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## From Economic Transaction to LGBT Identity: Transformations in Social Work Expertise About Gender and Sexuality in Vietnam During the 2010s

In June 2014, social workers and LGBT advocates from local NGOs in Hồ Chí Minh City organized a series of workshops to educate students, faculty, and practicing social workers about contemporary *đồng tính* [gay] experiences and identities. The sessions that I and other participants attended provided factual information from international English-language materials, including definitions and translations of terms such as gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and the letters comprising LGBT.<sup>1</sup> Presenters described the workshops as specifically intended to dispel pervasive stereotypes and misconceptions in Vietnam, including among students and social workers, that homosexuality was a disease, a deviance, or a fad imported from abroad.

The presenters, almost all of whom did not identify as LGBT, took opportunities at various moments to narrate how their own understandings had shifted over the course of several years of work with LGBT individuals. Tuấn, a social worker at a prominent transnational NGO, had participated for years in an internationally funded HIV/AIDS prevention and safer sex education project.<sup>2</sup> He told the group that he had originally thought that

economic necessity compelled unhoused young men to engage in sex work, becoming men who have sex with men (MSM). The acronym MSM became popular globally in HIV/AIDS education and intervention work during the first decade of the 2000s precisely because it described a behavior and not a sexual identity, thus sidestepping potential stigma. When Tuán's social work clients had expressed shame about participating in sex work, Tuán had interpreted this as due in part to it being same-sex sexual activity. He had therefore focused on supporting male clients to decrease or cease sexual activity with other men—including, but not limited to, transactional sex.

Tuán explained that recent studies funded by transnational NGOs and Vietnamese research institutes, as well as his own experience working with MSM, helped him realize that most MSM identify as gay and engage in transactional sex because of both economic necessity and sexual orientation. While their unhoused status and engagement in sex work reflected limited economic options, they had been compelled to migrate to urban areas for reasons related to familial and community discrimination—sometimes violent discrimination—that had targeted them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Tuán now understood that assisting economically vulnerable MSM and preventing other LGBT youth from becoming homeless required broad popular education about the diversity of human gender and sexuality that would promote acceptance and rights for LGBT individuals.

Tuán's story encapsulates a broader transformation in attitudes toward LGBT identities and persons that occurred in Vietnam during the 2010s. National opinion surveys in the early 2000s documented very high, widespread levels of opposition to homosexuality and gender variance that were especially negative toward men having sex with men.<sup>3</sup> A 2003 survey by the World Health Organization, Ministry of Health, General Statistics Office, and UNICEF found that homosexuality was unknown to approximately 40 percent of Vietnamese young people.<sup>4</sup> Reports on the experiences of LGBT persons during the 2000s and 2010s chronicled violence, high rates of suicidality, discrimination in education and employment, microaggressions, rape of women presumed to be lesbian, and state-sponsored violence at the hands of civil defense forces and police.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-2010s, however, there were clear signs that change was underway. Vietnam held its first Pride event (2012), the National Assembly

removed the prohibition on same-sex marriage from the Marriage and Family Law (2014), a civil code legalized gender reassignment surgery and the recognition of transgender individuals (2015),<sup>6</sup> media coverage of LGBT issues became more positive, and popular opinion moved toward acceptance of sexual minorities as “normal” [*binh thường*] and deserving of rights and recognition. In urban areas in particular, longstanding pejorative terms such as *pê đê* (from the French *pederasty*) or *bóng* [shadow] were being replaced by the global English term LGBT. A study of LGBT street youth published in 2012 found it remarkable that the LGBT community in Vietnam now shared “an international language in designating particularities in the realm of gender identities and sexual orientations.”<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, challenges remained. Legal rights, including to same-sex marriage, were incomplete.<sup>8</sup> Heteronormative expectations continued to fuel family dynamics, discrimination, harassment, and violence against LGBT persons. Family members who might accept their children’s sexuality or gender identity still risked ostracism by others in the community, and this could lead young people to hide their LGBT status or leave home.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, scholars, LGBT activists, and allies rightly characterized the trajectory in Vietnam during the 2010s as progressive.<sup>10</sup>

The arc of change in Vietnam may be evident, but less clear is why specific ideas about gender and sexuality began to be seen as credible and compelling at particular moments and in specific contexts. The workshops I attended demonstrate that the labor of individuals and organizations to translate, popularize, and apply transnational expertise played a notable role in this transformation. Drawing on extensive participant observation fieldwork conducted in several phases from 2010 to 2016 with social work students, professional social workers, and university professors of social work, this article ethnographically traces the politics of knowledge production about gender and sexuality in Vietnam through transnational political economic relations that include significant research, programming, and funding by NGOs and governments.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by David Valentine’s groundbreaking analysis of the emergence of the category *transgender*,<sup>12</sup> I analyze how the institutionalization of particular terms and their associated conceptualizations of gender and sexuality in Vietnam during the 2010s advanced important political claims, including calls for rights and agency,

but may also have rendered other identities and the persons associated with them unintelligible. While much was gained, what might have been lost, and at what price?

To address this question, I focus on social workers' lived experience of knowledge production and application. First, I outline the broader context for my research on the Vietnamese government's push to develop the field of social work in Vietnam during the 2010s. Official promotion of social work as a scientific solution to the inequalities of an expanding market economy led to a rapid infusion of foreign expertise. This transnationally circulating knowledge promoted a notion of the social work client as an individual possessed of thoughts and feelings who could be guided to engage in projects of self-assessment and self-improvement. I argue that while Vietnamese social workers often decry the inequity associated with a market economy, the traits associated with the concept of client personhood in fact closely resemble those of what I have elsewhere called "market personhood."<sup>13</sup> The Vietnamese government's promotion of social work during the 2010s should thus be seen as part of a broader biopolitical project to shape market-ready citizens.

I then turn to how these dynamics shaped the specific transformation of expertise regarding gender and sexuality within government and civil society organizations that Tuán chronicled during the workshop: from HIV/AIDS prevention focused on the behavioral category of MSM to rights-based articulations of LGBT as gender and sexual identities inherent in individuals. While understandings of sexual minorities changed in many segments of Vietnamese society during the 2010s, the context of social work training is particularly useful for exploring how this transformation occurred, for two reasons. First, like Tuán, many social workers intentionally and explicitly sought to develop knowledge about LGBT identities through increased social contact with sexual minorities and participation in internationally sponsored training, such as the workshops I attended.<sup>14</sup> Second, social workers then deployed their newfound knowledge to play a crucial role in research and advocacy to effect similar changes in the broader population by promoting an identity-based conception of LGBT individuals.

Identity and rights approaches have undoubtedly promoted positive change in LGBT individuals' lives. As Valentine and other scholars have demonstrated, however, the relatively recent invention of the notion that

gender and sexuality are ontologically distinct aspects of human identity intrinsic to a person has certain costs, the most notable of which is that this way of knowing renders invisible persons who do not as neatly fit these ascendant understandings of gender and sexual categories.<sup>15</sup> For example, Valentine describes how many of the African American and Latinx participants in one New York City organization's support group for transgender individuals did not in fact see themselves as transgender. Persons whom the organization's staff characterized as transgender heterosexual women might instead self-identify as female and gay, terms that in these specific instances would seem contradictory to staff.<sup>16</sup> The consequence is that the very categories deployed in quests for social justice related to gender and sexuality may in fact exclude other more fluid or complex understandings, with the result that those to whom such latter understandings are meaningful might be dismissed by experts and activists as uneducated or confused—a marginalization that often reflects class, race, ethnicity, or other forms of difference.

This seems to be the case in Vietnam as well, in which the promotion of transnational LGBT expertise leads to diverse historical and contemporary configurations of gender and sexuality receding from popular consciousness or being dismissed as inauthentic. What's more, because social workers' expertise about both LGBT and MSM emerged through transnational NGO activity, the power dynamics fueling this shift in views are reminiscent of colonial-era racialist projects to transform supposedly insalubrious or backward native gender and sexuality through the application of "modern," "enlightened," or "scientific" ideas from the West.<sup>17</sup> This logic has labeled Vietnamese attitudes toward gender and sexuality as culturally embedded homophobia that should be replaced by global scientific knowledge about individual identity as a political basis for universal rights.

Transnational conceptions of gender and sexual identity as inherent in the individual also draw upon scientific models of human physical and psychological development that assume the person to be an autonomous, rather than an interrelational, entity. That this model of LGBT personhood and the rights that can be claimed on its behalf resemble the broader conception of the client that is foundational to contemporary social work helps to explain why the model so quickly gained traction among Vietnamese social workers. And just like social work's notions of client personhood more

generally, transnational expertise about LGBT persons and their rights is also implicated in biopolitical efforts in Vietnam to inculcate a form of personhood best suited to a market economy. The irony, I argue, is that alongside the significant benefits of transnational LGBT knowledge and claims to rights, the promotion of this expertise by Vietnamese social workers may in fact also further entrench biopolitical logics about personhood that work to naturalize and normalize the unequal market economic outcomes that social workers otherwise devote their professional lives to counteracting.

An important caveat: by focusing on knowledge production about gender and sexuality among practicing, academic, and student social workers—almost all of whom, like me, are heterosexual, cisgender, and university-educated—this article represents the voices, experiences, and self-identifications of LGBT persons only indirectly, through social workers' descriptions of their clients in the privileged venues of classrooms, workshops, and written materials. As such, I risk replicating precisely the dynamic that I critique: the ways that advocacy and rights seem to advance primarily through a “representational colonization”<sup>18</sup> that depicts LGBT persons as objects of study and intervention by agentive others, rather than centering them as world makers. But perhaps this danger is precisely the point, for it lays bare how the power dynamics of knowledge production immanent in allyship can enable authoritative “speaking for” to sideline “speaking with” and “speaking as.”<sup>19</sup>

## Social Work as a Biopolitical Science of (Market) Personhood

The field of social work expanded rapidly in Vietnam during the 2010s, due in large part to its explicit promotion by the Vietnamese government.<sup>20</sup> This was a noteworthy reversal of the government's earlier post-reunification rejection of social work in the southern Republic of Vietnam (1954–1975) as a bourgeois profession that was not needed in a socialist society that would eliminate the economic causes of individual, family, and community distress. With the turn to market socialism after 1986, economic inequality and attendant problems such as unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and lack of access to healthcare and education appeared to be on the rise. The government shifted course to promote social work as a scientific

endeavor to address these concerns. In 2010, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs announced plans to train sixty thousand cadres in social work by 2020. In response, universities, government offices, and NGOs rapidly established social work curricula and training workshops.

My ethnographic fieldwork focused on the education and socialization of potential future social workers, with the goal of understanding the worldviews—especially the concepts of personhood, gender, and class—associated with social work expertise. To do so, I attended all sessions of two social work courses, one introductory and one advanced, at a major university in Hồ Chí Minh City. I also reviewed the written assignments and exams that students completed for both courses. For the advanced course, students were required to complete a practicum placement at a local state or private organization. I closely followed three groups of five to six students each who were placed, respectively, at three organizations: a transnational NGO focused on youth, a religiously run school for primary and middle school students from low-income families, and a government-affiliated program offering primary and middle-school instruction to children whose family circumstances—poverty, migration, addiction, violence, or illness, especially AIDS—precipitated their withdrawal from regular, formal schooling. Under the supervision of key organization staff and a university faculty member, the practicum students spent approximately sixteen hours per week conducting outreach to identify one client with whom they then worked closely to complete a case file with a detailed needs assessment and concrete intervention plan. Over the course of the semester, I attended group supervisory sessions at each site and read students' notes, drafts of case files, and final submissions. I conducted group interviews with students in each of these three practicum cohorts, as well as detailed life history interviews with the seven professional and academic social workers who supervised them. In the summers of 2014, 2015, and 2016, I participated in a variety of intensive, multiday training workshops for social work students, cadres, professionals, and faculty on such topics as HIV/AIDS, gender and sexuality, addiction, trauma, autism, and human trafficking. Finally, archival and media research provided details on the history of social work in the Republic of Vietnam, as well as contemporary efforts to professionalize and expand the field.

Given the official mandate to develop the profession of social work rapidly, course syllabi, practicum supervision, and training workshops were often works of bricolage. Textbooks and other materials were translated from English. Workshops typically featured foreign experts presenting in English with live translation into Vietnamese, often resulting in inconsistent use of terminology or confusion about underlying conceptual frameworks. The practicing social workers supervising university student practicums typically lacked formal degrees in the field; some had completed bachelor's or master's degrees in related disciplines such as sociology or community development, while others had acquired expertise through years of hands-on experience. This meant that the content of the training they provided to students often differed from what professors viewed as proper, professional social work.<sup>21</sup>

Given these conditions, social work professors described their core challenges at the time as, first, the dearth of case studies and other training materials specific to Vietnam and, second, the lack of professional standards for practicing social workers. During interviews and informal conversations, they frequently emphasized the desirability of developing a Vietnamese social work that would be responsive to the country's particular circumstances, while also reflecting international scientific standards. Science, in their view, encompassed theories of human psychology, development, and environmental interaction, as well as rigorous methods of data collection, evaluation, and intervention.

Science was also key to what social workers viewed as a crucial distinction between charity—voluntaristic, haphazard, and short-term alleviation of suffering—and social work: professional, rational, long-term assessment, engagement, and intervention that would promote sustainable improvement in clients' circumstances. The scientific model of social work practice took as its core object the client [*thân chủ*], defined during the first lecture of the introductory course I attended as “a person, a group, or a community that is facing difficulties in the process of existence and development and is the partner with whom the social worker works.” The goal of social work was to help the client to understand and take steps to address the sources of their own distress through a model of empowerment that accepted clients as they are and respected their right to self-determination and confidentiality.



Notwithstanding the possibility of the client being a group or community, the classes and workshops I attended tended to focus on an individuated model of the client: a person who could be scrutinized by self and others and who could be empowered to respond to problems—including those caused by environmental factors such as economics, politics, and social relationships—by altering their own feelings and actions.<sup>22</sup> Self-cultivation has long been important in Vietnam in both Confucian and Buddhist approaches to personhood, but the model of client personhood articulated in social work education strongly asserted a vision of the person as an autonomous entity with intrinsic characteristics, emotions, and desires (possessive interiority) deserving of respect and rights. As I and other scholars have argued, this model of possessive interiority has unmistakable resonances with market personhood that requires individuals to objectify themselves as projects of continual self-improvement and investment so that they can better exercise rationality, responsibility, and flexibility in the marketplace.<sup>23</sup> In both its therapeutic and neoliberal market valences, this kind of individuated, autonomous self differs markedly from a notion of personhood as shifting, flexible, and shaped through, and hence dependent upon, environment and social relationships (interrelational personhood), which is often cited as central to cultures in the Global South, most especially Asia.<sup>24</sup>

For compelling evidence that the expansion of a market economy entails a shift in personhood, one need only observe the vibrant “psycho-boom” in market socialist and post-socialist societies globally, including Vietnam, China, Russia, and Eastern Europe. A profusion of therapy services, self-help books, talk shows, advice columns, and training programs promise modern and scientific strategies to realize individual happiness and economic success.<sup>25</sup> Therapeutic personhood is part of a broader biopolitical project to produce citizens responsabilized to engage in and advance the market economy. Coined by Michel Foucault, the concept of biopolitics “takes the body as its target” to construct “a form of governmentality that disciplines individuals through the defining, measuring, standardizing, and categorizing of human physical difference.”<sup>26</sup> Focusing on biopolitics enables us to explore how “technologies of rationalizing power that are centered on life” emerge through “the production of social norms, standards, and categories as tools of governmentality.”<sup>27</sup> While governmentality often appears as a top-down project to form citizens and their

conduct, biopolitical logics are themselves shaped by popular opinion that makes claims to culture, norms, and social relations. As Claire Edington and Martha Lincoln note, these dynamics in Vietnam have significant local, regional, and transnational dimensions.<sup>28</sup> The psycho-boom in Vietnamese society is evidence that in recent decades, biopolitical targets have become increasingly focused on the psychological dimensions of the population as an important component of what scholars inspired by Foucault tend to describe as the “conduct of conduct.”<sup>29</sup>

I expected that the obvious resonance between therapeutic personhood and market personhood would make social workers in Vietnam uneasy: first, because it implicated them in a top-down biopolitical project of market economic formation that they saw as a cause of clients’ distress, and second, because the foreignness of the construct of possessive interiority jostled uneasily with longstanding notions in Vietnam of personhood as something that emerges relationally and collectively through socialization that prioritizes meeting others’ needs, as opposed to expressing a true self that predates a particular context.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, critiques of the power dynamics of the global transfer of social work knowledge elsewhere have prompted calls for decolonial and Indigenous social works that reject the social work practices of the Global North for their reliance on the same “modern” notions of individualism, culture, and civilization that in the past justified imperialist abuses, such as the removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities of origin.<sup>31</sup>

Instead, I found that most of the social workers I encountered asserted the value of their field and their own expertise by describing social work as reflecting universal scientific knowledge. While the details of clients’ circumstances were particular to Vietnam, principles such as the stages of child development or the relationship between individuals and their environment were, I was told, true throughout the world. One experienced social work professor with an advanced degree from the United States asserted during an interview that Western scientific knowledge has value precisely because its theory is universal. Anyone who claims that such knowledge is not relevant to Vietnam, she declared, probably lacks the language skills or understanding to read and think about it.<sup>32</sup> As I describe below, this promise of universal science and the status that attaches to those who master its theory

made, first, the behavioral description MSM and, subsequently, the knowledge about gender and sexuality associated with the term LGBT especially attractive to Vietnamese social workers eager to establish the legitimacy of their field.

## Transnational Social Work Knowledge, Part 1: From Social Evils to MSM

The Vietnamese government's call to expand the field of social work in the 2010s represents the latest iteration of measures to address the problems arising from rapid change associated with the market economy. Two decades earlier, officials had taken a more coercive disciplinary approach that singled out particular "social evils" [*tệ nạn xã hội*] as threatening to the well-being of the nation. Like the French colonial term *les fleaux sociaux* from which this approach derived, "social evils" biopolitically linked health, nation, race, and population.<sup>33</sup> During the 1990s, among the primary social evils were heterosexual sex work and intravenous drug use because of their prominence as vectors for the transmission of HIV. In contrast, while gay individuals were originally identified as at high risk of infection, homosexuality did not figure significantly in HIV/AIDS prevention work at that time, perhaps due to the supposedly small number of such individuals in Vietnam.<sup>34</sup>

In the first decade of the 2000s, as the government moved to recognize the field of social work, official formulations of social evils expanded to suggest that non-heteronormative practices threatened public health. The Marriage and Family Law (2000) explicitly prohibited same-sex marriage.<sup>35</sup> In 2006, the National Assembly included gay men among groups at high risk of HIV/AIDS.<sup>36</sup> Reeducation camps were repurposed to reform the individuals who engaged in such practices.<sup>37</sup> The pejorative term *pê đê* continued to circulate widely, and even seemingly neutral phrases like *đồng tính* and *gay* were often prefaced by the auxiliary verb *bị* to indicate that a subject suffered from being homosexual.<sup>38</sup> Sexuality and gender identity tended to be conflated in descriptions of all sexual minorities as part of a "third world" [*thế giới thứ ba*, i.e., third gender] or *bóng*, a term associated with spirit mediums who wear clothing corresponding to the gender of the spirit whom they are inviting to possess them.<sup>39</sup> Homosexual persons [*người đồng tính*] were often contrasted to "normal persons" [*người bình thường*],

with even gay individuals referring to heterosexual persons as “normal.”<sup>40</sup> Media reports tended to depict homosexuality as a disease,<sup>41</sup> while gay characters in fictional accounts on television and in novels often met tragic ends or became heterosexual.<sup>42</sup> In a 2001 report on street children in Hồ Chí Minh City, the Swiss children’s rights organization Terre des Hommes stated that in a survey, several direct service providers identified homosexuality as “one of the most serious problems (more so than HIV AIDS).”<sup>43</sup>

Social evils discourse fueled a moral panic that condemned homosexuality as some variant of the following: a foreign import, including from overseas Vietnamese; a fashionable, but dangerous trend; or an inherent pathology and transmissible disease.<sup>44</sup> Dr. Trần Bồng Sơn, whose popular column, “Thắc mắc biết hỏi ai?” [Wondering Who to Ask?], ran in the Hồ Chí Minh City newspaper *Tuổi Trẻ* from 1989 until his death in 2004, popularized the idea that some people were “truly homosexual” [*đồng tính thật*] as a congenital condition, while others were “fake gay” [*đồng tính giả*] and following a trend.<sup>45</sup> I detail below how the workshops I attended in the 2010s attacked this distinction and its emphasis on determining whether someone was “really” gay. Nevertheless, Dr. Trần Bồng Sơn’s claim that congenital homosexuality was a normal feature of the human condition and not something that could be “cured” [*chữa*] fostered acceptance of LGBT identities, particularly for parents seeking advice about children whom they believed could be gay or transgender.

As indicated in Tuấn’s comments during the 2014 workshop, social workers’ engagement with LGBT issues during the 2000s and 2010s primarily took the form of HIV/AIDS prevention among men who have sex with men (MSM). This work was supported by funding from the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) of nearly \$300 million between 2003 and 2008.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the social evils discourse that conflated and condemned both the behavior and the people engaged in it, the shift to the global term MSM provided what Alfred Montoya characterizes as “a clarifying or technical intervention, allowing disease surveillance workers to sidestep the psychosocial, or sociopolitical identities associated with other terms, focusing strictly, in technoscientific fashion, on practices that conditioned health outcomes.”<sup>47</sup>

As the term MSM spread, however, Montoya demonstrates that this Western public health term came to denote an identity category,

interchangeable with the term gay: “a casual ‘youthful’ and ‘modern’ self-description.”<sup>48</sup> As a result, the changing meaning of MSM shows how “a new assemblage of epidemic prevention inculcates new ways of knowing about oneself and others, and generates new communities and solidarities.”<sup>49</sup> According to Tom Boellstorff, this transposition was a global phenomenon in which MSM shifted “from a category primarily excluding other notions of sexuality and gender to a category primarily including them; from a category primarily referencing behavior to a category primarily referencing identity; and from a U.S.-based category to a category transnational in scope.”<sup>50</sup>

During my first round of fieldwork on social work (2010–2011), I witnessed these dynamics play out on the ground in case work with at-risk young people. The international NGO at which Tuán worked was one of the practicum placement sites for the students I was following. I got to know him during the group’s supervisory sessions. The organization was engaged in extensive outreach to unhoused youth as part of an initiative funded by PEPFAR/USAID (US Agency for International Development) to stem the transmission of HIV by reducing risky behavior, providing health advice, and promoting empowerment and self-advocacy. Tuán and other project personnel also engaged in extensive research, some of which is now cited as foundational to changing perceptions of LGBT identities. At the time, however, the category of most concern to the organization was not LGBT, but MSM as a specific risky behavior to be addressed through education and harm reduction.

Although Tuán would later describe himself and other social workers in his organization in the 2000s and early 2010s as not yet understanding gender and sexuality, the field’s cardinal principle of nonjudgmental acceptance of clients as the first step in helping them to identify and address their own problems led supervisors to guide students toward adopting this attitude when they encountered behavior by clients that they initially found confusing or troubling. Students were tasked with outreach among unhoused young people in several urban parks. They were to select one person to become a client and to complete a case file consisting of intake, assessment, and an intervention plan.<sup>51</sup>

One student worked with a young man, Huy, who had twice been sent to a reeducation center for sex work. In her diary, the student reported that although Huy expressed sadness about going with “clients” [*khách*], he did not have a better option. Huy wanted to study haircutting but could not gain admission to a vocational training program. The student criticized reeducation camps as doing little to address the factors leading to sex work and in fact causing further harm because of few alternatives post-release for a different occupation. The student’s assessment of Huy’s needs reflected her assumption that he did not identify as gay and that a true loving relationship would be heteronormative: “Having to rely on the entertainment of gay men, Huy does not dare to dream that he will have a girl who will truly love him in the future.”<sup>52</sup> Her assumption was not questioned during the practicum’s group supervision sessions, something that reflected the broader popular perception at that time that most MSM were “not truly homosexual.”<sup>53</sup>

Because the need for privacy meant that I did not participate in students’ conversations with clients, I lack direct information about how Huy may have viewed himself. I therefore cannot say whether the student’s assessment is accurate, but it demonstrates the ready availability of a narrative in which MSM sex work reflects economic necessity, rather than sexuality. The idea that homosexuality was a job, not an identity, was also something that clients themselves might assert. An experienced social worker recounted to me in 2015 how one of her clients, an unhoused 12-year-old boy living in a park, had disappeared during government efforts to clear the park of social evils. When she saw him some time later in a different park and asked him what he was doing, he responded, “làm pê đê,” which she translated into English during our conversation as “working gay.”<sup>54</sup>

Another student placed at a charity school run by a religious organization prepared a case file about Thu, a 17-year-old girl. Thu’s youngest brother died in 1996, apparently due to neglect by the paternal grandmother who was watching him. This same grandmother had critiqued Thu’s father, who died in 2008, as an inadequate provider. While the relationship with the paternal side of the family had improved over the prior three years, Thu was very sad and for several years had been going out late at night with friends. The student reported in the diary that Thu “associated with unhealthy gangs, including groups of *đồng tính nữ* (Lesbian), and was starting to engage in

quarrels, fighting, and swearing.”<sup>55</sup> Thu’s friend called her “*fem*” [*femme*]<sup>56</sup> and “a girl who isn’t a girl.”<sup>57</sup> While Thu’s mother did not seem concerned about Thu’s friendship with lesbians, her aunt worried that Thu would not find a husband. Thu had run away from home for three days, and her younger brother was arrested for thievery in 2010. Thu’s deep sadness led her, by the social work student’s account, to interact more with “*nhóm xã hội đen*” [gangsters], which placed her at risk of sexual assault or addiction. The student saw the negative family environment as the key factor that had pushed Thu toward a bad crowd. She was surprised that their influence had been so strong that Thu became the “boyfriend” of another woman and that she did not seem embarrassed about this fact.

The student did not elaborate upon a possible contradiction in Thu’s apparent simultaneous identification as *fem* and a boyfriend in a relationship with another woman. The description may be consistent with fluid understandings of gender and sexuality on the part of Thu or her friends. Or it may reflect that the student did not define gender and sexuality as distinct, because such understandings had not yet become prevalent.<sup>58</sup> Either way, the student repeatedly ascribed Thu’s behavior to being a victim of her environment. The proposed intervention plan, developed in dialogue with other students and the leadership of the school, would alter this environment through a series of positive rewards (ice cream) and negative punishments (fines for swearing, low grades, and fighting).

These episodes from social work students’ training provide insight into how a concept such as MSM can become a meaningful way to categorize individuals and behaviors. The students encountered individuals whom they identified as MSM because the proliferation of the concept fostered significant NGO work and international funding. Montoya argues that such encounters, in tandem with internet access that enabled transnational advocacy and development of shared vocabulary around gender and sexuality, would ultimately lead individuals identified as MSM to come to understand themselves through that term as not just a descriptor of their behavior, but also as an identity.<sup>59</sup> During the early phase of my fieldwork in 2010–2011, however, this shift was still in the future. Instead, NGO and academic social workers, as well as students, tended to view the category MSM and other non-heteronormative expressions of gender or sexuality—with little or no distinction between the concepts of

gender and sexuality—as context-dependent responses to economic necessity. They were behaviors that young people could be guided away from through a change in environment that might include incentives for positive behavior, stronger family support, or access to vocational training. The students’ diaries, the case files they prepared, and their conversations during practicum sessions provide an on-the-ground portrait of “an HIV/AIDS apparatus that is also, again, a system of subjectivation, a means of apprehending and remaking subjects and futures in the service of securing health.”<sup>60</sup> The form of this subjectivation would soon become a problem, however, as a growing movement seeking rights would assert that sexual minorities could not be reduced to the public health category of MSM.

### Transnational Social Work Knowledge, Part II: From Environment and Health to Identity and Rights

By the middle of the 2010s, the limitations of the category MSM in Vietnam were apparent. A 2014 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on LGBT issues in Vietnam asserted that while HIV/AIDS prevention funding and support groups had contributed to building LGBT networks and sense of community, the focus on the epidemic had neither promoted broader dialogue nor reduced stigma toward LGBT groups and identities; it may even have increased stigma due to the association between MSM and HIV.<sup>61</sup> PEPFAR funding for Vietnam dramatically declined between 2014 and 2016, and state promotion of “socialization” [*xã hội hóa*] meant the transfer of responsibility for social services from public to private entities.<sup>62</sup>

This shift in international and national priorities, as well as the increasingly apparent limitations of the MSM behavioral framework, led transnationally funded NGO work in Vietnam to move from health and harm reduction to what Natalie Newton describes as “explicitly politicized frameworks of sexuality” that call for “‘sexual literacy’ around all forms of sexual behavior and lesbian rights.”<sup>63</sup> Vietnamese NGOs had begun to advocate for LGBT rights in 2008 and campaign for same-sex marriage in 2012 using a language of “rights of human beings” [*quyền con người*] that was carefully formulated to be distinct from “human rights” [*nhân quyền*], the latter being associated with critiques of the Vietnamese government by Human Rights Watch and other entities.<sup>64</sup> With this shift came new language to articulate



LGBT identities and promote awareness and acceptance through global symbols, such as rainbow flags and Pride parades.<sup>65</sup> As Newton sums up, “This work is strategic, political, and aims to redefine cultural norms around gender and sexuality in Vietnam, using the momentum and clout of the global LGBT movement.”<sup>66</sup>

What did the LGBT framework and support actually look like, as articulated in social work training programs? Most of the sessions I attended between 2014 and 2016 were collaborative endeavors organized by a university social work department and social workers affiliated with public and private organizations, including Tuấn’s international NGO, that assisted in training undergraduate social work students. While the focus of the workshops varied based on the intended audience, they all proceeded from the premise that gender and sexuality are fundamental, inherent aspects of an individual’s identity. As such, LGBT individuals, like all human beings, deserve recognition, rights, and respect. Educating social workers about LGBT identities and experiences was key to their ability to provide empowering, client-centered care and to combatting persistent stigma and discrimination in the broader population.

All workshops spent time presenting key terms in English, translating them into Vietnamese, and providing succinct definitions: gay [*đồng tính nam*], lesbian [*đồng tính nữ*], bisexual [*song tính*], heterosexual [*dị tính*], and transgender [*người chuyển giới*], with the latter defined as someone with a desired gender that does not match their biological sex.<sup>67</sup> Transgender individuals were said to be particularly vulnerable to stigma due to not conforming to society’s gender expectations. Presenters described these identities as reflecting the broader framework of sexuality [*tính dục*] and sexual orientation [*xu hướng tính dục*], on the one hand, and gender identity [*bản dạng giới*] and gender expression [*thể hiện giới*] on the other. These concepts were often introduced through international educational materials. One workshop used the “genderbread person” created by Sam Killermann in 2011 to distinguish between gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation.<sup>68</sup> Another workshop used a whiteboard animation video funded by the US Consulate in Hồ Chí Minh City.

Presenters described the English terms contained within the initialism LGBT as conveying authoritative knowledge about gender and sexuality.

Although some noted that the first three letters designate “who someone loves” and the last letter describes “who someone is,” they all emphasized that sexual and gender identities reflect one’s nature [*bản chất*]. They are basic [*căn bản*] aspects of a person that cannot be changed or “cured.” Nor can one be pulled into different gender or sexual identities by one’s milieu. As a result, all of these identities are normal [*bình thường*] and natural [*tự nhiên*]. This claim was read back through time, with a presenter in one workshop saying that LGBT individuals had been part of humanity throughout its existence, on the order of 5–10 percent of the population. Given that the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE) had estimated in 2012 that the LGBT population in Vietnam was around 3 percent of those between the ages of 15 and 59, or approximately 1.65 million individuals, the higher figure provided in the workshop reflected global estimates.<sup>69</sup> While young people, especially in contexts that were unwelcoming or hostile, might need to explore or experiment in order to determine their gender or sexual identity, the presenters suggested that ultimately “nature is nature” [*bản chất vẫn là bản chất*]. This last statement reflects what Trang Mai Le and Nilan Yu characterize as “an affirmative practice approach,” in which the social worker guides clients to awareness of the selves that they already or truly are and positively reinforces these self-understandings.<sup>70</sup> In the context of gender and sexuality, an affirmative practice approach rests on “essentialist understandings of homosexuality that view sexual orientation as an inherent trait that is fixed across the lifespan. It sees the exploration, confirmation, and acceptance of homosexual identity as an important need of sexual minority clients; thus, social work should address such need.”<sup>71</sup>

Emphasizing the normalcy, naturalness, and inherent quality of sexual orientation and gender identity was explicitly intended to combat the stigmatization of LGBT as a disease or a trend that reflected moral corruption, perhaps associated with external influences that run counter to Vietnamese culture and tradition. Workshop presenters often narrated an optimistic view of Vietnam’s social progress, much like the one in the introduction to this article. One presenter explained that in the past, Vietnamese people had been unable to act on who they believed themselves to be. Compared with that past narrow-mindedness, “today there are more

open views” [*ngày nay đã có nhiều quan điểm cởi mở hơn*]. Such a context enabled people to “reveal” [*bộc lộ*] themselves. While this could therefore look like a trend, what they were expressing was who they had been all along.

Although I never heard the term “possessive interiority” used in these workshops, facilitators nonetheless presented gender and sexuality in ways consistent with this concept of personhood. Different sessions elaborated upon this underlying notion in a variety of ways. One workshop advanced an essentialist approach by narrating the stages of child development at which aspects of the interior gender or sexual identity would be expressed: gender around the ages of 6–10 years old, with sexuality following at ages 11–14. Education about child development would help parents to support their children and combat the stress, anxiety, and shame that presenters claimed more than half of LGBT teens felt.

The idea that sexuality was inherent, yet perhaps not evident until the second decade of one’s life, sometimes confused workshop attendees. At a workshop in May 2015, one breakout group participant said that children do not have a definite sexual orientation until they are about nine years old. Because this workshop had an overarching focus on preventing human trafficking, other participants interpreted this statement as suggesting that sexual abuse at a young age might make someone gay. Some participants countered that sexuality is something you are born with. A US-based social worker summarized this exchange for the entire group. She then clarified that while both gender identity and sexuality are inherent, gender identity emerges first and becomes the basis for the expression of sexual orientation in terms of the relationship between one’s own gender and the genders to which one is attracted. She also noted that the causal direction of the relationship between abuse and sexuality was opposite to what the participant had implied: because of stigma and shame, she explained, LGBT youth were especially vulnerable to various kinds of abuse. For this reason, the notion that children and sexual minorities had rights as human beings was particularly important.

One reason that the workshops I attended focused so much on the inherent nature of gender and sexuality was due to ongoing, widespread public perception that LGBT identities were a trend into which vulnerable young people could be pulled. For example, during a breakout group in

a June 2014 workshop, one university social work student described her male friend who liked a girl, then thought he liked a boy. The workshop participant was not sure whether her friend's attractions reflected external influences, emotional experimentation, or bisexuality. The ensuing discussion pushed the young woman to focus less on her friend's identity and more on her own attitudes. A presenter pointed out that in asking whether her friend was "really" gay, she had used the negative auxiliary verb *bị*, indicating that one is experiencing something unwelcome or harmful. With educational environments and peers having such a strong influence on young people's psychology, the presenter suggested, the stigma embedded in this small turn of phrase could block her friend from expressing his identity and could lead to internalized homophobia, depression, and failure in school. Workshop participants, both social workers and students, were encouraged to empower LGBT youth so that they could express who they naturally are and build the confidence to engage in self-protection in the face of discrimination.

Another workshop included an extended discussion of the dangers of heteronormativity embedded in Vietnamese phrases. Young men were commonly asked whether they had a girlfriend—or young women a boyfriend—"yet" [*chưa*]. Presenters noted that homosexuality was described as a disease [*bệnh*] that one suffers, gets, or spreads [*bị, mắc phải, lây*]. While affection and love [*tình cảm, tình yêu*] were linked to heterosexual relationships, same sex relationships were often dismissed as "just a temporary feeling" [*chỉ là cảm xúc nhất thời thôi*]. In yet another workshop, a participant asked who in same-sex relationships is the "man" and who is the "woman." The presenter explained that this question reflected heteronormativity and that it is better to think of roles in all relationships as fluid and not dictated by gender.

Alongside countering the disease conception, presenters also contested the idea of situational or fake homosexuality [*đồng tính giả*] that had continued to receive a lot of attention in Vietnam. As noted earlier, "fake gay" is associated with Dr. Trần Bồng Sơn and his *Tuổi Trẻ* column. In a post on its Facebook page, the community advocacy organization Hà Nội Queer describes Dr. Sơn's distinction between real and fake homosexuality as follows: "Real [gay] is born men loving men and born women loving

women, and it's a disease, but one can't cure it. Fake [gay] is following the fashion of dating people of the same sex in order to be considered fashionable and trendy."<sup>72</sup> Hà Nội Queer notes that Dr. Sơn advocated that those who were born homosexual should not try to change themselves. Others, however, continued to cite him as evidence that experts believed there to be fake homosexuality.<sup>73</sup> As in the workshops I attended, Hà Nội Queer rejects the distinction, and hence public obsession with distinguishing, between "real" and "fake" and instead asserts, "Everything is the diversity of human expression."<sup>74</sup>

The possibility of fake homosexuality nonetheless continued to circulate in the media and among the broader public. In November 2010, *Tuổi Trẻ* published a letter from a young man to his parents, who were devastated to have recently discovered that he was gay. The young man understood their distress but wondered why they could not see him as a "normal" person who wants to love and be loved. He closed the letter: "the only difference is that I love a boy. What can I do for you to accept this?"<sup>75</sup> The next day, the newspaper published a column by a doctor and PhD responding to the many parents who had written that they thought their child might be gay (using the English term). After asserting that people should see homosexuality as normal,<sup>76</sup> the doctor described a message from one concerned parent whose twelfth-grade daughter had a relationship with a girl the year prior. The parent asked the doctor whether "this disease could be cured."<sup>77</sup> Two other parents had submitted similar questions about their daughters. The doctor responded that given the social acceptability of girls spending time alone with each other, girls themselves might not be able to distinguish whether this was "real or fake, they don't know if it's a temporary feeling or their true sexual orientation."<sup>78</sup> A "real homosexual woman" [*đồng tính nữ thật*] or "lesbian" (using the English term) might conceal her sexuality, but her clothing or mannerisms would offer telltale signs. Noting the lack of statistics in Vietnam, the doctor stated that globally only about 1.5 percent of women were "true lesbians," less than half the figure of 4 percent of men being gay. "True" lesbianism cannot be cured because, the doctor wrote, it is a matter of sexual orientation [*xu thế tình dục*]: "if a girl reaches 20 and is still in love with other girls, then people should accept her as lesbian." "Fake gay," in the doctor's view, would instead be a temporary state of confusion

about gender, perhaps due to isolation, disappointment in heterosexual relationships, or being forced to dress in particular ways.<sup>79</sup> In terms of advice, the doctor suggested that parents could subtly guide their children toward the opposite sex via books and films. With time and patience, children would come to “understand themselves clearly” [*hiểu rõ bản thân mình*].<sup>80</sup>

The durability of the notion of “fake gay” in the Vietnamese public sphere reflected an unresolved tension that also lurked in the social work workshops. Participants sometimes struggled with the assertion that gender and sexual identities were inherent, inborn, and fixed, versus something that might change over time. For young people in particular, were different expressions of sexual desire or gender part of the process of discovering their true inherent identities? Or were gender and sexuality themselves more fluid? During one workshop, a presenter responded to a question about how to support LGBT youth by stating that sexual orientation can change according to environment and should not be seen as fixed. It was not clear how to reconcile the dominant theme of sexuality or gender as natural and inherent with the claim that it might shift in an ongoing process of development. As a result, by emphasizing gender and sexuality as congenital—“nature is nature”—experts risked reinforcing perceptions of fluid gender or sexuality as inauthentic, illegitimate, and illegible.

These moments in which participants and presenters suggest that the environment or a process of experimentation might alter a person’s expression and understanding of their identity reveal the continued attraction of an interrelational notion of personhood in which one becomes a person in dialogue with others. Nevertheless, the expertise presented at all of these workshops always returned to the fundamental assertion of possessive interiority: gender and sexuality reflect who a person is within themselves, naturally and all along. As such, LGBT persons must be respected and guaranteed the same rights as other persons.

The affordances of this formulation are significant. Its adoption by an increasing number of people in Vietnam has resulted in noteworthy improvements in the lives of LGBT individuals. Acceptance means decreased discrimination and violence within families and communities of origin, making it less likely that LGBT youth will become unhoused and

engage in transactional sex—precisely the outcome that Tuấn and other social workers had dedicated themselves to achieving.

Without discounting this very real progress, however, the educational moments chronicled in this article show that transmission of transnational rights-based LGBT discourse also sets up a binary between global—Western, really—scientific facts about gender and sexuality versus Vietnamese cultural conceptions (the latter of which are often cast in this binary as *misconceptions*). The supposed Vietnamese cultural attitudes are then read backwards in time to claim that Vietnamese society has always been homophobic. For example, Le and Yu state that negative attitudes toward sexual minorities stem from the “entrenched systems of ideas and beliefs” associated with Vietnam’s triple religion [*tam giáo*] of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.<sup>81</sup> Confucian notions of patriarchy and filial piety [*hiếu*] construct obligations to continue lineage through reproduction and emphasize respect for hierarchy and social cohesion.<sup>82</sup> Taoism construes a foundational gender binary of yin and yang [*âm/dương*].<sup>83</sup> Buddhism seems more accepting, but its focus on renouncing desire could be seen as especially discouraging non-normative sexual behaviors or gender expressions.<sup>84</sup> As a consequence of this ingrained cultural inheritance, “advocacy work at various levels—community, institutional and societal—would be needed to initiate the necessary social changes required to foster a more inclusive environment.”<sup>85</sup> Momentum for this advocacy has come from external expertise and foreign investment by UNDP, PEPFAR, and transnational NGOs such as Save the Children, Oxfam, and the Ford Foundation. On the level of the individual, such global expertise claims to foster self-recognition and coming out.<sup>86</sup>

To be clear, elements of beliefs and practices in Vietnam historically certainly did stigmatize forms of sexuality or gender expression. Specific precepts within the *tam giáo* presumed and hence promoted what today would be termed heteronormativity and cisgender roles.<sup>87</sup> These legacies continue. Surveys show that Vietnamese individuals who closely identify with Confucianism are more likely to have negative attitudes toward sexual minorities.<sup>88</sup> A man who identifies as gay may nonetheless marry a woman to produce an heir.<sup>89</sup>

But there has also been significant scholarship that complicates the story of entrenched homophobia as a timeless, enduring feature of Vietnamese culture. First, there is no evidence that homosexuality was legally prohibited in pre-French colonial Vietnam.<sup>90</sup> While the sixteenth-century *Hồng Đức* code stated that male household servants would be decapitated for fornication with a son of the household, Nhung Tuyet Tran argues that this prohibition was more about protecting class hierarchy in a patriarchal setting, as opposed to condemnation of the sexual act in general.<sup>91</sup> Second, scholars of Vietnamese history have identified diverse forms of gender expression and sexual desire that were practiced in the past and either accepted or ignored. To give a few examples, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some Vietnamese rulers had male concubines.<sup>92</sup> In the early twentieth century, Emperor Khải Định “presented a coherent and consistent gender and sexual subjectivity outside the norms of masculinity for men in French colonial Vietnam.”<sup>93</sup> Further, the spirit possession rituals of Mother Goddess religion [Đạo Mẫu] appear to have provided an acceptable space for gender fluidity that might also be expressed outside spiritual contexts.<sup>94</sup> Traces of this diversity are evident in Vietnam today in different concepts of identity and behavior that “blend together notions of gender, class, and rural/urban geography, and were not neatly homogenous.”<sup>95</sup>

Perhaps most significantly for understanding contemporary transnational flows of knowledge about gender and sexuality, there is evidence that a preoccupation with naming and condemning homosexuality and non-cisgender expressions emerged with particular force during the French colonial period. French public health officials were concerned that the debilitating effects of climate, the availability of opium, the supposed lack of sexual attractiveness of Vietnamese women, and the purported femininity of young Vietnamese men would lead French men to fall into same-sex relations.<sup>96</sup> French colonial influence also led to the denigration of spirit possession rituals.<sup>97</sup> Newton characterizes this history of Vietnamese gender and sexuality and critical interrogation of colonial classificatory practices as challenging “the stability of gender itself in Vietnam, as well as homosexuality or transgenderism as subjectivities or ‘identities’ that are stable across time.”<sup>98</sup>

Here, I wish to emphasize a related point: the contemporary adoption in Vietnam of a specific corpus of knowledge about gender and sexuality and



the notion of possessive interiority embedded within it might entail the erasure of other more fluid and complex articulations of gender, sexuality, and personhood, past and present.<sup>99</sup> Although the educational efforts sponsored by transnational NGOs that I have analyzed in this article clearly differ in tone and content from French colonial moral panics about “opiomania and pederasty,” there is an uncanny resonance between these as biopolitical projects that identify flaws in gender and sexuality, declare them to be inherent in Vietnamese culture or society, and call for them to be fixed through the application of external expertise.

The global terminology of LGBT that defines gender and sexuality as inherent features of the individual on the basis of science makes it hard to discern how this supposedly universal formulation in fact reflects specific cultural, social, political, and economic contexts that have made some identities possible, and others not. As Pham Quynh Phuong argues, the Vietnamese LGBT movement’s focus on rights garnered emotional recognition for LGBT individuals, but it sidestepped other important dimensions of rights—such as the redistributive economic effects of legal recognition of same-sex marriage.<sup>100</sup> Without overt attention to other aspects of inequality, campaigns for recognition on the basis of gender or sexual identity risk disproportionately advantaging individuals whose ethnic or class privilege positions them as legible in transnational ways of knowing LGBT. As definitions of LGBT identities gained traction in Vietnam in the 2010s, they were retrospectively applied to human history to assert both that such identities had always existed and that Vietnam had a persistent history of homophobia and heteronormativity in need of correction by foreign expertise. This narrative made it harder to recognize other—perhaps more fluid or shifting—configurations of gender and sexual desire.

Finally, this lack of recognition of fluidity or contingency also has effects on individuals. The assertion that rights and recognition are warranted because gender and sexuality are inherent in one’s nature reflects a model of possessive interiority in which a self precedes its social context. Rather than the dialectical assertion that society is necessary for a person to become a self, the “possessive interiority” formulation tends to see society as blocking the self. This vision also asserts that while the true self may be inherent, it must be discovered, examined, cultivated, and developed. This rights-based

notion of possessive interiority has a long history in the Global North associated with the Enlightenment and liberal democracy, which, in turn, incorporated aspects of earlier Christian confessional approaches to the person as an ongoing project to be probed and improved.<sup>101</sup> In recent decades, however, the construct of possessive interiority has acquired a decidedly neoliberal cast and become globally ascendant in contemporary economic formations precisely because such a person is responsabilized to scrutinize and invest in the self and, as a consequence, behave as a rational market economic actor.<sup>102</sup>

The social workers with whom I conducted research did not explicitly discuss the similarities between possessive interiority, therapeutic conceptions of client personhood, and neoliberal market personhood. Instead, they tended to view their field's definition of the client and methods to work on the self as tools to counter the inequalities of the marketplace by empowering individuals to understand themselves, change their behavior, and, in so doing, improve their circumstances, including economic status. They recognized this model of client personhood as novel in the context of Vietnam. As noted above, however, instead of seeing it as reflecting particular historical configurations of political economy, they tended to assert that it was a universal, scientific fact that could now be promoted because Vietnamese society itself was changing for the better and becoming more open.

In the specific case of LGBT expertise shared in social work training programs, the possessive interiority conception of client personhood entailed an essentialist assertion of gender and sexual identity as inherent. Vietnamese social workers astutely realized that adopting this transnational expertise about gender and sexuality would improve the lives of LGBT individuals by enabling them to discover and be their "true selves" and to have society recognize and value them as such. What social workers did not seem inclined to interrogate was how this notion of LGBT personhood, as with their notions of client personhood more broadly, contains elements of possessive interiority that are also integral to the turn toward therapeutic governance in service of the development of a market economy, especially in socialist and formally socialist contexts. In other words, they did not question whether application of expertise about LGBT identities and advocacy for particular legal rights like same-sex marriage in Vietnam might be

implicitly linked to biopolitical and political economic projects to transform personhood. Nor did they tend to ask whether their own promotion of such a model of personhood, in spite of its benefits, might also foster problematic social sequelae of a market economy, such as the tendency to treat socio-economic distress as an individualized pathology.

## Conclusion

Tuán and other social workers were right to see transnational LGBT rights movements and scientific expertise as countering prior Vietnamese government approaches to homosexuality and sex work as carceral targets to be transformed through repurposed reeducation camps. In the 2000s and early 2010s, the construct MSM appealed to social workers because of its centrality to global HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. By the mid-2010s, the term MSM was supplanted by English-language notions of gender and sexuality, rooted in universal scientific claims about identity and child development. The initialism LGBT both encapsulated knowledge about identity that reflected Vietnamese social workers' conception of client personhood and invited them to join a globally progressive movement toward rights that celebrates human diversity. This corpus of knowledge has provided compelling language to change public attitudes—including claims about Vietnamese culture and tradition—that had fueled stigma, discrimination, and violence.

But this article is a provocation to consider how expert knowledge about gender and sexuality, like all such ontological formulations about human beings, involves trade-offs. The persistent popular concern in the 2010s about “fake gay” as a phenomenon to which young women were thought to be particularly susceptible underscores the need for further critical intersectional analysis of the connections between gender and sexuality in Vietnam. Newton notes significant differences in visibility and community strength between Vietnamese gay men and lesbian women and argues that these reflect priorities of “global LGBT human rights movements” as well as “NGO structures, political rhetorics, and financial structures of sustainability.”<sup>103</sup> If sexual orientation and gender identity are to be asserted through a universalizing discourse that sees these constructs as distinct, then such recognition is also subject to, and risks perpetuating, “global political hierarchies.”<sup>104</sup>

Even as social workers began in the 2010s to advocate for a rights-based approach that linked “sexual rights with rights to health, housing, food, employment, and social mobility opportunities,”<sup>105</sup> limitations on political mobilization and the need to prove the scientific efficacy of the field led Vietnamese social workers to focus on individual casework and transformation, as opposed to advocacy, to address structural inequality.<sup>106</sup> By adopting and spreading transnational expertise about gender and sexuality, social workers in Vietnam during the 2010s became key allies in the movement for LGBT rights. Their contribution is haunted, however, by a profound irony. Social workers are dedicated to ameliorating the negative effects of the marketplace. As they moved from viewing MSM practices as the circumstantial result of market forces and instead embraced LGBT as authoritative scientific knowledge about universal human gender and sexuality, they adopted a model of personhood that was even more fundamentally implicated in market logics because it located them within the most intimate architecture of the self.

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#### ABSTRACT

*During the 2010s, public attitudes in Vietnam shifted from hostility toward homosexuality to increasing support for LGBT rights. This article analyzes how social work expertise contributed to this transformation. In 2010, staff at an international NGO in Hồ Chí Minh City ascribed unhoused men’s*

*transactional sex with men to economic desperation. Within five years, social workers had adopted global frameworks positing gender and sexuality as innate aspects of personhood and blamed homelessness and sex work by LGBT individuals on homophobic discrimination. While these expressions of transnational expertise promoted LGBT rights, they also reinforced notions of “market personhood” and risked marginalizing diverse articulations of gender and sexuality in Vietnam, past and present.*

KEYWORDS: LGBT, social work, expertise, gender, sexuality

### Notes

1. Throughout this article, I use the term LGBT, rather than LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+, to be consistent with the terminology used in the social work workshops that I attended in the 2010s.
2. The names of social workers and clients in this article are pseudonyms.
3. For an overview of these studies, see Trang Mai Le and Nilan Yu, “Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings of Attitudes Toward Sexual Minorities in Vietnamese Society,” *Sexuality & Culture* 23 (2019): 444–457.
4. Paul Horton, “‘I thought I was the only one’: The Misrecognition of LGBT Youth in Contemporary Vietnam,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 16, no. 8 (2014): 966.
5. Save the Children and Institute of Social and Medical Studies, “Being LGBT Young People in Vietnam: Life on the Streets and the Light Through the Crack; A Summary of Research Findings,” 2015, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/lgbt\\_young\\_people\\_in\\_vietnam\\_-\\_save\\_the\\_childrens\\_report.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/lgbt_young_people_in_vietnam_-_save_the_childrens_report.pdf), 20, 21, 25; Le and Yu, “Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings,” 445; Horton, “I thought,” 960; Rebecca B. Hershov et al., 2021, “Minority Stress and Experience of Sexual Violence Among Men Who Have Sex With Men in Hanoi, Vietnam: Results from a Cross-Sectional Study,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, no. 13–14 (2021): 6531–6549.
6. Hương Thu Nguyễn and Helle Rydstrom note, however, that these legal measures are not necessarily enforced; Hương Thu Nguyễn and Helle Rydstrom, “Feminism in Vietnam: Women’s Studies, Gender Research, and Intersections,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Vietnam*, ed. Jonathan D. London (London: Routledge, 2023), 413.
7. Nguyễn Thu Hương et al., *Trẻ em đường phố đồng tính, song tính và chuyển giới tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh* [Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Street Children in Hồ Chí Minh City] (Hà Nội: Thế Giới, 2012), 13, 72; Horton

- likewise notes the common usage of English terms in the LGBT community; Horton, "I thought," 962.
8. A 2014 study of more than five thousand people showed that over 50 percent were against legalization of same-sex marriage; Paul Horton and Helle Rydstrom, "LGBTQ in Vietnam: Heteronormativity and Resistance," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Vietnam*, ed. Jonathan D. London (London: Routledge, 2023), 463.
  9. *Ibid.*, 464, 467–468.
  10. *Ibid.*, 461–463.
  11. Natalie Newton similarly argues that expertise about sexuality in Vietnam has been produced through a "politicized landscape of players, including the Vietnamese state, international rights movements and funders, and Vietnamese sexual communities"; Natalie Newton, review of *Tình dục: Chuyện dễ đùa khó nói* [Sexuality in Contemporary Vietnam: Easy to Joke About, Hard to Talk About], by Khuất Thu Hồng, Lê Bạch Dương, and Nguyễn Ngọc Hương; *Hạnh phúc là sống thật* [Real Life, True Happiness], by Bùi Thị Thanh Hòa, Vũ Ánh Tuyết, Nguyễn Văn Anh, and Lê Hồng Giang; and *Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*, by Nguyễn-Võ Thu-Hương, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 2 (2012): 179.
  12. David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
  13. Ann Marie Leshkovich, "Market Personhood in Urban Southern Vietnam," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Vietnam*, ed. Jonathan D. London (London: Routledge, 2023), 245–258.
  14. A 2018 survey of 292 social workers in Hà Nội using a Vietnamese translation of the "Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men" scale found that social workers hold moderate to positive views. Some reported that their views had moved from negative toward acceptance of sexual minorities. Older social workers and those working in government offices, however, tended to have a higher proportion of negative attitudes, while male social workers displayed more heterosexist attitudes, especially toward gay men; Trang Mai Le and Nilan Yu, "The Attitudes of Vietnamese Social Work Practitioners Toward Sexual Minorities," *Journal of Social Work* 22, no. 5 (2022): 1255, 1259; Trang Mai Le, Nilan Yu, and Stephanie Webb, "Correlates of Attitudes Toward Sexual Minorities Among Vietnamese Social Work Practitioners," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 5, 4241 (2023): 9–10.
  15. Valentine powerfully demonstrates how advocacy work in the United States based on the idea of gender and sexuality as distinct aspects of human identity advantages white, cisgender gay men; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*; see also Tom Boellstorff, "But Do Not Identify as Gay: A Proleptic Genealogy of the

- MSM Category,” *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2011): 287–312; Richard Quang-Anh Tran, “An Epistemology of Gender: Historical Notes on the Homosexual Body in Contemporary Vietnam, 1986–2005,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 9, no. 2 (2014): 1–45.
16. Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 4–6, 108–109.
  17. See, for example, Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); on the domestic and transnational colonialist dimensions of contemporary configurations of gender, sexuality, and personhood in Vietnam, see Huong Thu Nguyen, “Navigating Identity, Ethnicity and Politics: A Case Study of Gender Variance in the Central Highlands of Vietnam,” *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 11, no. 4 (2016): 255–269.
  18. Valentine, “Imagining Transgender,” 229.
  19. As Mary Margaret Steedly argues, the power of speaking is not just to speak, but to convene an audience to attend to one’s stories; Mary Margaret Steedly, *Hanging Without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
  20. For a brief overview of the history of social work in Vietnam, see Ann Marie Leshkovich, “Affective Expertise: The Gendered Emotional Labor of Social Work and the Naturalization of Class Difference in Hồ Chí Minh City,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 18, no. 1–2 (2023): 178–180.
  21. For example, one group of practicum students spent a lot of time covering and cataloging the books donated to a school’s library.
  22. For detailed discussion of the model of client personhood, see Leshkovich, “Market Personhood,” 251–253.
  23. Nicolette Makovicky, “Introduction: Me, Inc.? Untangling Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism,” in *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism: Enterprising Selves in Changing Economies*, ed. Nicolette Makovicky (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 1–16; Leshkovich, “Market Personhood”; Allen L. Tran, *A Life of Worry: Politics, Mental Health, and Vietnam’s Age of Anxiety* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).
  24. Leshkovich, “Market Personhood”; Gish Jen, *The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017); Allen L. Tran, *A Life of Worry*, 26–27.
  25. Allen L. Tran, *A Life of Worry*; Leshkovich, “Market Personhood”; Arthur Kleinman et al., *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person: What Anthropology and Psychiatry Tell Us About China Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Makovicky, “Introduction: Me, Inc.?”; Tomas Matza, *Shock Therapy: Psychology, Precarity, and Well-Being in Postsocialist Russia* (Durham,

- NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Jie Yang, *Unknotting the Heart: Unemployment and Therapeutic Governance in China* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press and Cornell University Press, 2015); Li Zhang, *Anxious China: Inner Revolution and Politics of Psychotherapy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).
26. Claire Edington and Martha Lincoln, "Introduction: Biopolitical Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 18, no. 1–2 (2023): 2–3.
  27. *Ibid.*, 6.
  28. *Ibid.*, 7.
  29. Although this specific phrase does not seem to appear in English versions of Foucault's work, the idea of government as shaping (*conduct* as a verb) behavior (*conduct* as a noun) is explained in Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 789–790.
  30. Allen L. Tran, *A Life of Worry*; Leshkovich, "Market Personhood."
  31. See, for example, Mel Gray, John Coates, Michael Yellow Bird, and Tiani Hetherington, eds., *Decolonizing Social Work* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013).
  32. A self-reinforcing dynamic is undoubtedly present here: For a field eager to establish itself, individuals who acquire social work expertise through transnational knowledge transfer sponsored by governments, NGOs, and foreign universities can access employment and professional status, which in turn deepens their investment in the validity of that knowledge—in this case, both explicit claims about its universality and implicit models of personhood. In other contexts, such as those associated with Buddhism, however, individuals engaged in social work activities may very well advocate for interrelational notions of personhood or explicitly nonmodern ethics and spirituality. See, for example, Sara Ann Swenson, "'Three Trees Make a Mountain': Women and Contramodern Buddhist Volunteerism in Vietnam," *Asian Ethnology* 81, no. 1–2 (2022): 3–22; Huong T. Hoang, Trang T. Nguyen, and Jerry F. Reynolds II, "Buddhism-Based Charity, Philanthropy, and Social Work: A Lesson from Vietnam," *International Social Work* 62, no. 3 (2019): 1075–1087. Although a number of practicing social workers whom I met in university, NGO, and government contexts also actively participated in voluntary Buddhist activities, they tended to classify them as charitable endeavors distinct from professional, scientific social work; see also Huong T. Hoang et al., "Buddhism-Based Charity."
  33. Christoph Robert, "Social Evils and the Question of Youth in Post-War Saigon" (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2005), 125–126; cited in Alfred Montoya, "Becoming MSM: Sexual Minorities and Public Health Regimes in Vietnam," *Open Anthropological Research* 1 (2021): 35.
  34. Montoya, "Becoming MSM," 38.



35. Paul Horton and Helle Rydstrom, "Reshaping Boundaries: Families Politics and GLBTQ Resistance in Urban Vietnam," *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 15, no. 3 (2019): 293.
36. Montoya, "Becoming MSM," 38.
37. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
38. Le and Yu, "Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings," 447.
39. *Ibid.*, 446.
40. *Ibid.*, 446.
41. Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), *Diversity and Identity: Portrayals of Homosexuality in the Vietnamese Press* (Hà Nội: Thế Giới, 2011); cited in Horton, "I thought," 963.
42. Nguyễn Quốc Vinh, "Cultural Ambiguity in Contemporary Vietnamese Representations of Homosexuality: A New Historicist Reading of Bùi Anh Tấn's Fiction," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10, no. 3 (2015): 48–86.
43. Terre des Hommes, "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City" (HCMC: Terre des Hommes, 2001), 59.
44. Le and Yu, "Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings," 446; Horton and Rydstrom, "LGBTQ in Vietnam," 465; Horton, "I thought," 964; Marie-Eve Blanc, "Social Construction of Male Homosexualities in Vietnam: Some Keys to Understanding Discrimination and Implications for HIV Prevention Strategy," *International Social Science Journal* 57, no. 186 (2005): 661–673.
45. Blanc, "Social Construction," 664.
46. Alfred Montoya, "Making MSM: Biopolitical Subjects in Vietnam," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10, no. 3 (2020): 1072.
47. Montoya, "Becoming MSM," 34.
48. *Ibid.*, 34.
49. Montoya, "Making MSM," 1071.
50. Boellstorff, "But Do Not Identify as Gay," 288.
51. For details about the contents and creation of social work case files, see Ann Marie Leshkowich, "Standardized Forms of Vietnamese Selfhood: An Ethnographic Genealogy of Documentation," *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 1 (2014): 146–149.
52. "Phải sống nhờ vào sự mua vui của những người đàn ông đồng tính, [Huy] không dám ước mơ sau này sẽ có một người con gái yêu thương mình thật lòng."
53. Donn Colby, Nghia Huu Cao, and Serge Doussantousse, "Men Who Have Sex with Men and HIV in Vietnam: A Review," *AIDS Education and Prevention* 16, no. 1 (2004): 48.
54. *Pê đê's* etymology from the French word for pederasty could make this seem an accurate description of a boy's transactional sex with men. It is therefore

- particularly telling that the social worker instead paused our conversation in Vietnamese to emphasize in English that the term in this context meant gay.
55. “kết giao với các băng nhóm không lành mạnh, trong đó có cả những nhóm bạn đồng tính nữ (Lesbian) và bắt đầu hành vi gây gổ, đánh lộn, chửi thề.”
  56. For discussion of the meanings of *fem*, see Natalie Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism in Vietnam,” in *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, ed. Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (Abingdon: Routledge 2015), 263; Natalie Newton, “Contingent Invisibility: Space, Community, and Invisibility for *Les* in Saigon,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 118.
  57. “con gái không ra con gái.”
  58. Richard Tran notes the widespread belief in Vietnam from 1986 to 2005 that “homosexual identity is synonymous with gender-crossing” (Richard Tran, “An Epistemology of Gender,” 1).
  59. Montoya, “Making MSM,” 1072.
  60. Montoya, “Becoming MSM,” 42.
  61. *Ibid.*, 41.
  62. *Ibid.*, 42–43. For analysis of socialization as a move from public to private funding for social services, see Minh T.N. Nguyen, “Vietnam’s ‘Socialization’ Policy and the Moral Subject in a Privatizing Economy,” *Economy and Society* 47, no. 4 (2018): 627–647.
  63. Natalie Newton, review of *Tình dục*, 173. Although Newton refers specifically to lesbian rights, her statement about sexual literacy applies equally well to gay and transgender rights.
  64. Pham Quynh Phuong, “From ‘Social Evils’ to ‘Human Beings’: Vietnam’s LGBT Movement and the Politics of Recognition,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 3 (2022): 430; Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 263.
  65. Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 263.
  66. *Ibid.*, 264.
  67. “Người có giới tính mong muốn không trùng với giới tính sinh học.”
  68. Sam Killermann, “The Genderbread Person,” Sam Killermann’s website, November 2011, <https://www.samkillermann.com/work/genderbread-person/>, accessed March 17, 2024.
  69. Institute for Social, Economic and Environmental Research (iSEE), “Sơ lược về cộng đồng người đồng tính ở Việt Nam” [A Brief Overview of Homosexual Community in Vietnam], Facebook, April 8, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=483012505188312&set=a.366109256878638.1073741869.106680586154841>.

70. Trang Mai Le and Nilan Yu, "Vietnamese Social Work Practitioners' Conceptions of Practice with Sexual Minorities," *Qualitative Social Work* 21, no. 2 (2022): 323.
71. Ibid.
72. "Thật là bầm sinh đã nam yêu nam, nữ yêu nữ, và là bệnh, nhưng không thể chữa được. Giả là theo một cặp kè với người đồng giới, để được coi là sành điệu, theo trào lưu"; Hà Nội Queer, "Đồng tính giả' từ đâu ra?" [Where Did "Fake Gay" Come From?], Facebook, June 20, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/HaNoiQueer/photos/a.837316729692091.1073741828.834668029956961/1381035598653532/?type=3>.
73. Ibid.
74. "[M]ọi thứ đều là sự đa dạng trong thể hiện của con người mà thôi"; Ibid.
75. Đ. Khôi, "Gay là xấu hờ ba, hờ mẹ?" [Is Being Gay Bad, Mom and Dad?], *Tuổi Trẻ*, November 2, 2010, <https://tuoitre.vn/print/gay-la-xau-ho-ba-ho-me-408715.htm>.
76. Lê Thúy Tươi, "Đồng tính giả, chữa khỏi không?" [Homosexuality, Can It Be Cured?], *Tuổi Trẻ*, November 3, 2010, <https://tuoitre.vn/print/dong-tinh-gia-chua-khoi-khong-409050.htm>.
77. "Xin bác sĩ cho biết bệnh này có chữa khỏi không?"; Lê Thúy Tươi, "Đồng tính giả."
78. "thật giả, không biết đó là cảm xúc nhất thời hay đó là xu hướng tình dục thật sự của mình; Lê Thúy Tươi, "Đồng tính giả."
79. Dr. Lê Thúy Tươi briefly mentioned that Dr. Đỗ Minh Tuấn had described another form of "fake" gay that did not have anything to do with gender and instead involved psychologically obsessive control over a same-sex friend that could be mistaken for homosexuality; Lê Thúy Tươi, "Đồng tính giả." Natalie Newton notes that the Vietnamese public seemed especially concerned about "trendy les (les phong trào)," who would be economically supported by female partners as an image of "hyper-consuming, non-reproductive, and reckless sexuality"; Newton, "Homosexuality and Transgenderism," 260.
80. Lê Thúy Tươi, "Đồng tính giả."
81. Le and Yu, "Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings," 454.
82. Horton and Rydstrom, "LGBTQ in Vietnam," 463; Le and Yu, "Vietnamese Social Work Practitioners," 327; Trinh Thi Hong Nguyen and Luong Duc Doan, "The Prospects for the Legalization of Same Sex Marriages in Vietnam," *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 22, no. 4 (2022): 354–355; Robert Shanklin, "Confucianism and LGBTQ+ Rights," in *Encyclopedia of Business and Professional Ethics*, ed. D.C. Poff and A.C. Michalos (Cham: Springer, 2021), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1\\_1251-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1_1251-1).
83. Le and Yu, "Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings," 450.
84. Ibid., 451.

85. Ibid., 454.
86. For an example of how foreign expertise fuels coming out, see Diana Van Oort, *Là chúng tôi đang sống cuộc đời mình: Những câu chuyện và chân dung của cộng đồng LGBT Việt Nam* [This Is Who We Are and How We Live: Stories and Faces of the Vietnamese LGBT Community] (ICS: HCMC, 2016). Former US Ambassador Ted Osius and his husband Clayton Bond cowrote the preface to the book.
87. For a detailed discussion of the *tam giáo* and LGBT, see Le and Yu, “Ideological and Philosophical Underpinnings.”
88. Ibid., 452; Tam Nguyen and Holly Angelique, “Internalized Homonegativity, Confucianism, and Self-Esteem at the Emergence of an LGBTQ Identity in Modern Vietnam,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no. 12 (2017): 1617–1631.
89. Horton and Rydstrom, “LGBTQ in Vietnam,” 467.
90. Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 257.
91. Nhung Tuyét Trần, “Vietnamese Women at the Crossroads: Gender and Society in Early Modern Đại Việt” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004); cited in Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 258.
92. Jakob Pastoetter, “Vietnam,” in *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality Online*, ed. Robert Francoeur, [www.2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/vietnam.html](http://www.2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/vietnam.html); cited in Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 257.
93. Newton, “Homosexuality and Transgenderism,” 257.
94. Tran Thi Thuy Binh, “Queer Deities of Dao Mau—A Vietnamese Indigenous—and Its Religious Tolerance Toward Gender Diversity,” *Twelfth International Convention of Asia Scholars* (2022), <https://www.aup-online.com/docserver/fulltext/29496721/9789048557820/083.pdf?expires=1711412168&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=6B117C268054B1C6838C595738A3B459>; Elliott M. Heiman and Cao Van Lê, “Transsexualism in Vietnam,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 4, no. 1 (1975): 89–95; Barley Norton, *Songs for the Spirits: Music and Mediums in Modern Vietnam* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
95. An Thanh Ly et al., “Categorical Dilemmas: Challenges for HIV Prevention Among Men Who Have Sex with Men and Transgender Women in Vietnam,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 22, no. 10 (2020): 1171.
96. Frank Proschan, “‘Syphilis, Opiomania, and Pederasty’: Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese (and French) Social Diseases,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 4 (2002): 610–636.
97. Nguyen Quoc Vinh, “Deviant Bodies and Dynamics of Displacement of Homoerotic Desire in Vietnamese Literature from and About the French Colonial Period (1858–1954),” *Talawas* (1998), <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/suche.php?res=1056&rb=>.

98. Newton, "Homosexuality and Transgenderism," 257.
99. For example, as Marie-Eve Blanc argues, contemporary gender and sexual identities and behaviors may partly reflect "an old Vietnamese culture that is now re-emerging," yet in the global discourse of LGBT, this genealogy is obscured from the public imagination; Blanc, "Social Construction," 671.
100. Pham Quynh Phuong, "From 'Social Evils,'" 424, 434.
101. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 19–21, 59–63.
102. See, for example, Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
103. Newton, "Homosexuality and Transgenderism," 262.
104. *Ibid.*, 264.
105. Save the Children and Institute of Social and Medical Studies, "Being LGBT Young People," 15.
106. Le and Yu, "Vietnamese Social Work Practitioners," 328.