Experiences, Perceptions, and Discrimination among Bisexuals

Ocampo, Kristel Anne
Alonso-Balmonte, Juli-ann

ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of bisexuals regarding their lives as a bisexual, the concept of their gender identity on how they see themselves, and discrimination experiences. Qualitative design was used. Using purposive sampling, ten participants (five male bisexuals and five female bisexuals) were interviewed using a self-made questionnaire. Experiences were thematically analyzed and divided into two groups which are the positive side that refers to the acceptance from their family and friends and the negative side which is the judgments towards them. These experiences urged them to cope up easily, become open-minded, and understanding of the judgments from our society. Despite of being different from others in terms of gender, relationship, characteristics, and such, they still feel normal and act normal similar to the straight people. For the discrimination experiences, half of the respondents said that they received insults from their friends and were not accepted because of the belief of their family. Respondents’ insights imply that these experiences did not make them weak, nor of getting stressed, instead, they took it as a challenge to be a better person with a positive outlook.

Keywords: Bisexuals, Experiences, Perceptions, Discrimination, Acceptance, Family, Friends

Bisexual is someone who is sexually attracted to people of the both genders—opposite and same sex, (Harris & Emberley, 2011). However, bisexuals blend into the straight cultures and may be fit into different categories of LGBT such as Gay and Lesbian. Bisexuality is a temporary stage of denial or transition, a stable "3rd type" of sexual orientation. (Diamond, 2008).

The lesbian, gay, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) community in the Philippines have always make a stand for the equality and respect from our society. The 2011 Philippine National LGBT Conference official statement said that despite the growing tolerance towards LGBT people, acceptance is still yet to be achieved. LGBT persons in the Philippines still face violence and discrimination from the family, from civil society organizations, from medical and health institutions, in schools, in employment and from the government. According to (Ochs, 2005) studies have shown that bisexuals lead a life in which they sometimes suffer from social isolation and their lifestyle is affected. They lack any specific community accepting them, even lesbian and gay communities have their pattern of life and socially accepted communities. This is because today, cultural forces generally acknowledge a person as homosexual or heterosexual and bisexuals do not fit in either category. However, besides their bisexual feelings, they generally strive to live a normal life with similar lifestyles of a heterosexual, gay, or lesbian. Bisexuality raises the issue regarding validity of sexual categories and encourages acceptance of the diversified range of sexuality. Bisexual people believe and focus on initiating and developing a relationship with both man and a woman.

Along with the problems arising from being labeled as "gay, • bisexual people need to find the recognition that they are neither gay nor straight. It's this middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality that is difficult for bisexuals to reach and for the non-bisexuals to comprehend and acknowledge. "Development of a bisexual identity involves the need to come to terms with, and accept, both the heterosexual and homosexual aspects of one's feelings, attractions, and desires. Further, it requires the ability to integrate homosexually and
heterosexually oriented aspects of self into a cohesive sexual orientation, which can then be experienced as a congruent, affirmative aspect of one's self-concept.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, perceptions and discrimination of the respondents. To attain the said main purpose of this research, the study would like to answer the following questions (1) what are the experiences of the respondents in terms of: a.) Coming out, b.) Judgment from their family or friends, c.) Feelings regarding with sexual preference (2) what is their perception about oneself? and (3) what are their discrimination experiences?

Bisexuals

Franke & Leary (2004) focused on the individual's self-acceptance of bisexual's sexual orientation, in openness than the degree to which they accepted their own sexuality. Previous research has indicated that social support and social networks are a major factor in determining whether or not a bisexual individual has accepted their identity. Moreover, according to (Bronn, 2004) bisexual self-identity and behavior images reflect change and variation within the bisexual orientation. Other research has indicated bisexuals are in a constant state of confusion concerning their identity. In addition, the way in which bisexual individuals manage and deal with the stigma they receive from the greater outside community and society as a whole is explored (Knous, 2006). Coming out is marked as one of the crucial steps in developing a healthy sexual identity. In these discourses, coming out is positioned as ‘good’ as it enables the healthy development of sexual identity, while non-disclosure is positioned as ‘bad’ (Mclean, 2007). Study about cultural attitudes to bisexuality that have made an impact on their identity development; self-reliance, openness and enrichment were enhanced for these bisexuals conducted by (Bradford, 2008). Bisexuals have experiences that make them unique as a group. Thus, it would seem reasonable to have a model of identity development for this group (Brown, 2008). A study was made about Bisexual women who were perceived less different by heterosexual women from themselves than to their lesbian friends. Thus, comparison with lesbian-heterosexual friendships gave them understanding how bisexual friendship is unique (Galupo, Sailer, & John, 2008). Research by (Stotzer, 2009) has focused on the development of positive attitudes toward the LGB community amongst heterosexuals despite evidence demonstrating increasing levels of acceptance for sexual orientation minorities results showed experiences of empathy based on an LGB peer’s struggles and successes, or resistance to hatred expressed by those with negative attitudes. Lastly, Bisexuals who were less open with their sexual orientation experienced less minority stress; bisexuals who were more open with their sexual orientation experienced more conflict that led to stress (Robin, Valerian, Debra, Suzanna, & James, 2009).

Family

The role of family acceptance as a protective factor for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents and young adults has not been established. Findings suggests that family acceptance predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status; it also protects against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors (Ryan, 2010). A study about the main effect of family support/acceptance of gay identity is related to the process of disclosure, and that both general family support and family acceptance of same-gender orientation play a significant role in the psychological adjustment of gay men (Elizur & Ziv, 2004). The same social psychological variables appear to underlie both males’ and females’ attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians: religiosity, adherence to traditional ideologies of family and gender, perception of friends’ agreement with one's own attitudes, and past interactions with lesbians and gay men (Herek, 2011). A study were made about conservatives were defending heterosexual “family values” and attacking homosexuals as the major threat to traditional family values; most often reduced to the issue of defending or attacking the “normality” of homosexuals, and failed to address the diversity of sexual and gender minorities,
their specific human rights, and their need of protection as vulnerable and discriminated minorities (Pikić, Aleksandra, Jugović and Bokan, 2006).

Discrimination

Discrimination and victimization standpoints among LGBT pride was approximately reported almost 60% of the respondents experienced insults or threats. (Jimena, 2010). Moreover, men reported experiencing anti-gay verbal harassment and discrimination in the previous 6 months. Findings suggest that absent policies preventing anti-gay mistreatment, empowerment and community-building programs are needed for young gay/bisexual men to both create safe social settings and help them cope with the psychological effects of these events (Huebner, 2004). Although the pervasiveness of heterosexism in the lives of gay and bisexual youth is well established, little is known about the strategies these youth use to cope with stigma and discrimination based on their sexual minority status. The narratives from the current study suggest that the emotion regulation paradigm is well suited to understanding the functions of strategies for coping with heterosexism and similar types of stigma (Mcdavitt, 2008). A study of (Willoughby, Doty, & Malik, 2010) was about the victimization and family rejection of sexual orientation that are said to be the two salient stressors facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) young people.

Synthesis

Previous research relating to the experiences of bisexuals stated that Bisexuals have experiences that make them unique as a group (Brown, 2008). Moreover, according to Mclean (2007) coming out is positioned good as it enables the healthy development of sexuality. Other research includes the impact of the attitudes of their family or friends regarding their self-acceptance. An author suggests that some of the discriminations experienced by LGBT people were insults or threats (Jimena, 2010). These kind of situations experienced by LGBT people led for having a poor mental health compared to the heterosexual individuals. On a positive side, studies suggest that stronger self-esteem is predicted by having greater sense of social support and less internal conflict over one’s sexual orientation (Ryan, 2010). Family support plays a significant role of an LGBT individual for concerning equality and acceptance (Elizur & Ziv, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences of bisexuals regarding their sexuality, perception about oneself and their experiences in discrimination. Moreover, this study aims to know the standing of the bisexuals in our community today and their perception of their situation being associated with the third sex. Also, all the studies that was made focused on a group, this time the researcher will only be focusing on individuals, which is on the bisexuals itself.

Furthermore, the research explores these following questions; (1) what are their experiences being a bisexual? (2) how do bisexual people perceive their situation regarding with their sexuality and how are they dealing with it? (3) does bisexuals today ever experience discrimination? And if so, what kind of discrimination and how does it affect them?

Method

Research Design

Qualitative research design was used; a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning; for the researcher to be able to gain insights, explore the depth and richness for the given topic (Burns & Grove, 2003). It is useful for obtaining insight into situations and problems concerning which one may have knowledge. This method is commonly used for providing beliefs and knowledge related to sexuality, or for exploring the opinions of respondents about particular issues.

Participants and Sampling
A total of ten college students, 5 females and 5 males from different universities, 18-22 years old, and have experienced relationship on both sex are qualified as bisexuals. The self-identified bisexuals are selected by purposive sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.

**Instruments**

The instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview that consists of 10 items with the opportunity for the researcher to explore particular themes or responses further. The interview allows the researcher to identify potential source information in a manner that will bring out relevant information from its respondent. In addition to that, the researcher prepared a self-made questionnaire and follow-up questions that may be brought up during the interview where the participants are free to answer any response. The researcher used a recorder for the gathering of data.

**Procedure**

The researcher started the interview on the second week of June 2015. The researcher contacted and met each of the participants for the interview. The researcher established first its legitimacy by showing some identification, moreover, the researcher gained the participant’s cooperation and then proceeded to the importance of the research. The interview consisted of a self-made questionnaire, having questions formulated based on the objectives of this research. The interview had gathered data about their experiences as a bisexual, perception about their sexuality and discrimination experiences. The researcher then used recorder for the gathering of information. The researcher interviewed the participants individually and thank them afterwards. The gathered data were kept confidential and organized.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used, as a means to gain insight and knowledge from the gathered data (Howitt & Cramer, 2007), after all the data was gathered the researchers grouped the results as a theme. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Results and Discussion**

The results of this study were thematically analyzed and focused on the respondents’ experiences regarding their sexuality, their perception about oneself or on how they see themselves, and their discrimination experiences in today’s generation. The objectives of this study in relating to the research questions are; to know their experiences in terms of their coming out, judgment from their family or friends and physical changes, to know their thoughts, concepts about oneself, to know their feelings being bisexual, and to know their discrimination experiences if there’s any. 10 bisexual students were interviewed.

**The Respondents**

The researcher interviewed 10 bisexuals college students from different universities. Participant 1 is 21 years old, lives in Sampaloc, Manila, discovered himself as a bisexual when he was in second year high school.Participant 2 is 19 years old, lives in Tondo, Manila, discovered herself as a bisexual 2 years ago. Participant 3 is 19 years old, lives in Putatan, Muntinlupa City, discovered himself as a bisexual when he entered college. Participant 4 is 19 years old, lives in Putatan, Muntinlupa City, discovered herself as a bisexual when he was in third year high school. Participant 5 is 19 years old, lives in Parañaque, discovered herself as a bisexual since first year. Participant 6 is 20 years old, lives in Ayala, Alabang, discovered herself as a bisexual since grade. Participant 7 is 18 years old, lives in Bacoor, Cavite, discovered himself as a bisexual when he was in third year high school. Participant 8 is 19 years old, lives in
Poblacion, Muntinlupa, discovered herself as a bisexual as she entered college. Participant 9 is 22 years old, lives in San Pedro, Laguna, and was not discriminated. Participant 10 is 18 years old, lives in Muntinlupa City, discovered himself as a bisexual last two years ago.

**What are their experiences as a Bisexual?**

The participants mentioned their experiences on their life as a bisexual including their good and bad experiences.

**Positive Experiences**

Life as a bisexual wasn’t that easy to find true friends who’ll accept and support you of what you’ve chosen to be, however, based on their responses. Some of them stated that being bisexuals gave them more friends and met new people same as their sexuality. In support to that, “Nung naging BI ako diba nasali ako sa group na BI din tas nagkaroon ako ng mga kaibigan don parang para sakin mas masaya sila kasama kay ka dun sa mga natural lang kasi ano eh madami akong nashi-share sakanila madami din silang nashi-share sakin,” - Participant 2. As related to the research of Stotzer (2009) that has focused on the development of positive attitudes toward the LGB community amongst heterosexuals, despite evidence demonstrating increasing levels of acceptance for sexual orientation minorities results showed experiences of empathy based on an LGB peer’s struggles and successes, or resistance to hatred expressed by those with negative attitudes.

**Coping skills**

There could also have a good effects of being true to yourself and who you wanted to be as Participant 5 said that she can handle things and understand better than her usual self, “...Perks of being bisexual is that you can handle things and understand way better than your usual self.” Participant 6 said that it would be good to discover who you really are , “…It would have to be discovering yourself in all aspects. Finding out if its a phase or that’s what you really are.” Loving two genders is a good thing for Participant 7, “One good thing about being a bisexual is being able to love more people. Being able to love two genders which is not common to everyone.” Coming out is marked as one of the crucial steps in developing a healthy sexual identity. In these discourses, coming out is positioned as ‘good’ as it enables the healthy development of sexual identity, while non-disclosure is positioned as ‘bad’ (Mclean, 2007).

Furthermore, being open minded is the willingness to accept or receive any thoughts or opinions about a particular facet. Participants 3, 4, and 8 mentioned that they begin to become more open minded into having a relationship with same gender and a better understanding of the Bisexual’s life. Participant 4 explained further, “Good side parang mas naging malawak yung pag iiisp ko parang nagkaroon ako ng different perspective parang yun kung baga parang mas na ano ko na parang mas naging malawak yung pag iiisp ko, pagunawa ko sa lahat ng uri ng tao ayun.” In relation to the study about cultural attitudes to bisexuality that have made an impact on their identity development, self-reliance, openness and enrichment were enhanced for these bisexuals conducted, (Bradford, 2008).

**Confused**

Being confused is hard especially when it comes to distinguishing your true self like Participant 5’s experience. She shared that it makes her confused and hurt by also being discriminated. “The bad side about it is that it makes you confused and it hurts you when you are being discriminated.” It is related to the study of Knous (2006) other research has indicated that bisexuals are in a constant state of confusion concerning their identity.

**Society’s Judgment**

Society’s judgment is one of the many reasons of some people expect you to be, such as the responses mentioned by the participants. Participant 1 said that you cannot avoid some people talk about you, “Pag uusapan ka talaga depende kung ano ka ba, kung anong katayuan mo sa buhay, at kung anong itsura mo, kung either pangit ka pagkusapan ka kasi pangit ka, kung
Participant 4 said that he must limit his actions because not everyone is gonna accept him. “You can’t tell the world about you parang ganun and sometimes yun nga nadi-discriminate ka you feel different and parang may limit ka lagi sa galaw mo hindi parang required pero kasi alam mo so sarili mo na not everyone are gonna accept you.” Participant 7 mentioned that society won’t fully understand their situation. “The bad side of it is, society will not fully understand what you’re going through. That what you are right now is not your choice.” Lastly Participant 8 said that it is also cannot be avoided to be judge by her choice of who she wanted to be. “Sa bad naman ano parang nag iba yung tingin sakin ng mga friends ko hindi naman sa di nila ko accepted pero feeling ko lang nagiba ganon and sa society syempre di maiwasang ijudge ka, pero all in all masaya naman ako for what I chose to be.” A study suggest that the emotion regulation paradigm is well suited to understanding the functions of strategies for coping with heterosexism and similar types of stigma, these youth use strategies to cope with stigma and discrimination based on their sexual minority status (Mcdavitt, 2008).

Family’s reaction

Family consists of people who accepts and support your decisions no matter what, but sometimes they cannot be avoided to be hindrance of your some decisions like Participant 2 said that at first her family thought that they didn’t raised their child right because of her choice, but eventually they accept her because that’s what she really wanted to be, “Nung unang nalaman nila parang hindi ano marami pa sila nasasabi sakin na masama na yung pagpapalaki daw ba nila nagkasama daw ba sila sa pag papaalala sakin mas marami pa sila na nagbigay para daw ako parang abnormal ganon pero nung pagdating din naman nung mas tumatagal wala na rin sakanila ayun lang yung ano nun yung minsang iniyak ko non nung una talaga.” While for Participant 6, “My family is against my relationship with a girl.” Related to the research made by Ryan, C. (2010) that family acceptance has truly not yet been established among LGBT community that could be their great protector against depression and such impacts of discrimination. And a study made about conservatives were defending heterosexual “family values” and attacking homosexuals as the major threat to traditional family values; most often reduced to the issue of defending or attacking the “normality” of homosexuals, and failed to address the diversity of sexual and gender minorities, their specific human rights, and their need of protection as vulnerable and discriminated minorities (Pikić, Aleksandra, Jugović and Bokan, 2006).

Feeling Different

Having a unique identity could be one of the reasons why some people feel isolated into a group or society just like some of the participants. They shared that they feel different because of knowing that they have their own world. They believe that they cannot fit into our society for being a Bisexual. Participant 3 said, “Feeling ko iba ako dun when dealing with some straight guys kasi di ko minsan malabas kung ano talaga ko kung ano yung dapat kong iilos, igalaw para sakanila feeling ko minsan di ako belong sakanila kasi may mga topic sila na parang masyado ng parang di na ko maka-relate sa pinag uusapan nila minsan ganon.” In relation to the study of Brown (2008), bisexuals have experiences that make them unique as a group. Thus, it would seem reasonable to have a model of identity development for this group.

Self-Acceptance

Acceptance is one of the key for being true to yourself and to others such as Participant 7 who said that he just accepted who he is and that we just have to deal with each other. “I just accepted the fact na ganito na ako. It’s not a crime tho. Just coexist with each other.” (Franke & Leary, 2004) focused on the individual's self-acceptance of bisexual’s sexual orientation, in openness than the degree to which they accepted their own sexuality.
Rejection

Rejection is one of the worst feelings you might experience in your life especially when it comes to the choices you have chosen of who you want to be. Like Participant 4 said that sometimes he feels that his family won’t accept him because of their bad perceptions towards Bisexuals that made feel rejected and insulted. “...kunyari may mga napapanood na mga BI related shows or ganyan ano parang minsan feel ko di nila ko tanggap kasi yung mga comments na naririnig ko from them na though hindi naman para sakin para dun sa ibang BI yun na parang feeling ko anong hindi nila tanggap parang ang sama ng image pag ganun ka for them kaya parang minsan naiinsulto ko.” According to Willoughby, Doty, & Malik (2010), victimization and family rejection of sexual orientation are two salient stressors facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) young people.

Feeling Indifferent

Some of the participants did not feel different at all because of their friends who also happen to be specified as third sex and act along as well as socialize in a normal way. Participant 4 shared, “Normal lang normal na kung pano ko makisama sa BI ganun din ako makisama sa straight people.” and Participant 9, “Ganun pa din naman. Kung pano ako nung straight ako, ganun padin ako ngayon. No, I don’t feel different at all. I feel normal lang just like before.” In the perspective of Bradford (2008) cultural attitudes toward bisexuality affects their sexual identity development; also, their openness affects their self-concept in forming and maintaining their bisexual identity.

Discreet

Participant 3 & 10 mentioned that they see themselves as discreet and acts in a straight way to other people. They are not likely to act or show themselves towards other people the way they wanted to. Participant 3 said, “Kapag kasama ko mga closest friends ko dun lumalabas ako yung the real me pero pag sa iba I act ng straight the way na lalaki ganon kung alam kong dun sila makaka-relate ng pagkilos ko pag galaw ko.” and for Participant 10, “discreet and formal one.” In relation to the study about bisexuals who were less open with their sexual orientation experienced less minority stress; bisexuals who were more open with their sexual orientation experienced more conflict that led to stress (Robin, Valerian, Debra, Suzanna, & James, 2009).

What is their perception about oneself?

Perceptions Of Bisexual

Participants had the same sexual preference but have different perceptions in being a bisexual. Participant 1 answered that in his deepest darkest side he asked God on why he got to be like that but eventually he accepted himself and had no regrets and by just being happy with it, “...Minsan I tell God why me bakit ako pa sa dinami namang pwedeng maging bisexual bakit ako why I’m one of them pero it’s okay wala naman ako I have no regrets with that and I’m happy with it.” Most of the participants see themselves as a normal person and it’s only the way they are attracted to male and female that has changed. Participant 2 shared, “Feeling ko naman walang pinagkaiba sakal nung hindi pa ko BI sa nung BI ako eh normal pa rin lahat sa lahat pati pananamit siguro dun lang sa na-feel ko nung meron akong nakilala ganun lang,” Participant 3 answered that being flexible helps him to easily communicate and socialize to both sex,. “Bilang isang bisexual nakaka-adapt ako sa society being flexible the way na makikipag-communicate ako sa girls, sa mga straight guys pakikipag socialize saknila.” Participant 5 was way more comfortable around girls, “When I started realizing that I like girls and I’m comfier around girls,” while Participant 7 said he sees himself as normal given that he’s not showy, “Paminta overload (jokes) Basta normal, hindi naman ako showy.” In relevance of the study made by Galupo, Sailer, & John (2008) states the understanding of how bisexual friendship is unique and were perceived by heterosexual friends less different from other sexes.
What are their discrimination experiences?

**Discrimination Experiences**

Five answered they were discriminated. Participant 1 was discriminated by being insulted the first time he came out and was asked to not be gay by his parents, “I’ve actually experienced discriminations since the very first time na asarin ako...my mom and dad asked...and parang sabi wag daw akong magiging bakla ganyan.” Participant 4 and 6 were verbally discriminated and did not feel accepted by their families because of their traditions and the belief of being gay is a sin. Participant 4 said, “...kunwari sasabihin nila na ayaw nila ng ganto ganyan kasi kunyari sa mga lolo, lola ganyan pag naring or pag sinabi ay nako yung mga bakla na yan mga tomboy na yan mga kasalanan yan sa Diyos.” And for Participant 6, “First would be inside the house. My family is traditional, conservative, and religious. Being in a relationship with a girl had some drastic effect on me since my parents would disapprove.” Lastly, some were discriminated by being compared to straight people and being insulted or teased. “Parang nung medyo naiinsulto or naaasar lang ako pag medyo nako-compare ako sa straight people or pag pinag uusapan na yung tungkol sa sexuality ko.” - Participant 8. It is related to the study made by Jimena (2010) that suggests that LGBT were most likely to experience insults or threats in neighborhood, schools, or religion.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the result of the study, the respondents agreed that going through the phase of being confused to bisexual was hard for them at first and yet as they accept themselves and from the people around them they became comfortable of whom they are. But discrimination cannot be prevented in their life as a bisexual such as insults or getting teased. In addition, the respondents became more open minded and got more friends same as their sexuality for being a bisexual. However, being different from others did not stop them from showing their true selves for there are people who would still accept and love them for who they are.

Furthermore, for future studies, the researcher would like to recommend to explore more the world of bisexuals to increase the understanding of heterosexuals towards them; struggles of bisexuals of coming out and the factors that influenced them, also, their strength to live as a bisexual suchlike who motivates them and its impact to the life of bisexuals. Also, the researcher would like to recommend a higher self-esteem of a bisexual individual for them to know their worth, enough confidence so that they’ll be able achieve what they believe, and lastly, the most important of all is their self-acceptance for them to be aware of their weaknesses and strengths and self-understanding to attain their happiness.

**References:**


Ochs, R (2005). Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World, Bisexuals Resources Center: Boston, MA.


