

A Phenomenological Inquiry on the Lived Experiences among Parents with both Homosexual and Heterosexual Children

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ABSTRACT

One in three parents has a homosexual child. Parenting is a role that has a significant influence on the development of many adults. While children learn from their parents, they also provide opportunities for their parents to learn from them and grow. A phenomenological qualitative approach was used to collect, scrutinize, and understand the lived experiences among parents with homosexual and heterosexual children and to find commonalities among the different perspectives with data obtained from a purposive sampling of seven mothers. The researcher conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews using self-created interview guides or protocols recorded

through voice memos with subjects' permission. The researcher transcribed the interviews and identified the emerging themes with the help of three reliable validators. The results of the study revealed the lived experiences of participants, revealing nine themes; *Parental Acceptance of their homosexual children, Feeling of Frustration Leads to Resignation, Awareness of Difference, Denial, Afraid of Being Discriminated, Equal and Different Treatment*. Hence, parents of heterosexual and homosexual children as the heteronormative society became more progressive, were able to adapt their parenting practices by allowing themselves to learn, relearn, and unlearn the new norms on sexual orientation and gender. It requires open-mindedness, endurance, and acceptance to embrace the reality of being the parent of a sexual minority. None of these parents felt prepared to embrace this reality.

KEYWORDS

Live-Experiences, Homosexual, Heterosexual, Phenomenological, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

One in three parents has a homosexual child (Woodman, 1985). The relationship between homosexual children and their parents and how parents bargain with the truth that their child is homosexual are important issues for researchers and those in the helping professions to understand. The development of gender identity is one of many physical and mental changes during this stage of development. The discovery that one's gender identity is not deemed "normal" by societal standards is an event that causes stress, not just for the homosexual but also for the familial system (Coenen, 2014). It is logical to assume that parents find it difficult to accept their child's homosexuality. In the study of Sutfin (2007), it was found that parents who have differential treatment with their children according to their children's gender, in parents' verbal interactions, the stimulus of motor behavior, nurturance, discipline, and joint play. Many studies have demonstrated that children's well-being is affected much more by their relationships with their parents, their parents' sense of competence and security.

Homosexual children rejected by their parents are at risk for depression and suicide (Ryan, et al., 2009). On the other hand, parents accept who are

accepting of their child's identity can be a protective factor that promotes well-being (Russell, et al., 2010). At younger ages, homosexual children reveal their sexual identities to their parents, which extends their time in the home, where they are subjected to parental reactions (Grov, et al., 2006; Ryan, 2003). Parents assume that their child is a member of the accepted heterosexual majority before they are aware that their child is homosexual. They plan and dream in accordance with this assumption (Robinson, et al., 1989). When they discover that their child is homosexual, they must come to terms with the fact that their child is no longer a member of the majority but rather a member of the minority (Woodman, 1985). As soon as the child's assumed familial role is revealed, family members are quick to redefine their relationship with the homosexual member in light of common misconceptions about homosexuality (Strommen, 1989; Coenen, 2014). Their hopes that their child will have a fulfilling traditional marriage, complete with children, must be put to the side. Instead, they must learn to accept that their child will have a different kind of identity and behavior than they do. Some parents may be experiencing grief similar to that experienced by parents whose child has died. They may be coming to terms with the death of dreams for their heterosexual child and the birth of new dreams, and a changed relationship with their homosexual child. Parents suffer emotional upset upon learning of their children's homosexuality, many progressed through a five-stage grief process that ended with acceptance (Walters et al., 1989). A number of parents have stated that they accept their homosexual child but do not accept their child's sexual orientation or gender identity (Bertone & Franchi, 2014; Freedman, 2008). The fear of social stigmatization towards themselves as inadequate parents, as well as towards their son or daughter as sick and deviant, was the most significant barrier to parental acceptance of their child's homosexual orientation (Bernstein, 1990).

In many contexts, organized religions play a critical role in framing sexual orientations outside the heterosexual norm as a social problem and in maintaining social hostility toward those who do not conform to this norm (Bertone & Franchi, 2014). Prayer, supportive clergy, and affirming faith communities were all mentioned as being utilized by parents during the process of accepting their homosexual child into the family (Freedman, 2008; Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015; Pearlman, 2005; Sides, 2017). Research from the United States shows that religion is a major factor in their lives. Although a source of conflict and difficulty, it also gives them the moral authority to set the conditions for their children's acceptance and legitimizes

their involvement in the defense of rights for children (Broad et al., 2004). There is a potential challenge to the current framings of the conflict between religion and homosexuality in the ways that parents make sense of the relationship between their religious identity and the acceptance of their child's sexual orientation on one side and the other, the challenge to current framings of the conflict between religion and homosexuality (Fassin, 2010). Study shows that homosexual children relationships with their parents are frequently challenged, particularly around the time of disclosure of sexual orientation or "coming out" (D'Augelli, et al., 2005; Patterson, 2000).

On the other hand, when family members are aware of a young person's homosexuality, they may engage in concrete forms of coercion to conform to the hegemonic sexual norm, which may be harmful to the young person. The use of physical and psychological violence appears to be modalities that are constantly used to achieve this goal. In turn, young people are subjected to psychic distress, uncertainty, and fear (da Nata et al., 2017).

The Philippines is a religious nation, and the vast majority of Filipinos adhere to a common religious viewpoint that stems from the dominance of Catholicism in the country. In the Philippines, religion plays a significant role in Filipinos' lives, even more so under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (UNDP & USAID, 2014); however, there is still a significant lack of anti-discrimination legislation at the local and national levels that protect the rights of homosexual Filipinos (Reyes, et al., 2019). Most Filipinos have not accepted the view that homosexual orientations are normal variants of human sexuality, homosexual Filipinos continue to face discrimination, prejudice, and stigma (PAP, 2011). Though gays are highly acceptable in different fields of society, there has yet been legislation to protect them of their rights. Parents play a critical role in promoting or discouraging feelings and behaviors associated with sexual minorities, as they are the primary socializing agents for children (Docena, 2013). The majority of parents, on the other hand, do not encourage their homosexual children to accept their sexual orientation. Gay Filipinos occasionally face ridicule and discrimination (Tubeza, 2013; Cuneta, 2014). It is the acceptance end of the acceptance continuum that is concerned with the quality of the affectional bond between a parent and a child and with the physical and verbal behaviors that express the warmth and affection of the parents as well as the comfort and concern they have for the child, as well as their nurturance, support, and love for the child (Rohner, et al., 2003).

Upon checking the scientific literature, there is a dearth of studies dealing with parents with homosexual and heterosexual children. Does the study will be the first to shed light on the lived-experiences of parents. Growing up as an LGBT child the researcher feels that, in a way, there is a different level of parents' treatment, discipline, control, and expectation between his heterosexual siblings. From a phenomenological lens, the researcher wants to study lived-experiences parents with both homosexual and heterosexual children. This will create an exemplary understanding to shed light on parental biases based on their children's gender. Moreover, this will contribute to the global repository of knowledge in scientific studies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to capture the essence of an event by discovering and documenting the lived experiences of parents with both homosexual and heterosexual children and finding commonalities among the different perspectives. Moreover, to create an exemplary understanding to shed light on parental biases. Finally, this study also aims to determine the different levels of parents' treatment, discipline, control, and expectation between heterosexual and homosexual children.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to scrutinize and understand the lived experiences of parents with homosexual and heterosexual children, one of the unstudied topics that have not yet been explored in the scientific community.

Significantly, this study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the participants' lived experiences as parent with heterosexual and homosexual children?
2. What are the difficulties and struggles experienced by the participants' as parents of heterosexual and homosexual children?
3. Is there a difference in treatment of children based on sexuality?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Phenomenology is a qualitative method designed to help researchers understand how individuals create meaning from experience and understand their social world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In discovering the lived-experiences of parents with both homosexual and heterosexual children. The researcher will be employing the qualitative research design anchored on the phenomenological tradition by Creswell (2008). The qualitative phenomenological design is centered on examining the depths of human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved. Qualitative phenomenological research tries to dig out how people construct a meaning or understanding of their real experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Neuman, 2006; Oakley, 2005; Polit and Beck, 2006).

The qualitative phenomenological approach in this study is deemed appropriate as it allowed the natural occurrence of rich stories, feelings, and experiences, including the struggles and challenges of parents with both homosexual and heterosexual children.

Participants

The participants are parents (either mom or dad) of children who identify as homosexual (gays or lesbians). Parents who have children who are transgender, intersex, bisexual, etc., are not considered participants in this study or excluded. The parents of homosexual children should range from mid-forties, early fifties, and last fifties having homosexual and heterosexual children.

The first participant is a 50-year-old businesswoman and mother. She is the mother of four children, two males, and two females. She is the mother of a homosexual son, her second child, who is 31 years old, single, a college graduate, and a government employee.

The second participant is a 55-year-old widowed mother who runs a restaurant business. She is the mother of three children, two males and one female. She has a homosexual son, her second child, who is 27 years old, in a relationship with a heterosexual man, a college graduate, and managing the family business.

The third participant is a 48-year-old widowed mother working as a community health worker. She has two children: one is a heterosexual son, and the other is a homosexual son. The youngest child is aged 22-years-old and still studying.

The fourth participant is a 59-year-old widowed mother who works at a lending company. She is the mother of five children, four males and one female. She has a homosexual son, the middle child, who is 32 years old, single, college graduate, and an executive director at a private firm.

Fifth participant is a 60 year-old widowed mother who is the president of their church group. She is the mother of five children, three females, and two males. She has a homosexual daughter, the second from the youngest child, 31 years old, college graduate, and working in the BPO Industry as a call center representative.

Sixth participant is a 57-year-old mother who is a street vendor selling "*kakanin or Philippine Delicacies*". She is the mother of four children, three females and one male. Her eldest daughter is lesbian who is 25 years old, still studying, living together with her girlfriend in their house.

Seventh participant is a 60-year-old widowed mother who is a food vendor. She is the mother of five children, four girls, and one boy. She has a homosexual daughter, second from the eldest who is 32 years old, in a relationship, college graduate and a marketing graphic designer in a private firm.

Sampling Procedure

The research used purposive sampling because the participants will be chosen based on criteria. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to identify and select relevant cases. The study will be using criterion sampling (Palinkas, et al., 2013) because the participants should passed the exclusion and inclusion criteria set by for the study.

Data Collection

The phenomenological research discovers in-depth the meaning of a particular aspect of the experience, words and language are viewed as the primary symbol system through which meaning is constructed and conveyed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994).

The gathering of information or data from the participants of this study involved semi-structured individual in-depth interviews used the self-made

interview guide questions or protocols which were phone recorded with their permission. Interviews allowed for a deeper insight into the actual experiences of the participants of this study. They also provided the avenue and opportunity to clarify themes (Merriam, 1998; Neuman, 1997; Polit & Hungler, 1995).

Procedure of the Study

In choosing the participants, the researcher will invite them to be part of the research study. Participant information sheets will be provided to them, and they will be asked to participate in the study by affixing their signatures. The participants will also be provided with a consent form to read and understand and are encouraged to contact the researcher if they are interested in participating in the study. Once the participants have read the information and agreed to keep taking part in the study, a time and place for interviews that work for them will be scheduled. A home visit will be set up with some of the people who wanted the researcher to come over to their house.

Data Analysis

The information will be gathered and analyzed using thematic analysis (Van Manen, 1997; Yin, 2003). Creswell (2008) stated that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The researcher will cluster the participants' descriptions of their experiences into statements and then will look for themes of their experiences and clustering them again into the most common and the most extreme of themes or meanings of experiences. The researcher will finally tie the most common and the most extreme themes together to make a general description of their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part contains the discussion of the information shared by the participants of my study as well as my analysis and discussions of the themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences.

Lived experiences as parent with heterosexual and homosexual children

Parenting is a role that has a significant influence on the development of many adults. While children learn from their parents, they also provide opportunities for their parents to learn from them and grow. The participants shared their experiences, stunned by the finality of their children's gender preferences. Most of the parents knew, on some level, the sexuality of their children as far back as childhood. When asked about their lived experience among parents with heterosexual and homosexual children, the participants' answers can be clustered into four themes - *Parental Acceptance of their homosexual children, Feeling of frustration lead to resignation, Awareness of Difference, and Denial.*

For all the participants, parents were able to share their different parental lived experiences of their children, most especially on their homosexual sons and daughters. I listened attentively as they shared their stories for me to capture the core of phenomenological inquiry.

Parental Acceptance on their homosexual children. Parental acceptance is typically defined as warmth, affection, approval, support, and positive involvement (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Schaefer, 1965; Bebes, et al., 2013). The participants expressed their acceptance of their homosexual sons and daughters. Though at first, they have a hard time accepting their children's sexual preferences. According to the participants, they already accepted that their children are homosexual because this sexuality was already evident in their ancestors, bloodline, or family history. And they believed that it was a product of inheritance. In contrast, according to Hammersmith (1987), parents try to find an outside reason for their child's homosexuality and become angry at this "perpetrator." The following statement below are from the study participant:

"... my husband will say that no matter whatever disciplinary measure you want to do even you beat him, that is the way he wants to be. You just leave things as is. That's why until now, he is like that. And Now he looks like a girl and he is joining beauty pageant and he has a boyfriend, and I just leave him alone and accepted his choice of sexuality.

"... I already accepted my gay son."

“It’s all about acceptance because we can’t do anything about that. It is thier inheritance.”

“We learn to accept him because both our family has this kind of gender preference or I can say inheritance, sir. I also have a sibling who is gay as well and the same goes with my husband. So it is not really difficult for us to handle this situation nor accept it.”

“... so we as parents, we just accept, support, and guide them.”

“Just during high school, my lesbian daughter really showed up for who she wanted to be. She changes her haircut to a boy’s haircut, including the way she dresses. But you know it runs from the blood sir from the side of my husband. Because most of my daughters cousin is really lesbian. It is inheritance and influence by the environment.”

Because of the positive effects of parental acceptance on their homosexual children, it appears that adolescents who feel accepted have higher self-esteem, perform better in the world, and are more protected from psychological distress in general. (Barber, et al., 2005; Bean and Northrup 2009; Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005). In contrast, a lack of parental acceptance appears to increase the risk for both externalizing and internalizing symptoms, such as depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation, among other things (Baumrind 1991; Fergusson, et al., 2000; Finkenauer et al., 2005; Garber et al., 1997). Moreover, parental acceptance, according to Bebes et al. (2013), may be especially critical for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals (LGBT). Homosexual adolescents face an increased risk of parental rejection as a result of their same-sex orientation, gender identity, and/or gender atypical behavior.

This present study shows the participants’ verbatim expression of their openness in accepting their children sexuality and shows support for their children gender preferences. Some parents experienced a dilemma on how to continue parenting their children after knowing they are gays and lesbians. They had taken some positive steps toward adjustment, acceptance, and support for their children. The research on homosexual adolescents says that more than half of parents who found out about their child’s sexual orientation first react with some level of negativity (D’Augelli,

et al., 2010; Heatherington and Lavner, 2008). However, regardless most parents become more willing to accept, or at least be more tolerant, over time.

Support groups, educational materials, and TV shows are thought to help parents move toward acceptance, which means that they have almost finished mourning and can accept that they are parents of a gay child (Savin-William, et al., 1998). During this stage, the family is back to normal. The son or daughter's homosexuality is no longer a secret or a source of shame (Savin-William et al, 1998). Parents start to feel more comfortable talking about their child's same-sex interests with other people, and through these conversations, parents become less sensitive to the issue. Even when many families react negatively at first, most families eventually come to terms with the situation as well as acceptance. (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle, 2013; LaSala, 2010)

Feeling of frustration that leads to resignation. When parents have recovered sufficiently from the initial shock, they are able to comprehend the gravity of their newfound knowledge and accept the reality of their child's homosexuality. The loss of their child's heterosexual identity, as well as their hopes, dreams, and expectations for their lesbian or gay child to live a traditional life (Mahoney, 1994). As I noticed, some of the study participants based on their verbatim and tone of voice during the interview, the feeling of frustration as they shared their live experiences with their homosexual children was transparent. As much as they want their children to be part of the sexual majority, however, their children choose to be part of the sexual minority.

"...we just accepted them and supported them, sir"

"...Also, sir. I will not expect sir that my lesbian daughter will change her preference since as I want mentioned a while ago sir. It runs from the blood. So we as parents need to accept, support, and guide them."

"...since both me and my husband just accepted the fact that my son is gay."

"... however, right from the start sir when he do homosexual action (gabinayot). I always make a follow-up that I do not like you to become gay."

“... I have this kind of tendency to accuse him, accusing him that I know who is with you. You are with your other gay friends, and watch out if I will caught you, I will slam your face on the ground. I really have an unpleasant attitude, sir. I don’t want him to be gay.

“... at first we have a hard time accepting our lesbian daughter for her choice of sexuality.”

It is possible that some parents do not react with shock because they have had prior suspicions that their son or daughter is different or that they are not heterosexual (Savin-Williams, 1998). Most often, the suspicion that parents are aware that their children are lesbians or gays comes from their children’s gender-atypical behavior or interest. As I noticed after the interview, the study participants feeling of frustration added to the lack of grandchildren and the special relationship of being in a grandparent role from this sexual minority. According to Mahoney (1994), their perceived lack of success as parents and as individuals and the improbability of changing their child’s orientation contributes to the frustration of the parent. Because of their child’s situation and memories from their youth, the dreams that they thought were part of adolescent development no longer made sense. They knew that many important events in a parent and child’s lives would not happen as planned, and they felt a strong sense of frustration when parents of the sexual minority realized this (Saltzburg, 2004).

According to Ben-Ari (1995), parents who are not very familiar with homosexuality may have a hard time with their kids. In the end, many parents said that they did not know much about homosexuality, had common stereotypes, or did not think about it at all. More parents thought that homosexuality was normal or had sympathy for gay and lesbian people than thought that it was a bad thing to be homosexual.

Awareness of Difference. I found out from the study that participants through their live experiences in remembering an earlier awareness may, in part, be reconstructed memories based on how they notice their gay and lesbian children during the developmental stage. The recalling enduring awareness was tied to the actual memory of the study participant, which helps to be aware of the gender difference between their heterosexual and homosexual children (Saltzburg, 2003). The following statement below are the live-experience of the study participants:

“... before she went high school, during her grade school years, she really dressed like a lady. Wearing those girly dress and all.... during high school my lesbian daughter really showed up for who she wanted to be. She changes her haircut to boy's haircut, including the way she dresses.”

“... However, from high school to college, that's the time I observed his talent as an event decorator. However, as I kept observing him, I had an assumption that he was not a gay or just pretending to be gay or doing feminine action.”

“... She has boyish actions that is really different according to her biological sex. Since she was a small little kid we already discovered that she is really different from her female siblings.”

“... when I and my husband notice that our other son is gay.”

The study participants were fully aware of the gender preference of their homosexual children. Despite this difference, they inculcate their homosexual and heterosexual children to respect one another regardless of sexuality and accept their preferences.

Denial. The first stage of the grief model of Kubler-Ross (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) others existing related literature has theorized that parents go through parallel stages of identifying as parents of gay men and lesbians to those of their children's coming-out process (Boxer, et al., 1991; De Vine, 1984; Herdt & Koff, 2000). The narrative stories of the participant at some level, the parents are aware of the truth but refuse to believe that their children belong to a sexual minority. As I noticed, some parents dismissed the child's homosexuality as only a phase or seek alternative evidence. According to Willoughby & Malik (2008), it is not clear why some parents deny the sexuality of their children while others support and encourage their child's sexuality. The study participants already have suspicious observations about the behavior of their children, but they tend to correct those behaviors according to their heterosexuality and gender appropriate behaviors. Based on the story of the study participant, the parent assumed that her homosexual son was not gay but pretending to be gay.

Parents assumed that their homosexual children were simply experimenting or going through a rebellious phase of their development (Boxer et al., 1991). Other parents who are still in denial period will then selectively edit details about the child when they are with others to maintain the family secret and preserve the family's social status

"... I did not hope that my son is gay because he had a girlfriend during high school, and when they broke up with his girlfriend, I think he was discouraged at that time. From there, he went out to be gay during college.

"... for me, sir, just to be honest, I don't want my child to become like that (being gay)."

Difficulties and struggles among Parents with both Homosexual and Heterosexual Children

Life is difficult, and difficulties and struggles are an unavoidable part of the experience of being human (Peck, 1978). Parents of gay and lesbian children take time, trust, and endurance in recognizing and integrating a new identity of their children. As I observed during the interview process of my study participants, they are concerned and afraid that their homosexual children will experience discrimination by the sexual majority. Coming out to one's parents has long been recognized as one of the most difficult and critical tasks gay men and lesbians may face (Ponse, 1978; Berzon, 1979; Troiden, 1988; Ben-Ari, 1995). According to Dube (1998), many parents are saddened about what they think their child will have to go through now. They only think about the sexual aspects of being gay or lesbian, believe that their child will be lonely in old age, or face discrimination that will make their child live a secret life. In this inquiry, the participants' difficulties can be clustered through one theme: *Afraid of being discriminated*.

Afraid of being discriminated. The study participants experienced difficulties in raising a homosexual child, no matter what their gender or the gender of their child was. They have no idea what it means to be gay or lesbian, these parents did not know how to stay in their child's life as they went into the homosexual world. In view of parents' predicament towards their children, they are scared that their gay or lesbian child will be the victim of discrimination because of their sexual orientation. The following

statement below are the live-experience of the study participants:

“...it will very difficult for a parent to see his gay son experience discrimination and bullying in their choice of sexuality. I am hurt every time my gay son encounter that scenario.”

“...it’s a struggle on how you as a parent save your gay son not be hurt and being bullied or discriminate.”

“...what I am concerned about or afraid about sir, if my lesbian daughter will experience discrimination because of her choice of sexuality. You know what I mean sir. This kind of preference is prone to discrimination. That is what I am having a difficulties in handling this homosexual thing as a parent. Because seeing my lesbian daughter either my heterosexual children being bullied.

“...seeing my homosexual child is in pain because of discrimination is a very difficult part for me as a parent. The pain that my child experienced is twice or thrice painful when a parent sees her child is in deep pain.”

“... I am really afraid that my homosexual son will be discriminated. I always told him that no matter how rich you are and if you are like that (being gay) people will look you down and underestimate you as a person.”

“What I am concern about or afraid about, if my lesbian daughter will experience discrimination because of her choice of sexuality. You know what I mean sir. This kind of preference is prone in discrimination. That is what I am having a difficulties in handling this homosexual thing.”

The participant’s above mentioned makes it abundantly clear that they wish to protect their children from any potential discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation in the future. For them, seeing their children being discriminated against, bullied, or undervalued because of their sexual orientation will be more painful than any other experiences. Despite the fact that they accept their children’s sexuality, they are powerless to prevent this from occurring in their children’s lives.

Their stories are based on their personal experiences, the study participants' stories convey a strong message: no parent wants their children to be judged by society or by the sexual majority because of who they are and what they want to become. According to Gonzales, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle (2012) in their study *The Positive Aspects of Being the Parent of an LGBTQ Child*, as parents learned more about stigma, discrimination, and prejudice, they often felt more compassion and empathy for other people. Many homosexuals, in contrast to their heterosexual peers, may feel the need to conceal their sexual orientation for fear of harassment and discrimination (Coenen, 1998). Moreover, parents gained a greater understanding of discrimination and a greater sense of empathy and compassion for their child. In addition, it is important to help parents in finding other parents and LGBTQ-affirming individuals with whom they can openly and honestly share their experiences and emotions (Malpas, 2011). These supports can assist parents in developing new meanings that foster generativity (Wren, 2002).

Different treatment of children based on sexuality

Parents' differential treatment could have significant impact in shaping the quality of parent-child relationships. It is also possible that variations in the quality of these relationships may influence differential practices (Kowal, et al, 2004). Parents may feel closer to, or more comfortable with, a particular child, and it is possible that these feelings of warmth are what causes them to treat the child in a different way (Larson & Richards, 1994).

The study participants shared their different live experiences in handling their children. As I listened to their stories, most parent implement equal treatment to their children regardless of the sexual orientation. Though parents have been challenged in evaluating their parenting treatment toward their children; *did I give them an equal opportunity? Am I too bias being a parent? Am I favoring this gay son or tolerating my normal child?* This kind conundrum creates a crisis on this parental treatment. According to the Theory of Parental Development, parents learn and grow exponentially as a result of their interactions with their children (Gonzalez et al., 2012). Dillon (2002) found that parents' cognitive flexibility and creativity, as well as their emotional sensitivity and attention to personal values, were all improved by interactions with children. By assisting their child's growth and fair parental treatment, parents can improve their own self-acceptance, authenticity, and openness to new ideas, as well as their relationships with others (Luvmour, 2011).

Based on the narratives of the study participant can be clustered through two theme: *Equal Treatment and Different Treatment*.

Equal Treatment. Most of the narratives of parent with homosexual and heterosexual children their parental treatment were equal. They practiced equal opportunity to their children for them to grow and foster. From this equal treatment, parent shows respects on the decision of the heterosexual and homosexual children. Based on their lived experiences they provided fair attention to their children even with the absence of their significant others.

“There is no different treatment between my gay son towards his heterosexual siblings. I treat them equally...”

“I did not have different treatment to them. I gave them fair attention until they grow up. Even when their father die, I raised them with an equal treatment and I did not leave their side so that I can raise them equally because they are all my children.”

“I am fair with my treatment to them regardless of their sexuality. As long as there is respect on their decision.”

“Honestly, I have an equal treatment between my heterosexual and homosexual daughter.”

“So far. None. Because I don’t discriminate my children. I am fair with my treatment to them regardless of their sexuality. As long as there is respect on their decision.”

According to the Association for Psychological Science (2011) raising children is difficult, and any parent who claim otherwise is deceiving themselves and their children. Taking care of children is both emotionally and intellectually draining. The efforts of some heterosexual parents to treat their lesbian or gay children and their heterosexual children in an equal footing treatment, challenged them to become an effective parent. According to Field (2001) stated straight mothers and fathers may and that on their sons’ and daughters’ coming out, they can no longer claim simply to be “parents”; instead, they become “the parents of lesbians and gay men.”

Different treatment. I discovered from the narrative stories of the participants some of the parents practiced different treatments towards their children based on the sexual orientation of their children. They control some of the activities or behavior of their homosexual children compare to their heterosexual child. It is also apparent that the study participants anchored their treatment to the sexuality of their children or practice heteronormativity treatment. Researchers who have studied parents' gender and sexual lessons to their children have discovered that heteronormativity plays a significant role in these lessons (Kane, 2006; Martin, 2009; Nolin and Petersen, 1992). Here are the following narrative stories from the study participants:

"...If I will assess myself as a parent, honestly, I have a different treatment among my heterosexual and homosexual sons. I mostly control my homosexual son compare to his siblings. If I say go home at 9PM, he should be at home at exactly 9AM. If I say no, it should be NO."

"... Yes! I have different treatment between my heterosexual son and homosexual son. In term of discipline, I am a little bet soft to my gay son and not soft to my heterosexual son."

"... Before sir, I have different treatment to them especially during we observe our eldest daughter is somewhat boyish. I control them to be a girl like her sister"

"... there is also a time, I am somewhat very strict to my gay sone and not to my heterosexual son. Crazy Right?"

According to Kowal, Krull and Kramer (2004), differential treatment is a common, and often necessary, event in family life; the different attributes of siblings expressed in their diverse ages, sex, interests, needs, and behavior make it appropriate that they would be treated differently by parents at least on some occasions. Children's perceptions that parents' differential practices are generally fair that tends to be linked with more positive sibling relationships, even when levels of differential treatment are relatively high (Kowal & Kramer, 1997; McHale, et al., 2000). Parents, on the other hand, do

not take their children's gender or sexual orientations for granted (Solebello & Elliot, 2011). Rather than that, they work actively to ensure that their children, sons and daughters, uphold gender norms and feel accountable when they do not (Martin, 2009; McGuffey, 2005; White, 1994).

CONCLUSIONS

Parenting is not an easy job. Indeed, it is one of the most stimulating yet emotionally and physically challenging opportunities in life. Parents have to juggle life's responsibilities on a daily basis, they become highly skilled at multitasking, especially during the trying times of their children's lives. Once you become a parent, you are committed to it for the rest of your life, and there is no turning back.

My journey with the seven courageous mothers who participated in this study allowed me to listen to and reflect on their varied and unique experiences handling their heterosexual and homosexual children. Some parents are still in the process of accepting the sexual orientation of their children, and some have entirely accepted the gender preferences of their children. Parents of heterosexual and homosexual children, they experienced challenges and difficulties in knowing how to provide equal treatment or different treatment of their children based on their sexuality. As the heteronormative society became more progressive they were able to adapt their parenting practices by allowing themselves to learn, relearn, and unlearn the new norms on sexual orientation and gender.

Evaluating and assessing their parental obligations makes them question whether or not provide fair opportunities to their children regardless of their sexuality or if they are biased in some way when dealing with their children's needs. The coming out process of their children is one of the most difficult tasks a parent faces in their parental responsibilities. It requires open-mindedness, endurance, and acceptance to embrace the reality of being the parent of a sexual minority. None of these parents felt prepared to embrace this reality.

Our parents are our first line of defense. These parents who participated in this phenomenological study were a great inspiration to those parents who are facing the same challenges with their children. These parents chose to accept the reality of their lesbian and gay children as long as there is respect, mutual understanding, and support coming from their heterosexual

children for them to build a strong parent-child relationship. The narrative stories of the participants will be a great reference for those future parents who might be experiencing the same challenges in their parental journey.

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