The Rainbow Recast

Queering Karen non-profits on the Thai-Burmese border

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Presented to
Professor Suzanne Sicchia and Professor Paul Kingston

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# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOGIE</td>
<td>Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iNGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPAR</td>
<td>Feminist Participatory Action Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILGA</td>
<td>International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDAHOT</td>
<td>International Day Against Homophobia &amp; Transphobia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSM</td>
<td>Males who have sex with males</td>
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# Glossary

**SOGIE minority** – a person whose gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation does not adhere to hegemonic norms. Includes but is not limited to people who identify as LGBT.

**SOGIE majority** – a person whose SOGIE aligns with hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality.

**Cisgender** – a person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Karen** – The Karen people are an ethnic group living in South-East Asia. The Karen people are culturally and linguistically diverse. While most Karen people are S’gaw Karen, there are other Karen cultural and language groups such as Pwo Karen and Bwe Karen. About seven million Karen people live in Burma (Myanmar), another half a million Thai-Karen whose ancestral villages are in Thailand live in Thailand, and smaller groups of Karen live in India and other South-East Asian countries (“About the Karen People,” n.d.).

**Naw** – a S’gaw Karen language female honorific used before a person’s name.

**Saw** – a S’gaw Karen language male honorific used before a person’s name.

**Burma/Myanmar** – A country in Southeast Asia, bordering Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. While the official name for the country changed in 1989 from Burma to Myanmar, many of those in exile continue to refer to it as Burma for political reasons, those this practice is quickly fading. Nevertheless, the language and the demonym is often “Burmese”, for convenience.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Two years ago, I was given a task for my Research Design for Development Fieldwork course – to write a research proposal. Searching for a niche of the interdisciplinary field of development studies that I could call my own for the next two years, I realized that despite professing to be interested in poverty and oppression globally, our program offered no comment on sexual oppression and its relevance to development, except marginally by including MSM in analyses of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Since I find human sexuality and its oppression fascinating – I believed I had found a topic that could sustain me through the gruelling process of my first major research project, as well as contribute to existing literature.

Apprehension soon engulfed my eureka moment. I feared that sexuality would be a contentious topic to raise with my co-op employer in Thailand and other residents. Alternatively, what if my intellectual pursuit does not align with the needs and interests of my potential participants? My critical training made me vigilant against imposing my own values, interests, and concerns on my research participants.

Serendipitously, in my first month in Thailand, I met Saw D, a young Karen man who identifies as gay and happened to work for a Karen community-based organization. Since he revealed his sexual orientation to me, I decided to trust him and see what he thought of my preliminary research interests. Much to my delight, he affirmed that my research would be an important step in bridging the gap in understanding between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Karen and straight, cisgender Karen, and was hopeful it could lead to positive outcomes for LGBT Karen working in non-profits on the border that are dominated by ethnically Karen employees.

In addition to Saw D’s personal interest and investment in the results of my research, I also observed positive developments at the CBO level, which provided an entry-point for my research. During a networking event for human rights defenders in the region, one of the members of my Karen CBO was asked by a representative of a United Nations agency whether our organization has received any reports regarding the state of LGBT rights in our areas of operation. Stumped, this Karen CBO worker brought the question back to the organization, prompting a group discussion on the topic. The organization discussed the reasons they do not receive information on anti-LGBT human rights abuses, as well as the feasibility and reasoning for trying to include LGBT in their
work more explicitly. Having had the privilege of attending this discussion and observing first hand the willingness of the Karen CBO staff to, at the very least, discuss this issue, I became convinced that my research will not only be reasonable but also timely. It is likely that inquiries concerning LGBT issues from foreign donors and key players in the international human rights scene will only become more prevalent. I hope my research can intercept those donors who may be hoping to introduce a generic requirement for grassroots non-profits to demonstrate the ways in which their work is inclusive of LGBT beneficiaries, and problematize and challenge the assumption that a blanket framework of inclusion across countries and cultural contexts is an effective strategy. Instead, I hope to illuminate the ways in which effective inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) could take place within the grassroots non-profit sphere, specifically in the development sector on the Thai-Burmese border.

1.1. Aim of this thesis

The overall objective of this study is to investigate and challenge the understandings and attitudes towards homosexuality, bisexuality and gender non-conformity among Karen non-profit staff along the Thai-Myanmar border, as well as their implications for the sense of safety, acceptance, and inclusion of Karen SOGIE minorities within these organizations.

I begin this exploration by establishing Karen non-profit staff’s understandings of SOGIE and their corresponding attitudes towards people who are SOGIE minorities. I proceed by portraying the experiences of SOGIE minorities within these non-profit organizations, as they pertain to their experience of inclusion/exclusion based on SOGIE. Synthesizing the above findings, I consider the challenges SOGIE minorities in Karen non-profits face in attempting to introduce changes in organizational policy and practice to facilitate greater SOGIE minority inclusion, as well as potential avenues for overcoming these challenges. The breakdown of my objectives in this thesis can be seen below in Table 1.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Research Objective</th>
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<th>Associated Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish and compare the understandings and attitudes towards homosexuality,</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>What are the understandings and attitudes towards homosexuality, bisexuality and gender non-conformity held by SOGIE majority Karen non-profit staff, compared to SOGIE minority Karen non-profit staff?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and attitudes towards homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender non-conformity</td>
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<td>among SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority Karen working for Karen non-profits.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Document and analyze the experiences of acceptance and/or exclusion of SOGIE</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>How have Karen SOGIE minorities negotiated their intersectional identity within Karen non-profit spaces?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>minority Karen non-profit staff within their respective organizations, as they</td>
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<td></td>
<td>relate to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>How do Karen SOGIE minorities describe the experience of inclusion and acceptance and/or exclusion and oppression within their respective organizations?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.3 What are the factors affecting the inclusion of SOGIE minority Karen staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>within Karen Non-profits?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Explore the obstacles and motivation for Karen non-profits to change policy and</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>What are the intra-organizational obstacles and motivation for articulating a SOGIE minority-positive internal policy within Karen non-profits?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>practices to increase inclusion of Karen SOGIE minorities.</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>How can Karen non-profits’ policies and practices be re-imagined in a way that is inclusive of SOGIE minority Karen and appropriate for their needs while being palatable for SOGIE majority Karen staff?</td>
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Table 1.1 Research Objectives and Associated Questions
1.2. Background

1.2.1. Sociopolitical context of the project

The primary research for this thesis was conducted in Mae Sot, Thailand, on the border between Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). Due to the civil conflicts and poor living conditions in Myanmar, Myanmar citizens of various ethnicities continue to migrate to Thailand in search of refuge, education, healthcare and/or work, often coming to reside in the small city of Mae Sot or refugee camps nearby. Because of the large refugee and undocumented migrant population, Mae Sot has experienced a proliferation of non-profit organizations of various sizes who provide services for these populations, as well as advocate human rights issues on the border and within Myanmar. Since Mae Sot borders Karen State in Myanmar, ethnic Karen from Myanmar and Thailand staff and lead many of these non-profits. They work with Karen communities both in the refugee camps along the border, in Mae Sot, and in Karen State. Karen-led organizations are often affiliated with, or collaborate with, the Karen National Union (KNU) and various Karen ethnic armed groups who operate along the border, whether out of necessity or out of shared ideals of Karen self-determination within the boundaries of the greater Karen State as envisioned by Saw Ba U Gyi (Harriden, 2002).

Although these non-profits are located on Thai land, many operate outside of the purview of the Thai state because they are unable or unwilling to register as formal non-governmental organizations. While granting these organizations some freedom from government control and surveillance, these non-profits inevitably depend on foreign donors, primarily from Western countries and multilateral organizations. Thus, they often must navigate the demands of donors with those of their constituent communities. From my position within a grassroots Karen-led non-profit, I

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1 This is due in part to restrictions on NGO registration in Thailand, which specify an NGO must be working on social issues that benefit the people of Thailand. Hence, many Myanmar-focused NGOs are unable to fulfill that requirement. In addition, some of these NGOs prefer the freedom associated with being unregulated by the Thai government, which has been known to crack down on civil society during (the frequent) coups.
observed that one such tension between Karen staff and foreign donors is the topic of LGBT rights. While Karen staff unanimously agreed that LGBT people should be protected from human rights violations, they expressed that they feel inexperienced and hesitate to raise those issues in more traditional Karen communities that have not immersed themselves in international human rights. My interest stems from this tension between the priorities of Karen-led organizations and the international human rights trends that pressure these organizations to consider LGBT/SOGIE minorities in their work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Why sexuality, gender non-conformity, and development-sector workplaces?

The tension between global North priorities and global South non-profit priorities is an issue that has been at the centre of critical development studies for quite some time; however, the introduction of “LGBT” and SOGIE into development policy and practice did not originate in the priorities of development funding agencies. The push for the inclusion of “LGBT” as an explicit category for non-discrimination under international human rights has come from a “global” movement for LGBT rights, founded in the United States and Europe. As a result, ongoing development and human rights projects in the global South use these Western-centric understandings of sexuality and gender identity in their policies and practice. Such practice leaves out individuals and groups in the global South who may not subscribe to Western labels and understandings but who nevertheless experience oppression and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014; Majeedullah, Wied, & Mills, 2016). While the recent penetration of LGBT rights discourse into the mainstream development practice has resulted in attempts to include LGBT people as beneficiaries of development programming, the inclusion of LGBT people within non-profit organizations has been neglected as an area for change-making, with the exception of large development funding agencies (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014). Non-profit organizations that may wish to become more inclusive of SOGIE diversity, may find the available recommendations primarily in human resources journals which presume a for-profit, hierarchical and large organization as their audience, as well as a Western socio-legal context.

To further situate my research within the available literature I will now consider the ways in which development policy and practice has been affecting its gendered and sexual subjects, as well as recent progress in the field of sexuality and development. I will then continue to consider in
further detail the literature from LGBT advocacy and human rights scholars, as well as Queer scholars as it pertains to the fight for “global” LGBT rights. I will then consider how this global movement for LGBT rights translates into the lives of SOGIE minorities in Myanmar. Finally, I will delve into the human resources literature on LGBT inclusion within traditional for-profit workplaces and the limitations of these studies and their recommendations.

2.2. Gender and sexuality in international development policy and practice

Within development practice, the standard for integrating gender equity since approximately 1997 has been the Mainstreaming Gender Equality (MGE) paradigm (Report of the economic and social council for 1997, 1997). MGE has been implemented at all levels of the development industry, from multilateral development agencies to grassroots community-based organizations (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). The framework, however, has been criticized for its application through an apolitical, ahistorical, decontextualized and technical approach, and without any accountability system in place (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). The shortfalls of the approach do not end there, however, as its core conceptualization of gender, gender roles, and (implicitly) sexuality, entrench the development industry’s institutionalized heterosexuality, i.e. heteronormativity.

Lind and Share (2003) illustrate that heterosexuality has prevailed in development practice, since it excludes LGBT people from any analysis, and so assumes that everyone is heterosexual, marriage is a given, and everyone fits neatly into traditional gender roles. Consequently, development organizations that should promote social justice nevertheless perpetuate the oppression of lesbians, transgender people and others whose gender and/or sexuality do not conform to societal norms. For example, some development organizations only offer their resources to heteronormative households. Since families of LGBT people often banish them, they come to live in communities of sexual dissidents. Unable to access the services of development organization, they must then rely on the informal economy (Drucker, 2009).

Scholars who challenge the heteronormativity of the development industry are still few and far between, and their scope of investigation remains narrow, although this type of research has been trending since 2011 when several Western leaders and the United Nations have called for human rights for “LGBT” (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014) and especially since the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (Mills, 2015). Previous studies which looked at the intersection of LGBT issues and the international development “industry” focused primarily on the
inclusion of LGBT people at the multilateral development agency level, as well as considered LGBT people of developing countries exclusively as beneficiaries of development, rather than as agents of development and human rights advocates at the civil society and community-level in spheres beyond LGBT-specific activism (Armas, 2006; Bergenfield & Miller, 2014; Cornwall & Jolly, 2009; Drucker, 2009; Harcourt, 2009; Jolly, 2011; Lind, 2009; Lind & Share, 2003; Mills, 2015; Shah, 2012). The only exception is the study by Mizzi (2013), which considers the ‘heteroprofessionalism’ of the development industry, however, this is done from the perspective of a foreign gay aid worker in an iNGO.

I could not find any research regarding local LGBT employees of small non-profit organizations. The available literature by Bergenfield and Miller (2014), however, point exactly to this lacuna. Their analysis of LGBT-specific policies at the international development agency level concludes that most agencies do not have LGBT non-discrimination policies which extend to implementing partners, and that the area of NGO policy is “one of the most important dimensions of change”. Baines (2010) provides a poignant example of the importance of NGO policy and practice in relation to LGBT inclusion. The event she recounts occurred when she was a gender consultant for a North-South development partnership. Northern team members suggested including LGBT participants in the program, but the Southern team did not think this was a priority. Their dismissal of the issue made some LGBT Northern team members suspicious, as they worried Southern team members could be homophobic. This event also pointed to the seeming trade-off between the project’s commitment to anti-colonial development partnerships and promotion of LGBT rights and development. Bergenfield and Miller also allude to this dilemma by highlighting the ways in which Western threats for aid conditionality based on LGBT non-discrimination had resulted in a backlash from both anti-LGBT actors in aid-recipient countries, but also significantly from LGBT activists in those countries who protested the lack of consultation and the perils of aid conditionality (2014).

I suggest that the importance of “LGBT” policy at the NGO level is important not only because participants in development programs primarily interact with NGOs, rather than agencies (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014), but also because NGOs are a promising sector for inclusive employment for SOGIE minorities in aid-recipient countries, despite Baines’ vignette above, as they are generally explicitly committed to human rights and diversity, at least in principle. Hence it is
timely to explore whether SOGIE minority employees indeed experience the non-profit sector as an inclusive work environment, and in what ways can non-profits be more inclusive.

This need to ‘queer’ development, as Lind and Share (2003) call for, as well as Jolly (2011) and Drucker (2009), must not end with the integration of global LGBT activism with ‘mainstream’ development and human rights work, but must be cognizant of other simultaneous and interlocking forms of oppression, as per the framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw (1991), is a framework that addresses the ways in which multiple social categories intersect at the micro-level and reflect macro systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012). In the context of gender and sexuality in development and human rights advocacy, intersectionality calls for representing queer identities in any location within their historical articulations (and, if applicable, their colonial repression) and current political climate, as well as considering the ways in which ethnic/racial identity and class intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE), particularly among minority groups that are marginalized.

This study explores the shortfall in the integration of SOGIE into development work via the case study of Karen-led non-profit organizations, drawing on the (intersectional) lived experience of Karen SOGIE minorities within them. My research focuses not on the question of how best to deliver services and/or scout out LGBT people for inclusion in development/human rights projects; but rather on the ways in which civil society and NGOs can create spaces that explicitly welcome SOGIE minorities as employees. Moreover, I aim to establish strategies for inclusion that do not necessitate a “coming out” process to gain access to equitable treatment, and strategies which do not rely on SOGIE minority individuals conceptualizing their gender and sexuality through a Western “identity politics” lens and identifying with prescribed labels (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014).

As scholars and activists continue to push for development that includes sexual minorities in its programming under the new framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (Mills, 2015), it is likely that grassroots non-profit organizations will also be pressured to be inclusive of SOGIE to satisfy (global North) donor demands (Bergenfield & Miller, 2014). Indeed, non-profits as organizations do not operate in a gender-neutral and de-sexualized vacuum, but are “sexualized and reproduce particular sets of sexual relations and sexual orders” (Hearn and Parkin, 1995, as cited in Baines, 2010, p. 135). Thus, my study aims to examine the extent to which SOGIE minority employees feel included within the non-profit sector on the Thai-Burmese border and the current
challenges and opportunities for greater inclusion, beginning with the under-studied population of ethnic Karen non-profit staff in one aid-recipient locale.

Development donor policy, however, is shaped in part by the global LGBT rights movement, which advocates to the UN and promotes LGBT concerns globally. I will now examine the available literature by and about this global LGBT movement to determine how closely the development policy described in this section corresponds to the discourse and advocacy used by the LGBT movement itself.

2.3. “Global” LGBT rights activism and critiques of the ‘global gay’

While an exhaustive history of the global LGBT rights movement is beyond the scope of this review, it can be glimpsed through its oldest and still active non-profit proponent, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). Established in the UK in 1978 as International Lesbian and Gay Association, the ILGA originally promoted equality and liberation regardless of sexual orientation, later adding gender identity and sex characteristics to its advocacy mandate. The framing of “equality” and “liberation”, common in UK and US early gay movements, aimed at the root of sexual oppression. Internationally, however, the movement did not begin to gain traction until the human rights turn in the LGBT advocacy discourse in the early 1990s (Kollman & Waites, 2009).

Latching on to the framework of international human rights, LGBT activists were able to promote their agenda to the UN and other multilateral bodies committed to human rights, such as the Commonwealth of Nations (Waites, 2016a). Although narrower in focus than a framing of “equality” or “liberation”, the human rights approach was undeniably successful in adding LGBT issues into the global human rights and development agenda. As the previous section noted, however, the resulting top-down programming also caused significant backlash from aid-recipient countries, as well as LGBT advocates in those countries who found the agenda of these large Western-based LGBT organizations to be insensitive and incompatible with their own priorities (Waites, 2016b). This is particularly so with regards to the new breed of transnational LGBT NGOs founded in the UK in 2011, which, unlike previously-established LGBT networks, emerged from UK political elite circles and human rights commissioners and were thus unaffiliated with the LGBT organizations that preceded them (Waites, 2016b). Their approaches to LGBT rights promotion was thus regressive in
their focus on LGBT as a single issue, rather than through an intersectional approach, in their lack of Southern leadership, their prioritization of legal reform regardless of priorities in each locale, and their lack of engagement with cultural and religious traditions (Waites, 2016b). Moreover, the focus on enshrining individuals’ rights into law disregards the ability of the presumed right-bearers – sexual and gender minorities who may be poor, uneducated, and disenfranchised – to claim these rights in practice, thus leading to a sense of disempowerment and lack of ownership of these rights (Kollman & Waites, 2009). The leadership of the new wave of UK LGBT NGOs continues to leave these problems untackled.

The leaders of these new UK-based organizations were not the only political elites to appropriate the LGBTI cause. While connected to circles of influence in which they can affect meaningful change, Western politicians’ use of the LGBTI cause to stigmatize global South countries and even justify military intervention in places such as Iran has contributed to a legitimate association of LGBT rights with Western imperialism among some global South governments and citizens (Kollman & Waites, 2009). Aware of these unfavourable developments, the ILGA appears (according to their constitution) to promote the mobilization of their resources by their members according to their own priorities and their countries’ socio-political conditions (“Constitution of ILGA,” 2014). Thus, there is not one homogenous “global LGBT rights movement” but rather various organizations of different roots and priorities.

While these differences in discourse and practices between international LGBT organizations are discussed in the literature, what is missing is an analysis of the dominant discourses that percolate to the grassroots level and the ways in which small non-profits in global South loci interpret this movement, its objectives, and its relevance to their work. My research would begin to provide this missing link by examining the way non-profit staff in human rights organization that are not primarily working on LGBT issues understand the relevance of LGBT rights to human rights work on the Thai-Burmese border, and their willingness to incorporate LGBT issues into their organizational practices. Thus, my research is inherently and intentionally intersectional, accounting for the importance of Karen ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and education level as proxy for class in the resulting analysis.

The need to contextualize queer identities historically and intersectionally is not a new proposal. In the last decade or so, Queer scholars began writing about manifestations of same-sex
attraction and gender non-conformity globally (Biruk, 2014; Boellstorff, 2005; Boulden, 2009; El-Tayeb, 2012; Engebretsen, 2008; Heinz, Gu, Inuzuka, & Zender, 2002; Masequesmay, 2003; Oswin, 2010; Rahman, 2010 - to name a few) – generally falling into one of two groups: The first group emphasizes the indigenous and the local, particularly where local-language terms for queer identities exist – such as Kathoey in Thailand – scholars are willing to grant the label a local history (Jackson, 2001) which is generally said to precede the global LGBT rights movement and to continue to exist. The second group looks at queer identities around the world and sees the rise of a “global gay” – a cosmopolitan gay (man, usually) who is presumed to mean the same thing when calling himself “gay” in English, as an American gay man would (Altman, 1997; Jackson, 2001). In reality, people around the world who adopt the English terms “gay” and “lesbian” could be using them to describe their own substantially different realities (Altman, 1997; Jackson, 2001). Not paying attention to the particularities of these different realities, Coloma (2013) warns, could lead even Queer of Colour scholars to inadvertently engage in an imperializing project, if they remain trapped in a global North logic and imaginary yet try to assert themselves as applicable to all racialized and sexual minority Others globally.

Not only is the “Western” term “gay”– as a label for a sexual orientation unbound by a particular gender identity and expression – inapplicable to various non-West context, it is also often an imperfect fit in the West itself (Oswin, 2006). As Altman aptly points out, “Most homosexual encounters, both in the West and elsewhere, take place between people who don’t identify themselves as gay or lesbians and certainly do not affiliate themselves with a community”. This means that advocacy and programming that is smothered in “LGBT” discourse can only hope to benefit those who identify with such labels. Such an approach is not only a disservice to others of non-normative sexuality and/or gender identity, but also those who experience discrimination based on their gender expression despite being heterosexual and cisgender. While the ILGA, for one, acknowledges the need to advocate for all people experiencing discrimination regardless of their identity labels (“Constitution of ILGA,” 2014), its programing and focus continues to be around LGBT people, likely due to states, law and policy makers’ need for identifiable categories to combat discrimination (Kollman & Waites, 2009). Thus, the LGBT movement’s mobilization of human rights is in fact restricting it from addressing the broader oppression of sexuality and gender expression, namely heteronormativity.
In my intentional inclusion of gender expression in my analysis, and my seeking out of SOGIE minority participants regardless of the label (or lack thereof) with which they identify, I hope to highlight the experiences of oppression and discrimination among a group of people who are at once broadly familiar with LGBT rights discourse from their education and work experience, yet simultaneously do not subscribe to these labels and apply them to describe culturally-specific forms of queerness in their community.

Moreover, in including both SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority participants from the same community, I qualitatively compare the understandings of SOGIE between the two groups, which has only been done quantitively thus far. Available literature either hones in on “local” queer identities and their internal categorization (e.g. Gilbert, 2013), public opinion surveys regarding attitudes towards LGBT (Carroll & Robotham, 2016), or policy level discourse. My project aimed to synthesize the three perspectives in one location, specifically to examine how the “global” LGBT discourse combines with Karen experiences on the Thai-Burmese border and the Myanmar LGBT rights movement to produce plural understandings of gender and sexuality. To better understand the manifestation of the “global” LGBT movement in my specific research local, I will now review the available information of LGBT rights in Myanmar, the national context most relevant to the participants in my study (see section 1.2.1).

2.4. LGBT Rights in Myanmar and in Karen communities

LGBT people in Myanmar and their human rights movements are increasingly becoming the subject of scholarly and non-profit research activities. Non-profit research is originating in Myanmar-based and international LGBT rights organizations such as Colors Rainbow (under Equality Myanmar) and Kaleidoscope Australia (Colors Rainbow, 2015, Kaleidoscope Australia, 2015). Their research focuses on documenting human rights violations against LGBT people in Myanmar, with a skew in focus towards male-at-birth GBT people, namely the most visible and accessible group under the LGBT umbrella. This research is being used primarily to advocate at the Universal Period Review process for Myanmar, as well as to pressure the Myanmar government to amend laws which discriminate against LGBT and allow police forces to discriminate against them, often resulting in physical and sexual abuse. While this work is no doubt crucial for the advancement of human rights for sexual and gender minorities in Myanmar, the scope of all this research remains
within major urban centres such as Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar, and for the most part within the Bamar ethnic majority. Despite the International Organization for Migration reporting that as of 2014, 70% of Myanmar’s population resided in rural areas (“Myanmar,” 2015), there has not been any research on anti-LGBT human rights violations in rural areas of Myanmar or the border region with Thailand, as well as no research focusing on the multiply oppressed group of Karen SOGIE minorities. In addition, this type of research focuses on victims of government-condoned SOGIE-based discrimination, and not on individual interactions between SOGIE minority and majority citizens, or human rights advocates who are SOGIE majority.

In terms of academic research, prior to 2013 Burmese SOGIE minority research has been ethnographic in nature, depicting primarily the nat kadaw (transgender spirit mediums) (Keeler, 2016). Studies of Burmese SOGIE minorities in the context of human rights advocacy has only been available since 2013 with the pioneering research by Singaporean scholar Lynette Chua and Australian scholar David Gilbert (Chua, 2015, 2016; Chua & Gilbert, 2015; Gilbert, 2013). These studies focus on the use of vernacular (Chua, 2015, 2016) among the SOGIE minority community in Myanmar (mostly in Yangon) to identify and categorize themselves and others under the SOGIE minority/LGBT umbrella² (Gilbert, 2013), as well as to recruit other SOGIE minority Burmese to the SOGIE human rights advocacy (Chua, 2015, 2016) or HIV/AIDS awareness initiatives (Gilbert, 2013) in which the primary research participants were often involved.

These studies also discuss the persecution of sexual and gender minorities as stemming in part from a belief in Theravada Buddhist culture that feminine-presenting homosexual men (i.e. Apwint or “opens”) are a result of transgressions in a past life such as adultery or desiring monks (Chua & Gilbert, 2015). In addition, Burmese Buddhists believe “biological” males possess a spiritual power known as hpoun, which posits them as structurally superior to women. Thus, males who choose to present in feminine ways, and traditionally act as the receptive sexual partners in their same-sex relationships, are seen as reducing their hpoun and are thus less worthy of respect (Chua & Gilbert, 2015). This Buddhist belief is reinforced by the colonial legal remnant that is Section 377 of the Penal Code in Myanmar, which still criminalizes “sex against the order of nature”, and enables local police to intimidate and violate LGBT people (Chua & Gilbert, 2015).

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² Gilbert points out his participants use the term “LGBT” as an identity label itself, while simultaneously employing Burmese-language sub-categories for specific “queer” identities and expressions.
Missing from these studies is an examination of the processes of identity formation among those SOGIE minorities who are not already active members of LGBT communities and who do not ‘look’ like a SOGIE minority. Additionally, while Chua (2016) speaks of the intra-movement contestations of priorities and direction for the LGBT advocacy movement, none of the research speaks to whether and how the Burmese non-LGBT population is perceiving the terminology and messaging that LGBT advocacy organizations in Myanmar are attempting to disseminate, nor their general evolving understandings of SOGIE, aside from blanket cultural understandings stemming from Buddhism. The focus on Buddhist understanding is a limitation since although the majority religion in Myanmar remains Buddhism, not all citizens subscribe to it, with an estimated 15% of the ethnic Karen community practicing Christianity (Moonieinda, 2011). While this estimate alone does not constitute a significant omission from the literature, in the context of non-profits on the Thai-Burmese border, Christian Karen people predominate⁢ and therefore the available literature is insufficient to understand the various opinions and beliefs they may hold regarding gender and sexuality.

According to the Karen Cultural and Social Support Foundation (previously Karen Buddhist Dhamma Dhutta Foundation), which does make an attempt to describe beliefs among Christian Karen, Karen people say that there is no homosexuality among them, but they concede that there are men who are born “with the heart of a woman” or vice versa, and it is only natural for those people to love someone of the same biological sex as them. Because it is believed that deep inside they are not the gender they appear to be, such relationships are considered heterosexual (Moonieinda, 2011). Despite these moderately tolerant beliefs, Karen people who have grown up in Burman-majority areas which are known to be highly homophobic are likely to be much more homophobic themselves, compared to Karen people from Karen- or other-majority areas (Moonieinda, 2011). This scant information available on Karen understandings of homosexuality lacks nuance as it projects this set of opinions on the whole Karen population. It is not comprehensive as it only highlights the traditional views of non-LGBT Karen within the Karen State and refugee camps on the Thai-Burmese border (Win, 2013).

The Government of Myanmar estimates that about 4.25 million, or about 8.25% of its citizens are living abroad, with 70% of those residing in Thailand (“Myanmar,” 2015). No record is

⁢This is evidenced by 8 out of my 9 participants being Christian, despite working in different organizations and religion not being part of the selection criteria.
available for the proportion of Myanmar expatriates who are ethnic Karen migrants and refugees. Karen State’s border with Thailand, however, is very accessible for Karen people wishing to cross over into Thailand. Since the Karen National Union controls some of the border, Karen people can often cross even if they do not have proper documentation to be in Thailand. This state of affairs offers a unique opportunity to investigate the ways in which Karen from (rural) Myanmar who migrate to urban areas along the Thai-Burmese border differ in their understandings and attitudes towards SOGIE minorities from the traditional views ascribed to them. To further disaggregate what constitutes “Karen attitudes” towards SOGIE minorities, and indeed to challenge the cultural essentialism implied by the term “Karen attitudes” itself, my research compares and contrasts the views of my SOGIE majority Karen participants and those of SOGIE minority Karen. In addition, examining potential exclusion of sexual and gender minorities in the Karen-led non-profit sector along the border provides a unique political context in which neither the Myanmar nor Thai laws carry much weight in terms of employment discrimination, as many of these organizations operate under the radar, and allows for a consideration of inclusion practices that are not contingent on state-level legislation and its enforcement, but are bottom-up. To understand non-profit inclusion practices, I will now review the literature available on LGBT inclusion within the workplace. While this literature focuses on the for-profit sector in developed (mostly Western) countries, it is nonetheless relevant as it allows for a deeper understanding of the “best practices” in LGBT inclusion according to human resources specialists, and the limitations that may prohibit or discourage non-profits in global south countries like Thailand from emulating or drawing inspiration from them.

2.5. LGBT inclusion in the workplace

Research on LGBT inclusion in the workplace is almost exclusively focused on the private sector, primarily in North America and the UK (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Buddel, 2011; McDermott, 2006), with the exception of a study on LGBT employees in Turkey (Ozturk, 2011) and in social cooperatives in Italy (Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014) and the Community Business Limited report on LGBT inclusion in the workplace in India (Banerji, Burns, Vernon, & others, 2012). This predominant focus restricts understandings of LGBT inclusion to organizations which are primarily driven by profit, have hierarchical
management structures, tend to be large in size with professional human resource managers (Brooks & Edwards, 2009), and that are located primarily in the global north.

The human resources scholarship has been conceptualizing LGBT inclusion in terms of building organizational climates that are welcoming to “out” LGBT employees, and that demonstrate to LGBT employees that they may be safely “out”. The motivations cited for companies to work towards such climates include increased productivity and creativity through LGBT inclusion, where LGBT employees who feel welcome are more likely to make innovative contributions. Thus diversity and inclusion are subservient to branding and profit-making (Buddel, 2011).

Even in research that considers sexual discrimination from an international perspective (Badgett & Frank, 2007), the exclusion of the non-profit sector limits understandings of inclusion of LGBT in the workplace. For instance, when looking into company policies that extend benefits to LGBT families, Badgett & Frank (2007) argue that such companies are likely to reduce their employee turnover rate, as LGBT employees feel secure and respected and develop loyalty towards their employer. However, in grassroots organizations that are not-for-profit, employees are generally already committed to their organizations and believe in the work they do (Non-profit HR solutions, 2013, Opportunity Knocks, 2012). Despite this high level of employee commitment, turnover in non-profits is often perpetually high (“Results Are In,” 2016) as employees must take better-paid options in other organization to support their growing families. This is because the non-profit sector is less inclined to promote internally, making pay raises scarcer within the same organization. Thus, there is a need for sector-specific research to better identify which rationales are most effective in encouraging non-profits to work towards LGBT inclusion.

In terms of mechanisms that could facilitate greater LGBT inclusion in the workplace, existing research speaks of the importance of a workplace policy which includes LGBT (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005), as well as the creation of “employee voice mechanisms”, such as diversity councils (Bell et al., 2011) or LGBT employee networks, and even mandatory training for all employees (Buddel, 2011). As Priola et al. (2014) aptly point out, many of these suggestions are only attainable in large organizations and may not be possible in organizations that lack human resources expertise and a critical mass of LGBT employees who could have a collective voice, as is the case with grassroots development organizations. In addition, it is not only LGBT employees who can experience SOGIE-based discrimination or inhospitable climate in the workplace.
Another prospect for LGBT inclusion identified by Brooks and Edwards is that allies in the workplace were motivated to support LGBT inclusion and equity based on their own family’s positive attitudes and a social context in which they had stumbled upon LGBT friends and co-workers (2009). Given that SOGIE minorities are much more “underground” and invisible in many development contexts, such a motivation would be lacking. Future research should establish what obstacles stand in the way of SOGIE minority inclusion, as well as which motivation(s) may be effective in generating commitment among SOGIE majorities in the global south to work towards SOGIE minority inclusion in their workplaces and broader communities.

While some research (Bell et al., 2011) points out that a workplace in which the culture enables “gay jokes” and similar behavior is overall harmful to all employees’ morale, regardless of sexual orientation, there is no emphasis in research on individuals who are at the receiving end of comments regarding their sexuality or gender expression yet do not subscribe to an LGBT category, despite such further research being called for (Buddel, 2011). Gender discrimination and policing and LGBT discrimination are hence not addressed in a single intersectional study, as gender and sexual orientation are conceptualized as separate matters, with the notable exception of Pringle (2008), who specifically calls for the reframing of the discourse of gender in the workplace as “heterogender”, unmasking the implied normative heterosexuality that permeates the construction and operation of gender in the workplace.

Considering the scope of the above research, my own project offers new insight into the ways in which LGBT (SOGIE minority) exclusion/inclusion operates at a grassroots non-profit workplace, considering both the views of SOGI minority employees and SOGI majority employees and allowing for greater focus on the ways the heteronormative workplace (negatively) impacts some heterosexual employees. Moreover, my project’s Participatory Action Research approach allows for the examination of the possibilities for organizational change-making in-vivo, which is important considering the previously observed difficulty in identifying whether progressive intentions from managers and employees translate into concrete action (Priola et al., 2014).
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1. Conceptually situating variance in sexuality and gender

When referring to sexual and gender minorities, the term LGBT dominates Western activist circles and scholarship, as well as international human rights circles. I, however, choose to limit my use of it in this thesis for several reasons. First, while all my interlocutors were familiar with the term LGBT and initiated the use of it in conversations with me, I soon realized that some of them did not actually know the specific labels the acronym stands for or were only actively referring to the individual labels of “lesbian” and “gay”. This corresponds to the use of LGBT in Burma/Myanmar among the “LGBT” community itself, where the term is used without specificity, meaning that one may identify as “LGBT” rather than a specific label under the umbrella (Gilbert, 2013). Moreover, the term LGBT is predicated on the idea that sexual orientation and gender identity are separate aspects of identity, requiring separate labels under the umbrella of LGBT; however, this does not correspond to interlocutor understandings of the phenomena of sexuality and gender, where “lesbian” and “gay” serve both as a sexuality and a gender category (see Section 5.1.2). To privilege the subjugated knowledge of Karen interlocutors in this regard, and to avoid conflating Western understandings of LGBT and the indigenized version of the same terms, I restrict my use of “LGBT”, “lesbian” and “gay” to the instances in which interlocutors used these terms, unless speaking about literature and communities in Western countries, or international LGBT human rights advocacy.

In addition, I choose to use the terminology of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE). Specifically, I use sexual orientation to refer to “each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender” (“Preambule – Yogyakartaprinciples.org,” n.d.); and the term gender identity and expression to refer to “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms” (“Preambule –

4 The term LGBT and its various expanded forms such as LGBTQIA+ were originally coined as an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual
Yogyakartaprinciples.org,” n.d.). Given this definition, I choose to refer to gender non-conforming and/or homosexual/bisexual individuals as “SOGIE minorities” and individuals who conform to hegemonic categories of both gender and sexuality as “SOGIE majority”.

These definitions are taken from the Yogyakarta principles on the application of International Human Rights Law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, and have been increasingly used within emerging discourse on gender and sexuality within international development (Mills, 2015) as well as within scholarship on sexual and gender identities in Asia (Jackson, 2001; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Sanders, 2015) and in Myanmar specifically (Chua & Gilbert, 2015). In addition to their rising popularity, the explicit inclusion of “gender expression” in this definition encompasses those whose gendered behaviour and appearance do not conform to societal norms but who do not identify with a label under LGBT or consider themselves a minority, despite experiencing substantial bullying or micro-aggressions related to their gender expression.

3.2. Gender policing within the heteronormative workplace

This study aims to determine the factors affecting inclusion based on SOGIE and the ways in which inclusion/exclusion manifests itself in the Karen non-profit space. I operationalize workplace inclusion according to Bell et al.: “The ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization; a sense of belonging, respect, and being valued” (2011, p. 135). Inclusion can be gauged through an organizational “culture of inclusion” (Priola et al., 2014) in which the “different voices of a diverse workforce are respected and heard” (Pless and Maak, 2004, p. 131, as cited in Priola et al., 2014) I ground this definition of inclusion in an intersectional sensibility (Crenshaw, 1991) that takes into account the ways in which individuals’ multiple and mutually-constitutive social locations, specifically sexuality, gender identity and expression, and ethnicity interact with macro-level systems of oppression to create specific experiences of exclusion in the workplace among SOGIE minority Karen staff.

In its ontological orientation, this study stems from an understanding that society – and by extension most workplaces – is patriarchal and characterized by hegemonic heterosexuality, i.e. heteronormativity. This creates a hierarchy whereby heterosexual cisgender masculinities are privileged and normative, and others are cast as subordinate and deviant (Hopkins & Noble, 2009). The ways in which masculine subjects embody hegemonic heterosexual-masculine traits and
behaviours are understood to be specific to the sociocultural context in which they are positioned (Hopkins & Noble, 2009).

In circumstances where a deviant subject’s sexuality is not explicit or visible, as is mostly the case in Karen employee interactions with each other and in workplaces in general (Pringle, 2008), the ways in which normative heterosexuality is enforced is through acts of gender policing (Butler, 1999), which can take place in the form of microaggressions. Payne & Smith define gender policing as, “the social process of enforcing cultural expectations for ‘normal’ masculine and feminine expression. Various levels of aggression—from microaggressions to overt verbal harassment to physical violence—are targeted at individuals whose masculinity or femininity is perceived to violate cultural standards” (2016, p. 129). Gender policing is fundamentally commensurable with enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, since the ways in which gender differences are socially constructed inherently assume heterosexually (Pringle, 2008), and thus the hegemonic meaning of gender can more accurately be framed as ‘heterogender’ (Pringle, 2008).

I use the concept of gender policing to investigate the degree to which the Karen non-profit workplace is a heteronormative space and discover the ways policing of gender manifests during staff interactions. Likewise, from the perspective of those at the receiving end of acts of gender policing, I interrogate their subsequent workplace navigation strategies and “practices of survival” (McDermott, 2006). I also seek out instances of microaffirmations: acts which affirm rather than police non-normative gender or sexuality, thus uncovering avenues for liberation from heteronormativity itself.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Positionality

My positionality as a “global North” researcher seeking to generate knowledge on/in a “global South” context was a concern for me, as I am of the critical development studies school of thought, which recognizes that knowledge that an outsider creates about a population can often be exploitative, and create representations of the research participants that are orientalist, victimising or simply skewed by the researcher’s own social location (Scheyvens, 2014). In addition, such research has historically been used to administer populations and subject them to control by foreign actors (Scheyvens, 2014). In this case, the same could be said of the way international donors have been enforcing frameworks and regulations on non-profits based on knowledge and theory generated about them by consultants and development scholars (Baines, 2010). Hence, it was important for me to encourage my research participants to suggest courses of action and their desires for the outcomes of this research, rather than exclusively surmising actionable recommendations myself.

More specifically to my research topic, I am a cisgender woman and express my gender heteronormatively. This positioned me uniquely with my research participants, as my Karen SOGIE majority participants assumed I was heterosexual, whereas I could relate to and gain the trust of my Karen SOGIE minority participants as an invisible SOGIE minority. This dual and flexible positionality allowed me to cast myself as (partially) an insider with both of my participant subsets, while of course keeping in mind our intersectional identities and the power dynamics therein.

4.2. Development of research approach

To collect the information required to satisfy my research objectives above, I employed a qualitative approach combining the Participatory Action Research and critical ethnography traditions, as informed and inspired by Freire’s scholarship on the creation of a critical consciousness via the means of dialogue (1970). I collected data through the following methods:

1) Semi-structured ethnographic interviews and dialectic\(^5\) with both SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority Karen non-profit staff.

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\(^5\) Dialectic refers to the recursive, reflective exchange of ideas between the researcher and the participants (Averill, 2002)
2) Feminist Participatory Action Research workshop with the staff of a Karen non-profit, aimed at exploring understandings of gender and sexual orientation, engaging with narratives of Karen SOGIE minorities, and gauging the willingness of the participating organization to act to make their workplace more inclusive of SOGIE minorities.

3) Participant observation within a Karen non-profit focusing on attitudes towards LGBT and SOGIE minorities.

4.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

To satisfy both objective (1) and (2) of my research, namely to inquire into the understandings of sexuality and gender diversity among Karen non-profit staff and to document their experiences of exclusion and/or inclusion within the Karen non-profit space, as they relate to their SOGIE, I chose to rely on semi-structured interviews. This data collection method allowed me to create a private and safe space for each of my participants that allowed for a candid and free-flowing conversation. Although I created an interview schedule and questions (see Appendix A), I prioritized following up on any new relevant avenues of conversation that came up during the interview. I also asked my participants to comment on statements other interviewees made, or that I had heard during my participant observation, because I wanted to know if these statements were idiosyncratic opinions or whether my participants thought them to be dominant beliefs in the Karen community. While the small sample of participants is not conducive to making sweeping claims about the Karen community and the real opinions of its members, I thought it important to draw on participants’ perceptions of their own community and its beliefs in order to understand the sort of social expectations and pressures Karen SOGIE minorities (and the majority) may experience within the Karen community.

4.2.1.1. Choice of participants

Seeing as my research set out to establish, and collaboratively challenge, perceptions of homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender non-conformity among Karen civil society organizations, as well as the lived experiences and obstacles to acceptance of SOGIE minority Karen, it was important for me to engage both SOGIE minority Karen people who work or have worked in the past for Karen organizations, as well as SOGIE majority (cisgender, heterosexual) Karen staff within said organizations. Engaging both of these subsets was crucial to determine the extent of current
exclusion/inclusion of SOGIE minority Karen within Karen non-profits and to engage in humanizing dialogue with both “oppressor” and “oppressed” (Freire, 1970) regarding possibilities for a more inclusive and anti-oppressive environment and approach to their work.

Given the limited visibility and access to the SOGIE minority Karen community, the study sample in this research was an exploratory sample (Denscombe, 2014), meant to generate new insights and empirical data in an under-researched population, and attract further attention and study. For my interview participants, this sample was selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Denscombe, 2014). The sampling was purposive initially, in approaching individuals from a variety of Karen non-profits, as well as in purposefully selecting individuals from different categories under the LGBT/SOGIE minority umbrella to try to not privilege more dominant or visible groups. However, some convenience sampling was used given my limited resources, which resulted in a majority of participants being selected from one Karen non-profit with which I was affiliated.

I asked my first participants to help recruit other potential participants, without “outing” them to me. To protect the privacy and safety of potential SOGIE minority participants, I asked that potential participants contact me or express interest to past participants, rather than have me contact them. All participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Self-identify and are identified by the Karen community as Karen
2. Are employed/regularly volunteer at a non-profit organization that has multiple ethnically Karen employees and works on human rights-related issues in Karen (Kayan) State, Myanmar, or refugee Karen issues in Thailand and/or the diaspora, and/or human rights in Myanmar as a whole.
3. Are 18 years of age or older
4. Speak sufficient English to participate in an interview without a translator
5. Feel safe to participate in the project, and do not believe that participation in the project will result in loss of employment, physical and emotional violence, or other severe and detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

To satisfy SOGI minority (“LGBT”) quota:
6. Describe their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression as diverging from strict heterosexuality and/or traditional gender norms and expectations, or are viewed by their community to be doing so.

Through this method, my final sample size for interviews came down to 3 SOGIE minority Karen staff and 6 SOGIE majority Karen staff (see Table 4.1 below). This sample size is in line with similar research at the undergraduate level (Tarrant, 2011).

Table 4.1 Breakdown of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>SOGIE</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Recording method</th>
<th>Length (hr:min:sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Saw A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>In person (audio)</td>
<td>1:35:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Saw B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>In person (audio)</td>
<td>0:33:56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Saw C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>In person (audio)</td>
<td>0:39:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saw D</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>Skype (audio)</td>
<td>1:11:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Naw A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>In person (audio)</td>
<td>1:12:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Naw B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Org. B</td>
<td>Skype (audio)</td>
<td>0:56:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Naw C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. C</td>
<td>In person (notes only)</td>
<td>~1:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Naw D</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Org. D</td>
<td>In person (audio)</td>
<td>0:48:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Saw E</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Org. C</td>
<td>In person (notes only)</td>
<td>~1:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5 M</td>
<td>6 Maj.</td>
<td>5 Org A.</td>
<td>5 In person (audio)</td>
<td>~9 hrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2. Participatory Action Research Workshop

I decided to conduct a workshop as part of my data collection specifically to fulfill objective (3) of my research, namely to gauge the willingness and motivation within a Karen non-profit to introduce a policy or take any other action to become more welcoming and inclusive of SOGIE minorities. Although during my interviews I had asked participants (some of which were later present at the workshop) what they think their co-workers and organization will think about
introducing a new policy, I thought it valuable to observe such decision-making processes in person, rather than rely on hypothetical responses.

In addition, guided by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I wished to create a space for dialogue and collaboration in which the “oppressor” - SOGIE majority Karen can engage in a “humanizing” participatory educational activity, which I hoped would generate more empathy towards SOGIE minority Karen as well as provided a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. This goal was guided by Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) sensibilities, which call for participant-driven knowledge creation, as well as for research that is action-oriented towards anti-oppressive change (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). I satisfied this objective by first conducting an activity in which the participants brainstormed their associations with their stated gender categories: “male” and “female”, and later challenged each other regarding the associations their peers wrote down.

Following this, I asked where individuals who were assigned a certain gender at birth but do not identify with it would fall in the Venn diagram we had previously created. This then led to a discussion of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, for which I used the “Genderbread person” diagram (See Figure 7 in Appendix B).

Having completed the conceptual groundwork, I proceeded to allow participants to engage with anonymous case-studies I had prepared by drawing from my interviews with Karen SOGIE minorities. I encouraged participants to write down responses to the testimonies they were reading and note what they agree with, what they find surprising, etc. I kept these materials for analysis.

Eleven Karen staff participants from one Karen non-profit organization attended my FPAR workshop, but only 6 participants stayed until the end, the other five returned to their work duties. There were also 2 other foreign staff members present, whom I asked to help document the workshop by taking photos of the materials as they were being created.

I am not aware of any participants who identify as a SOGIE minority and did not ask them to disclose their SOGIE to me to ensure their safety and privacy. The atmosphere was light and humorous during the gender brainstorming activity but became serious following the engagement with the real-life case studies. While all remaining participants remained on task and read through their assigned case study, I had forgotten to number the pages of case studies and so, unfortunately,
the lack of organization and the fact that my workshop was running late at that point resulted in a rushed experience for participants and they did not write extensive comments. Nevertheless, following the workshop, I sent out an anonymous online feedback form and received positive responses, with one constructive comment about my lack of organization. This form and the outline of the workshop that I followed can be found in Appendix B.

4.2.3. Participant observation

I conducted my participant observation in the same Karen organization as the FPAR workshop, allowing me to easily observe staff behaviour before and after the workshop. The main challenge in my participant observation was that although all staff spoke English fluently, they often communicated among themselves in either S’gaw Karen or Burmese, which I could not understand. Hence, I had to rely on my ability to pick up keywords related to SOGIE and immediately ask the speaker or someone beside me what was said. Since staff often used English-language terms for SOGIE/LGBT categories, and I had learned the Burmese and Karen words that are commonly used for these categories as well, I believe I was able to catch the majority of ethnographic moments related to SOGIE that took place in my presence, despite the language barrier, although doubtlessly my descriptions of these moments lack thickness (Ponterotto, 2006), which was lost due to the need for a casual translator.

4.3. Data analysis procedures

I recorded all my interviews (except the two who asked not to be recorded) using my laptop microphone and the free software Audacity. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim, including pauses, false starts, laughing and other minute sounds.

Verbatim translation was chosen to enhance the rigour of the study, and supplemented with field notes on tone and context (Poland, 1995). I personally transcribed all interviews using VLC media player, replaying to ensure accuracy and noting all pauses and false starts.

During and after transcription, I wrote memos in a notebook, as well as in the form of “comments” in the .doc file, and I employed topic coding, in-vivo coding, as well as analytic coding.

To analyze the interview transcripts conducted by participants, I used a discourse analysis approach to decipher the meaning of participants’ narratives as they relate to the historical, political

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6See Appendix E. Karen and Burmese SOGIE minority labels, pg. E-11
and, socio-economic and cultural context of their lives (Denscombe, 2014), using what Daley & MacDonnell (2011) term “critical discourse analysis using a gender-based diversity framework”. This framework is an adaptation of the traditional discourse analysis which strives to expose how power is exercised through language (Denscombe, 2014), in that it emphasizes, in particular, the power dynamic between different genders and their intersection with processes of racialization. This method is particularly appropriate for an intersectional study of this kind, which concerns itself with ethnicity and SOGIE.

4.3.1. Member-checking

Member checking is the continuous process in which a researcher presents their developing transcripts, case studies, analyses, and/or developing theories to their research participant(s) in order to solicit the participant(s)’ reactions, clarifications, and verification. Member checking is used in qualitative not only to ensure rigour, but:

“Thorough member checking, including respondent review of field notes, working hypotheses, and case study drafts, means that the researcher is accountable to those sharing their words, lives, and experiences. As such, member checking is more than assuring that the researcher “got it right.” It is about representing those lives, including the contradictory perspectives, in all their complexity. Member checking is part of the collaborative process of negotiated outcomes that assures that the themes emerging throughout the study arise from the respondents.” (Manning, 1997)

I conducted member-checking of one of my SOGIE minority transcripts and subsequent edited case-studies. This member reviewed and approved his case study, adding clarifications into his direct quotations to reduce ambiguity.

4.4. Limitations

Due to the nature of work in the non-profit sector, all Karen staff were well-educated compared to the general Karen community, and had a strong command of English. However, I noticed that the staff who were most eager to interview with me were those with higher levels of education, several of whom have taken undergraduate-level courses on gender and felt particularly comfortable speaking about these issues. This became especially apparent when I approached a female Karen non-profit staff member who only had a high school level education from one of the refugee camps along the border and she replied she has no idea about the topic and is not confident enough to interview with me. This is a limitation of the study, as it skews my descriptions of SOGIE Karen non-profit staff in favour of those who have had more “western” education and more human
rights training. Despite this, I believe in this exploratory work, it is valuable to examine the coherence of these most educated Karen staff’s narratives, and the extent to which they practice what they preach in their daily conduct.

Another limitation of the study is that two out of the three SOGIE minority interviews were via Skype call. The inability to establish the sort of rapport one can in person, as well as the delay in audio transmission and need to repeat questions also interrupted the flow of the interview and made for a less conducive environment for my participants to share in-depth narratives. This was particularly the case for one of these participants whom I had not met in person prior to our interview, and who did not enable the video option for the call. Nevertheless, the conversation was amicable and warm, and these participants exhibited trust in me, sharing with me their personal stories of SOGIE Karen identity formation.
Chapter 5: Understandings of SOGIE

5.1. The commensurability of SOGIE

Early on in my research process, it became clear that it is almost impossible to isolate participants’ comments on sexual orientation from those on gender identity/expression, as the two phenomena were so closely associated in their accounts that they were often used interchangeably. Gender identity and expression, however, was salient and explicitly discussed, whereas sexual orientation was either implied, or assumed to be a by-product of a person’s gender identity and expression.

The first indication of this was the common response from SOGIE majority interviewees to the following question: “Why do you think some people are attracted to the same gender as their own?” with statements that explain a desire to be a different gender, i.e. explanations for transgender identity rather than a homosexual one. Although SOGIE majority interlocutors did not use the term transgender spontaneously, they were familiar with it when I introduced it into the dialogue. They did not, however, incorporate it as a significant concept in their accounts when speaking about gender non-conforming individuals. Instead, all participants preferred the terms gay and lesbian, which many contrasted with “real men” and “real women” (or “Natural man”, a phrase a male Karen non-profit employee inscribed onto his soccer jersey, as seen in Figure 2).

To understand these dichotomies, I first discuss the normative gender categories of “male” and “female”, drawing on materials produced during a participatory workshop conducted with 11 Karen SOGIE majority non-profit staff, as well as on individual interviews. I then address the ways SOGIE majority interlocutors label and understand gender non-conforming behavior, including homosexuality. Subsequently, I consider how SOGIE minority Karen relate to the categories of gender/sexual difference available to them, and the disjunction between their lived experience and these categories.
5.1.1. Attributes of the (heteronormative) male and female

To establish and collectively question binary and hegemonic understandings of gender among my Karen non-profit staff interlocutors, I held a participatory workshop focusing on issues of gender and sexuality. During the workshop, I presented a blank Venn diagram to the group of 11 Karen non-profit staff who attended and asked them how they would like to label this diagram if it were to be a diagram of gender. The participants decided unanimously on “female” and “male”. Next, I split the room into two mix-gender groups and asked one group to brainstorm the different attributes of the “male” gender category and the other group to brainstorm “female” attributes, including but not limited to: appearance, kinds of work they do, personality traits, abilities. The groups then added their attributes to the Venn diagram on sticky notes and presented their traits. For each trait, the other team could contest the attribute and the two groups then discussed whether the attribute belongs in the intersection of the Venn, meaning that both females and males share it. The results of this workshop, before and after the discussion, are presented below in Figure 3.
Figure 3 Participant-produced diagram of gendered association. Pre-discussion and post-discussion distribution from top to bottom.
As can be seen in the figure, although each group worked independently initially and was not asked to contrast the attributes of their assigned gender with the other gender, they wrote many of the male attributes in direct contrast with female attributes, e.g. “can’t get pregnant”, “taller than women”, and even “better than women”. The latter attribute was likely written to purposefully stir controversy – which it did. Even after a heated debate, and protest from female participants, “better than women” remained in the male section of the Venn. This corresponds with pervasive ideas about masculinity in Myanmar, which partially stem from Buddhist beliefs (see Section 5.4) but have permeated into the Karen Christian community. Men are better than women, culturally, not for some great feat of personal character, but from the very moment they were born male. “Males have more power than females. Males are good and males are better than females, so like having… getting a chance, getting opportunity to be a male is really great,” said Saw A, describing the opinions of some members of his community.

If participants understand gender identities as inherently comparative and tend to position one as implicitly “superior”, this helps to understand why later interlocutors juxtapose the gender attributes of non-conforming people with those of the “real woman” and “real man” as conceptualized above.

The Venn diagram also reveals that participants see the male and female gender categories as fundamentally tied to appearance and secondary sex characteristics. As seen in Figure 3, although participants agreed to move some cognitive attributes, such as being smart and creative, and some jobs, such as “President” and “Taxi driver”, into the intersecting space in the diagram, all the traits that have to do with outward appearance and mannerism, such as “look”, “appearance”, “expression”, “make up” and “different clothing” were left in their original gendered spots, along with the biological secondary sex characteristics.

Unmentioned in the diagram, but implicit in the workshop discussion and all SOGIE majority interviews, is that to be a proper (“real”) male or female, one must have a heterosexual life-trajectory. As Naw B stated of the community expectations: “Men have to marry women; women have to marry men.” This hegemonic heterosexual gender (heterogender) binary is crucial for understanding the behaviours and appearances which subsequently constitute gender deviance.
5.1.2. “Lesbian” and “gay” as gender categories

In all my interviews, interlocutors chose to use the terms “gay” and “lesbian” when asked about people who are attracted to their own gender; Unsurprising, given their high English proficiency and familiarity with international human rights framework. They also, however, used the terms “gay” and “lesbian” when speaking of people who “wish to be a different gender”. “If you are born with, let’s say, you got born with lesbian, you are a female, you dress like [a]7 male, the sign will show since you were a kid,” said Naw A. This was common in interviews, where the definitions of “gay” and “lesbian” were primarily about the person’s gender identity and expression, with sexual orientation being either unspoken, implied, or secondary to the definition.

Saw A also described lesbians in the Karen community as females who, “try to be like male” by adopting masculine appearance and behaviour. He said this resulted in males being friendlier with lesbians than gays, because, “For gay, he’s, even though he’s physically […] a man, his mind is gay,” noting that heterosexual cisgender men have more in common with lesbians than with gay men when it comes to their gender identity/expression, making it easier for them to socialize amicably. 8

Saw A and other interlocutors who made similar statements were not always presuming these people’s gender identity and sexual orientation based on appearance. In some cases, the SOGIE majority interlocutor had spoken to the “lesbian” or “gay” person in question and established that they were striving to be recognized as a different gender. For instance, after Naw D stated that she believes gays and lesbians were born in a way that makes them desire to dress and act like the opposite sex, I inquired whether she thinks this is an indication of them truly being or identifying as the opposite gender, or just being interested in appearing more feminine/masculine, respectively. She replied, “[F]or me, I understand they [“lesbians”] want to be a man.. but they said openly to me… my body is a woman, but I want to be a man.”

In contrast, other interlocutors said that they tend to assume a person’s gender-non-conforming appearance indicates not only a queer gender identity, but also a homosexual orientation:

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7 In all quotes, “[…]” indicates redacted text, all of which was either redundant, a false start, a series of “um”s etc. Where I made a significant redaction, I provided a link to the raw transcript in the appendix. Ellipses without square brackets “…” indicate a short pause in speech or trailing off of the previous word, and [2 sec] indicates a longer pause with the approximate number of seconds. Text between double slashes “//” indicates that the interviewee and I spoke at the same time. Text within (round brackets) indicates the word was difficult to make out in the recording. Any other words within [square brackets] I added to clarify sounds such as laughter, or to clarify meaning such as when it was not clear from an excerpt who a certain pronoun refers to.

8 See Appendix D, SawA.r61
I: So, if you see a man... or someone you think was, you know, born a man [...] and dresses and acts like a woman – [...] Do you automatically assume that he also... he’s attracted to men? That he is gay?

Saw C: Mhm

I: Is it the same thing for you?

Saw C: Um... I will say... 70% yes. Yeah.

I: Yeah. And you- people just assume, then?

Saw C: Yeah, assume that... And like let’s say, if I... don’t like [...] identify myself as [a] woman, why would I use women’s shirt or you know, women’s material.9

The inverse assumption, that same-sex attraction is indicative of identification with the opposite gender, was also prevalent, and could be gauged particularly in the way interlocutors responded to my following question:

I: So my first... question is... How do you, as a Karen person, think about sexual attraction? Like the reason why people are attracted to a different gender, or some people are attracted to the same gender as them? What are your thoughts on it? Why are some people like that?

Saw B: [3 sec] Uh... I think uh... [3 sec] it’s the like uh... [2 sec] [tsks] [5 sec] there’s some, some people it’s natural for them. Because they’re born to that. Yeah I have seen that some people they’re born... as their gender, but they act like a different gender.

Such a response was very common, and caused me to question the range of possibilities within my interlocutors’ understandings of SOGIE. I was interested in establishing whether my interlocutors think a “deviant” sexual orientation can ever be decoupled from a corresponding gender non-conforming appearance. As it turned out, while most people conceded it is within the realm of possibility that a person can be cisgender and have a gender-conforming appearance, yet be attracted to the same sex, such a hypothetical individual was often dismissed as rare, or only existing outside of the Karen community. As Saw C clarified when I questioned him about an earlier remark that, “some people, [are] like.. gay, but they’re just like men.:

I: Okay, [...] you said some gays are very manly

Saw C: Mhm

I: So they’re not like a woman.

Saw C: Some gay are really manly, but not-not in Karen State.

9 See Appendix D, SawC.r60
This relegation of certain SOGIE minority identities to Western countries alone and refusal to expand the narrative of what “queerness” can look like among Karen people presents Karen SOGIE minorities with challenges when striving to be recognized and understood by their SOGIE majority peers. Saw D, a cisgender gay Karen man, expressed frustration at the false conclusions his peers jump to when he attempts to explain his sexual orientation to them, even though he specifically avoids the Burmese or English terms for “gay” and opts to pre-emptively elaborate:

Saw D: [W]hat I say to [...] my close friends- is that uh... I’m a guy who likes other guys. Uh... a boy who likes other boys. [laughs] Uh... Like that kind of thing. And uh... Always have to expand, because... They think that.. when I say that, they would.. Their reaction would be, "Oh, are you gonna start dream- dressing or putting make up on, or lipstick on?" I always have to have additional explanation of “Oh it doesn’t mean that I want a transgender, I’m just... You know, a boy who likes boys, so I will be like this, you know? Um.. So [...] understanding myself is easy, but... Um... explaining [to] other people who I am is quite difficult [...]¹⁰

Not only does Saw D find it difficult to explain his SOGIE to Karen SOGIE majority people whose understandings of SOGIE do not match his embodied reality, he also reported experiencing peer-pressure from his Karen or Burmese SOGIE minority peers. Specifically, his male-at-birth friends who were openly gay, complete with a public enactment of femininity, labelled him using the Burmese word for a closeted gay, Apone – a man whose spirit is truly female, but who hides his identity under an enactment of masculinity (even if engaging in relationships with other males). Saw D was at the time still exploring his own SOGIE, and expressed that he did not appreciate the implication that his gender expression was an attempt to hide his inner gender identity out of fear:

Saw D: When I was addressed like that I did not like it... Because I’m still finding who I am, right? So... You’re accusing [pressuring] that person to be out for.. by force–makes me feel uncomfortable. And, you know, you’re not comfortable with your own skin, but somebody is already telling you that you’re a gay, so... [...] I didn’t like that.

Thus, it is not only SOGIE majority people who uphold this narrow set of categories of minority SOGIE which they see as genuine and “legible”, but also those SOGIE minority people who do fit into those categories and who, due to their visibility, are able to define what it means to be

¹⁰ See Appendix D, SawD.r52
a queer Karen person. This restriction on the ways in which aspects of SOGIE may coexist and be expressed is compounded by the corresponding Karen and Burmese terminology for SOGIE minorities, which stems from this understanding that certain gender expressions correspond to and imply a certain sexual orientation.

5.1.3. Karen and Burmese SOGIE terminology

Due to Saw D’s and Naw B’s challenges in categorizing and articulating their SOGIE to other Karen and Burmese people, I decided to document the words others use to describe SOGIE minorities in Karen and Burmese, their definitions, as well as their connotations – specifically whether a term is derogatory or neutral. Most of the native Karen and Burmese terminology for SOGIE minorities presented in Table 5.1 was contested between participants. One the one hand, certain interlocutors were simply not familiar with certain Burmese or Karen words and so could not help me to triangulate their definition and connotation. On the other hand, there were quite a few disagreements as to whether a certain word is derogatory or not. For instance, the word Apwint, which literally translates from Burmese as “open”, denotes a male-at-birth who is attracted to masculine men and presents as very feminine or “as a woman”. Their inner spirit or gender identity is understood to be that of a woman. As I did not interview anyone who identifies with that term, nor that could be said by others to fit that label, I am left to rely on Gilbert (2013) to acknowledge that there are people, at least in Yangon where he conducts his ethnographic research, who use Apwint as an identity label for themselves and others. Being labelled as Apwint by others, however – while considered superior to being closeted or a “hider” (Apone) in the Burmese SOGIE minority “hierarchy” (Gilbert, 2013), may still be offensive or simply frustrating if applied to a person who does not feel that it fits them, such as Saw D, who does not feel that he has a female spirit, even though he is attracted to men and has “softer” mannerisms than prescribed by hegemonic masculinity.

I initially documented all the terminology above to determine whether any words could be considered exclusively derogatory and hence should be avoided, particularly in work environments that wish to be accommodating and inclusive of SOGIE minorities. However, I quickly realized that not only are the meanings of these words contested, but their derogatory nature is contextual and depends on the labelled individuals’ understanding of their own SOGIE, their preferences, and even the nature of the relationship between the one using the label and the one being labelled. Both
SOGIE minority and majority interlocutors indicated that they are less likely to be hurt by a word that could be interpreted as derogatory if the speaker is a close friend.

As it turned out, the word *Achouk* was used to make fun of and pressure not only SOGIE minority males, but also SOGIE majority men (more on such policing of gender expression in Section 6.3). This is reminiscent of the ways in which the word “gay” in North America can be used to bully both homosexual and heterosexual men who act in a slightly gender non-conforming way, while at the same time can be used as neutral and even proud identity label. In the absence of a Karen LGBT/SOGIE minority community that would collectively reclaim the term *Achouk* or any of the other Burmese and Karen terms, I cannot infer what the most SOGIE-minority-positive and empowering terminology is. What is evident, however, and has been reiterated by all interlocutors, is that there are simply not enough terms available, especially in Karen, to speak precisely about SOGIE. Naw D recommended that the language should be developed or terms borrowed from English more widely disseminated and understood: “Because we don’t have a specific study, and to develop our language. [...] So we categorize everything in it, wearing or not wearing, attracted to men, we call one word.”

This sentiment, that there is only “one word” in Karen and Burmese was repeated by many of the informants, despite those words being different between them, as can be seen from the plethora of terms in Table 5.1 Interlocutor definitions of Karen and Burmese SOGIE minority labels. What all these words have in common, however, is that they can be applied indiscriminately to both sexual orientation minorities and gender minorities, whether they coexist within the SOGIE minority person to whom they are applied or not:

*Saw D:* [I]t may not fit for the gays, I don’t know. There’s only one word for Karen. So [...] for Karen if you like guys then your heart is... Your heart must be a girl [laughs].
*I:* Do you think that lack of terminology in Karen is an obstacle for acceptance and understanding of LGBT Karen in the community?
*Saw D:* Yeah, I think so... [...] It’s not only in Karen community, but also in Burmese community, because the terminology for those... people is... not there. So... It’s hard to describe [1 sec] and make them understand.

This linguistic logic explains the commensurability of SOGIE that is evident when Karen and Burmese people speak about SOGIE minorities in English. Despite the limitations in
terminology, my interlocutors provided a rich and diverse set of narratives regarding the origins and the process of SOGIE formation.

5.2. Formation of the SOGIE minority subject

If my interlocutors agreed on anything regarding SOGIE formation, is that there is not one reason or process through which one becomes or is born homosexual/transgender. While most participants agreed that for some or all SOGI minorities, there is an innate component to their same-gender attraction and/or gender non-conformity, additional themes of childhood experiences and exposure, experimentation and choice, and circumstantial factors for being in a homosexual relationship emerged from an analysis of interviews.

5.2.1. “They’re just being who they are; they’re born with that.”

All interlocutors, except Saw C, acknowledged that for some SOGI minorities, the reason they have a certain sexual orientation or gender identity is that they were born with it. Saw A chose to articulate this in terms of his understanding of genes and hormones, which instruct a SOGI minority’s mind to behave as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth based on their biological sex:

*Saw A:* [...] *So [biologically male] people are attracted to their own gender because, like, because his genes are actually female genes.*

*I:* His own genes are female genes?

*Saw A:* Yeah, lots of female hormones.

*I:* And so [...] have you heard of bisexuality? Where people are attracted to people... their own gender and also can be attracted to a different gender? So... Is that also genetic, do you think? or how do you explain that?

*Saw A:* I think this also, like, gets some genetics that makes their minds describe liking both, or liking male or female - like this. It's because of their genetics.

Among study participants, this pseudo-scientific explanation was unique to Saw A, however, the notion that same-gender attraction is a result of innate transgender was commonly repeated. While side-stepping the “scientific” terminology of Saw A, other interlocutors echoed similar notions with expressions such as “born with it” or “born to it”. Although both SOGIE majority and SOGIE minority Karen subscribed to this view of innate SOGIE, both groups were unsure about the exact source or mechanism that determines SOGIE:
Despite the vagueness of the biological argument for SOGIE among interlocutors, several of the participants reiterated the general sense that SOGIE is an innate or uncontrollable occurrence. Naw D, for instance, drew on her embodied experience of her own SOGIE majority status and extended the same logic to SOGIE minorities. She explained that just as she cannot pretend that she does not like women’s dresses, LGBT people, specifically those who cross-dress, cannot be pretending to be the way they are:

Naw D: [...] Some people think that, “Oh this is just kidding, they [SOGIE minorities are] pretending... [2 sec] acting or something like this, some people think like that. For me, I think that gay or lesbian... it’s coming from naturally, since they were born."\(^{11}\)

Contrary to all other interlocutors, Saw C held strongly that non-conforming SOGIE is not natural and innate, but rather developed later in life through the various themes explored below. His understanding of SOGIE non-conformity as a choice did not, however, imply that a non-conforming SOGIE is illegitimate or should be prevented. In fact, he affirmed that people should be allowed and encouraged to live in the way that makes them happy. Moreover, while he was the only interlocutor who negated any innate component to SOGIE, other interlocutors echoed the themes below in addition to their belief that SOGIE is (somewhat) innate.

\(^{11}\) See Appendix D, NawD.r100-102
5.2.2. Childhood experiences as shaping lifelong SOGIE

Two of the interlocutors shared the understanding that early childhood experiences, such as treatment by parents and a disproportionate time spent with adults and peers of the opposite sex, can shape a child’s gender and sexual identity away from the hegemonic cisgender heterosexual one. Saw C explained his understanding of the development of sex-same attraction, focusing on male homosexuality:

*Saw C:* [S]ome people find men—*it’s like the same gender*—*is more attractive.* I think... mm.. [...] based [on] many things, like it could be... where they grew up, they grew up with, you know, with like many.. wom- like together with many women, and they’re only... not many girls, with a boy. And... [...] also... [3 sec] they find men attractive, it’s difficult. [2 sec]. [...] I: *So you think same-gender attraction is developed later in life? So through experiences in someone’s life?* Saw C: Um... yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

*I: So it’s not something you’re born with?*

*Saw C:* Mm... no. 12

It is not completely clear here whether Saw C meant to say that if a male child spends his formative years surrounded by many women, he may develop homosexual attraction, or whether he meant the opposite— that if a male boy spends his formative years with “not many girls” but rather “with a boy”, that he may begin to find men attractive. Nevertheless, what seems to be conclusive for Saw C, is that one way or another – a skewness in the proportion of people of a certain gender that a child spends his childhood years around is a strong basis for later homosexuality.

While Saw C did not apply this reasoning to transgender identities, he also concluded non-conforming gender identity “comes later” in life. Naw C shared this sentiment, explaining that her belief was always that kids grow up to be transgender because their parents treated them as the opposite gender in their childhood. She explained this could happen, for example, if the family was expecting a male baby but instead got a female baby and then decided to dress the child in boy clothes regardless. Lately, however, Naw C has been questioning her views since her own 7-year-old niece has been demanding to only dress in boy clothes, despite her parents never condoning such

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12 See Appendix D, *SawC.r12-18*
behavior. The niece has been refusing to wear dresses and prefers to sit next to the boys in class. Given this ongoing situation, Naw C expressed concern that “If she keeps going like this, she won’t be attracted to males”. This indicates that for Naw C, too, there is a direct connection between one’s gender expression and one’s sexual orientation, and it is one’s gender expression in their formative years that shapes their future sexual attraction.

5.2.3. “…Because it's their mind, they have the right to choose what they want to be, right?”

Paradoxically, the theme of choosing one’s SOGIE – or at least a SOGIE minority life trajectory – featured prominently in interviews, even among interlocutors who strongly felt SOGIE is innate. Contrary to many North American LGBT activists’ beliefs about the importance of framing SOGIE as innate and categorically not subject to an individual’s choice to promote LGBT acceptance (Malory, 2012), both SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority Karen did not seem to view one’s ability to choose how to conduct themselves when it comes to SOGIE as contrary to the idea that SOGIE minorities are naturally-occurring and should be accepted. Choice was articulated either in terms of one’s right to choose, implying a framework of individual human rights and freedoms, whereby one should be allowed to make whatever personal choices they want, or in terms of specifically a choice to be happy, which carried an empathetic emotional appeal, rather than a legal-political one.

The first notion of choice can be seen in Saw A’s almost automatic recitation when asked whether cross-dressing people, which he presumes to be transgender, should be accepted by the community: “Yeah, any kinds of... you know, males or females or gays or bla bla bla should be accepted. That's because it's their mind, they have the right to choose what they want to be, right?”

This understanding of the right to personal self-determination when it comes to SOGIE seems to echo Saw A’s work in his Karen non-profit, which takes place within the framework of international human rights, and comes without much pondering or hesitation.

Naw B demonstrated the notion of the right to choose even more clearly. “I don’t care [about] anyone. Because I know that I have a right. [1 sec] to be like this, to be crazy [laughs] or whatever I want to do,” said Naw B. While Naw B does not strongly identify with a label from within the LGBTQIA+ “alphabet soup”, she has had a bisexual life trajectory and has used the word
bisexual to cautiously describe herself. Naw B’s statement shows that she values her right to a whole slew of choices, whether or not others deem them to make her happiest, and it is important for her to not have this right impinged upon by anyone else or their opinions.

Naw B’s potential bisexuality also reveals the limits of this “right to choose”. When prompted to consider bisexuality, Naw A elaborated that within the Karen community, even if people are willing to accept a person living a homosexual life, their freedom or right to choose is restrained to being with either the same-gender or the opposite-sex, thus making bisexuality inconceivable and particularly deviant (potentially due to its connotation with promiscuity. See discussion of notions of sex and SOGIE in Section 5.4).

\[\text{Naw A: Yeah so true it's going to be unacceptable. [laughs] Like you, you have only one choice. Whether you're going to be gay or lesbian or you're going to be straight. Like, sexually active with opposite sex or same sex. You have only one choice, like you don't have a choice like to, you know, just like female and then like male at the same time.}\]

This restriction on bisexuality sheds light on Naw B’s choice to declare to her family that she intends not to marry anyone for as long as she lives. Naw B stated that her decision regarding marriage was not subject to her family allowing her to marry another woman, but rather a choice of independence and freedom:

\[\text{Naw B: If I get married, [...] I’m not free anymore, that’s why I just want to be alone. [laughs] [...] If you are... alone, every day is Independence Day.}\]

While several of the other interlocutors’ affirmations of SOGIE minorities’ rights to choose who they want to be, like the one by Saw A above, seem at first sight to be inclusive of all potential SOGIs, a closer examination suggests that for Karen SOGI minorities or those drawn to a SOGI minority life trajectory, the choice presented by even their most progressive community members is in fact between either:

(a) A state of perfect conformity to hegemonic sexual and gender identities, at the expense of their inner “true” deviant identity

(b) a specific and permanent state of deviance from hegemonic sexual and/or gender identity, as manifested by the claiming of a monosexual identity and/or the opposite gender identity from the one they were prescribed at birth.
This leaves bisexuality and gender fluidity out of consideration and as such implies bisexuality and gender fluidity are a state of having not yet made a choice.

The alternative framing of SOGIE choice within interlocutor narratives was more anchored in affect rather than legal or personal-political rights of the individual. The primary consideration in these sets of narratives was whether the choice a person makes is the one that makes them the happiest. This framing often implied that before making a “choice”, a SOGIE minority person experiments with the kind of life that they feel drawn to. Saw C voiced his understanding of transgender people’s choice of gender identity as a choice to be happy thus:

Saw C: [...] I think they like the choice; they can [be] happy, you know... Anyway that they’re happy. [2 sec] [It’s] not about, you know, “Oh you are a man, you should act like a man.” [...] I: So you’re saying, they’re just making this choice because they think they will be happier this way? Saw C: Yeah, they will be happier this way, and they, they like that way.

Other interlocutors affirmed that sexual orientation, as well as gender identity, is not only a choice that SOGI minorities “like” or prefer as the course of greater happiness, but in fact a choice that is hard to avoid once they are able to “try” living according to it, presumably since the happiness involved in choosing the life that they are so strongly drawn to is too great to give up.

In contrast, the notion of SOGIE as a choice to be happy can also leave room for encouraging SOGI minorities to explore their options and “try” a conformist lifestyle before “choosing” a non-conformist one. This framing of SOGIE formation becomes particularly attractive to SOGI majority Karen who are religious and may see one’s homosexual life trajectory as sinful. Naw C exemplifies this outlook most clearly, as she discusses the decision that is available to (specifically Christian) SOGIE minorities in terms of whether to pray to God to alleviate them of their deviant desires. She believes that if a SOGIE minority person chooses to stop their deviant behavior with the help of God, and after making this choice they are still happy – then “it is a good thing”. Thus, the choice of SOGIE for Naw C is not value-free or solely dependent on happiness, but places the desire of the Christian Karen to live according to God before the pursuit of happiness; It is not the greatest happiness that should be sought, but rather a Christian way of life that allows a given person to still be happy to a satisfactory degree. This emphasis on attempting to choose a conformist life can be

13 For further discussion of religious influences on Karen understandings of SOGIE see Section 5.4
seen in Saw D’s narrative of coming to terms with his own homosexuality, which involved a period in which he tried to like the opposite gender:

*Saw D:* [Y]ou try to like a different gender when you’re growing up in Karen community, because that’s the way it is for the majority people, so [...] I tried to like girls but, you know, knowing that um... you still like boys, but thinking that ‘okay, if I get married then it might change’... But I don’t... I’m glad that not... I didn’t have any girlfriends, so... [laughs].

For Saw D, the choice before him was between a life of pretending or a life aligned with his inner true sexual orientation. Thus the framing of SOGIE crystallization in an individual as a matter of choice, whether in terms of one’s right to self-determination or one’s inner drive to choose what makes them happy, presents both opportunities for greater empathy and acceptance of SOGIE minorities, as well as potential causes for questioning and pressuring SOGIE minorities about their “chosen” life or their perceived inability to make a “choice”, depending on the worldview and religiosity of the Karen SOGIE majority person in question.

5.2.4. Circumstantial homosexuality and the hetero/homo “agenda”

While in the previous section, the discussion of SOGIE as choice involved some consideration of the individual in question being drawn towards homosexuality and/or gender non-conformity in general, and having to decide whether or not to act on this pull, a separate theme among some interlocutors was concerned with the circumstances in which a choice of homosexuality was made, specifically in people who they claimed would not otherwise been drawn to a homosexual/bisexual life trajectory. This theme of circumstantial homosexuality is purporting to explain homosexual romantic and sexual behavior among gender conforming Karen individuals, whom Karen majority interlocutors portray as “real” women or men, meaning also heterosexual in nature. According to this explanation, some heterosexual Karen engage in homosexual behavior and relationships due to one or more of the following:

(a) Having their libido activated towards same-gender desire by a “true homosexual”.
(b) Financial considerations, when a “true homosexual” who is interested in them can provide a higher standard of living
(c) Being overwhelmed by a true homosexual’s loving devotion and thus unable to reject them
(d) Feeling pity for the “true homosexual” that is interested in them.
This theme became evident when SOGI majority interlocutors related their encounters with SOGI minority Karen and Burmese couples. A case in point is Saw E’s encounter with a male homosexual couple who arrived at his non-profit to receive treatment. During their visit, Saw E interacted with each man separately and learned how they came to cohabit and be sexually involved with one another.

As Saw E told it, the couple consisted of “a gay” and “a real man”. When questioned about what he meant by “real man”, Saw E explained that the second man was masculine in appearance and referred to himself as “100% man”, implying not only that he is a cisgender man, but also a heterosexual one. The “gay man” was once married to a woman, but got divorced when he realized he could only be attracted to men. He met his current “real man” partner when the latter was unemployed and without a place to live and the “gay” offered him a bed in his home. Saw E explained that when the “real man” slept in the “gay’s” house, the “gay” made a sexual advance on the “real man”, which caused him to develop a “sexual feeling”, meaning that his libido was activated, and the two men proceeded to have sex. When I then asked Saw E whether he thinks the men love each other, he replied that he thinks the “gay” likes his partner romantically, but his partner is only sexually driven.

This encounter highlights the financial and sexual circumstantial factors that presumably caused the “real man” to be in an ongoing homosexual relationship. While Saw E emphasized the carnal sexual benefits of this relationship as the primary reason for the “real man’s” initial and continuous involvement, the financially vulnerable circumstances under which the “real man” and the “gay” came to cohabit cannot be discounted from this narrative.

Indeed, in her narration of her female friend’s homosexual relationship, Naw C also emphasizes financial considerations as integral to her friend’s decision to remain in said relationship. Naw C said that her friend, a feminine woman, is a very religious Christian. According to Naw C, her friend is not a lesbian (possibly meaning she does not look like one), but she simply could not deny her lesbian suitor’s love. In addition to the loving devotion of her friend’s homosexual partner, the lesbian woman’s family was wealthy relative to the rest of the community and the lesbian woman often helped her partner financially, as they were both students at the time. Naw C mused later in the interview that perhaps her feminine friend also felt pity for her lesbian partner who seemed so helplessly in love with her.
Surely people of all genders and orientations may take economic factors into consideration when deciding to enter into a romantic relationship, or feel pressured by a suitor’s insistence, or feel pity for a suitor. The interlocutors who chose to explain a homosexual relationship along this line of reasoning, however, specifically did so to provide “evidence” that the feminine women and masculine men above were heterosexual and would have continued along a heterosexual life trajectory had one homosexual person not come into their lives under certain financial or emotional circumstances.

In such accounts, the feminine woman was said to eventually leave her lesbian partner and marry a man, or remain with a lesbian partner because a previous serious relationship with a man ended on bad terms and resulted in the feminine woman shying away from men. Although it is possible that these feminine women and masculine men would describe their own experiences in a similar way, I find it curious that SOGIE majority Karen specifically choose to presume such people to be heterosexual, rather than bisexual or homosexual, while feeling comfortable to presume feminine men and masculine women to be homosexual, at times without “evidence” in the form of their romantic and sexual behavior.

Given that in Saw E’s narration above he identifies the more feminine-presenting man in the homosexual couple as a “gay man”, despite him living out a bisexual life-trajecotry, but chooses to speak of his partner as a “real man” and assume that he has no same-gender-specific attraction despite his homosexual relationship, I am left to conclude that the circumstantial homosexuality argument is specifically linked to a gender-conforming gender expression, and is a manifestation of bisexual erasure.
5.3. Getting bi unnoticed: “I don’t really see that kind of gender”

Bisexuality can be understood in a plethora of ways, but I would like to define bisexuality as per Robyn Och’s definition of a self-proclaimed sexual orientation that indicates being attracted “romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree” (Ochs & Rowley, 2005). In addition, I would like to distinguish the sexual orientation, or bisexual identity, from a bisexual life-trajectory, which I use to indicate that a given person has engaged in romantic and/or sexual relationships with more than one gender, regardless of whether this person considers themselves bisexual, homosexual, or heterosexual.

Many of my SOGIE majority interlocutors encountered individuals throughout their lives who have had bisexual life-trajectories, as can be seen in Section 5.2.4 above. Except for Naw A, who had a Filipina friend that openly identified as bisexual, none of the other SOGIE majority interlocutors used the term bisexual to describe these individuals, nor did they use any other phrase that would indicate an attraction to two or more genders, “both genders”, or anything of the sort. Given that bisexuality presents a challenge to the notion that a non-conforming gender expression is indicative of or even a prerequisite for same-gender attraction (discussed in Section 5.1), I specifically questioned my interviewees about it. I asked whether they think some people may be attracted to both the same gender as well as the opposite gender, and if so, how my interlocutors make sense of it.

Responses regarding bisexuality among SOGIE majority Karen fell into one of three categories:

(a) A complete unfamiliarity with the term and the phenomenon of bisexuality
(b) An awareness that bisexual people exist, but they are unique to Western countries
(c) Awareness of bisexuality as a biologically-induced identity, much like homosexuality

Saw C’s answer demonstrated his ambivalence regarding the existence and prevalence of bisexuality, and that his only familiarity with the phenomenon comes from representation in film:
I: [H]ave you heard of... bisexuality? [2 sec] Where people can be attracted to [...] the same gender but also to [a] different gender? [...] Have you heard of that? Or have you seen //that//?

Saw C: Mhm. //Yeah//

I: You have?

Saw C: No, I think, I seen in the movie, or...

[...] I: Not in the Karen community?

Saw C: Not in the Karen community.

I: But do you think-

Saw C: //’Cause I don’t// know. Because [...] I don’t have... friend like that.

I: Mhm. Yeah. [1 sec] Do you think it exists, though?

Saw C: [...] it might be, but... [2 sec] mm.. [2 sec] but not, you know, [...] not many.

Other interlocutors were similarly stumped at the suggestion of bisexuality, stating they have not personally encountered it. Saw B’s response regarding bisexuality was constrained by his understanding of sexual orientation being tied to gender expression. The following question was asked after Saw B described how lesbians and gays behave and act:

I: [S]o then how would bisexual people.. act? Like if I’m a woman who’s attracted to women and also men, how would – which gender would I act?

Saw B: Uh.... Well, that one.... Yeah I... [2 sec] I don’t, I-I don’t really see that kind of gender.

This crystallizes the ways in which bisexuality is made invisible within an understanding of SOGIE that presumes a non-conforming gender expression is a necessary marker of a minority sexuality. Of course this rule of thumb was not cohesive, and often the same interviewee stated seemingly incompatible notions. Saw A, for instance, explained bisexuality as being due to “some genetics, [...] that makes their minds describe liking both”; This is despite earlier describing homosexuality as resulting from an individual having genes or hormones of the opposite sex in their body. Saw A does not dwell on what kind of genes exactly a bisexual person would have according to this logic. Overall, for all SOGIE majority interlocutors, the potential existence of bisexuality seemed to present an inconvenient challenge to their understandings of SOGIE, which they reconciled by stating they have no experience or knowledge of it and emphasizing that if bisexuality exists, it is probably a very rare occurrence in their communities.
Naw B, who thinks she is likely bisexual herself, provided her own observation of the manifestation of bisexuality in Burma/Myanmar when compared to Thailand or Canada:

*Naw B: [...] I think in Canada [...] In Thailand in Burma it’s different. [...] Like the lesbians in Canada they, they can have sex with a man too, I mean... [2 sec] And in, in I think in Burma... or Thailand, that lesbians they won’t... They will just uh like a woman.

I: [2 sec] Uh so. You mean in Canada... [1 sec] lesbians are having sex with men or like bisexual //women//?

*Naw B: bisexual //I mean//.

I: Yeah. So you don’t think there is bisexuality really in.. in Burma?

*Naw B: Mhm.

I: [3 sec] Right. But I mean, [laugh] [...] you said you might identify like that so maybe it’s just //not visible//

*Naw B: //but I think// they have, they have different lesbians. Like... the lesbian who dress up like a...[man and] who like a woman... it won’t like... have a bisexual. But the woman who also are bi-bisexual they can have both. I mean like that.

In this last statement I clarified that Naw B was talking about the categories of women who like women in Burma. She meant that there are some women who dress like women (i.e. feminine) and they can be said to be bisexual. The women who dress more masculine, however, will only have female partners.\(^\text{14}\)

Naw B’s typology of female sexuality/gender expression, while acknowledging the potential bisexuality of feminine women who would likely be deemed heterosexual by SOGIE majority people (see circumstantial homosexuality Section 5.2.4), nevertheless affirms the supposed connection between gender expression and sexuality, which limits the bisexual identity to those women who present in feminine ways. Ironically, Naw B’s own gender expression is quite androgynous and yet she has a bisexual life-trajectory. The incompatibility of her embodied experience of SOGIE with prevalent understanding and typologies renders her brand of bisexuality illegible or invisible to most SOGIE majority (and even many SOGIE minority) Karen people.

In contrast to the lack of awareness and incoherence which shrouded SOGIE majority answers to direct questions about bisexuality, many of those same interlocutors made unprompted statements in other parts of their interviews that suggested that in fact all people have the capacity to

\(^{14}\) For raw transcript see Appendix D, NawB.r280-295
be attracted to both men and women. This sentiment ranged from one encompassing both sexual and romantic attraction (Saw E) to a more guarded statement that people of the same gender can form “strong attachments between each other” that merely constitute a “human love feeling” that is not homosexual (Naw C). These statements, when considered in conjunction with the above reticence to acknowledge bisexual identity echo the same cognitive dissonance encountered by Western bisexual activists, who have long attempted to dispel what they term the “Everyone/no one is bisexual” myth or contradiction (“What is Bisexuality?,” n.d.). This contradiction is especially striking in Saw C’s description of his own sexual attraction, when contrasted with the remainder of his interview:

*Saw C:* [...] sometimes, like you talk to your friend, [...] let’s say I chat to a woman, and [inaudible] kind of I feel something between [us], and I kind of like her, and say bla bla bla.. and sometime it might also happen in men that way, but it’s... [3 sec] very less possibility.

*I:* For you, personally, or for..?

*Saw C:* Yeah, for me personally.

Despite willingly admitting to harbouring a certain capacity for same-gender attraction, Saw C states earlier in the interview that while some men mind find other men sexually attractive, “*For me like, I like men... to be friends, not for sex.*” Moreover, when asked about bisexuality, he said he had not experienced it within the Karen community.

In contrast, Naw A did encounter bisexuality in the form of a Filipina friend she met in university who identified as bisexual. Naw A mentioned this friend after trying to understand a bisexual life-trajectory of a famous Karen singer, Saw Yuri Galler:

*Naw A:* [...] How can I say to people that... He is, you know, bisexual...? It’s not good, like... [1 sec] Ideally, it’s... [1 sec] bisexual is unacceptable in the community, you know? Me, myself, it’s very hard for me to accept it, but... [1 sec] maybe I believe that there’s some people out there they are really true who they are, they are bisexual, you can’t deny it. [1 sec] Um, I have a friend, actually [...] she’s a Filipino. [2 sec] She date both girl and...[sec] um... male and female, but [s]he prefers more on female, [s]he said that [s]he feels more comfortable being in a relationship with female. [...] Like maybe 60% of her is lesbian and 40% it’s just [s]he like male.

15 “The third-person pronoun is gender ambiguous in Burmese — as the root pronoun thu may refer to both masculine and feminine subjects, although it also has a specifically feminine form. This gives some flexibility to gender-liminal subjects — one can use the pronoun thu while leaving some ambiguity whether the signifier is a “he” or a “she”. When Burmese speak English, it is common for them to use “he” and “she” interchangeably — a habit considered a grammatical mistake” (Gilbert, 2013)
Naw A sincerely discusses her own difficulty reconciling bisexuality as a legitimate identity, even after encountering a bisexual which seemed to embody what she saw as legitimate bisexuality. Thus, while all interlocutors seemed to understand the concept of bisexuality abstractly, most SOGIE majority interlocutors found it difficult to conceive of bisexuality and a “bisexual person” in practice, and hence felt inclined to conclude that bisexual people must not be very common. Simultaneously, some interlocutors believed all people have a capacity to be attracted to both genders, but they did not dub such a capacity “bisexual”, and did not consider this capacity as indicative of an actual sexual orientation.

As Naw A pointed out, even the Karen community most famous (ex-)gay member, Saw Yuri Galler, had a life-trajectory that could be considered bisexual, having been engaged to a woman and later married a man, however no one would speak of him in those terms. Instead, to the Christian Karen community, he has been “saved” through the power of prayer, as he says he no longer experiences sexual desire.

To delve into the complex set of attitudes among Karen non-profit staff towards SOGIE minorities, and the ways they have been shaped by religious sensibilities, I would like to begin with the case of said Karen singer turned LGBT activist turned Christian speaker, Saw Yuri Galler.

5.4. Saw Yuri Galler and “praying your gay away”

Saw Yuri Galler (henceforth Yuri) was a famous Christian Karen singer who was at one point publicly gay and an LGBT activist, but later claimed God freed him from having a sexual desire and became a speaker for the Christian community promoting prayer as a means of becoming “cured” of homosexuality. The public unfolding of his story exposed Karen attitudes towards LGBT/SOGIE minorities, and challenged or solidified these attitudes. While it is an exaggeration to say that every Karen person

Figure 4 Saw Yuri Galler at the 5th ILGA-ASIA conference in Bangkok, Thailand. (Posted on Rainbow Mae Sot’s Facebook page on March 29, 2013)
has heard of Saw Yuri’s story\textsuperscript{16}, all my interlocutors have, and they knew many more people who have.

Yuri became infamous in the Christian Karen community circa 2008 when he decided to “marry” a Thai gay man in Mae Sot and was subsequently kicked out of the Christian Karen band in which he sang, which he said was for homophobic reasons (Cho & Guest Contributor, 2010). After he posted on Facebook and other social media sites to protest his discrimination, some Karen commentators expressed that his homosexuality is sinful and should be treated, and others offered their support. At the time, Yuri stated that he will continue to fight for his rights and the rights of other Karen gays (Cho & Guest Contributor, 2010).

True to his word, in February 2013 Yuri founded Rainbow Mae Sot, “a Community Organization that aims to help Thai or Non-Thai Migrant LGBTIQ with their health, education, and human rights (“Rainbow Mae Sot - About,” n.d.). Between February 2013 and May 2014, the organization seems to have been very active, hosting a celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDHOT), as well as distributing food and other goods to the general Mae Sot community after the city flooded.

Inexplicably, in July 2014, Yuri switched gears. He announced that he prayed to God and as a result woke up the next morning no longer having a “sexual desire”. My interlocutors had mixed interpretations of what he meant – whether he is now heterosexual or asexual. Regardless of the nuance, Yuri became a public figure among the Christian community. He visited churches to share his story of salvation, and gave a video testimony that is now public on YouTube (See snapshot in Figure 5, from “Ko Yuri ( JESUS set free from Homosexual ) - YouTube,” n.d.).

\textsuperscript{16}Since Saw Yuri Galler himself did not respond to my requests for an interview, his story as presented here draws on interlocutor accounts as well as online news articles and his public Facebook pages and YouTube videos. Although some of the details may be inaccurate, the story as it is known to the Karen public is important, as it shapes their understandings of homosexuality in their community.
Whether Yuri’s stark change in narrative between 2010 and 2014 stems from a personal spiritual journey, or is a result of the pressure he faced from the Karen community, its impact on the Karen SOGIE minority population has been profound. To Christian Karen people, his public and heartfelt testimony affirms that homosexuality can be “prayed away” by the power of God. Moreover, it perpetuates the idea that homosexuality is an “obsession” or a “disease”, and that a homosexual will only be happy if they gave themselves completely to God and Jesus.

According to Naw A and my participant observation in the Karen community, even within the non-profit circles, Christian Karen staff use Yuri’s case to encourage gay Karen to at least attempt to change:

_Naw A:_ I think.. I can feel, even I’m not, you know, part of LGBT group, I can feel it, the pressure that they giving to you... Your family, your friend pressure, “see, Yuri can change, why you cannot change?” But... How-how can he change, it’s him, not me, I’m separate person, right? So... There are a lot of pressures and like even gay community don’t want to talk to him [Yuri]... Because... [2 sec] He’s personally not talking bad about gay people or LGBT people, but people are [...] using him as an example, you know, to-to... criticize, or... to point a finger at the LGBT people, like gay people

_Saw D_ corroborated Naw A’s statement, having personally experienced the impact of Yuri’s testimony:

_Saw D:_ [T]he Christian will say that "Oh, look at Yuri!" You know “He was so gay! And... [inhales] um now you can change!” And one of my friends even... When she saw his message, she called me from Thailand, I was in Burma that time, she called me(!) and said, “Hey, my friend Yuri has also already changed... he, you know, you are not as bad as Yuri [was] in the... [...] past, so you can still change” I’m like, “Girl! [...] He is making... a false statement so” [laughs]

_I:_ Wow. That’s-That’s hard [laughs] //When, when your friend//

_Saw D:_ //Yeah! That/ has impact... A lot of impact, and it will make [it harder for] younger people to come out... Or do stuff, you know? Advocate gay person, and they would, the Christian community will always [inhales] um use Yuri as a reference to say, “Hey, look at him!” You know like urgh! Feels bad!

_Saw D_’s frustration at the long-lasting and significant impact Yuri’s testimony has had on his life was palpable. As a Yuri’s friend, Saw D felt particularly betrayed by Yuri’s turning away from his LGBT advocate identity, but his disdain also had to do with the impact Yuri’s story will have on other Karen SOGIE minorities and their prospects for acceptance within the Karen community. Doubtlessly, Yuri has the right to live his life however he pleases and pursue happiness through
devotion to God; however, the danger of his story is the Danger of a Single Story (Adichie, 2009). As the one and only widely known gay Karen person, Yuri has a disproportionate power to shape understandings of SOGIE within the Karen SOGIE majority community. The community could benefit from additional diverse stories from SOGIE minorities, such as that of Saw D, who feels strongly that he is unable and unwilling to change his sexual orientation and is happiest living accordingly.

5.5. Religion, sex, love and SOGIE

In addition to his lasting impact of the Karen SOGIE minority community, Yuri’s story also sheds light on the ways religion, specifically Christianity, within the Karen community shapes ideas regarding the relationship between one’s SOGIE, their sexual and romantic conduct, and their moral fiber. The common interpretation of Christian teachings in the Karen community is one that reduces a sexual orientation or gender identity to one’s (presumed) sexual conduct, where a sexual orientation is seen to imply a pursuit of sexual pleasure and precludes the pursuits of love and commitment. Due to Christianity’s opposition to sex outside of marriage, SOGIE minorities are viewed as the epitome of sexual deviancy, as they are presumed to be engaging not only in sex outside of marriage, but also “against nature”. Notably missing from the mainstream Christian discourse around sexual orientation is the notion of same-sex love. Where love is mentioned by devout Christian Karen, it is to emphasize that same-sex love is natural for all men and women to experience — if it is platonic. Moreover, since in Christianity humans are born sinners who must overcome their inherent evil impulses to be righteous (Psalm 51:5; Proverbs 22:14; Genesis 8:21), the argument that homosexuality/gender non-conformity is an innate quality does not imply one should not attempt to suppress and overcome it, as all humans must overcome their sinful impulses. Thus, if a Karen person is openly gay, whether through a “coming out” process as in the case of Yuri, or simply by exhibiting significant gender non-conforming behaviour, it is difficult for such a person to position themselves as a morally upright member of the community.

All my interlocutors — except Saw E— identified as Christian, with various degrees of religiosity. Nevertheless, having lived in Buddhist-majority Thailand and Myanmar, they also showed Buddhist influences. When explaining their community’s attitudes towards SOGIE minorities, many interviewees cited Buddhist beliefs about homosexuality and gender non-conformity. In Myanmar’s Theravada Buddhism, men have hpoun—a masculine sacred spirit. If a
male-at-birth person sheds it and enacts femininity instead, they are giving up the honour of masculinity that has been bestowed upon them at birth. It is considered that they do so in this life because in their previous life they must have committed sins such as adultery (Chua & Gilbert, 2015).

Some interlocutors who grew up in more rural areas of Karen State also referenced Animist beliefs, some of which have been hybridized into the Karen (otherwise Baptist) Christianity. In animist communities, such as in rural Karen State, sexual conduct between two members of the same-sex (and even sex between unmarried heterosexual couples) would bring “bad luck” (attract malicious spirits) to the village, according to Saw B. From my conversations with Christian Karen, I understand that at times Karen who identify as Christian concurrently subscribe to this belief, as it is congruent with Christianity’s opposition to sex outside of marriage. This belief that one community member’s sexual conduct can have an impact on the entire village justifies community intervention, which has been rumoured to happen in the past. One Karen non-profit staff member recalled that during his childhood in rural Karen State, a lesbian couple were presumably killed after the community found out they were cohabiting and informed the soldiers in the area, who took them away, never to be seen again. My informant said this account was never reported officially by any of the active human rights organizations in the region. Accordingly, most of my other interlocutors were confident Karen communities are unlikely to act on their disapproval of same-sex relationship in such extreme ways, but are rather more likely to restrain themselves to verbal disapproval and pressure:

*Naw A: [...] Christian community they can’t really accept it, they said it's a sin, so for them they will try to say that person might, “You need to change, it is not what God wants, and that is not right.” Like, they will push that person... um... emotionally... I think. And I have seen it. Like, they will try to preach them, this is not what God wants and you have to change it, but they will not—they don’t do it like physically, like, put them in isolation place and try to get them, change them, it's not like that*

Knowing that these are the prevalent attitudes of Karen communities on matters of SOGIE minorities, some Christian Karen interlocutors experienced significant tension and inner conflict

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17 Karen State is a heavily militarized region, with various Myanmar government-controlled armed groups, as well as Karen ethnic-armed groups active in many areas. It is unclear in this account whether the Karen community called Karen soldiers to intervene, or the Burmese Tatmadaw soldiers; however, the former is the more likely option as Karen villagers are normally distrustful and afraid of Burmese soldiers.
between their religious beliefs and their subscription to human rights principles. Most prominent was Saw A’s account:

*Saw A: I’m Christian and I go to church regularly and […] even though I’m Christian I’m too for human rights, so it seems that I […] don’t live my life as God wants me to live, so it’s like […] I’m being opposite with the God’s will. For example, […] God doesn’t want the human to be… to like each other male-to-male or female-to-female, but I’m working for human rights, […] maybe I will also work for LGBT, so like… My career is opposite with God’s. So my life also maybe opposite with God’s. […] so like […] some strong Christians will even call me – I am Satan. I am like working for Satan. […] Because […] God have the exact word that you can’t do […] that things, so if […] I’m encouraging that kind of manner […] Everything that opposite God is Satan, right? So […] if I’m a strong human rights activist, […] even though I’m not a.. that kind of person [LGBT], I work for them, so […] like Christian community will avoid me…*18

Saw A said he resolves this tension in his life currently by compartmentalizing his life into his personal life and his work life, all the while recognizing this is not an ideal solution. He mused that he is not sure what he would do if someone in his private life was openly discriminating against LGBT: whether he would stay silent and complicit due to his religion, or stand up to the person based on his human rights vocation. When asked about this tension, another interlocutor, Naw D, had a disparate interpretation of God’s will and subsequently did not experience the inner struggle Saw A did, albeit she confessed she is not a very religious person:

*Naw D: What I can see is God created human beings, and so he loved and then he created. He loved being whatever he or she.. is -- he still loves. So even they are lesbian… or criminal, or whatever, [it] doesn’t cost them [His] love…*

Naw D’s progressive interpretation of the Christian God and his love is emblematic of the ways Christian Karen non-profit staff reimagine and reconcile Christianity with human rights work and diverge from the mainstream Christian discourse that reduces SOGIE to sexual intercourse. Indeed, some of my most pious interlocutors spoke of SOGIE minorities as engaging in relationships based on deep love and commitment. Naw C, for instance, said that people who are gay seem to sacrifice a lot for their partners and are very affectionate. She thought they would do anything for their partners, which makes it hard for the object of their love to reject them.

Despite this recognition that same-sex relationships can be founded on love and commitment, SOGIE majority interlocutors did continue to express some disapproval of same-sex relations based

18 For raw transcript, see Appendix D, SawA.r173
on the pursuit of sexual pleasure alone, and particularly promiscuous behavior, as an extension of
their belief that such promiscuity would also be immoral if heterosexual: *If the.. the gay people.. or
lesbian people, they just.. trying to get a relationship with same... ah you know, their partner, just for
sexual pleasure, I think this is wrong, because there is no love, right?*” said Naw A. Although this
moral principle by which sexual relations are only appropriate within a loving relationship was
presented as egalitarian – applicable to both heterosexuals and homosexuals – in practice this
principle is applied disproportionately to SOGIE minorities, as they are the ones whose sexual
orientation, and by extension – sexual conduct, even comes into question. This can be seen in Saw
A’s comment on SOGIE minorities: “[T]hat's symbol of sex, right? Because... uh if male to male...
like interest, attract to each other, and later the consequence is... sex will also... be included, so like
it's also... sex is sin”. Because heterosexual Karen do not claim a sexual orientation at all under
hegemonic heterosexuality, their potential for other-sex attraction does not undergo the same
scrutiny and is not presumed to inevitably lead to “immoral” sexual conduct. Thus, the SOGIE
minority subject is cast as disproportionately likely to engage in sexual conduct outside of a loving
relationship and against the “will of God”, which under all dominant religions in Karen society
makes them sinful. While Karen who work in non-profits recognize that SOGIE minorities are
capable of moral romantic relationships, their approval is somewhat contingent upon SOGIE
minorities conducting themselves according to these moral principles.

SOGIE minorities, especially feminine gay men, do not only face moral scrutiny when they
are pursuing relationships with other SOGIE minorities; They may also find themselves kept at an
arm’s length when trying to build friendships or close working relationships with heterosexual men.

5.6. Men’s fear of association with gays

Both male and female interlocutors spoke of heterosexual men’s aversion and fear of
associating with gay men. These anxieties were described as stemming from (a) a fear of
experiencing a sexual advance or harassment, and (b) a fear of being perceived as gay by
association by the community.

Interlocutor accounts suggested that because of heterosexual men’s fear of gay men making
a sexual advance at them, they not only avoid intimate encounters with gay (feminine) men, such as
sharing a bed (which they are likely to feel comfortable doing with another heterosexual/masculine
man), but may also avoid any interaction, including online contact. Naw D recounted a story where
her male colleague at work was worried about accepting a Thai gay man’s Facebook friend request for fear that this would lead to a sexual proposition. This is despite meeting this gay man in a professional capacity as part of a collaboration with a Thai organization.

The second reason for heterosexual men’s aversion to associating with gay men is a fear that the community will assume that they are also gay and are dating the other gay man, or alternatively, that they might become gay if they have a close gay friend. Saw A explained the latter in terms of especially young people emulating each other’s behaviour, so that for example if one has friends who play sports, one may start to play sports, as well. The implication is that one may adopt feminine mannerisms and potentially same-sex attraction by associating too closely with a gay man. Saw C corroborated this pattern of thinking, stating that especially gay schoolchildren may find it difficult to build close friendships with their classmates due to such fears. While the young adult Karen men whom I interviewed mostly spoke of this fear of association as something they felt more in the past, they did indicate some lingering discomfort at the prospect of being friends with feminine gay men, which could seep into their workplace conduct, despite their better wishes to overcome it.

5.7. Displays of empathy

In contrast to the fears and anxieties which some men were said to harbour, several of my interlocutors displayed empathy towards LGBT Karen and their predicament in Karen society, through statements where they imagined what it must be like to experience discrimination based on SOGIE. Such statements ranged from an acknowledgement of the pressure LGBT Karen must feel from their family and community, to statements imagining the impact verbal teasing can have on LGBT Karen, as Saw C said, “They feel, you know, feel... [3 sec] feel... small.” In several of these statements, the SOGIE majority Karen began the statement by saying something to the effect of “for example, I’m a gay”, indicating not only a willingness to put themselves actively in SOGIE minorities’ shoes, but also a lack of aversion to momentarily associating the word “gay” with themselves.

5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed research objective (1): Describe and analyze participants’ understandings of and attitudes towards homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender non-conformity. I
discussed the ways in which SOGIE majority interlocutors saw homosexuality and gender non-conformity as very closely linked, and to an extent even determined by each other. In other words, many of the participants thought that people are ‘gay’ because they want to be a different gender, and vice versa: people who desire to be a different gender than the one assigned to them at birth will subsequently be attracted to members of their own “biological sex”. Participants conceded there are exceptions, and that there are many reasons people may experience these sexual desires and gender non-conformity in the first place, but felt that the coupling of homosexuality and non-conforming gender identity/expression was nevertheless the norm among SOGIE minority people.

SOGIE minority (and a few SOGIE majority) interlocutors disagreed with these views, stating that gender identity/expression is not indicative of sexual preference and vice versa. However, even these interlocutors at times made assumptions regarding the sexuality and gender identity of the people they had met at work and elsewhere.

As for bisexuality, both SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority interlocutors expressed that bisexuality does not exist by name in the Karen community. However, all acknowledged that there are masculine men and feminine women who, over the course of their lives, have romantic and/or sexual relationships with both men and women. They did not label these people bisexual or LGBT at all; Only their same-sex, gender non-conforming partners were described as gay/lesbian. For instance, if a feminine, i.e presumably straight, woman is in a relationship with a masculine woman – then she has been seduced despite her heterosexuality and is likely to eventually leave her lesbian partner for a man. The same was said about masculine men in relationships with feminine men – the masculine man could still be a “real man”, i.e., straight. (Unless they are Westerners, in which case they could be masculine gays).

To further contextualize my participants’ understandings of SOGIE, I explored the ways in which the dominant religions among Karen people, Christianity, Theravada Buddhism, and to a lesser degree animism, inform and influence my participants’ attitudes towards SOGIE minorities, and their notions of sex, love, and gender hierarchy. Finally, I recounted participants’ anecdotes which spoke, on the one hand, of heterosexual men’s fears of being associated with gay men and subsequently stigmatized, but also on the other hand, of the empathy SOGIE majority people can and do feel towards SOGIE minority Karen people.
To continue to foster empathy and substantiate it with real life experiences as opposed to assumptions, I will now present three case studies summarizing the experiences of three SOGIE minority Karen in their respective organizations. Through these case studies and subsequent analysis of my participant observation within a Karen non-profit I will address my research objectives (2): Document and analyze the experiences of acceptance and/or exclusion of SOGIE minority Karen non-profit staff within their respective organizations, as they relate to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression; and (3) Explore the obstacles and motivation for Karen non-profits to change policy and practices to increase inclusion of Karen SOGIE minorities.
Chapter 6: Challenges and opportunities for inclusion within non-profits

6.1. Karen SOGIE minority narratives: Case Studies from Karen non-profits

Due to the difficulty in locating and interviewing Karen SOGIE minorities, most findings thus far have been based, as I have explicitly stated, on SOGIE majority accounts. While these accounts help to identify the prevalent understandings and attitudes towards SOGIE minorities within the Karen community, actual experiences of individual SOGIE minorities inevitably vary from the observations and assumptions SOGIE majorities made, particularly among my SOGIE minority interlocutors, none of whom quite fall into what Karen SOGIE majorities envision to be a stereotypical “gay” or “lesbian” Karen person. Thus, I find it important to hone in on the experiences of SOGIE minority Karen, specifically within their respective non-profit workplaces, to highlight the discrepancies between their experiences and the narratives of SOGIE majority interlocutors, as well as to respond to SOGIE majority interlocutor desires to hear more from SOGIE minority Karen. As one participant in my FPAR workshop on gender and sexuality stated in his feedback form, after he read excerpts from my interviews with Karen LGBT participants:

This kind of workshop builds understanding between straight people and LGBT. I assume if anyone LGBT participated in this workshop [they] will feel that people do understand and recognize them. To also strengthen friendship between straight and gay. Straight people will understand and realize how difficult LGBT lives in this society and will treat them with respect if they didn’t in the past. We had a chance to put ourselves in their shoes and walk their paths by reading about their expressions and their stories.

I hope that by centering the voices of SOGIE minority Karen, further solidarity can be built within and outside the Karen community. Specifically, I hope to highlight the dynamic formation of an intersectional Karen SOGIE minority identity, as well as the workplace navigation strategies of SOGIE minority Karen. I will then use these cases, together with the data collected from SOGIE majority Karen participants, to articulate the emerging opportunities and ongoing challenges for the full inclusion of SOGIE minority Karen within Karen non-profits.
6.1.1. Saw D: Striving for acceptance through community service and merit

Saw D is a bright young gay Karen man. He was born in Myanmar and subsequently migrated with his family to one of the refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border, where he completed his high school studies. Early on, he realized he must take his learning into his own hands if he wishes to excel, as his teachers in Myanmar were inattentive and did not facilitate his learning. He was determined to one day become better than them. This determination persisted throughout his career with Karen non-profits, where he often felt that as a gay person, he must work harder than others to prove that he is a morally upright and capable person. If he worked hard enough, proved his value to the organization, and his commitment to the Karen community, then his homosexuality could not be held against him, he figured.

Saw D: Because they have [sighs] negative uh impression or negative uh.. feelings towards LGBT people, especially gay people, and uh transgender people, so... I need to work harder than anyone else, I feel like, because I need to prove that... "Hey, I am.. Yes, I am gay, but I cannot uh.. let this [negative] thing impose on me" you know? I am a good person. I can be better than any other ones, so you know, that’s why I worked really hard and have crazy ideas [to improve my organization] and made those ideas work, yeah. [...] I don’t think it’s fair [that I have to do that], but it’s good for me, because, if it is a normal thing, then I wouldn’t be the person who I am today.

While Saw D succeeded in being highly regarded by his colleagues and did not experience any SOGIE-related bullying or teasing directed at him in his workplace, he did overhear several gender- and sexuality-related microaggressions uttered by his (presumably SOGIE majority) colleagues. Such incidents ranged between irksome and “quite disturbing” and he wished to challenge their perpetrators but had little success doing so. At first, his status as a newly hired employee discouraged him from speaking out at all:

Saw D: In a lunch period, where everybody come together um... I was... new that time, but I’m not sure what topic we were talking about and then he.. He was.. He used that word Achouk [derogatory term for “gay”] and then I’m like, "okay."... And that is... quite disturbing to me, but.. I was new so... I didn’t. And he was about to leave [his job] so I didn’t want to have any um clash [with him], so I didn’t say anything.

After being more established in his position at the same organization, Saw D gently attempted to call a different male colleague out for saying to another male colleague, "Why you so slow like a girl". Saw D intervened by saying, “Hey, he’s not a girl”. However, when this colleague simply continued smiling and did not make much of Saw D’s comment, Saw D took no further
action. For Saw D, this limit to his capacity to intervene stems from a perception that to be able to stand up to colleagues in the workplace when they say derogatory statements about LGBT or someone’s gender expression, he must be in a hierarchically higher position within whatever organization he happens to work in to be taken seriously and not be insolent:

_Saw D: Because... In Burma, it is hierarchy system, right? In an organization, wherever you work, you have certain respect if you’re in a higher position. Um.. So, to be able to say that... [...] That’s the thing that makes me want to work hard, that I want to get to that point [higher position]. So if I can.. If I hear those things [offensive comments] then I have... I can say those things easily. If I’m not there [at the higher position], If I am lower rank... If I say this [intervene] they will ask, “Oh what are you?” You know, “You have the priority [self-importance] to say that to me?” That is why I have to work really hard to be a, you know; ideal person, to be there so that I can gain certain respect or recognition, so that I can say, “this is wrong”. [1 sec] So that people... //yeah//, people cannot, you know, um.. tell me [anything] [laughs] That is selfish! [laughs hard].

Despite the discomfort Saw D feels whenever derogatory comments as the ones above are made, and his inability to do much to stop them from being spoken in the workplace at the current stage in his career, Saw D stated that he would still apply to work for a workplace that is not explicitly accepting of LGBT in the future, but try to change it from the inside, so long as it is not hopelessly narrow minded. “I’d probably die of depression,” he said about the prospect of working for a particularly close-minded organization. Interestingly, Saw D felt that his desire to work for LGBT-positive organizational change was a selfish one, since it would benefit him, as a gay man, in the form of a more positive working environment.

Fortunately, the organization in which Saw D worked was not a close-minded one, and despite the comments by some of his colleagues, he was fortunate enough to have several other colleagues to whom he felt comfortable disclosing his sexual orientation. His disclosure was greeted with various degrees of surprise, and several of his female colleagues expressed concern for his mother:

_Saw D: Some people were surprised, some people were disappointed [inhaler] um.. Some people are okay, yeah. So... It’s different sort of feelings, but yeah. I-I know that people who will be disappointed, for example Naw U, she wasn’t happy about it, you know? She was... She knew my mom and she was like... ”Umm, but what is your mom going to do? She won’t be.. She won’t have any grandchildren!” I’m like "oh, I have my brother and sister” [laughs] So yeah... It was, it was alright...

I: How does... It make you feel when she said that? [...]
Saw D: I'm like oh.. you know.. Why? Why? [laughs] A question was, "Why do you say that?" You know? You're working in a human rights organization and why do you have this... Yeah, I can't blame [her], she... Her husband [and she are] quite conservative.

Another female colleague expressed feeling closer and more comfortable with him after he told her he was gay, seemingly because she felt that she did not have to have a certain guard up as she would with heterosexual guys:

Saw D: I think Naw K said, "[...] I feel closer to you more now than ever" [laughs]
I: Really?
Saw D: [laughs] yeah. Because she can, she uh... she feels safer or... Uh comfortable if I'm around, you know, unlike other guys, so yeah...
I: But she's also very Christian, isn't //she//?
Saw D: //Yeah// yeah, she's very Christian, and she said "Oh you know," she didn't have any negative impression on her face, she just said, "Oh if you want to change, then you can pray and you, you get a girl" [laughs] So, "Thank you, Naw K, but I will not get that" [laughs]

Saw D related several more such comments from his female friends, who simultaneously accepted him as gay, but also felt compelled to offer him the possibility of praying or otherwise attempting to be heterosexual, if he ever thought he would like to change. While Saw D expressed frustration at having to fend off such comments to me, he nevertheless acknowledged that these women love him and only say these things due to their Christian background and out of genuine desire to help.

When I asked Saw D if he has ever experienced any microaffirmations in the workplace, such as positive comments about LGBT, he at first said, "No, never", but then recalled one colleague who has always been unconditionally accepting and encouraged him by telling him about successful LGBT people she has met and telling him he could be like them. In the meantime, Saw D wanted Karen SOGIE-majority people to know the following about Karen SOGIE-minorities: “Know that they are human and they also need same degree of respect um that they give to straight people [inhales] non-LGBT people, you know?”
6.1.2. Naw B: Challenging the politics of an “LGBT” Karen identity

Naw B is an avid advocate for human rights issues in Karen State. Having had the opportunity to resettle in a Western country, she chose to return after a couple of years to live on the Thai-Burmese border because she so strongly felt committed to the Karen people in Karen State:

*Naw B:* Too much attachment. I mean here, in Karen area. Because I’m working with the Karen community for so many years, so... I.. I start working with the student groups and I’ve like... how can I say – fall in love with the students, I mean in Karen State. [...] I left [to Western country], but I wanted to come back. Because I-I feel like I belong to Karen.. Karen State, I mean.

Naw B realized she is attracted to women when she first moved from the refugee camp on the border to live in an urban area in Thailand, where she came to see and know lesbian women. While Naw B seems perfectly comfortable with that realization and says she is “very open” about it, she does not actively claim a sexual identity label:

*Naw B:* It’s complicated for me. [clears throat] But um I’m very.. uh I’m very like open... [1 sec] Like.. But the community and my family... are very conservative, so I’m just.. [1 sec] for me, I think... How can I explain myself? It’s difficult. Maybe sometimes I thought I’m bi... //Or// [laughs] [...] I: Do you ever talk about it with eh with anyone?

*Naw B:* Yes! I always, because I’m... I’m in like.. easy-going person [laughs] and I don’t care, I don’t care anyone. Because I know that I have a right. [1 sec] to be like this, to be crazy [laughs] or whatever I want to do.

I: [laughs]

*Naw B:* Yeah. [...] But for my community, it’s... if I want to be.. eh... for example, lesbian, they won’t accept it. Like, if I want to get married with a woman, they won’t accept it. [1 sec] Like my parents too. [...] But I... for.. when I was like... a teenager, I used to have like boyfriend. [1 sec] And then they... accept it. They know it. [...] And then we broke up, something like this, so I.. I told them I will never have it [a boyfriend], or I don’t like it. But I never... uh... tell them that I’m-- that I like women.

It seems that while Naw B is aware of western LGBT categories and is comfortable trying them on for size, she does not feel that there is a need or a reason for her to claim one. Since she says her Karen community will not accept her as a lesbian or bisexual woman, and Naw B expressed elsewhere in the interview she never intends to marry anyone at all (of either gender, regardless of societal pressure), there does not seem to be much point to claiming a social identifier that will only marginalize her within the Karen community where she strongly feels she belongs.
Even beyond English-language LGBT categories, Naw B said there is not a Karen language term for women-who-like-women which she finds acceptable, either. I learned that she only knows one term: Mu Kwa, literally, “man-woman”, which she sees as derogatory. Moreover, Naw B expressed that although this is the only term available, there is no need to use it, as people should just address others by their first names, “[W]e have [a] name, right? You just call the name. You don’t need to call like Mu Kwa”, said Naw B.

While Naw B has clear opinions about how people should treat Karen SOGIE minorities, and articulates some of those opinions through a rights-based approach (“I have a right to be like this”), she has no interest in joining any LGBT advocacy organizations or community:

Naw B: Mm... No. I don’t want to join any group like that. I mean LGBT group. I just want to be myself.

I: Mhm. […] Is there a reason? Like do you feel like you’re different from them? Or umm you don’t like what they do?.. or something like that?

Naw B: Yeah, I like.. the.. what they are doing, but I just don’t want to join them. I just want to be myself.

Naw B repeatedly expressed this sense of individualism and desire to be independent when it comes to her romantic life and sexuality, a quality that, to me, stood in contrast with her very collectivist sense of duty to the Karen community and her strong sense of belonging to the Karen people. Additionally, the sense of sexual individuality and her formerly stated openness did not necessarily translate into explicit conversations with her Karen friends and colleagues on the topic of her romantic life and/or sexual orientation. Such conversations only took place with specific friends who wanted to discuss the topic and displayed openness themselves, “I never talk about the LGBT things with my friends. Just with some friends that they... want to talk to me, and like open to me,” said Naw B.

Consequentially, Naw B has not disclosed her sexual orientation to colleagues, as she feels there is no need for her to come out. Moreover, she thinks her colleagues may already know. When asked whether she has ever been made to feel uncomfortable about her SOGIE because of a comment at work, she said she has not. However, she described an occasional form of teasing she experiences, where her colleagues jokingly ask her whether her future partner is going to be a boy or a girl. She finds this to be insulting and unnecessary, but also says she does not care about it and thinks her colleagues do not mean to be insulting her:
Naw B: [...] They are a little bit... how can I say.. educated, and then they know it’s.. [1 sec] sometimes they’re just teasing like... Sometimes they, they insult... but they don’t know that their insults mean something like that. Sometimes they ask me, “You get boy or girl?” something like that. They don’t need to ask me like that, I mean..

I: Sorry, they ask you if... you will get a boy or a girl, like a partner?

Naw B: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [...] I //just// say that it is none of your business.

I: Mhm. [...] and after you said that [...]—did you get that question again, or was it only one time?

Naw B: I mean [they] just said (I don’t know), “I’m just kidding,” that’s it. [...] I: They only said that to you one time? Or is it kind of occasional uh... //joke//

Naw B: Uh //just sometimes// But they just teasing, I mean.

I: Mhm. [2 sec] Just with that comment? [1 sec] And did you ever, you said sometimes uh... um... people get that nickname, that word that you think is an insult [Mu Kwa], have you ever been called like that? [2 sec] by anyone in your organization or before that?

Naw B: Uh... Yes... Before that, too. Like, since I was in the high school people try to tease me like, like that. But... I don’t care, for me, I don’t care, so...

I: Mm... How do you respond, usually? Like do you tell them //don’t use that word//

Naw B: //It’s none of- none of your business://

I: But you don’t, you don’t tell them um... not like, not to use that word.. or you just say, you just laugh or? How do you respond?

Naw B: [2 sec] I just walk away.

As she walks away from such conversations, Naw B mentioned she is unsure whether people speak about her behind her back at work, but regardless she would not care. She would simply like to be respected for who she is. “For me, all I want to say is like... be yourself and respect each other and know your rights,” said Naw B.
6.1.3. Saw E: Inhabiting a non-LGBT deviant masculinity: Beyond identity politics

Unlike Saw D, who actively identifies as gay, and unlike Naw B, who does not actively identify with a SOGI-minority label but who acknowledges her capacity to be attracted to both men and women, Saw E can be squarely placed in the “non-LGBT” category. He is not sexually or romantically attracted to men, and he identifies with the gender assigned to him at birth – male/man. Currently, he is not interested in being involved with anyone romantically or sexually as he wishes to prioritize his work and study but said, “Later I will get married to a woman”. Where Saw E does deviate from hegemonic masculinity, however, is in his gender expression, which casts him as somewhat feminine for a man: he is scrawny and his mannerisms are gentle and expressive. His deviation is such that would generally omit him from any LGBT-focused advocacy, but I choose to include him in my SOGIE minority sample and highlight his experiences on the grounds that while he does not identify as a SOGI minority, he is overwhelmingly presumed to be gay, and subsequently experiences substantial teasing at his workplace.

According to Saw E, workplace teasing consisted of colleagues whom he considers his close friends making comments such as, “Hey you are like a girl,” “You are a girl, you are gay. You will marry a man; you will not marry a woman,” “Do you have a boyfriend or a husband?” Such comments seem to take place often and depending on the day and circumstances, Saw E’s responses vary, “Sometimes it’s okay because we’re close, and other times I feel angry and they don’t know. Sometimes I feel comfortable. Sometimes I feel like I don’t want to be working with them, sometimes I want to go away. Sometimes I show them I’m angry, and I tell them, ‘Don’t say that, I don’t like it’”.

When Saw E asks his colleagues to stop, they do. But their silence on the matter never lasts and they later make similar comments again. When Saw E is particularly frustrated at the repeated comments, he may say to the colleague who is teasing him, regardless of their gender, “Sleep with me and I will show you!” Saw E described this as an attempt to make them feel angry and finally realize that they should not tease him anymore.

The persistent comments regarding his sexuality have made him wonder over the years whether he could in fact be gay, but he concluded that these people do not know him as well as he

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19 Saw E did not wish to be audio-recorded during our interview, therefore the quotes in this case study are based on my live transcription during the interview as well as interview notes.
knows himself, “How can you tell me I will have a husband? You don’t know me; you just see my behaviour”. Saw E strongly felt, based on his personal experience as well as from Thai popular media, that one’s sexuality cannot be deduced from one’s appearance: “We cannot decide. Some men are strong, but they have a boyfriend, or they have a girlfriend. Maybe they have a wife, but sleep with a man”. Beyond this observation, Saw E displayed a strong sense of empathy towards LGBT Karen people:

“We have to show that gay [and] lesbian are human, they have love, even though same genitals. They are the same as other people, they can learn, they can work, they can have children. Because they are human. Because of their spirit, we cannot change them.”

He mused that if an LGBT Karen person faced the same persistent joking comments regarding their sexuality that he experiences, “they will be feeling very sad and angry, because someone is talking like that. […] Because people make comments to me, I understand how they might feel.” He expressed that he thinks greater LGBT awareness among non-profit staff regarding this topic would be great, and may subsequently help reduce the teasing he experiences, “Yes! Very good to have awareness! I agree about that. Sometimes I don’t feel comfortable, so maybe they will change their behaviour.”

6.1.4. Case study implications

The case studies presented above suggest that the current condition of SOGIE minority Karen staff within non-profits cannot be described as that of utter exclusion or inclusion. Rather, these case studies paint a picture of three SOGIE minority Karen individuals who overall are passionate about the work they do in the non-profit sector and consider their respective organizations to be allowing them to do the work they wish to be doing and contribute meaningfully. On the other hand, however, all three participants describe experiences in their workplaces which were negative, and in which their sexual orientation or gender identity was called into question in an uncomfortable way. Facing these incidents, the three individuals above did not mobilize the language of LGBT identity politics or attempt to assert a form of collective rights based on SOGIE, rather, given their generalized human rights work, they simply stated their desire to be respected as a matter of being human and hence deserving of equal human rights.
The framework of international human rights, including the right to be protected based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression is a framework to which SOGIE majority Karen in this sample subscribed, as well. Unfortunately, their work in the field of human rights and development in Myanmar resulted in “LGBT issues” being positioned at the bottom of the priority list of human rights violations, due to the plethora of other human rights in the border regions of Myanmar, which they view as more severe. Considering that the SOGIE minority Karen above also chose to prioritize working on human rights and development issues that are not directly related to LGBT advocacy, it is unsurprising that SOGIE majority staff in this study did not perceive a specific or pressing human rights concern when it comes to LGBT Karen, especially not within their own organizations, which they viewed as progressive and inclusive. It is in the context of this relation between SOGIE majority and minority participants and the human rights framework to which they and their organizations subscribe that I examine the possibility of further inclusion of SOGIE minorities and the creation of workspaces that are anti-oppressive.

6.2. Constraints on SOGIE-minority intra-organizational agency

When a SOGIE minority staff member or any other employee within the Karen non-profit sector witnesses a gender/sexuality-based microaggression, their inclination and ability to denounce such behaviour and prevent it from occurring in the future is constrained not only by their understandings and attitudes towards such behaviour, as was previously discussed, but also by the structure and organizational culture of their workplace.

For one, the management structure of the organizations can have significant effects, as was evident in Saw D’s case study and his concern with deference to authority within a hierarchical management structure. In addition to authority based on position and title, Saw A and others noted the cultural expectation of deference based on age, where younger people are expected to agree with and respect their elders, even if they are in the wrong. Saw A went as far as to dub this ageism. My interviewees also suggested that the older generation is more likely to hold negative opinions and attitudes towards LGBT and SOGIE minorities, although within the non-profit context this seems to be somewhat mitigated by a high level of formal education among older staff. Since older staff are the ones more likely to hold higher-ranking positions within an organization due to seniority and experience, the constraint on employee agency is compounded, making it difficult for a lower-ranking staff member to criticize a higher-ranking staff member who has made a microaggression, or
even report such microaggressions by other staff to management, if they are likely to be dismissive of such complaints. Indeed, I only encountered one instance in which a staff member who made a SOGIE-related joke at another’s expense subsequently apologized, and this was when the one being teased was the director of the organization. After the director messaged the joker to tell him the joke made him sad, the joker apologized profusely. This stands in contrast to every other comment I observed among similar-ranking same-age-group staff, which were left unchallenged. Hence, managerial hierarchy could enable top-down dissemination of LGBT-positive policy and protection mechanisms, if the leader of the organization was inclined to initiate such policy.

Naw B believes inclusion endeavours to be more difficult in an organization such as her own, where decision-making is done collectively through consensus and all staff must be on board with the change. However, even within a hierarchical organization, the efficacy of top-down policy is questionable, as Naw C, who is a manager in her organization, found that it frequently does not translate into behaviour change among employees.

Further challenges to introducing intra-organizational policy is that given the common lack in human resources expertise within small non-profits on the Thai-Burmese border, policies are written reactively, after an incident takes place or a donor presents a new priority. This creates an impasse, as organizations are more likely to introduce new policy and practice following a complaint or report by a SOGIE minority staff member, which due to the tendency to defer to authority and the lack of reporting mechanisms, as well as the cultural framing of many microaggressions as acceptable jokes, is an unlikely occurrence. The framing of incidents is important, as both SOGIE minority and majority interlocuters displayed a pro-social reluctance to categorize behaviours and incidents in the workplace as discrimination, harassment, or bullying, as these carry a connotation that is severely negative, and all interlocutors were inclined to portray their organizations positively overall.

Precluding organizational change-making is also the lack of visibility of LGBT Karen, as the “coming out” process is seemingly rare and done selectively, so that not all staff within an organization always know that there is an LGBT staff member. Thus, many SOGIE majority interlocutors expressed that they feel LGBT Karen are a small minority of the population and is not represented in their organization, making LGBT inclusion policies irrelevant. I heard these opinions from staff in organizations where I knew there to be LGBT-identified staff members, who due to the lack of a collective voice and visibility of LGBT Karen, are left to individually navigate the
heteronormative workplace. Conversely, if openly gay Karen people successfully work for Karen non-profits, Naw A said that she believes this will encourage other gay and lesbian Karen to apply to work for the organization.

However, as the case study of Saw E and my participant observation suggests, it is not only those who are LGBT who may face SOGIE-based harassment and teasing, but also any employee who even momentarily displays a gender-deviant behaviour, especially male employees.

6.3. Gender policing and micro-aggressions regardless of SOGI

At the onset of this research project, I was focused on highlighting the experiences of self-identified sexual and gender minority Karen in their workplaces, under the assumption that their experiences of inclusion/exclusion are unique to their SOGI\textsuperscript{20}. However, Saw E’s narrative, as well as my observations of gender and sexuality-based comments and teasing forced me to expand my focus and explore the ways (some) cisgender heterosexual staff also experience acts of gender policing (Payne & Smith, 2016) as a result of even the most minute deviation from hegemonic gender expression.

In the context of the Karen non-profit in which I conducted participant observation, gender policing manifested through ongoing jokes among the Karen staff targeting several male Karen staff. From what I can surmise, one target was chosen based on his quiet and shy personality, and his gentle mannerisms, whereas the other target was chosen based on having stated an interest in being involved with LGBT advocacy early in his career within the organization, despite not being or identifying as LGBT himself. While these two individuals were the ones I observed being targeted most often, other male staff were also occasionally targeted in jokes implying a homosexual relationship between them and another male staff member. Given my lack of Karen and Burmese fluency, I am not sure whether such jokes were triggered by a display of intimacy between the individuals targeted that day, or whether this was simply a random-yet-routine practice – shifting targets in a perverse inclusivity, where if everyone is targeted then no one is being discriminated against.

\textsuperscript{20} In this section, I chose to drop the ‘gender expression’ from the SOGIE acronym, since I discuss a spectrum of slightly “deviant” gender expressions and behaviours among people who are otherwise conforming with hegemonic gender and sexuality and gender. To be able to draw distinctions and contrast the experience of the hegemonic majority and the marginalized sex/gender minority, I use SOGI to create this working (and in some senses – false) dichotomy.
The types of behaviour that may trigger a gender policing comment differ from hegemonic masculine ideals in North America, in that I observed several instances of male staff casually giving each other back rubs or holding hands while sitting at an office meeting, and such events did not prompt any commentary. Although the range of accepted behaviours under the Karen hegemonic masculinity may be different or even broader than North American ones, gender policing behaviour was nonetheless prevalent among male staff. As the organization staff consisted primarily of men, it is difficult to gauge whether and how gender policing behaviour takes place among female staff, but I will attempt to discuss this with the available data.

6.3.1. A men’s culture or a joking culture?

Male interlocutors repeatedly informed me that behaviours which I categorize as gender policing are male-specific phenomena, perpetrated by men against other men. Male interviewees reported that men are not likely to use similar techniques (e.g. gender-based jokes) to police women’s gender expression, as women deviating from hegemonic femininity towards masculine traits simply affirm men’s own attempts to align themselves with the same hegemonic masculine traits. Lesbian women (or transgender men) were said to also be spared gender policing treatment, because “she is physically... a woman, so we dare not make a joke,” said Saw A. He explained a certain taboo in Karen culture against insulting women, calling such behaviour “kind of a crime,” or simply “bad manner”. On the other hand, transgender women and feminine-presenting gay men were not spared, “Because in our mind, even though he – how much he acts like a woman, he is... his physical body is male so we dare to make a joke more than that [lesbian] woman.” According to Saw A, this gendered pattern of socially acceptable gender policing is so insidious it would translate into settings such as the education system, where a teacher is not likely to punish a boy for making fun of a gay (or simply feminine) boy in class, but will punish a boy for making fun of a girl.

Despite my interviewees generally agreeing that cisgender women are not likely to make fun of men based on their gender expression or sexuality, my participant observation suggests that women too can be comfortable engaging and perpetuating the normalizing culture of policing men for their gender expression. I observed a comment in which a female staff member called a male co-worker, who was quite a close friend of hers, a “ladyboy”, which in Thailand commonly refers to transgender women. This comment was made publicly in front of the entire office, when the female staff member interjected in a conversation between the male staff member in question and me, in
which I asked him whether he was a “city boy” in the sense that he did not like the wilderness. The ladyboy comment elicited laughter from all the Karen staff present, as well as a comment to the female staff member asking her why she would attack her friend’s dignity this way. This comment was not a serious scolding, but more likely an expression of surprise at her participation in the ongoing joking about this male staff member’s sexuality and gender expression. Indeed, during my participant observation at the organization, this staff member was at the receiving end of multiple jokes about his sexuality, including a comment stating that I chose to conduct my gender and LGBT workshop for his benefit, to “save” him from jokes.

This framing of gender policing comments as jokes was ubiquitous among participants of both sexes. It inhibited participants from categorizing such jokes as discriminatory behavior or bullying, as their intent was not seen as malicious or fully serious, and they were seen to be part of a culture of joking among Karen and/or Burmese people. Saw A framed jokes regarding a man’s gender/sexuality as part of a broader set of themes in teasing jokes, which commonly include fatness, thinness, height, and even very narrow eye structure. However, Saw A did not say this to discount the impact gay jokes can have, since he simultaneously stated these joking themes are in fact somewhat “serious jokes”, but have an ambiguous status in Karen culture where on the one hand they are not considered insults when targeted at those who are presumed not to be seriously offended by them, and those who use them to tease are never scolded for it; However, on the other hand they have the potential to make those on the receiving end angry and hurt. The framing of SOGIE-related name-calling as a culturally accepted form of joking was repeated in all interviewees and enabled interlocutors to downplay the impact language of this sort can have on those at its receiving end.

6.3.2. “Gay” and “woman” label as destruction of reputation and a peer-pressure strategy

While downplay of the malicious intent and impact “gay jokes” can have on non-gay targets emerged as a theme in my interviewee data, a parallel theme suggested that such “gay” labelling is sometimes used to “destroy a man’s reputation”, often with the intention of pressuring the targeted male to “correct” non conforming behaviour, which could be feminine mannerisms, but also being quiet, keeping to yourself, and other passive behaviour. Alternatively, gender-based name calling can be used to pressure a man to perform a task that is framed as aligning with hegemonic masculine traits such as strength or bravery. While I did not observe such manipulative gender policing behaviour take place in the workplace setting, Saw A described a hypothetical example in which a
group of young men who are about to go cliff-jumping would pressure a man who was too scared to jump by telling him that if he does not jump then he is gay or he is a woman. The implication here being that to be a man is to be brave and for a man to show cowardice is to be a woman or a gay person (hence not a “real man”). Although there are few opportunities for such behaviour in the setting of the office, many Karen staff maintain close friendships outside of working hours in which such comments could take place. Whether or not this happens, however, is beyond the scope of my research.

6.3.3. Self-suppression of femininity in men

As discussed above, masculine culture among Karen men dictates that the perpetrator of gender-based name calling has not done anything wrong, it is the deviating party which was in the wrong. As a result, men who experience SOGIE-based teasing sometimes subsequently suppress any feminine qualities for which they were teased, as Saw A described, “We can’t do anything but we try to be... act like a man, [in a] manly manner, so like... just... we just try to avoid [being called] that kind of a word.” This (attempted) behaviour change is the fulfillment of the goal of gender policing as a social process which homogenizes gender expression.

In addition to suppressing femininity to avoid future name-calling, some SOGI majority men also spoke of a desire to respond aggressively to their perpetrator, presumably to affirm their masculinity, although the two interlocutors who have mentioned such an instinct did not act on it. One staff member did respond to a taunting comment by throwing an insult back at the staff member who taunted him, calling him an “old uncle”. While this retort was not gender-based, acts of gender policing among SOGIE-majority staff members were cyclical, to an extent, in the sense that the positions of teaser and teased alternated from day to day among some staff members, many of whom recounted being teased and teasing others. However, as mentioned above, certain male staff members were chosen as targets disproportionately more frequently, as their slightly deviant gender expression was a personality trait such as shyness which they could not or would not “correct”.

6.4. Responses to attempted change-making

Seeking to disrupt gender policing in the workplace, with the goal of creating an anti-oppressive space not only for SOGIE minority staff but all staff, I interrogated the extent to which current staff members were willing to introduce such changes into their organizational policy and practice. Most staff I interviewed affirmed verbally that more inclusion is better, and they would vote
in favour of such policies, because everyone deserves respect, but also because “many LGBT are talented” and they can contribute to the community and the organization. However, most staff exhibited little motivation to take substantial actions, as became apparent in the workshop I conducted. When, following a review of the SOGIE minority Karen case studies above, I opened the floor for suggestions of action items to address inclusion of LGBT in the organization, the room fell silent. This was not particularly surprising, as during my interviews staff felt that the status-quo within their respective organizations is already inclusive enough because staff are educated and open-minded and there are already policies which prohibit sexual harassment. Thus, although interviewees believed that if someone tried to introduce an LGBT-inclusion policy, a non-profit that works on human rights and development issues would be forced to accept it to stay true to its mission, in practice no one seemed to be particularly interested in introducing such policy and instead emphasized current policy is sufficient.

The sense that action on SOGIE inclusion is not necessary was also based on the idea that LGBT people should stand up for themselves. SOGIE majority staff felt that while they wish to be inclusive of LGBT people, they do not have the expertise to know what policies would benefit them, and in the absence of an LGBT staff member voicing a complaint or suggestion, there is not much they can do. While awaiting such a suggestion, staff who attended my workshop agreed that a statement of inclusion regardless of sexual orientation can be added to future job postings, but this action point was not pursued subsequently.

Despite this lack of action at the organization level, many SOGIE majority staff member expressed a keen interest in hearing more about the experiences of LGBT Karen, as well as to learn more about Western theories of sexuality and gender identity, which I had intentionally kept to a minimum during my workshop and interviews.

6.5. Conclusion

Attitudes towards SOGIE minorities among Karen non-profit workers reflected tolerance and explicit acceptance, but lacked nuance and coherence in understanding the diversity of SOGIE minority experiences, and what behaviours they may find hurtful or insulting. Factors such as a strong religious background and the age or generation to which the Karen non-profit staff belongs influenced their attitudes towards SOGIE minority Karen. There was a sense among SOGIE majority people that whereas in the greater Karen society, LGBT discrimination was strong among the older
generation and will take a long time to uproot, the situation within NGOs on the border was such that there was little to no discrimination against LGBT Karen since it was staffed with primarily young educated and tolerant Karen. This later assumption was prevalent despite the presence of micro-aggressions towards SOGIE minority Karen staff members within non-profits, which affected not only those who identify as LGBT or a sexual and gender minority, but also any staff member, especially biologically male staff members whose gender expression, behaviour, or mannerism stray from hegemonic masculinity. Such behaviours which I term micro-aggressions, were dismissed as jokes by most SOGIE majority interlocutors, and can be thus understood as a manifestation of gender policing as conceptualized by Payne and Smith (2016).

Taking these observations and insights into account, I will now provide some recommendations for the participating non-profits to become more inclusive workplaces in terms of SOGIE, which I hope may be applicable to non-profits operating in similar contexts, as well as to scholars and activists working on SOGIE issues globally.
Chapter 7: Recommendations

I base my following recommendations on the discrepancies I have observed between SOGIE majority understandings of SOGIE, mainstream LGBT rights discourse, and the lived experiences of my SOGIE minority participants within their non-profit workplaces. In addition, I draw on recommendations previously made by scholars which I believe are pertinent to the case of SOGIE-inclusion within the grassroots non-profit workplace in Southeast Asia.

7.1.1. Broaden scope from LGBT non-discrimination to uprooting policing of difference

Those interested in creating SOGIE inclusive workplaces should broaden their language beyond “workplace LGBT discrimination” for two reasons. Teasing behaviour in the non-profit workplace studied here was taken to constitute LGBT discrimination only if (a) there was malicious intent and (b) if the teased party identified as LGBT. This means that workers who are teased, but are not gay, lesbian, and/or transgender, see no possibility for recourse or for making unpleasant behaviours cease. On the other hand, even LGBT individuals who experience teasing are reluctant to interpret their experiences as “discrimination” because they assume the behaviour to not stem from malicious intent and wish to be pro-social in their organizations. In fact, both SOGIE majority and minority interlocutors showed cognitive dissonance where they would say there is no discrimination or negative comments at work, but then they would go on to tell me about incidents that, for me, would fall under that category. Thus, the framing of “discrimination” is exclusionary and narrow.

Accordingly, workplace training and human resources practice must bridge this gap in labelling of negative behaviours and the reluctance to disclose uncomfortable circumstances and to complain. One way to do this is to ask employees the right questions. SOGIE minorities consistently spoke of negative incidents in the workplace from a non-victim perspective. For example, asking, “Have you ever felt uncomfortable or mistreated at work” elicited a negative response, but the same employees spoke at length when asked which comments they do not like, or what they wish colleagues did not ask them or joke about. Hence, I echo Payne and Smith:

“We call for a paradigm shift—one that positions the aggression targeting LGBTQ and gender nonconforming [people] within a broader system of gender regulation that is experienced by all people and in all contexts. We propose gender policing as a concept that more accurately encompasses the cultural phenomenon of targeting gender performances that do not conform to binary gender norms. We argue that shifting researchers’, educators’, and policy makers’ collective understanding of peer-to-peer aggression from bullying to gender policing and regulation of difference will produce
new possibilities for sustainable reform efforts that target cultural manifestations of hegemonic gender, rather than only focus on eliminating overt bullying behaviors and developing tolerance between peers” (2016, p. 129)

Their suggestion, made in the context of gender policing in North American schools, also resonates with Bergenfield and Miller, who wish to see development organizations “engaging in a more transformational project that addresses the underlying factors that generate violence and oppression thus encompassing a benefit for all people who differ from mainstream conceptions of sexual or gender normality in a community, not just LGBT-identified people” (2014). They recognize that this will require development organizations to de-emphasize measurable targets and goals.

7.1.2. Focus on building understanding, not enforcing policy

Following the above recommendation, I suggest that although broader NGO policy and inclusion statements can signal to gender non-conforming and potential LGBT employees that they will be welcome and protected, there is a greater need to focus not on policy, but on cultivating solidarity and understanding of SOGIE minorities among all non-profit staff that would translate to a welcoming workplace in practice. Policy statements often remain in the books and do not translate to behaviour change, as non-profits often introduce policies mainly to prevent imminent risk or respond to past incidents or donor stipulations. Thus, the presence of such policies does not spare LGBT and other gender non-conforming employees from gender policing comments.

Therefore, I draw on Freire’s pedagogical suggestions (1970) and recommend that non-profits cultivate a workplace culture where all behaviours are subject to discussion and critique. While this suggestion could be construed as imperialist or ethnocentric coming from a global North researcher making recommendations for global South organizations, I invoke Baines who concludes in the context of anti-colonial development practice:

“Debate and discussion may be one of the few ways to begin to un-do unliveable scripts. In this context, all practices must be subject to critique and debate. It is not helpful to stop dialogue or the search for un-doings for fear of appearing colonial and oppressive. Rather, ongoing dialogue about new ways of doing these relations may be one of the only ways to un-do gender, colonization and its siblings. (2010, p. 140)

Since small non-profit organizations lack the know-how to implement such SOGIE-inclusive programming and practice there is a need for anti-colonial and anti-oppressive resources and for collaboration between grassroots “LGBT” groups and other human rights groups operating in the
Recommendations

same geographic areas and cultural contexts. Such collaborations could be fruitful for expanding understandings of SOGIE by conveying for example that while for some people gender non-conformity is related to their homosexual orientation, for others they are independent of each other. Broadening the scope of what staff members understand as a “legitimate queer” can help combat teasing behaviours that are based on presumptions of co-workers’ identities. Another avenue for discussion could tackle the tension between employees’ religious beliefs and their acceptance of SOGIE minorities. Of course, discussions of such sensitive matters would require a competent facilitator. In the absence of one, I suggest organizations implement an anonymous reporting mechanism through which employees can submit incidents that they wish to discuss publicly, not to punish or correct the perpetrator, but to collectively interpret and understand the impact these incidents had and their underlying causes.

Another way of enabling such discussions is by using materials available online. All my participants said they learned significantly about LGBT people through the internet and movies, and research on queer youth in Asia and ICT suggest that online platforms are also useful for SOGIE minorities to expand their understanding and find support (Hanckel, 2016; Lin & Van der Putten, 2012). Some resources for global LGBT advocacy are available online already, such as the “myth busting toolkit” on matters of faith, gender, and sexuality produced by the Institute for Development Studies (“Faith, Gender & Sexuality: A Toolkit.,” n.d.). This toolkit is incomprehensive, however, as it does not address many of the myths I have encountered in my interviews. For example, under the myth “homosexuality can be cured,” they only speak about conversion therapy and peer pressure, and not about how to understand a homosexual person themselves “praying their own gay away”, like Yuri. Thus, I recommend that websites that publish advocacy materials of this sort open themselves to user feedback and continue to expand their materials. This could be easier if they host resources on a wiki where users from around the world can add their own content. (Of course wiki spaces are not without the peril of exclusion, see for example, Lannon, 2014.)

7.1.3. Increase Karen SOGIE minority visibility

I recommend that not only negative incidents be made more visible and public, but also the overall experiences of Karen SOGIE minority people. My interviews demonstrated that even when someone was abstractly aware of a large spectrum of gender/sexual identities, they did not necessarily think their own community “has those people” unless personal experience proved
otherwise. My participants also explicitly said they wanted to hear more from SOGIE minorities and have more opportunities for public interaction with them. Thus, I call on researchers, advocates, and Karen SOGIE minorities themselves, to document and make available Karen SOGIE minority testimonies, even if anonymous, so that SOGIE majority can learn from and empathize with actual people, rather than abstract and simplistic categories. Especially useful would be to highlight individuals affected by SOGIE-related discrimination who do not fit the mold of the Karen “gay” and “lesbian” that I outlined in this thesis. Once again, the easiest method for disseminating these testimonies is through online publication, and indeed I managed to find one such blog in which Yaya, a young Karen transgender woman from Yangon, documents her life and advocacy efforts ("A memoir of the Karen (Kayin) Transgender Woman of Burma", 2016). Yaya’s blog is a good beginning, but of course many more stories must be told to encompass the diversity of Karen SOGIE minorities experiences.

7.1.4. Further research the impact of SOGIE on education, employment and well-being

Given the social location of all the participants in this research as educated and employed urban Karen people, it is not surprising that for the most part, participants did not acknowledge that discrimination against LGBT people in their context significantly impacts LGBT Karens’ access to education and employment. Consequentially, future research should document the livelihoods of SOGIE minority Karen outside the non-profit sector, particularly in rural areas of Myanmar and Thailand, as well as the quality of their employment in comparison with SOGIE majority Karen people.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

SOGIE majority Karen non-profit staff explain who they understand to be “LGBT” Karen largely by merging gender identity and sexual orientation into one phenomenon. So, for them, there is only one way to be legitimately “gay” or “lesbian” – through being visibly gender non-conforming. Gays dress and act feminine, and are thus not “real men”, and lesbians dress and act masculine, and are thus not “real women”. Gays and lesbians are, in essence, separate gender categories. Bisexuality does not exist by name in the Karen community, according to most SOGIE majority participants, and those Karen who have had bisexual life-trajectories are heterosexuals engaged in homosexual relationships for factors unrelated to their sexual orientation. Thus, when SOGIE majority participants affirm the need to protect the rights of LGBT people, they envision only the narrow categories of “gay” and “lesbian” as relevant to the Karen community.

Interviews with SOGIE minority Karen, however, showed that not all Karen fit within these gender/sexuality categories. Thus, SOGIE minority Karen find it difficult to disclose their SOGIE to their colleagues, and when they do so, they must extensively clarify misconceptions. Nevertheless, all SOGIE minority Karen whom I interviewed felt strongly attached to the Karen community and to their non-profits, and portrayed them overall as positive work environments, despite occasional gender- and sexuality-based jokes or teasing comments that they overheard.

The persistence of SOGIE-based teasing within Karen-led non-profits stems from the way they interpret their obligation to protect “LGBT” according to the human rights framework to which they subscribe. Thus, to protect “legitimate” gays and lesbians, SOGIE majority staff believe the extent of their non-profits’ obligation is to ensure no LGBT staff member is maliciously bullied, and to not discriminate against LGBT candidates when making hiring decisions or delegating work duties. Because both SOGIE minority and SOGIE majority staff understand “LGBT non-discrimination” through this narrow definition, they dismiss the insidious and unintentional ways in which non-profit staff police each other’s gender expression (and by extension – sexuality) at work. Teasing is especially common when staff presume the person they are teasing is not LGBT. Such gender-based teasing has a negative impact not only on LGBT staff who do not appear to be “gay” or “lesbian”, but also on staff who are heterosexual and cisgender, yet are also frequently teased.
If Karen-led and other non-profit organizations wish to become more inclusive and affirming workplaces, I recommend they encourage dialogue and debate about gender expression and its suppression in society and the ways in which this takes place in the office. Through compassionate discussion, I believe non-profit staff will slowly change the behaviours that make their colleagues uncomfortable. I also recommend that organizations have an anonymous reporting mechanism, where uncomfortable comments or incidents can be brought to light, not to punish or criticize, but to collaboratively discuss whether and how such behaviour should be changed. In addition, I hope further research and advocacy would increase the visibility of Karen SOGIE minorities and their experiences, so that the spectrum of what a Karen SOGIE minority could be like expands in the community’s mind.

Outside of the Karen non-profit community, I hope this research serves to inform change-makers in international non-profit organizations and community-based organizations striving towards more inclusive programming and workplaces. My research has problematized the assumption “LGBT” labels and rights-based activism are universally relevant and comprehensive in their reach. I hope international organizations striving to promote SOGIE equality act accordingly to expand their focus beyond identity politics and challenge the underlying oppression and repression of gender expression and sexuality at all levels of their work, including their own offices.
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Appendix

A. Interview questions and schedule

Phase I: LGBT Karen participants:

1) How do you, as a Karen person, think about sexual attraction?
   a. Why do you think certain people are attracted to people of their own gender?
      i. What about people who can be attracted both to their own gender, as well as other gender(s)? [bisexuality]
   b. Why do you think certain people identify as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth?
   c. If you feel comfortable, please elaborate on how you understand your own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

2) How do you think Karen society feels about people who are homosexual, bisexual, and/or identify with a different gender than was assigned to them at birth?

3) Please tell me about your experiences working in Karen CBOs
   a. Have you disclosed your gender identity and/or sexuality to any co-workers? What were their responses?
   b. Have you faced any discrimination, bullying, or negative comments based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity? Could you elaborate on any instances where you felt uncomfortable? What action have you taken in response?
   c. Have you experienced any positive, accepting moments where you felt that you could be openly yourself, regardless of your gender identity and/or sexual orientation?

4) What do you think Karen CBOs that you have worked with can do to be more inclusive and welcoming to Karen staff who are a sexual orientation and/or gender identity minority?

5) Do you have anything else to add? What would you like non-LGBT Karen CBO members to know about being an LGBT/SOGI minority Karen person?

Phase II: Non-LGBT Karen participants:

1) How do you, as a Karen person, think about sexual attraction?
   a. Why do you think certain people are attracted to people of their own gender?
      i. What about people who can be attracted both to their own gender, as well as other gender(s)? [bisexuality]
   b. Why do you think certain people identify as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth?

2) Within your organization, what do you think are your local staff’s attitudes or beliefs about LGBT Karen people?

3) How do you think Karen society feels about people who are homosexual, bisexual, and/or identify with a different gender than was assigned to them at birth?

4) What do you think are some challenges LGBT Karen people face in the Karen community?
   a. Do you think any of these challenges are also present in the Karen CBO workplace?

5) Does your organization have a policy about preventing discrimination and promoting the inclusion of LGBT Karen in your organization?
   a. As participants in your programs?
   b. As employees?
   c. If not, how do you think your staff would feel about including such a policy?
Appendix

Phase III: Post-workshop follow up with the LGBT Karen participants working for participating CBOs

1) How did you feel during the workshop that I conducted with your organization (if attended)? Was there anything you observed that made you hopeful? Upset?

2) What do you think could have been improved in the way the workshop has been conducted or received by the organization?

3) Since the LGBT-inclusion/anti-discrimination policy has been drafted by your organization, have you felt any change in the office atmosphere/culture/attitudes towards LGBT issues?

4) In the time since the workshop, have you observed or experienced any comments or incidents that made you feel uncomfortable due to your sexual orientation and/or gender identity (micro-aggressions) or that made you feel included and accepted (micro-affirmations)?
B. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) workshop outline

Materials:
- Post-it notes
- Colorful markers
- Velcro
- Flipchart paper

Introduction (20 min)

- Objectives:
  1. All staff who attend the workshop have a better understanding of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation as well as gender inequality and oppression.
  2. Staff who attend the workshop are able to reflect on their actions and others' actions and identify potentially oppressive behaviour and take action to change such behaviour
- Why am I doing this workshop?
  1. I am interested in helping us work together to understand gender inequality and why it is that we are doing a report on women's issues.
  2. Work together to make sure our internal office conduct reflects what we are trying to do with our work.
  3. I am hoping to use the materials we produce together as data for my thesis project, which as some of you know, is about challenges and opportunities for LGBT inclusion in Karen CBOs/CSOs. I will not be recording our discussions or quoting anyone – but I would like to take photos of our progress (without any people in them) to document this journey, both for my thesis and also for us to see where we started and where we ended up in the course of the next hour and a half.
  4. This workshop is not like some of our other capacity building workshops. The main purpose is not for me to teach you something, but for us to learn from each other and create meaning together. Since my research is about Karen people, I would like you – Karen people – to help me interpret my findings and be active creators of this research, because I think you have the right to influence the knowledge that is created about you and put out into the world.
- Ground rules!
  1. No one should be interrupted – should listen respectfully
  2. If you disagree with someone else – do so politely – use "I" statements
3. If you feel uncomfortable or need to leave – you can go to the kitchen and our active listener [censored] will quietly follow up to see if you need to decompress by talking to someone
4. Keep an open mind and question everything!
5. Do not share or talk about anything personal that is shared in this space after the workshop – but you can talk about ideas and what you learned.

- Power flower: Age, gender, language, geographic origin, documentation type (refugee/migrant/citizen), ethnicity. Inner petal for dominant group, outer petal for own personal status/identity.

Figure 6 Powerflower diagram
What is gender? (20 minutes)

Questions to explore:

1) Gender – word associations/definitions
2) **Venn Diagram** – how many genders are there? What makes them different from each other? What do people of different genders have in common?
3) How do people know their gender? How do people know each other's gender? Can you always tell someone's gender?

**Gender inequality and oppression (20 minutes)**

- All humans are equal (?)
- Political, economic, cultural, family factors that make people with different identities unequal
  - Activity: Scales with added "burdens"?
  - Men have more opportunities to work in construction and labour, higher positions

**LGBT case studies and action taking (30 minutes)**

- What happens if someone's gender identity is not the same as the gender identity other people gave them at birth/by looking at them?
  - Activity: People's profiles – place them somewhere on the Venn
- Should other people respect that person's identity, or is it right for them to try to make them fit into one of the circles already created?
- Genderbread person
Case Studies: Experiences of Karen LGBT and Thoughts of non-LGBT Karen

What can be done about this oppression?

- How can we do this:
  - in our work for this organization? Projecting women's voices, hiring more female researchers, collecting more women's testimonies, hiring more female IPOs, encouraging women in our organisation to take leadership roles/present/speak up
  - Create checklist/audit/survey to be revised in 6 months? what kinds of questions should we ask to be accountable in 6 months' time? (engage in research) (services, inclusivity statement on our job descriptions, awareness posters around the office? PE form? KHRG positions on important issues? Strategic planning discussion?)
  - In our daily life?
C. FPAR workshop feedback form

**Feedback for Gender/LGBT/Anti-Oppression Workshop**

Please take 2 minutes to let Becky know how you felt about the workshop :)  

The main thing I took away/learned from the workshop is....  

Long-answer text  

After the workshop, I still want to know....  

Long-answer text  

During the workshop I felt...  

Long-answer text  

What do you wish was done differently? Any suggestions for Becky?  

Long-answer text  

*Figure 8 FPAR workshop feedback form*
D. Relevant excerpts from interview transcripts

8.1.1. Saw A

**SawA.r61**

*Saw A: ... Like for males, we would be more friendly with lesbian because in the cul-
most of the lesbian in our community try to be like male, so like ... Try to be like male,
so there won't be a problem. So he is like... Even she is... uh physically... female, she
tries to be male so we can be more friendly. But for gay, he's, even though he's
physically is he's gay- he is a man, his mind is gay.*

**SawA.r173**

*Saw A: I'm Christian and I go to church regularly and... I really discuss about the...
like, the, like the Christianity, and when we talk about.. wh-when I talk with my friend,
so like, even though I'm Christian I'm too for human rights, so it seems that I am....
like, I don't-I don't live my life as God wants me to live, so it's like... Maybe I'm like
doing the... I'm being opposite with-with the God's will. For example, God's.. God
don't want, God don't want the peo-human to be... to like each other male-to-male or
female-to-female, but I'm working for human rights, I'm working for-maybe I will also
work for LGBT, so like... My career is opposite with God's. So my life also maybe
opposite with God's. So th-that kind [of] mindset, you know... I-in... that's also you
can.. that can reflect religion and religion bet-with the career; so... even though I'm not g...
I'm not a gay, I'm working for human rights so there are, there are some human
rights articles that... like... that is not appropriate with God will, so like I'm... Maybe I
become... people-ev-even some strong Christians will even call me-I am Satan. I am
like working for Satan. They can call like this; you understand? Because... uh we use
like even, even activists of the LGBT, so... God told-God have the exact word that you
can't do y-you can't do th-that things, so if I do like, I'm encouraging that kind of
manner; and like... that.. Everything that opposite God is Satan, right? So everything
what—eh if I-I'm very.. If I'm a strong human rights activist, I will.. Even though I'm
not a.. that kind of person, I work for them, so I become.. may—like Christian
community will av-avoid me...*

8.1.2. Saw C

**SawC.r12-18**

*Saw C: [S]ome people find men— it's like the same gender— is more attractive. I
think... mm.. based on, based on where it... based [on] many things, like it could be...
where they grew up, they grew up with, you know, with like many..wom- like together
with many women, and they're only... not many girls, with a boy. And... Also- Yeah...
and also... [3 sec] they find men attractive, it's difficult. [2 sec]. [...] 

I: So you think, um.. uh same.. same-gender attraction is developed later in life? So
through.. through experiences in someone's life?
Saw C: Um... yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
I: So it’s not something you’re born with?
Saw C: Mm... no.

**SawC.r60**

I: So, if you see a man... or someone you think was, you know, born a man
Saw C: Mhm
I: And dresses and acts like a woman
Saw C: Mhm
I: Do you automatically assume that he also... he attracted to men? That he is gay?
Saw C: Mhm
I: Is it the same thing for you?
Saw C: Um...I will say... 70% yes. Yeah.
I: Yeah. And you- people just assume, then?
Saw C: Yeah, assume that... //And like// let’s say, if-if I... don’t like, like you know... like women, [and] identify myself as woman, why would I use women, mater-shirt or, you know, women material.

8.1.3. Saw D

**SawD.r52**

Saw D: [W]hat I say to other- my close friends- is that uh... I’m a guy who likes other guys. Uh... a boy who likes other boys. [laughs] Uh... Like that kind of things. And uh.. Always have to expand, because... They think that.. when I say that, they would.. Their reaction would be "oh, are you gonna start dream- dressing or putting make up on, or lipstick on?" I always have to have additional explanation of "oh it doesn’t mean that I want a transgender, I’m just... You know, a boy who likes boys, so I will be like this, you know? Um... So it’s just... Understanding myself is easy, but... Um... explaining [to] other people who I am is quite difficult [...]

8.1.4. Naw B

**NawB.r280-295**

I: [...] They tell me “oh, like, a lesbian is always ah it’s also a woman who wants to be a man and is attracted to women” Like a lot of people just assume that. Um... [tsks] Do you, do you, do you find that also? Do you see that also?

Naw B: Yeah, totally different. I.. For in I think in Canada... In Canada... In Thailand in Burma it’s different. [2 sec] And we cannot just the people I think, like.. some L.. Like the-the lesbians in Canada they, they can have sex with a man too, I mean... [2 sec] And in, in I think in Burma... or Thailand, that lesbians they won’t... They will just uh like a woman. I mean.

I: [2 sec] Uh so.. You mean in Canada... [1 sec] lesbians are having sex with men or like bisexual //women//?
Naw B: bisexual //I mean//.
I: Yeah. So you don’t think there is bisexuality really in... in Burma?
Naw B: Mhm.
I: [3 sec] Right. But I mean, [laughs] clearly that.. that you said you might uh... you might identify like that so maybe it’s just //not visible//
Naw B: //but I think// they have, they have different lesbians. Like... the lesbian who dress up like a.. a who.. like a woman. [2 sec] it won’t like... [1 sec] have a bisexual. But the woman who also are bi-bisexual they can have both. I mean like that.
I: Sorry... Are you talking about Burma now?
Naw B: Yeah.
I: Uh okay, so wait, there’s women who dress like women...
Naw B: mhm
I: And they are kind of bisexual?
Naw B: Mhm.
I: And then the women who dress more masculine are just, just want to have uh.. female partners?
Naw B: Mhm.

8.1.5. Naw D

NawD.r100-102

Naw D---: It’s just coming naturally.
I: Naturally?
Naw D---: Naturally. This is not a... pretending. They cannot pretend looking like... right? If I like... [3 sec] I cannot pretend, I think. For me, I cannot pretend [laughs]. If I like to wear like women’s dresses.. [3 sec] I cannot pretend like this is... I like, so I want to buy, I want to dress... This is coming naturally, you’re not pretending. Some people think that, oh this is just (kidding), they [SOGIE minorities are] pretending... [2 sec] acting or something like this, some people think like that. For me, I think that gay or lesbian.. it’s coming from naturally, since they were born. [3 sec]
### E. Karen and Burmese SOGIE minority labels

#### Table 5.1 Interlocutor definitions of Karen and Burmese SOGIE minority labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corresponding English categories</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Karen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender woman / feminine presenting MSM</td>
<td>Achouk “dry”(^1)</td>
<td>Mein Ma Sha “searching woman” (wants to be a woman)</td>
<td>Akwee Taw “dry”</td>
<td>Loh Ta Poe Moo “your heart is like a girl”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ma Youcha “female guy”</td>
<td>Apwint “open”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lo Mu Za Yu &quot;like a woman&quot; (does not imply MSM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSM with masculine gender expression</td>
<td>Apone “closed”</td>
<td>Tan Lo (verb) gay with someone.</td>
<td>Homo (^2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender man/lesbian</td>
<td>Ya Ta Sha “searching man”</td>
<td>Mu Kwa “man-woman”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lesbian (^3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tomboy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Achouk or Achaut literally means “something dry”. The “LGBT” Burmese informants in Gilbert’s study (2013) interpreted it as referring to the dryness of anal sex in contrast to vaginal sex or the idea that achaut do not have semen.

\(^2\) This term was not used by my interlocutors but was found in literature on Myanmar by Chua (2015) and Gilbert (2013).

\(^3\) While my informants used “lesbian” to imply gender non-conforming female-attracted-to females, according to Chua the term “refers generally to women who are attracted to other women, and, depending on the user, sometimes also specifically to those who appear gender conforming.” (2015, p. 313)