

Vox Populion Gender Reassignment: A Review On The Moral And Ethical Basis

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ABSTRACT

This paper looked into the common people's reception on gender reassignment being part of a generation highly-exposed to societal acceptance and trust. Researchers delved into Kantian basis of one of the confounding issues of the society- local, national and global- on gender reassignment and thereby reviewed its moral and philosophical tenets. Qualitative and Quantitative approaches are utilized and made use of survey questionnaire on The Global Attitudes Toward Transgender People from IPSOS Global Advisor. The survey used the Likert Rating Scale with 19-item question which were divided into 3 sub-questions, namely: Familiarity of transgender people in the society, View on the rights of transgender people in the society and View on transgender people in the society. The study showed that majority of the Cebuano participants have familiarity on transgender individuals in the society. Majority of the participants have acquaintances with people who are transgender and who have personal friends/family who are transgender too. Extensive study and substantial data regarding gender reassignment are still needed as there is an increase in attention given to gender equality and education in schools, workplace, and employment.

Keywords

Gender and Development, Transgender, Transsexuality

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Introduction

In the postmodern era, there has been a fleeing of traditional beliefs and the embracing of bold, new thoughts which are not limited to technology, fashion, or lifestyle but as well as gender reassignment. Gender reassignment refers to individuals who have undergone, intend to undergo or are currently undergoing medical and surgical treatment to alter the body. A decision to undertake gender reassignment is made when an individual feels that his or her gender at birth does not match their gender identity. This is called 'gender dysphoria' and is a recognized medical condition. Transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) youth who suffer from gender dysphoria are at a substantially elevated risk of numerous adverse physical and psychosocial outcomes compared with their cisgender peers. Yet, despite advances in these relatively novel treatment options, which appear to be highly effective in addressing gender dysphoria and mitigating associated adverse outcomes, ethical challenges abound in ensuring that young patients receive appropriate, safe, affordable treatment and that access to this treatment is fair and equitable.

Being part of a generation that advocates movement and challenges the conservative and often traditional standpoint, the researchers are delving on the Kantian basis of one of the confounding issues of the society- local, national and global- on gender reassignment and reviewing the moral and philosophical basis of this topic. Though some may argue that use of surgery for purposes of treating Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is morally unacceptable since transsexuality does not belong within the domain of medicine, Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS) is morally permissible. In cases in which adult patients have been

suffering from a severe gender-related mind-body imbalance which interferes with their everyday life functions, gender reassignment surgery is a morally permissible treatment option.

The opinion of moral theologians concerning transsexual surgery has evolved significantly over the past thirty years. The earliest opinion claimed that such surgery was not morally permissible because it would constitute "a grave mutilation of the human body." This opinion was based on three premises, all of which have been subsequently challenged. The first is that gender identity is determined by the genitalia. The second is that the ethical norm involved in a decision concerning surgery should be exclusively " ... the body's health and integrity" ([7], pp. 133-135). The third premise is that any surgery not required for the good and integrity of the body violates humanity's custodianship of the body and represents an immoral act of supreme ownership.

Compared to some Asian countries, gender reassignment or sex reassignment is still taboo to the Philippines knowing the culture and the background from the pre-historic era that includes religion and beliefs of the elders. This has been a prohibited topic for some and still in the midst of investigation. There are cases when this topic is being discussed, to some they find it unreligious or malpractices to the extent it is inhumane.

Despite the challenges many transwomen of the Philippines before they undergo sex reassignment appear to begin transitioning in their high school years. Some leave school or college already displaying not only a stereotypically female manner, gait, gestures, and style of voice, but also female hairstyle, dress, and use of cosmetics. Many later appear to change their bodies by way of hormones, some by injections or surgery. Strikingly, the majority appear to grow

up displaying heterosexual interests (by which we mean here an erotic attraction to men). Gender identity is based on the experience of each individual that they prefer to be called such as being a man or a woman, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex.

Founded on a variety of studies, articles, journals, theories, and collection of works of different philosophers, this research illuminates a logical and philosophical basis on gender reassignment

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative and quantitative approach utilizing the survey questionnaire of The Global Attitudes Toward Transgender People from IPSOS Global Advisor. In August 2019, Winston Luhur, Taylor N. T. Brown & Andrew R. Flores, conducted a study on the Public Opinion of Transgender Rights in the United States, which utilized the same survey questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the survey participant's familiarity with transgender people, attitude towards transgender people, their rights, and their status in society. The survey used the Likert Rating Scale with 19-item question which were divided into 3 sub-questions, namely: Familiarity of transgender people in the society, View on the rights of transgender people in the society and View on transgender people in the society. A letter of consent was attached to the Google survey form to inform the participants the topic of the study as well as confidentiality assurance, in line with the data privacy law. Therefore, only the basic personal information obtained from the respondents, and they moved on to answering the survey questionnaire. To have a further reach of respondents, the researchers maximized the use of social media platforms, particularly Facebook. The survey link generated from Google Form was posted on the researchers personal Facebook wall where respondents could also share their additional thoughts and opinion regarding the topic in the comment section. However, only the gathered data from the survey questionnaire were treated and analyzed by the researchers. The data were treated and supplemented with various articles, research, and journals.

RESULTS

There were 50 Cebuano adult participants (19-50 years old) in this study, in which 12 or 24% of the participants were males, 36 or 72% of the participants were females, and 1 or 2% of the participants identified as bisexual, and 1 or 2% of the participants preferred not to say. All the participants are Filipinos who reside in Cebu City and/or its provinces. Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N= 50)

Variables	Values
Gender	
Male	12 (24%)
Female	36 (72%)
Bisexual	1(2%)
Prefer Not to Say	1(2%)
Age (Years)	
19 - 29	43 (86%)
30 - 40	5 (10%)
41 - 50	2 (4%)

Illustration 1. Familiarity of Cebuanos of Transgender Individuals

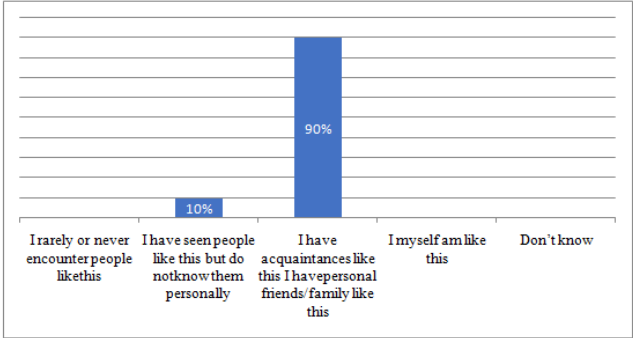


Illustration 1. About 90% of the participants have acquaintances who are transgender individuals and/or have personal friends/family who are transgender, and only 10% have seen people who are transgender but do not know them personally.

Illustration 1 above, shows the results of the Cebuano participants' familiarity of transgender individuals in the society. Majority of the participants have acquaintances who are transgender and who have personal friends/family who are transgender. While 10% report to have seen transgender people but do not know them personally. Furthermore, there is no response for the statements I rarely or never encounter people who are transgender and I myself am a transgender.

Views of participants toward the rights of Transgender people in the society

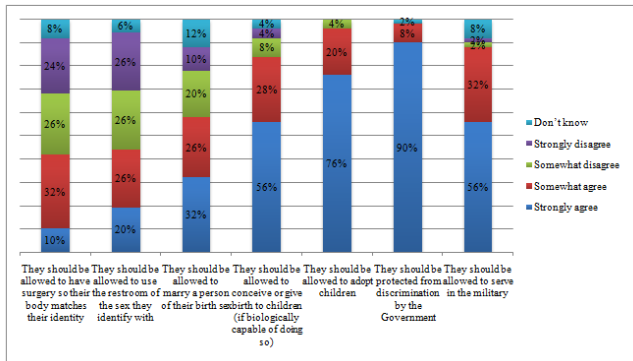


Figure 1. The chart above shows the views of the Cebuano participants regarding the rights of transgender people in the society.

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, there were 32% of the participants who somewhat agreed that transgender people

should be allowed to have surgery to match their identity and a greater percentage showed 50% disagreement (26% somewhat disagree and 24% strongly disagree) and 8% still “don’t know”.

On the statement whether transgender individuals should be allowed to use the restroom of the sex that they identify with, there were 46% who agreed and 48% disagreed and only 6% of those answered, “don’t know”.

Majority of the participants agreed that transgender individuals should be allowed to marry a person of their birth sex (58%), allowing them to conceive or give birth to children (84%), allowing them to adopt a child (96%), protection from discrimination by the government (98%) and allowing them to serve in the military (88%).

View of participants towards transgender people in the society

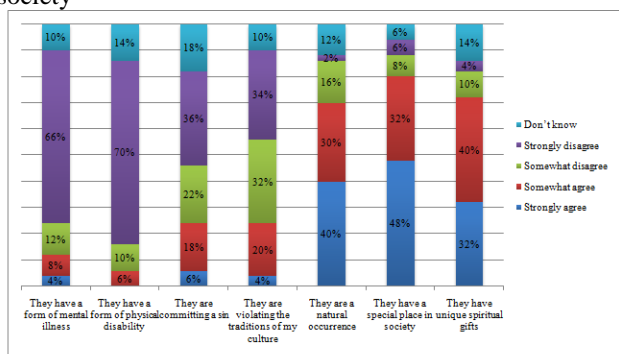


Figure 2. The chart above shows the views of the Cebuano participants towards transgender people in the society.

Most of the participants have expressed positive attitudes toward transgender individuals as shown in Figure 2 above. Furthermore, majority of the participants disagreed that transgender individuals have a form of mental illness (78%), have a form of physical disability (80%), and about 58% disagreed that they are committing a sin, 66% disagreed that they are violating the traditions of the culture. While there is a great percentage, at about 40%, where participants of the study don’t know whether being a transgender is a natural occurrence. Additionally, 70% of the participants agreed that they are a natural occurrence, while 18% disagreed. The participants agreed that transgender people have a special place in the society (80%), and 72% agreed that transgender people have unique spiritual gifts.

Views of the participants towards transgender people within the context of Philippines as whole society

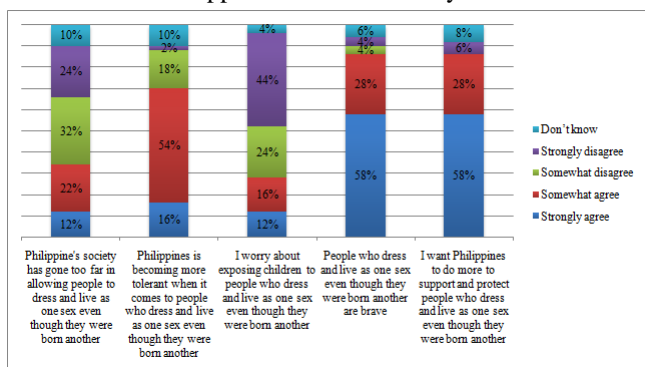


Figure 3. The chart above shows the views of the Cebuano participants towards transgender people within the context of Philippines as whole society.

Most of the participants have observed the efforts of the Philippine government with regard to the protection of the transgender individuals as well as the LGBT community. There is a significant difference in the percentage in the statement that the Philippine’s society has gone too far in allowing people to dress and live as one sex even though they were born another with 34% of the participants agreeing while there is 56% who disagreed with the statement. Moreover, 70% of the participants agreed that the Philippines is becoming more tolerant when it comes to people who dress and live as one sex even though they were born another. The percent of the participants worrying their children in exposing them to transgender people was 28% which was lesser for those who weren’t worried (66%). Still, there were 86% of the participants consider transgender individuals as brave, and 86% expressed their desire for the Philippines to do more to support and protect transgender individuals.

Discussion

From the results of our survey, Cebuano adults (Filipinos who reside in the city of Cebu and its provinces) ages 19 to 50 support transgender rights throughout various policy areas, which are similar to the survey finding conducted by institutions in the U.S. such as the Public Opinion of Transgender Rights in the United States published on August 2019. It is evident in the data that positive behaviors and attitudes toward transgender and transsexual people is popular among the Cebuano than negative behaviors and beliefs. The majority of the respondents move the Philippine society to be more supportive and caring towards transgender and transsexual people. The awareness regarding the rights and acceptance of transgender and transsexual identity has increased and is showing tremendous positive development.

Majority of the sample at 90% know someone who identifies as transgender. The results of the survey, 18% of the Cebuanoss “don’t know” whether being a transgender is tantamount to committing a sin while, still 18% somewhat agreed that they are committing a sin. Furthermore, about 36% of the Cebuanos strongly disagree that transgender individuals are committing a sin. The increasing support and awareness of the rights of transgender people or community was associated with several engaging dialogues and intentional conversations with the LGBT community with the local government leaders and/or organizations/units and the church. In July 2015, Christopher J. Hale wrote an article in TIME entitled The Pope Francis Statement That Changed the Church on LGBT Issues. In his article, multiple accounts from interviews with the pope were cited when he had revealed his pastoral approach toward the LGBT Community saying that God doesn’t condemn LGBT individuals; suggesting the church could be open to civil unions; and, actively meeting and conversing in dialogues with LGBT individuals and activists (2015). Philippines being a religious country, majority of the entire population are Christian or Roman Catholic, pursue the leadership of Pope Francis.

The results also indicated that 72% of the respondents were female participants and younger participants, predominantly

those ages 22-28, sustain considerably higher levels of support for transgender and transsexual rights and more encouraging attitudes about transgender people, which shows consistent findings of the survey conducted in the United States. About 66% of the responses showed strong disagreement with the view of transgender people “having a form of mental illness”, and about 70% strongly disagree on transgender people “having a form of physical disability.”

There is an even distribution of responses of the Cebuano adults regarding the statement that transgender people should be allowed to undergo surgery for their body to match their identity where 32% somewhat agree, 26% somewhat disagree, and only 24% said they strongly disagree. The same trend of responses is evident on the statement that transgender people should be allowed to use the restroom of the sex they identify with, where 20% of the Cebuano adults suggest that they strongly agree while 22% strongly disagree. Still, 26% of the Cebuanos somewhat agree and 26% somewhat disagree. We hypothesize that this is due to differing personal values, level of acceptance, and degree of awareness. Additionally, some opposition to transgender people using restrooms consistent with their gender identity has been articulated as a concern about potential safety risks for girls and women (where the potential assailants of concern are cisgender men). However, these concerns have not been supported with significant research and empirical data.

Moreover, majority of the Cebuanos showed positive attitude toward marrying a person of their birth sex, conceiving or giving birth to children, and allowing adoption of children. To supplement philosophical and ethical basis in the context of gender reassignment, we refer to Immanuel Kant’s understanding of human nature as what he calls the “original predisposition to good in human nature (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, Kant 1996b, R6:26). The second disposition (of the three predispositions discussed) posits to “humanity as a living and at the same time rational being.” This predisposition is “physical and yet involves comparison for which reason is required”, and “out of self-love originates the inclination to gain worth in the opinion of others, originally, of course, merely equal worth” (Varden, Helga: Kant on Sex. Reconsidered. Vol. 4 Issue 1 Article 1). According to Varden, this predisposition adds to our animality “comparative uses of reason” and acting rationally. Varden further adds that it means orienting ourselves in the world by means of comparing things (including ourselves to each other), setting end of our own, and acting on maxims (subjective principles of action). Moreover, Varden adds that as we are realizing healthy intimate relationships, we regard each other as equally valuable in all our differences; we take joy in each other’s successes, and we always assume that the other is directed towards us as we are towards them.

There was also greater support for the protection of transgender people/community from discrimination by the government as well as allowing them to serve in the military with 56% of the respondents who strongly agreed. Compared to the study conducted by Luhur& Brown & Flores (August 2019) where the federal government of the United States implemented a ban on the enlistment and service of transgender people in the military, the Armed

Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesperson, Ernesto Torres, emphasized that giving equal opportunities to prospective soldiers (inviting gay men and lesbians to join the Philippine Military) proves that Philippines has zero tolerance for discrimination within the military ranks (Outright Action International, 2009).

Summary and Recommendation

The study conducted involved the developing studies and research on the awareness on the rights and policies regarding gender reassignment and the LGBTQ community in the society of Cebu City, Philippines. To refine future studies on gender reassignment and may include the LGBT community, within Cebu City and its neighboring provinces and/or regions, it should include profiling religious affiliations (or non-religious affiliations) for the filtration of data saturation among religious and secular communities. As more communities, organizations, and institution bring light into the awareness on the policies and rights protecting transgender individuals, as well as delving into the impacts of embracing gender reassignment (and/or transsexuality) and establishing a clear and unified guidelines, codes of conduct and practices, school heads, administrators, parents and other academic stakeholders should participate in further studies to increase representation. Extensive study and substantial data regarding gender reassignment are still needed as there is an increase in attention given to gender equality and education in schools, workplace, and employment. A well-documented change or update in mandated non-discriminatory laws and other policies should be conducted, supervised, and maintained to assess and evaluate how mass attitudes change over time regarding gender reassignment.

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