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Identities and Roles of Gay and Bisexual Teachers in Rural Philippines

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A B S T R A C T

This study utilized a descriptive exploratory approach to explore the identities and roles of gay and bisexual teachers in their workplace. The ten informants were purposively chosen. Interviews, focus group discussions, and direct and participant observation were the data-gathering procedures employed in the study. To dig deeper into their identities and roles, thematic analysis was used. The study revealed that the profile of gay and bisexual teachers varied from one another. Further, the informants identify with their preferred gender identities and characterize their roles and duties as teachers who are committed, competent, creative, and compliant. Training and seminars on gender mainstreaming issues may be strengthened to foster gender-responsive schools toward safe and inclusive spaces for LGBT teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

School leaders can make school safe and inclusive for all. Learning institutions can therefore foster effective and responsive school culture to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) educators in their workplace. They also need to feel safe and accepted in order to provide the best education to their students (Wright et al, 2019).

This equality of human rights which protects and respect Filipino people is strongly grounded in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Moreover, it enshrines in its due process and equal protection clauses that "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws." However, with the traditional perception and norms brought by religious views and opinions on sexual preference and gender roles, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in the Philippines whether professionals or not, have experienced discrimination and non-acceptance (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). With the non-existence of effective implementation and monitoring of policies, many, discrimination cases were experienced by teachers. Marginalization in education profession is not only permissible, but it is extensively tolerated in a number of public learning institutions (Bishop et al., 2010). Teachers experience fear of coming out of their identity to their students in spite of the belief that being out may allow them to become more effective within the classroom setting (De Jean, 2004).

However, LGBT community today is getting more recognized. In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held the First International Consultation on GLBTIQ issues in educational institutions which highlighted the position in interpreting the rights of GLBTQ and argues for the protection of all people against marginalization in relation to their gender orientation worldwide. Further, a global network against homophobic and transphobic bullying in education institutions has been formed, funded, and supported by UNESCO and other organizations which provide LGBT the opportunity to experience schools with equality and inclusivity (UNESCO, 2012).

In the Philippines, in order to make a quantum difference in the lives of LGBT educators, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Equality Bill and the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill (CADB) have been filed. Moreover, in order to address the increasing gender issues at school, the "Guidelines and Procedure on the Establishment or DepEd Gender and Development Focal Point System" (DepEd Memorandum Order No. 27, s. 2013), and the "Policy in the Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education" (DepEd Memorandum No. 31, s. 2018) were released. Its institutionalization provided teachers, learners, and parents the opportunity to develop their knowledge on gender related laws, and policies. However, these policis have not been strongly implemented.

Despite of the different policies released, the right of LGBT individuals to express their preferred sexual orientation remained denied (Alegre, 2006). Further, LGBT teachers and other individuals experienced greater anxiety from

their workplace (Rubio and Green, 2009). As such, they work to their best abilities, work harder to attest their qualifications (Concordia, et al., 2017). Moreover, there is no sporadic progress in passing policies and bills which left LGBT people in school setting including teachers and students without any national protection from discrimination on the grounds of gender identity or gender expression(UNDP & Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2018).

Moreover, in the District of Irosin, many LGBT educators still do not reveal their orientations because coming out may be quite risky. Lack of school and district policies may also be the reason why it is hard for them to come out of their identity to the fact that individuals were not protected by laws and school policies.

As such, this study is connected to the Sustainable Development Goals No. 5 (SGD5) which is about achieving gender equality and empower all women that aims to end all types of discrimination, eliminate all forms of violence, and harmful practices, ensure effective participation and opportunities and adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality. In the same manner, this study aimed to protect LGBT teachers at all cost and mitigate discriminatory practices and stereotypical perceptions in school- community environment.

Therefore, in order to solve this and other gender-related related problems, there is a dire need for continued striving towards equity and justice within the realm of sexual diversity which will not only benefit LBGT teachers and their well-being, but also students. More so, undertaking this study may identify and explore the significant challenging experiences and turned them into substantial contributions in the fields of teaching and gender studies. It is the researchers' hope that it could bring hopes among LGBT teachers and encourage administrative change and integration of evidenced-based solutions that support LBGT teachers and, consequently, their learners.

Added to that, undertaking this type of exploratory research will somehow help to address the gender issues and violence given the fact that teacher are aconfounded andre uncomfortable in dealing themselves when they are involved in gender- related problems. Moreover tackling the issues at hand makes it easier for LGBT teachers to provide necessary assistance or solution to victims of gender biases, thereby rendering teachers powerful to protect themselves, more so, the students concerned. Hence, this study examined determined the profile of gay and bisexual teachers and described the personal standpoints about their identities and roles as teachers characterized as gay and bisexual teachers.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Disclosure of gender identity leads towards acceptance and discrimination to LGBT teachers. Their sexual preferences may be opened depends largely on the people they interact with. Connell (2014) points out that coming out of shells is a big challenge because of the discrimination that one might experience from their environment.

According to Gan and Chen (2017) LGBT teachers behave depending on whom they interact with. Some don't have the opportunity to open their sexual identity. Some don't even share their personal experiences such as their partners and other because they are afraid from the others' judgments. Also, Whipple (2018) stated that some teachers express their sexual orientation depends on whom they work with. Abramo (2014) found out that there were still LGBT teachers who are afraid of coming out though there are LGBTQ rights that protect them. Jones et al. (2014) found out that fewer GLBTIQ teachers had divulged their identity to students. Meanwhile, educators teaching in religious institutions had difficulties in coming out which led other to resign in teaching.

Most educators experienced homophobia in their workplace. Bhana (2012) defines homophobia that entails dislikes, fear, and denial of homosexuality for gays and lesbians. Likewise, Russell et al. (2021) emphasized the discriminatory scenarios experienced by LGBT learners. Gender violence cases make school unsafe for LGBT individuals. Morrison (2019) revealed that LGB teachers experienced fear, anxiety and depression due to lack of privileges to speak their sexual preferences and incompatibility of their professional and personal at school. Chatman (2015) explored the impact of homophobic bullying of LGBT youth of twenty-two secondary schools in Shelby County, Tennessee. The results revealed that most of the youth were bullied for being a gay.

School administrators and colleagues can mitigate the discriminatory practices experienced by LGBT teachers in school to make school safe, and inclusive to all LGBT individuals. United Nation Human Rights (2019) calls states to create programs along sex education programs to provide students and teachers information about diverse sexuality and gender orientations. Meanwhile, Gonzales (2020) emphasizes that LGBT policies and laws largely must be enacted to eradicate discrimination and bullying cases at school. Teacher-training programs need to be strengthened to educate learners about their responsibilities as future citizens who are aware of the rights of all, including sexual minorities, and are accepted in emergent school-based educational research as a crucial intervention to enable good citizenship (Hooker, 2018). Furthermore, Reyes et al. (2016) concluded that the support of parents has significant roles in the lives of LGBT individuals.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive exploratory research design was employed in this study for it describes the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and to explore the causes of phenomena. The ten (10) gay and bisexual teachers currently working in elementary and secondary were the informants of the study and were chosen through purposive sampling. Researchers-made interview guide and focus group discussion questionnaire were the instruments used in the study. During the data collection process, the researchers sent a letter of consent to the gay and bisexual teachers of Irosin District. After which, researchers contacted the selected participant using messenger to set a date for an interview. The interview was scheduled at a time and place convenient to

the informants. Additionally, open-ended questions were used due to different experiences shared by the teachers which were based largely on the stories they are narrating. Moreover, the researchers conducted a focus group discussion to the selected participants. In one setting and on particular time, all narrated their experiences. Audio recorded interview was the transcribed verbatim for each participant. Lastly, the researchers analyzed the data gathered from the interview and used the information gathered for the objective of the research using thematic analysis to cluster the results and create themes.

RESULTS

The study analyzed the musings and reflections of gay and bisexual teachers in a province in the Philippines. The study used a phenomenological approach and found out the following data in terms of profile of informants and on understanding their identities and roles as educators.

Table 1. Profile of Gay and Bisexual Teachers

Variables	Number of Informants
Gender Identity	
Gay	7
Bisexual	3
Age	
30-35	1
36-40	5
41-45	1
46-50	1
51-55	2
Educational Attainment	
Bachelor's Degree	2
with MA Units	6
Master's Degree Holder	1
with Doctorate Units	1
Doctorate Degree Holder	1
Related Trainings Attended	
International	0
National	0
Regional	1
Division	2
Length of Service	
5 - 10 years	3
11 – 15 years	5
16 years and above	2
Teaching Position	
Teacher I	3
Teacher II	0
Teacher III	6
Master Teacher I	1

Master Teacher II	0
Gender and Development Coordinator	
School GAD Coordinator	1
District GAD Coordinator	0
Division GAD Coordinator	0

Table 1 shows that most of the informants were gays, aged between 36 to 40 years old. Likewise, most of them have already earned units in graduate studies. However, as shown in the table, most have no seminars on gender-related issues, and only one is currently handling gender and development coordinator. Further, most informants have been in the service for 11-15 years and were Teacher III in a teaching position.

Moreover, the experiences disclose that most LGBT educators are out of their chosen identity despite some barriers to being open and honest about their sexual identity. This finding also indicates that they labeled themselves as committed, competent, creative, and compliant members of the academic community.

DISCUSSIONS

*1. **Profile of the Informants***

When they were asked about their gender identity, it revealed that of the ten respondents, seven (7) of them indicated that they were "gay" while three (3) of them were "bisexual". Gay and bisexual teachers have different gender identity depending on what they felt and preferred. Overall, gay sexual orientation is the top having the highest informants.

As to their age, gay and bisexual teachers didn't hesitate to share their years of existence. Only (1) of the 10 informants aged between 30-35 years old, five (5) aged between 36-40 years old, one aged between 41-45 years old, one (1) being 46-50 years old, and two (2) being aged between 51-55 years old. None of the them aged 60 years old and above.

Gay and bisexual educators proudly shared their educational attainment in their teaching profession. Based on their stated responses, out of ten (10) informants, six (6) of them have MA units, two (2) have Bachelor's Degree, and one (1) participant has doctorate units Meanwhile, informants with Master's Degree Holder have gained a total of one (1).

When informants were asked if they have attended trainings or seminar about gender issues, only three of the participants out of 10 have attended trainings. Most of them have no trainings on gender mainstreaming. Though few of them have attended seminars about gender and development, topic about LGBT issues are not included, thus, make them difficult in handling gender violence issues at school.

In terms of their length of service, five (5) out of ten (10) informants have length of 11-15 years in the service. Meanwhile, three (3) of them are in 6-10 years while two (2) of them are 16 years and above. Further, when asked about their teaching position, of the ten (10) informants, six (6) of them are Teacher III gaining the highest number of participants. Also, three (3) of the informants are

Teacher I and only one (1) is Master Teacher. In terms of other ancillary functions, of the disclosed information by LGBT educators, out of ten (10) informants, only one is a school gender and development coordinator. This indicates that nine (9) of them are not handling GAD Coordinator in their respective school.

2. Understanding standpoints about their identities and roles as teachers

Gay and bisexual teachers identify with their sexual orientation and characterize their teacher roles. The interviews also revealed that the teachers are committed, competent, creative, and compliant.

*a. On their gay and bisexual identities***.** Coming out means having the courage that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teachers go through as they accept their sexual preferences and share their identities with others. Showing the informants' identities becomes easy because they feel it's better to be honest about their sexual orientation than to hide it. And once they recognize and accept themselves, they tell and show it to their learners, colleagues, and school leaders.

> *I'm very open with my gender identity. 100% they know that I am gay. And I have no reason to hide it. I show them the way I talk, act, and bond with my students, and colleagues (I1, I3,I4, I6, I7, and I9).*
>
> *Of course, they know that I am bisexual even sometimes I'm confused of my identity. I used to show my identity within the school and community (I8).*
>
> *When they were in kindergarten I was their adviser, they know that I'm a gay. And I'm proud being a gay (I5).*
>
> *Yes. I told to them that I am gay. When I teach, pay with students, mingle with my co-workers, I am fully out and they know it. And I embrace it because I see it as good and right (I2).*

The experiences disclose that most LGBT educators are out of their chosen identity despite some barriers to being open and honest about their sexual identity. This finding indicates that at current times LGBT individuals are brave to be available publicly their identities because they are gradually accepted by students, teachers, school heads, and the community. This finding is congruent with the study of Simons et al. (2021), which revealed that gay teachers fully disclose their identities to their colleagues. For example, one male teacher who identified as gay told his assistant coaches that he is gay, while the other one shared that he is not afraid to be with kids even though he is fully out. Meanwhile, the other one said that for him, it is essential to be visible in one's sexual preferences and that one should not be ashamed of his experience; instead, embrace it, use it, and learn from it.

b. On their characteristics as teachers. The informants identified themselves as teachers who can perform their tasks and responsibilities. In addition, they labeled themselves as committed, competent, creative, and compliant members of the academic community.

Committed teachers. Teacher commitment is an internal force willing to promote teaching professions and build an effective and responsive environment to ensure students learn. The interviews revealed that the teachers

are dedicated and passionate about their work. This character is shown in their actions by doing all the best strategies and styles to ensure students learn and exert extra time and effort to work in school. Learning new things, giving the best education to learners, and producing quality students with holistic and life-long learning are the guiding principles that made them committed teachers in their profession. They said:

> *I am really dedicated to my work as teacher. I always put extra time to ensure that all my students are learning. I do give efforts conducting intervention programs just to ensure that no one is left behind. I am very responsible. Whatever task is given to me, I do it well (I8, I9).*
>
> *I make myself busy at work even on weekends especially when we have important activities to do at school. I don't see it as extra burden. What matter is, I do my job and responsibility as teacher. I continue learning as teacher. That's how I dedicate my life at work (I1,I3,I7,I10).*
>
> *As LGBT teacher, in spite of challenges I may face of being gay, I still choose to do my job. It's my commitment to serve my learners. They are my number one priority in school. So I always think out of the box especially in classroom teaching to ensure that they are learning. I have passion of learning more to share more.*

The findings revealed that the informants have chosen to teach and have dedicated years to the profession. They stated that they need to do well in the job since there is personal and external pressure to do well. The interviews also revealed that the teachers vouched to be committed because of their burning love, enthusiasm, and passion for their chosen profession. They invest time and energy in promoting school, particularly in making a difference to commit their intellectual capacities and enabling a realistic environment where learners develop their achievement. This finding runs parallel to the study conducted by Simons (2021), who revealed that whether they are accepted by others or not, they still chose to dedicate their lives to teaching and that after serving for many years in education, they were able to continue learning and doing better in school. They emphasized that a committed teacher chooses to serve the betterment of their students and their workplace. Both suggested that LGBT teachers must continue to love their chosen profession and do their best to give their learners the best education and improve their performance.

*Competent teachers***.** The teachers said that they were thoughtful about their work. This quality of a teacher was shown by pursuing their career to earn a master's and doctorate. In addition, some gay and bisexual teachers offer their versatility and competency by leading different activities at school, maintaining good relationships with others, and carrying out duties and responsibilities as teachers. Competence means competence in professional practice, leadership and management, and personal effectiveness.

> *I am academically competent. I used my skills and knowledge as opportunity in teaching and learning. I am adaptive and flexible. But still, I continue improving my own professional practice to provide quality learning to my students (I7,I8, and I10).*

I never stop learning. I continue to enroll in my doctorate degree because I realize the importance of developing myself as teacher. The more I know the more knowledge I can share with my learners (I1, I2, and I4).

I do maintain my personal and professional while carrying out my duties and responsibilities in school. One thing is I change our school to a better learning institution. I bring out the talent of my pupils in arts, dance singing, and sports. And that I am one of the reasons why there are many good changes in my workplace (I9).

The sentiments above reveal that teachers are effective in professional practice by allowing themselves to develop professionally and personally. The finding parallels the study conducted by Lomibao (2019), who revealed that teachers are competent, practical, adaptive, and flexible at any level. Likewise, enrolling in master's and doctorate degrees made teachers more academically and professionally qualified. Grit among gay and bisexual teachers is high as they perceive themselves as competent in their chosen field.

Moreover, it was found that they gained positive attitudes from their colleagues and students' education and enhanced their professional lives (Sevim and Akin, 2021). Both findings suggest that every educator must have the opportunity to improve their knowledge and teaching practices to give a bigger chance to have much-needed knowledge and skills. As such, a career system that would enhance the professional development practices of teachers must be created in the fields of education and be prioritized by the government to become more competent in their profession.

Creative teachers. Gay and bisexual teachers described themselves as creative. They are talented and creative in school, particularly organizing various affairs and events. Some are artistic in school planning, while some are talented in designing stages, beautifying surroundings, and training skills of pupils in dance, arts, and others.

"I am very creative and artistic teacher, that's how they described me as teacher. I served as consultant in terms of school planning particularly in decorating stage whenever we have event in school (I3, I9).

"They love and appreciate me for making our school a better place. I do not just teach but I make our surroundings a colorful one by leading my pupils and colleagues in landscaping, and painting school gardens (I4).

"I served as choreographer and trainer to my pupils in dance, role playing, singing and other competitions which are compete in other schools. I always ensure that we create a unique and creative performance (I1,I7,I10).

I am creative in terms of innovating instructional materials which I can use in teaching pupils. I made a lot of big books, learning activity sheets, and modules which I utilized to make my teaching- learning process interactive (I4, I2).

The statements of informants are indications that LGBT members are creative in terms of creating positive changes not only in the four corners of the classrooms but also in the entire school and community. It also shows that they are not only dispensers of knowledge to pupils but also consultants, beauticians, talent managers, trainers, designers, decorators, innovators, and artists in their working place. And that they efficiently perform their duties well to meet the

needs of their class better, including their workmates and the school. The experiences disclosed by teachers were similar to that of Simons et al. (2021), who found that creativity in the classroom is vital for LGBT teachers. Queer teachers facilitate shill and talent transfer through creating their art and by teaching pupils to enhance their creativity. Moreover, Lomibao (2019) found that school heads and teachers have the same level of agreement regarding the characteristics of LGBT teachers as creative and flexible in teaching and other related activities as educators. LGBT leaders best serve their students as positive role models and empower individuals, particularly learners and advance the well-being of the entire school community (Wright et al., 2019). It is, therefore, crucial that LGBT teachers may be given more support by giving them pieces of training and workshop to develop their hidden talents and skills, mainly being creative and innovative in many ways.

Compliant Teachers. The participants defined themselves as respectful teachers. Their responses showed that although they are gays and bisexuals, they experienced acceptance, love, and respect for following the rules and doing their job responsibly.

> *I always ensure that I even if I am gay I act ethically according to my profession (I4, I7, I8).*
>
> *I am law abiding teacher. Whenever there are changes in policies, rules, new assignments, coordinators in school I follow and I do it (I1, I3, I6).*
>
> *My gender identity doesn't define who I am as long as I know how to distinguish right or wrong, and I am modest, and I am not breaking any rules (I2, I5, I10)*

Being compliant means being able to follow any rules being implemented in school and even as professional teachers. As such, it was revealed in their responses that they maintain their professionalism, perform their assigned duties and responsibilities, and never break any laws in their workplace. This finding indicates that compliant teachers are expected to be role models to young learners. They are expected to socialize, engage, and participate in various school activities and situations with proper etiquette and high morals as essential in building a good image of the professions, school, and community.

The responses are similar to the experiences of LGBT teachers working abroad, as revealed in the study conducted by Wright and Villaflor (2019) that their participants need to be compliant in their work setting by being very formal and sensitive to their actions as professional teachers. But on the other hand, it was also found that other teachers who are identified as gay in international schools and who are very respectful and obedient experienced respect despite their diverse sexual preferences. Thus, teachers who interact and engage with people from various belief systems and backgrounds are expected to be truthful to their identities and be accommodating to those who agree and disagree with them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research found that majority of the informants are gays, aged between 36 to 40 years old, have masters' degree, have no seminars on gender-related issues, were 11-15 years in the service, were Teacher III and were coordinators of Gender and Development in their respective school. Moreover, gay and bisexual teachers are out and honest regarding their lived identities. Such honesty resonates in the execution and performance of their duties and responsibilities as teachers. They described themselves as dedicated and passionate about their job, versatile in professional practice, able and capable leaders and managers, and effective in their vocation as facilitators of learning. The informants also mentioned that their queer identities are equated to their talent and sense of innovation, where they can create and show uniqueness in teaching students and beautifying the school in all aspects. Likewise, the teachers feel that they are compliant for abiding by school rules and for being always professional all the time. The study recommended that school leaders may formulate school and district policies that address gender issues, organize school-based seminars and trainings on gender mainstreaming issues, and strengthen the implementation of gender-responsive basic education to capacitate learners' gender-related concepts.

FURTHER STUDY

There is still a wide range of room for further research on the lived experiences of lesbian , gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teachers. The research opportunities can be on the aspects of methodology used, and other similar studies about LGBT issues of educators.

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