

Diasporic Queer in Classroom: The Resiliency of Filipino Gay Teachers in International Schools

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Abstract: This phenomenological study explored the Filipino gay teachers' lived experiences in selected international schools overseas, including various roles they played, challenges they met, the mechanisms they applied to cope, and the resiliency they embodied as they managed the challenges posed by the school and community. Using the concept of resiliency, alongside Giorgi descriptive phenomenological method, this study captured the meaning structure that gave sense to the whole unique experiences of gay teachers in the diaspora. The findings revealed the patterns and structures of phenomena as lived by the respondents who made necessary mechanisms to survive. The study serves as empirical evidence that centers on the profound extrapolation of experiential accounts of gay teachers as they perform their duties and carry out their responsibilities mandated by their international schools overseas.

Keywords: Filipino gay teachers; diaspora; Giorgi method; resiliency

1. INTRODUCTION

The Commission of the Filipino Overseas Statistics on Philippine International Migration (2015) presents the statistical profile of the documented Filipino abroad. Unfortunately, the figures do not present the exact data of the Filipino teachers, regardless of their gender, abroad. However, despite the absence, it does not mean that the Filipino teachers, specifically, gay teachers remained non-existent. In fact, one may consider them as part of the thirty-nine percent or more than the seven hundred million recorded overseas professionals based on the 'recent' study.

With this lack of specific record, the Filipino gay teachers' struggles and challenges they have gone through in diaspora remained unidentified and unexplored, including the impact of these challenges to them. Therefore, this paper became a significant study as it unfolded those challenging experiences and turned them into substantial contributions in the fields of teaching and gender studies, highlighting gay teachers in the overseas.

The researchers adhered to the following objectives about the gay teachers' lived experiences in international schools overseas: (a) Explain the fundamental meaning structure of the lived experiences of the Filipino gay teachers in international schools and community abroad; (b) Identify the roles and challenges of gay teachers in their school and community; and, (c) Explore how gay teachers see teaching overseas.

The said objectives could offer ways of addressing the problematic situation of gay teachers abroad by exposing a more comprehensive understanding of the plight of the Filipino queer teachers in foreign lands.

This work likewise helped in presenting a clear depiction of gay teachers' personalities, roles they played in schools, challenges they faced in community, and resiliency they embodied to surpass all trials posed to them.

Though comprehensively presented, it must also be stated that the findings of this study reflected the investigative nature of the project and did not give, or at the very least, offered a complete or definite account of the Filipino gays in diaspora.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 The Filipino Gay Workers

The Philippines has limited scholarly works reporting the experiences of the gay teachers in diaspora. This limitation has been likewise reflected in the specific records of gay teachers in Commission of the Filipino Overseas (CFO).

United Nations Development Programme (2014) commissioned a study chronicling the legal and social environment faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in the Philippines. The study confirmed that many homosexual Filipinos, whether professionals or not, have experienced discrimination and non-acceptance. It specifically examined LGBT experiences from a development-and-rights perspective which promoted understanding of the inherent human rights of LGBT people and the stigma and discrimination they faced. It also outlined steps toward LGBT-inclusive development work for UNDP and the UN system; USAID and the US Government; and other development partners came up with reports like this and other social and multimedia products. However, it should be mentioned that despite the attempt of exposing, it remained still lacking.

Notably, in the said study, it used a research evidence of employment discrimination and its effects on LGBT people (Sears & Mallory, 2011). Likewise, it discussed the discrimination faced by LGBT workers in their employment, particularly the transgender Filipino women whose individual right to express their gender identity in the workplace remained denied (Alegre, 2006). More so, Rubio and Green (2009) stated that the Filipino gay men experienced greater anxiety associated with less conformity to a prescriptive 'male' role. They had to work harder to attest their qualifications, received more punishments for the same mistakes than of a 'straight' coworker, and worst, they had less priority for promotions compared to others (Concordia, Cortez, Panaligan, & Velasco, 2009). As these conflicts persevered, Wright (2017) stated that the Philippine society's recognition for gay sensibilities, which shaped the Philippine culture, remained a delusive promise.

1.1.2 Filipino Gay Experiences

Garcia (2007) presented a collection of different genres that discussed the flight, adversities, personalities and emotions of homosexual characters in the Philippines. Homosexuality, being a major concern of the books, presented thematic narratives on what and how it was to be a homosexual in society.

The books functioned as emblems of the growing homosexual community perceived to be fragile, composed of healing souls that affirmed one another. The urgency of forming a community that embraced all kinds of homosexuals become clear in the *Ladlad*, a series where themes on *Kabaklaan* intersect, if not merged, with the homoerotic self-avowals of those “other gays” whose primary suffering concerned their desire and the difficulty of pursuing its fulfillment.

To open another avenue for the often misunderstood and least likely to be understood segment of the Filipino society, Holmes (2005) published an epistolary book that recounted experiences of Filipino gays. Though these books were published, the gap in exploring the experiences of gay teachers in the foreign land persisted.

With the attempt to produce comprehensive findings on the lived experiences of the Filipino gay teachers, the present study serves valuable in filling in the gap in the fields of education and gender studies.

1.1.3 Resiliency Concept

The resiliency provides a conceptual framework for considering the strengths-based approach in understanding human development and informing intervention design. The American Psychological Association (2014) similarly defines resilience as the process of proper adaption in facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress.

In describing a resilient individual, there should be the presence of the two coexisting preconditions, which include their abilities (a) to recognize the effects of stressful situations, and (b) to experience positive outcomes despite sources of adversity.

On the one hand, the resilience of affective-grounding clouds to many factors like biological, psychological, social, and cultural which interact with each other resulting in a stressful experience. On the other hand, the resilience that a person embodies in an event has been likened to the nature of metals where hard and solid materials seemed unbreakable, a contrasting distinction against those that referred to as frail, malleable, and soft.

In real-life comparison, the highly positive emotionality characterized the resilient individuals. By this, it means that one can roll with the punches and spring back into action.

The difficulties of LGBT workers continued as worse compared to the ‘normal’ employees. The life stressors challenged gay teachers as they performed their roles of their profession and responsibilities posed by their communities.

The lived experiences defined the resiliency of gay teachers abroad. In fact, with the challenges that they encountered, this study formed in the shape as these teachers found ways and means to make things work out better. So, as one did his duties, responsibilities, and obligations, he managed to cope with them and remained firm against the struggles he faced for the good of himself, including the community and school that he served.

2. METHODOLOGY

This purely qualitative research study aimed to extract the lived experiences of five (5) Filipino gay teachers in selected international schools in Indonesia, Thailand, and Turkey. The qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of the study participants and understand the meaning and interpretations that they give to behavior, events or objects (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The study employed Giorgi (2009) method of phenomenology and concept of resiliency to explore the lived experiences of the selected overseas Filipino gay teachers who qualified from the sampling plan. Further, the purposive and criterion sampling helped in choosing respondents who ideally met the drafted standards established by this study and who could provide information relevant to the nature and scope of the survey (Penner & McClement, 2008).

With this, the researchers understood how lived experiences of five overseas Filipino gay teachers shaped the meanings of their lives and appreciated their unique conditions. The researcher determined the final number of the respondents based on the saturation of the data.

To carry out the aims of this research, the researcher first did a thorough investigation to locate where Filipino gay teachers typically teach. Second, he formally asked the permission to the ideal respondents for the conduct of the in-depth interview with validated open-ended and self-made interview guide questions, focusing on challenges met by the respondents, measures to address these hurdles, and best coping skills. The conduct of the interview happened through Skype interviews, video calls, FB messages, and emails. After the interview, the researcher coded, transcribed, and categorized the answers of the respondents. Only this time that the corpus seemed ready for interpretation with the guide of the theories used in this study. Most importantly, the researchers set up an audit trail by documenting the detailed procedures covering Giorgi descriptive process of phenomenology.

Concerning ethical considerations, the researcher conducted the procedures on ethical engagement in research to protect the respondents' identity. Also, to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality of shared information, the respondents had their pseudonyms. Above all, the respondents received informed consent forms that explicitly stated the objectives of the study, the right to withdraw, risk, benefits, duration of the interview, and a clause stating the ethical considerations, and voluntary participation. With this, the study would not pose severe ethical problems to the Filipino gay teachers in the diaspora.

2.1. *Giorgi's Descriptive Method of Phenomenology*

Broome (2011) outlines the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method of research of Amedeo P. Giorgi. The more notable work, Husserl's descriptive phenomenological philosophy, influenced Giorgi method to become an alternative epistemology for human science research.

Each step of Giorgi’s modified Husserlian way clarified the context of the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

The researchers meticulously and faithfully conducted the following steps: (1) assumed the phenomenological attitude, (2) read entire written account for a sense of the whole, (3) delineated the meaning units, (4) transformed the meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements of their lived-meanings, and (5) synthesized a general psychological structure of the experience based on the constituents of the experience.

Further, the researchers sought the first-person psychological perspective, which in turn elicited an empathetic position from them. The study considered all steps as essential to understanding the essence of the situation or an event from the views of the gay teachers who had experienced challenges and embodied resiliency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study’s first aspiration was to explore the situations of the Filipino gay teachers in the diaspora. To achieve the aim, the study employed the concept of resiliency, along with Giorgi’s phenomenological methods, to examine challenges faced by the Filipino gay teachers. The findings revealed the following results:

3.1. The Fundamental Meaning Structure of the Lived Experiences of the Filipino Gay Teachers in Selected International Schools Abroad

The study explored the fundamental meaning structure of the Filipino gay teachers (FGT) in diaspora through the unifying themes (general psychological structures) that associated with identified psychological constituents. These experiences led to the significant realizations of the gay teachers abroad. Specifically, all these phenomena descriptions emerged as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Meaning Essence of Filipino Gay Teachers in the Diaspora

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES	PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTITUENTS
Teaching Abroad Provides a Great Sense of Achievement for Filipino Gays	State of Pride and Honor States of Financial Security Realization of a Dream
Fulfilling the Teaching Roles Contributes to Self-worth and Negates the Gay Stereotypes	Validation of Capability Serving One’s Purpose
Challenges Teach the Values of Resiliency, Flexibility and Adaptability	Adjustment to Roles Adjustment to Social Situations

3.1.1. Teaching Abroad Provides a Great Sense of Achievement for Filipino Gays

The study identified three (3) constituents from the data that shaped the theme: Teaching abroad provides a great sense of achievement to all respondents as they teach overseas. When the respondents qualified to the teaching post that they applied for, it gave them personal fulfillment that positively affects their individuality and self-image. In fact, the gay teachers seemed overwhelmed with pride and honor, became financial secured, and realized their dreams overseas.

3.1.1.1. State of Pride and Honor

The Filipino gay teachers became proud of themselves and felt honored beyond compare. They felt being held in high regard as they performed their duties as teachers. Remarkable to mention was the time when they first learned that they qualified to the teaching post overseas. In fact, FGT1 shared that: *“My family was very proud [because] I qualified, and I moved here in Jakarta. My family thought that being a teacher could not experience going abroad (for them) Only seafarers could do that”* (line 17-20). Being honored contributes to the teachers’ sense of pride, which serves not only exclusive to them but also to their family. In fact, one of the teachers openly expresses that: *“My family became proud of me.”* (FGT2, line 3). Indeed, teaching abroad gives self and familial pride. Having both the fulfillment comes after. As what FGT2 stated: *“The experience is very enriching professionally, socially and spiritually”* (line 120).

3.1.1.2. Sense of Financial Security

The material benefit that one received from teaching abroad served as one of the reasons why gay teachers regarded their profession important. Such advantage helped the family if appropriately served its purpose. To cite, FGT1 expressed his excitement while comparing the difference of his remuneration between the Philippines and overseas. He then further stated that: *“Monetary wise, the pay was high compared to the Philippines”* (line 34). The increase in the salary did not only give teachers comfort they needed as they *“can save money, buy properties, shop what they want and need”* (line 38) but most importantly provided a sense of financial security that every family member enjoyed.

3.1.1.3. Realization of a Dream

All respondents regarded teaching overseas as an essential experience of a ‘greener pasture.’ All of them believed that teaching abroad meant a fulfillment of one’s dream despite the difficulties and pressures that they faced. Being in the foreign land served as a realization of a sought-after fantasy that not all gays had the opportunity to experience. All respondents shared that they felt fulfilled that despite their gender they were qualified to teach overseas and share their passion for teaching.

3.1.2. *Fulfilling the Teaching Roles Contributes to Self-Worth and Negates Gay Stereotypes*

The resilience characterized the Filipino gay teachers as they “performed their duties at par from the other foreign teachers” (FGT1, line 80), and after facing struggles, they learned to “adapt with them, and perform well” (FGT5, line 92). With this resiliency, they accomplished their duties bestowed upon them, and most importantly, they have negated the gay stereotypes. Consequently, the respondents’ self-worth had positively emerged. A realization that nothing seemed wrong for a gay person to teach abroad had led to one’s re-evaluation of own’s worth. As gay teachers shared their experiences in fulfilling their responsibilities and facing the challenges in their community, the study determined their success as a validation of their capability and attainment of their purpose.

3.1.2.1. *Validation of Capability*

Becoming an openly gay teacher abroad has been seen difficult by all respondents. FGT4 shared that he needed to become a discreet gay so as not to flame rumors about his personality. In comparison, FGT5 stated that a gay teacher must work beyond the expectations of others. Not to mention that being a homosexual teacher in non-Catholic countries would mean an arduous journey to take. In fact, FGT4 shared that many would doubt a teacher’s capability not because he came from a developing country, but because he was a gay teacher. Complementary to this view, FGT1 shared that others questioned him concerning “the way I dress, and the way I talk” (line 102).

With these challenges, gay teachers flamed their desires to prove their worth. In doing so, they worked hard and provided better results than what others gave. All these undertakings validated their capabilities in performing beyond what others expected of them. The quality of work that they delivered also affirmed their significance. In fact, one of the teachers confirmed that: “It is important because I prove that I can do more.” (FGT4, line 8). In relation, FGT1 shared that: “Some think that you are not capable because you came from a Third-world (Developing) country” (line 56). This line suggested that gender served not the only challenge that made their life challenging, but also the fact that they came from the Philippines. Despite this, the respondent-teachers felt that they served and achieved their purpose in life. In many ways, fulfilling their teaching roles well served as a form of validation that became associated with one’s meaning of life.

3.1.2.2. *Serving One’s Purpose*

All gay teachers aimed to give their best in teaching. However, the realization of this purpose became challenging yet fulfilling. Affirming to this was the statement of FGT5: “Actually, these challenges that I faced led me to the realization of a greater purpose as a teacher, and they gave me a satisfying feeling whenever I did well in my teaching.”

3.1.2.3. Sense of Flexibility and Adaptability

Being a gay teacher abroad has tested and proven one's sense of flexibility that required one's best ability to make positive changes in classrooms and perform his duties well to meet the needs of his class better, including his workmates, and the school in a whole. Also, being a gay teacher presumed overwhelming societal expectations, responsibilities, and tasks that in many ways called for his sense of adaptability. These remained significant to accomplish the work demands that their jobs asked of them. The researcher determined the importance of the adjustment to working roles and social situation.

3.1.3. Challenges Teach the Values of Resiliency, Flexibility, and Adaptability

Teaching in an International School entailed greater workloads, obligations, and responsibilities that required on the ability to perform more than the usual. Further, being 'new' and 'gay' in a new working environment would presume weightier responsibilities and pressure to achieve societal expectations. Thus, adjustments to both work roles and social settings would be essential.

3.1.3.1. Adjustment to Work Roles

The aspect of social relations - adjustment to work roles meaningfully takes place in the lives of the gay teachers. Much has been said and coded based on their expectations before the qualifications to the post. As what one stated, which encapsulated the experience: *"Regarding the workloads and responsibilities, I expected lesser work; however, it was more than what I had in my country"* (FGT1, line 15 and 16).

The adjustment to the role became not as easy as how one anticipated especially when the society bombarded one with high expectations. The demand for the adjustment in social relations, too, influenced the teachers to handle this situation in the international school better.

3.1.3.2. Adjustment to Social Situations

The Filipino gays' social situation was significantly affected when he became a diasporic teacher. The teacher as one of the key persons of the school is demanded to engage in, socialize with, and participate in different school gatherings and situations with proper etiquette and high morals. In fact, as to how all gay teacher-respondents claimed, social relations are considered substantial in building the image of the school, relationship to the community, and appropriate association to the parents who are always available to extend help to their needs. This idea has been put in words by the gay teacher that goes as: *"My social life is greatly affected because I have to be very formal and sensitive to my actions."* (FGT4, lines 42). However, FGT1 stated the other side of the coin through his words: *"Many international schools are respectful to the different sexual orientations as*

long as you are not insinuating and showing off to your students. Professional ethics should still be there.”

Given the tasks to engage with other people, including parents, school officials and stakeholders, gay teachers must learn to do more and to act more for the benefit of his school and community.

3.2. The Roles and Challenges that Gay Teachers Play in Their School and Community

The roles and challenges that gay teachers experienced have contributed to their sense of self-worth. They functioned not only as members of the academic community but also, they took part as cultural preservers, models for their students, and bringer of breakthrough and trends in teaching in their schools. One significant challenge for the Filipino gay teacher is silencing himself not to make a sensual joke or do a feminine act in schools. They even tried not to make fun of the unusual things, which they fond of doing in their home country, the Philippines. Also, the societal expectations, including workmate’s comments, pressure them on how they should perform and act in the community as teachers. Another challenge post to them pertained to the massive works compared to others, and the sense of ‘inequality’ concerning their country of origin.

3.3. The Way Gay Teachers See Teaching Overseas

All respondents believed that being a gay teacher abroad was not an easy task. It meant not only an opportunity but a more significant responsibility to carry. One needs to go through a lot of processes, which entail various challenges that test not just one’s self-resiliency but also one’s cultural belief and faith that he can stand still and achieve what he has aimed for years. How the teacher puts it in words: *“Being a gay teacher abroad means many challenges”* (FGT3, line 45). This statement encapsulates the recounting of the difficulties that he experiences.

Some say that one’s worth of a profession is justified by how the person gets and performs it. The teachers have put much significance in the teaching posts for they have experienced a lot of tests and trials. Regardless of their gender, the Filipino teachers remain *“... Great teachers as labeled by my students”* (FGT1, line 40).

4. CONCLUSION

The teaching experience abroad opened the doors of opportunities for the Filipino gays to serve their purpose and to validate their self-worth. In fact, the resiliency concept has proven that their optimism and openness to challenges while adapting to it made their experience most valuable. Therefore, the teaching post abroad means more than just having a job because it serves as a realization of one’s dream and fulfillment of one’s purpose despite difficult terrain to walk through.

As gay teachers proceeded to their functions, the ‘challenges’ remained constant. Despite this, they remained strong and positive in doing their duties; thus, it provided them a sense of achievement and self-worth.

Teaching in international schools abroad as gay teachers is a culmination and recognition of their strength to cope with the demanding work, and it serves as the validation of their capability. With this situation, the gay teachers, together with their families, experienced happiness as they took pride and honor in this achievement.

The teaching post served beneficial also to their respective families in giving financial stability and security brought by the increase in their salary and work benefits.

Gay teachers faced various challenges on performing their work roles and engaging in social situations. With these tasks, teachers must make necessary adjustments to address the pressing societal and work demands.

All respondents specifically exhibited a sense of adaptability and flexibility in performing their teaching, social, and personal roles.

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