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# The Future of the LGBTQ Asian American and Pacific Islander Community in 2040

Glenn D. Magpantay

## Abstract

This article reviews the implications of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population growth over the next twenty-five years on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) AAPI community. After reviewing some initial considerations of the census data and the history of the LGBTQ rights movement, it then details possible changes in substantive rights and protections for LGBTQ AAPI people in the areas of immigration, nondiscrimination laws, and family-building policies. It discusses anticipated changes in AAPI attitudes toward LGBTQ people and the impact on LGBTQ AAPI community infrastructure.

## Introduction

As Paul Ong and his team have uncovered, the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations will grow significantly in the next twenty-five years (Ong, Ong and Ong, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of AAPIs will increase 74 percent, from 20.5 million in 2015 to 35.7 million in 2040, making AAPIs the fastest-growing racial population in the nation. In addition, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) are higher among AAPIs when compared to the general population (Gates and Newport, 2012). This demographic trajectory will have profound social, cultural, political, and economic implications as AAPIs become nearly a tenth of the total U.S. population.

This article provides some insights into the implications of the AAPI population growth of the LGBTQ AAPI community, as well as the exponential growth of multiracial Asians over the next twenty-five years. Before reviewing the impact on public policies, advocacy,

and community infrastructure, I will present a short discussion of the census data and the history of the LGBTQ rights movement. I anticipate tremendous advancement in substantive rights and protections, a sea change in AAPI attitudes toward LGBTQ people, and significant growth among LGBTQ AAPI community organizations.

## Initial Considerations on the Data and LGBTQ Movement

### **Limitations of the Data**

Although the U.S. Census reports on the AAPI population and ethnic subgroups, future censuses must count LGBTQ people, which is not currently done.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the U.S. Census recognizes both “married couples” and “unmarried partners” who may be of the same sex. However, being in a same-sex partnership is a limited identifier of the LGBTQ community. Advocates are exploring asking the “LGB” question and reforming the gender question. Knowing an approximate population size of the LGBTQ community is necessary to explore the need for and impact of an array of public policies, social services, and substantive rights and protections.

The Williams Institute at UCLA has researched how to collect data about the LGBTQ community (Gates, 2011). One challenge in measuring sexual orientation is that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals may be identified strictly based on their self-identity or based on their sexual behavior or sexual attraction. Identifying the transgender population can also be challenging because the transgender experience includes aspects of both gender identities and varying forms of gender expression or nonconformity. Moreover, sexual orientation and gender identity, like race, are ever-changing concepts. Today, there are more than fifty gender options on Facebook. The Census Bureau has already started to analyze this trend (Harris, 2015).

It is also important to recognize that LGBTQ people may also be reluctant to honestly answer such questions for fear of stigma and discrimination. In a study by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 71 percent of transgender people said they do not typically disclose their gender identity or gender transition in order to avoid discrimination (Grant et al., 2011). Many people feel that these are private questions, inappropriate for a governmental survey. Nevertheless, there are some commonly used survey questions to gather data on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The census relationship question may need to change as well. LGBTQ people are beginning to develop more dynamic relationships.

They are more complex than just monogamous partnerships. There is a growing movement for polyamory (Easton and Liszt, 1997 James, 2010), which is a relationship that has multiple partners. Some of these relationships are triads or have even more people involved. Human relationships are complex, and I could foresee a census policy movement developing to recognize these multiparty partnerships.

The next twenty-five years will also see an exponential growth in the population of multiracial Asians. Complex racial identities go hand in hand with complex sexual and gender identities in terms of recognition. Racial, sexual, ethnic, and gender identification are powerful unifiers but also imperfect categories. As we look to 2040, the census will need to look at new ways to document the demographic diversity of America.

### **History of the LGBTQ Movement in the United States**

The early LGBTQ rights agenda was focused on being left alone, to live free, but not necessarily openly, as lesbian, gay, and transgendered people (Egan and Sherrill, 2005). In the 1970s and 1980s, antigay and antitrans harassment, violence, and hate crimes were commonplace. Gay bars were frequently raided by the police, no one was LGBTQ in high school, college-aged young people were being harassed in dormitories, and gay men were contracting HIV and dying from AIDS.

Today, so much has changed. LGBTQ people no longer simply seek tolerance, but affirmative acceptance, if not celebration, of who we are, whom we love, how we love, and our gender presentation. LGBTQ people can now legally marry. LGBTQ acceptance has changed considerably where, today, a majority of Americans are supportive of LGBTQ rights (Baunach, 2012). It is common for someone to know an out LGBTQ person.

And yet more work still needs to be done. LGBTQ people can get married but we still need to ask, "Who will come to the wedding?" Marriage is an important legal right, but also a familial recognition of our partners. Parental acceptance of their LGBTQ children and their partners is still needed. LGBTQ people can get married, but they can also get fired from a job in many states or beaten up because of whom they chose to marry. People of transgender experience, especially transwomen of color, are facing horrific rates of violence. While the LGBTQ community has secured many rights in the United States, the world can still be a dangerous place for LGBTQ people to live. So much work is ahead of us.

## Rights for LGBTQ People

Before delving into the issues of the LGBTQ community and movement over the next twenty-five years, we must consider how rights are developed. The agenda for LGBTQ AAPI rights and equality is often a function of being LGBTQ or being a racial minority. LGBTQ AAPIs live at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. When LGBTQ people win the right to marry or are protected from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations, LGBTQ AAPIs win those rights as well. When race-based affirmative actions are preserved, undocumented immigrants given legal status, and limited English proficient Asians can vote in their native languages, American society and democracy becomes more inclusive of LGBTQ AAPIs. So forecasting an LGBTQ AAPI rights agenda must lie at this unique intersection.

The victories of today can be lost tomorrow. The 1970s feminist movement fed into a sexual liberation movement. The National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in 1979 saw the beginnings of a more politicized gay community. And then there was AIDS. Lesbian and gay organizations and communities were decimated. Gay men and trans people were dying. Discriminatory policies were written into federal immigration and state adoption laws. Agendas shifted from rights based on sexual orientation to health care access. In 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld state sodomy laws in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. The opinion's legal reasoning surprisingly cited William Blackstone from the eighteenth century (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986). A second national march on Washington in 1987 demonstrated the communities' resilience. But it was not until much later that the LGBTQ community began to make some headway in public policies.

The 1990s saw a different rhetoric and much more access to the White House and top public policy officials under the presidency of Bill Clinton. Yet, LGBTQ leaders wondered whether winning access was the same as winning policy changes. The obvious setbacks were the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. The George W. Bush years saw an LGBTQ regrouping and refocus on state and local initiatives, especially state DOMAs that prohibited same-sex marriage. This laid the foundations for what would become a powerful political machine. Under the presidency of Barack Obama the LGBTQ community won a string of federal as well as state and local victories (Human Rights Campaign, 2015; On the Issues, 2015; Ring, 2015).

Policies affirmatively discriminating against people with AIDS and LGBTQ people were overturned. Obama signed the federal Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law. Military discrimination ended with the overturning of Don't Ask Don't Tell. The Supreme Court recognized a federal right to marriage for same-sex couples. These substantive rights are incredible. But they are yet to be fully implemented to truly alter the everyday lives of LGBTQ people. At the same time, for LGBTQ AAPIs, many of us are immigrants and deportations have reached an all-time high under Obama. Transgender people still faced ongoing violence.

The civil rights movement provides ample evidence for continued struggle. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision outlawing segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* was in 1954 but Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from a Birmingham Jail underscoring the need for action against segregation and injustice was written in 1963, nearly ten years after *Brown* was decided. Rights must be institutionalized. And cultural shifts are necessary prerequisites to institutionalization.

### Demographic Implications on Public Policies

Three substantive public policy areas that can be directly implicated with the increase of the AAPI community over the next twenty-five years are immigration, nondiscrimination, and family-building policies.

AAPIs will comprise 10 percent of the U.S. population by 2040 due to large waves of immigration. This rise in immigration will shift the AAPI population from being predominantly U.S.-born to a mainly immigrant constituency. The Williams Institute found that AAPIs comprised a larger share of LGBTQ immigrant populations, with 15 percent of undocumented LGBTQ adults and 35 percent of documented LGBTQ adults identifying as AAPI (Gates, 2013). Immigration issues are vitally important to the LGBTQ AAPI community. By 2040, I hope that advocates will have developed the ability to win a legalization program that allows undocumented immigrants to gain status and U.S. citizenship.

Today several states and municipalities outlaw employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and some on gender identity. I hope that in the next twenty-five years we will not just see the passage of the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act but also a more comprehensive measure, like the Equality Act, modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1965, that prevents discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The new law will have to cover both intentional discrimination and discrimination in effect (Rutherglen, 1987). Current laws prevent racial discrimination when it is done openly and is easy to prove. Today, racial discrimination in employment and housing tends to be more nuanced or race-neutral (Kang and Lane, 2010). For instance, offending parties may claim that they are not discriminating against African American people per se, but against those who are “unqualified” or have criminal prolixities if not actual convictions. There is then a disproportionate impact, or “effect,” on African Americans.

Similarly, firing a LGBTQ person may be motivated on the basis of sexuality or gender identity, but an oral record to illustrate that animus was the reason is far more difficult to prove. Jerry Kang’s work on implicit bias has also uncovered discrimination without any intent or even awareness. Over the next twenty-five years, my hope is that advocates will develop a legal standard to outlaw discrimination in effect that will more competently address discrimination against both LGBTQ people and racial and ethnic minorities (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2015). The latter includes remedying discrimination against multiracial people who will grow in population.

Today there is a baby boom among LGBTQ people. There is already a growth of AAPIs who have come out and openly identify as LGBTQ. More and more LGBTQ people, including LGBTQ AAPIs, are raising children, either through adoption or artificial insemination (Badgett et al., 2007; Goldberg, Gartrell, and Gates, 2014). AAPI parents of LGBTQ kids have sometimes said that coming to terms with their children being LGBTQ has meant coming to terms with no longer becoming a grandparent. For AAPIs, having children and grandchildren is especially powerful. It is about legacy and long-term security and gives status and meaning to one’s life.

The children of LGBTQ parents are often from a different racial background from their LGBTQ parents or they are of mixed race. In domestic adoption, there are simply more black and Latino children to adopt than white and AAPIs. Lesbians often secure sperm from a donor of a different race. Many Asians still harbor old prejudices against adoption and artificial insemination, but the desire to have a family is powerful. I anticipate that these prejudices will subside as more and more LGBTQ AAPIs demand recognition, resources, and support for family building.

Today, we already know that a large number of AAPI same-sex unmarried parents are raising children, oftentimes children of a differ-

ent race or of mixed race (Kastanis and Gates, 2013). The projected 104 percent increase in the multiracial AAPI population between 2015 and 2040 is attributable to the large number of interracial marriages. I believe that AAPI LGBTQ families will contribute to the growth of the AAPI multiracial population over the next twenty-five years.

### Demographic Implications on LGBTQ Acceptance

There will be a sea change in the acceptance of LGBTQ people among AAPIs. This will largely be driven by the growth of the U.S. native-born AAPI population and as the AAPI young people of today grow up, more inclined toward acceptance. Young people will be more inclined to accept LGBTQ people. Such changes in attitudes, coupled with increased voter eligibility and voter registration of AAPIs, will result in a new landscape of LGBTQ people advocating for public policy changes.

### Public Opinion

Today, a majority of Americans support the right of same-sex couples to legally marry (Clement and Barnes, 2015). Yet, AAPIs have been less accepting, if not opposed. In 2012, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) polled 9,096 Asian American voters during the elections in fourteen states in twelve Asian languages. It was the largest multilingual exit poll of its kind and it was the first time that AAPI support for LGBTQ issues had been polled on such a national and representative scale (Tran, Magpantay, and Fung, 2013). AALDEF found that only a third (37 percent) of Asian American voters supported the right of same-sex couples to legally marry. Almost half (48 percent) were opposed.

The greatest opposition came from Asian Americans who were foreign-born, limited English proficient, and older. This cut makes up the largest portion of the Asian American electorate today. Only a fifth (21 percent) of Asian American voters polled were born in the United States and 79 percent were foreign-born citizens who naturalized. Majority support did not break by gender, college education, or Democratic Party affiliation.

The greatest support for same-sex marriage came from Asian American voters who were native-born, younger, highly educated, and fully English proficient. In fact, 75 percent of Asian Americans born in the United States and 65 percent between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine supported same-sex marriage.



AALDEF conducted another exit poll in 2014 of 4,102 Asian American voters in thirty-eight cities across eleven states. That year, Asian Americans showed support for laws that protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, with an overall result of 56 percent indicating their support and 24 percent expressing opposition. The greatest support again came from native-born and younger voters, at 89 percent of native-born voters and 82 percent for those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine.

In 2040, the increase in the U.S.-born AAPI population, coupled with a larger share being younger, could push forth AAPI support for same-sex marriage and legal protections for LGBTQ people.

### **Advocacy**

Electoral and attitudinal changes will also fuel changes in public policy advocacy. By 2040, one in fifteen registered voters will be AAPI. The increase will make AAPIs one of the fastest-growing electorates in America. Ong and other commentators predict that politicians will reach out more deliberately to the AAPI community.

Likewise, I anticipate that mainstream national LGBTQ advocacy organizations will not only reach out to, but also substantively address the needs of AAPIs. This would occur not only to keep their base of donors and members satisfied, but also for political advantage through coalitions. National LGBTQ organizations may need to press for immigrants' rights because so many LGBTQs will be immigrants. Indeed, AAPI registered voters who are foreign-born are predicted to continue to be in the majority. Demographic changes could thereby promote more racial inclusion in the LGBTQ rights agenda.

### **Family Acceptance**

As public opinion changes, the acceptance of LGBTQ people by their families will surely change as well. Today, the parents who are visible and who have publically proclaimed that they love their LGBTQ kids are almost all white or only say so in English. Few AAPI parents have stepped forward to say the same (Aizumi, 2015). Traditional cultural attitudes sometimes dissuade such outness. To address this conundrum, the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA) spearheaded an effort to present parents who love their LGBTQ children through public service announcements and multilingual leaflets (National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance, 2015a, 2015c).

AAPI parents are often stuck in a “time warp” when it comes to awareness about LGBTQ people. Parents tell their children that “there are no gays back home” or share their perception of LGBTQs as being all “transsexual prostitutes.” That is what they remember from when they immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Today the LGBTQ community has flourished abroad. There are sizable LGBTQ pride celebrations and public parades in Manila, Mumbai, Beijing, Taipei, Hanoi, Seoul, and the Pacific Islands (Mediator News Group, 2015; Pawar, 2014; Senzee, 2014). But AAPI parents who are in the United States today never saw those parades so they understand being LGBTQ as a “Western influence,” something that would never happen back home.

The trajectory of the AAPI community in 2040 will see a tremendous rise in U.S.-born Asians and Asian immigration. These individuals will come to the United States with an increased awareness of the existence of the LGBTQ community, which may enable them to contribute to the movement for increased understanding and ultimately the acceptance of LGBTQ people.

### Demographic Implications on LGBTQ AAPI Community Infrastructure

The rapid growth of the AAPI population by 2040 will have a tremendous impact on LGBTQ AAPI community infrastructure. Between 2015 and 2040, AAPIs will grow 74 percent, from 20.5 million to 35.7 million (Ong, Ong and Ong, 2016). By 2040, nearly one in ten Americans will be AAPI. These numbers are not so far off from the size of the black population today, and one can anticipate that the level of the black community’s infrastructure today will be what is to come for AAPIs in the next twenty-five years. Today, the LGBTQ AAPI community is primarily served by two models of institutions: HIV/AIDS agencies and volunteer community-based organizations. These are enduring independent groups, but it is important to note that there are also professional associations, employee networks, and queer Asian student groups that form from time to time within larger institutions. With the rapid rise of the LGBTQ AAPI community, these institutions will be transformed.

### **Transformation AAPI-Serving Institutions from HIV/AIDS to Health**

Today we already see that HIV/AIDS institutions are transforming themselves. Just a few years ago, in 2010, there were five HIV/AIDS

organizations primarily serving AAPIs.<sup>2</sup> These institutions were founded because mainstream AIDS service organizations were incapable, or unwilling, to provide HIV services, outreach, and education with sufficient cultural competency to AAPIs.

In 2015, these agencies have changed considerably. API Wellness Center in San Francisco and APICHA in New York are becoming full-fledged community health centers that provide a host of health and wellness services far beyond HIV/AIDS. Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team in Los Angeles also tried to become a community health center but found the process too arduous and too political. The smaller agencies in Philadelphia and Boston have since folded.

As the population of AAPIs dramatically grows over the next twenty-five years, demands for cultural competent health services in the fields of HIV and transgender health will assuredly increase. Current and/or new agencies will step up and respond to changing demographics. Some cities may follow current models in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Seattle, where mainstream AAPI health agencies or minority AIDS service agencies address the needs of AAPIs. The undeniable demographic changes will encourage, if not require, changes in HIV/AIDS services.

### **Community-Based Organizations**

The second model of community infrastructure has been community-based organizations (National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance, 2009). About thirty-five local LGBTQ AAPI community organizations across the nation currently exist. Most are all-volunteer groups and only a handful have full-time staff.

In 2005, NQAPIA was founded as a federation of LGBTQ AAPI organizations to build their organizational capacity, develop leadership, invigorate organizing, and challenge homophobia and racism. NQAPIA conducted a survey of these organizations in 2009 and again in 2015 (National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance, 2015b). NQAPIA found that they all have limited capacity. Only a quarter of them are incorporated as tax-exempt nonprofits. Half have budgets under \$10,000 and only a quarter (those with staff) have budgets of more than \$50,000.

LGBTQ AAPI organizations engage in social, support, educational, outreach, and political activities. They provide essential social networking spaces where they can connect with people of common heritage and experiences. They provide an alternative space to gay bars

and clubs, which is and will continue to be especially important for young people given that the AAPI population in 2040 will be younger on the whole.

Educational activities include workshops, guest speakers, or discussion groups on a variety of topics. Peer support provides help for those coming out of the closet, or who experience other forms of marginalization due to their identities as women, people of transgender experience, or young people.

All LGBTQ AAPI groups engaged in some form of political advocacy or activism. They have written letters to editors, launched campaigns, and participated in rallies, protests, and lobby days. They challenge racism in the LGBTQ community and homophobia in AAPI communities. Some groups engaged electorally, through their companion 501(c)(4) Political Action Committee (PAC) to endorse candidates or to host nonpartisan public forums on the elections. But there are internal tensions in this work.

Some organizations' members pushed back regarding political work. One faction focused on social activities and had a distaste for political activism. Another faction believed that it had a duty to be politically engaged and speak up for LGBTQ AAPIs. These dynamics have been seen with many local grassroots LGBTQ AAPI organizations, such as Asian Queers and Allies (AQUA), Durham, NC; Queer & Asian, Houston, TX; Shades of Yellow (SOY), Minneapolis, MN; Invisible-to-Invincible (i2i): Asian Pacific Islander Pride of Chicago; Trikone-Chicago; Asian Pacific Islander Queer Sisters (APIQS), Washington, DC; Khush-DC, Washington, DC; Gay Asian & Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY); Q-WAVE; SALGA; Massachusetts Area South Asian Lambda Association (MASALA), Boston, MA; Queer Asian Pacific-Islander Alliance (QAPA), Boston, MA; Asian Pacific Islander Pride of Portland, OR; Trikone-Northwest, Seattle, WA; Pride Asia, Seattle, WA; Gay Asian Pacific Alliance (GAPA), San Francisco, CA; South Bay Queer and Asian, San Jose; Trikone, San Francisco, CA; Barangay – LA; Satrang; Gay Asian Pacific Support Network (GAPSN); and Viet Rainbow Orange County (VietROC).

Digging deeper, NQAPIA found that the struggle emanated from membership demographics. The more socially oriented leaders and members tended to be immigrants. The more politically oriented were U.S.-born. This is understandable. Many AAPIs come from countries where homosexuality is still frowned upon, that have palpable histories of government repression, or where speaking out has direct

consequences for them and their families. With the tremendous rise of native-born AAPIs in 2040, I hope this push back will subside and more of the groups will more affirmatively seek the same rights and dignities as all Americans.

I suspect that in the next twenty-five years, there will be a proliferation of these community-based organizations, in new cities and states with large AAPI growth. For current organizations, I see their programs expanding considerably in the future. Many groups want to provide specific support on immigration matters or professional counseling services, for example, but they lack the capacity to do so. But the demands may continue as the population increases. In order to accommodate more expansive programs and regular services, these organizations will need a higher level of infrastructure. These organizations will incorporate, acquire tax-exempt status, attract more institutional funding, and hire staff. Today, they have been reluctant to take on such infrastructure, but as they grow, they will find themselves needing to do so.

In some places, like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, the local LGBTQ AAPI organization may have the requisite infrastructure and local AAPI population may be sufficiently large enough in 2040 where they will be able to develop full-fledged community centers. These may be needed because mainstream LGBTQ community centers lack the diversity and cultural competency to service all sectors of the LGBTQ community.

## Conclusion

The dramatic increase of the AAPI population and electorate has many implications on the LGBTQ rights agenda and manner in which the movement is organized. Greater acceptance of LGBTQs by AAPIs will not only be fueled by ongoing education but because the demographic who are the greatest supporters of LGBTQ rights today will become the AAPI electorate of the future. Likewise, community needs will increase as the population increases, and so the infrastructure of the LGBTQ AAPI community will mature and formalize. I believe that multiculturalism within existing legislation, programs, and agencies will normalize, and civil rights protections will more sufficiently address discrimination in a more dynamic and diverse American society. The noted author, activist, and thinker Urvashi Vaid (1993) once said, "The gay rights movement is an integral part of the American promise of freedom." I hope we will achieve that freedom in the next twenty-five years.

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## Notes

1. It is notable that many other federal, state, and local data collection efforts include sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual orientation identity is now measured on the National Health Interview Survey and sexual orientation and gender identity measurement is currently being tested for inclusion on the National Crime and Victimization Survey. The National Survey of Family Growth includes measures of sexual orientation, behavior, and attraction. The California Health Interview Survey has just added measurement of gender identity for adults and gender expression for adolescents and has expanded sexual orientation identity measurement to all adults.
2. The groups are API Wellness Center in San Francisco, APICHA in New York, and Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team in Los Angeles, as well as smaller agencies such as AIDS Services in Asian Communities in Philadelphia and MAP for Health in Boston (see Wong et al., 2011).

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