



Coming Out of the Closet: LGBT Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Coming out, in one way or another, could be a very difficult process for some LGBT individuals, specifically those who were in the closet for quite a long time. However, its effect could also be freeing and liberating that these individuals no longer have the need to hide their identity – themselves. The primary goal of this study is to investigate the stories of LGBT individuals in the municipality of Alicia, Payao, and Imelda. Specifically, this study aimed to identify the difficulties and the favorabilities experienced by these individuals upon coming out. This study also determined its effect on the personal and professional well-being of the participants and the ways they cope with these challenges. The findings of the study indicate that LGBT individuals experienced difficulties upon coming out. The dominant difficulties experienced were the disclosure of their sexual orientation to some of the family members which resulted to an emergence of negative responses. In addition to that, LGBT individuals also experienced unacceptance and social discrimination. On the contrary, the repercussion of this process can be very much rewarding such as being accepted and supported by friends, peers, and other family members. The coming out process affected the LGBT individuals' personal and professional well-being, specifically, it has negative effect on their mental and emotional health. Resemblant to the different ways of coming out, each participant's coping mechanism also differs from one another. Some individuals cope with these difficulties by not concerning themselves with people's discrimination, and other individuals cope through reading and journaling.

Keywords : coming out, LGBT individuals, gender identity, difficulties, favorabilities.

INTRODUCTION

HAPPINESS and satisfaction of a person is rooted from being true to themselves. Being true to oneself is a life – long practice that requires commitment and re- commitment as a person grows and evolve. It is being honest with what you feel, deeply value and desire. A person who is true to himself communicates with their feelings wholeheartedly both within themselves and others (Hakansson, 2011). Moreover, it was stated by Ralph Waldo Emerson that being a person's true self in a world that is constantly trying to make them something else is the greatest accomplishment.

Allen Ginsberg has also added up this quote, "Follow your inner moonlight; don't hide the madness." This quote has stated that it is always important to understand that a person should always be following his inner moonlight instead of hiding his madness because real beauty lies and shines only when an individual stays unique and mad on his own way. Moreover, a lot of people and individual are being sick trying hard to become normal and thinking that they always need to be perfect. Individuals must reveal the kind

of persona they truly have.

Relative to this, living a peaceful life and being provided with a chance to be treated with quality and equity in the society is so much important. Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognizes that historically certain groups of people with protected characteristics such as race, disability, sex and sexual orientation have experienced discrimination (EHRC, 2018).

Further, according to Jaggar as cited by Musingafi et al (2021), equality, in the sense of sexual aspect does not mean that individuals of different sexes should be physically indistinguishable from each other. It means regardless of their sexual orientation they should be treated equal and fair.

A famous quote has stated that "Sexuality is who you want to be with while, gender identity is who you want to be in the world." This quote by Hari Nef has describe the vital differences on the concept of sexuality and gender. Moreover, another quote by Bob Paris has also cited that "Every gay and lesbian person who has been lucky enough to survive the turmoil of growing up is a survivor. Survivors always have an obligation to those who will face the same challenges."

In this regard, sexuality in this present world is no longer inclusive for male and female. There is also the accepted third gender which is the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender or the collectively called LGBT. Nowadays, the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' are used to refer to people who experience attraction to members of the same sex, and the term 'bisexual' describe people who experience attraction to members of both sexes. It should be noted that, although these categories continue to be widely used, sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and, instead, occurs on a continuum and people perceived or described by others as LGB may identify in various ways (American Psychological Association, 2012).

Since the world is accustomed to only two genders, acceptance of the third gender in society has become challenging. The LGBT Community or LGBTQ as popularly known is a community of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders, who share a common culture and represent themselves at social movements. The LGBT Community has been fighting for a cause towards acceptance and recognition of their community. The Stonewall Uprising that took place in June 1968 is considered a significant social movement that fought for LGBT rights. In today's world, diversity, inclusion, and acceptance are openly talked about. While equal rights for women are still strengthening their ground in some parts of the world, the LGBT community has risen to showcase their importance of inclusion across society. LGBT has become a widely accepted designation for minorities based on sexual and gender orientation. All members of these subgroups are subject to similar prejudices rooted in beliefs and traditions about sexuality and gender. LGBT people, as members of a social minority group, are suffering from various forms of socio-economic and cultural injustice. Lack of social recognition has an effect on the capacity of LGBT people to fully access and enjoy their rights as citizens. They are more likely to experience intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and the threat of violence due to their sexual orientation, than those that identify themselves as heterosexual. Highlighting some major problems faced by LGBT people across the world is the theme of this article (Subhrajit, 2014).

In a study by Russell & Fish (2016) on mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth. It was revealed that today's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth come out at younger ages, and public support for LGBT issues has dramatically increased, so why do LGBT youth continue to be at high risk for compromised mental health? We provide an overview of the contemporary context for LGBT youth, followed by a review of current science on LGBT youth mental health. Research in the past decade has identified risk and protective factors for mental health, which point to promising directions for prevention, intervention, and treatment. Legal and policy successes have set the stage for advances in programs and practices that may foster LGBT youth mental health.

In addition, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people face tremendous difficulties growing up in a society where heterosexuality is often presented as the only acceptable orientation and homosexuality is regarded as deviant. They continue to face discrimination and exclusion across the world in all spheres of life. Homophobic violence and abuse targeting LGBT people occur on a regular basis. In most EU Member States, same-sex couples do not enjoy the same rights and protections as opposite sex couples, and consequently suffer from discrimination and disadvantage in access to social protection schemes, such as health care and pensions. In the labour market, a majority of LGBT people continue to hide their sexual orientation or to endure harassment out of fear of losing their job. Particularly vulnerable are young LGBT people who experience estrangement from family and friendship networks, harassment at school and invisibility, which can lead in some cases to underachievement at school, school drop-out, mental ill-health and homelessness (Sabhrajit, 2014).

Consequently, according to Warren- James (2019), developing a positive identity can be tricky for all young people, especially those questioning their sexuality or gender. As added by Leung (2021) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, identity development is one of the most critical developmental task. These youths have shown to be at risk for a variety of risk factors including depression and suicidal ideation and attempts due to how their identities are appraised in heteronormative societies.

Furthermore, a study by Pew Research headed by Dimock (2013), had aimed to conduct a survey on the experiences of LGBT Americans through an interview. Findings have revealed that the vast majority of LGBT respondents (86%) say they have told one or more close friends about their sexual orientation or gender identity. And some 54% say all or most of the important people in their life know that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. There are large differences here across LGB groups. Lesbians and gay men are more likely than bisexuals to have told at least one close friend about their sexual orientation (96% of gay men and 94% of lesbians, compared with 79% of bisexuals). And they are much more likely to say that most of the people who are important to them know about this aspect of their life: 77% of gay men and 71% of lesbians say all or most people know, compared with 28% of bisexuals. Among bisexuals, there are large differences between men and women in the share who say the people closest to them know that they are bisexual. Roughly nine-in-ten bisexual women (88%) say they have told a close friend about their sexual orientation; only 55% of bisexual men say they have told a close friend. Similarly, while one-third of bisexual women say most of the important people in their life know they are bisexual, only 12% of bisexual men say the same. Furthermore, 65% of bisexual men say that only a few or none of the important people in their life know they are bisexual.

Given the above scenario and information, the researcher of this study become interested to conduct an in – depth study as to what were the experiences as to coming – out of the closet of these LGBT individuals and how were they able to overcome, prepared and managed the challenges that they have encountered relative to their coming out of the closet as members of the LGBT group and be accepted to the society. The study utilizing a qualitative phenomenological

research design has investigated the experiences of LGBT on their coming out of the closet. This was done through interviewing members of the LGBT group locally in the province of Zamboanga Sibugay. The results of this study become a basis for creating action plans and programs in support to the LGBT group in terms of psychological, professional and health welfare.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the selected municipalities of Zamboanga Sibugay, specifically the municipality of Alicia, Payao, and Imelda. Participants were the selected individuals inside the gender spectrum – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, who were selected through purposive sampling for phenomenological

This study employed qualitative research perspective, purpose to explore the various experiences of the LGBT individuals in the process of their coming – out of the closet. In qualitative research, “the researcher relied on the views of the participants, asked broad and general questions, collected data consisting largely of words from participants, describe and analyzes these words for the theme, and the conducts inquiry in subjective, biased manner” (Creswell, 2005). The phenomenological approach used was to study how the participants perceived their experiences. The participants were interviewed and explored the themes that provided a greater understanding of the central phenomena, the stories of the special education teachers.

The study commenced upon the approval of the selected LGBT individuals. After approval being granted, each of the participant was given a letter of consent. These participants were interviewed during their most convenient time aid with audio recorder device. The researcher conducted a one – to – one physical interview while ensuring that the health protocols were observed.

Each of the participant was interviewed within a range of 30 – 60 minutes. In these interviews, the researcher set off pre-determined questions, but also asked additional follow up questions for clarifications pertaining to the study.

The researcher secured that the interview process was held purposively and their participants’ responses were kept with high confidentiality. Participants were also reminded of the possibility that the researcher might contact them for further information to support their statements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following subheadings indicate the experienced difficulties and favorabilities of the LGBT individuals upon coming out; its effect on their personal and professional well-being; and, the ways of how these participants cope with the challenges.

Difficulties among LGBT individuals upon coming-out experiences.

As presented from the findings of the study on the difficulties among LGBT individuals upon coming – out experiences it has revealed that these LGBT individuals have various experienced difficulties. The dominant difficulties experienced were the disclosure of their sexual orientation to some of the family members has resulted to an

emergence of negative responses. With that LGBT individuals experienced unacceptance and social discrimination.

Sabra El Katza-Wise (2016) said that family acceptance may be protective for LGBT youth’s health. Among sexual minority youth, adolescents whose mothers responded positively to their sexual orientation disclosure were less likely to use substances compared to those who had not disclosed their orientation to their parents or whose mothers and fathers did not react positively.

Many people hesitate to come out because of the risks of meeting prejudice and discrimination. Some choose to keep their identity a secret; some choose to come out in limited circumstances; some decide to come out in very public ways, American Psychological Association (2008).

Favorabilities among LGBT individuals upon coming-out experiences

Coming out may be a difficult process but the repercussion can be very much rewarding such as being accepted and supported by friends, peers, and other family members.

Since prior research indicates that close friendships help LGBT Individuals foster a sense of identity, Foster and Meyer stated in their research that it is understandable that sexual minorities may not only want more friends, but *need* more friends (i.e., individuals who affirm their minority identity) compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Further, the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) research shows that families, parents, foster parents, caregivers, and guardians have a dramatic impact on their LGBT children. Family acceptance promotes a healthy sense of well-being and protection from risk factors.

Effect of coming out on the personal and professional well-being of LGBT individuals

The coming out process affected the LGBT individuals’ personal and professional well-being, specifically, it has negative effect on their mental and emotional health.

In addition to their feelings of discrimination, the prevalence of the depression, panic attacks, and psychological distress is higher among bisexual men and women; sexual orientation differences are seen as the result for the mental health issues (DeAngelis, 2002).

On the contrary, individuals who came out were able to express themselves freely and start gaining freedom, confidence, and self-esteem. An article published on Skidmore states that coming out allows the person to develop as a whole individual, allows for greater empowerment, and makes it easier for an individual to develop a positive self – image.

Ways of coping with the challenges

Similar to the different ways of coming out, each participant’s coping mechanism also differ from one another. Some individuals cope with these difficulties by not concerning themselves with people’s discrimination, and other individuals cope through reading and journaling.

Lessening the importance of what other people think about LGBT individuals is a pivotal step in the process of moving away from shame and toward acceptance. In addition to that, realizing other people's reaction cannot be controlled may help quiet feelings of shame and have a positive impact of learning to express freely and openly, John Sovec (2016).

Elizabeth Scott (2020), stated that journaling about traumatic events helps one process them by fully exploring and releasing the emotions involved, and by engaging both hemispheres of the brain in the process, allowing the experience to become fully integrated with one's mind.

CONCLUSION

Coming out truly is a very challenging process. With the experiences of the participants, the disclosure of their gender identity resulted to unacceptance and social discrimination by some of their family members and peers. On the contrary, this coming-out experienced has made them feel free and liberated. As their stories say, they were accepted and supported by the people who truly care about and for them.

With regards to the the personal and professional well-being, the coming-out process has negative effect to some of the participants specifically on their mental and emotional health. However, some LGBT individuals who came out were able to express themselves freely and start gaining confidence and self-esteem.

Each of the participants' coping mechanism differ from one another. By which means, some individuals cope with these difficulties by not concerning themselves with people's discrimination while others cope through reading and journaling. Thus, this asserts that the act of not paying attention to what others have said is a pivotal step in the process of moving away and moving forward.

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