

# Gender-Based Violence in Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ Communities

## Roundtable Convened by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

September 2020

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence convened a roundtable in September 2019 with the purpose of growing the Institute's capacity to represent issues affecting Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> communities experiencing gender-based violence, and creating space in our work that is explicitly queer and trans inclusive. The roundtable's goals and outcomes will serve as a forum to:

1. Acknowledge the range of LGBTQ, trans, and gender non-conforming identities present in our API<sup>2</sup> communities;
2. Identify how API LGBTQ/trans communities experience gender as a site of oppression;
3. Inform the Institute's learning and strategies in order to strengthen advocacy for API LGBTQ survivors of gender-based violence.

## (1) Organizing in Asia

### Presentation by Grace Poore, OutRight Action International

The Roundtable started with setting the context of struggles and activism in Asian counties where OutRight Action International, an international LGBT human rights organization, provides research and documentation to activists addressing LGBT rights. Grace Poore, Regional Program Coordinator for Asia and the Pacific Islands, presented on the critical analysis, research, discussions among activists, backlash and its impacts, societal contexts, and movement strategies infusing the work for LGBT rights and safety in Asia.

OutRight provides training to develop LGBT inclusive programs for frontline domestic violence and family violence (DV/FV) responders and domestic violence service providers; resources and expertise to develop protocols for LGBT inclusive DV/FV

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ is used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer throughout this document for consistency; except in the section on Asia where the presenter uses LGBT.

<sup>2</sup> Although API is technically an abbreviation for Asian and Pacific Islander, the Institute includes West Asians/Middle Eastern and Native Hawaiians – the report uses the abbreviation and the full list interchangeably.

services, and learning and advocacy exchanges to change implementation of existing laws that address domestic violence so they are LGBT inclusive/responsive. Partnering LGBT organizations work with NGOs addressing domestic violence to link LGBT people to counseling, legal services, and other intervention services for DV/FV.

The full report of Grace Poore's presentation can be found at:

<http://www.api-gbv.org/resources/Poore-Asia-Rpt/>

## (2) Intersectionality in U.S. Movement-Building

**The presentation was followed by fishbowl discussions with the advocates who attended from:** API Chaya, Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse Project, Freedom, Inc., Hmong Queer Suab / California Hmong Advocates Network, Jahajee Sisters, LYRIC (Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center) / Center for LGBTQ Youth, National LGBTQ Institute on IPV / Northwest Network of Bi Trans Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse, New Mexico Asian Family Center, Shaping Change: Social Justice Therapy and Consulting, South Asian Network, Trans and Non-Binary Educators Network: Teachers for Social Justice, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and long-time activists advocating for Filipina and Hawaiian communities who were not representing their professional affiliations.

*As LGBTQ API folks, our identities are inherently intersectional – that's our power!*

**Introductory Remarks:** Intersectionality is structural across movements: From an intergenerational perspective, there is now significant growth in the understanding and importance of representation and intersectionality in movements than ever before. In the U.S., movements for LGBTQ rights and a focus on identity politics have created greater visibility and centered representation to include queer, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming identities. Movements to build culturally and linguistically specific advocacy for Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander survivors of gender-based violence center on mitigating barriers based on the intersectionalities of race, class, sexual orientation/gender identity, histories of colonization, religion, and immigration/ refugee/ asylee status; *and* on anchoring structural intersectionality in community well-being. Our discussions explored two questions:

1. In the movement against gender-based violence, how does intersectionality show up?
  - Within Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, there is extraordinary inter-API and intra-API diversity. It is equally important to recognize so many different backgrounds *and* the connections across them.
  - In the field of GBV, interpersonal violence draws connections to family and community violence, state violence and historical violence. But, it needs to consider intersectionality across movements such as environmental justice, to

build cross-movement collaboration and address how these issues touch the daily lives of our communities, and to educate activists in other movements about the impacts of gender-based violence.

- The GBV field is working to articulate accountability and recognizing the wholeness of a person, of both survivors and those who do harm – recognizing that being a survivor or abuser is not all that someone is.
- And yet, the question remains: how do we build accountability meaningfully? Ensuring that “we’re not so colonized that we find it easier to be mad at our colonizers and can no longer hold ourselves accountable.” How do we create a culture of being able to call each other out from places of love; rather than just holding accountability meetings when something happens?
- Oppression of LGBTQ people within an API ethnic group and between API ethnicities both act to inhibit GBV disclosure, as does oppression within LGBTQ communities (“you’re not queer enough, you’re not API enough”). Can this result in survivors trying to prioritize either their racial or their queer identity to get access to services?

2. In the movement to address LGBTQ issues and representation, how does intersectionality show up?

- The LGBTQ movement is one of the spaces where intersectionality and creativity flourish the most.
- People find themselves having to prioritize their identities – unable to show up with their whole identities, their whole selves in their API communities, and then struggling to reclaim their space because “when I was away from my community, I lost myself”.
- There is a lack of language in many cultures to capture LGBTQ identities and the spaces to express them in. For example, in the Hmong community, coming out is harder because there is no vocabulary describing these concepts. In a tight knit community, it becomes valuable to find a network of folks who are Hmong and queer and who understand the complexities and challenges of navigating Queer/Trans spaces (e.g., for a cis femme person) within Hmong and within Hmong LGBTQ communities. Language around LGBTQ identities is experienced as gatekeeping (“you cannot do this work in our community if you do not know the language”), preventing activists from working within this movement.
- It is important to affirmatively articulate space for LGBTQ individuals – e.g., recent discussions on Hmong feminism define it as loving Hmong women and loving Hmong LGBTQ folx.
- Race can create an invisibilization of LGBTQ identity: e.g., API leaders in social justice movements are not forefronting their LGBTQ identity; or in LGBTQ spaces, there is more intersectionality, but less API representation.

- How does one navigate the intersections of racial and LGBTQ identity given levels of homophobia in API and other communities of color, and given the racism people face from whites and from other Asians outside their own ethnic group? In other words, does homophobia/transphobia in one's ethnic community feel more or less harmful than racism from the mainstream community? This question applies equally to women navigating the sexism/devaluation/abuse sanctioned and upheld by their own ethnic/identity specific community and societal racism.
- In the gay API community: is there a place we can discuss questions about masculinity?
- Amongst API LGBTQ youth, many are already struggling with not being Asian enough and not being American enough, and struggling to figure out their identity just as Asian Americans.
- Co-opting intersectionality: as intersectionality has become mainstream and a buzzword, it has just become about divulging identities. However, our movement is more important than our identities. We need to talk about intersectionality in terms of the intersectional oppressions that we experience: from misogyny, sexism, transphobia, etc., among LGBTQ communities to classism and colorism among APIs.

These discussions concluded by asking moving questions: How do we hold on to our identities, forge our own paths instead of going the "American" way, and not replicating colonial power relations? Is it a privilege to be able to work through an intersectional lens? How do we make sure movement leaders know us and are making space for us, and that there is space for all of us in all our Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities?

### (3) Analysis | How does Gender Manifest as a Site of Oppression for API Women, Girls and LGBTQ Communities?

Chic Dabby seeded the discussion with the Institute's analysis of gender-based violence

*I will just wait for my next lifetime to live and love as I feel and as I want*  
 ~ Hmong elder transman

**Gender** is a site of trauma, discrimination, rejection, oppression, and abuse by state, family and community actors in public and private spaces. Historically, women and girls have and continue to face an overwhelming trifecta of gender-based violence in state structures, in the home, and in public spheres perpetrated by state, non-state, non-familial and familial actors.

**Gender-Based Violence** is defined as any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Gender-based violence is largely male-patterned violence and can include the victimization of women, girls, men, boys, adolescents, and lesbian, gay, transgender, and gender non-conforming people.

**Patriarchy** is a structure of beliefs and practices (institutional, cultural, and individual) that define the social relations of power and entitlement based on gender. Patriarchy establishes a binary gender system of two distinct genders (“men” and “women”), within which men are granted power and privilege at the expense of women, trans/gender, and gender variant individuals.

Patriarchy prescribes and enforces gender roles; defines “transgressions”; patrols the spaces of culture to enforce tradition; exiles/blames survivors; protects and insulates abusers; and prevents cultural change and transformation. It is a system for maintaining class, gender, racial, and heterosexual privilege and the status quo of power – relying on crude forms of oppression, like violence; and subtle ones, like laws; to perpetuate inequality.

**Culture** operates in three domains: Cultures of gender-based violence devalue women, girls, LGBTQ /gender non-conforming individuals; normalize or minimize abuse; ignore sexism and misogyny; and promote aggressive masculinity, transphobia, and homophobia. Cultures of ethnic/identity-based communities contain strengths and rich histories of resilience and thriving; yet they inflict harms by maintaining traditional patriarchal gender norms and roles. Cultures of systems often fail survivors; create barriers; withhold resources; act punitively; increase abuser impunity; and compound trauma. As advocates and activists, we are constantly interrogating and challenging culture.

**Gender Identity and Marginalization:** Because sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are each sites of oppression, many LGBTQ people may experience threats to their safety based on multiple identities or social group memberships. This can mean:

- There are more opportunities for, and risks of, violations that include scrutiny, surveillance, abuse, micro-aggressions, threats, etc.;
- Increased severity of violence/abuse in streets, homes and systems;
- More types of state, family, and community perpetrators; and
- An ever-changing list of ‘transgressions’ defined by states, communities and families.

The **Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence** was developed by the Institute to reflect the narratives of Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander survivors and advocates. It emphasizes that:

- GBV is structural and historical, not accidental;
- Abuses occur over the lifecourse and are not just single events;

- Multiple abusers are located over the lifecourse;
- These abuses occur within a broader context of societal oppressions; and
- All these factors affect help-seeking – by the time survivors come to advocacy agencies, they not only have histories of abuse, they all too often have a history of negative help-seeking experiences.

The Lifetime Spiral is used as a powerful tool for individual advocacy, for raising public awareness, and for community organizing about gender violence affecting APIs.

### Group Discussion on Analysis

The idea of building out an LGBTQ Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence for APIs to include abuses/harms perpetrated by family, by intimates, by our own ethnic and LGBTQ communities, and by systems failures sparked a broader analytic discussion that touched on:

- Contextualizing how LGBTQ movements contribute to building resistance, collective action, resilience, healing;
- Accounting for the impacts of institutions, families, communities, transphobia, racism, homophobia, colonization and other structures of oppression and violence (such as Islamophobia) affecting Asians, Middle Easterners, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders;
- Identifying how the dynamics of patriarchy and hetero-patriarchy differ within API communities and how LGBTQ APIs are affected;
- Analyzing intra and inter-API LGBTQ intersectional identities that includes listing how people in different API communities self-identify around gender and sexuality in culturally specific ways;
- Identifying different types, trends and vulnerabilities affecting LGBTQ Asians, Middle Easterners, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and consider building out an LGBTQ Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence;
- Identifying traumas affecting LGBTQ API survivors – and how homophobia and transphobia within API communities contribute to the root causes of GBV;
- Providing more culturally informed healing spaces, survivor centered spaces, and intergenerational spaces and be mindful of traumas survivors have experienced;
- Analyzing transformative justice to deepen understanding of how someone can be a survivor and someone who inflicts harm; and
- Learning from the issues and needs affecting LGBTQ communities and organizations addressing GBV in Asia to understand the complexities of movement solidarity.

The above discussions converged around building a spiral of harm and a spiral of resilience and healing – a double helix to depict our communities moving from a spiral to a whirlwind, thereby framing a new Whirlwind Model.

## [4] Building a Changed World

*Beliefs and ideology are like a compass. Even if we get lost, we will still find each other because we still have the same end goals.*

We want a world where...

- We heal, show up, and are accepted and valued as whole selves with all our identities
- People feel connected, healthy and celebrated
- All LGBTQ people are loved, accepted, and treated with dignity
- Our rich, distinct and diverse identities are not used as barriers but to uplift, connect and support the whole of humanity
- Kids are joyous, present in themselves, laughing, and families are based on love
- We shouldn't have to say that "family" means love and acceptance
- We are all involved in the healing, repair and restoration of our world and planet and Mother earth is surviving and thriving as we coexist
- The concept of gender is removed
- Education systems reflect the cultural, gender and sexual orientation of our API LGBTQ young people
- We live life without worrying and towards fulfillment brought by love, change, compassion, transformation
- Accountability is celebrated and people are excited to engage
- Gender democracy/equality is the norm instead of gender violence
- Economic and political shifts move permanently towards liberation and peace within all our bodies
- People are free from all forms of violence and relationships of power are replaced by relationships of meaning

## [5] Ways the Institute can Address Gender-Based Violence in API LGBTQ Communities

1. Resources
  - a. Develop analyses around identities, gender-based violence and structural oppressions as discussed in Analysis section (above).
  - b. Develop fact sheets (where possible, disaggregated) on domestic violence, family violence, sexual violence in API LGBTQ communities.

2. Convenings
  - a. Convene LGBTQ API advocates and organizers in pan-API or ethnic-specific groups, in local, regional or national conferences/roundtables
  - b. Invite more youth; create balance of attending to the history of older generation and emergence of rising generation.
  - c. Include APIs from feminist and from queer organizations to educate and interest them in GBV work.
  - d. Maintain a core group to deepen connections and strategize
3. Strategies / Organizing
  - a. Energize cross-movement building to bring together advocates and organizers addressing API, LGBTQ and GBV issues.
  - b. Build capacity of advocates to address GBV and trauma affecting LGBTQ APIs.
  - c. Support leadership development within API LGBTQ communities, networks, and service programs.

Chic Dabby authored this report based on notes taken by her and Shirley Luo. Special thanks to Nathan Naik Shara for his review and comments for the final draft. Grace Poore reviewed and edited the write-up of her presentation on *Organizing in Asia*: <http://www.api-gbv.org/resources/Poore-Asia-Rpt/>

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Advocates from API Chaya, Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse Project, Freedom, Inc., Hmong Queer Suab / California Hmong Advocates Network, Jahajee Sisters, LYRIC (Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center) / Center for LGBTQ Youth, National LGBTQ Institute on IPV / Northwest Network of Bi Trans Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse, New Mexico Asian Family Center, Shaping Change: Social Justice Therapy and Consulting, South Asian Network, Trans and Non-Binary Educators Network: Teachers for Social Justice, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and long-time activists advocating for Filipina and Hawaiian communities (not representing their professional affiliations) attended. Regrettably, advocates from Asian Women's Shelter and NQAPIA/National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance were among others that were unable to attend.

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