Dilemma Experiences of Lesbians in Reconciling Religious Belief with their homosexual behavior: A Grounded Theory Approach
Concepcion, Tessa
Alonso - Balmonte, Juli-ann

ABSTRACT

This study explores the dilemma that lesbians face when they want to incorporate their religious belief with their homosexual behavior. The study utilized a qualitative design to explore the opinions and views of the participants on how religion can be way to reconcile homosexual behavior. Specifically, the study utilized the grounded theory research design which follows a systematic process in connecting the information gathered and being able to determine a theory built from the data. Five lesbians were interviewed using semi-structured with 12 questions. Purposive sampling techniques were used with the following criteria: 18 to 50 years of age and belong to any religious group. The findings show concepts of lesbian these are religion, reconciliation, and spirituality. The present struggles shared were dealing with male privilege in religion as lesbians, coming out to their family and being caught between following doctrine and their desires.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Lesbianism, Religion, Gender, Patriarchy

Lesbians are not as highly represented and problems unique to them are not being focused on. Studies on religiosity and homosexuality involve lesbians and gay men together on finding a relationship between the group’s attitudes towards homosexuality and how it will affect them (Veenvlie, 2008). Studies on body image and gay men (Swami, 2006) have been done as well as the problem of ageism in gay men (Schope, 2008). There is one study that focuses solely on queer women (lesbians and bisexuals) concerning religiosity and how it affects their psychosexual development (Mathy, 2008). However, this study focuses on the relationship between religion and psychosexual development but not on the causal conditions that will make a lesbian reconcile her religion and sexual orientation. The researcher chose lesbians for this study because they have concerns that are particular to them such as gender roles and patriarchy in religion. This also serves as tool for helping lesbians who want to stay true to their Catholic Faith and who prefer not to leave it but also find it unable to deny themselves to explore their sexual orientation.

Religion Belief

According to Veenvlie (2008) a fair amount of empirical evidence now exists linking increased conservative religiosity with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Results from the study according to Veenvlie indicated that those who had high scores of intrinsic religiosity and reported attending a religious group that taught “love the sinner, hate the sin” responded with relatively more positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

In Buchanan’s (2010) study, it describes describe the struggle that gays and lesbians face as they incorporate their sexual orientation and identity within the context of an existing religious or spiritual identity.

Homosexual Behavior

The Pew Research Center (2013) noted the strong relationship between the increased levels of a country’s religiosity with negative opinions about homosexuality. In the survey’s
“religiosity scale”, a score of “3” was considered as the “most religious”, and the Philippines got almost 2.5. However, LGBT Filipinos questioned the results of this survey, claiming that LGBT Filipinos are tolerated only if they fit stereotypes.

In an article written by Dominique Mosbergen in the Huffington Post (October, 2015) The debate on same-sex marriage has also proved controversial, with the Catholic Church and other conservative groups speaking out vehemently against marriage equality -- the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines said in 2011 that the “church won’t tolerate same-sex marriage,” adding that being LGBT is a “choice.”

In a study by Veenville (2008), he found that gays and lesbians who score high on religiosity attend religious groups that have positive attitudes towards homosexuals. However, there have been cases where homosexuals struggle incorporating their religious identity with their sexual orientation.

**Synthesis**

Previous studies like Buchanan’s (2010), it describes describe the struggle that gays and lesbians face as they incorporate their sexual orientation and identity within the context of an existing religious or spiritual identity.

The study explores the following questions: (1) What are the dilemmas experienced by lesbians? (2) What are the causes of the dilemmas? (3) How does the lesbian resolve the dilemma through religion? And (4) how do lesbians resolve the dilemma when they believe one thing yet do another which their religions do not approve?

**Method**

**Research Design**

The researcher used qualitative research since the subject matter at hand need not be quantified because the gist of the study is to explore on how the lesbians were able to resolve the dilemma that they experienced.

The researcher used grounded theory approach since it is systematic and the data had more direction and this approach exhausted all the possible information that the researcher needed to know about the process on how lesbians resolved the dilemma through religion. Grounded theory helped the researcher analyze the data thoroughly and it helped with the interviews since she interviewed the participant.

**Participants/Sampling**

The study targeted five (5) lesbian with age group from 18 to 50 years of age. The respondents belong to different religious groups. Purposive sampling was used since it focuses on a specific target of respondent in a population which best enables the researcher to answer the given research question. Referrals from people and other organization that are qualified to be part of the study was the priority in choosing the respondents. All respondent was given a copy of informed consent and was assured of confidentiality and privacy. The respondent were also informed about the importance of their participation that would help in coming up with an accurate findings.

**Instruments**

The researcher used the interview as a means of gathering information. Since this is a qualitative research, there is no need for a scale. The interview consisted of 12 questions created by the researcher, follow up questions in case there were some clarifications needed or to probe more into the participants’ answers.

In order to test the validity and reliability of the instruments that was used, the researcher had to focus on formulating question delimited to the objective of the study. Consultation and approval from an expert adviser was also part of the validity and reliability of the instruments.
Procedures
A letter of informed consent given to the respondents and to the organization that they belong to in case the researcher will meet them, not necessarily the religious group only, but also the LGBT group that they belong to where the researcher met them since the participants may also divulge information about the social group. The researcher also respected the confidentiality of the respondents.

The respondents were debriefed and the researcher will promise to give them a copy of thesis and the organizations to whom the researcher also requested for an informed consent.

Data Analysis
The responses of the respondents were transcribed and encoded through a computer based methods. The researchers then utilized open coding specifically for the respondent perception on knowledge acquisition and axial coding for the dilemma of reconciling religious belief based on the grounded theory process of Strauss as quoted by Borgatti, S. (2008).

Open coding focused on the clustering of the responses of the respondents form the guide questions which was identified as recall, analysis and interpretative. The axial coding on the other hand was used to determined the relationship between their responses with causal and intervening reason that may influence their perception on the dilemma experiences of lesbian in reconciling religious belief.

Results and Discussion
The researcher transcribed the interviews and read them repeatedly for further analysis and put all of the data in one theme as part of the answers to her research questions that made up the theory. The researcher did follow up questions with her participants to clarify the information.

What are the dilemmas experienced by them?
Dilemma Between Religion and Sexual Orientation
The participants have experienced a dilemma between their sexual orientation and their religion because according to doctrine, their nature is not in accordance to what is considered “right”. Wila, a pastor from the Unitarian Universalist Church had conflicts with her sexual orientation and her Catholic faith:

“Yeah, when I was a Catholic it was a real conflict. Kaya nga hindi talaga ako tumiwalag sa Katolisismo. Kasi inisip ko, kaya ko yan, kaya kong maging straight. And I was thinking maybe this is just lust, but then again, I was lusting for men, just to, you know, I mean, kind of a stimulation... So, um, umalis ako sa pagka-Catholic ko”

Dilemma Between Social Teachings And Her Own Explanation Of Her Lesbian Relationship To Her Children
The participants have experienced dilemma especially on those who are expected to have children and those who have children.

Rhiannon: Sa Catholic kasi, diba, when you go, when you hear mass, diba, walang problema sa akin holding hands, kiss, ganyan, parang hindi lang adults and nandoon, may kids...

Intimate relationships are meant to beget children because it is said in the Bible that Adam and Eve should go forth and multiply.

Rhiannon: Kasi, ang nasa isip ko lang, walang sinabi si God na hindi kita love kasi pumatol ka kay Eba eh si Eba ginawa ko para kay Adan lang.

The participants have difficulty explaining to their family that it is possible to have a relationship with the same sex and have children.
They are taught in school that a family consists of a mom and dad while they see their mother in a romantic relationship with a woman and the participant is concerned on how she’ll preempt the confusion that her child might feel.


**Their Desires Versus Religious And Social Norms.**

The Catholic Church has a strong dichotomy between the body and the spirit. It is deemed wrong by the Christian doctrine to engage in same sex relations and the participants have attempted to rectify this but they are still in a dilemma for they are not fulfilled and it is only when they have given in to their true desires that they have been free.

However, being in the Catholic Church has not made them free also for it is conservative on issues that involve pleasuring the body. Early Greek thinkers that emphasize this dichotomy and the superiority of the spirit over the body influence the Catholic Church. Peace is a unifying factor in the motivations of the participants in dealing with these conflicting interests. They have found peace by accepting it and continuing their relationships with women for they found no separation between what is deemed right and their own desires.

**Soledad:** So, I felt peace, I felt happier, I enjoyed my relationships more, both with men and women. And before my life when I was living in this kind of relationship, I had no, I feel empty all the time... I mean, you don’t have to be in a relationship. (Laughs) Do you get my point? And I’m satisfied and I am happy because of who I am.

One is finding peace by assuming celibacy and following doctrine while she sublimates her lesbianism by caring for other women in a non-sexual way.

**What are causes of the dilemma?**

**Religious Doctrine**

The researcher was directed to “clobber passages” in the Bible which display persecution against homosexuality. Some of these books are Genesis, Leviticus, Romans, Timothy, etc. The lesbians found conflicting values in their religion with their sexual orientation especially on what is deemed to be right and wrong.

**Sabine: Bible-based, pretty much. So, it is the Bible verses that they keep citing, noh. And these are the typical Bible verses that you would find as clobber passages, noh, we call as**
clobber passages in the LGBT community. These comprise of six biblical passages; Genesis 19, Leviticus, Romans…..

**Different Values Between Family And The Participant**

The participants are aware that their children and parents need to be convinced for they are important and that they need to be on the same page since they are in many ways a part of each other. That being said, their partner is also a part of them that they are at peace with but it causes a dissonance for it is considered wrong in social and religious norms.

Althea: Coming out to my entire family... Letting them know that I love them... And then showing them that I can live this way...

**Intimate Relationships Are Only Meant Between Men And Women Only**

For those whose concern are children, it is natural for their parents and other people to assume that these children are raised by a man and a woman. Deviating from that is wrong but the participants cannot see themselves being in that kind of relationship aside from their same-sex partner.

Rhiannon: Kung saan sila masaya.... Pero pag kids ka, hindi mo pwedeng i-push kung ano yung gusto mo.... Pero sa religion, sasabihin ba nila yung “O, wala tayong against sa third sex, ha?” Grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, grade 4, grade 5,” walang ganun.

For those who have not accepted their lesbianism but know that they are lesbians, the Bible is their guide to know what is right. Thus, they know that they are lesbians but refuse to practice their sexual orientation. Regardless, even in celibacy they deem themselves to be sinful because of the differences on what is regarded as unnatural which is their nature which they did not choose.

Soledad: He said that God created all of us and He created man and woman, and marriage is to a man and a woman, and it is in the Bible. It is in Romans 1 and anything other than what God has ordained in His covenant is a sin.

**Incongruity Between Religion And Sexuality**

Sex is a testy topic in religion particularly if it’s sex between two people of the same sex. Even premarital sex in a heterosexual relationship is frowned upon for it deviates from the doctrine that sex is only for procreation. This has caused dissonance for the participants. They resolved it through sex with men but it has only caused them problems because it is not natural for them and what is natural to them which is lesbianism isn’t deemed “ordered” or “natural” by religion.

Althea: I’m never gonna have kids. If I do, it’s gonna be an extraordinary and different situation. It’s either I adopt or I...

A concern is how they will explain to people that sex between two women isn’t wrong when it feels right for them yet their religion’s doctrine conflicts with it. If they will practice their sexuality that conflicts with their religion, it is frowned upon but they are at peace and they feel nothing wrong with it however, they have to explain to others. If they do not practice, it conflicts with their true self and they have a need to explain it to themselves.

Wila: Eh para sa akin, what the hell is wrong with sex anyway? So, alam mo yun? I really questioned a lot of things. Why is the sexual wrong? When is it wrong? Why is out here? And why is pleasure wrong?

The participants accepted that there is nothing wrong with sex and that religion is also mired in politics and that it is also created by men. They have decided to accept who they are and make no apologies for it and resolved this conflict by staying true to who they are and be in an environment where it doesn’t conflict with their values.
How did they resolve the dilemma through religion?

Study, Exploration, And Their Desire(S) As Priority

Knowing God in their way that is in accordance with their nature is a priority that does not directly disagree with them for their own peace of mind. They cannot imagine themselves as atheists or be in a life where there is no God. They explored their spirituality by doing other forms of prayer like meditation where they will commune with God in an environment where they are not called sinful. They also explore by prioritizing authenticity in order to attain happiness.

Wila: First, I prioritized that I haven’t explored it. I wanted to explore it so okay naman. As for the gayness, let’s see what happens, and we’ll see if uh, people get hurt, or am I gonna get hurt, is society gonna get hurt?

They will find their own valuations of right and wrong through their own exploration. They also explored it through studying the Bible through a socio-historical lens and knowing the context of the passages that are supposed to persecute LGBT persons.

Sabine: exegesis is studying that text in its sociohistorical, through the sociohistorical lens or through the feminist lens.

Reconciling The Dilemma Through Love And Education

The participants gather information to inform themselves and others in order to make informed decisions that will affect their lives and those that they love. One participant plans to tell her younger children about the nature of her relationship with her partner once they are ready.

Rhiannon: Wala lang, parang steady lang for now. Kasi in the future, they will understand. I will make them understand.... Siguro at the right age and the right time, at the right age of the kids.

They have been raised to believe that parents comprise of man and woman but the participant is waiting for the day where the children are cognitively equipped to question their own beliefs and their own thinking about certain things they have always believed in. The same goes for another participant who is committed to a lifelong study of the scriptures. She is prepared to be critical and to be mindful of her own beliefs in order to make informed decisions about her sexuality and values. The participants also acted out of love for their family whether by blood relation or a family of choice.

It Is Through Love That Religion Eases The Conflict

According to the participants it is through acceptance and love from God that it is taught by their religion which enabled them to see no conflict between this and their sexuality. If one were to quote the Bible, they should consider its context. They also do not spend a lot of time dwelling on conflicts because even Jesus himself was inclusive. He included those who were marginalized and persecuted. The conflict is actually borne of social expectations from their parents who expect them to have kids, from religious leaders who look down on them for having a lesbian partner, and from those who expect them to be straight.

Rhiannon: God na hindi kita love kasi pumatol ka kay Eba eh si Eba ginawa ko para kay Adan lang.

Even the lesbian who finds her sexual orientation that is not in accordance with her religion does not blame God for she believes that He has forgiven her sins in the past, present, and future. Whatever sin she makes or dissonance she feels is coming from herself which is the need to have sex with women and that is deemed sinful but still God will love her for all eternity regardless of who she is.

Soledad: He was there all the time eh, and understands me and comforts me na kapag nagkakamali ako, hindi niya kina-count against me yung ginawa kong mali. He just made me feel na I am still accepted, I am loved and I am forgiven; so, move on.
Finding A Religion Or Being At Peace In A Situation Regardless Of Judgment

Since they have encountered problematic scenarios with their religion and sexuality, finding another religion where freedom to pursue their spirituality is key to find balance in speaking for oneself and being a partner in a relationship. Being open to everyone is a way to pursue equality where no one is marginalized and everyone is accepted regardless of race, faith, or sexual orientation. The participants looked for a religion where they will be accepted and to live their faith because being with God is as natural to them as breathing.

Wila: I lived in New York for a year and a half… So inintroduce niya ako sa UU pero paalis na ako ng New York. So, pagbalik ko dito nakalimutan ko na yung UU and I felt like “Huuy, wala naman sa Philippines nyan.”

Studying the text is a journey where they continue to discover themselves in the context of being with God and finding a role where they will do His/Her work. Even if they stayed in the Catholic Church they found no conflict and don’t put themselves in situations where they are discomfited by the judgment of people who have no relevance to their lives since they know that God accepts them. The pursuit of happiness enables one to live their lives in peace as well as to accept others who do not accept them for they believe in a God who loves them unconditionally.

How do lesbians resolve the dilemma when they believe one thing and do another that their religion does not approve?


In dealing with their conflicts, the participants have to consider what is right for themselves and avoid doing wrong. For those who are clear that their sexual orientation is not wrong, it was easy for them to do this for they know that sex with women is just like heterosexual sex and that there is nothing wrong with the pursuit ofpleasuring the body. According to a former evangelical protestant, their doctrine also dictates that homosexuality is a sin to the body much like smoking and drinking.

Sabine: The dilemma actually came in the intersection of my sexuality seemed to disagree with the Christian doctrine that I was raised with….kung nagkakasala ako sa pagyosi at paginom, ang pagiging lesbian ko isama ko na rin doon

Homosexuality is a part of them and is something that they did not choose. They choose to do what is right for them which is being true to who they are and knowing that their sexual orientation is not sinful. Their only concern is the readiness for this change and the scenarios that they will encounter in case they will get hurt. Also, the questions that they might get from the people they love such as the children who will ask questions about their relationship.

The value judgments will be problematic for they might incur the disrespect from their children. The main concern is to find one’s place and to be assured of it so they will find it easy to be at peace and so it will be effortless to explain their situation.

Althea: I was not part of the decision-making in me coming into existence which is, you know, like a tautology if you think of it. It is a vicious circle if you really think of it. But because I could immerse myself in those questions but have no choice but to live the questions each day, then something like this question, religion and sexuality, I could also inhabit it. Gets mo? Parang mas marami pa ngang nakakalokang bagay sa buhay eh.

Choosing Both Religion And Sexual Orientation: Dichotomy Between Body And Spirit, & Striving For Wholeness

The Catholic Bible has stated that the flesh and body are two separate things such as “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Mt 26:41)”. To choose both religion and sexual orientation and be at peace with both, one should accept that the body and spirit are one. Choosing between their sexual orientation and their religion is like a chicken and egg scenario for them because their spirituality is just as indivisible from themselves.
Rhiannon: Para mo akong tinanong kung ano an ngauna, itlog o manok. Kung papapiliin mo ako, religion or sexual orientation...

They cannot live peacefully with their sexual orientation if they will live a life without God in their lives and it is also impossible for them to be with God if they will not express and accept their sexual orientation. Since homosexuality is not a choice and is something that one is born with, acceptance is important and looking for means that the body is indivisible from the spirit is key to know that sex for love and pleasure is not a sin.

Sabine: Later pa lang, later ko pa lang narealize yung it is not a choice, actually. Being gay is not a choice. You are wired that way, you were born that way.

Another way is there are different forms of prayer such as meditation, work, or play. Every faith is a way towards God and it doesn’t have to be exclusive to the Catholic faith. God is everywhere, in people, in inanimate objects, everything is a manifestation of God. They find their place in the universe and realize that everything is connected. Hence, they see no need to choose their sexual orientation over their religion and vice versa.

Sabine: Ngayon, sa aking journey sa pagiging Kristiyano, ni-reclaim ko ang aking pagiging Asian, Southeast Asian; ng ispiritualidad isang katutubo, halimbawa, nung bago pa tayo sinakop ng Espanyol, ay iisa lang at ispiritualidad at yung pagkatao. Medyo geo-theological yung kanyang ano that God is in the trees.

Merging Conflicting Interest: Authenticity

Regardless of what society or religious doctrine says, authenticity is important in merging conflicting interests. What is common among them is how they can live in peace with their sexuality and their religion. Authenticity to oneself and listening to what feels right to them is important for they will continue to express and live their sexuality in spite of judgment and possible persecution from their peers. If one is self-assured that they are doing what is right, they will just continue to be in their lesbian relationships and embracing their lesbianism until others will cease to admonish them. Regardless whether they stopped because they change their minds or grew tired of advising them, it reinforces the truth even more and will strengthen their resolve in defending themselves from self-doubt. Being genuine and authentic also strengthens their relationships and it makes it easier to accept others and not presume that they know what is right. Accepting that it is part of them and not resisting their sexual orientation is the key for they believe that resisting it will only lead to more conflicts. If one does not accept their lesbianism, it doesn’t resolve their conflict but actually amplifies it. They feel dirty when they express it and they feel just as dirty because the desire intensifies when there is actually nothing wrong with it since it is not unnatural.

Wila: Sa akin kasi I’d rather be authentic and you just have to accept it. Pero kasi people know that I’m on a genuine journey where my questions are genuine and I’m being authentic. Therefore, conversations with me are authentic and they respect it so....Ganun. But people should also be willing to do that, to have that. To have that stand. I’m on a real conversation, if I’m wrong, I’m wrong! Ganun ako eh. I’m just gonna put it out there.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The researcher concludes that the primary dilemma between religion and sexual orientation is that it conflicts with Christian Doctrine especially with lesbians who choose not to have children. The pervasive male presence of the Catholic Church is a factor as to why lesbians prefer not to be in religions that don’t allow them to be leaders or be ministers. It is actually not God or religion per se that causes the dilemma but society’s expectations and how women are not on equal footing with men in the Catholic Church which is why there are lesser lesbians than gay men in religious organizations.

Homophobia also comes from people and not from God. The negative attitudes towards lesbians come primarily from people who expect them to be in a relationship that produces
children and subverting that social norm is not preferable especially for those who work in the Catholic Church that advocates sex for procreation.

There is also virtually no dilemma for lesbians who never had any negative attitudes towards their sexual orientation. The dilemma between religion and sexual orientation will only happen when the lesbian sees it as a sin. If she does not, she will have no difficulty looking for a religion that will accept her fully. She will not see it as an opportunity for self-discovery.

The researcher recommends more time spent on the study to have more participants, or it should focus on lesser members and much more must be given on the depth of the process. There should be interviews done for people that have been recommended by the participants that will give more insight to this research such as religious authorities that are responsible for theories on religion and sexual orientation. The researcher also suggests that one should look into the work of the participants, whether oral or written if they have produced works related to the research. If they have creative work that is related to the research, it should also be looked at as well as their references or reading material that provide them with inspiration. This will be added insight into their process and it will also encourage more dialogue that may unearth more information that hasn’t been covered by the interview.

The researcher also recommends that the reading material suggested by the participants should also be looked at and it could provide as related literature for the research especially when the information given has noted a lot of theories. It is also advisable if one can interview the close relationships of the participants so that another perspective will be given into how they work which will deepen the exploration of the research.

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