

**Reaffirmation of Non-discrimination of LGBT Filipinos**

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Abstract

*The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) reaffirms its position on the non-discrimination and the dissemination of accurate information on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community following a feature article on the topic published in a national newspaper. This reaffirmation is followed with a short response in question and answer format clarifying some salient points on parenting LGBT youth and children written by developmental psychologist Liane Peña-Alampay, PhD.*

In response to concerns from the public about a Philippine Star article dated 11 March 2013 entitled "Being Gay" by Tintin Bersola Babao and featuring Dr. Camille Garcia, the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) wishes to reaffirm its position borne from scientific knowledge that being gay is not a disease or disorder. Like other national organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the British Psychological Society, and the Hong Kong Psychological Society, among many others, the PAP recognizes that there is no inherent illness or pathology behind same-gender sexual orientations. In fact, it has been 40 years since homosexuality was taken out in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders.

The PAP enjoins Filipino psychologists to stand by their professional and ethical commitments to affirm the rights and wellbeing of all individuals. Its position paper on Non-Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression reads, "The PAP Code of Ethics (2010) is clear in its stance against discrimination. Filipino psychologists are called upon to recognize the unique worth and inherent dignity of all human beings; and to respect the diversity among persons and peoples. This means that Filipino psychologists should not discriminate against or demean persons based on actual or perceived differences in characteristics including gender identity and sexual orientation."

It continues, "Lesbians, Gay and Bisexuals and Transgendered individuals confront social pressures to hide, suppress or even attempt to change their identities and expressions as conditions for their social acceptance and enjoyment of rights.... This anti-LGBT prejudice and discrimination tend to be based on a rhetoric of moral condemnation and are fueled by ignorance or unfounded beliefs associating these gender expressions and sexual orientations with psychopathology or maladjustment."

Says PAP President Dr. Gina Hechanova, "The article presents a view of homosexuality that is clearly misinformed. We wish to invite the public to read more appropriate responses to the same questions posed in the article of Ms. Bersola-Babao. We also encourage media practitioners who wish to get professional psychological advice to see the list of certified psychologists in the PAP website ([www.pap.org.ph](http://www.pap.org.ph))."

**On Parenting Gay Children**

*By Liane Peña Alampay, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology, PAP member and certified specialist in Developmental Psychology*

In a recent article by Tintin Bersola-Babao on "Being Gay", she interviewed a psychologist, Dr. Camille Garcia, on the question "What should a parent do if the child shows early signs of

being gay?" Unfortunately, the psychologist interviewed offered advice that was based neither on scientific psychological knowledge nor the Code of Ethics of Psychology. In this column, we present new advice in response to the same questions for parents of children who are or may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), based on psychological knowledge and practice.

***Question: What are the early signs? I've read that when a two-or three-year-old plays with girl's toys, that doesn't necessarily mean he is gay since that is just the "curiosity phase." Is this true? At what age will the signs of true "gayness" come out?***

Answer: Gay children develop in the same way that straight or heterosexual children do. They will engage in play just as any other child. A child's choice of toys does not directly reflect on a child's sexual orientation. At age 2 or 3, there are no clear signs that will tell us the gender of the person the child will eventually be attracted to. By about 6 or 7, we may start developing crushes and discovering who we are attracted to. By the time we become adolescents, we usually already know if we are attracted to men, to women, or to both and may explore our attraction through dating and relationships.

Sexual orientation or attraction is an aspect of our deepest self or personhood and is not necessarily reflected in one's appearance, dress, or speech, or from the toys he or she plays with as a child. We can only truly tell if a person is gay, lesbian, or bisexual if the person shares with us his or her experiences and feelings of attraction towards others.

**Question: Should parents be alarmed and arrest the situation? Or encourage it?**

Answer: The question of whether to "arrest" being gay or "encourage" being gay assumes that gayness is a child's behavior that parents can—and should—control. It also assumes that there is something wrong with being gay and that gayness needs to be "corrected". To be clear: gayness is not a sickness or abnormality, but a form of human love and sexuality that is as valid and legitimate as the heterosexual form. Our best scientific knowledge has shown that sexual orientation is not a choice. Parents cannot control who we are attracted to.

What parents can control is whether and how they will show their unconditional regard and acceptance of their child. Whether the child is gay or straight, the ingredients of good parenting are the same. Parents who are warm and affectionate, sensitive to their children's needs and respond to these appropriately have children who are well-adjusted and confident, have positive social relationships, are competent in school, and are at low risk for behavioral and emotional problems. For gay children, who will undoubtedly experience confusion, isolation, even rejection from others at some point in their lives, the positive regard of their parents is all the more important and can protect them. Research in family psychology shows that children who are able to "come out" to parents who support them and affirm their sexualities report fewer problems of depression and self-harm, feel more confident, have lower suicide risk, and experience greater well-being. Certainly, these are outcomes parents desire for their children.

It is true that many parents will find it difficult to accept a gay child; acceptance is a process that can take time for the entire family. The realization may come as a shock to parents or make them feel confused or disappointed. These are natural reactions. As parents, it is good for us to reflect on and process our own beliefs and attitudes about gay people, and we may need to first deal with our negative beliefs and misconceptions about homosexuality. When you are ready to talk about it, you and your child can find your own ways of dealing with the reality of having a gay family member.

**Question: How should the parents address this? Some parents resort to threat and extreme military-style punishment. Some parents go to great lengths to explain to the child the consequences of being gay, so that the child can think, then make a choice.**

Answer: Despite possible feelings of disappointment, parents should address the issue with sensitivity and continuous efforts to communicate support and unconditional love to the child. All children, straight or gay, need this from their parents. If gay children find the care and strength they need from their parents and families, they have greater chances of leading healthy, happy, dignified lives.

On the other hand, parents who respond to their gay child with criticism, rejection, harshness, or abuse communicate to the child that he or she is not accepted; that to be valued, the child must change something fundamental in his or her self that cannot be controlled nor denied. As with positive parenting, harsh and rejecting parenting has the same results for gay and straight children: they are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems such as depression, self-harm, and delinquency.

**Question: Why is being gay still considered a shame for conservative families, even now that we are living in modern times that gays are accepted in our society? Gays (both male and female) are contributing well to our society, in different professional fields.**

Answer: The short answer is that there are still those who believe that homosexuality is a sin and a sickness. The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) upholds the position that homosexuality is a moral and rightful way of life and a healthy and normal form of sexuality. As stated in the PAP Statement on Non-Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression, "The PAP aligns itself with the global initiatives to remove the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with diverse sexualities and to promote the wellbeing of LGBT people."

**Question: Is being gay really a lifestyle choice? Or genetically influenced?**

Answer: Being gay is NOT a "lifestyle choice". Being gay is a sexual orientation –an enduring romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction –that is not a choice. We do not choose who we fall in love with or who we get attracted to. We simply do.

As written in the American Psychological Association's Primer on Homosexuality, "there is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors."

As yet, we do not have clear answers as to why some people are gay--or for that matter--why some people are straight. **But what matters is we do our best to treat each other, especially our children, with the dignity, respect, and care we all deserve as equal human beings.**

For accurate, scientific, psychological information on sexual orientation and homosexuality, please go to [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org), and download <http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/orientation.pdf>

For the PAP statement on non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, please go to [www.pap.org.ph](http://www.pap.org.ph), and download [http://www.pap.org.ph/includes/view/default/uploads/statement\\_on\\_lgbt.pdf](http://www.pap.org.ph/includes/view/default/uploads/statement_on_lgbt.pdf)