

Acceptability and Challenges Experienced by Homosexual Indigenous Peoples in Southern Palawan

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Abstract : Gender perception represents how an individual perceives the gender identity of a person. Since this is a subjective assessment, it paves the way to various social reactions, either in the form of acceptance or discrimination. Reports across the world show that lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people often face discrimination, stigmatization, and targeted violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the challenges faced by those who belong to both a sexual minority and a marginalized ethnic, religious, linguistic, or indigenous community are even more complex. Specifically, in Palaw'an community, members own those who identify themselves as gays or lesbians and use "bantut" to identify them. There was also the introduction of various scholarly works to facilitate dialogues that promote visibility and inclusivity across sectors in terms of gender preferences; however, there are still gaps that need to be addressed in terms of recognition and visibility. Though local research initiatives are slowly increasing in terms of numbers, culturally situating gender studies appropriately within the context of indigenous cultural communities is still lacking. Indigenous community-based discourses on gender or indigenizing gender discourses remain a challenge; hence, this study aimed to contribute to addressing these identified gaps. These research objectives were realized through a qualitative approach following an exploratory design. Findings revealed that the Palaw'an indigenous cultural community has an existing concept of homosexuality, which they termed "bantut." This notion was culturally defined by the participants as (a) kaloob ng diwata; (b) a manifestation of physical inferiority; (c) hindi nakapag-asawa or hindi nagka-anak; and (d) based on the ascribed roles by the community. These were recognized and valued by the community. However, despite the recognition and visibility within the community, the outside people view them otherwise. The challenges experienced by the Palaw'an homosexuals are imposed by the people outside their community, and these include prejudice, discrimination, and double marginalization. Because of these struggles, they are forced to cope. They deal with these imposed limitations, biases, and burdens by non-Palaw'an through self-acceptance, strong self-perception, and the option to leave the community to seek a more open and progressive environment for LGBTs. While these are indications of their 'resilience' amidst difficult situations, this reality poses an important concern -how the recognition and visibility of indigenous homosexuals from the mainstream perspective can be attained.

Keywords : gender preference, acceptability, challenge, recognition, visibility, coping

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