



Attitudes of Millennials and Baby Boomers Toward Same-Sex Public Displays of Affection

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ABSTRACT

A field experiment on the public display of affection of same-sex couples examined whether the age groups specifically millennials and baby boomers give respect to people in same-sex relationships and if there were variables that would arise as to how they perceive and treat those people. After the same-sex couples flaunted their affection in public, such as surprising their partners with a bouquet of roses and holding hands, the respondents who witnessed the scenes and who passed the minimum age requirements were asked for a short interview. This experiment demonstrated that both age groups, the millennials and baby boomers, have generally accepted the idea of same-sex relationships. However, the results have shown that religious beliefs and societal norms influenced how the respondents viewed the LGBT community. It appears that a few millennials have accepted homosexual identities, but not the public display of affection (PDA). Also, both groups reported having reservations as to what specific displays of affection in public are deemed acceptable, especially being physically intimate with the partners in private places.

Keywords: same-sex relationships, homosexual identities, public display of affection, field experiment, millennials, baby boomers

Introduction

The Philippines has a history of repeated failure to pass the SOGIE Equality Bill and discrimination and physical assault against members of the LGBT. Therefore, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of Millennials' and Baby-boomers' attitudes toward what is considered normal in same-sex relationships.

According to the 2002 Pew Global Attitudes Project, 64 percent of Filipinos outlined that homosexuality must be accepted by society. A society's welcoming is taken into account not merely a current and physical portrayal of a homosexual but also the enactment that distinguishes his personality. A deeper look at same-sex relationships shows a vast majority 94 percent of those who refuse to be convinced to accept homosexuality also disproves of both men dating men and women dating women (Cruz & Mallari, 2008).

Religion plays a role in shaping the attitude towards LGBTQ (Del Castillo et. al 2021). Also, ideological perspectives such as patriarchy play a role in facilitating attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Findings indicate that millennial cisgender males who possess wealth and power tend to express stigma towards LGBTQ. Also, the status and ideology of these millennials inhibit the general tendency of that generation towards supporting LGBTQ (Worthen, 2021).

In the Philippines, LGBTQ individuals face cultural violence due to the persistence of patriarchal ideology and heteronormativity. These societal norms create rigid gender roles and expectations, which LGBTQ individuals may not conform to, resulting in verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. The root of this patriarchal ideology can be traced back to the Spanish colonization and the importation of Christian values. This harmful ideology affects not only LGBTQ individuals but also boys, girls, men, and women in the Philippines (Manalastas, 2016)

A national survey was conducted by the social weather station in the years 1996 and 2001 of 1,200 participants- investigating the attitudes of Filipinos as a general population toward lesbian and gay men. Another research suggests that two heterosexisms included in the surveys dictate that Filipinos held largely negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay men. Results showed that about 28% of the total participants considered being gay/lesbian as "can never be justified" while only 4% thought it could "always be justified". Moreover, about 1 out of 4 Filipinos expressed lacking the will for gay men/lesbians as their neighbors. This heterosexist attitude did not change remarkably from 1996 to 2001 and was all-inclusive, despite of gender, socio-economic status, educational attainment, or religiosity. Participants residing in NCR had the least negative evaluations, and attitudes toward lesbian and gay men were positively correlated with attitudes toward sex work, abortion, and divorce (Manalastas, 2005). According to Cruz and Mallari (2008), the aforementioned heterosexist attitude is shaped by trumping institutions within society. Societies might deviate in the extent to abundant homosexuality (or some form of same-sex romantic relationship) is sanctioned or rejected. In the Philippines, the definitions of homosexuality are the ones that do not fit in the hetero-normative ideal of being male or female. A study by Cruz and Mallari (2007), indicates that Filipino youth accept homosexuality while showing reservations towards some of its manifestations. Furthermore, women tend to be more accepting than men when it comes to homosexuality (Duhaylungsod et al., 2018).

In connection, those who belong to a sexual minority showed an association with suicide ideation. An archival data from a national survey of 8,891 young Filipina women aged 15 to 24 to investigate the relationship between sexual-minority status and suicide ideation and attempt. The results were consistent with previous research on young Filipino men and global LGBT mental health literature, indicating that sexual-minority status was related with higher rates of suicide ideation and attempt, as measured by same-sex attraction and same-sex romantic relationships. Sexual minority Filipina youth were found to have significantly higher odds of thinking about and attempting suicide compared to their heterosexual peers. The study also explored various correlates of suicide ideation and attempt, including depression, the present-day suicide attempt of a friend, and experiences of threat and victimization, using a minority stress framework (Human Rights Commission, 2015). The issue of mental health among sexual minorities might be related to social relationships. Scholarly studies from other countries show inhibition to social acceptance among LGBTQ. Haruna Umar (2015) conducted research in Ghana about the social acceptance of homosexuals. Homosexuality is still not accepted in this country even though they are highly aware that these people exist. They still find it cringing because of their religious outlook on it. In terms of law, being a homosexual is still illegal, not normal, and punishable by law. In medical perception, they have this generalization that STDs have something to do with being a homosexual. Another study was conducted by Kent and El-Alayli (2011) about the public display of affection of hetero and non-hetero couples. They found out that same-sex couples are more likely not to engage in public displays of affection because they are marginalized and judged by society than heterosexual couples. However, they did find out that there is no difference between their relationship when they are in private.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Crocker and colleagues (1998) suggests that same-sex partners are hesitant to show affection, kiss their partner, and to be intimate publicly as they feel uneasy and somehow stigmatized by the people around them. The idea of being discriminated against and violated because of their same-sex relationship hinders them from showing off publicly. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals avoid showing signs of emotional bonds, affection, and care toward their partners in public places because they fear that somebody might harm them. These face challenges and grasp their opportunities to build communities and create spaces where they can feel safe and free. In connection to Filipinos, Tubeza (2013) shows that 73% of Filipinos agreed that the LGBT community deserved acceptance, compared with 9% in 2002. But contrary to that survey, some LGBT students are still experiencing passive tolerance rather than fully accepted. Likewise, bullying and discrimination were taking place (Tang & Poudel, 2018).

Therefore, the current field experimental study sought to analyze the social acceptance of same-sex relationships among the millennials and baby boomers, especially in public displays of affection, and to check whether the views and attitudes that the younger generation holds are more leaning toward socially accepting the same-sex relationships or the older generation.

Method

Participants

Eight millennials (ages 19–39) and five baby boomers (ages 55–75) were interviewed. Uneven number of participants was due to limited time and they were considered participants already once a reaction was elicited upon witnessing a public display of affection (PDA) from a lesbian and/or gay couple. Anyone in the location can be considered a participant once a reaction is elicited. Since this is a field experiment, variables such as attitudes, perspectives, reactions, and religious influences vary depending on the participant and might influence their interaction and attitude with the same-sex relationship.

Design and Procedure

This field experiment has two sets of actors/actresses who will act out as in a relationship of lesbian and gay couples (female to female; male to male relationship). The first pair to experiment was the lesbian couple. The respondents were not given informed consent before the experiment started. This was to get the most candid reaction from the respondents who witnessed the scene. In this field experiment, two pairs of actors performed as same-sex couples (i.e., lesbian and gay couples). The locations of this field experiment were fast food chains within Morayta and Welcome Rotonda in Quezon City. These locations were chosen due to the higher presence of the chosen demographic as Morayta has Universities nearby while Welcome Rotonda has plenty of business establishments as well as residential buildings. A confederate was instructed to get inside the fast-food restaurant to look for potential respondents, and once identified, the confederate informed the first actor from the lesbian couple of the profile or identity of the respondent so she could sit as near as possible. Then, the actor was texting or calling the partner that she was already at the venue and waiting. The romantic partner got inside the fast-food restaurant attracting attention from the customers due to holding a bouquet of roses, which she used to surprise the first actor. The lesbian/gay couple acted sweet by holding hands, hugging, or kissing the temple of the other partner as a form of Public Display of Affection (PDA). The other confederates who were at the scene filming the reactions of the target respondent approached the person, informing him or her that it was a social experiment, and introduced themselves. After a brief introduction as to what transpired, the confederate/researcher asked if he could take a few minutes of one's time for a very short interview. They were asked a few questions to probe their reactions caught on camera. The set of probing questions was checked and validated by the researchers' adviser to maintain a flowing conversation and extract the necessary information for the data and thematic analysis. However, a few people were not willing and refused to be interviewed. Although the other respondents accepted the invitation, a few of them refused to be filmed and chose an audio recording of their interview. After the first set was done with the interviews, the researchers transferred to another fast-food restaurant. These procedures were repeated for the gay couple.

Data Analysis

The researchers compiled the videos and audio recordings of all the interviews and Thematic Analysis was used to analyze any possible patterns, repetitive responses, etc.

Verbatim responses were transcribed and were read to identify quotes that seemed to be important. After highlighting those quotes from the interviews, the responses were compared and contrasted to get the common and unique ones. The narrowed-down responses were analyzed to get the themes. After discussing the variables that arose from the analogies, they came up with four themes that were highlighted in this field experiment.

Results and Discussion

The main aim of this study was to analyze how millennials and baby boomers perceive and accept same-sex relationships. In this study, two age groups have been employed to find out whether the views and attitudes that the younger generation holds are more leaning toward accepting same-sex relationships or the older generation if there is a large generation gap between the two age groups. This section reports and discusses the responses of the millennials and baby boomers to the face-to-face interview conducted after having witnessed the public display of affection (PDA) of same-sex couples (i.e., lesbian and gay couples). Based on the analysis of the respondents' interview accounts, four themes emerged that highlighted the responses of millennials and baby boomers toward same-sex relationships. These are the following: attitudes from witnessing PDA of same-sex couples, shared perspectives in accepting people from LGBT community, reactions in seeing same-sex couples showing affection in public places, and influence of religion in the perception of same-sex relationships.

Themes from the Interview Data

Attitudes Toward Same-Sex PDA

This theme pertains to how the respondents perceive same-sex couples who are being affectionate in public. This includes how the millennials and baby boomers differ or not in their attitudes and initial reactions to seeing the lesbian and gay couples. The data suggest that most of the millennials who were asked about their initial reaction to same-sex couples being affectionate with their respective partners in public appeared to have feelings of curiosity, shock, admiration, and envy. These perceptions are generally leaning toward a more positive attitude toward the people in same-sex relationships. In the interviews, the data revealed that they were startled upon seeing the same-sex couples and that they could not help but look at them. They described the gesture of giving flowers to the partner as being "cute," while a few of them reported to be quite envious for having such kind of romantic relationship. In one interview with a heterosexual couple, the 22-year-old male partner observed, "*Normal lang naman sa 'kin 'yon. Pero siyempre normal lang na mapapatingin ka sa kanila. 'Di kasi, normal lang naman 'yong girl-boy, tapos pag nakakita ka ng ganun, ayun... ang galing eh! Cute naman, parang ganun. Yun lang, ganun lang... wala namang kabastusang pinakita.*"

A 20-year-old female interviewee described her experience, "*Hindi ko ini-expect, pero okay lang 'yon. Kasi diba, parang respeto na din 'yon kasi parehas [hand gestured denoting same sex] na ganun.*" In a group interview, a 21-year-old gay interviewee expressed he was envious of the gay couple's gestures, such as surprising the partner by giving him a bouquet of roses, and how he wished to have a romantic partner who would be affectionate to him.

On the other hand, all baby boomers have shown an agreeable attitude toward the same-sex couple's public display of affection. In an interview with a 73-year-old woman, she stated that seeing the same-sex couple being affectionate with each other was okay as it was a sign of love and that there was nothing wrong with it. Moreover, a father of 65 years of age was asked about his initial reaction to seeing a same-sex couple being affectionate in public, he mentioned, "*Okay lang naman. Hindi na kami nagulat kasi dumaan din kami sa stage na na-in love. Ayos lang sa amin kasi anak namin gaya rin nila, kaya okay lang.*"

As the previous study revealed, out of the six countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines was found to be relatively less rejecting of lesbians and gay men, and this supports the popular notion that the Philippines is indeed one of the most "gay-friendly" countries in region (Manalastas, Ojanen, Torre, Ratanashevorn, Kumaresan, & Veeramuthu, 2017). This previous study further confirms the analysis of the results of the current study, which suggests that both age groups are generally accepting of the sexual orientations of lesbians and gay men regardless of the age group. This is consistent with the research conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013) in 39 countries, the survey results showed that 73 percent of Filipino respondents said that homosexuality should be accepted by society with an even higher percentage (78%) of younger respondents in the 18–29 age group.

Shared Perspectives about LGBTQ+

This theme tackles the several abstract constructs that Filipinos usually give importance to in their interpersonal relationships. Not surprisingly, the results have shown that both age groups such as millennials and baby boomers have shared perspectives when it comes to accepting people from the LGBT community. It appears that both age groups think that there is gender equality in terms of love. Such a view in love comes with happiness, respect, and understanding of other people's preference for romantic partners. More so, they have pointed out that they have no qualms about accepting same-sex couples, for as long as no one is aggravating or stepping on other people. A 20-year-old male student shared: "*Ano pa rin po, ah, for me it's good naman po kasi unless wala naman po tayong tinatapakan na tao, wala tayong na a-anong tao. Sa'kin hangga't mahal nila ang isa't isa, go.*"

It was highlighted in an interview with a millennial couple the society's role in welcoming the LGBT community. "*And I think, okay lang naman na mag-PDA sila and all, kasi we're all people naman. Pare-pareho lang naman tayo, kasi I think 'yong society lang naman 'yong nagcre-create ng barriers and standards,*" said the 23-year-old woman who is in a heterosexual relationship. Moreover, a 64-year-old mother said, "*Ayos lang sa amin kasi anak namin gaya rin nila, kaya okay lang. Walang kaso naman sa amin kasi pantay-pantay naman lahat.*" A female baby boomer with the age of 74 supported this statement, "*Parang ang point lang, bakit? What's wrong with that? We are all human beings. Nagkataon lang... hind ba?"*

Reactions to Seeing Same-Sex PDA

In the third theme highlighted in the results, shows that religion and societal norms dictate the appropriate social behavior that should be portrayed by the LGBT. Filipinos may

demonstrate a certain degree of respect for same-sex couples, yet there are constraints on their tolerance for public displays of affection. It appears that both millennials and baby boomers are reluctant to accept overt physical affection, such as kissing, demonstrated by same-sex couples in public environments. What they consider as appropriate though include but are not limited to holding hands and toned-down voices when conversing. They pointed out that physical intimacy should be reserved in private places only.

Based on the results of the data analysis, it appears that millennials and baby boomers have a few reservations when it comes to public display of affection, most especially to same-sex couples. Both age groups emphasized the need to know one's limitations in showing PDA. If the gestures are too intimate, it is suitable for private places. A 74-year-old female baby boomer shared, *"It depends ano.... I mean this is a public place, 'yong magsigawan ng malakas at napapatingin ako. This is not your own place or what. This is a public place. So meron naman yong natutuwa ako kasi they are so sweet.... Pero ayoko nung imagine, nagki-kissing... alam mo very particular ako sa ganyan. Nanlalaki mata ko titingnan kong ganyan kaya matagal ako dito bukod sa nagsasagot ako, I'm trying to observe."*

In another interview, a 21-year-old male student pointed out the behavior that is appropriate when you are in a public place. He mentioned *"'Yon pong PDA po kasi ay sinasabi na parang intimate, intimate na... ipapakita mo sa public, which is para pong mali. Intimate meaning po is 'yong para lang po sa inyong dalawa, so I would really like to prefer it na... kayong dalawa lang talaga 'yong nakakaalam ng ginagawa n'yo, na hindi po pinapakita sa iba. 'Pag po nasa labas, it's like 'yong act po na 'di naman po sobrang formal pero something that everyone would accept."*

Furthermore, the results indicate that there are still people who remain conservative in their views of appropriate social behaviors. It stressed the importance of being mindful of one's actions when you are in a public place for a good social modeling of behavior because children might misunderstand the exchange of intimate gestures by people who are in same-sex relationships. In the interview of a 20-year-old male student, he shared: *"Dapat talaga pag ginagawa natin 'yong mga gano'ng bagay dapat may limitation, lalo na maraming mga bata na hindi dapat pinapakita sa kanila kasi 'di pa nila maiintindihan 'yong mga gano'ng bagay."*

Influence of Religion in the Perception of Same-Sex PDA

In the study by the Pew Research Center (2013), Filipinos surprisingly scored high in the "religiosity scale." This may be the case, but the Filipino respondents are said to be accepting of LGBT people. As such, Filipinos are "considerably more tolerant of homosexuality" than the country's "relatively high levels of religiosity would suggest." The Pew Research Center's study supports the results highlighted in this theme; however, as the data suggest, it was not surprising that issues regarding religion have appeared in the results of data analysis. Only two out of 20 millennials who were interviewed have opinions about the same-sex relationships. During in an interview, a 20-year-old female student said, *"For me, siyempre mas acceptable 'yong different 'yong sex niya kasi nga parang kailan lang naman na naging ano 'yong LGBT sa'tin. Pero mas sweet pa rin kung men and women, at tsaka 'yon nga sa Bible meron kasing dalawa lang na ina-ano si God, so 'yong men and women."*

Religion has a way of influencing a person's mindset regarding people of the LGBT community. Church, media, and law play a big part in shaping the people's perception toward them (Cruz & Mallari, 2007). Filipinos may be accepting of the members of the LGBT community, but it is undeniable that some remain strong in their religious beliefs as to what the Bible says. As the result suggests, one may be accepting of the homosexuals' identity, but not of what the identity entails, such as committing and engaging in same-sex relationships and showing public displays of affection.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the lack of related literature that addresses the themes that emerged from the data analysis. While the results may not be broad to society, this study may have enlightened a growing number of researchers here in the Philippines. The set of questions asked during the interview should have included a few probing questions regarding the values that Filipinos held in accepting the members of the LGBT community. Moreover, since this study employed a field experiment, a lack of informed consent becomes an ethical issue. Also, some of the target respondents refused to be interviewed. There was a lack of respondents who were baby boomers. This may have been caused by not thoroughly anticipating the particular hours those baby boomers were present in the fast-food restaurants. In this field experiment, the baby boomers were usually available in the early hours of the morning to lunchtime and were mostly eating in fast-food restaurants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

By analyzing the perspectives of millennials and baby boomers on same-sex relationships, this study has shown that there may be a presence of disparity due to the generation gap between the two age groups, but both have shown similarities in their views and attitudes toward giving respect to the members of the LGBT community. The millennials and baby boomers tend to be more socially accepting of same-sex relationships; however, considering the religious beliefs that people have due to the Philippines being predominantly Roman Catholic, a discrepancy appears in what is socially acceptable to them. The study has shown that although younger generations and late adults may generally accept them for their homosexual identities, to a few of them, the same-sex relationships, and activities their identities entailed are undesirable. Furthermore, religious beliefs and societal norms deem what specific appropriate behaviors are when in public. As such, physical intimacy is limited to the private places only.

While this study clearly illustrates that both age groups are socially accepting of same-sex relationships, there are still constraints and reservations on their tolerance for public displays of affection. Both age groups have reservations as to what specific displays of affection in public are deemed acceptable, especially being physically intimate with their partners in private places. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address the disparity between people's acceptance of homosexual identities and same-sex relationships and their sexual activities. This study is recommended to future researchers

who are interested in expounding their knowledge on same-sex relationships as well as acceptance. Also, the researchers are open to replicating their methodology to control the uncertainty of events and proper elimination of extraneous variables. Additionally, this study might be utilized to break the stigma surrounding same-sex relationships. For the students, this may help as informative research that will educate them about the social acceptance of same-sex relationships among different people.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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