

*Nananatiling Tahimik:*¹ Exploring the Lived Experience of Deaf Gay Workers in the Private Sector

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ABSTRACT

This interpretative phenomenological study aims to document and examine the experience of discrimination against Deaf gay men workers at the intersection of their disability and gender, particularly in recruitment and selection, provisions of reasonable accommodation² at work, and workplace participation. The results of the in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven Deaf gay men workers and key informant interviews with three experts reveal the role of patriarchy in the centrality of the able-bodied, heterosexual image in the workplace and these Deaf gay men's experience of distinct forms of discrimination on the basis of their disability and gender. Key themes that emerged include the convergence of gender and disability stereotypes, the ableist and heteronormative workplace practices, and the unequal power relations between Deaf gay men workers and their hearing heterosexual colleagues. The study recommends various workplace strategies such as (1) development and implementation of inclusive policies, (2) conduct of awareness-raising activities among employees and human resource professionals, and (3) adherence

to the implementation of the law on reasonable accommodation. The study also seeks to advance the need to develop a feminist development approach that is markedly intersectional to capture the lived realities of marginalized people and communities holistically.

Keywords: Deaf gay, disability, LGBTQ+, intersectionality, employment

INTRODUCTION

The lived experiences of Filipino Deaf lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other genders (LGBTQ+) workers in the private sector remain under-researched. This can be attributed to the inadequacy of reliable and accurate gender- and disability-related statistical data on Deaf and LGBTQ+ individuals (Alicias, 2017; Buenaobra, 2011) and the lack of documented experiences of discrimination against Filipino Deaf LGBTQ+ workers at the intersection of their gender and disability, rendering their situation as practically invisible. Hence, the research focuses on their lived experience, specifically on Deaf gay men, to make their intersecting experiences visible and validated and allow their unique needs and concerns—as these directly impact their personal and professional lives—to be urgently addressed. With the view that the quality of their lives should be a development priority, the study hopes that a serious appraisal of their present situation, mainly as workers in the private sector, can be an essential starting point to explore.

In this research, I aim to document and examine the Deaf gay men workers' experiences of discrimination in the private sector.³ Specifically, it intends to:

1. Describe the experiences of Deaf gay men workers in the following areas:
 - a. recruitment and selection,
 - b. provisions of reasonable accommodation at work, and
 - c. workplace participation;

2. Examine the gaps and limitations in existing national laws related to the employment of Deaf gay men workers in the private sector;
3. Examine the intersection between disability and gender to understand how this contributes to further discrimination among Deaf gay men workers in the workplace; and
4. Identify strategies on how the private sector can create an inclusive workplace environment for Deaf gay men workers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

On Patriarchy, Deafness, and Homosexuality

Feminists have long used the concept of patriarchy to explain the power relationship between men and women as a “system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby, 1990, as cited in Sultana, 2012, p.2). As a male-dominated and institutionalized system that operates in different social arenas (Sultana, 2012), patriarchy legitimizes the unequal power relations between men and women, and its impact is further extended to other vulnerable groups that do not conform to the societal norms and expectations of masculinity and femininity, including Persons with Disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, to which Deaf gay men workers belong.

Several scholars on disability and queer studies explained how the patriarchal system favors those who conform to what is “normal” and “desirable.” For example, Adrienne Rich coined the term *compulsory heterosexuality*, which posits the notion that “heterosexuality is not an inborn sexual preference, but an institutional compulsion” (Vaahtera, 2012, p. 79), suggesting that heterosexuality is seen as the normal and dominant state hence, as Rich (1980, cited in Vaahtera, 2012, p. 79) explained, “a compulsion for all women and the differences between different heterosexual cultures could not change its compelling nature.” Applying this term in disability studies, Robert McRuer (2006, p. 301) forwarded the concept of *compulsory able-bodiedness*, reinforcing the notion that dominant identities in everyday society, such as being able-bodied, “are

not really alternatives but rather the natural order of things.” McRuer (2006, p. 306) further suggested that “compulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness,” noting “how queer/disabled figures are deployed in order to support the two systems (heterosexuality and able-bodiedness)” (Kafer, 2003, p. 79). As McRuer (2006) mentioned:

. . . people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer (as paradoxical stereotypes of the asexual or oversexual persons with disabilities would suggest), while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (as ongoing medicalization of identity, similar to what people with disabilities more generally encounter, would suggest). Once these confluences are available in the popular imagination, queer/disabled figures can be tolerated and, in fact, utilized in order to maintain the fiction that able-bodied heterosexuality is not in crisis. (pp. 304-305)

Despite the growing academic interest surrounding the intersection of disability and gender, a large proportion of these academic studies are situated in the Global North (Chappell, 2019). The experiences of Deaf gay men workers in the private sector remains under-researched, most especially in the Philippine context. Michaels (2015) explains that the Deaf gay community is rarely included within the minorities well documented by scholars, although they can be viewed as a dual-minority group. Taking into consideration the lack of available literature, this section presents (1) the international and national legal instruments that protect and promote the rights of Deaf and LGBTQ+ workers and (2) the separate experiences of Deaf and LGBTQ+ workers in the private sector to establish the presence of workplace discrimination against them.

Rights of Persons With Disabilities: International and Philippine Contexts

Various legal frameworks are established to protect the rights of Persons with Disabilities in the workplace. Consistent with these legal frameworks is the objective of upholding the rights of Persons with Disabilities to enjoy their right to work and be fully integrated into

mainstream society. For instance, Article 27 of the UNCRPD states that Persons with Disabilities should enjoy the right to work and be equal with others, emphasizing the nondiscrimination, protection, provision of equal opportunities for decent work and employment, promotion of opportunities in the private and public sector, and opportunities for self-employment (United Nations, 2006). At the national level, the mandate to integrate Persons with Disabilities into Philippine society is enshrined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Republic of the Philippines, 1987). To fully realize this mandate, Republic Act No. 7277, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons,⁴ stipulates the State's role to adopt policies that will ensure the rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance of Persons with Disabilities (Republic of the Philippines, 1992). Republic Act No. 10524, on the other hand, promotes equal opportunity in the workplace and fosters inclusion by encouraging private companies to reserve positions for Persons with Disabilities (Republic of the Philippines, 2013). Executive Order No. 261 mandates establishing an inter-agency committee on employment promotion, protection, and rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, chaired by the Secretary of Labor and Employment (Republic of the Philippines, 1995). Specific to Deaf workers, Republic Act No. 11106⁵ directs government offices to utilize Filipino Sign Language (FSL) in the civil service and all government workplaces (Republic of the Philippines, 2018).

Unheard Voices: What It is Like to Be a Deaf Worker

A growing body of literature shows that Deaf people experience discrimination in the workplace based on their disability. This section provides data gathered from previous literature on the lived experience of Deaf workers in the private sector, specifically on (1) recruitment and selection, (2) provisions of reasonable accommodation at work, and (3) workplace participation.

Recruitment and Selection

Deaf applicants face discrimination in accessing employment opportunities based on their disability. Previous studies conducted in

the United States (Perkins-Dock et al., 2015; Phillips, 2019), England (Stanbury & Thew, 2008), and Ireland (O'Connell, 2021) revealed that employers show a negative attitude toward Deaf applicants, mainly because of notions that they are incapable of doing tasks as compared to their hearing counterparts, which often negatively affect the outcome of their job applications. These findings were also echoed in a study about the challenges of Deaf individuals in Butuan City, Philippines, particularly on the reluctance of employers to hire Deaf applicants due to the preconceived notion of being incapable attached to Deaf individuals (Silva-dela Cruz & Calimpusan, 2018).

Provisions of Reasonable Accommodation at Work

Consistent across the literature are (1) the need for Deaf workers to have sign language interpreters at work to facilitate communication between them and their hearing colleagues, reflected in previous studies conducted in the United States (Perkins-Dock et al., 2015; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Stokar, 2016). However, employers tend to refuse this request because of the additional costs the interpreting services would impose on their business (Stokar, 2016); (2) the employers' lack of adequate understanding of Deaf workers' accommodation needs, revealed in previous studies conducted in the United States (Perkins-Dock et al., 2015; Stokar, 2017; Stokar & Orwat, 2018); and (3) the reservations of Deaf workers to request their accommodation needs from their employers, which is driven by their lack of knowledge on how to make accommodation requests and their anticipation of possible negative remarks that they will receive from their work colleagues (Stokar, 2017).

Workplace Participation

Communication difficulties remain to be the primary barrier for Deaf workers to participate in the workplace in the United States (Foster, 2019; Perkins-Dock et al., 2015; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010). As a response to the communication challenges, Deaf workers employ various strategies to ensure that they can still participate actively in the workplace, such as one-on-one communication strategies (Foster, 2019) and utilizing

various tools and technology, as revealed in the studies conducted in the Philippines (Pertierra, 2013; Silva-dela Cruz & Calimpusan, 2018).

Rights of LGBTQ+ Workers: International and Philippine Contexts

At the international level, the adoption of the Yogyakarta Principles in 2006 was a win for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions (SOGIE). The principles were developed for two purposes: (1) “to provide a fair assessment of the current state of human rights law as applied to sexual minorities, in particular, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (Ettelbrick & Zeran, 2010, p. 4); and (2) “to enhance LGBT activists’ and advocates’ capacity to successfully challenge some of the more persistent human rights violations faced by the community” (Ettelbrick & Zeran, 2010, p. 4).

At the national level, Article II Section 11 of the Philippine Constitution states that it is the “State’s responsibility to value the dignity of every person and guarantee full respect for human rights” (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2009, para. 10). Nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is further echoed in Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) (PCW, 2010). However, it is relevant to note that, while there is already a mandate on the State to protect the rights of every person, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, challenges to passing a national law that explicitly prohibits discrimination against LGBTQ+ people remain. Two decades after the SOGIE equality bill was first introduced to Congress, the bill has yet to become a law. Nevertheless, even without a national anti-discrimination law, 25 local government units in the country commit to prohibiting SOGIE-based discrimination by enacting their local anti-discrimination ordinances (PCW, 2022).

The Rainbow Struggle: The Plight of LGBTQ+ Workers

LGBTQ+ people continue to face challenges on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & US Agency for International Development [USAID], 2014). This section provides information about

the lived experience of LGBTQ+ workers in the private sector, which is further categorized into two separate areas: (1) recruitment and selection and (2) workplace participation.

Recruitment and Selection

Previous studies reveal that LGBTQ+ workers are targets of different forms of discrimination in the workplace. Consistent with the literature are the experiences of discrimination and harassment during the interview process because of the stereotypes and preconceived beliefs about LGBTQ+ people in the United States (Discont et al., 2016), Indonesia (Badgett et al., 2017), Puerto Rico (Luiggi-Hernandez et al., 2015), and in the Philippines (Enriquez, 2017; Laya et al., 2016; UNDP & USAID, 2014).

Workplace Participation

Several studies about the workplace participation of LGBTQ+ workers revolved around discriminatory attitudes and practices of employers and their coworkers toward them. Different authors agreed that LGBTQ+ individuals are often discriminated against in their workplaces because of their SOGIE, as revealed in the studies conducted in the United States (Baker, 2014; Discont et al., 2016; Eliason et al., 2011; Sears & Mallory, 2011), Indonesia (Badgett et al., 2017), and the Philippines (Alicias, 2017; Enriquez, 2017; UNDP & USAID, 2014), which resulted to significant effects including physical and mental health issues and economic consequences (Alicias, 2017; Discont et al., 2016; Sears & Mallory, 2011).

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

I draw on gender and development (GAD) theory and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to examine the situation of Deaf gay men workers in the private sector. First, this research recognizes the role of the patriarchal system in reinforcing and reproducing the existing social status quo that favors male dominance over women, which the GAD framework attempts to address through collective action and participatory processes (McIlwaine & Datta, 2003). This social status quo

is reinforced and reproduced in the private sector and is extended to other marginalized groups who do not conform to society's definition of what is normal and desirable, such as Deaf gay men workers. Second, this study acknowledges that gender intersects with different social identities. While initially conceptualized as a prism for examining how racism and sexism often overlap, thereby creating multiple levels of social injustice (Crenshaw, 1989), numerous scholars have broadened the concept to include multiple, intertwined categories of analysis, including disability (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Chappell, 2019). Hence, intersectionality guides the analysis of this research in recognition that Deaf gay men workers, based on their gender and disability, can experience multiple interlocking forms of discrimination that exacerbate each other.

Guided by feminist standpoint epistemology as “an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action” (Brooks, 2007, p. 55), this research puts a strong emphasis on generating knowledge that is heavily grounded on the stories of Deaf gay men workers who are discriminated against on the basis of their gender and disability in the private sector. The results of this study can then be utilized for consciousness-raising and empowerment of Deaf gay men workers in the workplace.

Conducted in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach through various online qualitative methods. Using a purposive sampling and through the assistance of Pinoy Deaf Rainbow (PDR),⁶ I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven Deaf gay men workers in two phases: (1) written interviews through Google forms and (2) online interviews through Zoom and Facebook Messenger. Conversations were recorded with the permission of the study participants. As a hearing researcher, I recognize the importance of addressing the unequal power relations between myself and the study participants, who are non-hearing individuals. I acknowledge that I am not knowledgeable in FSL; hence, I engaged a sign language interpreter known to the participants to assist in the data collection process. This also led me to enroll in an FSL class to familiarize myself with basic knowledge of FSL.

Table 1
Profiles of Participants

Study participants⁷	Deafness	SOGI	Years of experience in the private sector	Job industries
Jay	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	11 years	Education, arts, retail, personal services, and hotel and restaurant services
Lucas	Acquired	Cisgender male gay man	9 years	
Dexter	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	5 years	
Angelo	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	3 years	
Gino	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	3 years	
Nonoy	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	1 year	
Rommel	Inborn	Cisgender male gay man	3 years	

Second, I conducted key informant interviews (KII) with three experts in human resources, diversity and inclusion, and Deaf LGBTQ+ rights through Zoom and Microsoft teams.

Table 2
Profiles of Key Experts

Name	Background
Ms. Disney Aguila	Ms. Aguila is a Deaf transgender woman and the President of PDR. Her advocacies center on the rights and visibility of Deaf LGBTQ+ individuals and on eliminating discrimination toward the community in all areas of life.
Ms. Maria Criselda Bisda	Ms. Bisda is a human resource director and a disability inclusion expert with more than 10 years of experience in strategic human resources, talent acquisition, consulting, and project management. As a Person with Disability, her advocacies include promoting inclusive workplaces through strategic organizational and human resource solutions.
Mr. Eli Yanga	Mr. Yanga is an experienced human resource professional and a diversity and inclusion expert. His experience includes working on inclusive employment in both the public and private sectors.

Lastly, I employed a document review before and after the data collection stage to gather secondary data that aid in examining the gaps and limitations of national laws related to the employment of Deaf gay workers. These laws include:

1. Presidential Decree No. 442 of 1974, also known as the Labor Code of the Philippines;
2. Republic Act No. 7277 or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities;
3. Republic Act No. 10524, also known as An Act Expanding the Positions Reserved for Persons with Disability, amending RA No. 7277;
4. Republic Act No. 9442 or An Act Amending RA No. 7277; and
5. Republic Act No. 11106 or the Filipino Sign Language Law.

I sought the informed consent of all the study participants before commencing the data collection activities. Confidential information, including the participant's identifying data, was not included in the data analysis and reporting.

The data I collected from the study participants and key experts were transcribed, organized, and sent back to them for review and confirmation. This permitted them to take ownership of their stories by adding or deleting any information they wanted or did not wish to be reflected in this study.

I employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on the data set to generate themes that would address the research questions. I recognize that my background and personal biases as a researcher could affect my study participants, their responses, and the interpretation of their responses. My reflections, which also became part of this research, were informed by my experience as a hearing, self-identified gay man, a human resource professional, a disability advocate, and a feminist, which shaped my reflexivity on the lives and struggles of marginalized groups, including Deaf gay men workers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: DEAF GAY WORKERS' UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Three significant themes related to the unique experiences of discrimination against Deaf gay men workers at the intersection of their gender and disability were identified from the participants' responses, the responses of the experts, and the review of national laws related to their employment in the private sector. Common to these themes is the reinforcement and reproduction of the able-bodied, heterosexual image in the workplace influenced by patriarchal values that favor those who conform to the social norms of what is considered normal and desirable. Further, participants and key experts identified inclusive strategies to address Deaf gay men workers' unique needs in the private sector.

Convergence of Gender and Disability Stereotypes

The findings reveal that Deaf gay men workers experience further discrimination in the private sector because of the convergence of gender and disability stereotypes. This is reflected in (1) the attitudinal barriers that discriminate against them and (2) their internalization of ableist and homophobic ideas as workers.

Attitudinal Barriers at Work

The convergence of gender and disability stereotypes is reflected in the negative attitudes received by Deaf gay workers in their work environment. Attitudinal barriers are the most basic yet the most difficult to overcome because “negative attitudes often result in denying basic human and civil rights afforded to other members of their community” (Sahu & Sahu, 2015, p. 1). For instance, during one of his job interviews, Jay shared that he was discriminated against because of the attitudinal barriers that targeted his gender and disability:

When I applied for a teaching role for Deaf students, one of the interviewers’ concerns was about my identity as a member of the LGBT community. They were worried about my role boundaries, particularly about how I would separate my personal life from my professional life as a teacher. On top of this, they were also worried about the communication barriers with other teachers. It is a struggle if the majority of the people in the workplace are heterosexual and hearing people because they might judge me because of my identity and the communication barriers.

This response implies common stereotypes directed toward Deaf and gay individuals. It supports the reality that employers tend to assess Deaf gays based on their marginalized identities rather than their job qualifications.

Attitudinal barriers at work can also be illustrated in other forms. The majority of the participants shared their experience of being discriminated against based on the effeminate behavior communicated to

them through offensive and inappropriate non-verbal signs and gestures. Gender stereotypes are compounded by communication challenges, which further contribute to inequalities in the workplace. Nonoy shared:

There were times when people judged my ability because I am Deaf and gay. Some people ridiculed my signing and would say, “*Parang malambot daw ako*” (I seem to be effeminate), and I would tell them that this is who I am. Some hearing people even go out of their way by teasing me like, “*Ay bakla, bakla*” (Gay, gay). There is already a label attached to me. It creates more barriers.

Lastly, attitudinal barriers are also observed in the refusal of employers to provide reasonable accommodation at work. When they expressed their need for sign language interpreters, some Deaf gay workers received remarks of being dependent (a disability stereotype) and weak to do their job alone (a gender stereotype). Dexter shares:

My supervisors would always say that I should continue to challenge myself; thus, they would disagree with my request for an interpreter. They would say that we should just continue writing back and forth to each other, but again, I could not understand certain words.

The experiences reflected above imply that the convergence of gender and disability stereotypes is disadvantageous to Deaf gay workers, particularly if these stereotypes become the basis of assessing their fitness for the job. The concept of person-job fit, defined as the degree of compatibility between an individual and the work environment (Huang et al., 2019; Wong & Tetrick, 2017), was mentioned in the response of one of the key experts, Mr. Yanga:

Being gay is a bit of a disadvantage, especially that, in Philippine culture, it is considered as deviance. Why is that a fit issue? I have encountered organizations with very conservative beliefs, and sometimes they think there is an issue with your gender identity. On the other hand, a person who is deaf or hard of hearing has an issue with fit because first, people cannot speak with them or

may not speak with them. It is more of an issue of their physical capabilities, which I think is absolutely unfair. The applicant will not get hired because s/he cannot speak, cannot hear, needs adjustment or translators. It is frustrating because they are screened out even though they have graduated from college.

While the concept of person-job fit is generally regarded as “a positive element in the workplace” (Huang et al., 2019, p. 2) and is widely used in the field of organizational psychology because of its implications on the attitudes and behaviors of employers and organizational outcomes (Wong & Tetrick, 2017), I argue that it must be problematized when the person-job fit assessment is influenced by gender and disability stereotypes. For instance, when applied to the situation of Deaf gay workers, employers may automatically categorize them as unqualified for jobs, considering that attitudes are subjective and cannot be overcome simply by laws (Sahu & Sahu, 2015).

Internalization of Ableist and Homophobic Ideas

Some participants shared their experience of internalized oppression based on their disability and gender. Defined as the process by “which values, beliefs, and ways of understanding that are part of an external culture become aspects of the internal meaning-making of individuals within that culture” (Wallis & Poulton, 2001, as cited in Teeomm, 2012, p. 41), internalization can become a “fundamental mechanism through which systems maintain their existence in the society” (Teeomm, 2012, p. 152).

The internalization of ableist and homophobic ideas is reflected in Angelo’s experience of difficulties in asserting his rights to reasonable accommodation while facing challenges in coming out as gay in the workplace:

I have never informed my supervisors about my need to have a qualified sign language interpreter. They wanted me to be independent, and I did not have to defend that I needed an interpreter when I could write back and forth. Usually, they always want to have a positive environment in a company. I

am scared because I just want to keep the peace. I do not want to ruffle any feathers. Some companies do not like any disruption, “*Sasabihin nila, o ang pangit naman ng ugali ganito*” (They will tell you that you have an undesirable attitude), and I do not want that to happen at all. That is one of the reasons why I am concerned with their perceptions.

My coworkers found out that I am gay. They asked me if it is true, and I answered “No” because I did not want them to tease me. Some people teased me, but most of the time, I noticed that when somebody found out that you are gay, that is when the gossip happens in the workplace, and it is very disheartening.

Syeda (2020) noted that oppressed individuals internalize societal norms and values to deal with societal stressors. It can be gleaned that Deaf gay workers’ internalization of ableist and homophobic ideas from their work environment is mainly reinforced by the gender and disability stereotypes attached to them. As a result, this can negatively affect the enjoyment of their rights as workers in the private sector.

Ableist and Heteronormative Workplace Practices

Common to the research findings is the reinforcement of workplace practices that adhere to ableism and heteronormativity. *Ableism* refers to “ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness” (Williams & Mavin, 2012, p. 171); hence, the notion that “impairment is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured, or indeed eliminated” (Kumari Campbell, 2008, p. 154). *Heteronormativity*, on the other hand, is described as “the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon” (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478) and is maintained and perpetuated by social institutions that “dictate the boundaries of presumed normal sexuality and even normal interaction” (Habarth, 2008, p. 2). Such ableist and heteronormative workplace practices are present during job interviews, meetings and discussions, and in additional tasks given to Deaf gay workers.

Compounded Discrimination During Job Interviews

Some participants experience being subjected to ableist and heteronormative practices during job interviews. For instance, Lucas remarked:

The major problem that I always encounter during interviews is the absence of a sign language interpreter or the interviewer's lack of sign language knowledge. This has caused miscommunication between the interviewers and me. Whenever I attend interviews, I tell them that I need an interpreter, but they tell me that no one is available to interpret. Also, one of the things that they said was I am not allowed to have long hair, and I am not allowed to act too feminine. They always remind me that there are a lot of responsibilities in this work.

This experience implies that when ableist beliefs are deeply embedded in the organizational culture and structure (Foster & MacLeod, 2003; Jammaers et al., 2016) and heterosexuality is presumed as the normal standard (Habarth, 2008) in the workplace, the design and implementation of organizational policies, processes, and practices may discriminate and exclude Deaf gay individuals.

Ms. Bisda and Ms. Aguila mentioned that ableist and heteronormative workplace practices can be addressed by establishing inclusive mechanisms. However, most companies in the private sector face challenges because of the lack of knowledge about the needs of Deaf gay men workers. Further, the lack of inclusive mechanisms in the private sector can be attributed to the gaps in the implementation of national laws on employment related to the needs of Deaf gay workers. For instance, consistent with some national disability laws, the private sector is not required but instead is merely encouraged to comply with the law's provisions. The lax approach to implementing national laws may allow private companies to absolve their accountabilities and create gaps when translated into corporate policies and practices. This is further aggravated by the absence of an anti-discrimination law based on SOGIE.

Compounded Discrimination During Meetings and Discussions

Some participants shared their experience of interlocking forms of discrimination during meetings and discussions, which is best illustrated in Dexter's response:

I have never participated in any meetings or discussions because I am not invited to join. They would always excuse me because I am Deaf gay. I do not understand why. I want to be part of the team, and I want to know what is going on. I always feel that I am excluded from the team because everyone is hearing, and I am the only Deaf gay person in the company.

My experience was positive in the beginning but later became hostile and it became discriminatory. What concerns me is the feeling of discomfort that they feel whenever I am around. Often, I would see people staring at me strangely. By their way of talking to each other, I can tell that they would call me *bakla* (gay). I can read it through their lips that they say, "*bakla, bakla, bakla.*" I tried to be patient and just focus on my work.

It can be gleaned that the ableist and heteronormative culture in the workplace, as influenced by the negative attitudes of their work environment, discriminates against and excludes Deaf gay men workers during discussions.

Multiple Burdens at Work

The ableist and heteronormative practices, coupled with the lack of inclusive mechanisms in the workplace, further result in additional tasks given to some participants to educate their colleagues on sign language and SOGIE. Lucas shared:

I insisted on teaching my coworkers about primary sign language through gestures and writing. Some of my coworkers tried to apply what they had learned. Further, I also teach them about my identity as gay. There were also times when I explained SOGIE to them, but it was difficult since I was communicating with them

through sign language. They usually thank me after I teach them, and they would tell me that they will support and trust me. However, some will laugh and just snob me, so I need to be patient and continue to educate them even though they are not interested.

This experience implies that Deaf gay men workers face multiple burdens at work that can be argued as unreasonable treatment, considering that these tasks are usually unpaid and result from the lack of appropriate action from the work environment to forward inclusion.

Unequal Power Relations in the Workplace

The reinforcement and reproduction of the able-bodied, heterosexual image in the private sector also cultivate unequal power relations between Deaf gay men workers and their hearing colleagues. Research findings revealed that some participants experience bullying and harassment that targets their gender and disability, mainly on their effeminate actions and inability to communicate with others. These experiences are best illustrated in Dexter's response:

My supervisors tend to be very strict and abusive toward Deaf employees. They would work us to the bone, making us feel like we are not doing our tasks right even though we are already putting much effort into it. There were several instances when they told me that I was making too many mistakes. I was exhausted during those times until came the time when they suspended me for a month without telling me the reasons. I felt abused because I worked diligently, and I knew that my performance was acceptable.

Meanwhile, some participants encountered a unique experience of sexual harassment associated with their gender while facing difficulties in reporting the incidents because of communication barriers and the incapacity of their work environment to develop inclusive mechanisms of reporting incidents. Nonoy shared:

There were perverts in my workplace before who would show me inappropriate pictures and things about "blow job" (oral

sex) and other things with sexual content. They would grab my shoulder, and I was like, no, this is not good. I have to report it to HR. I had a conversation with HR to report the incident, and they told me that I was the bad worker. That somehow, I was the one who was at fault. I told them that I was being harassed—they were showing me inappropriate photos. I tried to explain, but I think the hearing persons were twisting my words, and they were trying to make it like they did not do anything. I was angry because I did not know how to express myself. Eventually, I gave up. I just had to say okay, that these guys are not worth my time, and HR was not really on my side. So even though they kept on asking if I did have evidence, I just ignored them.

The lack of enabling measures for the participants to defend themselves begs the question: If speaking up against bullying and harassment per se can be incredibly difficult, how much more for those who face challenges in speaking up at all because of their intersecting marginalized identities?

In a similar experience, Lucas shared his experience of being harassed or bullied because of his gender while facing challenges to defend himself from such treatment:

During one of our breaks, I was joined by some of my coworkers who were people of hearing. We chatted for a bit until one of them left. These men started to ask me who I think is the most handsome. I was surprised by their question and answered that I did not have a choice, so I said, all of them. And they laughed. Later, another question was asked, which I think was very rude. They asked me about whom I think has “the biggest.” I did not get the question, so I asked them to clarify it. They told me, “Who do you think has the biggest dick?” I was surprised because it was so rude. I didn’t expect those questions. They kept on putting pressure on me to answer the question. Out of frustration, I left and told them that I did not want to talk about it.

As a social arena, the private sector becomes part of the “social system that is male-identified, male-controlled, male-centered that will inevitably value masculinity and masculine traits over femininity and feminine traits” (Becker, 1999, pp. 24-25). It can be gleaned that some Deaf gay workers face unique challenges in the private sector where able-bodiedness and heterosexuality are presumed normal and desirable—a manifestation of how the patriarchal system silences disadvantaged groups to maintain its power and privilege. D’ Almeida (1994, as cited in Ifechelobi, 2014, p. 22) explained silence as a representation of “the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status.” Particular to the study participants’ experience, silence is driven by the backward ideas and beliefs regarding Deaf gay individuals and the absence of inclusive mechanisms that will enable them to report incidents or defend themselves from bullying and harassment.

Inclusive Strategies

Research findings identified three strategies to address the unique experience of intersectional discrimination against Deaf gay workers in the private sector. First, participants and key experts concurred on developing and implementing policies that will reinforce a safe and inclusive work environment. It is essential to empower Deaf gay men workers to participate in the development and implementation of policies that will directly impact their workplace situation. Further, seizing the private sector’s management prerogative to establish policies and systems is an opportunity to develop inclusive mechanisms that could provide evidence of best practices to lobby for changes in the national laws on employment.

Second, the findings reveal that the attitudinal barriers toward Persons with Disabilities and Persons with diverse SOGIE which remain can be addressed through education and awareness-building programs in the workplace. This can be approached in two different ways: (1) mainstream diversity and inclusion in different company activities, such as through onboarding programs and mandatory professional development programs on FSL; and (2) providing capacity-building

programs for human resources professionals on diversity and inclusion to address the specific needs of Deaf gay workers and other dual minority groups.

Lastly, the private sector must adhere to the law's implementation on reasonable accommodation. Research findings also stressed the importance of involving Deaf gay workers in identifying what qualifies as their reasonable accommodation needs.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research reveal that Deaf gay men workers experience interlocking forms of workplace discrimination at the intersection of their disability and gender. These distinct forms of discrimination are attributed to the reinforcement and reproduction of the able-bodied, heterosexual image that is influenced by the patriarchal system that favors those who conform to the societal norms of what is normal and desirable. This research showed that Deaf gay workers' individual and collective struggles persist, and promoting their rights in work and employment remains a challenge. Hence, the need to examine their lived experience under the lens of intersectionality, rather than viewing them from gender or disability alone, to provide an in-depth analysis of how various forms of inequality operate together and exacerbate one another (Crenshaw, 1989).

The findings generated from this research confirm the presence of interlocking systems of discrimination in the workplace, affirming Crenshaw's (1989) concept of *intersectionality* that multiple forms of inequalities simultaneously operate and aggravate one another. Applying the GAD perspective to the situation of Deaf gay workers in the private sector, gender mainstreaming is seen as a strategy to locate gender equality at the center of development efforts to uncover discrimination against gender and sexual minorities. However, reflecting on the findings of this research, it can be gleaned that there is a need to develop a feminist development approach that is markedly intersectional and will capture the lived realities of marginalized people and communities holistically. As a step forward in gender mainstreaming, the need for diversity

mainstreaming is an essential strategy to ensure that no one is left behind in the private sector workplace.

Implemented in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research also provides methodological implications in conducting feminist research when there is limited face-to-face interaction. First, it is essential to strengthen the data validation process to ensure the accuracy and integrity of data. Second, researchers should select the data collection methods appropriately based on the research context. For instance, acknowledging that Deaf gay individuals may experience difficulties writing their responses online, the written interviews were complemented with online live interviews with an interpreter present. I specifically chose to conduct one-on-one interviews instead of FGDs, in anticipation of the possible challenges in accurately and completely capturing participants' responses.

Moreover, the findings of this research must also be seen in light of some practical implications. The results can be used to improve human resource and organizational development processes and practices to address the experience of intersectional discrimination against Deaf gay workers. It is recommended that those in authority to influence change in an organization improve their knowledge of diversity and inclusion to create an inclusive workplace environment responsive to everyone. Further, diversity and inclusion must be approached in a participatory manner to ensure that the unique needs of marginalized groups are recognized and considered.

It is also recommended that the laws related to Deaf gay workers' employment be revisited and strengthened to effectively implement their provisions in the private sector. It is also crucial that the Anti-Discrimination Bill based on SOGIE be passed and the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the FSL Law be finalized. It is further recommended to develop a comprehensive anti-discrimination bill that will cover all forms of discrimination to avoid single-axis analysis that would possibly ignore the experience of those who face intersectional discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989) and to encourage the private sector to utilize their management prerogative to develop their policies on diversity and inclusion.

Lastly, the new knowledge generated in this research can be used to implement advocacy and awareness-raising programs, projects, and activities that aim to emancipate those at the intersection of marginalized identities collectively. This research recommends that the findings be used in educating the private sector on the unique needs of Deaf gay workers and, eventually, their inclusion in the workplace.

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NOTES

- ¹ The phrase *nananatiling tahimik*, when translated to the English language, means remaining voiceless. I used this phrase to describe the present situation of Deaf gay workers in the private sector as reflected in the findings of this study.
- ² The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defined *reasonable accommodation* as the “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments to safeguard the enjoyment or exercise of rights of Persons with Disabilities on an equal basis with others” (UN, 2006, p. 4).
- ³ The *private sector* refers to “all non-public entities including enterprises, foundations, nongovernmental organizations, and households” (International Labour Organization, 2014).
- ⁴ The original title of the law does not reflect the people-first language that is internationally accepted when referring to persons with disabilities. In the next pages, RA 7277 will be referred to as “Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities” in recognition of the use of people-first language.
- ⁵ Signed into law in 2018, the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the FSL law have not yet been finalized at the time this study was conducted.
- ⁶ PDR is an organization in the Philippines established in December 2010 to advance the interests of Deaf LGBTQ+ Filipinos and help mainstream the Deaf LGBTQ+ concerns (Mendoza, 2012).
- ⁷ I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to protect their identities. Their individual responses will be mentioned in the findings under their assigned pseudonym.

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