

7th International Conference on
HIV/AIDS, STDs and STIs

March 18-19, 2019 | New York, USA

ACCEPTED

J AIDS CLIN RES 2019, VOLUME:10 | DOI:10.4172/2155-6113-C1-030

**Kuwentong Positibo:
 Unfolding identities
 and human potentials
 of selected people living
 with HIV (PLHIV)
 through their counter-
 narratives**

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My fear of acquiring HIV as part of the risky population and my concern for the affected and infected sectors prompted my interest to pursue this narrative research. Current epidemiological data show that HIV/AIDS in the Philippines is already an epidemic and a public health concern that demands urgent action. In 2017 alone, 968 new HIV-positive individuals were reported, making this the highest number of reported cases since 1984 (Department of Health, 2016). After reviewing existing literature on people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the country, I found out that much can be explored about their experiences. Moreover,

labels and identities that were usually ascribed to them have a totalizing effect that centers on HIV/AIDS and stigmatizing typologies that have continued to misrepresent them. This study argued that these misrepresentations are products of dominant narratives that continuously shape their realities and identities, and by countering them, PLHIV may better represent their identities. Thus, this research explored how queer identities are constructed from their counter-narratives. This stems from the belief that empowerment and identity are inevitably inseparable concepts (Drury, Evripidou & Zomeren, 2015), and that the fight against oppressive structures begins with the collective consciousness of the oppressed of their distinct experience of marginalization (Turner & Maschi, 2014). Hence, to remain true to its goal of “unfolding human potentials” (Quebral, 1971), Development Communication must also interrogate the power relationship between identity and marginalization. Six PLHIV,

aged 22-35, were selected using intensity sampling to participate in the pakikipagkuwentuhan (Narrative interviewing). Through narrative analysis, this study: 1) narrated their individual stories of living with HIV; 2) analyzed the dominant and counter-narratives from their stories; and 3) unfolded queer identities from their counter-narratives. Some principles of narrative inquiry and the foundations of Queer Theory were adopted as theoretical lenses in analyzing their stories. Four general themes of dominant narratives were elicited from their stories of living with HIV. These include: 1) Hindi normal at tinatago (not normal and hidden); 2) Sakit ng bakla at makakati kaya mga walang silbi at mamamatay na (disease of gays and the promiscuous, and, by extension, the worthless and dying people); 3) Bawal sayo (you’re not allowed); and 4) Iresponsable (irresponsible). These narratives have continued to misrepresent their realities and suppress their identities. In response, their counter-narratives

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were elicited and analyzed individually to recognize the uniqueness of their narratives and their counteractions. A closer look at their counter-narratives revealed themes that talk about: 1) normal self; 2) PLHIV's different stories and needs; 3) fair treatment to PLHIV; 4) responsibility; 5) HIV as everyone's disease; and 6) breaking misconceptions about mental health. Subsequently, their narratives unfolded their queer identities as empowered

individuals, responsible, optimistic, and emphatic leaders and most especially, normal people. Findings revealed that the interplay of dominant and counter-narratives in their stories is dynamic and does not follow a one-to-one correspondence. Hence, this dynamic interplay can be used in understanding narratives inside a story and in constructing queer identities. Also, this study found that PLHIV are not passive "oppressed" individuals, but

actually have the agency to fight for their rights and represent themselves through their own stories. This study provides insights that could improve HIV/AIDS initiatives in the field of DevCom, and implications on DevCom practice that draw parallelisms between the recognition of (queer) identities and the giving of voice to the voiceless.

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