

Maria, Hanggang saan ang pagkababae mo? The Phenomenology of Women in a Homosexual Relationship

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Abstract

There are many studies about homosexuals, and mainly focus on gays and lesbians; only few studies exclusively focus on the femmes. This research centered on the femme within a homosexual relationship. The study aimed to explore the experiences of the femme and understand their perspectives for on future relationships. Eight Filipino femmes that are currently engaged in homosexual relationship were interviewed through phenomenological approach to know their lived experiences and perspectives. Analysis showed how they perceived lesbian relationships; why and how they engaged in their current relationship; how they view themselves while in their current relationship; the quality of their current relationship through its advantages and disadvantages; future plans for their current relationships; and thoughts regarding their possible engagement in future relationships.

Keywords

Femme, sexuality, lesbian relationship

Sexual orientation is a term used when pertaining to an individual's physical and emotional attraction to the opposite or same sex (American Psychological Association, 2008), which is said to be a product of society's expectations of a person. According to Miller, D. T., Taylor, B., & Buck, M. L. (2003) every society has different expectations based on their biological sex. Biological sex is determined by the presence of sex organs which is the vagina for females and penis for males (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 2014). In every society, men and women are expected to execute different roles and characteristics (Miller, et al., 2003). In line with this, according to Oakley (1972), males are expected to be masculine and provide protection to their family and society, and women are expected to be feminine and nurturing. Also, Blackstone (2003) suggested that society expects that a person should engage in a relationship with his or her opposite sex; that males should engage in a relationship with females, and females to males. However, there are people who

deviate from the said societal expectation; and those are the people who engage in same sex relationships.

People who engage in a relationship with the same sex are called homosexuals (Peel Public Health, 2009) such as gays and lesbians (American Psychiatry Association, 2014). Lesbian relationship is a kind of homosexual relationship which involves two female with sexual relationship (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Each female has her corresponding roles within the lesbian relationship; one is the butch who plays the role of the masculine and the other is the femme who is the feminine in the relationship. Although the femme fulfills the societal expectation of being feminine, she still deviates from the societal expectation of engaging in a relationship with the opposite sex; that is why the researchers aimed to know the experiences and perspectives of the femme in a same sex relationship to understand them.

With the aim to be familiar with the femme in a lesbian relationship, this study will hopefully increase the knowledge of



those who have read about the study and also enhance their awareness about the femmes. This study would generally be a basis for future studies since there is a lack of related studies about the femme. The study in general can be a contribution to the data bank of society on this types of study.

This research aimed to know and understand the life of the femme. As such, the researchers sought answers to questions about the experiences of the femme including why and how each of the participants started engaging in homosexual relationship; the current situation of this relationship; and the perspectives of the femme about her future life, including her plans for the course of her present relationship.

Homosexuality is a common research topic that had been discussed and studied by many researchers, but majority of them are more focused on gays and lesbian relationships in general. This study explored the experiences and perspectives of the femme in lesbian relationships. Thus, the researchers probed studies regarding homosexuality, women, lesbians and the comparison of homosexual relationships with heterosexual ones.

Homosexuality

The Center for Disease Control and National Institute of Mental Health (2004) suggested that homosexual individuals are said to experience a lot of discrimination and inequality than other genders because of insufficient understanding towards them. From among almost 700,000 suicide attempts each year, 30 percent (30%) are members of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. According to Hatzenbuehler (2011), gays, lesbians, and bisexual youth within an unsupportive environment about their preferred sexual identity have higher percentage of attempting suicide than those with supportive ones. The study conducted by Higa (2012) claimed that most of the negative experiences or harassments that

homosexuals experience were from their social environments such as their family, school or community.

Being a Lesbian

These days, being lesbian is an open topic. Some people define it as a form of sexual orientation. Others stated that this is being exclusively attracted to women. However, according to Koedt (2009), lesbianism is defined as women having sexual attraction or sexual activities with other women. A lesbian may dress like a man, act as a man or have a romantic and sexual relationship with other women.

One becomes a lesbian because of different reasons and factors. As a child, lesbians reported that they had a repetitive wish of being a boy or a man. Most of them have similar history of having this kind of wish and being attracted to other women. These factors are common predictors of becoming adult lesbians. Others also stated they were tomboy as a child. A tomboy is a woman who acts like a man, and is attracted to someone with the same sex before adolescence (Dewey 2007).

In terms of culture and society acceptance, lesbians are more accepted than gays, because as suggested by the study of Irvine (2013), most people find a lesbian relationship as a turn-on while gay relationship as unusual and awkward.

What Women Want: Psyche of Women

Women, most of the time are defined as the opposite of men and they are expected to have heterosexual relationships (Serano, 2013). But now, in the modern world, society is more tolerant of women in a lesbian relationship and women are now engaging in this kind of relationship. On this, Serano (2013), mentioned that many women are attracted to other women. Thus, this might be a factor why they entered into a same-sex relationship.

Majority of women are engaging in relationships to have someone by their side, to feel loved and to have a sense of identity.

Sanchez (2012) stated that most women derive their self-worth and enhance their self-esteem through engaging in a romantic relationship. While according to Harrison (2011), both men and women prefer a long term partner who is intelligent, kind and understanding. Women differ in a way because they mostly prefer someone who loves them in return. This could be related to the study of Cohen (2012) who found out that women want someone who can empathize and know when they are upset, and that they want their intimate partners to be emotionally attached to them. This is why most women become disappointed when their (male) partners are emotionally withdrawn.

Harrison (2011), claimed that women considered their partners' saying of "I love you" as a romantic act that they like because it shows sincerity and commitment to them as a partner. Thus, Marissa (2012) stated that women are more expressive and more often tell their feelings to their partners like "I love you" which they want to be reciprocated by their partner.

Love in heterosexual and homosexual relationships

According to Sanchez (2012), when individuals are in-love, they tend to exert a lot of effort to pursue and maintain their current relationship. Possibly, this is because of what Springer(2012) stated that falling in love is like smoking cocaine. It is very addictive and it offers the most wonderful state of consciousness. Boyless (2010) added a physiological explanation that there is a part of the brain that is activated when people fall in-love just like when they take cocaine.

Still according to Sanchez (2012), men are more interested in having sex than women, which can lead to inequality and inconsistency between both partners. Thus, women in heterosexual relationships have difficulties in negotiating autonomy and power in their relationship. The same study shows that women have the tendency

to look for and hold on to a relationship that is prone to unequal power.

Gottman (2003) claimed that homosexual and heterosexual relationships have similar emotional qualities that can produce satisfaction and stability in the relationship. But, partners in lesbian relationships are stated to be more satisfied and stable because they have greater intimacy and equality compared to other kinds of relationship.

Men and women, even gay and lesbian, do not differ in terms of love and how they perceive attractiveness. They have preferences in looking for a partner, and once they see it in other people, they feel attracted. One of the common characteristics that they like is physical attribute. According to Barelds, D. P., Dijkstra, P., Koudenburg, N., & Swamo, V. (2011), people naturally want partners who are physically attractive. Based on their study, when people are in a relationship they tend to be biased and perceive their partners as more physically attractive than the observers' objective view about them. Some people also feel attracted to each other regardless of physical attributes. Other studies found out that exclusive feelings and emotions are required between two people to be attracted to each other (Morgner, 2014). Therefore, physical attributes are not necessarily important to have feelings for another person.

Method

The researchers used qualitative design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of the femme in a lesbian relationship. Thus, phenomenological research was conducted for in-depth investigation into the subjective thoughts of the participants (Creswell, 2012).

In the selection process of the participants, the researchers used an indigenous method called *patanong-tanong*, in which the researchers went to different places or barangays in Puerto Princesa City, to ask for potential

participants. *Tanong* is a Filipino word for “ask”. Another method used was snowballing technique — some participants suggested other possible participants for the study. There were 18 initial participants. Six (6) of them did not respond to the letter of invitation. Twelve (12) of them were willing to participate, but one (1) of them did not fit the qualifications upon initial evaluation; another one was used for the pilot interview, and the other two (2) were interviewed but they were unqualified as participants after further

assessment. Thus, eight (8) were left to be the participants for the study, for they fit the following criteria set for participants in the study: (1) must consider themselves as the femme in a lesbian relationship; (2) must be officially committed with the butch; (3) must be 18 and above; (4) must be in a relationship for a minimum of six months; and (5) must be a current resident of Puerto Princesa City. For the profile of the participants, see table below.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participant	Bavarian	Apple	Kimberly	Nancy	Mae	Lina	Hershey	Mary
Age	18	19	21	24	25	28	36	49
Religion	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Had a Male Partner	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Has biological child	X	X	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓
Length of Present Relationship	8m	3y	2y	7m	9y	3y	5y	21y

Legend: RC – Roman Catholic; m – Months; y – Years

Before the final interviews of the final participants, the researchers conducted a pilot interview to be familiar with how the conversations would go during the final interviews. The femme interviewed for pilot study fit the laid criteria, but she was not counted as one of the final participants. The data gathered from her responses served as a baseline for the modification of the final set of questions. Prior to the official participants' final interview, the researchers established rapport by asking

from and sharing with the participants some basic background information, along with giving of informed consent. The researchers ensured that the participants know and understand the researchers' intention and their rights during the interview.

For the interview, the researchers used a one-shot semi-structured interview that lasted for twenty (20) minutes to one (1) hour. There were three researchers present during each interview: (1) the main interviewer; (2)

the assistant interviewer; and (3) another assistant who took notes and recorded all the information. There were three (3) main questions that were asked: (1) Paano nagsimula ang inyong relasyon? ; (2) Kumusta ang relasyon ninyo ngayon? ; And (3) Ano ang mga saloobin mo tungkol sa iyong buhay sa hinaharap? Follow up questions were asked based on the responses of the participants. Throughout the interview, the conversations were purely in Filipino. The main instrument for collecting information was audio recording. Seven of the participants agreed to the audio recording but one refused; so the researchers just took notes of her responses. After the interview, the participants were given a token of appreciation. Some of the interviews were done inside the house of the participants while others were in places the participants were most comfortable.

Furthermore, thematic analysis was used for evaluating gathered information. The researchers first transcribed the information gathered followed by familiarization with the data and the patterns that emerged by reading and reviewing the transcribed data. Afterwards, the researchers categorized the data and created different codes. Then the researchers combined the codes and formed themes.

Results and Discussion

With the phenomenological approach, the study produced three major themes using thematic analysis: a) Pre-engagement: Femme's Point of View; b) About the Relationship: Personal and Social Experiences; and c) About the Future: Prospects and Possibilities.

The results may only be relevant or applicable to the participants of the study

and not meant to generalize. Furthermore, the results that emerged from the analysis of the data were supported by the provided verbatim statements of the participants when they were interviewed.

PRE-ENGAGEMENT: FEMME'S POINT OF VIEW

The first major theme is about how the participants used to look at a lesbian relationship before they engaged in one. The participants expressed and reacted differently. For this reason, their thoughts and views about lesbians and lesbian relationships were divided into three subthemes based on their feelings which are the: a) Dislike, b) Acceptance, and c) Low satisfaction with male partners as a contributing factor for engagement.

Dislike: Feelings of aversion towards lesbians

Heteronormativity as described by Lovaas and Jenkins (2006) is the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation, and it states that only people between opposite sex must practice marital and sexual relationships. In the Filipino setting, heteronormativity takes a major role in the behavior of Filipinos. According to the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2011), the Filipino LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community continues to receive prejudice and discrimination in the Philippine society. Moreover, Gryboski (2013) stated that poorer countries with more central religiosity just like the Philippines have lesser people that believe homosexuality should be accepted. This study revealed that only three (3) out of the eight (8) participants expressed feelings of dislike towards lesbians. They narrated that lesbianism is atypical or not normal; and this stigma resulted to their manifestations of negative reactions such as disgust, rejection and other forms of dislike towards lesbians. Dislike is a feeling of distaste or hostility about something (Oxford Dictionary, 2015),

which is evident in three (3) of the participants' reports such as Nancy's, Hershey's, and Bavarians'.

"Eew, haha! Eew talaga! Nung una kasi may kakilala ako (femme), classmate ko nung first year; 'pag nakikita ko siya, eew talaga!" (Nancy, 24)

The statement above showed how Nancy looked at her lesbian acquaintance; bluntly expressing how disgusted she was whenever she saw that acquaintance. This kind of feeling together with other sense of dislike is called heterosexism, which is described as the negative attitude towards homosexuality including the belief that it is wrong, unnatural, or pathological (Manalastas & Pilar, 2005). Related to this were the statements of Hershey, 36 and Bavarian, 18, about lesbian couples in which they openly shared that those kinds of relationships made them express negative reactions: *"Ayoko ng lesbian, tingin ko abnormal. Tingin ko sa mga babae nila tanga."* (Hershey, 36) and *"Parang eew, parang ano ba 'yan, babae sa babae? Parang ganun, parang ayaw ko talaga. Makita ko lang sila naiilang ako."* (Bavarian, 18)

The statements above showed that the participants viewed lesbians and lesbian relationship negatively. These feelings can be associated to heterosexism and it was probably formed because the participants also grew up in the Philippines where heteronormativity exists as discussed earlier. Although heterosexism influenced some of the participants, they still ended up being in a relationship with the same sex. This shows that their views before engaging in the relationship, especially the negative ones above, are not important factors that hinder their decision for engagement.

Acceptance

Though three of the participants viewed lesbians negatively, there are participants who stated that they felt it was all right and seemingly acceptable to them. Such were the statements of Mae. She claimed that she never had any side comment, implying that

she had no form of judgment about lesbian relationships, revealing her acceptance towards them.

"Okay lang, tanggap naman. Hindi ako nagkaroon ng side comment sa kanila." (Mae, 21)

and,

"Yung ate ko kasi nagkaroon na rin ng lesbian na relationship eh okay lang din saakin. Parang wala lang. Normal lang talaga sa akin" (Mae, 21)

The second statement also showed that Mae's view about lesbian relationships is influenced by one of her family member's engagement to such kind of relationship, implying that her acceptance seems to be due to her identification with her older sister. The participant's opinion about lesbians can be explained by the study of Moore (2015), which states that individuals' perception of what is good and bad is highly influenced by their family members.

One of the participants shared that her acceptance about lesbian relationships was brought about by her attraction towards the same sex. Moreover, her attraction towards lesbians was brought about by her curiosity towards them; *"Attracted ako [to lesbians], kasi parang naiintriga ako."* (Apple, 19) Apple's statement seems to imply that skepticism can lead to attraction; such that as she tried to look for information about the lesbian, she must have found likeable characteristics that made her accept the lesbian.

Based from the participants' statements, acceptance is overall defined as the willingness to tolerate a situation but just in different forms. Since five of the participants already accepted the lesbians, they stated that they had no problem in engaging in a relationship with them.

Low Satisfaction with Male Partners as a Contributing Factor of Engagement

Before their current relationships, all of the participants experienced being in heterosexual relationships. Low satisfaction appears to be a contributing factor for the participants' engagement in lesbian

relationships as evident in their reports. Satisfaction refers to being happy or pleased due to the fulfillment of one's wishes, needs or expectations. According to Miller and Tedder (2011), satisfaction depends on the degree or level of women's expectations from their partner. So when their expectations are not met, women tend to be more dissatisfied. Similarly, based on the responses of the participants, satisfaction is the feeling of contentment and the state of being happy when their expectations are met by their partner. According to the participants, they experienced low satisfaction in the emotional and sexual aspects in their past (heterosexual) relationships.

Emotional Aspect: In the emotional aspect, the results showed that half of the participants revealed that they had feelings of discomfort being with males, even though they have had a romantic relationship with them. Two of them also revealed that they experienced low satisfaction towards their male partners on the emotional aspect of their relationship due to the way men express their love; “*Pag lalaki kasi ‘di masyadong showy.*” (Bavarian, 18) and “*Sa kanya [ex-husband] kasi hindi sweet.*” (Hershey, 36)

The participants seemed to be really particular on how their partners treat them, and it affected their level of satisfaction in their relationships. Lina also experienced low satisfaction in this, as she stated that being in a heterosexual relationship made her exert more effort but usually failed to get something in return, compared to her present relationship with a lesbian. In addition Mae, 21, also expressed a low emotional satisfaction with her previous male partner as stated in her statement:

“Yung past ko kasi, hindi kami normally give and take. More on give ako.’ Yung ex [boyfriend] ko nga noon kahit may motor hindi ako hinahatid, eh ‘yung ngayon [lesbian] kahit wala syang motor, kahit naka tricycle lang, ihahatid niya talga ako, tapos ‘yun uuwi sya, matutulog then susunduin ulit ako.” (Mae, 21)

The statement above showed that females are really particular on how they are being cared for and how their partners make them feel important even in the simplest acts despite of limited resources. By those simple actions, females' emotional needs are satisfied. As according to Gray (2013), in order to satisfy women's emotional needs, they have to feel loved, safe, heard, nurtured, appreciated and know that she can count on you. This correlates to the study of Harding (2010), which stated that emotional understanding and intimacy are the most important things in a relationship for a woman, which Bavarian, 18, Mae, 21, Hershey, 36 and Lina, 28 did not feel from their male partners.

In addition, one of the participants revealed that she experienced an emotional and physical abuse from her previous male partner as she stated that:

*“Yung tatay niya. ‘Yung tatay niya kasi laging lasing, nangbubugbog. Babaero. Tapos iniwan kasi ako ng asawa ko buntis pa ako. Kaya yun. Ayaw ko na. Ayaw ko na talaga,(to engage in a heterosexual relationship) Eto si ***(referring to her partner) mabait.” (Mary, 49)*

Mary's statement showed how her previous (male) partner treated her. And it seemed that her emotional needs were not satisfied as compared with her present (lesbian) partner whom she described as kind. Aside from the low emotional satisfaction that she experienced, it seemed that she developed a fear of engaging in a heterosexual relationship since she now considers her child's welfare as she stated that:

“Kasi mahirap na mag asawa ka ng lalaki tapos ‘yung anak mo pagdating ng syempre ‘pag lumaki dalaga ‘di ba? ‘Yung ibang lalaki ano eh, pangit ng ugali, hindi mo alam. Tapos ‘yung anak mo babae pa kaya ‘di na ako mag-aasawa ng iba.” (Mary, 49)

Sexual Aspect: On the other hand, the participants also revealed low satisfaction in the sexual aspect of their heterosexual relationships. Sex is an important component of a relationship and should provide satisfaction, because as Goertz

(2013), suggested, unsatisfactory sex may lead to a problem within a relationship. Hershey, 36; Lina, 28 and Mae, 21 shared their opinions about their sexual experiences with male partners. They claimed that it felt like it was a responsibility; something that they must give to their partners who were quite distant and lacked intimacy, as stated in the following transcripts:

“Nung past relationship ko sa lalaki, ‘pag sa kama, hihiga ka lang. Parang obligasyon mo na makipagsex sa kanya.” (Hershey, 36)

“‘Di ba minsan yung ibang babae hihilata na lang kasi iisipin nila obligasyon nila yun sa jowa nila ‘di ba?’” (Lina, 28)

and,

“Hindi ako happy, tapos ‘pag gusto niya, parang, alam mo ‘yung nakahilata ka lang; hindi ka nagmo-move. Unlike ‘yung ngayon parang may alam na ako sa make-out make-out na ganiyan, natuto na ako. Parang dito minsan ako pa ‘yung gumagawa ng moves, happy ka, nakatawa ka pa. Doon talaga siguro mga thrice lang kami nag-sex. Parang alam mo ‘yun, parang batang-bata ka pa, parang ni-rape ka lang na hindi mo alam, parang ganun.” (Mae, 21)

The statements above reveal the participants’ frustrations about having sex with men. It appeared like having sex just for the sake of sex is not enough, and seemed that the participants wanted something more such as enjoyment which they could not express directly. Also, basing from their statements, a passionate partner is what they prefer as they seem to believe that their partner’s way of expressing love affects their lovemaking. In the case of Mae, she enjoys having sex; not with men, but with her lesbian partner.

“Sa lalaki hindi ako mahilig makipag-sex, siguro ang pinakamaraming sex life ko is ‘yung ngayon sa lesbian (partner) ko. Kasi parang masaya ka eh.” (Mae, 21)

According to Schpancer (2015) women tend to want a relationship with less sex. In Mae’s statement, it showed that sex is not really important for women, instead the emotion behind, or the emotion that they feel while having sex is more important.

That if there is sex it must be passionate, and that respect for each other must exist. Maybe that is the reason why Mae seems to enjoy her sex life with her lesbian partner than with her male partner before.

ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

The second main theme relates how the participants’ present relationships started. It includes their personal and social relationship experiences during the engagement. Personal relationship experiences comprise information about their present relationship with the lesbian including the advantages and disadvantages of their relationship, and their personal problems being within the lesbian relationship. Social relationship experiences include information about what the couples experienced with their families, friends and the community where they belong that somehow affected their current relationship.

There are participants who claimed that their relationship started out just like in heterosexual relationships. That lesbian’s way of courtship does not differ from that of what a man does.

“Okay lang, parang lalaki manligaw. Kasi ‘yung usual na ginagawa lang din ng lalaki, ginagawa rin nila.” (Kimberly, 21)

and,

“Ano, ‘yung usually na ginagawa ng lalaki. ‘Pag kunwari ‘pag may problema ico-comfort ka tapos hatid-sundo, ganun din naman sa ginagawa ng lalaki. Ite-text ka, kakamustahin, ganun din. (Kimbely, 21)

On the other hand, some of them like Nancy and Mae did not experience courtship with their current lesbian partners; instead, they just admitted that they both liked each other and decided to be in a relationship.

In addition, all of the participants claimed that their relationship developed and started through text as Lina stated that; *“Ano, ah text lang, tapos naging friends kami sa text tapos nag-meet kami.” (Lina, 28).* Texting is done through the use of

mobile phones which almost anyone can purchase and use easily. Through mobile phone texting, people connect and get to know each other, establish friendship and even build a deep, romantic relationship. This kind of experience of the participants particularly on how they were courted by their current partner is said to be normal and socially acceptable today, as suggested by the study of DiDonato (2014) where it was stated that nowadays, texting is a new way of developing new relationships, even romantic relationships.

Personal Relationship Experiences

The participants' view towards themselves while within their current lesbian relationship was included as it may affect their personal relationship experiences. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2015), a person who is attracted with the same sex is considered as homosexual, and can be called gay for men and lesbian for women. There are two different roles in a lesbian relationship, first is the butch who dresses and acts as a man; and the second is the femme who acts as the woman within a lesbian relationship. When the participants were asked on how they view themselves, if they consider themselves as a lesbian, all of them answered that they do not. They consider themselves as a female with a female partner. Their role in their relationship is the "girlfriend" or female; therefore, they still view themselves as different from homosexuals.

The perspective of the femmes opposes the knowledge that when a female enters in a lesbian relationship, she is already considered as a lesbian. In addition, one of the participants expressed being offended and discriminated when she was asked by other people if she is a lesbian. This implies that femmes do not view themselves as part of the LGBT community.

Lesbian Relationship Advantages: Being in a lesbian relationship has advantages, as all

the participants claimed. One of those advantages is that the participants feel more comfortable with their present partners compared to their past men partners, such as what Kimberly stated;

"Hindi nga ako komportable 'pag kasama ko sila (males), naiibahan talaga ako, hindi ko alam kung bakit, ewan ko ba. Pero nagkakagusto naman ako; actually nagkaka-crush ako sa lalaki pero hindi ako komportable kasama ang lalaki." (Kimberly 21)

The statement above represents the feelings of three participants (Bavarian, 18; Nancy, 24; and Hershey, 36) about their discomfort being in a relationship with males. On the other hand they stated several characteristics of the lesbians that make the participants feel more comfortable, such as being kind, caring, affectionate, and sweet and do no lewd actions and respect their partner, such as what Mae suggested on her statement, "*Walang malalaswang moves, as in respetuhan talaga.*" (Mae, 21). The participants felt discomfort probably because men have different ways in expressing their affection towards their partners, which the participants did not enjoy. Men are said to be the opposite of women that's why they cannot completely understand women; while on the other hand, as Mae added, lesbians in general know how to comfort their female partners or how to approach a woman properly as they are also women that feels exactly what their partner feels. According to Cohen (2012) women want someone who can empathize and know their feelings; they want their intimate partners to be emotionally attached to them. This is exemplified by Mae's statement below.

"Babae sila, alam nila kung paano i-approach ang babae, kung paano lalambingin... Alam nila ang kiliti ng babae." (Mae, 21)

The statement above shows that lesbian partners are able to satisfy what a woman wants within the relationship as all of the participants described their partners as sweet, caring and generous. The statements are connected and could be supported by the

study of Gottman (2003) that partners in lesbian relationships are stated to be more satisfied and stable because they have greater intimacy and equality compared to any other kind of relationship. According to Hershey, 36 and Lina, 28, intimacy and equality in their relationship is maintained through their sex life; however, in a lesbian relationship, their sex life is not as active compared to their past heterosexual relationships, yet they still enjoy doing it more than they did with males before.

“Satisfied, ‘di ba kasi ano eh, ‘yung ‘pag ginagawa namin ‘yan nandun ‘yung love, ‘yung affection, nandun ‘yung passion, nandun ‘yung two become one.” (Lina, 28)

and,

“Sex hindi na active, pero there is a lesbian love that exists. Mararamdaman mo may care eh, para bang best friend, mas passionate lang. Sa tender love and care mas ano, babae kasi sila.” (Heshey, 36)

The statement above showed that the participants feel that having sex with lesbians are more emotional and makes them feel positive which results to them enjoying the act compared to that with males. Furthermore, women are more particular in the emotional relationship they have with their partners rather than centering on sex in their relationship. According to Schpancer (2013) women are bio-programmed to value relationship such as companionship rather than sex which is connected with Hershey’s statement. *“Sa lesbian, sex life is not active more on companionship siya.”*

Nancy stated that another plus factor is that lesbians have the ability to do both men’s and women’s job which is a huge advantage for her. *“Lahat ng gawaing bahay siya ‘yung nag-aasikaso tapos ihahatid niya ako sa trabaho, tapos pag-uwi ko kakain na lang”;* *“Kaya nila ang gawaing babae at lalaki” (Nancy, 24).* This kind of ability and diligence — lesbians doing a wider range of things — could stand as a form of sincerity and commitment for the femme; and also this kinds of effort make her feel that she is loved.

For Apple, the inability to bear a child is what she considered an advantage in

having a lesbian relationship; *“Advantage, siguro ano... ayaw ko kasi magkaanak.” (Apple, 19).* Considering her age, this means an advantage for her as she is still young to bear a child because at her age, female teens are expected to keep their responsibility as a student and not as a parent.

Lesbian Relationship Disadvantages: Being unable to have their own child is a huge disadvantage for older participants such as Mary, 49 and Mae, 21. It is probably because they are now ready to be parents, and being unable to have their own child saddens them; that is why they are considering adoption and artificial ways of having a child. Their feelings of sadness due to their inability to have a child can be explained by the study of Powdthavee (2009), which stated that there is a wide belief in every culture that child brings happiness in a relationship. In contradiction, according to some scholars (Alesina 2004, Di Tella 2003, Twenge 2003, and Clark 2002), partners who have children experience lower level of happiness in life and in their marital status compared to partners with no children.

Moreover, another disadvantage that two of the participants claimed is that their lesbian partner is quite jealous in some ways which is sometimes hard for them to deal with, as Mary and Bavarian stated; *“Magalit ‘yan siya (Butch) kapag makipagkwentuhan (ako) sa mga lalaking ‘di niya kilala.” (Mary, 49); “Minsan ‘yung pagseselos niya parang hindi sa tama. Wala sa lugar, Kasi lahat na lang, lahat na lang. Lalaki at sa lesbian.” (Bavarian, 18)*

The statements above showed that the participants’ partners still have their innate female characteristics that show in their relationships whenever their partners are with males as explained by Callaghan (2010), that evolutionary speaking, compared to men, woman tend to get jealous more because they always wanted to feel secured in their relationship. Thus, evolutionary speaking, the participants being with a male threatens their partners.

Another disadvantage also exists within the participants' relationships, that is, they cannot easily express their current relationship status to anyone like in the case of Hershey where she admitted that she has never been proud of her current relationship.

"Alam mo 'yon, 'di ka proud... It's a sin e, hindi ka pwedeng maging proud. 'Di ka proud, ingat ka palagi." (Hershey, 36)

The above statement suggested Hershey's consideration about her spiritual beliefs. It appeared that she believes her commitment to a lesbian relationship is a sin and has its possible consequence, that's why she claims it as something she can never be proud of. Hershey claimed that she grew up in a religious family in which moral standards were aligned with the spiritual and religious tradition. According to Moore (2015), parents and other close family members affect the child's morality development and standards. Morality is the individual's perception of what is good and bad in his or her behavior (Moore, 2015). If a person acts or does things that are not aligned with his or her moral standards, the person might feel shame and guilt due to incongruence between his or her beliefs and behavior (Tangney, et. al, 2007). In this case, Hershey's commitment in a lesbian relationship is directly affected by morality, leading her to behave in that way but is not something that would make them leave their relationship as they are still engaged with their partners.

Social Experiences

The participants' relationships were influenced by their social experiences as well and not just by each other. As stated by Miller, et al. (2003), men and women are expected to execute different roles and characteristics. This is further elaborated by Oakley (1972) and Blackstone (2003) who suggested that the relationship of the participants with their partners is something that crosses the expectation of others, such as stated from their social experiences. When they were asked about their experiences on their current relationship or asked about its

advantage or disadvantage, all of the participants provided an answer which is related to such.

Influences of family: One aspect of their social experience is influenced by their family. It can be said that the family of both the femme and the lesbian influenced their current relationship at some point which affected the way they look at their relationships such as the stated disadvantage where one of the participants claimed that it is something she can never be proud of. On the other hand, it appeared that they are more welcome in the (butch) lesbian's family than their partner (the butch) in their family. It is evident in the reports of three (Mae, 21, Kimberly, 21 and Mary, 49) participants as they experienced warm and positive welcome from their partner's family.

"Ah, close ako sa pamilya niya. Eh kasi sa kanila man, sa part ng mga lesbian welcome ka talaga." (Kimberly, 21)

and,

"Tsaka 'yung mga kamag-anak niya magkasundo kami, mababait sila" (Mary, 49)

One of the participants, Kimberly, 21, experienced negative reactions from her own family because of her current relationship. She reported that she and her partner stayed with her family for two years; however, she only felt a sense of rejection. She had to go away from her house because her family did not want her to commit to a relationship with a lesbian. Until now, her relationship with her family is in a poor status. Hershey also experienced negative reactions from her family because of their spiritual beliefs; *"Ayaw ng family ko, that is a sin from above."* (Hershey, 36)

This belief is possibly affected by our culture, because as a country such as the Philippines which has Christianity as its predominant religion, comprising 82.9% of the whole population (Department of Tourism, 2011), Filipinos consider the decisions of the Church that accords their belief to the Bible where it is written that those people who practice homosexuality will not enter the kingdom of God (1

Corinthians 6: 9-10). So, religion and cultural belief really affect the participants' current relationship and other's perception of it.

Influences of Friends: Another aspect that influenced their social experiences aside from their family is their friends. Friends also play a large role in a person's life because a friend gives a person a sense of identity, happiness and companionship and their opinion is important to a particular persons (Collingwood, 2006). So, when the participants opened their relationship to their friends for the first time, most of them received negative opinions and reactions from them.

"Nag-away kami ng tropa ko. Nung una hindi sila maniwala. Siyempre barkada mo icha-challenge ka. 'O? Kayo talaga?' Hindi sila masaya talaga. 'Di nila matanggap, magbo-boyfriend ka na lang babae pa." (Bavarian, 18)

and,

"Tinalikuran ako ng friends ko, masakit, pero syempre masaya ako dito eh." (Hershey, 36)

The statements revealed that they really experienced rejection from their friends but they still stood by their decisions because they were happy. Although most of them received negative reactions from their friends, some of the participants are still supported by the said friends even though it is hard for them to accept their (participants') friend's decision. The participants believe that a real friend will accept and support them no matter what their decision is.

Being in a relationship with a lesbian was very challenging for the following participants as they stated:

"Everyday is a challenge for us... Alam niyo sa totoo lang, sa relationship between same sex katulad ng ibang tibo sa babae, lagi kayong natest 'yong relationship niyo by opposite sex kasi ang baba ng tingin nila sa relasyon ninyo; ang rupok niyong tingnan para sa kanila. Babae ka pa rin, bibigay ka rin sabi nila." (Lina, 28),

"Ingat ka palagi. Hinuhusgahan ka eh, mahirap mag-explain lalo na sa bata. Parang dapat bang umakto kang hindi bastos sa mata ng society... Eh sa kalagayan namin, we must act carefully."(Hershey, 36)

and,

"Alam mo yung tipong nakatumpok sila, nagkukwentuhan, nagtatawanan tapos paglalabas ka tatahimik sila tapos paglampas mo tsaka sila tatawa ulit, ganun."(Kimberly, 21)

Societal Influences: The statements above showed that the participants did not just experience rejection from their family and friends but also from other people in society. The discriminations that they experienced affected their thinking and functioning, as evident in the participants being more conscious about their behaviors to avoid other's criticisms against them. Anis the excerpt from Hershey's statement earlier: *"Parang dapat bang umakto kang hindi bastos sa mata ng society... we must act respectfully."* She feels that being in a lesbian relationship is prone to negative reactions and criticisms, driving her to behave in such a manner she believes as respectful. Furthermore, it showed that it is not just the participants who experience discrimination but also their lesbian partners. According to the study that was conducted by the Center for Disease Control and National Institute of Mental Health (2004), homosexuals are said to experience a lot of discrimination and inequality than other gender due to insufficient understanding of them. In addition, the study of Higa (2012) revealed that most of the negative experiences and harassments that homosexuals experienced were from their social environment or community.

However, in the case of Lina, 28, both the community where she lives and that of her partner openly accepted her current relationship status. It was because she believed that personality outweighs gender preferences and that personality is much more important because it is what people like about a person.

Although some of the experiences and reactions were positive to some of the participants, most of the reactions were negative, if not surprised. This suggests that their social experiences are a problem that they face, be it with family, friends or the community. Even though this is the case, the participants continued their relationship with their partners which showed that this did not hinder them to stay in the relationship.

ABOUT THE FUTURE: PROSPECTS AND POSSIBILITIES

The third main theme focused on the participants' prospects about the future, and the possibilities that they may undertake. Prospects involved their plans about the course of their present relationships while possibilities include their new partners in the future. Thinking about the future seemed like establishing a preconception, making four of the participants unable to give clear thoughts about it easily. They were not able to give certain opinions maybe because they were still not in the situation.

"Hindi ko alam kung anong susunod na mangyayari. Ayoko na kasi magsalita ng tapos kasi kinakain ko." (Bavarian, 18)

Plans with the current relationship

However, four of the participants already planned and envisioned their future. As for Lina, planning with the person that you want to be with in the future is vital, and such dream-building should cover each person's ideals to establish a realistic and practical set of plans for the betterment of the relationship.

"So kung papasok ka sa isang relasyon at hindi kayo nagplano, 'wag niyo na ituloy. Don't build your dreams with a person with no dreams. Okay? Kasi kayo mahihirapan. Kasi kami we're building our dreams one by one. Okay? And we're building out dreams together." (Lina, 28)

The statement above emphasized that she wants definite plans for their future and it is important for her to have someone with the same dreams as her and has clear plans for the future. This showed the

significance of for Lina of being ready before engaging in a romantic relationship. And such decisions of engagement require a sense of certainty to take consequent plans on track. Being sure of engaging in their present relationship is what Apple, 19 and Mary, 49 emphasized; they shared that they do not see themselves separating from their partners and hoped that they will still end up together. As the participants disclosed their plans, marriage was marked as their primary step to start their life as official couples. Half of the participants seemed to believe that marriage is a substantial element in forming a proper relationship. Though they are aware that same-sex marriage in the Philippines is not allowed, the participants still want to get married. This might be because the participants desire to be recognized by society in their life-time commitment, or because of security reasons including having equal financial protection, or they wanted to be considered that their commitment is a human right that must be equally given (Robinson, 2003). In order to enjoy their formal commitment, the participants have their own ways to achieve such end; one of which is Lina who shared that they have been saving money for their plans of getting married abroad. She stated *"Kung suswertehin kami, makapag-apon, outside the country."* Mae also shared that she and her partner has plans to marry each other.

"Kasi may plano kami magpakasal since 'yung engagement namin is next year December." (Mae, 21)

Having a baby is the consequent step of half of the participants (Nancy, 24; Mary, 49; Lina, 28; Mae, 21) after marriage. To form a nuclear family structure, such kind of family structure consisting of a mother, a father and a child (Luscombe, 2014); where the participants become the mothers and their partners as fathers, the participants are willing to adopt or undergo artificial insemination.

"Either magte-test tube baby kami tapos bago kami magpapakasal or magpapakasal muna kami." (Lina, 28)

The statement above showed that Lina still wants to have her own child or children in different possible ways even though she is in a lesbian relationship; this may be because a child gives happiness and a feeling of fulfillment for her, which was suggested by the study of Pappas (2011), stating that children bring joy to a family.

Mae, 21, Nancy, 24, Kimberly, 21, and Lina, 28 also shared many positive responses about their future including their many plans with their partners. This suggests that the participants do not regret being in a relationship with their current partners since they plan to stay with them in the future. In relation to their initial views before engagement, even though most of the participants strongly disagreed or disliked lesbian relationships before, it did not hinder them to stay in their current relationship.

"Hindi ko nakikita na maghihiwalay kami sa future." (Apple, 19) and; "Siguro nga habambuhay na kami." (Mary, 49)

Other Future Partners

The participants were asked if they would still prefer same sex or a heterosexual relationship in the future if ever they engage in another one other than the current. All of the participants were able to experience having a male partner before they engaged into their current relationship and because of this, according to four out of eight participants, they do not want to have male partners in the future again. It will be hard to have male as a partner again because they have certain unlikable characteristics.

"Di ko alam, ayoko na kasi 'pag sa lalaki. Ayoko 'pag sa lalaki nagagalit. Siguro sa tanong na 'yan siguro ayaw ko." (Mary, 49)

The statement above showed that Mary already had negative thoughts about males which are affecting her perception about them and her preference of choosing her romantic partner in the future. She stated that she is afraid of what a male partner might do to her daughter thus she chose to have a lesbian partner.

"Kasi mahirap na mag asawa ka ng lalaki tapos 'yung anak mo pagdating ng syempre 'pag lumaki dalaga 'di ba? 'Yung ibang lalaki ano eh, pangit ng ugali, hindi mo alam. Tapos 'yung anak mo babae pa kaya 'di na ako mag-aasawa ng iba." (Mary, 49)

However, Apple and Lina stated that they may engage in a relationship with males in the future with their different respective reasons. Apple's statement was *"Pwede pero baka trip na lang"* and, Lina's, *"Posible kasi doon ako nag umpisa eh."*

Their statements show that it would be possible that they would engage in heterosexual relationship again, but Apple added that she might not be serious about it. On the other hand, Lina did not deny the fact that it is still possible because it was where she started.

When asked whether if they would engage again in a relationship with lesbians in the future, the following participants expressed their dislike:

"Di ko na makita na magkakarelasyon pa ako ng tomboy." (Apple, 19)

and,

"Hindi na ako magle-lesbian haha, napasubo na nga ako diyan, dadagdag pa ba ako?" (Nancy, 24)

Also, Apple which was curious about lesbian relationships already decided to not engage in another one. It might have satisfied her curiosity already and had enough of it. On the other hand, Nancy seemed to be experiencing problems with her current relationship which she feels she cannot back out on. Her statement suggested that she is just in her current relationship because she already got involved, and if she would have a choice in the future she will choose not to enter in a lesbian relationship again.

Mary also stated that she will never again enter in a relationship with a lesbian in the future due to her age. She added that she really did not intend to engage in such relationship in the first place; she just got engaged because her partner already supported her daughter's education and provided their other necessities.

The statements suggest that the participants do not plan to be in lesbian relationships in the future. Although Mary said she would not engage in a heterosexual relationship because of their characteristics, she also stated that she is not interested being in another lesbian relationship in the future. Such is the same with the rest where they do not see themselves being in a lesbian relationship in the future. It might be because of hardships or old age, but their prospects are all the same. Half of them considered the possibility of engaging in heterosexual relationships, suggesting that if their current relationships do not work out, the participants would most likely not engage in another lesbian relationship anymore.

Conclusion

When the participants had low satisfaction with their relationship with males, their dissatisfaction became a factor that led them to engage in a lesbian relationship. However, on their experiences on their lesbian relationship, the way they stated the advantages suggest that they are satisfied with what their partners could provide them. Though they plan to continue their current relationship, they do not think that they would engage in another one. In relation to their dissatisfaction with male partners being a factor of engaging with homosexuals instead, their hardships and problems could be a contributing factor as well. As they have realized that although their partners have their own advantages, they also have disadvantages which led them to rethink their actions in the future. Some of them think it could be possible to go back to heterosexual relationships and some think not to engage in lesbian relationships anymore.

In light of the disadvantages of being in lesbian relationships, the participants' statements revealed the discrimination against their relationship not only from the community but from their friends and families as well. Some of the participants plan to marry but are still trying

to earn money to do so, because same-sex marriage is not really supported in the Philippines and they need to go to another country to marry.

Going back to the relationship in which the participants are currently in, it was already mentioned how they would probably not engage in another lesbian relationship anymore and how their low satisfaction on male partners became a factor in engaging with homosexuals. It suggests that the participants are trying to make their lesbian relationships work. Although this might be the case, the statements that the participants shared also suggest that their relationship is working out and they still have plans on what to do in the future.

Generally, the study revealed that the participants who are the femmes in their relationship have tried out how lesbian relationships work. Factors could be their experiences from their male partners, curiosity about it or just practicality. After their relationships with a butch, they could still engage in heterosexual relationships. They still claim attraction towards opposite sex whenever they see an attractive male, but most of them claimed that they do not want or they are still confused whether they would or not enter into another heterosexual relationship. It might be because they currently are in a relationship that they do not think of engaging in another, but as they claimed that if their current relationships end, they would either not engage on another lesbian relationship or consider the possibility of engaging with males.

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