

Critical Reflections and Consciousness on the Gendered Lives of the LGBT in the Context of the Pandemic

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Abstract

This manuscript is an erudite documentation of the critical examinations of reflexive accounts from, and thought-provoking consciousness based on, the previously conducted gender-related studies with the aim of revisiting them “critically” to provide a broadened understanding of the idiosyncratic and gendered lives of the Filipino LGBTs with a special emphasis in the context of the pandemic. Thus, through this analysis, this paper notably emphasizes that by critically examining the established facts about the common and unique experiences of people from a gender-diversified population invites us to a new, fresh, and higher perspectives that are equally useful in dealing toward and forward the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *critical analysis; critical reflections; critical consciousness; gendered lives of the LGBTs; secondary data; pandemic study*

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1. Introduction

Data discussing about the impact of the COVID-9 pandemic to the collective lives of the LGBT in the Philippines still seems to be lacking. In the global trends however, Dawson, Kirzinger, & Kates (2021) have identified various significant drifts about the lives of the LGBTQ worldwide. In terms of its economic impact, “a larger share of LGBT adults compared to non-LGBT adults report that they or someone in their household has experienced COVID-era job loss (56% v. 44%)”. In respect to their overall mental health, “three-fourths of LGBT people (74%) say worry and stress from the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health, compared to 49% of those who are not LGBT, and are more likely to say that negative impact has been major (49% v 23%)”. Furthermore, Dawson, et. al., identified that one-third of LGBT adults (34%) believe the news has largely understated the severity of the

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pandemic (compared to 23 percent of non-LGBT adults). Similar to non-LGBT adults, three-quarters of LGBT adults (7%) are "extremely anxious" or "somewhat worried" that they or someone in their household would get sick from the coronavirus (67%). A sizable percentage of LGBT individuals say they are willing to follow the CDC's recommendations to avoid virus acquisition and spread.

In the views of vaccination, Dawson, et. al., (2021) reported that "majorities of LGBT people plan to get a covid vaccine as possible or to wait and see how it is working for others, just 1 in 10 do not plan to get vaccinated". Similarly, a global survey revealed that about 30% of gay men felt unsafe at home during the pandemic and 72% of the LGBT respondents said they were experiencing anxiety since the pandemic began based on the Reuters report by Greenhalgh (2020). Similarly, a review of the impact of social distancing measures on gay, bisexual, queer, trans, and two-spirit men concluded that control measures in response to the pandemic had serious potential to impact their mental, social, and sexual health (Brennan, et. al., 2020). LGBT people are more likely to be immunocompromised (Phillips II, et. al., 2020). LGBT people have elevated rates of depression and substance abuse, and social distancing may worsen these conditions (Ruprecht, et. al., 2021, pg. 28). Being a member of two demographics which both tend to be more economically vulnerable (for example, being both LGBT and an immigrant, or a racial minority), contributes to health vulnerabilities (Kline, 2020).

With these contexts, this manuscript aims to revisit locally established studies about the lives of the LGBT using a critical lens especially in the context of the ongoing global pandemic and offer alternative views in understanding their gendered lives. This population has been subjected enough to various societal stigmatization over the decades; the pandemic situation could play a vital part in terms of its exacerbation or normalization – which is worth looking into. In view of which, the following studies below are some of the erudite investigations on the lives of Filipino LGBTs which affronts critical evaluations:

Table 1. Gender studies on the lives of the Filipino LGBT in the past 5 years.

Studies	Main Results and Implications
<p>Study 1: <i>Coming-out and Romantic Relationships among Female Bisexual Adolescents: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</i> Masanda & Armentia (2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though the experience of gender-related stereotyping, prejudices, and some sort of discrimination seems to be rampant, the sense of acceptance and belongingness from peers including a solid friendship can significantly boost the coming out process among female bisexual adolescents. On the other hand, strict family values and conventions tend to otherwise hinder the said process. • Coming-out as a process is to access community, to feel good about oneself and to build a sense of personal integrity and pride. • The quality of the respondent's romantic relationships seems to have long lasting effects on their self-esteem which can shape their personal values regarding romance, intimate relationships, and sexuality. It is more helpful for them to enter a relationship because they gained the support, acceptance and belongingness primarily from their partner and peers.
<p>Study 2: <i>Home "Queer" Home: A Qualitative Study on the Family Dynamics of Filipino Gay Men</i> Masanda (2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall psychological wellbeing of the participant seems to be efficient despite what seems to be rather aversive factors which directly originated from within their own families. • Essentially, having an open communication and understanding relationship with their family members is highly important to their wellbeing and self-esteem. The presence of these protective factors contributes meaningfully to the participants' self-concept, life goals, and self-worth even though certain members of their families regard them otherwise • There are still number of Filipino families who are unprepared in having gender-nonconforming members. This can be indirectly illuminated through the cultural heritage most of the families grew in and

- became accustomed with. Hence, the expression of the participants' sexuality as they experienced it within their families has cultural underpinning.
- Study 3:
Family Life Experiences of Gay Fathers: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Arambulo & Masanda (2018)
- The experiences of gay fathers are hard but fulfilling. In spite of the harsh societal judgments, misunderstanding within the family, limitations in their family opportunities due to their sexual orientation, they remain to be strong and happy.
 - Gay fathers' sexual orientation is not a hindrance for them to fulfill their duties as the head of their family; though it was challenging for them to attain and maintain their responsibilities, the love and care from their family members enabled them to go through and even beyond.
 - Though there seems to be no important distinctions between gay and straight fathers, contemporary Filipino society at large is still not fully ready to an LGBT-lead family.
- Study 4:
A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Lesbian Women about "Heartaches": An In-depth Analysis
Persona & Masanda (2018)
- Lesbian women also experience relatively similar difficulties dealing with their heartaches, but their expressions seem to be lighter than their straight counterpart.
 - Lesbian women tend to be more confident than their straight counterpart in terms of their breakup: they believe that they are more capable of developing and finding new relationship. This is because they believe in incorporating their lessons learned from the broken ones they have had in their past relationships.
 - Lesbian women aim to be gain understanding and equal respect from their communities, earn proper education, aid in their family situations, and find someone who will love them as they are without judgment and shame.
- Study 5:
Does 'Education' Thwart Sexism and Gender Discrimination?
- There was a low average level of genderism and transphobia in the academic community of Central Luzon State University.
 - There was a significant difference in terms of the level genderism and transphobia between

- Prompts from the Level of Genderism and Transphobia in an Academic Community*
Masanda (2018)
- faculty, staff, and students.
 - There was a significant difference in terms of the level genderism and transphobia between males and females.
 - There was a significant negative correlation between educational attainment and the level of genderism and transphobia.
 - Instances of sexism and gender discrimination can be observed in and prompted by the level of genderism and transphobia. This is drawn from the defining characteristics and attitudinal components of the said factors as directly observed from the responses of the participants (i.e., lower level of genderism and transphobia means lower chances of sexism and gender discrimination) at least in an academic community.
 - Education, regardless of the specific field, provides a broader perspective upon which appreciation to gender-related issues and concern can be comprehended more closely. This affective and cognitive understanding can lead to a more tolerant behavior towards gender nonconforming individuals which can significantly thwart the likelihood of sexism and gender discrimination to occur.

2. Critical Analysis

The supplemented primary data provided rich descriptive and substantive information about the gendered lives of the LGBTs which are ambivalently knitted along their gender identity and expression, pre-existing societal biases and stigmas. This experience of their overall gender in the times of the pandemic can be highlighted as something that can challenge their wellbeing and total mental health. The pandemic could have only worsened the existing and persisting stigma in the society especially among this population.

A critical view of these gendered experiences of the LGBTs reveals that how we examine their worlds through the lenses of our own ingrained biases affect how we conceptualize gender-related factors (such as of

equality and equity) and how it is being premeditated and perpetuated in the public arena (primarily through memes and ‘memeplexes’). Through this means, perpetuation of gender related stigma especially during the pandemic crisis could continue to persist due to the virtual transactions and that very vital nowadays. To halt this kind of gender-related misinformation, a critical lens in analyzing gender and related perspective with the intent of understanding specific phenomena is what I call “**critical reflections**”. In achieving this feat, it requires developing a “**critical consciousness**” which is a mechanism that can project a critical comprehension of reality for the LGBTs both in research and practice with special emphasis in the context of this pandemic.

Hence, the following *critical reflections* (those “needed” questions) to the various studies conducted and pinpointed in this paper are put forward to further encourage *critical consciousness* (the “suggested” solutions) to aid in the halting of gender stigmatization.

Study 1 begs the question: from a developmental perspective, how should we view bisexuality? Specifically, is it a temporary stage of denial, transition, or experimentation? Or a “third type” of sexual orientation, characterized by fixed patterns of attraction to both sexes? Or a strong form of all individuals’ capacity for sexual fluidity? From this perspective, it can be helpful to understand that part of the development among adolescents is the need for sexual exploration where “bi-sexual” investigation of themselves can be commonly observed. Similarly, from the standpoints of both Freud’s and Jung’s psychodynamic theories, humans are basically bisexual in nature; this indicates that bisexual identity is a common and natural variation of a healthy sexual development. Lastly, bisexuality as a sexual identity can be best understood as one of the natural and healthy forms of gender fluidity which is the baseline of the very rich and colorful world of gender and sexual diversity which cannot be dampen nor hampered by the ongoing global pandemic. Though obviously challenged, it can also be an avenue for a better acceptance for everyone regardless of sex and gender.

Study 2 poses relevant question as: what possible implications do their family experiences contribute to the participant’s sexual orientation? If ever it has. If none, how could we improve intrafamilial dynamics in such a way that it would be affirmative to gay people to grow freely as themselves? Moving forward with this would require Understanding that the family dynamics of the Filipino gay men can be considered as one

factor that might highlight their happiness, sadness, and challenges in life, psychological functioning, and even their overall personhood, is a proactive approach in dealing with how family dynamics can be improved and flourished especially during this challenging time of the global pandemic. Hence, we use the extra time we share with our families to deepen our relationships with one another.

Study 3 further ask the following question: How does one's sexual orientation affect parenthood? If being a gay father is not significantly different from their straight counterpart, how can being gay, as creative as they are, improves present understanding of modern-day fatherhood? What can be helpful in such a reflection is the knowledge that sexual and gender identities are not prerequisite to a better and responsible fatherhood. Similarly, parenthood shall transcend societal biases and stigmatizing belief about what a "real father" should be like based alone on one's sexual orientation. Contemporary society globally, especially during this unprecedented time of the pandemic over the course of our lifetime, should strive to provide a more welcoming attitude towards gender-nonconforming parents. Children's overall development is not negatively impacted by their parent's sexual orientation but rather by the stigma people associate with them.

On the other hand, study 4 may be revisited with such questions: How can we improve our appreciation of love and affection of two individuals from the same sex? How can we fully comprehend that love needs no treatment or repair? How can we fully embrace to love all kinds of love? It can thus be dealt with properly knowing that Relationships on romantic nature shared by people are bound by love, care, and commitment and does not require an opposite sex or matching gender. Especially in the context of this pandemic where love and care go a long way in fighting the pandemic, people's relationships should be thriving despite the languishing situation. This speaks crucially true among LGBT people, specifically among lesbian women who are, much the same with everyone else, requires love and support that require no change, treatment, or repair.

Finally, study 5 can be reviewed using the following questions: how could we extend a gender-affirmative attitude from an academic community to the mainstream communities? How can we incorporate gender sensitivity and appreciation to mainstream education to harness understanding of the many about gender diversity? As a response, crafting

gender-affirmative rules and regulations within the academic institution as an initial step in eradicating pro-sexist, anti-feminist, and gender-biased attitudes among some individuals (i.e., using gender neutral terminologies, evading derogatory descriptions to certain minorities and the like). Further, steering a psychoeducational program for the staff who lack sufficient higher education to enhance their appreciation of the complexities of gender-related issues may also be beneficial.

In a nutshell, critical consciousness as an output of reflexive practice, is a process where one is reflective, self-aware, and is also involved in critically questioning one's consciousness to open one's mind vis-à-vis the lives of the LGBTs especially during this time of the global pandemic. People across all nations are affected by the pandemic in virtually all fronts: economic, socio-political, and most mental/psychological. The COVID-19 does not discriminate among people's race, age, cultural background, educational attainment, beliefs, sex, gender, and almost everything in between; and quite frankly, neither should we. Finally, the coronavirus does not discriminate among people on who will get infected, and again quite frankly, neither should anybody. Strengthening our systems against the virus is surely a proactive response against it, but so as helping others maintain immunity, too. Hence, in both contexts, critically reflecting on the gendered lives of the LGBTs will lead us to a critical consciousness that we are the source of their suffering, but we are the solutions too.

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