

Sexual Identity Development and the Coming out Process of Self-Identified Gays: A Qualitative Study

Maya N. Realista¹, Dorothea C. Dela Cruz², Mark N. Abadiano³

^{1,2}Centro Escolar University, ³University of Cebu

Abstract: The search for one's sexual identity is a significant process of human development and experiencing some difficulty in developing a positive sexual identity is normal and expected; however, when this process is entangled with a minority status, it becomes more complex to handle. Gay youth need to cope with being part of a minority group that is commonly stigmatized and discriminated for being different. This study was conducted to explore on the experiences of gay youth during their coming out process and sexual identity development. The study utilized a narrative inquiry approach which includes in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture individual narratives of self-identified gays with ages ranging from 19 to 24 years old. Findings reveal that visible gay figures in their immediate environment and frequent interaction with female figures reinforced their gay identity development. Gays compensate sexual identity by proving oneself to parents to earn their recognition and acceptance; however, parental acceptance typically involves articulated conditions. It was also found out that verbal abuse is a common form of discrimination experienced by these gays in the society. The findings provided a rich and deep understanding of the experiences of gay youth which can serve as bases for helping professionals to develop a more inclusive program that will address to the needs of this population.

Keywords: Sexual Identity, Coming Out Process, Self-Identified Gays.

1. INTRODUCTION

The search for one's sexual identity is a significant process of human development. During adolescence, young people begin to question what it means to be a man or a woman. For most of them, gender identity will correspond to their biological sex, either masculine or feminine (Oswalt, 2010). However, some may have a strong sense or feeling of having both sexual identities. Sexual identity development whether heterosexual or homosexual is an essential part of human development. The difficulty one experiences in developing a positive sexual identity is normal and expected; however, when this search is entangled with a minority status such as sexual orientation, it becomes more even complex to handle for the adolescents. They face these typical tasks and additional challenges that are strongly and directly related to the social stigma of their sexual orientation, which leads to health disparities and increase risks for developing serious mental health problems (Meyer, 2013).

It is somewhat important to consider the uniqueness of LGBT individuals' experiences during this process of development. Gay youth, although face the same developmental challenges as their heterosexual counterparts, need to cope with being part of a minority group which is commonly stigmatized and discriminated for being different. They are not only misunderstood, but teased, laughed at, and even punished for being who they are (Oswalt, 2010). However, research indicates that if they are able to establish a healthy identity, their risk factors decreased (Wang, Schale, & Broz, 2010). Some LGB individuals may be certain about their identities; however, they still experience negative feelings about self and his place in the world (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makyen, & Lindahl, 2013). Accepting themselves may become difficult for them considering the discrimination they received not only from society but also from their family and peers. Moreover, those who have accepted their sexuality may also face the problem of disclosing oneself to others. According to Legate, Ryan & Weinstein as cited in Li & Samp, (n.d.), disclosing in a supportive and non-controlling environment was found to be associated with developing a better psychological well-being. When they feel accepted, they will have greater self-esteem; functions well and generally safe from psychological distress (Baruth & Manning, 2016).

Furthermore, given that societal transformation is becoming more open, less restrictive, democratic, accepting culture for gays and despite significant changes in the contemporary world, still these youth are faced with specific needs and numerous challenges which affect their everyday lives. Gay youth are still susceptible to verbal, physical and emotional abuse which they experience at home, at school and in communities. Homophobia is still so pervasive that many people do not perceive ill-treatment of gay youth as abusive or wrong rather viewed as a natural response to gay lifestyles (Butler, 2000). There are discriminatory behaviors experienced by gays in the community especially those who are open and revealing about their gender preferences, often become a target of bullying, and face increasing alienation from mainstream society (Halquist, 2012). Gay youth are likely to experience bullying of some kind whether verbal, physical, emotional, or all of the above at some point during their adolescent development, and even beyond this stage (Ryan & Ivers as cited in Halquist, 2012). These experiences can hinder the development of a healthy identity. However, some counseling clients are able to manage these experiences and are more assertive of their rights. Thus, the ways these young gays address their experiences in coming out with a gay identity and given that the process of coming out is likely to vary from one generation to the next sparks some interest to the researcher to consider a qualitative approach to capture individual narratives from gay youth in an attempt to have an in-depth understanding of their experiences as a sexual minority. This approach was chosen in the sense that the participants belong to a group of individuals which are considered as marginalized or people with stigmatized identity. It is also the purpose of this study to help advocate for this group and offer future suggestions for professionals working with this population of youth. As Kietzer (2015) contends, a comprehensive understanding of the LGBT experience on individual, social, and community levels is valuable in the successful implementation and utilization of intervention techniques to help these individuals achieve a secure sense of self regardless of their sexuality.

Using narrative inquiry, this study investigates on the stories shared by gay youth in establishing a sexual identity and coming out process. People employ storytelling as a means to recall and construe certain milestone that made a significant change in their life. It is through the sharing of their narratives where they were able to express their thoughts and feelings from the meanings of their experiences. The participants have gone through the process of coming out and have established their gay identity. The main objective of this study is to explore and describe gay youth's lived experiences on their sexual identity development and the coming out process. Specifically, this study aimed to extrapolate and analyze themes on the narratives gathered to describe the experiences encountered by participants in the process of coming out and establishing their gay identity. The findings from this research could provide information to those in the helping profession who are working with these individuals. Understanding the interplay of gay youth experiences and the factors that influence their development is necessary to design effective support programs and appropriate resources for gay youth.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research provides a depth of understanding on the phenomena of interest from the standpoint of the participants. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is conducted to understand the contexts or settings in which participants address a problem or issue. It is also a way to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and allow them to collaborate with the researcher. In this particular study, a narrative inquiry design was utilized to delve into the gay youth's meaningful accounts of their lived experiences with regard to their identity development and coming out processes. Narrative inquiry is based firmly in the premise that, as human beings, they come to understand and give meaning to their lives through story (Andrews, Squire & Tambokou, 2008).

Research Participants

The participants were sixteen (16) gays recruited via purposive sampling specifically snowball or referent sampling. They were eligible to be part of the study with the following criteria: (1) must be a self-identified gay; (b) 19 to 24 years old; and (3) have been publicly out and have established their gay identity.

Sampling Technique

To achieve the purpose of the study, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling allowed researcher to actively choose individuals that serve a specific aim (Aday & Cornelius, 2011) and are willing to share the best information needed for the topic (Wa-Mbaleka, 2018). Moreover, using a snowball technique, participants who were recruited, in turn recruit other gays who met the criteria.

Data Collection

Being the most recommended method to collect participants' narratives, face-to-face and semi-structured interviews was considered as a suitable primary data collection tool for this study which enable a flexible and in-depth exploration of the issue. Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to have an opportunity to ask follow up questions and enable participants to speak freely. An interview guide/protocol which consists of open-ended questions was developed and validated by five experts on its content validity particularly on the relevance of the instrument to the topic of research. Furthermore, before the said interview guide was utilized to the research participants, a pilot study was conducted to three gays who also met the selection criteria of the participants but were excluded from the actual study.

Interviews were done in-person at a convenient and comfortable location that was personally chosen by the respondent. Prior to the start of each interview the researchers stated the purpose of the study; described and clarified the procedures including the audio recording of the interview; confidentiality, and risks and benefits. Field notes which described the observations on the behavior, nonverbal gestures such as facial expressions or body language of the participants were written on the same day that the interview or observation was conducted. A draft copy of the transcribed data was given to each of the participants for them to review, to give comments and to make adjustments to the information relating to their shared experiences. All collected data were kept and stored in a safe place.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started right after the first interview was done and continued throughout the duration of data collection. Organizing and managing data is important for an effective and efficient data analysis (Wa-Mbaleka, 2018). The collected data for the study were analyzed employing the analysis of narratives or the paradigmatic mode of analysis of Polkinghorne (1995). It is a method of classifying general features and common characteristics to fit into a larger pattern. It treats stories as data and seeks to identify common themes that hold across stories. Furthermore, this study utilized the inductive type of paradigmatic analysis of narratives in which concepts were inductively derived from the data. It is a process of coding the data without any preconceived analysis or the researcher is not trying to fit the data into some pre-existing coding frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The findings were presented by means of the description of themes that are common across stories. The data on the interviews were analyzed in its original form. The raw data were not translated into other language or dialect than what was transcribed to capture the essence of the words expressed by the participants in order to develop appropriate codes.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the conduct of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee of Centro Escolar University. The selection criteria for choosing the participants of the study were faithfully followed. There were no discrimination as to religious affiliation and social status in the selection of participants. Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and were asked to read, review and sign an informed consent form. A copy of the informed consent form was provided to the participants individually. Moreover, the participants were asked to choose their own pseudonym upon signing the form and were informed that this pseudonym will be used in the presentation of data. The participants who have voluntarily participated were informed of their right to withdraw anytime during the conduct of the interview without explaining their reason.

Researcher's Reflexivity

The researchers, being the primary data collection instrument and data analyst of this study, ensured that their personal biases and preconceived beliefs about gays or being gays did not affect the process of data interpretation. Their high respect, affection and predilection to gays were withheld so as not to interfere with the stories and answers disclosed during the interviews and ensure the credibility of the data. This was done by allowing each of the participant to tell his story in his own unique ways and incorporating the art of listening by focusing on what the participant has to say and not just hearing what they anticipated the participants to convey. Moreover, the researchers were cautious in ensuring the rigor of the study, thus strategies to guarantee trustworthiness were carried out throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 16 narratives investigated in this study have shown how young gays have explored and navigated their journey in establishing their sexual identity. Each narrative present a unique set of experiences which include highlights of events, turning points and meanings that outline the objective of this study. The emerging themes from the participants narratives

were discussed. Aside from the commonalities found in their narratives, distinctive issues which were found relevant in the stories were also included in the presentation and discussion of findings in order to present different perspectives on the issue (Yin as cited by Wa-Mbaleka, 2018).

Theme1: Curiosity and Awareness of Feeling Different

Majority of the participants revealed that they started to feel something different when they were in elementary. Some of them have come out to themselves and others during this time while others were able to come out only when they were in high school. At a young age, they shared that they would prefer getting along and playing with girls than with boys their age. Spongebob was only 8 years old while Minion was 9 years old and Zhen was 10 years old when they felt they were different. Prior to developing their curiosity and awareness of being different, these young gays used to play and get along with boys their age but gradually discovered that they enjoy more playing with girls than with boys. Then they started to show effeminate gestures and imitate their girl friends' actions. Jhey was also very young when his effeminate ways were already visible to people around him. Even his Grade 1 teacher has told his mother about her observation. However, he knew that his father will never approve of it so it was only in high school when he had the courage to come out. Jhey shared the testimony of his relatives regarding his behavior when he was a young boy:

“Adtong bata pa ko ingon akong mga aunties ug uncles makit-an nako nila magsayaw sayaw then magkiay-kiay. Then mga 5 year old ko mabantayan na ko nila mas ganahan ko makigdula sa mga babae.” (“My aunts and uncles told me that when I was a kid, they have predicted I will become gay because at a young age, they already observed my effeminate ways in dancing and walking. Then when I was 5 years old, I preferred playing with girls.”)

Just like Jhey, RJ, the third child among four children came out only when he was in high school. He bubbly shared his early experiences and how he eventually developed a gay identity.

“Actually murag sa elementray pa ko ganahan na jud kog fairy, flowers flowers then gaapil kog programs sa school sayaw sayaw. Mga Grade 2 ko adto pero wala pa ko kabalo nga gay na diay ako nilihokan. Hangtod nag Grade 6 ko gakaattract ko sa mga lalaki. Pag high school naa na jud kakaiba sa ako nilihokan pero feel na ko kabalo na akong mga parents pod.” (“Actually when I was in elementary, I was already fascinated with fairies and flowers. I joined school programs where I usually dance. I preferred girls' company over boys. I was in Grade 2 then but I was not aware of my actions yet. When I was in Grade 6, I started to get attracted to boys. When I reached high school, I already felt different and I also felt my parents know.”)

Being curious about one's preference such as being in the company of girls over boys was clearly manifested in the narratives shared by gay participants. Data show that this curiosity leads to being aware of feeling different from young boys their age. The more that they become curious, the deeper they try to explore that difference. Some had achieved self-acceptance at a young age while others had to take some considerations before admitting who they really are; thus, come out a little bit later. The findings is consistent with the study of Abcede, Esporna and Pepito (2016), where participants said that their sexual orientation is natural for them at a young age and some even disclosed feeling that way since birth. Additionally, Waray gays' coming out stories also begin with feeling different from their same-sex peers at a very young age as revealed in the findings of Docena (2013). Likewise, Go (2014) conducted a study on the coming out stories of Filipino gay men. These gays have disclosed that they were gay since young. They have experienced having a particular fondness for their same-sex peers. This description highlights their deviation from the established expectation that boys should be masculine and develop attraction toward girls.

Theme 2: Same Sex Attraction and Relationship

A big part in the construction of their identity is their unique experiences when it comes to same sex attraction and relationship. Like any other young adolescents, they too have experienced having crushes and same sex attraction. In their stories, participants described the kind of relationships they have experienced. Prominent to their stories were relationships which were discreet in nature. Others have revealed engaging in a long distance kind of relationship; a relationship characterized by distance and the only way of communication may be through phone and other multimedia means. Spongebob who had two long distance relationships, confessed that he never told anyone about these relationships because he knew they will not be fully accepted by the society. Zhen who had a relationship with a bisexual had kept his relationship a secret from his mother because of fear of rejection. However, there were also relationships as disclosed by the participants which lasted for years such as Rockstar Boss's first relationship lasted for three years but ended up

without proper closure. Other participants however have disclosed that they have not yet engaged in a serious relationship but experienced having some form of mutual understanding with the same sex.

Kim and Benja admitted that in the process of their identity development, they went through an identity crisis. Both have tried to fight the feeling and resorted to trying to establish romantic heterosexual relationships as a means to evaluate one's gender. They both expressed that before they achieve self-acceptance; they were struggling to fight back establishing a gay identity. Consequent to the curiosity and awareness of feeling different, it was evident in their stories that they experienced being attracted to the same sex peers aside from the preference of being in the company of girls. The study of Paul (2008) on gays, described that participants disclosed a feeling of being different early in their lives and tied this feeling to same-sex attraction. Likewise, in this particular study, gay youth have disclosed having developed crushes towards the same sex as young as 9 and 10 years old. Some of them have successfully established a relationship. Noticeably, there were three common descriptions that arise from these relationships: the relationship is discreet, a long distance type and the partner is a bisexual. One of the reasons provided by these gays when asked why they chose to keep their relationship a secret and get involved in a long distance type of relationship was because they want to avoid being judged. Being away from each other means less visibility in public

Theme 3: Challenges and Struggles in Coming Out

The most common challenges and struggles experienced by the gay youth in coming out pertains to their difficulty expressing themselves particularly to their family. Based from their narratives, most of them have not verbalized their being gay to their family while some have admitted only when they were asked by either their parents or their siblings. Between their mother and their father, it was their father whom they have experienced the worst. Dondon, Wawa and Nam Sin talked about how their fathers had emphasized their surnames and stressed that there was no gay in their bloodline.

Zhen's coming out struggle was caused by the fact that he felt alone being the first to ever come out in their place. He said it was a bit difficult "*maglaldad*" (unfold oneself) or to flaunt his effeminate behavior particularly in their *sitio* because he felt he is helpless without anyone to call on as an ally. Like Zhen, Dondon at first had concealed his identity before totally coming out but not because he felt alone too but rather he was afraid to be mocked and called "*bayot*". He confessed:

"Sauna pa lang bisan kabalo ko sa ako self nga bayot ko dili man japon ko pahalata sa akong nilakwan, pormal japon pero sa mga dugay na nako nga amigo diha ra ko mas open." ("Before, even though I already knew I am gay, I usually act like a straight guy because I was afraid of being called "*bayot*" (gay). I was only more open about my identity to my close friends or those I have known for a long time.")

Consistent with studies on sexual identity development of gays and other sexual minorities is the disclosure of one's sexuality either to parents, friends or to the society. Findings reveal that participants tend to disclose their sexuality to people with whom they discern that they would be accepted. On the other hand, they tend to feel hesitant about sharing this information with people they feared would not be supporting. According to Ereño (2014), apart from gays' personal struggle to accept their true gender identity, they must also face the difficult task of making their peers, families, and friends understand them for who they are. Based from the stories of the participants of this study, when they feel that they have acknowledged within themselves that they are gay, they have the desire to disclose it to their loved ones so that they will not have to pretend anymore however, based on the abovementioned data, their struggles and challenges in coming out were rooted from the expectations of their parents on them. Ereño (2014) contended that Filipino parents have high expectations that their children will have a heterosexual relationship and not of the same-sex. Thus, it is difficult especially for a father to accept his son become gay considering that in the Filipino culture, a son is expected to bear and carry their family name to the next generation. Indeed, identity development is influenced by heteronormativity and patriarchal norms which are common in the Philippine context (Go, 2014). Uncertainty and doubt over the reactions of others prevent them sometimes to come out.

Theme 4: Presence of Environmental Influences

The presence of gay figures and exposure with female figures in the home or in the school has been significant in the development of gay identity. Most of the participants disclosed that when they were young, they used to play with girl playmates and were surrounded by female such as their sisters, aunts and cousins. Growing up, Minion disclosed that his gay concept formation was influenced by his cousin (Kuya) who is also a gay and to whom Minion first revealed his gay

identity. He observed him wearing make-up and also had the chance to meet his cousin's boyfriend. These observations made him become curious and eventually become interested about being gay. On the other hand, for Spongebob, his gayness was largely influenced by his gay cousin who is one year older than him. He was also his constant companion while growing up. They both enjoyed the company of girls. Thus, at 8 years old, he disclosed, he already knew he was different from boys. He considered that at a very young age, he had already come out with his family and neighbors and has not struggled much during the process. His Kuya was his main reference in coming out. He revealed:

"Nakaingon ko ok ra siguro nabayot ko kay wala man pod kasab-i si kuya." ("I was convinced that being gay is okay since Kuya was not scolded for being one.")

KBPA and his younger brother usually share toys bought by their parents. But KBPA did not enjoy these toys so whenever he has the chance to go to his friend's house, KBPA would buy a doll. KBPA grew up in the company of his two older gay friends who were also his neighbors:

"Ana nga time naa koy duha ka close friends na mga bayot pod mas maguwang sa ako. Magdula mi ug doll paliton namu tag diyos pesos sa merkado. Human dula ibilin ra pod nako didto sa ila, dili nako iuli. Wala kabalo ako ginikanan." ("Growing up, I had two gay friends in our place who were older than me and were influential to me. We used to play dolls that we bought in the market at ten pesos in the house of one of my friends. After playing, I left the doll at my friend's house because I could not bring it at home. My parents were not aware of it.")

Rockstar Boss, Dondon and Queen grew up with older sisters whom they share things with. Dondon disclosed that he gets envious whenever her sister got a new dress or skirts and sometimes he will also try wearing it at home. Benja who grew up in a large family of nine siblings where five of them are boys and four are girls is closer to his sisters than to his brothers. Furthermore, during school break, Benja spent most of his vacation at his aunts's house where he interacts mostly with women. Queen, on the other hand, was not only influenced by her sisters by the toys they play but as well as on the fairy tales they were fond of watching when they were young:

"Nagdako jud ko nga dependent ko sa akong mama, mas close ko sa iyaha kaysa sa akong papa. Isa pod nainfluence pod ko sa akong mga magulang nga babae kay unsa nga stuff ila dulaan mura pod ako madulaan pati salida ila matan-awan like Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast ug Little Mermaid then Tinkerbelle pinakafavorite nako." ("I grew up so dependent with my mother, I was closer to her than to my father. I have older sisters whom I used to play with at home using their stuff and toys. When we were young, we were also fond of watching fairy tales like Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast and Little Mermaid and my most favorite character was Tinkerbelle.")

Unlike, the rest of the participants who were influenced by their relatives, Nam Sin considered a gay neighbor who was a high school teacher as his social model. He shared that at a young age, he admired his dancing skills as well as the way he was respected by his students even if he is a gay. Nam Sin became interested to become like him. The experiences of these gays from being curious about one's sexuality and feeling different from their same-sex peers as well as the experience on developing attraction towards them were reinforced by the experiences they encounter within their environment. For instance, data show that being with the company of girls whether they were their playmates, siblings or relatives somehow provided a means for them to be more inclined to explore the world supposedly attuned for girls.

Furthermore, the presence of gay figures seemed to be influential in their identity development. At the stage where D'Augelli (1994) described as developing a personal gay status, the person is in the exploration phase of discerning what it means to be gay. If during this stage, a young person in search for his identity have observed a role model; according to the principle of social learning theory, an individual more likely adopt a modeled behavior if the model has admired status and is akin to the observer (Bandura as cited in Culatta, 2019).

Theme 5: Recognition and Acceptance from Others

Five out of sixteen participants pointed out to having accepting and supportive families in the development of a gay identity and even prior to their coming out. These gays do not seem to have a problem earning the recognition and acceptance of their parents when they come out because their parents have either verbalized their acceptance or remained silent but supportive. They interpreted their parents' silence on the issue and some form of tolerance as a sort of acceptance on their sexual identity. They said that their gestures and behaviors were enough to show them their real self.

According to Rockstar Boss he has never heard his parents commented about his gender but he felt their support. Likewise, Dondon said his parents have concluded through his actions but told him not to wear skirts to continue earning other people's respect. Minion, who grew up with his mother and without his biological father on his side did not directly answer his mother when he was asked regarding his gay identity, but felt her support. While most of these gays found support and acceptance from their mothers, it was not as easy as to seeking the same acceptance from their father for acceptance involved some conditions. Nam Sin, who was punished by his father for his effeminate ways was eventually accepted by his father when he was able to achieve his expectations:

“Adto nga time nahubog ako Papa. Ingon siya di na nako mapugngan imong kagustuhan. Isa ra ako pangayoon sa imo kay wa man koy bahandi nga ikahatag sa inyo, kung ing ana man gani imo gusto, gusto ko mahuman kag skwela ug mahimo kang professional aron dili ka kaminusan sa ubang tao.” (“That time my father went home drunk. He said since this is what I want and because we are not rich, he will only request one thing from me, that is, to finish college and become a professional teacher so that people won't underestimate me.”)

Jhey and Queen have a different story to tell. There was a promise they have to keep, a promise that they told their fathers when they were still alive. When he was in Grade 9, Queen's father talked to him and told him that he can accept him as a gay as long as he will not let others disrespect him and that he will have to finish his studies. Queen was grateful for having that chance to hear his father's wish because his father died before he finished high school. Jhey, on the other hand had the chance to speak with his father about his sexual identity before he finished high school. He was in first year college when he lost his father.

Meanwhile, Elsa who lived with his grandparents, revealed how he was heartily accepted for being who he is without reservations. Elsa proudly shared how her grandmother's acceptance means a lot for him:

“Nagsalig ko nga nay usa sa among pamilya nga gidawat ko mao ang akong grandmother. Ginahimo nako siya nga great foundation sa akong identity. I don't care if nay manghugsa nako, I don't care kung makaexperience kog mga panlalait, the fact nga naa koy grandmother who accepts me for who I am and what I am, enough na kayo na sa ako. Dili ko magpakalalaki para maaccept ko sa tao.” (“I was confident that there was one person in the family who have accepted me unconditionally and that was my grandmother. I made her as a great foundation of my identity. I don't care if people will judge or mock me as long as I have my grandmother who accepted me for who I am and for what I am, that would be enough for me. If people will not like me for who I am, I don't care and I won't change my identity just to please them.”)

Furthermore, the acceptance and support of their friends were much valuable for these young gays. They even claimed that their friends protect them from anyone who tries to discriminate them. Majority of the participants revealed that they did not experience having to talk about their identity to their friends instead assume that through their actions and gestures, their friends already have known their sexual identity.

The need to be accepted at home and by their friends is equally important for these gays to be accepted in the school and in the community. At school, most of the participants disclosed that they have experienced being accepted and appreciated by their teachers. According to them, teachers were considerate and friendly to gays. Their teachers usually assigned them some responsibilities in school activities which they feel empowered. When this is the case, the school serves as a safe environment for these young gays where they are provided with a feeling of acceptance and sense of belongingness in a community wherein they could be themselves and have the chance to interact with other gays without the fear of being ridiculed. Most of them were also active members of the dance troupe for which they perform in some school events and programs.

KBPA was one of the gays who expressed how he was influenced by a gay teacher especially in learning new skills. These skills have helped him enhance his self-confidence especially that he is now earning an income by means of these skills. KBPA proudly said:

“Naa man gud mi teachers mga gays. Isa sa ila nag introduce sa ako sa make up ug flower arrangement.pag nay mga activities, kami na jud ang isalang.” (“We have gay teachers in the school. One of them taught me how to do make-up and flower arrangement. Whenever there are school activities, we were tapped by the teachers.”)

Some of the participants of the study were youth leaders in their community. They disclosed that they were pressured by the expectations of their superiors on them. Minion, an SK Kagawad said he won in the elections because people has a high expectation that he will responsibly and actively do his duties. Benja who admitted to be in a struggle within himself and fighting his feelings to become masculine to please his parents have gained the respect of his peers from their place:

“I was one of the boys. Ako man gud murag dili jud ko ganahan nga mabayot ko pero mao man jud ko so ako na lang iembrace kung unsay naa sa ako. Kabalo sila nga bayot ko then dili pod ko makigdula ug basketball magkuyog-kuyog lang jud. Feel man pod nako ginarespeto ko nila. Sa pag uban-uban nako nila mas ganahan ko kay dili ko nila ginajudge.” (“I was one of the boys. I really do not want to become gay but I have to embrace my own identity. I went out with them like when they play basketball I get along but I don’t play with them. I can feel their respect and they don’t judge me.”)

It was evident from the stories of the participant that to be recognized and accepted is a significant factor in the formation of their identity. The value that they put on this acceptance seems to complete their personhood especially when the recognition was from someone dear to them like their family and friends. Findings show that they have proven themselves to their parents by doing well in school or by finishing their degrees to make them proud. Consistent with the findings of Docena (2013), gay youth manifested a conscious effort to compensate for their sexual identity such as improving their roles as a son and as students. This compensatory mechanism implied the need to excel in one area of their lives and be acknowledged as a good son to strengthen their belief of the parental acceptance. Moreover, this current study found out that aside from the external motivation of having to please their parents by being a good son; intrinsically, they are also motivated to prove something for themselves. That is, despite being different and often stigmatized, they can compete with their heterosexual counterparts and eventually succeed.

On the other hand, participants have disclosed that their friends were the most supportive. Although they do not need to verbally disclose and come out, their friends have already accepted them. This finding is supported by Ereño (2014), according to him one clear reason why they prefer to disclose to their friends is peer attachment characterized by their closeness or the open-mindedness of their peers towards homosexuality that lead to disclose to them. Likewise, in the study of Paul (2008), participants talked about how important it was to find support from others in their journey and majority of them said that friends are the common source of support for them. Being a part of a larger community, these gays have found their niche as youth leaders and church servants. Similar to what they have experienced, these gays are recognized and tapped in their community for their leadership skills. In some interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2017, it appeared that LGBT has accepted the message that their acceptance was perceived to be conditional and such they have to present themselves as dutiful and talented members of the society.

Theme 6: Rejection and Discrimination Experiences

From their stories, these gay youth has unveiled the moments they had experienced some pain caused by rejection and discrimination. Gays were selective to whom they disclosed to or often discreet about their sexuality because of fear of homophobic reactions and rejection. As previously presented in the discussion, the most painful of these experiences were those they have encountered with some of their family members. When Zhen’s parents detected he was gay, they discouraged him because they want him to have his own family someday. Elsa, who grew up without a father experienced rejection from his uncle:

“Naay point nga no matter how positive you are moabot jud ang negativity. Nakaexperience ko nga naay member sa family nga dili ka accepted. It’s my uncle nga gusto niya himoon ko straight nga laki.” (“No matter how positive you are, you will be shaken by negativity. I have experienced being rejected by a family member. He’s my uncle, he wanted to make me a straight guy.”)

Even if the participants have confessed that they were treated nicely by their teachers in school, still they cannot avoid heterosexist remarks from their fellow students. Dondon admitted that it hurts him being called by names. One of the most painful discriminating remarks he heard was to be called “*chaka na bayot*” (ugly gay) by his schoolmates. Jhey also experienced being teased and shouted as “*bayot*” in public. The term “*bayot*” which literally means gay in English was sometimes used to belittle them. The term would figuratively refer to a person who is deviant to the society and an object of laughter. Generally, homosexuality is perceived as a deviation from the norm in the society where majority are heterosexuals. This might be true according to VanderStouwe (n.d.); however, an average heterosexual individual need

not enter into another phase of identity formation and since people spend their lives creating and recreating their identities, thus a thorough understanding of the narratives related with this identity construction as well as the role that language plays in the process is important. Young gays were also very vulnerable to derogatory and judgmental remarks from people in the community. They were inevitable from the inquisitive nature of local people. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Paul (2008) wherein gays experienced distress or struggle associated to what others would think or if others may reject them.

Furthermore, heterosexist remarks were commonly thrown at them. One of the descriptions that truly hurt them was being called a “*salot*” (plague). Elsa elaborated that people have that notion that if you were gay, you were “*salot sa lipunan*” (plague in the society) and that they were allegedly accused of triggering the presence of storm and were responsible for the disasters. And not only being called such but others would tend to add an undesirable phrase like these gays deserved to be crucified or “*ilansang sa krus*”.

To experience rejection and discrimination is inevitable for this group of people who are considered as marginalized and ostracized for being different. Undeniably, the heterosexism attitude would take a long time to diminish especially in a predominantly heterosexual society. Many forms of rejection and discrimination were voiced out by the participants. Verbal abuse was prominent in their stories. The fact that they were called with varied names, thrown insulting remarks and to be the object of laughter for some people made them more vulnerable to having a low self-esteem. In the findings of Halquist, (2012) on the lived experiences of gays who have experienced bullying during their formative years, it was evident that their experience has deeply impacted them and made them feel as if their sexual identity was a barrier to their overall existence and ability to succeed in life. No matter how they begin to love themselves and accept themselves for who they are, these gay youth were faced with uncertainties and inferiorities because of the experiences they have encountered with others.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The gay youth’s sexual identity development commence during elementary years when they become curious and aware that they feel different from their same sex peers. The awareness of feeling different is also characterized by their preference to get along with girls and fondness towards the same sex. These gay youth get involved in discreet relationship with the same sex due to the invisibility of this kind in the society. Moreover, visible gay figures in their immediate environment and frequent interaction with female figures reinforced their gay identity development. It was also found out that verbal abuse is a common form of discrimination experienced by gays in the society particularly in the research locale. They recognized their friends as the most supportive social entity in their coming out. On the other hand, gays compensate sexual identity by proving oneself to parents to earn their recognition and acceptance however, parental acceptance on their gay identity typically involves articulated conditions. It was also interesting to note that these young gays appreciate when they are empowered and given responsibilities where they can showcase their talents and skills.

In the light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were given: (a) Psychoeducational programs incorporating topics on gender sensitivity, bullying, and discrimination against gays in the school and in the community should be conducted; (b) Teachers and community personnel should be trained and be educated regarding mental health law and their responsibilities in order to assist gay youth who needs help such as victims of discrimination and bullying especially when the guidance counselor is not available; (c) The school and community should provide resources and opportunities for young gays to showcase their talents and skills to empower them and maximize their fullest potentials and; (d) The school and community may conduct a group intervention to parents to help them understand and learn the process of identity development of their child and that they will be able to share their experience to parents with gay children, too.

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