

Negative Self-Identity, Autonomy Support, and Disclosure Among Young Filipino Gay Men

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This study used the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as a lens to examine disclosure among Filipino gay men, despite the fact that disclosure of a gay man's sexual identity is a western construct. Specifically, it examined the relationship between negative self-identity, autonomy support, and disclosure to parents and peers of a gay man's sexual orientation. Findings indicated that individuals having high levels of negative self-identity were less likely to disclose to both parents and peers. Although peer autonomy support predicted disclosure to peers, parental autonomy support did not predict disclosure to parents. Practical and research implications are discussed.

Keywords: negative self-identity, disclosure, autonomy support, Filipino gay youth, LGBT psychology

On December 8, 2012, the Metro Manila Pride March was held by Task Force Pride Philippines at the Makati City Hall quadrangle. The full range of members of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual) community and their supporters attended, making it a very festive event. The event was both a celebration and a protest against gender discrimination. At the same time, just outside the quadrangle were a group of protesters with a very different agenda. They carried loud speakers and signs that religiously condemned

LGBTs and wore T-shirts that said, “Repent and Believe” (Wu & Jereza, 2012). Although men and women within the LGBT community both experience discrimination in the Philippines, these two groups experience ignorance of different kinds, one group more than the other. From 1996 to 2011, a total of 103 hate crimes (killings of LGBT individuals) were recorded, 57 of them occurring only between 2010 and 2011. Of these 103 hate crimes, 61 were against gay men, 26 against transgenders, 12 against lesbians, and four against bisexuals (Ubalde, 2011). This indicates that gay men are at a very high risk of hate-related violence, especially those who present their gender expression as feminine.

Such negative views on homosexuality, or on individuals who have emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to others of the same sex (American Psychological Association, 2008), is not surprising because the Philippines is one of the most religious and conservative countries in Southeast Asia. Even in childhood, LGBT individuals are often subjected to anti-LGBT stigma, not only from strangers, but also from their own families and communities, leading many LGBT individuals to conceal important aspects of themselves (Manalansan, 2003). Despite the negativity towards homosexuality, gay men still come out to themselves and to their friends and family. The purpose of this study is to examine this disclosure process among young Filipino gay men using the theory of reasoned action (TRA) as lens.

Bakla Culture

The Filipino culture on homosexuality is one that goes very deep into history. Different culture influences from Spanish and American colonization had their own roles in shaping the current view of gay men in the Philippines (Garcia, 2004). It is important to distinguish between “gay” and the *bakla*, or the effeminate gay man from the Spanish era, because their meanings are very different. The term *bakla* does not necessarily carry any political connotation. In fact, some feminine gay men in the Philippines do not feel like they are concealing their orientation and thus have no need to “come out” in that context; they believe that silence is in fact part of the disclosure and that verbalization is superfluous (Manalansan, 2003).

On the other hand, with the progressive shift to the more Western “gay” culture, there is now a group that is not necessarily defined by their femininity that has become more visible and thus, has given the topic of disclosure and concealment a bigger role in the Filipino gay community (Tan, 1995), engendering the need for deeper research. Unfortunately, even though the history of the two terms are different, Filipinos use them interchangeably as they both are linked to similar social effects — stigmatization and concealment.

Anti-Gay Stigma and Concealment in the Philippines

Concrete evidence of anti-gay stigma can be seen in a study conducted in the Philippines in 2001 where out of 1,200 respondents, 24% named lesbians and gay men as unwanted neighbors (Manalastas & Del Pilar, 2005). Stigma further manifests itself in different forms of harassment (e.g., violence and discrimination) towards sexual-minority individuals in the Filipino community (Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2011). Given such, LGB individuals who wish to avoid this stigma may choose to conceal their sexual orientation (Miller & Major, 2000).

Concealment allows LGB individuals to escape the stigma; however, concealment has generally been associated with numerous negative health, social, and mental effects including lower relationship satisfaction in same-sex couples, faster HIV infection progression, fewer job promotions and more negative job attitudes, as well as distress and suicidality. Over time, it can even be associated with higher incidence of cancer and other infectious diseases (Cole et al., 1996; Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Schaaff, 2012; Sylva, Rieger, Linsemeler, & Bailey, 2010).

Disclosure

In contrast, disclosure or “coming out of the closet,” which means admitting to oneself and disclosing to another person that one is gay, is associated with greater ease in expressing oneself to others, leading to an enrichment of work and relationships (Drescher, 2007). But even though research generally reports a positive relation between

disclosure and indicators of mental health, some studies have shown that disclosure could also have negative outcomes in some contexts (Legate et al., 2012). Individuals are more likely to disclose in contexts they perceive to be autonomy-supportive where a person receives interpersonal acceptance and support for authentic self-expression. In autonomy-supportive contexts, people feel accepted for who they are, are free to act and express themselves, and are more open to rely on others. In contrast, controlling contexts, where people feel pressured to appear, behave, or perform in a certain way, (e.g., pass as heterosexual) are a barrier to disclosure among gay men and are a risk factor for concealment (Legate et al., 2012). Therefore there is a need to delve deeper into disclosure within Filipino LGBT settings.

Conceptual Framework

The present study examined disclosure among Filipino gay men through the lens of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) using its factors as independent variables. The TRA proposes that a specific behavior is a result of behavioral intentions that are regulated by an individual's attitude toward the behavior and by subjective norms influencing the performance of the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In this study, the dependent variable, disclosure, is not an all-or-none behavior. Disclosure may vary depending on the social context indicating that it is not a dichotomous variable. In fact, researchers have already begun studying disclosure of sexual orientation in terms of outness levels (Balsam & Mohr, 2007).

Attitude toward the behavior is defined as an affective response towards performing a behavior and not towards a generalized attitude object. It is determined through an assessment of one's positive or negative beliefs regarding the consequences arising from a behavior and an evaluation of the desirability of these consequences (Hale et al., 2002). Disclosure reflects individuals' increasing ability to integrate in a positive manner their same-sex attractions and self-concept or to internalize their identity as members of a minority group (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), therefore allowing negative self-identity to be used as the individual's attitude towards disclosure.

Subjective norm is defined as an individual's perceptions of

whether people significant to the individual think that he or she should perform the behavior. The contribution of the opinion of any given referent is weighted by the motivation that an individual has to comply with the wishes of that referent (Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2002). The concept of autonomy refers to the degree that an individual experiences volition, choice, and personal endorsement for his or her behavior. Therefore, experiences of autonomy support from family and peers, as characterized by being accepted for being one's true self, may be interpreted by an individual as an acceptance of his entire person, including his sexual orientation.

Using the model in Figure 1, we hypothesize that among young Filipino gay men:

1. The more negative the self-identity, the lower the levels of disclosure of sexual identity to parents.
2. The more negative the self-identity, the lower the levels of disclosure of sexual identity to peers.
3. Parental autonomy support is positively associated with the disclosure of sexual identity to parents.
4. Peer autonomy support is positively associated with the disclosure of sexual identity to peers.

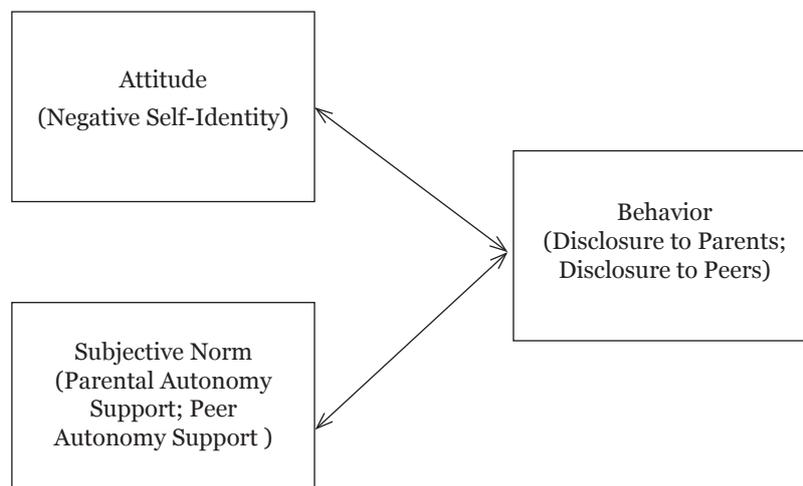


Figure 1. Proposed Model for Disclosure.

METHOD

This study used a correlational design to examine the relationship between parental autonomy support, peer autonomy support, and negative self-identity to disclosure of a gay man's sexual identity to parents and peers.

Participants

The study recruited Filipino male participants within the age of 16 and 24 who have either come out or not to themselves and others as gay, all of whom resided in Metro Manila, and are in the middle to higher class strata. Due to time constraints, age range was limited and chosen based on Erikson's psychosocial stages wherein identity and intimacy are most relevant, which are late adolescence and early young adulthood.

To obtain participants, the first researcher used a snowball technique. Initially, participants were recruited through social connections and social networking sites that catered to Filipino gay men. Those who agreed to participate were asked to forward the questionnaire to other people who met the criteria. Participants were also assured that their answers would be treated with complete confidentiality. Fifty-five complete surveys were obtained.

Instruments

Negative self-identity. This was defined as a negative view of one's gay identity. It was measured using the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS) by Mohr and Fassinger (2000). Negative self-identity was measured by averaging the scores for the subscales: internalized homonegativity, need for privacy, need for acceptance, and difficult process. The scale uses a 7-point scale (1 - strongly disagree and 7 - strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a more negative self-identity. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was high ($\alpha = .89$).

Peer and parental autonomy support. These were defined as interpersonal acceptance and support for authentic self-expression. It was measured using the Autonomy Support Questionnaire (ASQ)

by Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, and Ryan (2006). Scales were edited to assess the autonomy supportiveness level the participant receives from his parents and peers. The scale uses a 7-point scale (1 - strongly disagree and 7 - strongly agree) with questions like "My parents encourage me to be who I am" and "My friends try to understand how I see things." A higher score indicates greater autonomy support. The parental autonomy support questionnaire ($\alpha = .89$) and the peer autonomy support questionnaire ($\alpha = .88$) had high internal consistency reliabilities.

Disclosure. It was defined as the degree to which an individual has communicated his being gay to another whether it be through verbal or non-verbal means. It was measured using the Outness Inventory (OI) developed by Mohr and Fassinger (2000). Participants were instructed to indicate the extent specific individuals (mother, father, acquaintances, etc.) know about their sexual orientation. The scale uses a 7-point scale with 1 meaning the person definitely not knowing his sexual orientation status to 7 meaning the person definitely knowing his sexual orientation status and is openly talked about. There is also a score of 0 meaning it is not applicable to his situation or there is no such person or group of people in his life. In the present study, the internal consistency reliabilities of the parental disclosure scale ($\alpha = .78$) and peer disclosure scale ($\alpha = .79$) were acceptable.

Procedure

The survey was edited to fit the participants needed for the study, which were the male gay group. An online version of the survey was created and then posted online. Links to the survey were given to initial participants who were recruited through social connections and inquiry in social networking sites that catered to Filipino gay men; afterwards, they were asked to forward the questionnaire to other people who met the criteria.

RESULTS

To test the researcher's main hypotheses, correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between predictor variables

(negative self-identity, parental autonomy support, peer autonomy support) and the outcome variables (disclosure to parents and disclosure to peers) (see Table 1).

Negative Self-Identity and Disclosure to Parents

The hypothesis that the higher the levels of negative self-identity, the lower the levels of disclosure of sexual identity to parents was supported. Negative self-identity had a significant negative correlation with disclosure to parents, indicating that gay men with higher levels of negative self-identity tend to have lower levels of disclosure of sexual orientation to their parents.

Negative Self-Identity and Disclosure to Peers

The second hypothesis was that the higher the levels of negative self-identity, the lower the levels of disclosure of sexual identity of a gay man to his peers. This was also supported. Negative self-identity had a significant negative correlation with disclosure to peers, indicating that those with higher levels of negative self-identity tend to have lower levels of disclosure of sexual orientation to his peers.

Parental Autonomy Support and Disclosure to Parents

Hypothesis 3 suggested that parental autonomy support is associated with the disclosure of sexual identity of a gay man to his parents. Results of this study did not support the third hypothesis. Parental autonomy support had no significant correlation with disclosure to parents.

Peer Autonomy Support and Disclosure to Peers

The last hypothesis was that peer autonomy support is associated with the disclosure of sexual identity of a gay man to his peers. Results showed that peer autonomy support had a significant positive correlation with disclosure to peers, indicating that gay men with higher levels of peer autonomy support tend to have higher levels of

Table 1. Summary of Correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Negative Self-Identity	Parental Autonomy Support	Peer Autonomy Support	Disclosure to Parents	Disclosure to Peers
Negative Self-Identity	3.67	1.09	1				
Parental Autonomy Support	5.01	1.38	-0.07	1			
Peer Autonomy Support	6.44	0.59	-0.34*	-0.16	1		
Disclosure to Parents	4.12	1.78	-0.37**	0.19	0.19	1	
Disclosure to Peers	5.23	1.84	-0.56**	-0.18	0.43**	0.44**	1

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

disclosure of sexual orientation to their peers.

DISCUSSION

Using the TRA as a lens to study disclosure of young Filipino gay men in the context of their peers and parents led us to examine an individual's negative self-identity and the level of autonomy support received in that certain context. It was then found that these two variables have different effects to coming out.

Negative Self-Identity

Negative self-identity as a variable in the current study was found to be predictive of disclosure or concealment of sexual orientation by Filipino gay men. This supports other studies that found a significant relationship between internalized homonegativity and disclosure of sexual orientation (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). These findings indicate that beyond self-discovery of one's gay sexual orientation, it is the acceptance of the individual of his sexuality that ultimately affects disclosure or concealment.

Autonomy Support

Contrary to the third hypothesis, parental autonomy support was not significantly associated with disclosure or concealment of sexual orientation among young Filipino gay men to their parents. This contradicts previous research indicating that gay men are more likely to disclose in autonomy-supportive contexts (Legate et al., 2012). However, it is important to consider cultural nuances. In the Philippines, parents may not talk about sex with their children (Nadal, 2011). Given such, there would be no opportunity to obtain support about one's sexuality nor to disclose one's sexual orientation. It is also possible that parents could be supportive in a number of domains of an individual's life but not of gay sexuality, possibly due to their own anti-gay beliefs. The individual's attachment to his parents may also play a significant role in this wherein avoidant individuals may not feel the need to come out to their parents.

However, results showed that peer autonomy support was positively related to the disclosure of sexual orientation among young Filipino gay men. This suggests that these men may be more open to their peers and thus able to ascertain their support and disclose their sexual identity. This is supported by previous research that say adolescents engage in more sexual disclosure with their friends than with their parents (Colten, 1991; Papini, Farmer, & Clark, 1988).

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

There are a number of limitations to the current research findings. The relatively small sample may underrepresent the young Filipino gay community, thus there is a need for broader samples. This study was also limited to the variables of self-identity and autonomy support. Future studies may consider the impact and weight of other social factors like religiosity that may influence both attitudes and social norms toward gay sexualities.

Future research could also probe deeper into the possible factors affecting disclosure of Filipino gay men to their parents. Since the study only concentrated on gay men, future research in LGBT psychology may also gear towards the question of whether or not results are different among the other sexual-minority groups.

Implications for Counseling

Limitations notwithstanding, the results suggest the central role of self-acceptance among young Filipino gay men. Thus, psychologists and others seeking to provide support for young Filipino gay men need to assess the presence of a negative self-identity and assist clients in building a more positive view of themselves. Counselors who work with young Filipino gay men who are considering disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents may also need to assess the parents themselves. It may be important to know the parents' views on homosexuality in order to guide the child. Disclosing before parents are ready to handle the information may lead to conflict and rejection that could have negative impact on gay sons.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to assess whether negative self-identity and autonomy support are significantly related to disclosure to parents and to peers. Negative self-identity was found to be a barrier to coming out of young Filipino gay men to both parents and peers. Levels of autonomy support were predictive of disclosure of being gay but only within the social context of peers, not parents.

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