

# The Exploration on the Lived Experiences and Challenges Faced of the Gay College Students Amidst COVID-19

Angela Kate Ferrer<sup>1</sup> Luis Maranan<sup>2</sup> Justine Luntaga<sup>3</sup> Aira Del Rosario<sup>4</sup>  
Jhoselle Tus<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1-4</sup>Research Students, Filipino Psychology <sup>5</sup>Research Professor, Filipino Psychology  
Jesus is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc., Bocaue, Bulacan, Philippines

## Abstract

*The song "Sirena" by Gloc-9 has become widely popular and controversial in the Philippines, especially to gays, the song's primary subject matter. This song depicts the experiences of gay individuals starting from childhood up to adulthood by portraying an image of how gays deal with their sexual preferences and how society established its perception in viewing gays. Thus, Filipino setting of a family raised conservatively and traditionally, religious affiliations, cultural norms, and family expectations are the dominating elements that influence gay individuals in dealing with their sexuality. Further, this study utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to describe the respondents' lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Moreover, the implications of the study were discussed, and recommendations were suggested.*

*Keywords: Sikolohiyang Pilipino, LGBTQ+, Gay College Students, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The song "Sirena" by Gloc-9 has become widely popular and controversial in the Philippines, especially to gays, the song's primary subject matter. This song depicts the experiences of gay individuals starting from childhood up to adulthood by portraying an image of how gays deal with their sexual preferences and how society established its perception in viewing gays. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2012), the term "gay" refers to a male individual sexually attracted to the same sex as his. Some gays divert from conforming to the societal standards inclined with men but conveys a dismissive attitude towards the womanly actions of gays (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012). Because of this labeled femininity to males, these individuals are at high risk of violence, whereas discrimination, isolation, and avoidance are the extraordinary experiences of gay students inside the campus (Evans et al., 2017).

In a typical Filipino setting of a family raised conservatively and traditionally, religious affiliations, cultural norms, and family expectations are the dominating elements that influence gay individuals in dealing with their sexuality (Nadal & Corpus, 2013). On the other hand, it is a standard-setting of violence; heterosexuals are most likely the culprit for gay victimization (Jewell, 2011). Lack of legal protection from the law, mental health issues, and discrimination in every aspect are significant challenges to gay students in the Philippines (Tang & Poudel, 2018).

In the global scene as the population of gays rapidly increase, cases of discrimination and harassment also continues to rise. Violence continues to take lives and create divisions to equity (Kosciw, 2004) and opportunities as the U.S. President Donald Trump Administration presented new threats to this community (Durso et al., 2017). Young LGBTQ people have negative experiences at the campus due to homophobic violence, which negatively affects most aspects of their lives, including mental health (Valentine & Wood, 2009). In the Philippines, some gay students encounter physical, verbal, sexual, and cyber harassment in schools, and most of the students are not aware of the existing anti-bullying policies. They lack orientation for these gay individuals about coping with it and where to seek help (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Gay students experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation (Valentine et al., 2009), and that the campus should implement an anti-bullying policy (Minton et al., 2008). Different beliefs from different cultural systems implanted us a perception that being different and having another

gender cannot be considered straight male or straight female is not normal. That difference may be the cause to born future changes of perspective in society and acceptance for our gay peers.

Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer (LGBTQ), the home community of gays, has been the protective covering of gays against discrimination and maltreatment. Several unheard stories from the LGBTQ community keep them silent about their sexual identity, forcing them to conform to what society dictates and assigned them to be. Even though negative experiences are a high risk for them, there are also positive experiences that keep them fighting for gay rights. That is why their peers in the LGBTQ who have the same aim as them unite to establish a home exclusive for their comradeship as Henry Gerber, the founder of Society for Human Rights, created a gay rights organization in 1924 (CNN, 2020). Due to gay rights, which LGBTQ considered as one of their major milestones, their community has seen a glimpse of hope for the better. Because of that, gay people's experiences are now centered more on acceptance and positive views and outlook from the school (White, Magrath, & Thomas, 2018). A chance to openly show your true sexual identity as gay is essential to gay students' experiences (Robinson, 2012). Gay students view their experiences positively, and those may be a medium for them to explore and better understand their sexuality (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Gay empowerment is the spirit that gay students should possess. Creating a free identity, freedom, security, and belongingness are the essential elements every gay should feel to place their identity into existence (Pena-Talamantes, 2013). Intentional right actions and support were given by the faculty, staff, and peer groups to every campus activity of gay students. Their ability to deal with challenges is essential to success (Hill-Silcott, 2015).

And most importantly, family acceptance is a crucial turning point in gay individuals' acceptance of their sexuality (Ryan et al., 2010). And as the population of gays continues to rise, society keeps developing knowledge and a deeper understanding of their sexual preferences to accept and shift perception by giving gay individuals a sense of belongingness and oneness. Thus, making this world a habitable place for them to live.

Gays want their voices to be heard and freely represent their identities without violence and judgment. They want the world to treat them as worthy individuals who can take responsibility, make decisions, select what they want to do, and be significant to others. They are not the gender limited only to roles and stereotypes in which every individual raised to believe about them. These gays are more to male femininity, they are beyond gay slang, and they are beautiful beneath cross-dressing. Opening a lot of opportunities for them and acceptance is what they aim to fulfill. Out of fear, rejection, and gender stereotype, they considered such struggles and challenges to ignition to pursue success and spread greatness and break the belief that has chained them at the society's least areas. And as the finale of the song hits gays a sense of strength, bravery, and pride, "*Ako'y isang sirena, kahit anong gawin nila, bandera ko'y 'di tutumba.*" (English translation: I am a mermaid, whatever they do, my flag will not fall)

This qualitative study aims to explore the lived experiences of selected gay college students. It also seeks to convey the challenges faced by these individuals in the community. And lastly, it aims to know the coping mechanisms of the said individuals in dealing with themselves and different groups about their sexual preference.

This study on the lived experiences and challenges faced by the college gay students would like to outstretch its advantage to the gay community being the main subject of the study. Through this study, many silent tongues will speak to contribute to the knowledge of existing bodies of studies to be used by future researchers. This study explores different stories of other gay students' lived experiences. A wide range of groups will better understand homosexuality and their community, LGBTQ, where gay students belong. This study would like to emphasize the negative experiences and the positive ones, their challenges, and their ways of dealing with them and overcoming such battles.

### 1.1 Research Questions

This study aims to explore the lived experiences and challenges faced by selected gay college students.

Specifically, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of college gay students?
2. What are the challenges faced by college gay students?
3. How do gay students deal with and cope up with experiences on being a gay?

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 *The Lived Experiences of Gay College Students*

Social Weather Station conducted national surveys about the attitudes towards lesbians and gays in 1996 and 2001. The data from this survey is used to study the attitudes of Filipinos to homosexuality. It concluded that Filipinos had a massive percentage of negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians. 28% of Filipinos find homosexuals unjustifiable, while only 4% of the population identified homosexuals as justifiable (Manalastas & Del Pilar, 2005).

Canada, being one of the major nations that advocates equality and enforces LGBTQ rights, yet homophobia and homophobic violence still live on and remain a significant purpose of humanity's annihilators. LGBTQ-related crime widely flourished throughout Canada, but Canadian criminology has little to no statement and disclosure of this horror to publications. *Pink Blood* is the first published book that tackles homophobic violence, a compilation of horrible experiences of LGBTQ in their native land (Janoff, 2005).

In a qualitative investigation conducted to explore lesbian and gay youth's bullying experiences, researchers requested nine respondents to state their lives as a gay youth. Different factors associated with the source of violence and harassment, the perpetrator or the culprit of bullying, the effects of bullying in their social and mental health, and their defense mechanism in dealing with such kind of homophobic violence are the main discussion of the study. Homophobic violence still lives on even though LGBTQ is now widely understood and accepted in our society. Even though society is already open to such sexual preferences, they are always labeled as victims and at high risk for heterosexual victimization. Several factors and groups were still considered perpetrators of violence, such as their campus peers, communities, and even their families. Due to this continuous violence, low self-esteem, and poor social ability are unwanted effects on one's social and mental health. LGBTQ affirming policy and law that would cater to the rights and security of these gays should implement as protection against homophobic violence (Mishna et al., 2009).

Research conducted in Southeast Asia about homonegativity toward lesbians and gay men, Indonesia with a percentage of 66 and Malaysia with 59, is the most homophobic attitude toward these individuals. At the same time, Thailand with 40%, Singapore with 32%, Vietnam with 29%, and the Philippines with 28% are the countries where gays experienced the least rejection (Manalastas et al., 2017).

Studies show that most youths in a sample of 56% are nonvictims, with a low percentage of reporting any form of victimization. The second-largest group was referred to as the Social Victims group, 37% because these youth had a high probability of reporting social assault such as teased or called names, ignored, left out, and a low likelihood of writing all other forms of victimization. However, the Social Victims group had a relatively high probability of 87% reporting they had got bullied, which indicated that these students identified their experiences as bullying (Evans & Chapman, 2014).

According to the study on the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students at the University of South Florida, Tampa Campus, the following are the revelation of their university experiences: the subject individuals were more likely to live in the campus dormitories than those heterosexuals, they were more likely to be enrolled in minimal course hours, they were more likely to use loans or educational support funds to pay for college expenses and received less support from parents in providing for those expenses (Stewart, 2015).

According to research with the number of 264 UWA students, most participants (63.2%) view their classes' climate as accepting LGBT people. 5.9% of participants had experienced harassment or discrimination at UWA because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Of these participants, 88% experienced harassment or other students' discrimination (Dau & Strauss, 2016).

This study examined the effects of homophobic bullying of LGBT youth attending twenty-two high schools in Shelby County, Tennessee. Forty-one of the fifty-three participants (77%) interviewed stated they got bullied because they were gay or perceived to be gay. Thirty-one of thirty-four (91%) gay participants indicated that some force them because they were gay. Participants also revealed that even if they were not "openly" gay but were perceived to be gay, they got bullied as well. If their behavior was not deemed "masculine" enough or did not meet "heterosexual norms," they were forced (Chatman, 2015).

According to the survey conducted to study young gay individuals' experiences of homophobic bullying in Ireland, findings clearly emphasize that gays experience bullying and harassment in their daily lives. The result showed that the LGBT population has a high risk of campus discrimination and that the campus should consider creating welfare, an anti-bullying policy for these gay individuals (Minton et al., 2008).

In an analysis of LGBTQ college students' experiences regarding the campus climate, 12 LGBTQ responded to provide information about their perceptions and experiences of discrimination and isolation. The results discussed the three dominant problems encountered by these gays: discrimination, isolation, and avoidance. Heterosexuals from groups of fraternities and sororities and even the people who have religious affiliations are the perpetrator of such homophobic cruelty. LGBTQ people tend to stay away from these kinds of people to avoid trouble and to keep away from igniting negative interactions (Evans et al., 2017).

LGBT students suffer from damaging school climate indicators hearing discriminatory remarks, including homophobic comments, feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, or race/ethnicity. They often missed their classes or days of school because of safety reasons and experience of harassment and assault in school (Kosciw et al., 2012).

U.S High School students identified as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual report that 33% got bullied on school property, and 27.1 % got cyberbullied. In the past year, their heterosexual peers in 17% indicated that LGB students were not going to school because of safety concerns (Kann et al., 2018).

In an exploratory study of the experiences of 24 "tomboy" (lesbian) and "bakla" (gay) Filipino Americans on the East and West coasts of the United States, the findings discussed that religion, culture, and family expectations are essential to gain acceptance of one's sexual preference. These gays stated that they experienced psychological suffering, racism, and heterosexism from their families, peers, and neighborhood (Nadal & Corpus, 2013).

Assumption College in Iloilo, Philippines, stated in their employment contracts and student enrollment handbooks that homosexuality is immoral and expulsion to students and firing to staff will be the sanction to every gay pupils and employee they will ever have. *"Immorality, which refers to acts that are contrary to Catholic morals, teachings and values as defined, described and discussed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, including but not limited to... homosexuality... is considered a grave offense sanctionable by dropping from the rolls after due process"* as written in the school's handbooks (Calleja, 2020).

In a study about the experiences of LGBTQ in a Catholic school to influence leadership, researchers requested six LGBTQ fresh graduates from a Catholic high school to participate in the research using a phenomenological approach. The selected respondents stated the following experiences: the campus being silent about sexual and gender opposed students, substantial support given by their peers within the campus, and experiences of fear and rejection about being gay at a Catholic institution. This research concluded that educational leadership plays a significant role in shaping the LGBTQ people's experiences (Parodi-Brown, 2019).

In a study of the relationship between young men's sexual orientation and the probability of suicide in the Philippines, the discrepancy in the likelihood of suicide in sexual orientation was identified. It concluded that Filipinos that are self-identified as gay and bisexual young men have higher levels of suicidal thoughts but not in particular to suicidal attempts. Suicidal thoughts were identified to be twice higher among young Filipino homosexuals than heterosexuals. These thoughts of suicide are directly linked to psychological depression, vicarious experiences of suicide, and homophobic violence (Manalastas, 2013).

A study conducted to analyze the influence of parental support, and suicidal thoughts on Filipino lesbian and gay high school students concluded that the higher level of discrimination and nonacceptance among these students is associated with a higher probability of suicidal concepts. Rejection from mothers is determined to have a crucial role in a higher likelihood of suicidal thoughts than fathers' rejection (Reyes et al., 2015).

Six gay individuals who were all alumni from various American Catholic institutions of higher education were subjected to an interview to seek experiences attending a college or university where teachings are contradictory to the sexual orientation of the gays. This study concluded that four apparent factors have surfaced as an inclination to the gay men's experiences: these alumni received a negative report about their sexual orientation, visibility, and support given to them were the positive experiences they had, and technology plays an essential role for them to continuously connect with their gay peers (Kleine, 2018).

The study about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lived experiences at a youth foster care concluded that these individuals experienced verbal harassment from heterosexual peers, foster parents, and facility staff. These individuals are also dependent on their foster homes and other foster care centers because of behavioral issues related to homophobic violence and bullying and lack of accepting foster families. It also concluded that social workers, whether they belong to LGBTQ as well or not, act as sources of support to these LGBTQ youth. However, there is still a need for a thorough education for these social workers to promote equal rights and practices to LGBTQ and improve the qualification and recruitment of foster parents to give proper care and treatment to LGBTQ youths (Barnett, 2018).

In a systematic study on the mental health of LGBTQ youth, the discussions have determined that isolation, rejection, phobia, depression, and self-violence have emerged on the reflection of their feelings. Simultaneously, support, implementation of rights policy, provision of a safe and peaceful environment, sense of belongingness within their families, peers, and other groups are vital to better and healthy mental health (Wilson & Cariola, 2019).

According to a sociological exploration about the need for safe spaces for gay students at a South African University, ten lesbian students and ten lesbian gays were asked to state their experiences within the campus. The study concluded that gay students in a South African University campus need to allocate safe spaces exclusively for them and be separated from other heterosexual groups to secure safety, relatedness, and connection within their group (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

In phenomenological qualitative research about gay male college students' lived experiences after coming out to a heterosexual roommate in a residence hall, researchers interviewed ten self-identified gay male respondents from a university about their experiences of a heterosexual roommate. The gathered data were analyzed and

interpreted using the guidelines for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Four themes emerged after the data analysis: self-evaluation of these individuals to live as gay, the capability to freedom and coming out with their sexual identity, experiences of homophobic violence, and gaining support from peers (Burton, 2020).

The unjust treatment of gay is not a dominating problem in universities. Being gay does not mean it would make you or lead you to be a victim of harassment. Gay students view their experiences positively. Those may be a medium for them to explore and better understand their sexuality according to the narratives of gay male students in a university (Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

Researchers requested 26 lesbian, gay, and bisexual staff and students at a tertiary institution in Southeast England to narrate experiences of being gay within the campus vicinity. Even though LGBTQ had been the center of homophobic violence by heterosexuals, the results showed a better and improving perception towards LGBTQ. It also surfaced the visibility and the openness of these gays in the broader group of college peers, and that acceptance is phenomenal in campus climate (White et al., 2018).

The experiences that affect African-American gay men's college persistence are the intentional actions and support from faculty, staff, and friends to help them succeed in college. Permission given by these groups to their campus activities and the ability of gay students to deal with challenges is an essential key to success (Hill-Silcott, 2015).

In a critical visual qualitative research on gay and male bisexual college students' experiences, researchers requested nine individuals to state their experiences as a gay and bisexual on the campus. It concluded that freely showing your true sexual identity as gay is essential to the gay students' experiences. Connection or feeling of oneness within their fellow students serves as a crucial element in building a better experience for gay students (Robinson, 2012).

Research on the lived experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual college students supported by their parents, seven gays were invited to an interview about their experiences before, during, and after coming out to their families. The gay respondents experienced being different, but the coming out was positively understood and accepted, and the coming out had a significant impact on their education. At first, these gays were uncertain about what would be their families may feel. Still, their parents tightly assured them with endless love and support, an action of appreciation, and a sense of more profound attachment (Price & Prosek, 2019).

## **2.2 The Challenges Faced by Gay College Students**

According to the systematic study of the structure, experiences, and challenges of LGBTQ, these individuals received more support from friends than biological families. Others are not given adequate support due to the increased LGBTQ stigma, the differences in assurance and awareness strategies between the family and friends, and the difficulties and challenges that continuously hinder them from gaining social support and acceptance (Hawthorne et al., 2020).

In a qualitative study conducted to determine the advantages and disadvantages in coming out through the use of social media such as Facebook, researchers asked 12 gay men to state their experiences; the result showed out that homophobia was the primary response they received from coming out. They also expressed vital objectives and concerns in coming out online, such as looking forward to a better relationship among peers and expectations of gaining and losing friends. They find the importance of social media in coming out efficient and convenient compared to face-to-face conversation. Others may not be expressive enough in speaking, so they prefer talking and revealing their feelings about their sexual orientation online (Chester et al., 2016).

Catholicism, being the Philippines' dominating religion after the Spaniards introduced it to Filipinos, was also home to several traditions and beliefs that the Filipinos still practice up until this modern day. Traditional perception and norms brought by Catholicism involve the views and opinions on sexual preference and gender roles. Women who fail to conform to female gender roles refer to lesbians, and men to male gender roles refer to gays, and homosexuality was against Catholic laws. Due to those religious norms, lesbians and gays became the face of discrimination and victim of homophobic violence perpetrated by heterosexuals (Reyes, 2019).

Filipino gays continue to suffer from violence and discrimination in the Philippines. This adverse treatment demonstrated bullying and harassment actions to young gay individuals from different groups such as families, schools, and communities. The way media portrays the image of LGBTQ can be seen as a laughing stock and easily threatened by heterosexuals, cutting opportunities to have publicity and restricting them to participate in societal roles and responsibilities (Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2011).

"*Wala akong bakla/tomboy na anak*" (I don't have gay/lesbian child), "*wala naman sa lahi natin ang pagiging tomboy/pagiging bakla*" (Being lesbian/gay does not run in our blood), and "*walang lugar sa mundo ang mga tomboy/bakla*" (There is no room in this world for lesbians/gays) are the common forms of rejection that causes

psychological trauma to every LGBTQ children. Family and relatives were the primary sources of contradictions and discriminations experienced by these children (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2017).

High expectations from families and the belief that males and females must have relationships only with the opposite sex are some of the reasons why gay individuals often repress their actual sexual orientation (Ereño, 2014).

Filipino gays conformed less and experienced more conflict with the norms and standards of the family. Their anxiety is directly associated with the result of less conformation to male roles. On the other hand, straight men's psychological distress is determined to result from less confirmation of familial roles (Rubio & Green, 2009).

Research conducted to explore the self-stigma, self-concept, and mental health condition of Filipino LGBT concluded that a higher level of self-stigma is a significant factor in developing unfavorable mental health conditions. In comparison, a higher level of self-concept is linked with a better mental health condition (Reyes et al., 2015).

The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1973. Still, in 2011, the Psychological Association of the Philippines finally collided with the global mental health community when all Filipino psychologists got recognition for its LGBT policy that recognizes the dignity and rights of every human regardless of sexual preference. The procedure includes the right to freedom, the security against violence and discrimination, and the society where equality manifests and where every human can live harmoniously are all strictly implemented (Manalastas, 2013).

### **2.3 The Coping Mechanism of Gay College Students in Dealing with their Experiences of Being Homosexual**

In a qualitative study on the coping mechanisms and coming out process of gay college students in a fraternity, three approaches appeared as part of the revelation process of their sexual identity. The first one is the member-specific approach in which the gays reveal themselves first to a member of the group who is closer to them and with whom they have the strongest bond of friendship. The second one is the step-by-step approach in which the gays cautiously planned their action of revealing their identity. The last one is the passive or reactive approach in which gay men make scenarios to indirectly state their revelation regarding their sexual orientation (Trump, 2003).

Aside from adjustment and climate adaptation from secondary to tertiary education of LGBTQ students, multiple transitions such as identity, social, academic, professional, and psychological are also significant (Glazzard et al., 2020).

Despite that Roman Catholic was against homosexuality and a hindrance to the acceptance of LGBTQ, the Philippines was one of the nations that significantly tolerate actions and participations of our gay peers in different events. Even though they are now fully understood and accepted in the context, they remain subject to humor and insult. Opportunities for LGBTQ people have finally opened their doors not just in indoor-related works but also in public. Public figures such as Vice Ganda, a journalist, and a politician such as Geraldine Batista Roman made a grand entrance to give pride and colors to their symbolizing community and start the era of change and hope that LGBTQ people have waited a long time. President Rodrigo Duterte also laid a statement in his speech at the 7th LGBT Davao Year-End Gathering: "*If that is the trend of the modern times, if that will add to your happiness, I am all for it*" (Astudillo, 2019).

In a phenomenological queering of openly gay students' lived experiences at a school's student government, researchers selected eight openly gay men as a respondent. The conclusion discussed that these gays perceive a better outlook to live freely and come out as gay as an essential key to providing good leadership. They perceive that sexual preference has nothing to do with the quality of their work and ability to lead and that a leader was already born even before the sexual orientation comes out (Goodman, 2020).

In a qualitative study on gays' lived experiences on identity development, five gay men respondents stated their experiences and confronted these experiences toward self-acceptance and adaptation (Paul & Frieden, 2008).

In a study of how to empower gay college students by creating a free identity, findings stated that freedom, security, and belonging, given by their fellow students and felt by the gays, are the essential elements for them to place their identity into existence. Due to those three elements, gays become self-empowered and become brave enough to establish their third-world (Pena-Talamantes, 2013).

In a phenomenological study about the factors that affect gay, lesbian, and bisexual students' effort toward self-actualization at a private religious college, four fresh graduates and fourteen currently enrolled students voluntarily respond to an interview regarding their academic and extracurricular lives at a Roman Catholic tertiary institution in New York. Volunteered respondents discussed their perceptions and experiences on the behavior and treatment of gay, lesbians, and bisexuals, such as homophobia and unequal treatment among faculty, staff, and students. The result concluded that these individuals are continuously receiving support from different campus

groups such as the faculty, even those who have religious affiliations. Still, a more comprehensive range of support and awareness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are much more necessary (Gormley, 2017).

There is a term "*babaeng bakla*" (gay women) in the Filipino setting, which refers to women who associated themselves with gay men, develop strong bonds and friendships, and even join LGBTQ activities. According to an investigation on the *babaeng bakla* to test the hypothesized difference of them to other women, they developed a figure concluding that *babaeng bakla* form a mutual attraction towards gay men that made them create a sense of association with gay men (Torre & Manalastas, 2013).

Filipino LGBT has been struggling to fight for equality and human rights, which is believed to be one of the keys to empowerment and equality to the LGBT community, bringing social change, equality, and peace to the occurring rage between homosexuals and homophobic people of the Philippines. The result concluded to five significant themes such as the movement for LGBT human rights advocacy, the identified advantages of being an LGBT advocate, the essence of being a self-identified advocate of LGBT, and existing driving force and devotion for participating in LGBT-related advocacies and revolutions (Manalastas & Torre, 2013).

A study conducted to analyze the relationship identified that Filipino transgender has encountered a low internalized stigma and have intelligible self-concepts. There are no discrepancies between gays and lesbians regarding self-concept and self-stigma, but there is a present discrepancy regarding their internalized transphobia (Reyes et al., 2016).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Qualitative research relies on idiographic and scientific inquiry to determine how individuals discern a particular phenomenon's particular condition.

The use of IPA is to analyze how the respondents perceived their personal and social nature. IPA research's vital elements are the significance of specific encounters, phenomena, and affairs held for the respondents (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Thus, the process is phenomenological. It necessitates an in-depth and critical investigation of the respondent; it seeks to analyze one's understanding and explanation and illustrate a particular phenomenon or condition rather than the sole empirical or observational method to describe the occurrences or object.

#### 3.1 Participants

IPA research conducts with small sample sizes of respondents. It takes a longer duration to review the wide-range and in-depth case study. This research aims to thoroughly investigate the concept of experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of a particular group, aside from concluding broader knowledge for IPA's purpose to profoundly determine the variables of cases and not state vague conclusions (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

This research focuses on gay college students as participants. According to the following criteria, researchers specifically selected these participants who perceived that they are gay, ages 18 – 30, college student, and currently enrolled in a private school in Bulacan, for the school year 2020-2021. The respondents were comfortably willing to respond to state their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in dealing with their sexual orientation of being gay. The sampling method used in the selection of participants is judgment or purposive. In purposive sampling, the respondents are picked precisely according to the standards created by the researchers. This sampling method is suitable for the conditional selection of specific respondents that will best identify the subject variable's criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015).

#### 3.2 Instrument

The interview is used in this research to conduct the collection of data from the participants. Guide questions are also carefully checked and verified to assess the credibility and accuracy of the research subject. Expected data from the respondents were all acknowledged and assumed to be accurate and precise according to the issue and on what the study seeks to answer. After the research instrument's approval, the researchers begin with the data collection process with the study's ten participants.

#### 3.3 Procedures

This research has undergone several procedures to conduct data collection and conclude useful and accurate research results. A consent letter was first sent to the respondents via electronic mail to ask for a request if they are willing to participate in the research. After the consent was acknowledged and accepted, the researcher promptly proceeds with the data gathering through the interview. The researcher interviewed the respondents via a

social media service platform. The researchers interviewed them one by one to secure their confidentiality and make them feel pleasant and cozy to state their answers and share their stories willingly and comfortably.

The research questions were presented during the interview process for the respondents to ascertain their perspectives and statements and determine the level of relationship and interaction between the researcher and the researchee. Interviews motivate the participants to state their thoughts and stories using verbal and nonverbal communication to the researcher from their perspective and language and in their comfort zone. The researchers transcribed each of the participants' statements and analyzed them multiple times to effectively interpret and acquire the main idea from the respondents' point of view. After the researchers finished the data gathering and the interview ended successfully, the researchers had now gathered the data about the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of gay college students in dealing with their sexual orientation.

The researchers conducted the interview discreetly to secure privacy. Before the researchers informed the probable respondents, the participants had an orientation about the data gathering process, privacy, and noncompulsory response before receiving the consent. Permission must be approved first by the possible participants before the data collection process's actual execution. The information of the participants is confidential and strictly prohibited to confide to secure their privacy. Instead, they were introduced and identified with the use of numbers.

#### 4. RESULTS

This part of the paper includes the presentation of the result of the respondents' responses. The respondents' demographic profile shown in Table 1 consists of the college year level and age. Ten gays, currently enrolled as college students, aged 18 – 30, and living in Bulacan, participated as respondents in this study.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Variable	Frequency
College Year Level	
First	1
Second	6
Third	2
Fourth	1
Age	
20	4
21	3
22	1
25	1
27	1

The following divisions discuss the outcome of the comprehensive interview conducted by the researchers. Variations of the result are divided into three categories that tackle the three main themes of the research: the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of gay college students. Each of the three categories is divided into subordinate groups according to the participants' responses supported by their raw and untampered statements. The subordinate group's tabulated frequency from the main themes' types is arranged in a descending pattern. Views of the respondents are also quoted to support the presentation of the result. To further justify their statements, a citation from previous studies are also included.

##### 4.1 The Lived Experiences of Gay College Students

Most of the respondents stated that acceptance from their families and peers are the essential and happiest experience for them to embrace themselves as gay and to love themselves for what they are. It acts as a memorable and pleasurable lived experiences that make them feel that gay is worthy of love, freedom, and happiness. But not every journey is perfect; there are also struggles and negative experiences that gay experienced along their path of being gay. As illustrated in Table 2, fourteen subordinate groups in the lived experiences surfaced from the respondents' statements. The lived experiences that emerged from the data are the following: acceptance, unconditional love, freedom, source of happiness, self-growth, sense of worth, and empathy, which referred to as

positive experiences, and discrimination, bullying, gender inequality, emotional cutoff, criticism, low confidence, and gender concealment, which are referred to as negative experiences.

**Table 2: Lived Experiences Groups**

Lived Experiences	Frequency
Acceptance	6
Unconditional Love	3
Freedom	3
Source of Happiness	3
Discrimination	2
Bullying	2
Self-Growth	1
Sense of Worth	1
Empathy	1
Gender Inequality	1
Emotional Cutoff	1
Criticism	1
Low Confidence	1
Gender Concealment	1

#### 4.1.1 Positive Experiences

Respondents stated that positive perception from others contributes to the betterment of their journey as gay. It ignites a spark within their souls that even though they belong to the third gender, they will be able to reach the peak of empowerment through acceptance, unconditional love, freedom, happiness, self-growth, sense of worth, and empathy. It acts as a source of motivation that drives them to love themselves even more.

##### 4.1.1.1 Acceptance

According to the respondents, acceptance from family, peers, and other people surrounding their sexual orientation drives them to embrace and freely show their true colors. It is their primary motivation for perceiving their experiences positively. Even parents claimed that their acceptance gives gays strength in fighting and coping with their sexuality (Griffin et al., 1996). Six out of ten respondents declared the following statements regarding how acceptance gave them positive experiences and a positive outlook in life. Gay student 3 said that:

*"Hindi ako nakatanggap ng lait o hindi pagsang-ayon ng aking mga magulang sa kung ano ang kasarian ko. Sinabihan lang ako na mag anak soon. Bukod doon, wala na. Tanggap nila ako."*

Gay student 5 stated that even though his family's expectations pressure him, he is still happy because his family loves him no matter his sexual orientation.

*"To be honest, I was raised by a big family with different kinds of gender preferences that's why my family understands me, accept me, and fully loves me. Being a gay in the family is a pressure, they have lots of expectations to me but despite of that, I'm happy and contented to those nice experiences I've gained from my family."*

Even Gay student 1 proudly stated that his father never used violence on him and accepts him.

*"Kailanman, hindi ako pinagmalupitan ng aking ama sapagkat tanggap niya ang aking pagkatao."*

Gay student 7 shared that since he was a kid, he knew that he was gay, so it was not that hard for his family to accept his sexual orientation.

*"Noong una natakot ako sa tahanan kasi 'yung kasama ko sa bahay, hindi naman 'yung pamilya ko kasi nakikitira lang din naman ako pero hindi naman mahirap sa kanila na tanggapin ako kasi hindi ko naman nasabi sa kanila pero alam ko nararamdaman ko naman na tanggap nila sitwasyon ko."*

##### 4.1.1.2 Unconditional Love

Three of the respondents expressed their heartfelt gratitude to families and peers for the unconditional love they continuously receiving after coming out as gay. An organization called Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) promotes love to LGBT people. It also aims to raise a movement towards love and

provide emotional assertion to the family members who are self-identified as gays and lesbians who had been through many homophobic attitudes (Broad, 2011). This immeasurable kind of love is what drives these gays to love and accept themselves even more. Positive experiences will never bound to deplete as long as unconditional love is present and received. Gay student 2 said:

*"Bilang isang bakla sa loob ng aming tahanan, naranasan ko ang unconditional love na nagmumula sa aking pamilya lalong lalo na sa aking mga magulang. Dahil natutunan nilang tanggapin kung ano talaga ang kasarian at landas na nais kong tahakin."*

Gay student 7 also said that:

*"Sa baranggay, sa kapitbahay iba kasi yung comfort zone ko eh. Dito, noong sa city na ako nakatira, naging maganda, hindi naging mahirap sa akin kasi buong buo nila akong tinanggap. Doon ko naranasan yung tunay na pagmamahal, doon sa bahay na 'yon, 'yong kumupkop sa akin."*

#### 4.1.1.3 Freedom

Three out of ten respondents also stated how freedom contributes to their positive experiences as gay. Being released from gender-specific conformation to responsibilities is considered one of the positive experiences of gay (Riggie et al., 2008). Because of this, they can able to express their sexual orientation without violence and without causing harm to others. Freedom is being open and showcasing out what gay people can do beyond society's limitations, and that is one of their objectives in life. Gay student 3 shared that:

*"Masaya, dahil sa mga kauri ko nakikita yung saya at pagiging malaya sa kung ano ka at nararamdaman mo."*

Gay student 5 proudly declares that rejections and discriminations have no room for their friendship as long as they are together (gay peers).

*"Together with my gay friends, I felt the acceptance, love, support and the freedom to express my wholeness with them. Yes, sometimes we didn't understand each other considering that we have different wants and perspectives in life, but one thing is for sure, sama-sama kaming titignan ng lahat ng mga taong nanlalait sa amin, pinagtatawanan kami at wala silang lugar sa aming magkakaibigan."*

Gay student 6 also said that he could find freedom and be true to himself whenever his friends surround him.

*"Ako, masaya ako kapag kasama ko sila. Lalo na kapag kasama ko 'yung isa kong kaibigan na bakla din kasi parang kumbaga, doon lang sa mga panahon lang na iyon ako nagiging masaya at totoo sa sarili ko, at komportable akong kasama 'yung mga kapwa ko gays. Pero in real life scenario, ano lang, matino lang ako at 'di mo talaga mahahalata na bading ako."*

#### 4.1.1.4 Source of Happiness

Three out of ten respondents also shared their happy moments with their gay peers. They stated that gays are one of the sources of happiness and can take all your sadness away. That does not mean they are the laughing stock of their peers; it is just that they can effortlessly make you smile and happy, which is one of the colorful characteristics of being gay. Happiness is defined as a result of having a joyful life, and most gays gain pleasure when they are supported and helped in their obstacles by the people they find as significant (McGlynn et al., 2020). According to Gay student 1:

*"Bilang isang bakla, naranasan ko sa loob ng aming tahanan ang magpasaya sa bawat miyembro ng aking pamilya. Kahit maraming problema ay ako ang nagsisilbing solusyon sa mga lungkot na kanilang nararanasan."*

Gay student 4 also cheerfully stated that he is the clown of the group.

*"Hay nako, ang saya lang! Ako ang clown sa aming magkakaibigan and gusto ko 'yon dahil masaya lang, good vibes lang ganon."*

Gay 8 also said that his peers are his source of happiness because they can understand each other.

*"Masaya, masaya. Masaya kami 'pag nagkakasama kasi nagkakaintindihan kami, lahat alam namin 'yung problema at alam namin kung paano 'yon sosolusyunan."*

#### 4.1.1.5 Self-Growth

A respondent stated that aside from self-acceptance regarding their sexual orientation, he also developed growth and maturity as challenges of being gay, which he views as a positive experience, makes him stronger and unbreakable. Homes can be a solace and a ground for growing and boosting gays' self-worth by withstanding homophobia and embracing homosexuality and providing support for homosexual family members (Gorman-Murray, 2008). According to Gay student 2:

*"Bilang isang bakla na mayroon ding mga kaibigan na gaya ko ng kasarian, mas maraming kaalaman ang pumapasok at tinatangap ng aking murang kaisipan para mas lalo kong yakapin at maintindihan ang tunay na dahilan kung bakit ibinigay sa amin ang ganitong kasarian. Mas lumawak ang aking kaisipan para ibatid na kami ay bakla ngunit hindi isang bakla lamang."*

#### **4.1.1.6 Sense of Worth**

A respondent expressed how his self-worth developed out of adverse treatment and the challenges of being gay. Optimistic self-conceptualizations and resiliency to homophobia are considered to be the positive outlook of gays that lead to self-worth development (Harper et al., 2012). He stated that his experiences as positive turned him into the person he is right now. According to Gay student 5:

*"Mahirap, madaming mapanghusgang mata ang nakatingin sa amin at hindi kami matanggap, pero 'di 'yun 'yung naging dahilan para sumuko ako. Walang naitutulung sa akin 'yung mga taong walang ginawa kung hindi mangmata, manlait, at pagtawanan kami. I just want to make all things clear, that those experiences I've gained outside of my home gives a lot of impact to who I am now. But one thing is for sure, those criticisms, discriminations and many more are the reasons to make myself strongest."*

#### **4.1.1.7 Empathy**

A respondent also stated that having gay peers with whom you can share your thoughts and displeasure without judging one another and sharing their stories with you is the best friendship gift. Having moments with your gay friends like this contribute to positive experiences of being gay because gay men are identified to have high empathy. They are determined to show compassion, especially to their fellow gays who share the same experience of being gay (Chee et al., 2013). Gay student 10 revealed that:

*"Ang aking mga kapwa bakla na kaibigan ay nakapagsabi rin sa akin ng kaparehas na karanasan, kaya naman kami ay madalas na nagkakaintindihan sapagkat kami kami lang rin ang nagdadamayon ukol sa mga karanasan na ito."*

#### **4.1.2 Negative Experiences**

Respondents also had negative experiences such as discrimination, bullying, gender inequality, emotional cutoff, criticism, low confidence, and gender concealment, and these made gays suffered through life. Even though the population of the third gender is growing and acceptance of them is gradually improving, there are still instances that people, especially homophobic ones, are having a hard time making peace and reconciled with them. Instead, they continued violence and hostility towards homosexuals that have been one of the gays' terrifying nightmares.

##### **4.1.2.1 Discrimination**

Upon analysis of the respondents' descriptions, some gay college students have experienced discrimination wherein it was proven that gay people frequently experience discrimination in their college (Casey and Levesque, 2018). In this study, two out of ten participants shared their stories of discrimination at school and in society. Gay student 1 is one of the participants who verbally experienced discrimination; he experienced discrimination because of gender. He stated that:

*"Sa paaralan naranasan ko ang diskriminasyon, pangungutya mula sa mga salita ng mga taong hindi pabor sa kasariang meron ako."*

He further explained that even though he has the worst experience of discrimination in his community because of the different beliefs. According to him, when he is passing on the road, some people will shout at him "gay," "plague on society," and "crucify."

*"Sa aming komunidad, naranasan ko ang mas matinding diskriminasyon dahil sa iba't ibang uri ng kaugalian ng tao. May mga taong hindi sang-ayon at ilan naman ay pabor. Kapag nadadaan ako sa kalsada sinisigawan ako ng 'Bakla,' 'Salot ng Lipunan,' 'Ipako sa Krus.'"*

##### **4.1.2.2 Bullying**

A lot of people have experienced bullying in terms of appearance and poverty. Bullying among gay is one of the negative experiences of LGBT. Gay teenagers and straight teenagers' speculations to be gay frequently object to insulting, bullying, physical assault, and other abuse they experienced in school and society (Denizet-Lewis, 2009). Bullying about sexuality is very prone nowadays for being different and lack of knowledge about the third gender. Gay student 3 stated that:

*"Katulad ng nakikita minsan ay pag-uusapan ka at aasarin ka lalo na ng mga batang nakakakita sayo. Halos bata ang mga nang-aasar sa' kin kaya 'di ko na iniintindi."*

Gay student 6 also shared the same experience. For him, he experienced bullying while he was in high school verbally.

*“Noong high school ako, ayun nakakaranas ng mga pangbully pero in verbal way lang, or verbal bullying lang kasi ‘di naman nila ako kayang ibully ng physical na tipong sasaktan nila ako ganun.”*

#### 4.1.2.3 Gender Inequality

Gender inequality defines as the experiences of unequal treatment among different genders in society. Gender inequality among gays can lead to negative experiences wherein a feeling of being an outcast and invisible in other people's eyes or not getting attention is observed (Rankin & Weber, 2013). One of the participants who experienced gender inequality is Gay student 1. He is the one who experienced gender inequality in the same sex, and this reflects in his narrative below.

*“Naranasan din ng mga kaibigan kong bakla ang diskriminasyon kagaya ng sa paglalaro ng volleyball hindi kami nabibigyan ng pagkakataon makapaglaro sapagkat mas inuuna nila ang basketball.”*

#### 4.1.2.4 Emotional Cutoff

A person who feels scared or pressured to show their gender identity might choose to conceal this to feel safer. 33% of youth experience parental acknowledgment, another third experience parental dismissal, and the leftover third don't unveil their sexual direction even by their late young and mid-twenties (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). One out of ten participants shared his story that in their homes, he feels like an outcast. And he thinks that his parents are not comfortable with him. Gay student 6 stated that:

*"Sa tahanan namin, ayun nga nakakaramdam ako na para silang naiilang sa 'kin. 'Di naman ako yung tipo ng baklang sobrang feminine , ano lang, gusto lang talaga ng lalaki. And ayun nga feeling 'di nila tanggap."*

#### 4.1.2.5 Criticism

Judgments are a common problem in gay college students; it is natural for other people to be judgmental, especially when it comes to gender. These include being discriminated, which has a connection to mental health since many communities feel ignored and experienced unfair treatment (Patton & Simmons, 2008). In gay student 3's case, some people criticize him for being gay, but most of them who judge him are children who lack knowledge about gender. According to gay student 3:

*"Katulad ng nakikita minsan ay pag-uusapan ka at aasarin ka lalo na ng mga batang nakakakita sayo. Halos bata ang mga nang-aasar sa' kin kaya 'di ko na iniintindi."*

Gay student 10 also shared the same experience. For him, he experienced catcalling.

*“Naranasan kong macatcall at mapagbulungan base sa impresyon nila sa akin. Tuwing nasa labas ako ng aking komunidad ay ‘di maiiwasan ang mga tingin at usapan tuwing nakikita nila ako.”*

#### 4.1.2.6 Low confidence

Having low confidence was very hard for those who had negative experiences, which can cause an adverse effect. Low confidence reflects the negative experiences that can lead to anxiety, shame, and inability to make friends (Garber & Flynn, 2001). These people who experienced it have a significant impact on them, especially when it talks about gender. It reflects in Gay student 2's statement below:

*"Elementary to junior high school nakatanggap ako ng pangungutya bukod sa kasarian pati na rin sa itsura. Meron nilalait ako ng sobra na tipong medyo nakakasakit na pero simula nung senior high school at college wala naman akong nararanasan na ganun at wala na rin akong pakialam sa kanila."*

#### 4.1.2.7 Gender Concealment

Having fear by telling the truth about gender is not usually open to some family. They are afraid to tell the truth about being gay because their family may not accept their gender, fear physical abuse and bullying. 16% of LGBT matured people reported that they would feel uncomfortable being honest about their sexual orientation or gender identity (Stonewall Scotland, 2014). Gay student 10 stated that:

*"Kloseta ako bilang isang bakla sa loob ng tahanan. Wala sa mga kapamilya ko ang nakakaalam ng aking kasarian."*

### 4.2 The Challenges of Gay College Students

Respondents experience various challenges for being gay in school and community and even in their home. Listed in table 3 are the subordinate themes that surfaced in the respondents. Six gay students suffered from discrimination by fellow students, while four gay students suffered from the community. Three out of ten participants experienced some lack of acceptance with parents and friends, and two gay students suffered from bullying in school and the community.

**Table 3: Challenges Groups**

Challenges	Frequency
Discrimination by Fellow Student	6
Discrimination by Community	4
Lack of Acceptance	3
Bullying	2

#### 4.2.1 Discrimination by Fellow Student

All forms of discrimination and violence in schools are an obstacle to children and young people's fundamental right to quality education. Violence in schools and other educational settings is a global problem. Students who do not conform to prevailing sexual and gender stereotypes, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (LGBT), are significantly more vulnerable. (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This challenge is the most numbered that respondents experience. Six out of ten of them suffer from classmates or schoolmates' discrimination by teasing or making fun of them. Sometimes they feel left out of place just because they are gay. Gay student 5 said that:

*"Those experiences I've experienced in school is not easy, because there are people who don't want us accept our sexuality. Although there's a lot of discrimination I've gain."*

Gay Student 1 also said that:

*"Sa paaralan naranasan ko ang diskriminasyon, pangungutya mula sa mga salita ng mga taong hindi pabor sa kasarian meron ako."*

Gay student 2 also said that he chose to be strong despite experiencing discrimination and go with it and face reality. He even said that discrimination could not ruin his dream for himself.

*"Bilang isang bakla sa paaralan, naranasan kong kutyain at pagtawanan. Ngunit mas nangibabaw sa akin ang positibong kaisipan na sa kabila ng panglalait at pangungutya sa akin, mananatili akong malakas at buo ang loob na ituloy ang aking buhay para sa aking pangarap na hinding hindi masisira ng opinyon ng iba."*

#### 4.2.2 Discrimination by Community

LGBT adults say society is more accepting. There is a lot of social acceptance today. Unlike before, they had been victimized by discrimination, such as being subject to slurs or jokes or suffering rejection by a family member (Drake, 2013). However, the community's lack of recognition led to discrimination. It also happened when four out of ten respondents also shared their experience of discrimination by the community. Some of them experience calling the plague of society, making fun of them, and when they walk around the street, some people will look badly at them and talk some bad word to them. Gay student 1 said:

*"Sa aming komunidad, naranasan ko ang mas matinding diskriminasyon dahil sa iba't ibang uri ng kaugalian ng tao. May mga taong hindi sang-ayon at ilan naman ay pabor. Kapag nadadaan ako sa kalsada sinisigawan ako ng 'Bakla', 'Salot ng Lipunan', 'Ipako sa Krus.'"*

Gay student 2 also said that:

*"Bilang isang bakla sa loob ng komyunidad, nandyang napagtitripan dahil sa kasuotan at galawang hindi naaayon sa kasarian, ngunit lalo nitong pinatibay ang aking pagkatao. Nariyan ding nakatagpo ako ng mga kaibigan na maaari kong sandalan at takbuhan."*

Gay student 7 also said:

*"Naranasan kong macatcall at mapagbulungan base sa impresyon nila sa akin. Tuwing nasa labas ako ng aking komunidad ay 'di maiiwasan ang mga tingin at usapan tuwing nakikita nila ako."*

#### 4.2.3 Lack of Acceptance

A child or a person who does not act or behave how biological gender are expected to behave by their families and by society is often ridiculed by others (Ryan, 2009). According to the respondents, feeling thrown away

by a lack of acceptance and support is most likely, the difficult challenge in their lives. Some of the respondents suffer from their home example of an awkward atmosphere or not comfortable expressing their true self. Gay student 6 said that:

*“Sa tahanan namin, ayun nga nakakaramdam ako na para silang naiilang sa akin. ‘Di naman ako yung tipo ng baklang sobrang feminine, ano lang gusto lang talaga ng lalaki. And ayun nga feeling ‘di nila tanggap.”*

Gay student 6 also stated that there is a time that his mother used to say some foul words that hurt him, and he just keeps it inside, but deep inside he is deeply hurt.

*“Hindi ka ganyan, hindi ikaw ‘yan, tigilan mo na ‘yan. Ang babae ay para sa lalaki at ang lalaki para sa babae at hindi para sa kapwa niya lalaki.”*

#### 4.2.4 Bullying

Gay students are bullied because they are gay. Some of them are bullied by name-calling, being made fun of, being ignored, having bad things written about them, having mean things said about them behind their backs, having bad things done to them, and being attacked (Evans & Chapman, 2014). Bullying is one of the common challenges that gay experience, including in school and community. There are types of bullying that respondents encounter. Most of the respondents suffer from verbal bullying by mocking them or making fun of them. Gay student 3 said that:

*“Nakatanggap ako ng pangungutya bukod sa kasarian pati na rin sa itsura. Meron nilalait ako ng sobra na tipong medyo nakakasakit.”*

Gay student 6 also said that:

*“Noong high school ako, ayun nakakaranas ng mga pangbully pero in verbal way lang or verbal bullying lang kasi ‘di naman nila ako kayang ibully ng physical na tipong sasaktan nila ako ganun.”*

### 4.3 The Coping Mechanisms of Gay College Students

This superordinate discusses how the participants cope up and deal with the challenges brought by their sexuality. During the interviews, the researchers asked the participants how they deal with and cope with experiences regarding homosexuality. Listed in table 4 are the subordinate themes that emerged within the interviews. Eight in the ten participants demonstrate that they felt motivated and strengthened because of their family and friends. Also, eight of the ten participants stated that the key to dealing and coping with those challenges brought by their sexuality is to become braver or stabilized. While five in the ten respondents expressed that to cope with those problems and difficulties regarding their sexuality, they must first accept themselves fully.

**Table 4: Coping Mechanisms Groups**

Coping Mechanisms	Frequency
Courage from Family and Friends	8
Stabilizing	8
Self-Acceptance	5

#### 4.3.1 Courage from Family and Friends

Expressing their sexuality was one of the challenges faced by many LGBTQ members in the country. They are considering that the Philippines is a Christian country that believes that there is only two gender preference which is the male and female. Some participants stated that it is tough for them to reveal their sexuality and gain acceptance in this society. It concluded that the actual or anticipated family acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ youth is essential in understanding the youth's experience of minority stress, how the youth is likely to cope with the stress, and consequently, the impact of minority stress on the youth's health. It was stated that it was tough for them to reveal their sexuality and be accepted in this society, but they always get the courage from their friends and families to cope with this situation (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). As observed in the statement below of Gay Student 1:

*“Unang una ang aking pamilya na pinanghuhugutan ko ng aking lakas ng loob. Sa mga kaibigan ko na laging nakasuporta.”*

Another student (Gay Student 2) had the same sentiments. He stated that,

*“Ang pamilya ko dahil tinanggap nila ako kung sino ako. Kung gayon mas nilakasan ko pa ang loob ko para matanggap ko ang sarili ko”*

One of the participants shared that, as long as you have family acceptance, there is no reason to listen to what others say about your sexuality. According to him:

*"...pamilya ko. Tanggap nila ako eh. At alam kong mahal nila ako. Kaya bakit ako babase sa ibang tao kung ang pamikya ko palang oks na. Wala akong pake sa iba, basta ang akin tanggap ako ng pamilya ko."*

#### 4.3.2 Stabilizing

Dark episodes and chapters are one of the most highlights in every individual's life. Those challenges and bad experiences make every individual's life worst and problematic. There are a lot of challenges encountered by the participants. According to the Psychological Association of the Philippines, Filipino gays continue to suffer from violence and discrimination in the Philippines. This adverse treatment demonstrated bullying and harassment actions to young gay individuals from different groups such as families, schools, and communities (PAP, 2011). Expressing their true identity makes their lives worse, and eight in the ten participants stated that to deal and cope with those challenges brought by their sexuality, they need to become strong and stabilized. One of the gay student (Gay student 3) stated that:

*"Sa aking mga karanasan sa una pinanghinaan ako ng loob pero habang tumatagal mas lalo akong tumapang at patuloy na lumalaban sa anumang hamon ng buhay. Ginagawa kong motibasyon at inspirasyon ang lahat ng iyon para maging matagumpay ako sa buhay."*

For them, you need to be vital to reach your reach dreams in life. Just like what Gay Student 2 stated:

*"Naging matatag ako sa lahat ng hamon sa buhay upang makamit ang aking pangarap."*

Being brave and not letting other people hurt you is the deal with the challenges. Gay Student 4 said:

*"Mas naging natapang ako, hindi ako nag papaapi lalo na kapag alam ko ang tama at nangingibabaw ang kasamaan."*

#### 4.3.3 Self- Acceptance

Many people feel bad for themselves from time to time, but accepting yourself is key to finding true happiness in life. To be accepted by others, first, you must entirely accept yourself. Self-acceptance for the participants is one of the keys to coping with those challenges they have encountered while expressing their sexuality. Many individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and with other non-heterosexual orientations (LGBTQ+) experience stigma, prejudice, and discrimination because of their sexuality. According to minority stress and identity development theories, these experiences can contribute to difficulties with self-acceptance of sexuality (Camp et al., 2020). The participants' acceptance of themselves helps them cope with those challenges they have encountered while expressing their sexuality. For them, being true to yourself is a way to build and boost your confidence. One of them is Gay Student 1. In her words,

*"Nakatulong ang pagpakatotoo ko sa aking sa sarili upang mabuo ang isandaang porsyento ng kumpiyansa sa aking sarili para humarap, bumangon sa araw araw."*

One of the participants stated that there is no reason to hide their true identity in the darkness's shadows; being gay is all about taking the risk. They choose to become gay, so they must face the consequences.

*"Sa pamamagitan ng pagtanggap ko sa aking sarili at naniniwala ako na hindi ko kailangan magtago dahil ginusto ko kung ano ako ngayon. Mga pagsubok lang yan ang mga bagay na nararanasan namin bilang bakla. Kailangan mo lang maging malakas at matapang dahil pinili namin itong sitwasyon na to kung kaya't tatanggapin namin mga pangungutya. Pero kung sosobra na ang mga tao. May karapatan na rin kaming lumaban."*

Gay student 4 shared his sentiments on coping with these challenges in expressing their sexuality to the majority. According to him, it is easy to face challenges if you love and accept yourself.

*"Tinanggap ko kasi sarili ko at minahal kaya hindi na mahirap sa akin ang pagtanggap sa mga pagsubok."*

It would help if you accepted yourself first before being accepted by others. This statement is the same as the notion of gay student 7. He stated that:

*"Tinanggap ko muna yung sarili ko, para matanggap rin ng karamihan na kung sino ako."*

## 5. DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore the primary subject matter, which is the lived experiences of gay college students. As this study was further analyzed, this subject was divided into three significant themes: their lived experiences, the challenges they faced, and their coping mechanisms in dealing with being gay. These major topics regarding the lives of gays were addressed by collecting data from the selected gay college students through

interviews wherein subordinate themes surfaced according to their statements. This part of the research presents the discussion of the result from the previous chapter.

Even though gays are usually known and prone to be victims of discrimination, violence, and other homophobic actions, there are still positive occurrences that gays experienced along with being gay. The positive lived experiences that lead them to live satisfactorily are acceptance, unconditional love, freedom, happiness, and being a source of happiness among their families, friends, and other significant people in their lives. Self-growth, sense of worth, and empathy also contribute to their positive lived experiences as a gay. According to them, their families accepted them for who they are, and they never fail to give and show the love and care these gays deserved. On the other hand, their peers are also significant to gays. They stated that if there is someone whom they can freely show what they are and a people to lean on, no one can drag them down.

Despite the growing community globally, there are still harmful practices that gay people need to endure in their lives. Being gay is not easy since many people are against LGBTQ communities that can cause a negative experience for them. Gay people are still receiving discrimination that can affect their daily lives. Emotional cutoff, a person who feels scared or pressured to show their gender identity, might conceal this to feel safer. According to the respondent, gender inequality is still prominent in society. Bullying is one of the common problems that they are facing. Being bullied in school and the community is a challenge. It can cause anxiety, depression and other psychological stress from other homophobic attitudes. Other people's judgment is hard for gay people who experienced it by criticizing a person for being gay. Low confidence for gay has a big impact on them; they cannot focus or do their duty. And lastly, gender concealment is the most important thing than a lie. Some gay people are afraid to say to their parents because their family might not accept their gender or, worst, fear physical abuse.

There are many challenges that these gays face for being homosexual. One of these is discrimination experienced by many people who feel they are different from others and not only that but also in the family. Some challenges will be shared, like lack of acceptance, especially by parents who did not embrace their child. Despite suffering many problems, they stand stronger and face the truth that this is the reality of life and that there are some challenges you need to meet to achieve your dream. However, they cannot avoid the painful difficulties. They choose to stand straight and go with the flow and continue living and achieving their goals.

Life as a gay is too harsh, according to participants. Most gays suffer many challenges in their sexuality. In expressing their sexuality in society, especially to their family and peers, all participants face many hindrances and stressors. Participants have different ways to meet the challenges and stressors. Some of them cope with challenges by absorbing all the love, support, and motivation from their family and friends. According to them, there is no reason to pay attention to those persons who drag them down. Some face the challenges of coming out by exhibiting a sense of self, and some of them show off the courage and remain tough, brave, and stable in facing the life of being gay.

It is evident that the lived experiences of gays do revolve around lightness and darkness but what shines above is the presence of positivity that motivates them to embrace their sexual orientation. Being gay is never a different or isolated case of the third gender. Gender equality gradually improves due to empowerment and devotion to fight for human rights as these gays strive to achieve their objectives. Their sexuality and journey are milestones that these gays considered to be the reason to live, be free, and keep moving forward.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The research aimed to comprehend and analyze the unseen and unheard reality in the lived experiences of gays that have been covered up by them due to several factors. This study focused on the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of gay college students in their coming out process and after their revelation to society. In acquiring precise details to respond to this paper's requirement, ten gay college students were selected and interviewed to gather information about what is being asked in the study. Several results emerged that give an intensive understanding of gay college students' lived experiences, the challenges they faced, and their coping mechanisms towards it.

The gay students in this research responded comprehensively regarding the subject matter. The results concluded several lived experiences, which they all find as positive and negative. The positive lived experiences that they find inspirational and enlivening to be proud of their sexuality are acceptance, unconditional love, freedom, happiness, self-growth, sense of worth, and empathy given to them by their families and peers, and other people significant to them. These positive lived experiences drive and motivate them to accept what and who they are and love themselves even more, which leads them to believe that having a gender such as being gay is a blessing from above. But just like the actuality of life, their journey is never perfect. They also had negative lived experiences, which gays find as one of their worst nightmares, but that does not mean that they will lose a heart on their

principles in life. Instead, these negative experiences such as discrimination, bullying, gender inequality, emotional cutoff, having low self-esteem, and gender concealment become their driving force to fight and prove to others that they are gays but not just gays; they are significant people of the society, regarding and regardless of the gender, who are worthy of loving and be loved.

On the other hand, challenges were also significant to the lived experiences of gays, which were determined in this study. These challenges they had such as discrimination by fellow students and community, lack of acceptance, and bullying which scuffled, confused, and underestimated themselves if being gay is proper, if being gay is also worthy of love, and make them think and decide if confessing would set them free or is it better to keep their sexuality behind closed doors. But these challenges were conquered by these gays, which unchained them from being terrified, insecure, and depreciated of themselves. They used challenges as an ignition to escape from darkness and seek the light towards enlightenment that they are gays and stronger than ever.

Furthermore, battling towards freedom and acceptance of their sexual orientation has not been that easy, especially for those gays who cannot accept themselves first. For a gay to be able to accept by others, he should accept himself first and delightfully show to the world that despite all the rocks that have been thrown at them, they still able to stand at the top because they cope up, resist, and overcome the frays within themselves first and battles outside of themselves will be the next to be defeated. The coping mechanisms that surfaced in the study's findings are courage from family and friends, stabilizing, and self-acceptance.

These collected data from the respondents did not just fulfill this study's objectives but also through this study, lived experiences and life stories of gays, which were still undiscovered, emerged and is the climax of this study's result. Gays, together with their stories, will be acknowledged. Struggles and battles regarding their sexual orientation will be recognized, saluted, and serve as an inspiration to others. This study revealed how tough being gay is in a Filipino context. Even though they are gradually being accepted in our society, they can now participate in politics and other social activities. However, the reality is that homophobic violence and discrimination still lingers on in Philippine society. Even though these gays already gain acceptance, love, freedom, discrimination, gender inequality is always present and active. But that how life is, especially to them; there is no perfect life. Life can be fortunate while struggling with circumstances at the same time. And these gays turn their experiences as a driving force for motivation, make them stronger and braver, and come out from being closeted.

Participants' responses regarding their lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms were mostly similar to the existing literature and analyzed studies. The related literature and tasks that the researchers considered were from the Western and local context. The difference between these contexts is that Western countries were mostly affected by discrimination and homophobic violence regarding homosexuality, but what makes Filipino distinctive among other societies is that Filipino gay seemed to have a natural defense mechanism for homophobia. These Filipino gays, despite the cruelty and mockery that they had been through, can withstand such negative attitudes towards them. Every Filipino gay must be proud of themselves that they were born to be a fighter and free-spirited. No one can let these gays down. They are worthy of recognition. These gays have been justified that they are gays but not just gays limited to femininity; they are gays who are beyond society's judgments and expectations. They have just been proved that a Filipino spirit is rigid, resistible, and unmoved, so that being a Filipino is something that they must be proud of and grateful for.

Furthermore, the researchers recommended that the government should implement a policy that will protect the rights of LGBT here in the Philippines. The LGBT community should have a proper protection desk that will cater to their legal needs regarding homophobic violence, such as discrimination. They should also be allowed to organize more LGBT-related activities that will alight gayness in their hearts and be engaged in social participation to showcase their skills and abilities. The researcher would also like to raise awareness of every gay out there who are still afraid and closeted to be gay. Through this study, they may acquire encouragement and power to voice out their true self. Through this study, they may be motivated to fight with the circumstances and face what they have to conquer to show the world how beautiful and colorful being gay is.

This study will benefit this research's significant people, the gays, for they are the study's primary variable. It will also help the researchers who conducted this study because they were provided knowledge and understanding to fulfill this research's requirements. This study will also be beneficial to the community. Through this research, they will know how gays lived, perceived, and treated by society. Through this, they will be alarmed and conscious of the behavior and actions towards gay people, which are perceived to be positive, and avoid negative behaviors. Through this, everyone may be encouraged to better understand gay people, which may be the key to acceptance and freedom and the doorway out of homophobic violence.

This study will also be useful to future researchers of LGBT Psychology in the Philippines and outside of the country. This study can be used as a reference for the bodies of research to come. This study is also open for review to improve what is lacking that should be included in this study.

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