** had been using powdered *tawas* (alum) on his underarms every day since he was in high school. It was his family and friends, who called him “Mommmita,” that introduced it and bought it for him. Tawas whitened his underarms although they became sticky and smelled of sweat a little. He would highly recommend it because it had no chemicals and was very cheap—could be bought in tiny plastic bags. When he was in high school, he tried Rexona deodorant, but his underarms got severely irritated and darkened; so he stopped using it and used tawas instead. He saw a big difference in the effects of the two products. To smell fragrant, he used Bench cologne whenever he felt like it. Since he went to college, he had also been using perfumes either for men or for women, depending on who he was going to be with. If he would go out with boys, he would use a perfume for men. If he would be in the company of girls, he would use a perfume for women because he said that it would be awkward to smell like a man as his girlfriends knew that he was gay. He smelled good and felt fresh whenever he had perfume on, but he did not like to use it often “*para hindi ako masyado kasawaan*” [so that people will not get tired of me/my smell].

**Sexy** used Aficionado cologne number 60, which he discovered and bought in a mall. He liked its unique sweet feminine smell, so he used

it every day. Since he was gay, he chose a cologne for women to attract men. Indeed, because of his cologne, he seemed to have attracted a male board mate, who frequently passed by his room just to get a smell of his cologne. The cologne was expensive though, but he did not mind it. He just saved money to afford it.

### ***Pampapogi***

All the lesbian participants had their hair cut very short so that they could easily be identified as men, or women with “*pusong lalaki*” [the heart of a man]. This could also be the reason the participants who were studying criminology at the Palawan State University, along with all the other students taking up this course, were required to have short hair. In the Western Philippines University, though, girls were only required to tie their hair into a ponytail.

The 10 lesbian participants used different chemical products in taking caring of and styling their hair to express their desired gender identity. All of them used shampoo and conditioner to wash their hair. Seven of them used wax and/or gel to style their hair, and most of them used Bench Claydoh and Gatsby wax. One participant had tried Grips wax, while another used gel of an unknown brand. Five of the ten lesbians colored their hair, which was their way of expressing their desired gender identity. It is very common nowadays for boys in the Philippines to color their hair. Only two lesbians remembered the brand of the hair dye they used, and this was Bredmod.

Since she was in high school, ***Astig*** had been using Gatsby wax in styling her hair and keeping it as styled. She said that she had gotten used to having very short hair, and she was comfortable with and it kept her feeling cool. She needed to do her desired hairstyle every day to look good.

***Pogi***, a lesbian who lived with her girlfriend, used Rejoice shampoo because it made her hair soft and smell good, which was important to her. When she was in the elementary grades, she used Vaseline shampoo, which she learned about from a TV ad; she stopped using it in when she was in high school because it caused her dandruff. She styled her short hair every morning using Bench Claydoh, which was recommended by her friends and she bought from a mall. This product, though, made dust

cling easily to her hair. Aside from having short hair, she wore a cap to look more like a man. For her, having long hair was a hassle as she needed to always tie it into a ponytail, which she disliked. Styling her hair made him “pogi,” which she believed would make others idolize her.

**Ginoo**, who belonged to a family of born-again Christians, did not use wax or gel for hairstyling but had her hair color changed every summer. She had done it five times already since she was in high school, having tried four different colors: chestnut, brown, green, and violet. When the interview was done, her hair was colored chestnut. To make her hair soft, she used Vaseline shampoo, but it caused her to have dandruff.

**Tikas**, an adopted and only child, was a TESDA graduate and a businesswoman. Since high school, she had been trained by her mother to use her allowance in buying all the beauty products that she needed, including shampoo and hair gel. She used Head and Shoulders shampoo for men three times a day because her head felt cooler whenever she used it, and her hair smelled good too, which was very important to her. She used Bench Claydoh in styling her whenever she would go out. It made her hair firm and smell good too, that was why she liked it. She believed that she looked presentable whenever she styled her hair with it. She explained that she made her hair look like that of a man's because it suited her. She had also changed the color of her hair many times already, which she did with a little help from her cousin. She had tried blonde, green, red, burgundy, chestnut, brown, ash blonde, and black. As she changed the color of her hair, she usually changed her hairstyle too, which her mother objected to because it damaged her hair. She admitted that coloring her hair made it dry; thus, she would not recommend it to others. However, she believed that having colored hair made her look “*astig*” [tough], which was important to her because it boosted her confidence. She said that older people usually thought of young ones with colored hair as “drug addicts,” while, to her, the old ones who had colored hair were “*isip-bata*” [childish]. At the time of the interview, her hair was black because she had business dealings to make, and she believed she looked more credible with black hair. However, she was so certain that she would change her hair color again very soon.

**Kisig**, whose sister and brother worked for their family, had her hair cut very short. Her sister suggested it so that she would not need to tie her hair into a ponytail in order to feel cool. Besides, all the students who

were majoring in criminology, males and females alike, were required to have short hair. She used gel once a day in styling her hair, which was important to her because she did not want to look haggard and wanted to attract both boys and girls. She learned about the gel she was using from a TV ad, but she could not remember its brand because it was her older sister who bought it for her. When asked why she needed to style her hair, she said “*para maging pogi*” [to be handsome]. She wanted her hair to grow faster, so she used Dove shampoo and a hair conditioner, both of which also made her hair smell good.

***Simpatico***, a Roman Catholic whose family were members of Iglesia ni Cristo, said that having nice hair could project a good image to others. She used Bench Claydoh in styling her hair and either of two different brands of shampoo, depending on the effect she desired. She used the green and mentholated Head and Shoulders shampoo if she wanted her head to feel cooler, especially when she had a headache. For softer hair, she used Dove shampoo, which she preferred over Head and Shoulders. She chose the barber’s cut because it made her feel fresh, and it freed her from combing and tying her hair. To her, having very short hair could give someone like her an added appeal; and indeed, she felt that because of her hair, which made her look like a man, she had become appealing to girls.

***Guwapo***, who lived with her family and her partner, used Rejoice shampoo every day. However, when asked whether she could take a bath without shampooing her hair, she said she could because she used Bench Claydoh wax, sometimes Grips wax, both of which made her hair smell good. She had been using wax on her hair twice a day since she was in high school, as recommended by her friends. She used hair wax daily unlimitedly. Styling her hair with wax made her “*pogi*” or “*guwapo*” [handsome], which helped her find girls and be easily distinguished by them. She colored her hair golden red using Bredmod hair dye which she learned about from her friends. She liked the said brand because it was good on her hair and it gave her hair nice colors. She colored her hair for her to look “*astig*” and be identified as “*tibo*” or “*tiboom*.” She started coloring her hair when she was in the elementary grades. She stopped doing it when she was in high school to please her mother, who was mad about it and said that it made her look like a drug addict. Since she was in the elementary grades, she had also been keeping her hair short because she envied the boys’ haircut. When she reached second year high

school, she started donning the barber's cut (a certain style of haircut that is usually for men). It was difficult for her to have long hair and tie it, and that was why she did not want to don a girl's haircut anymore. Her hairstyle made her comfortable and helped her be identified as a lesbian, and she was able to wear what was "*uso*" [trendy]. Besides, she found it awkward to have a girlfriend while she had long hair.

**Brusko**, who lived in a boarding house, used Sunsilk shampoo twice a day because "*nakasanayan [na]*". Using shampoo was important to her, but she could do away with it; although doing so made her hair sticky. She used Vaseline shampoo from the time she was in the elementary grades until high school, but she had to stop using it because she was not *hiyang* with it. She got hair lice and her hair started to fall out while using Vaseline, so she switched to Sunsilk shampoo. Her hair was very important to her because she heard from others that if one's hair was nice, "*yon na 'yon*" [that's it, which could mean "it makes up for everything"]. She used to have long hair, and she regretted having it cut very short.

**Macho** was the third among nine children in her family. She used Gatsby wax (in sachets) to style her hair for important events like "*barkada gimmicks*" [friends' nights out] and "*magaporma*" [to show off]. She used wax to prevent her hair from drying and to give it a shiny and wet look. She learned about Gatsby wax from friends and TV ads. At the time of the interview, she had chestnut-colored hair. It was her second time to change her hair color. The first time was three months before the time of the interview, and it was a friend who colored her hair blonde. She colored her hair for different reasons: "*kasi trip lang*" [just felt like it], to get a new look, "*para astig tingnan*" [to look tough], or "*para maraming chicks*" [to get many girls]. She would recommend hair coloring to others except the criminology students who were not allowed to color their hair. She previously used hair styling gel but had stopped using it because it made her hair sticky, she got dandruff, and she was scolded by her father, who told her that gel could cause gray hair. Macho also used Palmolive shampoo twice a day to make her hair soft and smell good, which would then make her feel fresh.

**Masculado**, who lived with her older brother and sister, donned the barber's cut because "*nakasanayan [na]*" and it made her be identified as a tibo. Her way of hair styling was by coloring her hair burgundy red, which she had been doing annually since she entered college. She had

been doing it because, to her, having styled hair was an asset for girls. It also made her look good and be identified as a tomboy or lesbian. Although hair coloring had caused her dandruff and an itchy scalp, she still did it because Clear shampoo was there to get rid of those side effects, aside from making her hair soft. She had used Head and Shoulders shampoo before but stopped using it because it made her hair sticky and smell bad whenever she perspired.



The picture shows different brands of shampoo in sachets as displayed in one of the sari-sari stores in Puerto Princesa. Photo taken by Ralph Pulanco.

### *Pampaganda*

The gay informants used hormonal pills and all kinds of cosmetics and skin care products to feminize their bodies. They identified a variety of products, particularly those that made them smell good, feel fresh, look beautiful, and look like women.

#### *Hormonal Pills*

Hormonal pills, also known as “contraceptive pills” or commonly called “beauty pills” by the gay informants, were one of the gays’ means to attain their desired gender identity. Taking hormonal pills is close to the hormonal therapy discussed in the introduction of this paper.

Four of the 10 gay participants used hormonal pills for a variety of reasons, which redounded to this main purpose: to alter their bodies for their desired gender identity. However, using hormonal pills had side effects, and one of the four gay informants had stopped using them for fear of experiencing their adverse effects. One informant reduced the dosage he was taking because of the adverse effect he had experienced, while another had stopped taking the pills because they were unavailable. Another informant temporarily discontinued taking the pills because he could not achieve the effect he wanted due to an activity he was engaged in.

The following were the stories of the four transgender girls who took the hormonal pills to attain the looks suited for their desired gender identity.

**Ganda** had long hair and fair skin and looked like a “real” female. His alias befitted him. In 2013, he joined the Queen of Queens beauty pageant for gays. He was courted by men and dated some of them. He was making Php9,000 monthly from being a senior sales representative.

Ganda took the Althea pills, the so-called “beauty pills,” for two months. He learned about them from his male cousins who also wished to “become” females. He took the pills because he said “*gusto ko maging maganda pa*” [I wanted to look more beautiful]—with softer features and more beautiful skin, fresher-looking, more blooming, and looking very feminine. He claimed that he attained all these when he took the pills. The Althea pills contained estrogen, which could enlarge the breasts. Indeed, when Ganda took the pills, his breasts grew and became tender and sensitive like those of girls’ that they hurt with a slight bump. The pills also made his skin “super” smooth. But despite having achieved the good effects that he wanted from the pills, he stopped taking them because they were too expensive, and he experienced some of the pills’ adverse effects. While taking the pills, he felt joint pains, especially in the knees. He had also failed to have a penile erection, which to him was tantamount to being dead. He felt that something was lacking; it felt different from his “*nakasanayan*.” He claimed that his joint pains and erectile problem were most probably caused by the “melting” or loss of his male hormones. Aside from these, the pills made his heart palpitate most of the time, as if he was nervous about something. He also heard that when users of hormonal pills had reached old age, they would experience more adverse effects, such as getting body wrinkles and cancers. When asked whether he would continue using the pills, he answered no because to him it was

like putting waste to his body. What he wanted was to reduce, if not remove, his Adam's apple. On the whole, he was happy with what and who he had become because many boys were already attracted to him. In fact, he claimed that he was "*super habulin ng mga boys*" [very much pursued by boys]. With that, he already felt contented and would not want to totally transform to being a woman.

**Queenie** was an out-of-school youth who dreamed of joining and winning gay beauty pageants. He was tall, dark, thin, and could easily be spotted as gay because of his masculine facial features. He has two beautiful sisters, one of whom won a beauty pageant and had inspired him to become like her.

Queenie used two kinds of beauty pills, the Micropil and the Micropil Plus pills. Before he took the pills, his face was skeleton thin, with his cheeks being so sunken. He was jokingly called "*bangkay*" [corpse] by his friends who also told him that his being so thin was a hopeless case and that he had no chance of joining gay beauty pageants. But Queenie had this strong desire to be a beauty queen or even just a runner-up. His very close friend who recommended Micropil and Micropil Plus pills also used to have very thin or sunken cheeks, but they had become a little fuller after he took the pills. Queenie was convinced by his friend and tried the pills, but he did not let his family know about it. At first he tried Micropil, taking four pills a day. Then, he took Micropil Plus together with Micropil, taking eight pills of each daily—four of each at lunch time and at dinner time—a total of 16 pills per day. He started taking the pills in 2012 when he stopped studying. He felt dizzy when he first took all the eight pills at the same time. He told his gay friends about it, but they assured him that what he felt was just normal. Then he developed a strong appetite for food, making him eat a lot and sleep a lot too. His breasts then grew, and he attributed this to the pills. To see if what he thought was correct, he stopped taking the pills for a while; and indeed, he noticed that her breasts stopped growing. He and Ganda experienced the same effects on their breasts when they took and discontinued taking the pills. Queenie claimed, too, that the color of his skin lightened as his face became fuller. However, pus-filled rashes erupted on his arms. When he consulted a doctor about it, he was immediately asked, "Are you taking pills?" which meant that what he was experiencing was a common adverse effect of taking hormonal pills. His breasts also hardened and he felt a lump in one of them. When he shared this with his aunt, who was a nurse, she told him "*hinay-hinay lang baka*

*ka magka-cancer*" [take it slow, or you might get cancer]. But instead of discontinuing taking the pills, he just reduced the dosage he was taking. From 16 pills a day, he just took four Micropil pills and four Micropil Plus pills daily. He would not recommend taking the pills to others because of their adverse effects and expensiveness. The Micro Pill cost PhP45.75 per pack, while the Micro Pill Plus cost PhP80 per pack.

**Artista** was a gay dancer who came from a simple family. His father was a fisherman, while his mother was a plain housewife. He had two older brothers, who both had graduated from college, were working as school employees, and helping their family financially. Since he was in high school, Artista had been doing a summer job in a hotel wherein he was paid PhP3,000 monthly. As a dancer in his university, he did not need to pay for his tuition fees. In spite of all these and having a boyfriend, there was one thing that he still wished for, and that was to be understood and accepted by his father for what he was.

Artista took the Micropil pills during his first three years in high school to get rid of his Adam's apple, as recommended by a friend. He took four pills daily at four different times of the day. In his last year in high school, he replaced Micropil with the Lady Diane pills, which his friends said were stronger and worked faster. He took them twice a day, two pills in the morning and two pills in the evening, as if they were vitamin supplements. Because he was taking the pills, drinking alcohol was a no-no for him when he was in high school. When he first took the pills, he felt very dizzy and perspired a lot. He continued taking them and drank a lot of water because he believed that it would help melt his bulging muscles and make his breasts bigger. When he first learned, though, that the pills would make his breasts bigger, he stopped taking them for a while because he was afraid of having fully developed breasts. He had reservations about totally transforming into a woman as he was satisfied with what he was. Nevertheless, he continued taking the pills as they enabled him to get what he wanted, which was getting rid of his masculine features. He shared his friend's experience of having bigger breasts and getting rid of all his bulging muscles by taking 10 Lady Diane pills a day. As Artista's breasts got bigger, they developed itchy lumps which he needed to pinch every now and then for his breasts to have the shape of a woman's. As a university dance troupe member, he was obliged to help carry heavy props, costumes, and other things that the troupe needed during their performances. Because of this, his muscles grew again, so he

decided to just stop taking the pills as it seemed useless. It had been four years since he did so. However, if he would be given the chance not to do the things that made his muscles grow, he would take the pills again.

**Sexy** described himself as “a female born as a male.” A vibrant, versatile, and resourceful 20-year-old, he worked as a student aide, makeup artist, costume maker, and dance instructor and earned not lower than PhP1,000 every month. According to their dance troupe director, like Artista, Sexy was very creative in making costume designs.

Sexy could not remember the brand of the beauty pills he took, but he described them as brown pills in a pink blister pack. He learned about the pills from his mother, who owned packs of them. Curious about the pills, he asked his mother about them and he was told that they were vitamin supplements. He said that he knew they were contraceptive pills, but he was wondering why his mother took the white pills but not the brown ones. His mother said that it was because she knew that the brown pills were vitamin supplements, and she did not want them. Sexy’s nurse friend told him that the pills were “female hormones,” so he took them. Whenever he was at their home in the southern part of Palawan, he took three to five brown pills after every meal. He was not afraid to take a lot of them because he heard that he would not have an overdose of them as they were just vitamin supplements. He took the pills from 2012 to 2014. His breasts grew and he developed feminine curves, especially in the butt area. With pride, he stood up and showed his breasts, thighs, and behind. Unlike Queenie, Sexy did not get drowsy whenever he took the pills because he was energetic. Although he did not experience any adverse effects from the pills, he had stopped taking them because he had no more supplies; her mother had discontinued using them. He did not mind it, though, because he did not want to buy those pills and be dependent on them as he knew that they were drugs. Neither did he want injectables hormones. He was contented with the pills he had taken because he was already satisfied with what he had become.

### **Switching of Products**

This study found out that the transgender youth (gays and lesbians) tended to change the products they used, whether chemical or non-chemical, to express their desired gender identities. The succeeding paragraphs explain their diverse choices.

### *Non-chemical Products*

According to the website of the American Psychological Association, gender transition may be as simple as changing the type of clothes that a transgender person uses according to his/her gender preference. Some of their chosen clothes or outfits can be seen, but others are hidden.

The gays and lesbians involved in the study revealed their choices of getups. Their disclosures verified their predisposition to alter the sexes assigned to them at birth.

In the focus group discussion, four of the five lesbians who attended—Kisig, Guwapo, Masculado, and Astig—disclosed that they felt awkward wearing bras, so they wore girdles instead to cover and support their breasts. Another lesbian, *Bilog*, said that if it would be possible, she was willing to have her breast size reduced. All of them wore caps, but it was *Pogi* who wore a boy's cap most of the time “para astig.” When needed, they brought with them masculine backpacks instead of the usual bags carried by young women. All of them used big handkerchiefs and socks for boys, and the majority used boys' shoes. They also preferred boys' T-shirts and pants over blouses and skirts. However, they also wore loose blouses when needed. Ginoo, Tikas, Macho, and Astig owned motorcycles, which they used for transportation. All of them wanted to look handsome to be appealing to girls.

Among the gay informants, *Ganda* dressed like a woman from head to toe. He usually adorned his long hair with a hairpin, hair clip, or headband. Being a cross-dresser, he loved to wear ruffled, dainty, and carefully-designed colored blouses. For a feminine look, he usually wore a blouse, with a bra under it, paired with skinny pants and high-heeled shoes. When he was in college, he would enter the campus wearing the school uniform for boys and would later change into his preferred getup. He was usually sent out of the class by his professors to change into his school uniform, especially when the college dean called his attention and made him promise in writing that he would always wear the proper uniform in his classes.

Unlike Ganda, *Artista* did not always wear girls' clothes. He sometimes wore a micromini-skirt and a blouse. He had also tried wearing a bra and a wig when he joined a gay beauty pageant, wherein he placed first

runner-up. This pageant was not the annual event that the university male dancers usually participated in. Artista felt wonderful joining the contest and being selected as one of the members of the queen's court. Very ecstatic at that time, he felt that he was so beautiful and a true woman.

*Mestiza*, the most mature among the seven gay dancers, disclosed that during their regular gatherings, they were allowed to cross-dress and wear wigs, which meant that they were used to such a practice.

*Simpatica*, a "beautiful male dancer," was the only Muslim among the participants. He lived in a boarding house. His father worked as an overseas contract worker. In the focus group discussion, Simpatica revealed that he wore a panty liner during dance rehearsals and actual performances and whenever he had that "haggard" feeling. Wearing a panty liner made him feel comfortable because when he perspired a lot, which made him feel "*malagkit*" [sticky], the liner served as a sweat absorber. Also, with a panty liner, he changed his underwear only twice instead of the usual three times.

### ***Chemical Products***

The gay and lesbian informants used a variety of products that enhanced their looks and made them feel and smell good. They used shampoo and conditioner on their hair; soap, facial wash, moisturizer, cosmetics (foundation, blush-on, lipstick, lip balm, lip gloss, eyeliner, and mascara) on their faces; and body wash, moisturizer, and lotion on their bodies. To smell good and feel fresh, they used deodorant, cologne, perfume, and feminine wash. In general, there was a switching of the products that were supposedly used by the two groups as males and females; that is, the transgender boys (lesbians) used products for boys, while the transgender girls (gays) used products for girls. But the majority of them identified the skin care products that they used as their main means of making their bodies as congruent as possible with their desired gender identities.

### ***Hair Care Products***

It can be noted that only a few of the gay informants bothered fixing their hair, unlike the lesbian informants who all made an effort to make their hair look good. Most of the gays just used shampoo to clean their hair.

**Binibini**, who was earning more than the minimum wage as a call center agent, was a gay who had a unique hairstyle that attracted attention. His hair was longer than the usual for men. He used Dove shampoo for women because it gradually reduced his dandruff, aside from making his hair soft. He was attracted to the TV ad that promoted the shampoo and was convinced by the commercial model; so, he tried the shampoo until he became *hiyang* with it. He had tried three colors on her hair—two shades of red—burgundy and copper—blue, and blonde. He and the rest of his class in high school experienced being suspended because they all wore colored hair in their classes. They did it deliberately as an act of rebellion because a classmate was not allowed to attend their class for having colored hair. They valued friendship more than their studies, so the whole class, with him as the leader, agreed to attend their classes with colored hair. He said that, generally, it was all right for others if women changed their hair color but not if men did so. He pointed out that men's having colored hair, especially when they used loud colors, made them look not credible. Wanting to be unique, he would not recommend to other people his hair color and hairstyle, which he believed made him attractive and looked up to by others.

Like Binibini, **Ganda** also used Dove shampoo because it helped lessen his hair fall. However, he blamed the shampoo for the thinning of his hair strands. He used L'Oreal conditioner after every shampoo to prevent her hair from being dry and frizzy and to make it manageable. He was inspired by Filipino actress Anne Curtis, who endorsed the product in a TV commercial. Although he considered L'Oreal conditioner an expensive product, he would still recommend it to others. He previously used Head and Shoulders shampoo because its endorser was Filipino actress Angel Locsin, but he had stopped using it because it caused him severe hair fall. Aside from the regular shampoos, he also applied chestnut-colored shampoo on his hair every three months.

**Queenie** had long, straight hair. He used Rejoice shampoo, which she learned about from his family and friends. He consumed one sachet every time he washed his hair with the aim of making it grow faster, smell good, and look shiny. He wanted to have shiny hair so that he would look beautiful like his friends for their so-called "*rampa sa baybay*" [walk along the bay]. (The bay was where people in Puerto Princesa, particularly the young ones, strolled day and night. It was also where city events, especially the fiesta and foundation day, were usually held.) The

only bad effect Rejoice shampoo had on him was that his scalp would get itchy. He previously used Palmolive shampoo, but it caused him hair fall and dandruff because he believed he was not *hiyang* with it. On coloring his hair, he had tried different colors since he was in high school until he was in college. He learned how to color his hair from his cousins. Since having colored hair was a trend then, he decided to color his hair. He said, “*Tadtad na tadtad na ang hair ko ng kulay*” [My hair already had so many colors]. He had tried brown, red, and violet. He did not like brown on his hair, while red did not suit him, according to his friends. Both brown and red did not match his dark skin. He applied violet only as a highlight. He stopped dyeing his hair when his mother cut its colored portion, and because his hair became dry and difficult to comb and grew too slow.

**Artista** used to have dandruff but got rid of it with Head and Shoulders shampoo, as recommended by his friends. He stressed that he used the shampoo in pink bottle because he felt fresh with it.

**Guwapa** used Pantene, Sunsilk, or Rejoice shampoo, depending on what his mother and cousins had bought. He used any of the three to make his hair beautiful and clean.

### *Cosmetics*

The majority of the lesbian participants used only baby powder. On the other hand, the gay participants used a variety of cosmetics often for their dance performances for them to have confidence, feel fresh, and look beautiful and attractive. It was noteworthy, though, that Johnson’s baby powder was popular to both groups.

**Pogi** applied Johnson’s baby powder on her face at daytime and on her back at nighttime. Like the other lesbian participants, she believed that the powder removed the oil on his face, and that was why she kept using it. To her, to be good-looking, one’s face must not be oily. She would highly recommend this powder to others.

**Tikas** used a lip balm to keep her lips shiny, when needed. She also used SkinWhite face powder, which was like a liquid foundation. For her body, she used Johnson’s baby powder.

**Kisig** had been using Johnson's baby powder three times a day since she was in the elementary grades. She would buy the product either from a department store or a drugstore. She learned about the product from TV ads.

**Simpatiko** applied Johnson's baby powder on her face to reduce its oiliness and make it look fair. She liked the powder's smell. Like Simpatiko, Brusko used Johnson's baby powder because she wanted to make her face look fair and better because, to her, being "*negra-negra*" [dark-skinned] was not beautiful. She had been using Johnson's baby powder five times daily since she was in high school.

**Macho**, unlike the other lesbian participants, used Johnson's baby powder as often as she could to keep herself feeling and smelling good, clean, and fresh because she perspired a lot. To her, the product was affordable. She said she did not need to recommend the powder to others because she believed everyone was already using it.

**Cutie** applied Johnson's baby powder on his face and back four times at most daily. He remembered that he had been using it since he was a kid. He learned about the original version of the powder—the one with a white bottle cap—from his family. His friends introduced to him new versions of the powder. He chose the one in a pink bottle because it made his face pinkish, just like having blush-on. The one with an orange cap worked like foundation, while the one with a violet cap was for oil control. He said that there was also one with a blue cap, but he had no idea what its special use was. Applying powder made him feel fresh, look fair, and have self-confidence. He felt ashamed of himself going anywhere without applying powder, which he felt made him look haggard.

Cutie had also been using Pond's facial cream since he was in second year high school. He learned about the product from his friends. It made his skin smooth at first, but his skin peeled later and he developed pimples, which made him stop using it.

**Binibini** applied Revlon Bronzer as blush-on whenever he went out with his gay friends every Saturday night, which he called "*nagpe-perform*" [performing]. He used it to put some color on his face and make it appear smaller, which he believed made him look beautiful. He began using it when he started joining the Saturday night "gimmick" with his friends in

his sophomore year in college. It was his friends who suggested Revlon Bronzer, which was a commendable blush-on to him, especially that it was used by some movie stars. He admitted that the product was a bit expensive, but he would still use it and recommend it to those who were “*manang-manang na dalaga*” [old-fashioned single women]. For his daily use, he had Lewis and Pearl powder for oil control, which he put on her face three to four times a day even during his classes. He called all these “*kaartehan*” [girlishness], but he was the one spending for them.

**Ganda** used Nichido face powder and lipstick. He put on Caronia nail polish whenever he liked it because he wanted to make his hands look presentable to the one who would hold them. He chose red rouge because his hands looked nice with this color. To remove unwanted hairs on his body, he tried Veet hair removing cream. The cream was costly, so he opted to just shave his hairs.

**Pustura** had been using Johnson’s baby powder on his body, from his neck down, thrice a day since he was in the elementary grades. He learned to use this powder from his family, and it was his mother who always bought it. When asked why he used it, he said “*nakasanayan lang*.” He felt great whenever he used the powder, which he applied in the morning, at lunch time, and at bed time. He felt sticky and uncomfortable whenever he did not put powder on his body; that was why he would highly recommend it to others.

**Simpatika** used Maxi-Peel concealer cream (in a sachet) once a day to hide the blemishes on his face. Since his older brother introduced the product to him, he had been using it to look fresh. Whenever he had used up a sachet of the cream, he would immediately buy a new one. The product did not have any adverse effect on him, and that was why he would recommend it to others even if it was expensive. He had also been using Avon’s Simply Pretty pressed powder four times a day since 2010. He used the pressed powder, which was recommended by his friends, to feel cool because the hot weather made him perspire. He admitted that it was not cheap, but he would still buy it because it made him feel fresh all day.

**Mestiza** had been wearing Nichicko cake foundation and blush-on in their weekly performance since he joined the university dance troupe in 2008. He said that the foundation, which was recommended by a

friend, helped in controlling oil on his face when he perspired, while he used the blush-on to enhance his facial contour. All the members of their dance troupe had to have their own sets of cosmetics. Most of them bought Nichido products because these had shades that matched their skin tones, and they were cheaper than those of other brands.

*Artista* had been using the pink Johnson's baby powder three times a day since he was in the elementary grades because he liked its smell and it made his skin smooth. It was recommended by his friends, who bought it for him. Since he entered college, he had been using a liquid foundation by Watsons, which he applied every day to cover the scars on his face. Doing so made him look clean, attractive, and beautiful.

*Guwapa* had been wearing the amber shade of Nichido cake foundation in their weekly dance show since he was a college junior. He said that the foundation was important to him as it covered the dark spots on his face, although he sometimes got pimples because of it. He previously used Kokuryu Orange Blast foundation when he was a college sophomore until he discovered Nichido and found that it matched his skin tone better than Kokuryu.

*Sexy*, who had very expressive eyes, patronized three Nichido brand products—eyeliners (brown and black), lipstick, and foundation. He used the eyeliners on his eyes and eyebrows and made them livelier with mascara. He used the foundation to cover his pimples and make his face and neck have the same skin tone. Lastly, he used the lipstick to "beautify" his lips. He would recommend to others all the products that he used.

Table 3 shows the products used by the lesbian participants either in the past or at the time the research was done. As stated earlier, the lesbians regarded changing their hairstyles as their main means of asserting their preferred gender identity. Thus, the majority of the products they consumed were hair care products. It can be noted also that it was common among them to use products for men, whether they were for the hair, face, or body. It is remarkable that some of them also used whitening products.

Table 3. Brands/Products Used by Transgender Boys (Lesbians)					
Name of Participant	Shampoo/ Conditioner	Wax/Gel	Hair Color	Deodorant, Cologne/ Perfume	Soap/ Facial Wash/ Other Products for the Skin
Astig		Gatsby			
Pogi	Rejoice, Vaseline	Bench Claydoh			
Ginoo	Vaseline		(chestnut, brown, green, and violet)	Rexona deodorant for men	Master Eskinol for men, Uni-Kojic soap, Benzyl-peroxide ointment, malunggay soap, shark oil
Tikas	Head and Shoulders for men	Bench Claydoh	(blonde, green, red, burgundy, brown, ash blonde, black)		Master with Gluta, Maxi-Peel, SkinWhite
Kisig	Dove shampoo, hair conditioner	gel for men			Silka soap, Dove soap, whitening lotion
Simpatico	Head and Shoulders (green)	Bench Claydoh		Rexona deodorant for men, Bench cologne for men	Silka soap, Pond's facial wash, Eskinol, Pond's cream
Guwapo	Rejoice	Bench Claydoh, Grips wax	Bredmod (golden red)	Bench cologne for men	
Brusko	Sunsilk, Vaseline			Nivea deodorant for men	Pond's facial wash
Macho	Palmolive	Gatsby wax, hairstyling gel	(chestnut, blonde)		
Masculado	Clear, Head and Shoulders		(burgundy red)	Axe deodorant for men, Tawas foot powder	

Table 4 shows the products consumed by the gay participants either in the past or at the time the research was done. As shown in the table, the gays used a variety of products either for vanity or in asserting their preferred gender identity. In contrast to the lesbians, the gays were fond of using products for women. Their primary concerns were their skin and faces, which they feminized by applying cosmetics. There were those who took hormonal/contraceptive pills, which was a way of altering the body at a higher level.

**Table 4. Brands/Products Used by Transgender Girls (Gays)**

Name of Participant	Hair Care/ Enhancement Products	Skin Care Products	Cosmetics	Drugs	Others
Cutie		Pond's facial wash and cream, Safeguard soap, Nivea lotion, Jergens lotion	foundation, lipstick, pressed powder, Johnson's baby powder (pink)		Rexona deodorant for women
Binibini	hair color	Master facial scrub, Dove soap, Myra-E moisturizer with SPF, Myra-E lotion, Silka lotion, SSS Avon lotion	Revlon Bronzer		
Ganda	Dove shampoo, L'Oreal conditioner, Head and Shoulders shampoo, hair color (chestnut)	Pond's facial wash, Nivea facial scrub, Maxi-Peel soap, Belo soap	Nichido face powder, Nichido lipstick, eyeliner	Althea pills	Caronia nail polish (rogue red)
Queenie	Rejoice shampoo, hair color (brown, red, violet)	Pond's facial wash, Myra-E cream, Palmolive soap, Nivea soap		Micropil and Micropil Plus pills	
Pustura		Silka soap, Safeguard soap, Avon lotion, Jergens lotion, Block and White lotion	foundation, pressed powder, lipstick		Rexona deodorant for women, PH Care feminine wash
Simpatica		Pond's facial wash, Clean and Clear facial wash, Safeguard soap, SkinWhite lotion, moisturizer for women	Maxi-Peel concealer cream, Avon's Simply Pretty pressed powder, Avon lipstick, BB cream foundation, mascara, blush-on, eyeliner		
Mestiza		Myra-E facial lotion, Safeguard soap, Vaseline lotion, Kojic soap	Nichido cake foundation, Nichido blush-on, Nichido lipstick		

Artista	Eskinol Baby Face facial cleanser calamansi extract for women, Safeguard soap (pink and green), papaya soap, Kojie San soap, Myra-E lotion (red), calamansi	Watsons liquid foundation, Nichido lipstick (red and brown), concealer, blush-on	Micropil pills, Lady Diane pills	Bench cologne, perfume for men, perfume for women
Guwapa	Safeguard soap, Silka soap	Nichido cake foundation, Kokuryu Orange Blast foundation, lipstick, pressed powder		
Sexy	Pond's facial wash, Belo soap (blue), Safeguard soap, SSS Avon lotion	Nichido eyeliner (brown and black), Nichido lipstick and liquid foundation, mascara	hormonal/ contraceptive pills	Aficionado cologne number 60

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Both groups of gay and lesbian informants wanted to have smooth skin and to smell fresh and look good. They devised a variety of ways to achieve their goals according to their preferred gender identities. It was noted that there was a switching, although not total, of the chemical and non-chemical products that the two groups were supposed to use according to the sexes assigned to them at birth; that is, gays used products for women, while lesbians mostly used products for men.

The lesbians manifested their preferred gender identity through their hairstyles; hence, the majority of the chemical products they consumed were hair care products. The gays, on the other hand, showed their preferred gender identity by using products that would feminize their faces and bodies, such as cosmetics, whitening soaps, hormonal pills, etc.

Each of the lesbian informants wanted to be *pogi*, which meant looking and being identified as a man and being attractive to girls. To achieve this, they donned hairstyles for men. To have a masculine hairstyle, first,

they had their hair cut very short; and then they styled their hair using three kinds of products—wax, gel, and hair color. Aside from styling their hair, they keep them clean, soft, silky, clean, and smelling good by using shampoo and conditioner.

The gays, on the other hand, altered their gender identity by making themselves look femininely beautiful or *maganda*. Some of them wanted to look beautiful to attract men. To look beautiful, all of the gay informants needed to alter their looks by using a variety of chemical products.

How the lesbians and gays enhanced or changed their looks varied from simple to complex. The data gathered from the interviews show that the chemical products used by the lesbians were simpler and fewer compared to those used by the gays. Using more and varied chemical products, the gays seemed to exert greater efforts than the lesbians in modifying their bodies to achieve their desired gender identity. Both groups used products that were applied externally, but only the gays took hormonal pills, which was altering the body at a higher level.

The two groups had a common aspiration—to be good-looking and to attract others, that is, people of the same sex as them. The lesbians wanted to attract “chicks” [girls], while some of the gays wanted to attract boys. The chemical products that they consumed were congruent to their desired gender identities. Although the two groups’ desired gender identities and the genders of the people they wanted to attract differed, they had a common goal, and that was to look good. They also had a common method of achieving their goal, and that was to be fair-skinned; hence, using whitening products was common to both groups.

The majority of the participants from both groups learned about the products that they used from their families and friends and/or television advertisements. The products that helped them be identified as lesbians or gays were usually suggested to them by friends who had the same desired gender identities as them.





# **Taga-banuwa–Taga-bayan: Hiya and the Liminal Position of Young Indigenous People**

Ralph G. Pulanco

## **INTRODUCTION**

Asked about how she prepared for work and what particular beauty products she used, Baning, a Tagbanuwa woman answered,

*Kailangan kasi sa trabaho eh, kaya kahit hindi ako sanay eh kailangan. Umaalis ako sa lugar namin 'pag pumapasok ako sa pinagtatrabahuhan ko na nakaligo lang. Tapos 'pag nakasakay na ako ng multicab papunta ng bayan, 'yong medyo malayo-layo na sa amin eh doon ako naglalagay ng polbo sa mukha, tapos lipstick . . . 'yon na rin ang ginagawa kong panlagay sa pisngi ko kasi mahal. Nakakahiya kasi, baka kung ano ang sabihin ng mga kapwa ko Tagbanuwa sa akin, pati asawa ko. (Baning, personal communication, December 2013)*

Baning lived in Barangay Irawan, a mountainous rural community in Puerto Princesa City. This barangay, a 45-minute drive from the heart of the city, is the nearest place (to the city) where Tagbanuwas dwell. They moved here due to the establishment in 1912 of the large rural prison in Ihawig, which they used to inhabit. At the time the research was

being done, there was no public transportation in Irawan, although there was an accessible farm-to-market road. It was only along the national highway (a 15-minute drive, or 40-minute walk, from Irawan) where one could ride a public vehicle.

My six-month stay at the community enabled me to gather and observe enough data from 12 Tagbanuwas (2 males and 10 females) aged 18 to 25. Making the participants at ease during the interviews took much of my time as they seemed afraid to answer my questions using their own language. They also seemed to be shy and feel awkward answering questions about hygiene. Each interview lasted for more than an hour. The first 30 minutes were spent making them comfortable, to prepare them to answer my questions. Unable to gather enough answers from them, I went back the following day to ask them if they were willing to be interviewed again.

I learned from a 68-year-old “pure” Tagbanuwa and *purok* leader of the barangay that there were about 75 Tagbanuwa households in their community. She could not provide me the exact number of pure Tagbanuwa families because there were already interracial-marriages among the members of their community. She said,

*Iyong iba nag-aasawa na rin ng ibang lahi. Hindi na rin kasi nasusunod 'yong kagaya ng dati na dapat kaming mga katutubo lang ay mag-aasawa din sa kagaya naming katutubo. Matagal na, hindi ko na rin nga malaman kung ilan dito pa ang puro na lang. Konting-konti na lang, halos wala nang isang dosena. Kasi karamihan nag-aasawa na ng Bisaya, Cuyonon; tapos ginagawa na rin namin 'yong kung ano 'yong ginagawa ng iba. Wala na kasi talagang puro, kahit nga 'yong president namin na pumalit kay Narciso Pape, na namatay na, eh hindi na rin puro. Tatay niya Cuyonon; Nanay niya, 'yon ang purong Tagbanuwa, si Benjamin Zumarraga Jr. Hindi na mapigilan; 'yong iba kasi nahihiya na, hindi na sila proud, siguro kasi gano'n. Ako kasi noong bata gano'n din no'ng una, pero natutunan ko ding makiharap sa ibang tao. Ngayon, ako, wala na sa aking nang-aano, wala na ga'nong nambibiro.*

The “fear” of being identified or branded as *taga-bundok* or *katutubo* based on one’s looks was observed in the community. The Tagbanuwa

leader said, “*Nakakainis nga tingnan ‘yang mga lalake na ‘yan, kung ano-ano ang kulay sa buhok. ‘Yong mga babae naman sige kapolbo. Suklay na lang nang suklay. Tapos gano’n sila, ‘pag nanggaling sa bayan, akala mo nga hindi na mga katutubo.*”

Seventy-five-year-old Pilong could not control himself from commenting about his granddaughter Nene as I approached him to permit me to interview her: “*Ewan ko lang ba diyan sa batang ‘yan, lagi nga lang polbo nang polbo. Tapos naiinis na nga ako kasi sige na lang suklay nang suklay. Kung ano-ano ang inilalagay sa mukha.*”

“*Kasi, ano, sa school, kailangan naming maging presentable, maayos ang mukha, malinis tingnan,*” said 18-year-old Nene to defend her habit of combing her hair and putting powder on her face often. She glimpsed her grandfather before she said, “*Nakadalawang beses na ako magpolbo. Tapos sa hapon maglalagay din ako ulit.*”

This case study shows that the Tagabanuwa youth’s identity transformation using chemical products is shaped by many different institutional forces. When Tagabanuwa children go to school, they are expected to be presentable, which includes combed hair, a clean face, and a nice smell. When they get into service sector jobs (or are trained for such jobs), there are additional expectations for women, which include the use of facial whiteners and makeup—lipstick, powder, and eyeliner. Those taking up tourism courses are required to wear makeup; not doing so means they will be denied entry into their classrooms.

Indeed, the transformations that the Tagabanuwa youth go through involve a make-over of hair, face, and smell. Tinkering with just one of these would not be enough to be presentable. Underlying the transformative practices is a pervasive feeling of *hiya* (shame), both when using chemical products and when not using them, as indicated in the story that I started this chapter with. Despite the use of cosmetics, soaps, and lotions they still cannot disguise being Tagbanuwas. Also, despite having salaried jobs, they still cannot afford to buy all the products that they need, so they always economize—share products and/or buy cheap ones. When using beauty products in order to be presentable, they face the disapproval of the elders in their homes or community on a daily basis. The elders vocally oppose the colored hair of young men and the powdered faces of the young girls. The young Tagabanuwa husbands of

the women who straighten their hair and use cosmetics to whiten their faces and redden their lips are not happy with these new beauty practices. They consider these to be a form of flirting. Thus, the *hiya* is caused by these young people's being in a liminal state—between conforming with the modern society they are involved with and abiding by the unwritten rules of the community they belong to. It is also related to remaining at the bottom of the hierarchy in the fast-modernizing city of Puerto Princesa despite modifying their looks.

### **Baning's Story**

Baning's case is a proof that changing one's own identity to become part of the majority creates an emotional difficulty because one needs to disregard who he/she really is. Her story reflects the way young girls try to blend in with the majority due to the demands of their jobs, which is crucial to them. She related,

*Pag-uwi ko ng bahay, buburahin ko na ulit ang makeup ko kasi sa trabaho lang naman 'yon. 'Yon kasi ang sabi sa amin, kailangang maayos at presentable, kailangang maganda ang mukha. 'Pag hindi ko kasi tatanggalin ang makeup baka magalit ang asawa ko. Hindi niya rin kasi alam na gan'on, na naglalagay ako ng makeup at nagpopolbo, pati na din 'yong mga kapitbahay na madadaanan ko pag-uwi ko galing sa trabaho.*

An individual's physical appearance becomes his/her initial identity when he/she presents himself/herself in public. How one looks—from how his/her face is made up to the brand of bag he/she carries—tells what particular group he/she belongs to. Thus, the Tagbanuwas feel the need to look like a regular *taga-bayan*, particularly now that the city is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. These undeniable facts gathered and observed led to an analysis of how these indigenous people (IP) are able to adopt to the changes around them.

The Tagbanuwas mainly engage in agriculture, from which many of them get their income. As a source of income, agriculture competes with the tourism industry, especially in terms of the return of investment and cash flows. In Puerto Princesa City alone, it is observed that money comes in more easily in the tourism industry than in the agriculture industry. One

reason is the difficulty in marketing agricultural products, which drives the Tagbanuwas to sell their products at lower prices.

The location of Sitio Iratag in Barangay Irawan is part of the home of the watershed that supplies water to the entire city. This watershed is being protected by the government to encourage the Tagbanuwa community to venture more on other income-generating activities that use materials from the natural environment. Part of the efforts to support agricultural activities is the introduction of agri-eco-tourism, wherein the people of Irawan participate by promoting the eco-park located in their barangay. This puts pressure on the Tagbanuwas, especially those who work in tourism-related companies, because they need to always look presentable. There is also pressure from their coworkers who teach them how to belong and be like them. Some of the Tagbanuwas work as receptionists in community-based tourism agencies in the nearby communities or as store assistants or cleaners in the guest houses in the *poblacion* area. The present situation in the city and in Iratag and their eagerness to earn more in the fastest way drive them to adopt things that they are not prepared for.

My six months of constant visits to Sitio Iratag enabled me to observe and learn more about the Tagbanuwas. Many of them have reached high school, but only a few have finished it due to their poor economic conditions. Their earnings from their constant sources of income—selling *buho* (a local kind of bamboo), making *sawali* handicrafts, and extracting honey from bee hives—are not enough for them to meet their basic needs. Having enough food is their immediate concern, and this is where most of their income goes. One Tagbanuwa husband said,

*Iyon naman ang inuuna namin, basta may makain, kahit noon pa. Hindi naman kasi talaga kami naghahanap ng sobra-sobra sa kung ano ang kailangan namin. Dito naman sa bundok simple lang mamuhay. Masuwerte na rin na makapagtrabaho bilang katulong, serbidora. Sa construction, 'yong mga kasama naming katutubo, doon meron kaagad na kita na puwede naming ibili kaagad ng pagkain lalo na 'pag panahon ng taggutom.*

The Tagbanuwas who get nonpermanent or project-based jobs from the poblacion receive lower than the minimum wage. Although the Tagbanuwas' community is located within the city, the poor condition

of the road from the farm to the market makes transporting products difficult for them, so they just sell their products to middlemen at very low prices. Public vehicles are not available in the area. Most of the Tagbanuwas walk for almost 40 minutes to reach the national highway, where they can get a ride going downtown, and they consider this much more convenient compared to trekking the mountain's rough slopes which they used to do.

Located at the heart of the community is a *sari-sari* store owned by a Cuyunon married to a Tagbanuwa. The store displays posters of advertisements of shampoos, soaps, and other beauty products. It also has brochures of cosmetics and other beauty products. It sells common commodities, such as canned goods and instant food products, which are displayed in the store along with the bath and detergent soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, and baby powders. Rhea, the owner of the sari-sari store, said that most of the brands available in her store were those that the Tagbanuwas often bought.



Canned sardines and packed noodles are displayed in front of the sari-sari store. Canned sardines are popular in the community as they symbolize the goods from the bayan. Photo taken by Ralph Pulanco.

The community can be reached by radio frequency, but only a few households get to enjoy radios because the Tagbanuwas do not prioritize appliances. Their houses are decorated with cut-out pictures of popular

actors from old magazines and calendars and with empty bottles of lotion and other beauty products. The parents are usually the ones who buy beauty products and just share these with their family members. When the products they bought have been totally consumed, they will wait for the time that they are capable of buying such products again. Until that time, they just resort to using natural products, such as salt, coconut, and aloe vera, as substitutes for the chemical beauty products that they use. They use salt in lieu of toothpaste and the soft bark of the guava tree as their toothbrushes. They take care of their hair by using coconut oil and aloe vera extract. Knowing that natural products like coconut and aloe vera can be used for hair and skin care, the Tagbanuwas tend to buy shampoos and soaps that have such natural contents.

This research looks into the poor economic condition of the Tagbanuwas and their battle to shift to a different identity. Aside from knowing what chemical products they use, this research finds out interesting practices that they do to cope with the demands of the modern society and world.

## **METHODOLOGY, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION**

This study started in December 2013. In a visit to Brgy. San Jose with coresearcher Anita Hardon, I was able to initially talk with the three Tagbanuwa women being taken care of by a nongovernment organization. Interesting initial data were gathered from the women during the interview. This initial visit and interview aroused my interest to concentrate on the indigenous people, particularly the Tagabanuwas in the nearest community, in order to gather more interesting data.

In Brgy. Irawan, I interviewed an 18-year-old Tagbanuwa woman, whom I will call here “Nene.” I asked her, “*Nagpolbo ka?*” which she answered with a loud “No!” But seeing her even from afar, when I approached their house and asked permission from her parents if I could interview her about the chemical products that she was using, I could see that her face was fairer than the rest of her body. During the interview, it took me about half an hour to make her speak more about her personal hygiene. She admitted that she put baby powder on her face upon waking in the morning and added, “*Nakadalawa na ako ulit ng lagay. Mamaya ulit hapon maglalagay ako kasi gusto ko na mas maayos ako tingnan.*”

To break the awkwardness during the interview, I used the technique I utilized to begin a discussion with IP (whom I have been mingling with for years), which was telling stories of other IP communities that I had dealt with. Using their local dialect, which I knew a little of, also helped put them at ease. I was also careful in asking them about their personal hygiene because I knew they were afraid to discuss something that could make them be branded as “*taga-bundok*” or “*taga-banuwa*.”

I was able to interview only one Tagabanuwa each day because they resided far from each other; and this made me walk around the community. Doing so enabled me to keenly observe the daily routine of the people in the community, which was explained to me further by my guide, Nanay Puring. She and another elder (aged 68 and 75, respectively) served as my key informants. They helped in validating the things I observed in the community.

After my last visit in May 2014, or after six months of frequent visits to the village, I could clearly state that the poor community struggled in coping with the changes that came with modernization, which they were too aware of and exposed to. They had been in this battle every day for a long of time.

### **The Chemical Products They Used**

To the Tagbanuwas, how they smell is as important as how they look. Thus, they used various products both for looking and smelling good, and these included toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, face powder, makeup, lotion, cologne, and soap, especially whitening soap. They used toothpaste, bath soap, cologne, and deodorant once a day; while they use powder and lotion an average of three times a day. They used these products mainly to feel good about themselves and be comfortable with others.

As stated earlier, looking and smelling good are both important to the Tagbanuwas. “*Pinipiga-piga ko lang ang sachet ng shampoo kapag walang pambili; para umamoy sa buhok ko bukod sa mas maganda siya tingnan,*” said 20-year-old Leah, who worked as a *kasuy* shell breaker in a nearby community. She believed that taking care of one’s smell is an important factor in achieving complete cleanliness. She added, “*Kapag naubos na ang Safeguard, ‘yong bareta na lang, hati kami ng asawa ko. ‘Yon na din*

*ginagamit namin para mag-amoy-amoy lang at hindi kami mabaho. Minsan basta may makuha pang bula-bula eh ok na siya para lang makakuha ng amoy at okey naman na tingnan ang balat namin.”*

Bell, a mother of three, had a similar view about smell and appearance: *“Minsan po kasi ako po hindi talaga nakakaalis nang hindi nakakaligo. Opo. Naiilang po ako sa kanila dahil baka sabihin, ‘Uy siya may amoy, hindi naligo at halata sa hitsura.’ Ganun.”* Ensuring that they smelled good enabled them to perform their duties more comfortably. As Bell said, *“Parang pakiramdam ko pag hindi pa ako nakakaligo tapos baharap sa ibang tao, parang, ano bang tawag do’n? . . . Parang nasa kondisyon po ang katawan para magtrabaho. Parang preskong-presko, kumbaga nasa mood akong magtrabaho.”*



Aside from sachets of coffee and powdered juices, sachets of shampoos are hung inside Rhea’s store. Shampoo is an important product used by the Tagbanuwas to smell good. Photo taken by Ralph Pulanco.

Their own definition of being comfortable is shown in what they do to achieve it, which also gives them self-confidence. *“Parang ano, komportable ka na. Para sa akin, komportable akong nakapag-toothbrush, malinis ‘yong ngipin ko, tapos ‘yong walang bad . . . bad breath. ‘Yon lang naaano ko sa pagtu-toothbrush ko,”* said Jane during our interview. Her

smiling as she answered showed that she felt comfortable discussing a topic often avoided by others.

*“Nagpa-rebond din ako ng buhok. Testing lang. Kasi maganda din siya, natuwa din ako. Hindi na ako mukhang Tagbanuwa, ‘yong makapal ang buhok na sabog-sabog, gano’n siya. . . . Masaya sa pakiramdam na nasasabihan na maganda daw ang buhok ko,”* said Leah with confidence.

Although some of the participants seemed confident when they talked, they were actually naturally shy. In spite of this, though, they kept making themselves look and smell good because there were pressured by people they dealt with. They fixed themselves up not according to how they really wanted to look but in accordance with people’s expectations and demands. However, in the interviews, they were still not comfortable to share about the changes they were doing on their bodies simply because they were Tagbanuwas, the mountain dwellers.

Their use of chemical products was due to the pressure they felt at work or in school to look and smell good. They felt compelled to abide by the standards of what were presentable and not presentable. Jane shared her experience on the first time she used a deodorant:

*Noong una akong binigyan ng deodorant, naiyak ako, nahiya kasi ako . . . kasi sabi ko may amoy . . . nakakahiya. Ang nagbigay sa akin po ‘yong may-ari ng pinagtatrabahuhan ko na lodge. Pero no’ng una lang ‘yon, nasanay na rin ako. Kaya ngayon, nagde-deodorant na rin ako para di maamoy . . . sa mga tao. . . . Pero siguro kasi mabait lang ang amo ko sa akin kaya niya ako binigyan ng deodorant. Pero hindi ko pa rin sinasabi sa mga kasama ko na gumagamit na din ako ng gano’n.*

On why she used lotion, she explained, *“Siyempre po kapag naglalakad po, baka tawanan, baka sabihin ng iba ‘Yong balat n’ya bakit brown?’”* She added, *“Niloloko po ako na maitim ako.”*

The Tagbanuwas wanted to please other people, and this was confirmed by Nene’s statement:

*Para po hindi ano . . . kasi meron po akong ano . . . sa kili-kili, para hindi maamoy. May nilalagay po ako ngayon; natanggal ‘yong*

*amoy, tapos mas nakangiti na sila, 'yong mga tao. Kaya importante siya ngayon sa 'kin (deodorant) para hindi nila maamoy. Kayo rin po, ninyo, 'tsaka 'yon pong mga taong iba na makakasalubong.*

Upon hearing this, I remembered the joke that I frequently heard about indigenous people. They put sardine oil on their hair and let people in their communities smell them to prove that they were really able to go down and mingle with downtown people. This joke made me laugh out loud when I was a child. But as I came to understand that the sardine's smell served as an "identifier" of the *taga-bayan*, I realized that they used that smell to at least temporarily get away from their original identity and feel that they belonged to the majority (downtown people). The smell of sardines was their way to belong.

### **Shifting Identities: Conforming with both the *Taga-bayan* and the *Taga-banuwa***

Physical transformation for the Tagbanuwa youth today means becoming fair-skinned and wearing clothes that match their lighter color; putting on makeup to enhance their facial features, including reddening their lips; and making their hair soft and glowing.

Among the participants, Lara was the only one who described fair skin as pleasing to the eye. She said that having fair skin made her feel more beautiful. She clarified, though, that when she said "being fair," she was only referring to her face. "*Pag mas maputi, tingin mo mas maganda, mas maganda tingnan 'yung mukha,*" she said. She also believed that having a fairer face made her look younger. To make her skin fair and her skin tone even, she used soap and lotion. She reasoned, "*Para makinis 'yung balat, walang spot-spot.*" She never failed to compare the skin of the people in the city with those that remained in the village whom she called '*taga-taas.*' "*Parang sa mga . . . doon sa taas. May 'double-skin,' 'yon ang tawag nila,*" she said. She wanted her skin to be fair enough to match the clothes she preferred to wear. She explained, "*Para po din, ano, bagay sa mga isinusuot na damit, lalo na sa makukulay na damit. 'Yun nga po para masuot ko 'yung mga gusto kong damit gaya ng mga sando; tapos 'pag, ano, kasi hindi pantay 'yung kulay—dito maputi, tapos dito maitim,*" pointing to specific parts of her skin.

Generally, the Tagbanuwa men and women were not so engrossed with whitening their skin. In the interviews conducted, it seemed that they totally knew about skin whitening products, such as natural papaya soaps, but no one ever mentioned using a whitening soap or lotion to make their skin fair. However, their use of baby powder, or *polbo*, on their faces meant that they also believed that having a fair-skinned face could make one look better, possibly enough to look like a taga-bayan. One frequent user of baby powder, Nene, explained,

*Polbo, opo, gusto ko 'yong polbo. Para, ano, maputi din. Mabilis siya ilagay. Katulad ng ate ko na nagtatrabaho sa bayan, parang maganda. Parang malinis siya, gano'n. Mga anim na beses po ako naglalagay sa isang araw. Dati sa iskul po kasi, ano, may program lang ako unang nakaranas; tapos parang nagandahan ako no'ng may program. Tapos nakita ko sa ate ko. . . . Kaya gusto ko na palagi magpolbo.*

However, she looked at her grandfather before saying, "*Minsan hinihilamusan ko na lang din, madali kasi siya burahin kapag andito ako sa bahay.*" This meant that she did not want to disappoint her grandfather further because she knew he disapproved of her using baby powder on her face. Washing off the powder from her face whenever she was home was the same as Baning's quickly removing her makeup before she reached home to transform into the ordinary woman that her family and community expected her to be. The powder and makeup were the simplest means of the Tagbanuwa women to immediately transform into being taga-bayan and then back to being taga-banuwa.

When asked why she put a lot of baby powder on her face, Leah said, "*Para po, ano, maganda?! She laughed. "Pang-akit-akit. Para maputi ang mukha. Feeling ko sa maganda, 'yong hindi oily. . . . Pangit po kasi kapag oily. Pero 'pag gumamit na ng polbo, ayon po, kampante ako.*" When asked where she learned that practice, she pointed to the television, her peers, and her tourism-related work.

Most of the Tagbanuwa women who said they used baby powder on their faces also had experienced putting on makeup, mostly during school programs, for which they were required to do so. But among the participants, Jane had a different story. Her vocational course required

her and her classmates to wear makeup in one of their classes. Grinning, she related,

*Nung nag-aaral ako, nakagamit ako ng isang, ano, 'yung makeup . . . Oo, dun sa vocational training. Kailangan kasi ganun kami sa housekeeping; kailangan kasi kami naka-makeup. Laging may dala 'yung guro namin na si Olai. Kasi kapag pumasok kami nang hindi naka-makeup, siya ang magme-makeup sa amin.*

Jane, Lara, Baning, and other Tagbanuwa women experienced wearing makeup in their performances during their school days because they were required to do so. Since they started working, they had also been required to put on makeup, even if they were only helpers in tourist inns; and because what they earned was below the minimum wage, they were forced to buy cheap makeup. Jane explained, “*Mumurahin lang po 'yon, mga made in China. Nagamit ko po siya noong nagkaroon po kami ng Christmas party. 'Tsaka 'yon po 'yong nagtatrabaho ako. Sabi po kasi ni Ma'am, ano lang po, parang mas maayos tingnan.*” However, using makeup made them feel uncomfortable. “*Parang, 'yon nga po, parang kaiba 'yong mukha ko, parang na-feel ko . . . na iba, mabigat,*” said Jane.

Like Jane, Lara also bought cheap makeup and put it on because her work demanded it. “*Sa trabaho ko, ginagamit ko mga lipstick, eyeliner, polbo . . . mga gano'n,*” she said. She added that her boss explained that as a *katiwala*, she was required to put on makeup so that she would look pleasant to the customers.

Shifting to an identity that is far from what one is born with is a long process that needs to surpass varied complications—be it physical, emotional, economic, or social in nature. One must have a strong determination in order to fulfill it. The Tagbanuwas, especially the women, shift identities by using chemical products on their bodies, especially on their hair and faces. They do it not because they want to but because they need to.



# **Magastos pero Kailangan: The Use of Beauty Products by Salesladies**

Ralph G. Pulanco

## INTRODUCTION

The existence of malls and the aggressively increasing number of inns, hotels, and other business establishments that are architecturally engineered with modern designs have changed the picturesque setting of the once timid yet promising Puerto Princesa City. The city has become one of the fastest-developing cities in Southeast Asia. The “gleaming” changes in the city show that it has embraced modern-day development in parallel with the key cities all over the Philippines.

The presence of malls in the cities all over the country has resulted to swift migrations of rural dwellers to urban areas, seeing the malls as venues of job opportunities that can give them more decent lives. The increasing number of migrants in Puerto Princesa seems to show that the city is viewed as instrumental in fulfilling peoples’ aspirations and that a large number of people have accepted development and modernization.

This study looks into the mall salesladies’ use of various chemical beauty products to transform into how they should look, being frontliners, when at work. They are expected to be presentable—with fully made-up

faces, clean and combed hair, and a good smell. Becoming presentable eventually becomes natural for them as they want to belong and be comfortable with their peers and other people they deal with. However, despite having salaried jobs, they still cannot afford to regularly buy the products that they need to make themselves presentable. So, they economize—buy the products in small tubes or sachets and/or buy cheap brands. Their economic conditions do not allow them to try expensive skin whitening treatments, but they might try them if they become financially stable. These treatments will be their means to achieve permanent fairness, which seems to have become the standard of modern beauty.

How the salesladies alter their looks is just a small part of the bigger changes that we are doing to adapt to our society today. Without knowing it, every individual has embraced the concept of a changing environment. What we need now is to have control over such changes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The “Prescribed Look”

The demand for salesladies to wear makeup while at work is very apparent today. Upon entering a mall, you cannot help but notice their fully made-up faces—with a heavy foundation whose tone is much lighter than the color of the rest of their bodies, dark eyeshadows and eyeliners, well-arched eyebrows, heavy blushes on their cheeks, and fully-shaded lips. Some of them, though, might not be comfortable wearing makeup, but they have no choice because that is what their job demands.

Priscilla, a 19-year-old salesclerk, always made an effort to make herself look good, saying “*Kailangan kasi sa trabaho eh.*” Charissa, a graduate of a vocational course on being an administration clerk but ended up being a saleslady, also said that she put on makeup because “*kailangan ko siya araw-araw sa trabaho ko.*” When asked why it was necessary for her work, she simply replied, “. . . *siyempre sa trabaho po kasi naming ‘promo’ kailangan po. Kailangan po presentable ka palagi, na maganda, nakakaano ka sa tao. Kailangan mapansin ka ng tao, gano’n.*” When asked what she meant by being presentable and noticeable, she said that she must look beautiful so that other people would notice her and she could

promote the products that she was required to sell. She explained, "*Hindi ka mahihiya humarap sa ibang tao. Parang feeling mo na 'pag may ni-recommend ka na isang bagay, halimbawa, sa work mo, hindi ka nila mahihindian.*" The same reason was given by Priscilla.

Cynthia, a 24-year-old college graduate working as Sales Associate, said that, whenever she wore makeup, "*Nai-improve po 'yung ano mo . . . pagdating mo po sa opisina, nai-improve niya . . . 'yung hitsura, physical. So, gano'n siya kaimportante. Importante po talaga siya sa pang-araw-araw. Kailangan po talaga siya sa trabaho.*" She stressed, though, that if not for her job, she would not use any makeup. She added, "*Hindi naman po kasi ako talaga mahilig gumamit niyan, kung hindi ako nagtrabaho.*"

Gina, a Muslim, had to wear makeup even if her religion prohibited it because her work demanded it, and she needed her job. She said, "*Sa [mga] Muslim naman po masyadong maraming bawal. Tulad dapat nitong pagme-make up po, bawal. So, ngayon ko lang siya natutunan dahil required po siya sa trabaho.*"

Another reason salesladies make an effort to fix themselves up is that they want to look as good as their customers, which can give them confidence. Regina explained, "*Parang komportable kang humarap kahit kanino, di ka mai-insecure sa iba. . . . 'Kung maputi ka eh maputi rin naman ako,' gano'n . . . o parang 'pag makinis ka na, maputi ka na, parang mas feeling mo, 'pareho na tayo.' . . . Gano'n din, hindi ka mai-insecure sa ibang magagandang customer o tao eh.*"

All the salesladies interviewed (participants) stressed that their supervisors checked their makeup from time to time while they worked, which was why they retouched their makeup about three times a day. Baby, a professional makeup artist and sales agent in a high-end fashion store, said, "*Actually, kung di nga lang requirement dito sa store ko eh di ako magme-make up. . . . Sinu-supervise.*" The number of times they usually retouched their makeup was verified by CSY, a 25-year-old saleslady, who said, "*Parang three times, kasi 'pag magmerienda, magre-retouch.*" The same answer came from 21-year-old salesclerk Gina. She said she had to follow a protocol in retouching her makeup to ensure that she would look good throughout her eight-hour work period. She elaborated, "*Morning break, lunch, and afternoon break. During break time . . . nag-a-apply pa rin po. Face powder na lang din po, 'tsaka lipstick. . . . Opo,*

*pagkamerienda talaga naglalagay po, nagre-retouch.*” Most of the participants stressed, though, that they were willing to give up cosmetics if these were not needed for their work. “Willing po akong i-give up basta labas po sa trabaho,” said Gina.



A makeup set like this is a common sight inside a saleslady's bag. They retouch their makeup several times a day to make sure they will not be scolded by their supervisor who checks on their faces regularly. Photo taken from [http://www.everbilena.com.ph/publicsite/product\\_catalog](http://www.everbilena.com.ph/publicsite/product_catalog).

The participants' common reason for wearing makeup was to be comfortable and feel that they belonged with the people they dealt with at work. They were required to sell products by being always presentable, which they could ensure by checking and retouching their makeup from time to time, that is, during their breaktimes. Their supervisors made sure that they would do so because they believed that it could help them increase their sales.

Most of the participants believed in natural beauty—beauty that is not enhanced by any makeup or treatment. However, they had to set aside their belief and go with what their jobs demanded, which was to look presentable with cosmetic-enhanced beauty.

Some of the participants believed that makeup was something that should not be worn due to medical and practical reasons. “*Di ba chemical talaga siya? Kahit maganda 'yong product mo, chemical pa din. Ano din sa skin mo, nagko-close din, 'yong nagka-clog siya sa pores mo.* So, *hindi siya good talaga. . . . Kailangan maka-breathe din 'yong skin mo,*” explained 22-year-old Baby, a registered nurse working as Sales Associate in a high-end fashion shop. She, too, believed in natural beauty and that makeup was just an enhancer. She explained,

*Para sa akin kasi enhancer lang siya. Maganda ka, maganda ka na; mae-enhance lang kung maglalagay ka ng ganito, ganyan. Siyempre hindi naman perfect lahat, lalo na kapag nakapagpuyat ka. . . . Pang-ano siya, pangtapal ba sa mga nagawa . . . dahil sa ka-busy-han mo. . . . Para lang ma-feel mo na okey ka ngayon, para . .*

. *parang ma-feel good mo, 'yong araw na ito, magme-make up ka.*  
 . . . If you look good, you feel good, *di ba?*

Some of them had gotten used to wearing makeup. Gina shared, “*Sa personal kong paningin po kasi, nung una hindi po ako nasanay kaya naibahan po ako sa mukha ko. Parang ayaw ko siya nung una. Tapos nung medyo [tumatagal] na rin po, parang nasanay na ako, lagi na; parang gusto ko lagi may makeup. Hindi ako lalabas ng bahay na walang makeup.*”

When asked what particular makeup-related incident they could not forget, Gina shared that she was compared to a sex worker or prostitute, even by her father. She related, “*Tulad po ng father ko. Kasi 'yung father ko po, talagang Muslim. 'Pag nakikita niya akong naka-makeup nagagalit po siya. Hindi po siya nasanay, at saka bawal po sa 'min.* So, one time *nakita niya po ako sobra 'yung makeup ko. Nag-comment siya na parang 'Wow! Parang hindi na ikaw 'yung anak ko. Para ka nang pokpok.*” She smiled as she ended her story. Even her family and relatives questioned the practice of putting on cosmetics, saying it was unnecessary. She said, “*Yun nga po may time na 'yung mga kamag-anak ko may nagagalit po kasi nga ba't kailangan pa raw mag-make up. Bakit, 'yun nga, bakit natututunan mag-makeup eh hindi naman talaga dapat?*” One saleslady even experienced getting mocked and catcalled due to her fully made-up face. She shared, “*Minsan naman kasi nang dahil minsan sa sobrang kagandahan mo, siguro, minsan may nambabastos sa 'yo.*”

Recognizing their “new beauty” helped them to wholeheartedly embrace what was popular then and made them believe that enhancing one’s beauty using makeup was necessary. Their concept of beauty had changed.

Gina attested that the first time she wore makeup she felt that her natural beauty changed, while her coworkers said that she looked different, in a positive way. She said that she felt better then because they failed to recognize her. She related,

*Kasi po sabi sa 'kin nung first time ko po nag-make up, sabi nila, parang [bagay] daw po. Parang [blooming] daw po 'yung mukha ko. Nung ginamit ko kasi 'yung produkto . . . medyo, 'yung sa mga friends ko po, 'yun nga po sa mga ibang tao, hindi ako nakilala. [Sa mga] hindi ko po kakilala, parang 'pag nakita po [nila akong]*

*naka-makeup, me nagkakagusto. Kasi, 'yun nga, magkaka-crush sa 'yo kasi medyo maganda ka tingnan. Opo, may pumupuri po.*

Being appreciated was very important to her. It boosted her self-confidence. It made her use makeup continuously. She got to fully accept and embrace the practice that she was just required to do at first. She shared,

*Kasi napupuri ako ng . . . more on napupuri talaga ako ng mga tao pag naka-makeup ako. . . Masaya kasi sa pakiramdam 'pag 'yung may pumuri sa 'yo na "Wow, ang cute mo naman!" "Wow, ang ganda mo naman!" o "Wow, ang kinis naman ng mukha mo!" Tapos tatanungin ka, "Ano'ng ginagamit mo? Baka puwedeng i-share mo naman sa 'min. 'Yung parang ganun. So, nakakadagdag ng ano.*

Regina also excitedly shared how other people appreciated how she looked when she started using beauty products. She said they noticed good changes on her, particularly the lightening of her skin, which made the dark scars on her legs disappear. She related,

*Kasi no'ng unang ginamit ko 'yong product na yan, parang maraming nakapansin sa balat ko, na . . . "Hala, pumuti ka!" Mas okay. . . Marami kasi akong peklat sa paa, kaya sinabi na mas nag-light 'yong peklat ko sa paa. Tapos . . . 'yon na nga, maraming nakapansin sa ano ko . . . tulad diyan sa powder, parang di ako pini-pimples, parang ano, okay lang, kumbaga, . . . basta, parang maraming nagagandahan.*

## **Hair Coloring and Rebonding**

The participants had done numerous creative ways in reinventing their selves to be presentable according to the "prescribed beauty." With their hair, the first major change that they had made was changing its color. They believed that it would make them look fairer, which showed that they associated beauty with being fair-skinned. Isay shared her first time to color her hair: "*Okey lang. Di lang ako masyadong kontento kasi di tumalab . . . kasi sobrang itim ng buhok ko. Nagpa-dye ako after six months. Nakakaputi daw 'yon. So 'yon ang ginamit ko. Ok na sa buhok. . . Di ako gumagamit ng whitening, hair color lang talaga.*"

The next major change they tried was straightening their curly hair (which they considered ugly) through rebonding, wherein they had to endure a treatment that lasted for almost six hours. On why she resorted to this treatment, one saleslady explained, “*Kasi po ‘yung buhok ko po ampanget. Ano siya, mabuhaghag po siya. Di kasi siya maiwagwag kasi ‘pag nakawagwag siya nang ganito may nag-aangat-angat ‘tsaka kulot siya. . . . Nilagyan ng mga kung ano-anong gamot. . . . Magaan po sa pakiramdam. . . . Magaan po pag bagong rebond ka po.*”

Isay agreed that having rebonded hair further enhances one’s beauty. She said, “*Pag nagpapa-rebond, sir, siyempre maganda ‘yung buhok. . . . Parang nadagdagan ‘yung ganda.*

### Skin Whitening

Most of the participants had tried skin whitening products, hoping that they would achieve the fairness that they desired. Regina shared, “*Nagbabalak gumamit . . . ‘Yong ni-recommend sa akin ng kaibigan ko . . . Kojic soap. Effective naman sa akin. Almost one week ko pa lang siyang nagagamit. Two times a day ko siya ginagamit. Nagwo-work out naman siya. Parang mas nag-lighten lalo ang skin ko.*” When asked what she felt after using it, she said, “*Feeling maganda ang skin ko. Sinusunod ko after? Wala, puro lotion lang.*” When asked whether she believed that being fair-skinned was beautiful, she immediately said, “*Oo.*” She shared that she started to work on whitening her skin by just trying out products. She said, “*Nag-try na rin ako. Dati pa nga ang sabon ko Safeguard eh, pero wala din, parang nagsabon ka lang . . . parang walang epek.*”

What interested me the most in the interviews was the participants’ method of achieving the fairness that they desired—their ritual of using and putting layers of whitening products on their skin, starting with a bath soap, followed by a whitening soap and a whitening scrub, then a whitening moisturizer or lotion, and, finally, a sunblock. Gina shared her ritual:

*Carrot soap ang hilamos. . . . Silka papaya . . . Sa makeup ko naman po, gumagamit din po ako ng Silka papaya . . . ‘yung parang toner siya, parang panglinis. Bago ka [maglagay] ng cream . . . ‘yung cream na Maxi-Peel po. Tapos gagamit din po ako ng . . . face powder po na may rejuvenating . . . Ay, ano ba ‘to? . . .*

Ah, Maybelline. *Ipapatong ko po 'yung Maybelline. Saka ko siya gagamitan ng powder na may sunblock. . . . Ay, may lotion po, Myra E.*

Wanting to make her skin “perfect,” Priscilla had also tried several skin whitening products. She shared, “*No’ng una gusto ko lang, ano, ma-perfect ang skin ko kasi nga over ako dati. Para kuminis ang balat ko, kaya nag-aano ako ng kung ano.*” She even used a product that made her face peel severely. She shared, “*Yung, ano, Erase. E tapos rase. Sabi sa akin pampaputi daw.*” Whitening, *ginamit ko siya sa mukha, tapos nagbalat talaga ang mukha ko. Ini-stop ko siya nung talagang nagbalat-balat ang mukha ko.*” Luckily, she easily found the solution to her peeling face. She related, “*May binigay sa akin ang mama ko na skin toner, Vulgary. Naging okey 'yung mukha ko. Mga three days ko lang siyang ginamit. Nawala na ang balat-balat.*”

Regina shared her skin whitening regimen: “*Kojic na lang. . . . Naging dry 'yong balat ko dahil sa Kojic soap. Ayon pinartneran ko ng papaya lotion, whitening lotion; kasi ano siya, mas smooth siya sa balat, tapos naging okey na siya.*” People noticed the positive result on her skin of what she was doing, so she continued it. “*Ah, siyempre kasi, parang okey din, 'yon na nga nagandahan sila, kaya pinagpatuloy ko na lang,*” she said.

Most of the participants were aware of the acid content of whitening soaps, so they used moisturizers to counter the negative effect of acid on their skin. Regina shared, “*Pag ginagamit mo kasi, 'pag medyo dry ang balat mo, kasi 'yong ginagamit kong sabon, acid kasi 'yon, nakaka-dry ng balat; kaya kumabaga 'yang skin lotion na 'yan match siya sa Kojic kasi, di ba, ang Kojic, acid? . . . Opo, pampaputi rin siya, pero ang puti niya dry. Opo, pampaputi talaga karamihan lalo na 'yan may mga papaya-payaya.*” When asked why she still used it, she smiled as she answered, “*Para pumuti. Opo, siyempre.*”

The participants’ regard for being fair as a standard of beauty was so apparent in the interviews. “*Iba talaga kasi 'pag maputi ka eh . . . kasi, ano, kahit pangit ka, 'pag basta maputi ka parang okey na siya,*” said Regina. She pointed out that most Filipinos had the same view about beauty and fairness. She said, “*Kasi, di ba, halos lahat sa atin common naman na gusto pumuti . . . para maganda.*”

Regina had another reason for wanting to be fair-skinned, and that was to be free in choosing the clothes that she would wear. She explained, “Kasi ‘pag maputi ka, kahit anong klaseng damit, kahit anong kulay ng damit, okey lang. Yong match sa . . . tama lang siya. Halimbawa, ‘pag maitim ka, bawal ang mag-orange. . . . Okey lang naman na naka-orange ka, pero pangit tingnan.” She added that fair-skinned girls could also wear short shorts. Thanks to the whitening products that she was using, which lightened the scars not only on her face but also on her legs, Regina could now wear shorts. She would hear people say, “Uy nagliit-liit na ‘yang peklat mo!” She shared, “Siyempre parang kahit mag-short shorts ka diyan, ganyan, magsuot ka ng maigsi, okey lang; di ka mahihiyang tumalikod . . .” She added that wearing shorts was one of her ways of attracting boys. Being fair-skinned was a big advantage for her as she was also fond of wearing dresses. She said, “Para wala silang masabi, para kahit naka-dress ka.” She even mentioned hearing criticisms from guys on girls wearing shorts even if they had scars on their legs. One was “Kita mo siya . . . magsusuot-suot ng maikli tapos may peklat lang naman pala!”

A frightening tendency of wanting to be fair-skinned is trying stronger chemical products or treatments that could give more permanent fairness. When asked why she tried a strong whitening product, Priscilla reasoned, “Nagsasawa na akong pumangit eh.” She shared that when she just started being a saleslady, there seemed to be a demanding and authoritative force that continuously reminded her and her coworkers the fairness was the new standard of beauty. She said that most of them felt forced to put on makeup using a white-toned foundation to achieve temporary fairness. It was even encouraged by their supervisor, who said that it made them beautiful and attractive. This drove them to pursue achieving permanent fairness. This desire, though, could lead them to use more extreme means, such as taking oral or injectable skin whitening drugs, which Priscilla already had planned trying.

Among the participants, Priscilla was the most willing and daring to try different products. She had even tried using a cream to enlarge her breasts and at the same time firm her skin, which she did to attract men. She related,

*Hindi ko lang matandaan kung ano ang pangalan ng product na ‘yun, pero galing siyang Japan. Pampalaki ng boobs. So lagi kong ginagamit ‘yun. Bumili kasi nun ang mama ko, ni-try niya.*

*Ginamit ko ng eight months. . . . Cream, pinapahid. Tapos, nagpi-firm ang skin ko. 'Yung nag-firm ang skin parang medyo naniwala pa ako, pero 'yung lumalaki ang boobs, parang hindi. Para siyang gel, so ipapahid lang siya. Ganun lang.*

There was also a whitening product that she only saw on a TV commercial and tried it. She shared, “*Yung ano 'yun siya, sa TV eh. Cream siya. Pampaputi siya parang . . . 'In one minute!' Ni-try ko. Kaya lang in one minute maputi dahil sa cream, talagang cream na cream, pero 'pag binanlawan mawawala na rin. Super. Parang 'pag natuyo ang sabon . . . parang ganun.*” She finished her story laughing.

### **Other Look-Enhancing Practices/Experiences**

Priscilla had tried a shampoo that could help hair grow and thicken. It was brought home by her sister from Japan. Priscilla became curious with the product as she always saw it in the bathroom she shared with her sister. She tried the shampoo without asking permission from her sister. She related,

*Nag-try na ako ng shampoo, pampakapal . . . galing Japan din. Kasi ang ate ko nag-Japan din, ginamit niya 'yun. Hindi naman maganda ang buhok niya. Pag-uwi niya nagagalit siya 'pag sobrang dumi na ng buhok niya. Tapos tinanong ko siya kung anong ginamit niya. Nung ginamit ko, ang tigas naman ng buhok. Ilang beses kong ginamit. Talagang tinigil ko 'yun nung ganun din, hindi siya effective sa buhok ko.*

Baby, being a nursing graduate, knew much about chemicals. She would try chemical products, though, to easily sell them to her customers. For instance, she tried Pearl White slimming pills, which also had a skin whitening effect. She shared,

*Yes, sir, tinesting ko lang nga dati 'yon, 'yong Pearly White . . . mali, Pearl White! Bale ano siya, magpapapayat siya. Kasi balak ko magbenta no'n, so ang ginawa ko, tinesting ko muna sa sarili ko kung anong effect sa akin. Usually gano'n naman ako eh. . . . Ayoko naman talaga magpaputi, pero tinesting ko pa din. Try lang. Opo, capsule.*

However, when she tried the product, she had difficulty sleeping. She related,

*'Yong unang take, hindi, wala naman, normal. . . . No'ng pangalawang take na, 'yon na ang . . . kasi ang iniinom ko unang-una one capsule, isang araw. Tapos no'ng pangalawa, dinalawang capsule ko . . . although hindi sila magkasabay, umaga at saka gabi. Para kang . . . sa gabi di ka makatulog, praning ka. Alam n'yo 'yong kunwari dahon lang na grabe mo ka-hyper; gabi na, alas-dose ng gabi hanggang alas-tres ng madaling araw. . . . Hindi, inubos ko lang 'yong isang . . . para lang ma-try ko. Gano'n po every night, parang . . . high! Ay, wala naman po, 'yon lang, super high ka lang talaga.*

Contraceptive pills were on Baby's list too, but she was more interested in the pills' skin-enhancing effect (which could make skin firmer, fairer, and clearer) because of the pimples and whiteheads all over her back and chest. She shared,

*Yes, sir, Diane. . . . Sa skin . . . skin treatment kasi 'yang Diane na 'yan. At least three months kasi 'yan, pwede siya mag-treat ng skin niyan. Ako po kasi maraming pimples sa likod, daming pimples sa dibdib actually. . . . Over-the-counter nabibili. Pills po, as in pills. . . . One year na po . . . ngayong January. . . . Although 'yong iba kasi ginagamit nila 'yon pampalaki ng boobs, pangpa-less ng hair. Ay ako, sir, hindi ko naman talaga kailangan 'yon. . . . Pang hair care siya. Pang pa-healthy siya ng kuko at ng hair. . . . Ang sa 'kin, sir, di ko naman kailangan 'yon. Ang akin lang naman eh 'yong skin treatment at saka 'yong pampagana kumain.*

Babe had tried taking a drug called Inderal during her younger days, when she was joining beauty contests and modeling. According to her, this drug helped them calm themselves and get rid of their stage fright. She related,

*Mga pill po? Siguro, sir, no'ng nagmo-modeling ako. Ay oo, sir, Inderal . . . antihypertension. Ay, ano 'yon, sir, maintenance 'yon ng mga . . . nagbibigay mga bakla, mga trainor. . . . Pero kailangan 'yon may reseta. . . . Heart, hypertension. . . . Bakit kailangang mag-inom? Bale, 'pag kinakabahan ka malakas 'yong ano, 'yong pintig*

*ng ano, nagpa-palpitata ka. 'Yon, iniinom. . . . Oo, hindi talaga nagpa-palpitata. . . . Wala, hindi kami kinakabahan. Tumatagal na 'yon nang dalawang oras eh. . . . Opo, aware na aware. Ang wala lang sa iyo 'yong palpitation.*

Leah had tried drinking slimming teas, which she considered the most extreme measure she had taken so far with regard to enhancing her looks. She shared,

*Ay, pampapayat? Ang na-try ko po is 'yung Biofit tea. Kankunis rin po. Tapos, Slenda. Kasi po dati chubby ako. . . . Tapos lagi nga po kasi akong inaasar na, ayun nga, mataba, laki ng bilbil. So gusto ko po no'n tanggalin 'yung bilbil ko. . . . Kaso nga po, iba 'yung epekto eh. Masakit sa katawan 'yung Biofit tea . . . saka 'yung Kankunis po. Kasi ang nangyari po, no'ng ginamit ko 'yung Biofit tea, parang four times a day po ata akong nagdudumi no'n. Dudumi ka nang dudumi. Ilalabas mo 'yung mga fat. Minsan may mga mantika ring lumalabas. Masakit na siya.*

CSY was also willing to try chemical beauty products, although among the participants, she made the least effort in enhancing her body. Her only action so far then was to inquire about the pills that could increase her appetite. She wanted her body to be bulkier because she felt too skinny. “*Nagtatanong ako ng gamot na pampataba, tapos di ko rin mahanap, di ko rin alam kung ano. May binanggit na po sa akin, ano ba 'yon? MediPortal? Oo, willing ako, di ko pa lang siya na-try,*” she said, laughing. Asked if a doctor recommended it, she said only a friend advised her to take it.

Except for Priscilla, all the participants were not willing to take oral or injectable drugs to achieve permanent fairness. Three noted reasons for this were (1) they lacked sufficient knowledge about these drugs, (2) they were already satisfied with the cheaper whitening products that they were using, and (3) they could not afford those drugs.

The participants got to learn about the products they were using through networking, TV commercials, and their friends and families. On whitening their skins, they were all willing to try other products that they could add to those they were already using.

## Purchasing Capacity

“*Minsan parang gusto mo na lang magutom, mabili mo lang siya,*” said Gina when asked how important beauty products were for her job. This only shows how important those products were to the participants. Because they were earning only PhP185 to PhP200 per day or PhP4,800 monthly, which was less than the minimum wage then, they were willing to exchange food for products that they needed to keep their jobs. This also shows that, because of their economic conditions, they had learned to devise ways in which they could economize in their consumption of skin whitening products. As pointed out earlier, their poor purchasing power is also seen as the major reason they have not tried skin whitening drugs. They were stretching their salaries to meet their daily needs, which included food, fare, and personal hygiene and beauty products. When they shopped, their grocery baskets could be seen full of various personal hygiene and beauty products—such as whitening soaps, body lotions, facial moisturizers, cleansers, and toners, and even deodorants—mostly in small tubes or in sachets.

To economize further, the participants would buy multi-/double-purpose products; for example, personal hygiene products that also had whitening power, such as whitening bath soaps and deodorants. This kind of products had become attractive to a large number of consumers, including salesladies. Baby shared,

*Sige, hygiene, siyempre, positive na effect. ‘Yong mga toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, bakit ba ‘yong mga product na ‘yon ang ginagamit ko? Matipid kasi ‘yon . . . para sa akin, ha. At the same time, maganda ‘yong may mga whitening quality. . . . Hindi po, kasi po ‘pag binibili ko dapat safe; dapat may guarantee ako na gagana para sa akin. Tipid ‘yon, matagal, ‘yun na. Meron na din na pampa-ano, ganon.*

All the participants admitted that the products they used were generally expensive, but they had ways to economize. They also minimized their expenses on other things so that they could continue using the beauty products that they needed. However, some, like Marianne, still chose products that they found more effective than the others, despite being expensive. She shared, “*Yung pangit nga, magastos siya. . . . ‘Yung maganda,*

*siyempre, naano niya 'yung beauty mo, tapos na-improve niya. . . Mahirap i-maintain. . . Magastos, pero kaya naman."*

Regina, on the other hand, stressed that despite her beauty regimen's being expensive and time-consuming, she had to do it because her job required it. She said, "*Oo, magastos . . . kaso kailangan natin eh.*" Other salesladies were practical in their product consumption, like CSY, who used cosmetics only at work. She said, "*Pag sa bahay di naman ako nagme-make up. Pero 'pag may extra? 'Yon, sir, 'pag may extra ako, kasi bina-budget ko nga 'yon. Sulit naman po.*"

Isay would only have her hair rebonded if she had extra money. She said, "Ah, straight . . . *tapos habang humahaba, bumabalik naman sa dati. . . 'Pag ano lang, may budget, kung meron lang talaga kakayanin.*" She was taking capsules that made her skin firmer and glowing, but she could not use them regularly because they were too expensive. "*Araw-araw ko siya tini-take. Minsan 'pag bumibili ako, pang isang linggo na, sir, tapos hinto na. Tinitigil 'pag walang budget. Oo, mahal 'yun. Kasi, sir, kung may budget, maganda kasi siya. Parang, ano, sir, parang bumabata ba, pati 'yung mga ano mo. Oo, moisturized ka din. Basta maganda,*" shared Isay.

Some participants, like Gina, had tried various products before they found the ones that were most effective for them. She said, though, that the products she found really effective for her skin were really expensive. "*Pahiyangan lang. . . Sa pera, maano talaga siya. Actually, magastos talaga lahat. . . Tipid-tipid. . . Kailangan po talaga. Minsan naiisip ko na lang kasi mas kailangan mo po siya. Opo, sa trabaho ko din.*" But, she added, "*Willing po akong i-give up basta labas po sa trabaho.*"



## Students Experimenting With Chemicals

Floralice Basco Rengel-Josol

### INTRODUCTION

An individual's value orientation, belief system, and attitudes are viewed as social in nature and origin and are products of cultural constructions. Group socialization and interactive communication are ways through which those values, beliefs, and attitudes are transmitted. The socialization process, which starts from birth, is never-ending. After a child learns to interact, talk, and behave in society through family members (primary socialization), he/she is introduced to the world of peer groups and significant others (secondary socialization). The latter involves the group of young people also known as *youth*. Republic Act No. 8044 identifies the age range of the youth, which is from 15 to 30 years old. This age bracket is associated with experimentations and adjustments. This is the stage of making sense out of one's newly changed body. Far from being just passive recipients of socialization, the youth exhibit creativity in fashioning, redefining, and reinventing their physical orientations and lifestyles. This is the stage of rapid secondary socialization; and it is also in this period when they feel a sense of absolute freedom. Their practices are as varied as their value orientations, belief systems, and attitudes.

## CONTEXT

### **Puerto Princesa in Transition**

Way back in the early 1960s, Puerto Princesa was a municipality. Life here then was very rural. When Martial Law was declared in the Philippines in the 1970s, life in Puerto Princesa, a city by then, gradually changed because of the coming of many soldiers. The Western Command had found its place. Life in the city then was no longer very rural, but it was still simple. The city started to develop in the 1980s. Infrastructure started to boom, and in the 1990s, there were more improvements as investors from outside Palawan came. Many banks were erected. The millennium recorded dramatic changes in the city. Gradually, the residents witnessed the emergence of malls, subdivisions, hotels, more big business buildings, new businesses, and many more. At the turn of the century, life in Puerto Princesa was never the same again. In-migration and the influx of tourists from all parts of the world became natural occurrences in the city. The locals were exposed to different views and ways of life.

The young Palaweños today are strikingly different from the young Palaweños of the past generations when it comes to expressing themselves overtly and covertly. As an adopted daughter of Puerto Princesa since 1965, the researcher noticed the big change in Palawan, particularly in Puerto Princesa. Much of the changes were brought by many factors, such as social groups (family, friends, and couples); environmental changes (proliferation of markets offering health and beauty products); and technological development (modern communication system), which young people are adept in. Development created a new breed of youth in Puerto Princesa. Young people are able to express themselves through the way they carry themselves in their chosen attires, hairstyles, and other physical presentations. Hence, while Puerto Princesa is the capital city of an island province, its young people are indiscernible as provincial lasses and lads. Any researcher will not have difficulty in finding them. The researcher of this study was also lucky to be not much challenged in interviewing them as the academe was their neutral ground.

### **The University Youth as Participants**

The aim of this research was to interview both male and female students. As mentioned earlier, they were not difficult to find. As an associate

professor of a university in Puerto Princesa, the researcher had the advantage of studying the prospective participants beforehand.

Ten university students (five males and five females) were selected to participate in this research. Nine of them were enrolled in the different degree programs offered in the Palawan State University. One was enrolled in another university but was a bona fide resident of Puerto Princesa City and the researcher had known for a long time. The ten participants were carefully chosen based on their physical appearances and the way they carried themselves inside and outside their campuses. The researcher had prior knowledge about the nine students as she had been their professor in the past. She was quite familiar with them inside and outside of their class. They came from different colleges; hence, no interview was made with a key informant. Furthermore, the records of some of these students were available to the researcher.

## METHODS

The field research was conducted in Puerto Princesa City. The interview method was utilized to gather the data needed. The ten participants selected were interviewed in December 2013. Two of them were below 18 years old, so their parents' consents were sought before they were interviewed. All the participants did not hesitate to be interviewed. After they heard the nature and objectives of the interview, they felt comfortable to answer the questions they were asked. They were cooperative during the interviews. It was not difficult to convince them to share their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences. Although two participants hesitated to divulge their vices at first, the researcher managed to make them come out in the open by assuring them of the confidentiality of their identities.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were asked to use code names of their choice. Some chose code names that were totally unrelated to their true names. The interview was done in a conversational manner to put each of the respondents at ease. To make the interviews smooth-flowing and free of possible eavesdropping, the venues of the interviews were well-thought of: the house of a participant's relative, vacant classrooms, and a faculty room. Interviews were held at the participants' convenient time—during their free time or after their classes.

NVivo 10 was used in the analysis of the data gathered. Themes were first identified for the coding scheme. Nodes were identified and narrowed down to the main products used by the participants to make distinctions on the chemical products used based on age and sex. NVivo facilitated the further analysis of the themes identified.

## RESULTS

Based on the data collected, the students interviewed were using numerous chemicals disguised as products, which they either took internally or used externally for a variety of purposes or reasons. These purposes/reasons are classified into the following categories: for hygiene, to enhance beauty or looks, as remedies for beauty and health problems, for wellness, for protection, to relieve stress, for self-satisfaction, for pleasure or fun and relaxation, to smell good, to be fashionable, as energy boosters, for alertness, and by force of habit. The data also reveal that there were products that the participants continued to use, and there were those that they opted to stop consuming due to the effects these products had on them.

The influence of a significant other was found to be a factor in the participant's consumption of chemical products. Moreover, age and sex accounted for the differences in the analyses of the information gathered, wherein the researcher took into consideration the reasons that drove the students to use certain products, their reasons for continuing or discontinuing to use them, what or who influenced them to use them, and the effects the products had on their bodies. All these were further studied in relation to the participants' ages and sexes.

### The Participants' Profiles

Of the 10 participants, two were 17 years old at the time of the research but had turned 18 a few months after the interviews were conducted. One participant was a high school student and nine were students in college. Two were working students and were both females. All the participants were unmarried. Six of them lived with their families or parents. One lived with her relatives on the father's side, while one lived with his mother's friends. Two male participants lived alone, one in a dormitory and the other in a boarding house.

Six of the participants were middle children, three were firstborns, and one was the youngest in the family. One of the 10 was an only child.

The two tables below show other personal information about the participants.

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Whom Living With	Birth Order	No. of Siblings	Religion	Occupation
Pie	19	First year college	Mother's friends	Third	2	Born-again Christian	Student
JsT	23	Fourth year college	Alone in a dormitory	First	1	Roman Catholic	Student
LOL	17	Fourth year high school	Family	Youngest	1	Roman Catholic	Student
Msn	21	Fourth year college	Alone in a boarding house	Second	2	Roman Catholic	Student
StC	20	Fourth year college	Parents	Third	4	Roman Catholic	Student

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Whom Living With	Birth Order	No. of Siblings	Religion	Occupation
Ahl	17	First year college	Family	First	0	Roman Catholic	University student aide
Evv	20	Second year college	Family	Second	1	Born-again Christian	Former call center agent, now full-time student
Mjj	20	Fourth year college	Family	First	2	Roman Catholic	Networker
Myy	18	First year college	Paternal relatives	Third	4	Roman Catholic	Student
Shy	18	Second year college	Family	First	5	Born-again Christian	Student

## Reasons for Consuming Chemical Products

From the participants' answers in the interviews, it was noted that they used some products for two or more purposes. Foremost of their reasons for using a specific product was by force of habit, or "*nakalakihan*," "*nakamulatan*," or "*nakasanayan*." The products that they had gotten

used to included Coca-Cola soft drink, Safeguard bath soap, Colgate toothpaste, and Johnson's baby powder. They used rubbing alcohols, shaving creams, facial cleansers, facial washes, and makeup removers for hygienic and sanitary purposes. They used perfumes, colognes, lotions, shower gels, chewing gums, and feminine and masculine washes to smell good. They consumed bath soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, deodorants, tawas, and mouthwashes to be both clean and smelling good. Female participants used feminine washes to feel fresh. To enhance their looks and natural beauty, they used certain kinds of soaps and other beauty products. Both male and female participants whitened their skins using bleaching powder and different brands of skin whitening soaps, such as Kojie San, Manis, Pal Manis, and Beauche. The female participants enhanced their facial features using cosmetics, such as face powder, eyeliner, eyebrow pencil, lipstick, and mascara.

Two female participants took contraceptive pills; one took them to regulate her menstruation, while the other wanted to enhance the size of her breasts.

The participants used facial washes, facial creams for men and women, facial cleansers, facial masks, white masks, fresh *malunggay* juice, facial and body scrubs, foot powders, lip balms, lotions, and milk salt as beauty enhancers and/or cures or remedies for skin problems, such as dryness of lips and skin, oily skin, scars, pimples, acne, and skin blemishes. They also used these products for stretching and firming up their skin. Some used facial creams for sun protection.

To look good and fashionable, the students used hair wax, bleach, and dyes, and tried hair rebonding and perming. They also bleached and colored their hair to try something different and for self-satisfaction and fun.

They drank soft drinks, coffee, and energy drinks, such as Sting and Gatorade, to boost their energy and to be alert. Soft drinks also quenched their thirst and refreshed them. Some of the students smoked cigarettes,



Hair is one of the parts of the body that people enhance to have a pleasant overall look. Molding clays was the top choice for male students in grooming their hair.

drank alcoholic drinks, and used illegal drugs (specifically marijuana) for pleasure, relaxation, and to relieve stress. One female participant took Inderal, a beta-blocker for hypertension, to relieve stress. To remedy health problems and for wellness, the participants used antibacterial, antifungal, antihistamine, antidiarrheal, and antiprotozoal medicines; vitamin (C, B-complex, and multivitamins) supplements, such as Cherifer; ferrous sulfate; and dietary supplements, such as Beta-Life, C24/7, and Vita Plus. Two male participants who were body builders took whey protein, serious mass, protein shakes, and Appeton formula for fitness.

Some of the participants used contact lenses for two purposes: to correct their visions and to be fashionable.

### **To Continue or Not**

The participants' use of chemical products varied from simple to complex. The study reveals that some of them used layers and layers of products that gave the same effect. Others tried new products to achieve better results. There were those who stuck to a product hoping for the desired effect to take place. The majority of the participants stopped using the products that did not give the effect/s they expected. When a certain product had a negative effect on their bodies, they switched to another product. Female participants applied two or more products at a time to get the effect they desired. For example, they used facial wash, cleanser, scrub, and mask one after the other to clean their faces. To whiten and make them smooth, they applied just facial cream or with the juice of pounded fresh malunggay leaves overnight. They also rubbed their skin with body scrub and milk salt and applied lotion to whiten and smoothen them.

To make their eyes look beautiful, they used three different types of eyeliners—pencil, liquid, and gel—which they applied one after the other. They also applied mascara to their eyelashes and used an eyebrow pencil to shape their eyebrows. They also wear contact lenses to further enhance the beauty of their eyes.

For good health, the participants took a combination of vitamin and food supplements. To make their muscles big and well-formed, the two body builders took various forms of protein supplements.

There were participants, who, despite the negative effects they experienced with a product, continued to use it. On why or when they usually experienced a product's negative effects, various explanations were given by the participants, but the most notable one was when they overused it. So, to avoid the negative effects of a product they overused, they just moderated their consumption of it. Others said that they still used products

that had no effect on them yet because they believed that it would take time to feel or see the products' effects on them. Some of the participants, though, totally discontinued using chemical products that had negative effects on them. For example, they stopped using shampoos that made their hair worse, deodorants that made them perspire more and smell bad, and facial products that caused them pimples. The beauty titlist and pageant joiner, who experienced a negative effect from taking Inderal, vowed not to take the medicine anymore. The female student who took contraceptive pills to enhance her breasts stopped using them when she realized that nothing was happening to her breasts. A male participant also stopped taking the vitamin supplement which was supposed to help him grow tall because he claimed that it had no effect on him.



Vitamin and food supplements were important to the student participants. They believed that these helped them stay alert and focused in school and achieve their ideal physical characteristics.

There were some participants who said that even if they had found a product to be effective, they would still switch to new ones hoping for better and more astounding results. This was a remarkable attitude of the participants—they never gave up trying to discover products that would suit them and give them the most beneficial effects.

### **Influences on Product Choice**

Family, friends, coworkers, and significant others were found to have influenced the students in their choices of products. Parents and siblings, being the first persons a child associates with, influence the child's choices. It is the mother who usually has the greatest influence on all the family members. The mother budgets the family's income, buys the groceries,

and regulates the use of everything which she can possibly control. When she buys any item for consumption, be it a beauty product or a food supplement, she thinks of her husband and children. This explains why the majority of the participants used the terms *nakasanayan*, *nakamulatan*, and *nakalakihan* as reasons for consuming specific products.

As children grow up, their spheres of influence widen. From their families, students learn from their outside world. Friends, classmates, and the media become their sources of information on other products to use. The majority of the participants followed trends mostly from television advertisements, friends, and family members. Some of them just imitated others who looked good with the products they were using. Their technological know-how and exposure to the media made them more inclined to buy products, especially when the products were endorsed by famous and very good-looking celebrities.

Some of the participants learned different vices, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking illegal drugs, as they socialized with their friends and peers. Engaging in vices with them made them feel good because they felt that they “belonged.”

There were participants who were convinced by their colleagues on what products to use. The beauty titlist was convinced by her handler to take Inderal before a pageant to calm herself. The body builders were advised by their colleagues to take protein-rich supplements.

### **Effects of the Products**

The chemical products that the participants were using had either positive or negative effects on them. The female participants regularly washed their hair with shampoo and conditioner to make them clean, silky, and smelling good. There were participants who claimed that their shampoos and conditioners did great to their hair, and they were happy about it. On the other hand, there were those who complained about their shampoos. One participant got lice because of her shampoo. Others said that their shampoos had caused them dandruff.

Hair rebonding and perming enhanced the hair of the participants who tried them. However, the use of too much chemicals in those treatments eventually damaged their hair. For some participants, their deodorants

made their underarms smell good and even whitened them. Some of them even likened their deodorants to perfumes, saying that when they used their deodorants, they felt like they showered perfume on their bodies. On the other hand, other participants complained that certain deodorants could not be relied on because their underarms still perspired and smelled bad with them on. Some said their deodorants darkened their underarms.

There were facial products that made the female participants look more attractive because their natural beauty was enhanced, and the pimples, acnes, scars, and blemishes on their faces disappeared. For some, the opposite happened—pimples, blackheads, whiteheads, and dark spots started to appear on their faces when they used facial products.

Whitening products did lighten the skin of the participants who used them. However, their original skin colors returned when they stopped using the products. Some of them avoided exposing themselves to the sun whenever they applied whitening products because they got darker. Other participants claimed that certain whitening soaps had skin-thinning and stinging effects.

As mentioned earlier, there were two female participants who took contraceptive pills. The one who took the pills to regulate her menstruation eventually cured her problem; however, her breast size increased. Ironically, the one who took the pills to enhance her breast size did not get what she wanted.

The beauty titlist who was coached by her handler to take the antihypertensive drug Inderal to feel calm during a pageant vowed that not take the medicine anymore because of her bad experience with it. She suffered from dizziness and a headache that she needed to take another drug to relieve the pain. The pain lasted until the next morning that it became difficult for her to function normally for twenty-four hours. Furthermore, she lost control of herself during the contest; she had no inhibitions on whatever she did on the night of the event. She blamed her taking the medicine for her losing in the pageant. She realized later, though, that the cause of what she experienced was drug overdose because instead of taking just one tablet, she took two.

One male participant claimed that the vitamin supplement he took that would supposedly make him taller was “fake.” He said he took the supplement for a long time, but he did not grow any taller.

The participants who were cigarette smokers, alcohol drinkers, and illegal drug users knew very well the bad effects of all these products on their bodies. That was why all of them were not recommending the use of any of these products to others, especially to students like them.

Among the participants who consumed energy drinks, one claimed that the drink she was taking made her hyperactive and gave her so much endurance. However, when she overconsumed it, she suffered from different illnesses—insomnia (due to overalertness), gastric ulcer (because of not eating due to feeling full), and low blood pressure (due to lack of sleep and less food intake). This made her believe that energy drinks were not made for students but for laborers and people who needed to exert much physical effort to get their work done.

### **Effects of Age and Sex**

Among the variables included in the participants’ profiles, age and sex affected the quantity of the products used and the choice of products. The older students used more products than the younger ones. The older ones also had tried more different products and were able to compare them based on what they experienced while using them. As to sex, the male participants paid more attention to their hair, while the females’ focus was their faces. The males regarded having a well-built body as more appealing, while to the females, having smooth, blemish-free skin was more attractive. The males had more vices—smoking, drinking intoxicating liquors, and taking illegal drugs—than the females.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There are different reasons why the Palawan youth consume certain products. Having gotten used to a product is the simplest reason. Both male and female participants in the study first depended on their mothers on what beauty and wellness products to use. This shows that an individual learns first from his/her family, which is usually a child’s primary group, and continue to practice what he/she has learned. Thus,

by force of habit, the participants continued to use the products that they learned about from their mothers.

On the other hand, some of the participants seemed to have been influenced by their peers, especially on using products that they did not want their parents to know about. Addictive products, such as cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and illegal drugs, were sources of pleasure and relaxation for them. They used these products because they felt good while using them with their peer groups. They felt a strong sense of belongingness when they associated with their peers. This illustrates the movement from primary to secondary socialization.

The participants who were body builders were likewise dependent on the suggestions of their colleagues on what to take to help them grow big and toned muscles. They claimed that, as long as they continuously used the recommended products, they would never fail to achieve what they expected. The feeling of solidarity with people who had the same goal as them was strong.

The adherence of the youth to their social groups (family, peer group, and with a significant other) is best explained by the concept of cultural politics, wherein the society dictates what is “acceptable.” Social norms and values shape the youth’s desires and decisions.

Mass media and social media had a great influence on the participants’ product choices. Advertisements and endorsers mattered to them so much. This is due to the fact that the youth today are more exposed to modern means of communication, which are forms of interactive communication (such as the broadcast media, especially television, and the social media—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), where they usually discover new products. To be trendy and fashionable, they try popular products or those that famous celebrities endorse in advertisements on the television or the Internet. They seem to base their choices on the standards of the icons they admire. This shows that interactive communication influences the youth’s value orientations, belief systems, and attitudes.

A more profound cause of the participants’ chemical product consumption was their desire to look good or, better yet, look their best. They wanted to project a positive self-image for societal acceptance. Their experiences with certain products determined whether they would continue using

them or not. If a product had a positive effect on them, that is, it made them look good, then they would continue using it; if not, they would discontinue using the product. There were cases, though, when they had to wait for a reasonably long time for a product to take effect before they could decide whether to continue or stop using it. However, even if they already found a product to be effective, having the desire to look their best, they would keep on trying new products to achieve their goal.

It was very notable that the female participants focused on enhancing their eyes using various products—as many as five—at the same time. For eyeliners alone, they used three types: pencil, liquid, and gel. They shaped their eyebrows using an eyebrow pencil and thickened their lashes using mascara. To look different and more attractive, they used colored contact lenses.

On the other hand, the male participants focused on making their hair look good and their bodies fit and toned. They used shampoo and conditioner to make their hair soft and clean; and then styled them using hair gel and hair wax. Some of them took vitamin and food supplements to enhance their bodies; however, they also smoked, drank alcohol, and used illegal drugs as if they did not know what these could do to their bodies.

The older the participants, the more experiences they had in trying and using products. They had better judgements when making comparisons of different products.

The participants' different ages and sexes resulted to differences in their choices of products. Both male and female participants, though, used whitening soaps, which meant that they all wanted to be fair-skinned; thus, sex was not a factor in desiring fairer skin. Younger men nowadays say that the “tall, dark, and handsome” description of an ideal man is a thing of the past; the new ideal man is “tall, fair, and handsome.”

It was noted that the participants used layers and layers of products, applying one after another, to attain their desired looks. Likewise, they tended to combine chemical products bought from the market and natural products (such as *malunggay*) found in their yards. They had invested so much for the enhancement of their looks but took for granted how and what they ate—skipping breakfast and eating more junk foods

than nutritious foods like vegetables and fruits. They might not be fully aware that foods they were eating could affect their skin, hair, and total well-being. Chemicals represent modernity and technology; hence, it is imperative for the youth to try and use products available on the market. This is how the youth justify their actions—they feel obliged to decide and act on the present, which is influenced by trends and technology.

Truly, there is nothing in this world that does not change. Development has come to Puerto Princesa. With the transition process come the changes in societal view or outlook on many facets of life. This is true with the young Palaweños. They have transcended from just being compliant to being searching and experimenting. Such is a crucial transition that would later shape and propagate a new Palawan culture.



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