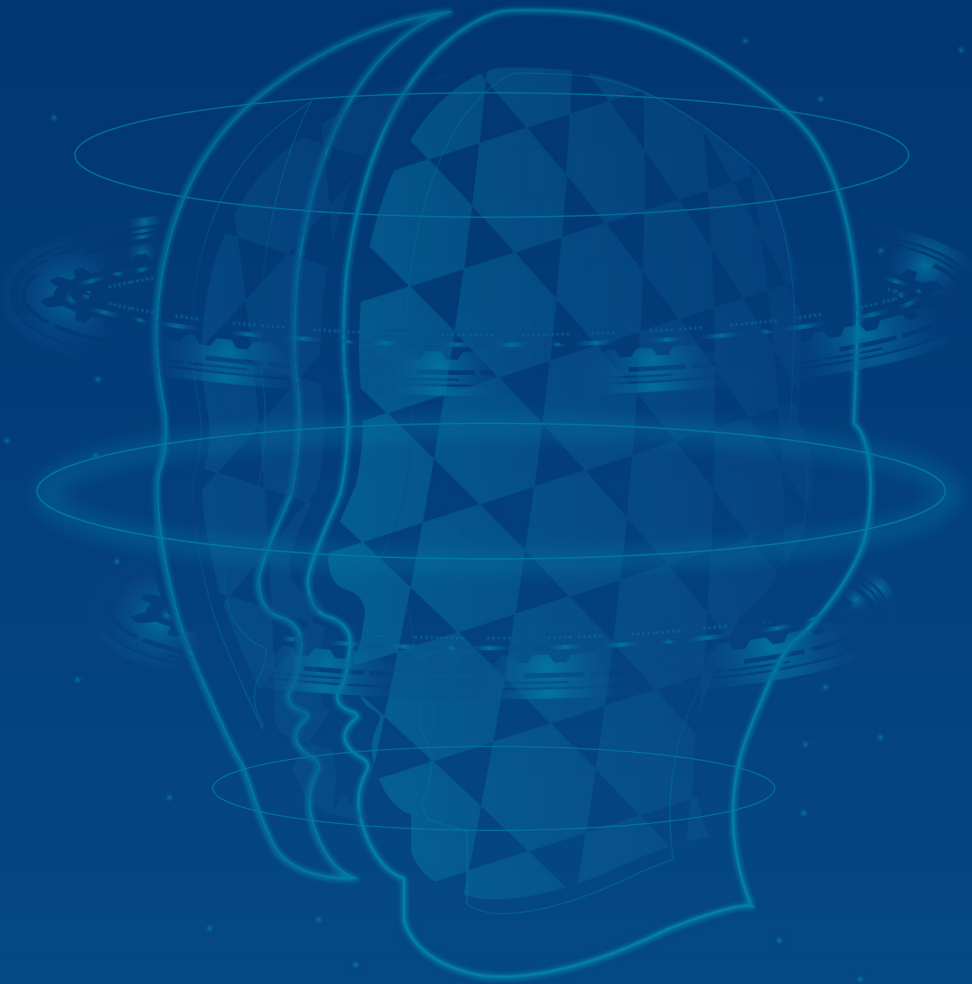




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Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy: Lived Experiences of Mothers with Gay and Lesbian Children

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the personal and social challenges experienced by parents with both gays and lesbians' children. Phenomenological research was used to investigate some of these challenges experienced by the parents. The participants were selected through snowballing techniques. Six (6) participants were selected to be the research participants. An in-depth interview guide was used to uncover the participants' experiences. The interview questions were unstructured, validated by experts, and complemented by possible probing questions that will be used if deemed necessary. The researchers had one-on-one interviews with the participants. The researchers transcribed the entire recorded interview and thematically analyzed each conversation. It may be difficult to accept their child's coming out as gay or lesbian at first, but as a parent, they have a broad mind, and as a mother, they choose to accept and understand their children's feelings and personalities. Acceptance of gay and lesbian children raises concerns as well. In general, parents welcome their gay and lesbian children's gender disclosure, in terms of fully accepting their children's gender representations and responsiveness in which they express sympathy when their child is hurt or frustrated. However, it cannot deny that there is a deep conviction that being a man is meant for a woman, and being a woman is meant for a man, which results of not accepting their children as gender-diverse individuals.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding, accepting, and disclosing one's gender identity and sexual orientation with others is a lifetime process known as "coming out". While it may be quick and easy for some, it may take longer and be more difficult for others; for most teenagers, developing their sexual identity is a continuous process that frequently begins before puberty.

Acceptance is a process that takes time, and the ability of parents to access the tools they need to deal with the pressures of having a child who identifies as lesbian and gay depends on this. Counseling or therapy, understanding friends and relatives, as well as a network of other parents of lesbian and gay children are some of these resources. This study also emphasizes the need for more research on parents accepting their children growing up in nontraditional families and with children who identify as other nonheterosexuality identities like asexuality, gray ace, bisexuality, or pansexuality. It also necessitates a study of the difficulties of parental acceptance as a continuous process rather than a one-time event. Some research demonstrates that parents typically accept their gay and lesbian children. However, they are not always welcomed by parents right away after coming out. No known research has taken into account the potential developmental advantages of family acceptance and supportive behaviors for LGBT youth; the majority of existing research has focused on the negative aspects of relationships between LGBT youth and their parents.

This research study aimed to understand better the complexities of parental responses and experiences coming out of their LGBT children. Specially the

researchers want to address the following issues in particular:

- (1) What are the prevailing problems experienced by mothers with LGBT children?
- (2) How do these mothers handle these problems?
- (3) What advice would these mothers give to others with similar circumstances?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescent development is difficult for families because the identities of both parents and children are fluid and changing during this period (Galinsky, 1987). During the adolescent psychosocial stage, also known as the identity versus confusion stage (Kempthorne, March 1969) one of the essential developmental tasks critical to LGBTQ adolescents' identity development is to "come out" or self-disclose their LGBTQ identity to themselves and others (Bates *et al.*, 2019). As evidenced by (Dunlap, 2016) finding, the average age at which LGB individuals "came out" or disclosed their LGBT identity tended to decrease when compared across cohorts of individuals (ranging from cohorts born before 1951 to cohorts born after 1988). This may be attributable to cultural shifts within the United States as the majority of the individuals lived within the United States. The age at which individuals come out corresponds to the adolescent stage of development (Dunlap, 2016), termed Erikson's identity versus confusion stage. During this stage, adolescents focus on identity development, divided into identity integration and confusion, which is important for psychological well-being (Rosario, 2011).

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Parental Acceptance/Rejection

While parental acceptance can be a protective factor for sexual and gender minority youth (Ryan *et al.*, 2010), psychological control, rejection, and fear of coming out to increase the risk of psychopathological development (Haas *et al.*, 2011). Personal discrimination experiences are understood through the specific social meanings of identities in a given historical and cultural context, as well as the specific social processes that create inequalities in this context. This implies that lesbian women's and gay men's personal experiences of discrimination is not only subjective experience but also a representation of a societal system of inequality (Warner, 2008).

Family ties have been shown to be protective against significant health risk behaviors, according to extensive research on the nurturing and safeguarding functions of families in general (Resnick, 1997). Only a few studies have specifically examined the role of parent-adolescent relationships for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGBT) youth and young adults, despite the fact that family relationships are known to be a primary context for adolescent development. There is hardly any literature on transgender adolescents and young people's family relationships. It is surprising that so little attention has been paid to the parenting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents given the critical role that parents play in fostering adolescent well-being. One study looked at the connections between depression, substance use, and suicidality and how LGBT young adults perceived their families' support (such as general warmth, closeness, and enjoyment of time together) (Needham & Austin, 2010).

Another recent investigation examined the connection between the health of LGBT young adults and family rejection during adolescence (Ryan *et al.*, 2009). That study demonstrated definite connections between parental rejection during adolescence and LGB young adults' use of illicit drugs, depression, suicide attempts, and risk for poor sexual health.

While it is known that initial parental reactions to the disclosure of LGBT identity may be damaging—sometimes including expulsion from the home—research has also shown that after parents become sensitive to the needs and well-being of their LGB children, many family relationships improve. Prior research has demonstrated the importance of family rejection in predicting health and mental health problems among LGBT adolescents and adults. (D'Augelli, 2005)

Rejection of Religion

To date, the majority of the research on parental acceptance has focused either on children's acceptance/rejection perceptions or on parents' qualitative narratives of their children's post-disclosure acceptance procedures. Within the child religiosity, defined as a connection to and commitment to a religious tradition, has been measured in both child and parent samples. In another study of 310 Seventh-day Adventists, 82.4% of Adventist adult

Millennials reported that religious beliefs caused difficulty in acceptance of their LGBT identities by their parents (Vander Waal, Sedlacek, & Lane, 2017). In a sample of 441 parents of LGBT children, a psychometric evaluation study of the Heterosexism Scale (Park, 2001) discovered that religiosity, defined as an individual's commitment to their religious tradition, was associated with heterosexist superiority ($r = 0.09$; Goodrich, Selig, & Crofts, 2014). In a recent online qualitative survey of 314 LGBT people, participants reported having negative experiences in conservative religious families.

The Family Acceptance Project (FAP), a research and intervention initiative to study the impact of family reactions on the physical and mental health of LGBT adolescents and young adults, presents findings about family acceptance in this article. We are unaware of any studies examining the relationship between a family's specific responses to a child's sexual orientation and gender expression, and the child's physical and mental health status as an emerging adult. Furthermore, given the links between parental rejection and adverse health outcomes (Ryan *et al.*, 2009), we anticipate that affirmation or acceptance of LGBT adolescents will be associated with positive adjustment and lower mental health and behavioral health risks in young adulthood: higher self-esteem increased social support, and better general health status, as well as lower depression, substance abuse, sexual risk behavior, suicidal ideation, and behavior.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the members of the LGBTQ+ community experience sexual violence and harassment at an equal, if not higher, rate than cis heterosexuals. Statutes were made to curtail their freedom to express and live their true SOGIE which, when violated, would cost their lives (Madanguit, 2021).

The Road to the Anti-Discrimination Bill

The Anti-Discrimination Bill (ADB), also known as the SOGIE Equality Act, was approved by the Philippine Congress in September 2017 with a vote of 198 to 0. (CNN 2017). The bill seeks to outlaw discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This bill includes a list of discriminatory acts as well as fines or jail time, depending on the court's ruling (CNN 2017). Representative Kaka Bag-ao and other congress people are lobbying for the bill's current version, which is different from the original bill that was filed by Representative Etta Rosales (CNN 2017). The act has not yet received Senate approval.

As stated in Article 11, the 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees equal protection for all and does not discriminate against any person living in the Philippines based on SOGIE for the state to value their dignity and guarantee full respect for their human rights.

Family Acceptance

Parents accept their children as homosexual in terms of their willingness to listen, responsiveness, and consistency.

Parents have the willingness to listen to their homosexual child in which they show sympathy when their child is hurt or frustrated. However, support is not given by parents in terms of letting their child see wearing his/her comfortable shirts, pants, shorts, and dress. Parents of homosexual children are open to their child's sexual orientation in terms of being consistent in supporting their child's journey – coming up in terms of their sexual orientation (Hibek *et al.*, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative approach since it sought real-life examples to understand the phenomena of interest from the participants' perspectives. In this study, the phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenology is the study of nature and meaning of everyday experiences. The phenomenological approach enabled participants to elicit their own interpretations of their experiences and difficulties with their children coming out as LGBT members. By highlighting people's experiences and perceptions from their own points of view, phenomenological approaches are especially good at challenging structural or normative presumptions. The study's goal of exploring and understanding the lived experiences of parents of gay and lesbian children was best suited to the phenomenological research approach.

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, six (6) mothers were selected through snowballing techniques to be the research participants. The inclusion criteria for the selection of the participants were: (a) must be Filipino; (b) with gay and lesbian children; (c) gay and lesbian children that come out during their adolescent stage. The researchers make sure to only interview participants who qualified on the criteria.

The data collection was reflective to give the participants the opportunity to reflectively express their experiences. An in-depth interview guide was used to uncover the participants' experiences. The researchers had one-on-one interviews with the participants and all conversations were recorded. The researchers transcribed the entire recorded interview and thematically analyzed each conversation. To ensure the validity of the results, member checking was solicited from the participants themselves. Interviewing research participants was done in a quiet environment, free from disturbances, and where they felt safe. The interview participants were a hybrid consisting of both face-to-face interviews and online interviews using online platforms. Interviews were conducted individually for 30 minutes to 1 hour.

The interview questions were unstructured, validated by experts, and complemented by possible probing questions that will be used if deemed necessary. The researcher can determine whether questions have been misunderstood and can clarify matters.

The researchers transcribed the recorded interviews of the participants. The data gathered were analyzed through thematic analysis. Common themes were grouped and analyzed to provide answers to the research objectives.

After formulating themes, the researchers conducted a member check involving the participants to be able to ensure the legitimacy or validity of the interpretation of all collected data. Participants can evaluate the sufficiency of the data and preliminary results as well as confirming specific parts of the data by using member checking.

The researcher had a moral obligation to strictly consider the rights of the participants who were expected to provide this knowledge. The researcher considered it very important to establish trust between the participants and herself and to respect them as autonomous beings, thus enabling them to make sound decisions. The ethical measures in this study include consent, confidentiality and anonymity, privacy, dissemination of results, and the right to withdraw from the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews with the participants, the results of the gathered data were then coded and themed from the six participants who were interviewed. Two participants have undergone in-depth face-to-face interviews while four others were interviewed via an internet-based system due to their geographic location. The participants of this study were all mothers with gay and lesbian children. In terms of disclosure, their children must confess during the adolescent stage.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the challenges and problems that parents with gay and lesbian children face through their lived experiences. It also attempted to ascertain how their cognitive role as parents affected their child's gender identity acceptance. The six participants generated four superordinate themes.

The Challenges and Problems of Mothers Having Gay and Lesbian Children

Parents want what's best for their kids. But sometimes providing support for their gender representation isn't always easy — especially if you are the parent of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) child. They may also have many questions along their child's journey. Having a gay and lesbian child is not just easy to accept because there were some problems, challenges, and worries that parents may encounter. Some parents may also need their own emotional support.

Disclosure Approach

Some children have a gender identity that differs from the gender assigned to them at birth, and many have interests and hobbies that are compatible with the other gender. Parenting a gender-diverse child can raise many questions and concerns for some parents about their child's well-being. According to research, gender is something we are born with and cannot be changed. So, rather than predicting or preventing who a child will become, it is natural for parents to wonder if it is "just a phase," and if it is better to value them for who they are

now, even at a young age, as this approach fosters secure attachment and resilience. Some of the parents have prior knowledge about their child's feelings (i.e., some parents have suspicions, which may lead to uncertainty reduction activities, while other parents are unaware). At some point, it is (directly or indirectly) confirmed or disclosed to parents that their child is attracted to the same sex and/or has an LGBTQ+ identity. Parental appraisal, in which parents inscribe meaning to this new information and convey whether it conflicts or resonates with their beliefs and values.

Doubting Their Parenting Style

While we don't know why some children identify as gender-diverse or transgender, research indicates that gender identity is influenced by biology, development, socialization, and culture. Some parents are concerned about their parenting style, but there is no evidence that parenting is to blame for a child having a gender identity that differs from the gender assigned at birth.

Parental Concerns. Two participants expressed their concern for the safety of their lesbian children, considering that they were still a woman outside. One participant mentioned that she's worrying about her daughter's health issues having PCOS.

Facing Reality

Some children may expect their parents to accept and understand them right away. There is evidence, however, that family members go through their own process of becoming more comfortable with and understanding their child's gender identity, thoughts, and feelings.

Social stigma and bullying of gender-diverse individuals result from the high expectations influenced by society's norms that a male or female should be in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, not with someone of the same sex as them. Although there are mental health issues, they are most often the result of other factors such as bullying, discrimination, and other negative experiences. Being perceived as "different" is difficult, especially in childhood, and can lead to teasing or bullying. Mental issues can also exist in parents experiencing the social stigma of having gay and lesbian children.

Use of Coping Strategies on Parental Acceptance

Many parents, when they receive confirmation of their child's same-sex attraction, use coping strategies to reduce or deal with their stress, a process that may be followed by a re-appraisal of their child's disclosure.

Coping has a physiological, psychological, and social foundation. Emotions, motivation, attention, volition, cognition, and communication, among other aspects of psychological functioning, are organized in ways that allow them to contribute to coping. Approach coping style refers to the parent's cognitive efforts aimed at resolving a problem, understanding its causes, and accepting it.

Avoidance coping style involves cognitive and behavioral efforts oriented toward denying, minimizing, or otherwise

avoiding dealing directly with stressful demands (acceptance of parents to their children coming out) and is closely linked to distress and depression. Acceptance is the recognition that something is what it is. It happened, and we can't change it. Acceptance can assist in preventing severe pain from escalating into suffering. Acceptance allows us to feel this natural distress, which is natural and sometimes even necessary.

Support System

Recognizing family groups as systems of interconnected individuals and dyads that influence each other and the overall functioning of the system (Minuchin, 1985) is a necessary framework for understanding how an adolescent's LGBT identity can cause ripple effects (and, in some cases, tidal waves) within the family.

CONCLUSION

The majority of participants expressed initial suspicions about their child's gender but chose to wait for them to reveal their identity or ask directly. They believed that as a mother, they always knew her child. It may be difficult to accept their child's coming out as gay or lesbian at first, but as a mother, they have a broad mind and choose to accept and understand their children's feelings and personalities. Acceptance of gay and lesbian children raises concerns, as they may not have a typical family to take care of them when they are gone. Social stigma and bullying result from gender norms targeted not only their gay and lesbian children but also them as parents. Parents generally welcome their gay and lesbian children's gender disclosure, supporting their child's journey in terms of their sexual orientation. However, there is a deep conviction that being a man is meant for a woman, and being a woman is meant for a man, which may result in some parents not accepting their children as gender-diverse individuals. Most research focuses on the negative implications of gender-diverse children coming out to their parents. The findings of this study show that many individuals are becoming more accepting of people of different gender identities. Accepting parents also support other parents in similar situations and emphasize the importance of accepting their children for who and what they are, as they are the only one who truly understands them as parents.

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