

The Lived Experiences of LGBTQ+ Educators in Selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Ilocos Sur, Philippines

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Abstract

This study explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ educators. This qualitative research focuses on the phenomenology method as it aimed to understand and explain the lived experiences of the teacher-participants. The researchers employed purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants through personal and professional networks. A total of six (6) self-identified gay and lesbian educators in SUCs in Ilocos Sur served as participants in this study. Data were coded and analyzed according to the research questions.

The research resulted to two major themes which emerged out of the experiences shared by the LGBTQ+ educators: (a). Personal Experiences and (b) Professional experiences. The theme personal experiences are divided into sub-themes: a. Familial acceptance and support, b. community acceptance of their identity. The theme Professional Experiences are composed of (a). respect from students and fellow educators and (b) Inclusivity. There were recommendations given in this study wherein the LGBTQ+ educators and the school may consider to elevate the status of the LGBTQ+ personnel. Expand future research to include non-traditional participants and integrate variables that impact such individuals.

Keywords: Queer, Phenomenology, LGBTQ+

1. Introduction

The perceptions about LGBTQ+ have changed in recent years, and much has been done to promote acceptance of this particular group of people. However, studies show that the LGBTQ + group still experiences bullying, harassing, discriminating, or prejudice.

Much research has been done to show that LGBT teachers are experiencing bullying, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice because of their gender identity. In addition, in a study conducted by the LGBTQ + Inclusion Center in Education at Leeds Beckett University, about 40% of LGBTQ + teachers and school leaders survey reported that gender culture in schools was limited. The same percentage of educators experienced bullying and harassment. Discrimination and prejudice, and about 30% of teachers, reported that their LGBTQ + educator experience hurt, or harmed on their mental health.

[1]Rankin, S. et al. (2010) cited the result of the national survey of 5,149 LGBTQ identified students, staff, faculty, and administrators that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons were almost twice as likely to experience harassment (23%) over their heterosexual peers (12%).

While in [2]Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence the State of Higher Education for LGBT People (2011), One-third of Queer spectrum (33%) and one-third of the Trans-spectrum (38%) have seriously considered leaving their institution due to the climate change.

Same with the findings of Canaria (2021) in his unpublished Master's thesis stated that due to religious beliefs, some teachers experienced being bullied, discriminated, identity crises, and pressure. In other words, the Philippines is no exception, as a stigma for the LGBT community still exists today. In an indiscriminate position against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Filipinos, the Philippine Psychological Association (PAP) has made it clear that LGBT Filipinos continue to experience stigma and discrimination in the community. The presence of bullying, teasing, and harassment of LGBTQ + members continue in families, schools, and communities, including unjustified portrayals of LGBT in the media and discriminatory gestures against transgender Filipinos by some commercial establishments. Even the scenario continues. LGBT limited roles and professions. In other reports, some LGBTQ + members faced social pressures which caused them to hide, suppress, or change their identities and expressions in exchange for social acceptance, and enjoyment of rights. These experiences can cause fear, anxiety, and other psychological severe distress to LGBTs. [3]Meyer, (2003) and [3] Hatzenbuehler, M. (2009) said, that sexual minorities are at increased risk of multiple mental health problems compared to heterosexuals.

While unsupported beliefs continually grow to associate the third sex as a mental disorder, mental health professional organizations worldwide have already pronounced that lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientations are normal variants of human sexuality. These include the American Psychiatric Association in 1973, the American Psychological Association in 1975, the British Psychological Society, the Colombian Society of Psychology, the Psychological Society of South Africa, the Australian Psychological Society, and the International Network on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns and Transgender Issues in Psychology, among others.

The conceptualization of this study was influenced by the fact that homosexual acceptance is still contested and highly controversial. In a post published in www.dailypedia.net, a Twitter user exposes his Spanish professor's Facebook status urging the Department of Education to ban gay teachers in elementary. The professor blatantly posted, "the Department of Education should ban gay teachers in elementary. Gays should not be allowed to teach in elementary (for studies in Psychology of Language Learning says that the child imitates whom he admires and loves). Gays have their own peculiar way in speaking or expressing themselves which sounds like being soft may train male children to speak and with gestures like passive or non-assertive females and may not become effective managers or leaders in the future." This notion was contradicted by the latter, stating he had gay teachers but still grew up straight and faithful, and further said he is thankful for his teacher for he has taught him good values. Cases as such say something about the promotion of gender equality, especially in education.

This study aimed to investigate whether or not this was reflected in the reality of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Moreover, the qualitative methods of this research will fill a gap in the research literature because of a lack of studies. We are hoping that this study will add significantly to existing works and will stand to bring a significant data to issues that need closer attention, mainly on the plight of LGBTQ+ educators.

2. Literature Review

Queer Theory

The concepts of Queer Theory (QT) served as the foundation for the study. According to Brizee and Thompkins (2010), QT deals with issues involving sexuality, power, and marginalized populations in literature and culture. Queer Theory further influenced this study since it concerns LGBTQ+ people as a marginalized group who have experienced discrimination. Since the focus was on sexuality, QT impacted the study because the emphasis on sexuality is being discursive or changing and being experienced and being understood in historically specific ways.

Queer Theory can be seen as a sort of 'inclusive' approach that encompasses all those marginalized identities, considered fluid and free-floating, that cannot fit into the normative discourses, allowing them to be effectively recognized as legitimate alternatives to traditional identities. Through this legitimization process, Queer Theory rejects fixed labels that refer to stable identities. It provides an alternative term, queer, which embraces all alternative and fluid subjectivities that cannot be ascribed in the hegemonic discourse (Piantato, G. 2016). How has Queer Theory influenced the ways we think about gender? Working Paper of Public Health nr. 12/2016. Azienda Ospedaliera Nazionale "SS. Antonio e Biagio e Cesare Arrigo".

The most important contribution of Queer Theory is "how gender functions as a privileged regulatory structure for heterosexuality, and the deconstruction of gender normative models justifies the position of lesbian and gay subjects. Queering supports new understandings and fosters a climate where there is an expectation for teachers to intervene and challenge gendered assumptions, learning that labels have a damaging impact on children that are felt well into their adulthood. By questioning actions or words that suggest children should act a certain way based on their biological sex, teachers and school leaders can interrupt binary concepts of gender and help transform the school culture into an accepting, inclusive environment while confronting and interrupting heteronormative discourse and patterns. [5]Jagose, A. (1996) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. Melbourne University Press. *Social Construction of Sexuality*. According to Tierney & Dilley (1998) as cited by [4]T. Msibi (2013), during early 1940s, homosexuality was regarded as deviant behavior and/or a disease. Schools sometimes expelled students and often fired teachers who were either suspected or found to be homosexual. These targeted students and teachers usually kept a very low profile about their homosexuality and the reason for being expelled, which resulted in a lack of studies about homosexual students' experiences of identities.

[6]Smith, N. (2008) reported in his study that the LGBT teachers perceived their workplace as homophobic, racist, sexist, and transphobic.

[7]Lander, R.'s (2017) study reveals that the participants all live their queer identity alongside their language teacher identity with ease. However, they do recount instances of homophobia that have impacted their day-to-day lives and careers.

In the article wrote by [8]Gilbert, J. and Gray, E. (2020), LGBTQ + teachers occupy multiple conflicting positions within the school. They face daily harassment and discrimination.

Similar findings documented by [9]Ferfolja, T. (2015) that school workplaces continue to produce challenges for staff that are sexuality diverse.

While a written article by [10]Neary, A. (2013) discussed the harassment, discrimination, and struggles of teachers with LGBTQ+ identities, how these groups deal with sexual identity in situations where crackdowns on heteronormativity have led to deep silence and misrepresentation, for many teachers, the disclosure process is valuable, and satisfies the desire to be open and honest. However, they suffer from

aspects of teacher identity and school culture.

In a British study conducted by Edwards et al. (2014), at work, lesbian teachers who are at the beginning of their teaching career were careful about coming out at work. There was also concern about revealing their sexual identities to students and parents.

In contrast with the existing works of literature which positioned gay teachers as victims, [11]Stones & Glazzard (2020) presented positive narratives about them. Stone and Glazzard said, teachers who belong to the LGBTQ group need to be rethought and reassigned as resilient, skilled professionals, and active agents who may help promote educational inclusion and social justice. The repeated description of the victims who dominate the existing literature reflects only part of the experience of the LGBTQ teacher. An empowerment story that emphasizes that LGBTQ teachers have contributed to inclusion and social justice, rather than repeating the story of discrimination and prejudice.

There are growing numbers of LGBT people choosing to come out to fight the issues of discrimination, and invisibility among others. The study of [7] Lander, R. (2018) revealed that the participants all live their queer identity alongside their language teacher identity with comfort. However, they do recount instances of homophobia that have impact on their careers and lives.

Furthermore, [12]Haddad, Z. (2019), stated that the way teachers feel the equal treatment and is included in their work context is central to understanding the negotiation and enactment of teacher identity. For LGBTQ teachers, the degree to which they are out of the closet with their students and colleagues leads to many possible outcomes. These outcomes, came from feeling like they need to live duplicitous lives to being activist teachers that subvert the heteronormative assumptions in schools and curricula, are studied here by examining the identity development of a group of gay teachers and their perceptions of the schools in which they work.

[13]Bower-Phipps, L. (2017) interpreting and queering discourses that normalize some sexual orientations and gender identities/ histories while positioning others as deviant is vital for teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and policymakers. She highlighted the importance of overtly and explicitly valuing all forms of diversity, and policymakers should promote laws that protect LGBTQIA teachers.

On the other hand, [14]Gray et al. (2016), said, in school, teachers with LGBTQ+ identities are often situated within exclusionary spaces.

3. Objectives

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators in State Universities and Colleges in Ilocos Sur.

Specifically, it is intended to expand the understanding of the experiences of the LGBTQ+ educators and add to the literature addressing diversity, acceptance, and equality in educational professions. The narration of their experiences will portray their uniqueness as part of the academe. The results will hopefully add to the limited published history of the LGBTQ educator's experiences and the relevance to success despite significant issues.

4. Setting and Participants of the Study

This study was conducted at the State Universities and Colleges in Ilocos Sur. The study's participants are the LGBTQ+ educators from selected SUCs in Ilocos Sur. Snowball and criterion-based sampling were utilized in selecting the participants.

5. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological, interpretive framework by Gubrium and Holstein (2003). Queer Theory informed this methodology by focusing on how notions of normal and deviant are constructed within the school settings, exploring participants' understanding of discourses within their schools and communities, and how these discourses serve to normalize certain behaviors and identities while pathologizing others.

Data Sources and Analysis

The participants were engaged in a semi-structured interview focused on their decisions around disclosure within schools and communities, their most significant contributions to the College/University as educators, and the impact of their influence on the lives of their students. The participants chose face-to-face interviews (when geographically possible) and via zoom meeting. The researchers' audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. After transcribing, we identify themes of regulatory discourses and the sources of these discourses. Thinking with Queer Theory, we identified these discourses when analyzing participants' statements about what was regular and highly valued within their school setting. We narrowed the breadth of themes and eliminated overlapping themes. We checked the resulting themes with participants. Excerpts from participants' interviews are included not only to illustrate the findings, but also to give voice to a community that has been historically marginalized not only in schools, but in society as well.

Treatment of Data

The data gathered from the participants were analyzed using Colaizzi's methodology.

Colaizzi's data analysis methodology is an approach to interpreting qualitative research data to identify meaningful information and organize it into themes or categories. The whole process involves two general steps: First is the cool analysis which is used to transcribed interviews to be sorted and categorized. After cool analysis, the warm analysis was conducted wherein the categories were thematized paving the way to an in-depth study of the experiences of the LGBTQ+ educator-participants. The researchers captured personal experiences and drew out detailed descriptions and deep meaning from the participants as they described the nature of their life as LGBTQ+ educators. Six (6) participants were utilized to provide the evidence needed to understand the lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ educators in SUCs in Ilocos. A one-on-one interview is done to solicit their views and experiences regarding life going on an LGBTQ+ educator in SUCs. After the interview, the researchers assured that information obtained from them would be kept confidential and that they will use pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

The questions provided during the conversation were unstructured. The true essence was derived from the experiences of LGBTQ+ educator-participants shared during the flow of conversation.

All conversations were audio recorded to capture the themes of the conversation and ensure their correctness.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study used phenomenological inquiry through casual and informal one-on-one personal and online interviews with the LGBTQ+ educators in SUCs, which was conducted from January to May 2022.

6. Analysis, Interpretation and Synthesis

This phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of six (6) LGBTQ+ educators in SUCs in Ilocos, Philippines. They are all single. Six (6) are self-identified as gays, and two (2) are self-identified

as lesbians. The following are the brief descriptions of the participants.

Participant 1 (Vicky) started his life as an educator in 2007. A permanent faculty with a Master's degree. He proclaimed that he is gay and that being gay has no negative impact on him as an educator. The experience is the same as usual or normal male/female faculty. He did not experience bullying or any type of discrimination. Most of his contributions are his skills in stage decorations during beauty pageants and other school activities. For him, LGBTQ+ is accepted already and is being embraced by society nowadays. He is accepted by his family, relatives, friends, and colleagues in the academe.

Participant 2 (Jinky) is a young educator. He has been teaching for three years in the institution which he is currently connected. Being a gay educator is normal or ordinary, just like the other faculty members who are straight. He has more positive experiences rather than negative ones. He is an active member of an LGBTQ+ organization in their community. He is active in the church where the LGBTQ+ organization he belongs attended. He is very much accepted by the community and his family, though at first, he struggles to be accepted by his family, especially his father. He has not experienced any bullying or discrimination act.

Participant 3 (Georgia) self-identified as gay. He has been in the teaching profession for 27 years. He never experienced being bullied and discriminated. For him, it is a matter of how you deal with people, whatever your sexual preference. For him respecting others is essential, so you will also be respected. He is an active faculty member who serves as a coach in various literary and skill competitions, good at hosting/emceeing and beautification. There's no problem with family, relatives, friends, and even in the workplace because he feels he is being accepted by them.

Participant 4 (Gracia) is a seasoned faculty whose been in service for 27 years. He's an active member of the LGBTQ+ in their community. He is accepted by his family and friends, and never experienced harassment, bully, or discrimination. He is well respected by the students and accepted and loved by his family.

Participant 5 (Sam) is 16 years of the service as an educator. She is self-identified as a lesbian. She has no discrimination or bullying experience. She is accepted in the community and in the family. My greatest contribution as faculty is coaching and documentation/photography. She discussed being comfortable with dressing or expressing socially defined masculine behaviors.

Participant 6 (Piolo) has been an educator for 20 years. Her sex preference is lesbian. Her most significant contribution to the school is her skill in landscaping, stage decoration, and coaching. She is very much accepted by the family and at work. She is also an active member of the LGBTQ+ organizations in their place. Like the other lesbian participant, she is also comfortable with dressing or expressing socially defined masculine behaviors.

Theme 1. Personal Experience

The first theme narrates the personal experiences of the participants in terms of levels of acceptance:

a. Familial acceptance and support

All the respondents experienced strong acceptance and support from their families and relatives. The respondents are independent, talented, responsible members of their family (most of them are breadwinners), and the love and respect from their loved ones is evident.

[15]Roth, K. (2015), said: Those who have support systems in their family are more likely to openly identify as gay or lesbian, be "out" publicly, contribute to studies more, and may report healthier psychologically. Such factors affect studies on LG satisfaction and self-identity.

In the study of [16]Stanton, M. (2013), 17 participants did disclose their sexual orientation to providers

and have had more positive experiences than negative with providers.

Teacher-Participant 1 Vicky said, “I’m accepted in the family. I’m even a cross-dresser when I’m home.”

Like the statement of Teacher-Participant 5 named Sam: “As lesbian, there’s no problem about my sex preference to my family. My father is even the one who bought or provide me jeans or pantalon to wear.”

The same experience with Teacher-Participant 6 Piolo said: “Being lesbian is not an issue to my family. I am accepted.”

Similar to the findings of [14]Jones, T. (2014), that there are teachers who were out entirely at school. For instance, one teacher said they felt supported and accepted by staff, and respected by students; therefore, able to disclose their identity.

Undoubtedly, acceptance by family members was an empowering experience for the participants. It helps increase participants’ self-esteem and self-awareness and allows them to be self-confident. Strong support and family acceptance gave the participants the courage and strength to move forward amid adversity and challenge heteronormativity.

b. Community-acceptance

The respondents in this study are active members of the LGBTQ+ community. Identifying with the social groups can help one’s self-esteem and confidence. There is a significant impact on how one feels he or she can be based on an individual’s community view of LGBT people.

According to [17]Simon (2020), one of the most challenging tasks for current and future educators to enact is be publicly identify as LGB.

With confidence, Teacher-Participant 1, Vicky stated: “In our community, I am a member and adviser of an LGBT group. The said group is an officially recognized gender advocates in our municipality.”

Moreover, Teacher-Participant 2, Jinky, asserted: “I am part of an LGBT organization and my contribution is to inspire young educators and co-member of the LGBT group.”

While Teacher-Participant 4, Gracia highlighted the things their group can do: “In the LGBT group where I belong, we had lots of activities for the community like alay gupit, coastal cleaning, ground beautification etc.”

In this study, the respondents feel accepted by their families and the community. Because of their essential role as part of their family and the community, the acceptance of who they are and what they are doing as members of their family and in the community they belong leads to other people to embrace and accept them as they are and even loving them of who they are.

Teacher-Participant 5, Sam, said: “I experienced good acceptance of the community even the school is open to us members of LGBT.”

[18]Haldeman, D. (2010) mentioned that “coming out” can end a lonely, marginalized path, and identifying with a social group can help one’s self-esteem and confidence. How the individual’s community views LGBT people also impact how to open one feels he or she can be.

McCrohan (1996) mentioned that results from a national survey show that most lesbian who responded agreed that interventions, support groups, and information about lesbian parenting, and adoption would be extremely helpful, in addition to methods for gaining community support.

Theme 2. Professional Experience

This part of the respondents’ experiences describes how they are being treated by others both in their community and in their workplace.

a. Respect from students and fellow educators.

The respondents in this study felt much respect from their students and colleagues. Most of them believe in the saying respect begets respect.

During the interview, Teacher-Participant 1, Vicky, said: “Based on my experience as an educator and an LGBT, it’s just like a normal instructor. I have no experience being bullied or disrespected by my students. I put barrier/ distance so that students will respect me.”

Almost the same statement uttered by Teacher-Participant 2, Jinky, said: “Being an educator who belong to LGBTQ is just like a normal thing. It depends on how you handle it. If you want them to respect you, you have to respect first yourself. I know my limitations. My students considered me as professional.”

Furthermore, Teacher-Participant 3, Georgia, exclaimed: “When I am in school, I have to be professional in all my actuations because I do not want to be disrespected by my students and fellow teachers.”

b. Inclusivity

The various roles, responsibilities, and assigned tasks given to the participants are manifestations that they were given equal treatment, opportunities, and not being discriminated. Disclosure of the sexual orientation of the participants can make a school more inclusive.

Teacher-Participant 3, Georgia, proudly said: “I serve as a coach in different contests, even in skills competitions, beautification, and emceeing. I always think of what I can give to the school, what I can contribute to the College. I always serve in SCUAA, Intercampus competitions and even up to now especially in cleaning I am the one who lead my fellow educators. I serve as trainer of our young co-teachers in the department”.

Similar to Teacher-Participant 4, Gracia, mentioned: “I’ve been serving as Chairman, Sports Coordinator for so many years, that’s my greatest contribution to the institution.”

Moreover, Teacher-Participant 6, Piolo, conceitedly uttered: “I always help in the preparations for school activities like stage decorations, landscaping, ground beautification and even coaching in terms of cultural dancing.”

According to [15]Roth, K. (2015), the inclusivity of LG people in the community has a positive impact on their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Similar to a study of lesbian working mothers by [19]Tuten and August, (2006), concluded that managers were the significant influence on an individual’s ability to maintain work-life balance. Positive role models and enforces of protective legislation and antidiscrimination policies contributed to a less stressful and more fulfilling work experience.

On the other hand, [15]K. Roth (2015) said, that LG individuals have the choice of being open about their orientation at work but face institutionalized discrimination in the form of pay gaps, fewer chances for promotion, and hostility from homophobic coworkers. Individuals can avoid such consequences by concealing their orientation but in many cases, experience personal distress over hiding their identity.

[2]G. Calleja et al. (2011) The MGRM, in its report “LGBT Discrimination in Malta. A survey on sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in Malta, 2006-2008, recommends that educational institutions should adopt LGBT inclusive policies and issues. That depiction of homosexuality should not be in a negative manner.

According to [20]Valentine, G. and Wood, N. (2009), based on ECU research about LGB staff and students’ experiences of HEI’s in England, 50% of staff chose to disclose their sexual orientation. The

HEIs have to effectively demonstrate their commitment to LGB equality effectively.

7. Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Findings

1. In terms of the personal experiences of the teacher-participants, most of the participants are accepted by their families and the community they belong. The strong support was expressed by respondents in various ways, thus making them bolder to disclose their identity or sexual preference and engage in various events in their institutions and in the community.
2. In terms of professional experience of the teacher-participants, most of them are treated with respect in the workplace. The students and fellow educators of the teacher-participants in the study considered them professionals and gave high regard of who they were. Thus, it increases job satisfaction and create more positive relationships with others.
3. The SUC involved in this study considered inclusivity by involving the respondents who belong to the LGBTQ group in various activities and giving them equal opportunity to share their talents and capabilities through given tasks and responsibilities by the school where the respondents can freely showcase their outstanding performances along their field of expertise.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Family and community acceptance and support to the LGBTQ people have a significant impact on their greater self-esteem and promote a healthy workplace environment;
2. Being professional in the workplace results in gaining respect and create more positive relationships with others.
3. As the LG population of educators were accepted into a dominant culture, research will need to expand its parameters and definitions or risk pigeonholing itself as historically non-inclusive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Comparative studies targeting the perspective of LGBTQ+ educators in other SUC would add dimension to this research.
2. Educational institutions should adopt LGBT inclusive policies and issues, and that the depiction of homosexuality should not be negative.
3. Provide better equality training concerning sexual orientation and establish effective support networks for LGBTQ+ educators.

8. Appendix

This section may be added immediately after main content, before acknowledgment, authors' biography and references.

9. Acknowledgement

The researchers express their indebtedness to the State Universities and Colleges where the participants are teaching, the participants of the study, their families and most especially to God, the Almighty.

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