

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LGBTQIA+ STUDENTS OF OCCIDENTAL
MINDORO STATE COLLEGE**

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ABSTRACT

Limited research on this topic has left a significant knowledge gap regarding the LGBTQIA+ sector. Consequently, this study was undertaken to delve deeper into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students at Occidental Mindoro State College, seeking answers regarding their acceptance, challenges in expressing their gender identity, and the support available to them.

This descriptive phenomenological study involved nine LGBTQIA+ respondents, selected using a purposeful sampling method. The analysis of their responses revealed four key themes: the confidence of LGBTQIA+ students in expressing their gender, the feeling of acceptance among LGBTQIA+ students, the desire for acceptance from others, and the challenges LGBTQIA+ students face in terms of gender expression, perception, and religious beliefs. These experiences also influence their behavior and interactions, as well as expose them to various forms of discrimination.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of the school environment in fostering a sense of love, care, and support for LGBTQIA+ students. It plays a pivotal role in shaping their characters and behavior, emphasizing the importance of inclusive educational settings in facilitating positive experiences for these individuals. This research sheds light on both the positive and negative aspects of LGBTQIA+ students' lives, contributing to a better understanding of their interactions with the wider community and their unique challenges.

Keywords: *LGBTQIA+, gender expression, acceptance, support, lived experiences*

INTRODUCTION

Having a school that creates a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, and having caring and accepting parents are especially important. Positive environments can help all youth achieve good grades and maintain good mental and physical health. For youth to thrive in schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported (Mowen, 2013).

As reflected in the study of Human Right Watch in 2017, schools should be safe places for everyone. In the Philippines however, students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) too often find that their schooling experience is marred by bullying, discrimination, lack of access to LGBT-related information, and in some cases, physical or sexual assault. These abuses can cause deep and lasting harm and curtail students' right to education, protected under Philippine and international law. The Social workers are responsible to promote policies, laws, and programs that affirm, support, and value LGBTQ individuals, families, and communities (Thoreson, 2023). Mistreatment that students faced in schools was exacerbated by discriminatory policies and practices that excluded them from fully participating in the school environment. Schools impose rigid gender norms on students in a variety of ways for example, through gendered uniforms or dress codes, restrictions on hair length, gendered restrooms, classes, and activities that differ for boys and girls, and close scrutiny of same-sex friendships and relationships (Scheitle et al., 2021).

In light of this compelling body of evidence elucidating the adverse repercussions of childhood bullying, and considering the substantial amount of time children typically spend in the company of their peers, significantly surpassing their interactions with parents prior to reaching the age of 18, it is rather remarkable that childhood bullying has not garnered greater prominence as a paramount subject within the domain of public health concern, particularly in the context of scientific discourse. Bullying by peers has been mostly ignored by health professionals but should be considered as a significant risk factor and safeguarding issue (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

The widespread and systematic human rights violations based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and homosexuality persist in the Philippines. Rights policy emphasized that the arrests, harassment, and discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the Philippines demonstrate the urgent need for the Government of the Philippines to act. They further stressed that LGBT persons are entitled to their full rights, in order to protect access and enjoyment of these rights the Government of the Philippines must take positive steps to repeal discriminatory laws and combat violence targeted as LGBT individuals. There is an urgent need for the Committee to take appropriate action to ensure LGBT people can enjoy the rights within the Convention to which they are entitled (Abesamis & Alibudbud, 2023).

In the context of Occidental Mindoro State College, positive actions have been implemented to safeguard the needs for equal treatment of the members of the LGBTQ. This is reflected in the inclusion of topics related to Gender Awareness Development (GAD) in the syllabuses and distance learning materials of the students. However educational and positive these actions may be, still there is a need for a deeper study and analysis of the lived

experience and support received by the LGBTQIA+ member-students of OMSC. Thus, the initiative of this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive phenomenology research design, based on the philosophical framework of Edmund Husserl, to investigate and elucidate the lived experiences of individuals, recognizing their construction of meaning within both their personal and social contexts.

Study Site

This study was conducted in Occidental Mindoro State College Main Campus. The Occidental Mindoro State College is the lone state college in the province of Occidental Mindoro. Its Main Campus is in Labangan Poblacion, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. Considering the diverse population and gender of students residing at the said campus it is seen by the researchers perfect to conduct a study.

Respondents of the Study

This study comprised nine (9) participants selected from the college level of Occidental Mindoro State College, Main Campus, employing a purposeful sampling technique, which is a form of non-probability sampling involving the researcher's judgment in participant selection. All participants in this study are members of the LGBTQIA+ community and are currently enrolled at Occidental Mindoro State College.

Research Instrument

In this study used semi-structured interview questionnaires validated by experts in the field. The interview had an interaction where verbal questions were posed by an interviewer to elicit verbal responses from an interviewee and collect facts and information. The interviewer does not strictly follow a structured list of questions; instead, an open-ended question was used, allowing for a deeper discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Data Collection

The data collection run from March to May 2022 utilizing the face to face and virtual platform in interviewing the participants through the use of semi-structured interviews by Thomas Groenewald which relies on asking question as basis of facts. Moreover, the researchers also secured a permission to the college deans and informed consent to clients in conducting the interview.

Ethical Consideration

Participation to the study is voluntary and withdrawal of the participants in the conduct of the data gathering is allowed. Reinforcement of confidentiality to the participants personal

information and responses. Permission to the institution and informed consent to the participants were also secured. Researchers also applied the observance of safety protocols through the wearing of facemask and the practice of social distancing of each participant.

Data Analysis

The data collected by the researchers through audio recording and video recording were extracted and scrutinized through the use of explicitation process it has five 'steps' or phases, which are: Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, Delineating units of meaning, Clustering of units of meaning to form themes. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it, and Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary. After the transcript of the interview was examined and checked.

With the following steps of the Colaizzi process for phenomenological data analysis was utilized to analyzed and interpret the data (Colaizzi, 1978; Morrow et al., 2015). (1) Each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. (2) For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. These statements must be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers. (3) Meanings should be formulated from these significant statements. (4) The formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. (5) The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. (6) The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. (7) Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

RESULTS

The themes emerged in the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ students of Occidental Mindoro State College are: acceptance experience; gender expression challenges; reasons why; and support system.

Acceptance experience

The confidence of LGBTQIA+ students

Creating a safe space, a supportive environment, and having a support system for the students may help them develop a sense of self-belonging that can have a positive outcome for all students, including building confidence.

"Simple lang, sobrang saya dahil nakakapagpakatotoo ako nang walang kahihyan" - [Respondent 9]

"Masaya, kase parang nakalabas ka, parang kulungan ganun. Nakalaya ka, nakakahinga ka ng maayos ... na wala ka ng tinatago sa pamilya mo, sa kaibigan mo."
[Respondent 2]

To feel accepted

When a student comes out as LGBTQIA+, some parents tend to react in different ways such as hard to accept the identity of their child or on the other hand, some parents may also welcome their child by expressing their love and support and same as with the people that surrounds them. As a result, the student may feel acknowledged and respected.

"lahat naman ng naging kaklase ko nagkaroon kami ng mga oo LGBT mga kaibigan ko, yung mga lalaki tanggap naman nila ako pati yung mga babae tanggap nila kung sino kami as an LGBT." (Respondent 9)

"In positive way, sobrang blessed ako na kahit kami'y mga LGBT, meron kaming mga taong tinatanggap at minamahal sa lipunan, kahit may mga paghihigpit, tulad ng haba ng buhok, na sana'y magbago sa hinaharap." (Respondent 8)

On the other hand, there were students that also was afraid of not being accepted as who they are.

"Yun 'yung nakakaiyak na part, pamilya mo 'yun (crying). Dapat sila 'yung una mong kakampi, pero nahirapan silang tanggapin kung sino ako (crying)." (Respondent 4)

"Pero Pagdating ko sa bahay takot pa akong mag-out, magsabi sa kanila kaya pagdating sa bahay sobrang limited nung words na nasasabi ko even interaction sa family." (Respondent 5)

Seeking acceptance from others

All along, people tend to seek acceptance and pleasing others in order for them to feel that they belong and are accepted. Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ students also tend to prove themselves that they are worthy and capable of doing what the others are doing as they seek validation.

"Kahit LGBT ako, may nagagawa pa rin ako sa lipunan. Ipinakita kong may talento ako, lalo na sa pagpapatawa, para maipakita na tayo'y dapat tanggapin." (Respondent 3)

"Sa pamilya, alam na nila mula pagkabata ko. Sa mga kaibigan, naging confident ako at ginamit ang talento, tulad ng pagmamanicure, para kumita." (Respondent 6)

Gender Expression Challenges

LGBTQIA+ Student Experiences: Open Expression in School

The LGBTQIA+ student openly express that they are experiencing difficulties in school such as discrimination, social pressure and acceptance because of their gender identity. This explains why there were still a LGBTQIA+ students are hard to express who they really are.

"Kinukutya at inaapi nila ako, naranasan ko ang diskriminasyon at pang-aalipusta. Hindi ko na gustong lumabas ng bahay, dahil ayaw kong mapagtawanan dahil sa pagiging tapat sa sarili." (Respondent 3)

"Naranasan ko ang masasakit na salita at mga subtextual na komento mula sa iba. Hindi man diretsong sinasabi, malinaw ang kanilang intensyon." (Respondent 4)

"Negative way that we experience is yun na nga yung parang hindi pa rin tanggag ng school or ng ibang estudyante ang pagiging gay na kinikwestyon pa rin nila na "bakit ka naging bakla?". (Respondent 8)

LGBTQIA+ Students' Gender Expression Challenges

The LGBTQIA+ students face judgement, discrimination, and harassment because of the way they express themselves in the society. As a result, there are still some students that can't really express and not yet coming out as who they really are. The respondents talk about the feeling of "criticism, petrified" after they come out as they are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

"Sa pananamit, nahihirapan akong suotin ang mga damit na gusto ko dahil sa mga negatibong komento. Marami sa amin ang nahihiya pa na ipahayag ang totoong sarili." (Respondent 6)

"Marami sa amin ang nahihiya pa na ilabas kung sino talaga sila at hindi pa kayang ipahayag ang kanilang sarili. Parang inuutay-utay nila bago tanggapin ng iba." (Respondent 9)

LGBTQIA+ perceptions and beliefs

People had different perception and views in religion and gender, therefore they also had these beliefs and norms regarding men and women. At some point, it was hard for the LGBTQIA+ members to express the part of themselves of being feel of a woman for the gays and transwomen, lesbian and transmen for being have a part of man and also for the other gender identity.

"Meron ding parte na natatakot ako na majujuge ka kasi hindi yun normal sa atin lalo na Pilipinas to unlike sa ibang bansa, dahil sa bibliya kung ano ang sinasabi doon tayo". (Respondent 1)

"A lot of things that questioning about my gender, "bakit ka nagbakla eh ang pogi pogi mo?". (Respondent 8)

"May mga pagkakataon na napag-iisipan ko kung bakit ako LGBT at nahirapan akong tanggapin ang sarili dahil sa takot na hindi ako matanggap ng ibang tao (Respondent 3)

"Nakatanggap rin ako ng negatibong feedback na nagsasabing sana maging tunay na lalaki na lang ako, at ito ay nagdulot ng sakit sa aking pride at pagtataka kung bakit may ganitong mga opinyon tungkol sa LGBT." (Respondent 4)

Reasons Why

LGBTQIA+ experiences impact student behavior

The experience the LGBTQIA+ students received inside and outside of school makes them feel uncomfortable and tend to be shy or become hesitant to show who they are because other people make fun of them in the environment they belong to.

"Nahihiya ako na baka pagtawanan ako ng mga tao kasi ito ako e, ito ang kasarian ko, Ganito ang pagkatao ko baka hindi nila ako matanggap". [Respondent 3]

"Sa CR, naramdaman kong kinakantiyaw ako dati sa dati kong paaralan, at iyon ay offensive para sa akin." [Respondent 5]

Diverse discrimination in environments

The LGBTQIA+ students experience minor physical abuse in their former school which results in the minor assault. Having received condemnation from their family and relatives, when they came out as members of LGBTQIA+. And facing inequality such as struggles, unfair gender treatment, and showing biased views between them and straight genders in the environment.

"Sobrang ayaw ko pumasok that time kasi natatakot ako na everyday kasi yun nangyayari na kapag nakikita nila ako sa corridor ayan maghihiyawan sila, kakantiyawan na parang iba parin ang dating ng LGBT sa kanila." [Respondent 5]

"Nahihirapan ako kasi yung mga tao sa paligid ko hindi nila ako noon una tinanggap. Pinagtatawanan nila ako, talagang yung mga masasakit na salita natanggap ko galing sa kanila." [Respondent 3]

"meron akong kakilala na ano lesbian siya tapos hindi siya pinapayagang magsuot nung uniform na gusto niya kaya ang ending nagdrop siya" [Respondent 6]

Support System

School System

The first theme is security for the members in the school, in this theme, the researchers thrive on sub-themes. The first is safety, some of the LGBTQIA+ feel secure and safe within the institution because they are free to express themselves. Nurture explained that most of the students received a supportive environment that has a broad understanding of the LGBTQIA. Lastly, the awareness tackles that the school showcases its love for LGBTQIA+ by being open and knowledgeable about their gender. However, not all LGBTQIA+ students received the same treatment. Respondents talk about the feeling of "safety, nurture, awareness" from the support received of LGBTQIA+ students after they come out as they mentioned in their answers to the questions given to them.

"Sa ngayon, oo mas nafefeel kong secure ako with the institution knowing that the faculty that we have in college programs di naman sila nag discriminate with the gays and LGBT." [Respondent 5].

"Para po sa akin, opo malaya naman po dahil meron naman po tayong tinatawag na guidance at responsableng mga guro upang aksyonan kung nababastos ka man or may ginawa silang sexual harassment." [Respondent 8]

"Thankful ako sa school kasi kahit sila gumagawa ng way upang maintindihan ng marami ang pagkakaiba iba ng gender preference ng bawat isa lalo kapag wala ka pang alam sa usapang lgbtq" and added "Hindi naman mawawala yun sa tao diba nga maraming judgemental pero dahil nagkakaroon na tayo ng mga seminar gawa sa paaralan, community mas nagiging open yung iba". (Respondent 1)

"Wala pa akong nakikitaang effort ng school. Siguro yung paunti unti na ano ko na tanggap nila yung mga LGBT yun lang." (Respondent 2)

Guidance and supportive system

The next theme is the guidance and supportive system. Here the sub-themes are motivation that the institution has quite of few supportive teachers that promote inclusivity and giving living motivations that support LGBTQIA+ students. Several students of LGBTQIA+ received respect from other students. Lastly, most of LGBTQIA+ students receive equal treatment and opportunity from the teachers, peers, and school. Respondents discuss their feelings of "motivation, voluntary acceptance, recognition of equality" after coming out in their responses to the questions posed to them.

"Sinusuportahan ako ng mga guro at kklase ko. Positive ang trato sa akin, at sana ay maipamulat sa iba ang pagiging bukas at pagtanggap." (Respondent 3)

"Nararamdaman ko ang espesyal na trato mula sa mga kklase ko, at ito ay isang positibong bagay para sa akin." (Respondent 5)

"Sana'y maging bahagi ng iba pang asignatura ang pagtuturo ng pag-unawa at respeto para sa aming LGBTQ+ community, hindi lang sa amin kundi sa lahat." (Respondent 4)

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ students at Occidental Mindoro State College reveal several key themes: acceptance experience, gender expression challenges, reasons behind these experiences, and the support systems that play a crucial role in their well-being. This discussion will delve into these themes, drawing attention to the significance of each with citation from the provided results.

The acceptance experience of LGBTQIA+ students is central to their overall well-being. The study underscores the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment, along with having a support system in place for these students. The study emphasizes that fostering a supportive environment can enhance the students' sense of self-belonging and confidence (Cha et al., 2022). The results reveal that the reactions of family and peers upon a student coming out can have a profound impact on their acceptance experience. Some parents offer love and support, which fosters a sense of acknowledgment and respect, while others may struggle to accept their child's identity. The varying responses from families and the wider social circle directly influence how LGBTQIA+ students feel about themselves and their place in society (Mills-Koonce, 2018). The need for acceptance is a universal human desire, but for LGBTQIA+ students, it can be even more crucial as they may seek validation from others. The

study underscores that these students tend to strive to prove their worth and capabilities as a means of seeking acceptance from their peers and society (Ceatha et al., 2019).

The study highlights the difficulties faced by LGBTQIA+ students when it comes to expressing their gender identity openly. Discrimination, social pressure, and acceptance issues create barriers to free expression. This reflects the broader societal challenge of acceptance and understanding of diverse gender expressions (Russell & Fish, 2016). The LGBTQIA+ students mentioned that they often face judgment, discrimination, and harassment for expressing themselves authentically. This leads to a significant number of students not being able to openly express their true selves, resulting in a reluctance to come out. The emotions of "criticism" and being "petrified" after coming out underline the immense pressure and challenges that these students face (Henriquez & Ahmad, 2021).

The study also reveals that LGBTQIA+ students experience discrimination and even physical abuse, such as minor assaults, in their previous schools. This is exacerbated when they come out to their family and relatives. The unequal treatment and biased views further emphasize the importance of addressing the structural and societal issues that LGBTQIA+ students confront (Meyer, 2003).

The support system is a critical aspect of the LGBTQIA+ students' experiences. The research identifies different aspects of the support system, including the school system. The study suggests that many LGBTQIA+ students feel secure and safe within their school environment, which allows them to express themselves more openly. Supportive schools, with a deep understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues, can create a nurturing environment. Moreover, schools that openly display their acceptance and knowledge of gender diversity play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Leung et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2021). However, it is important to note that not all LGBTQIA+ students receive the same level of support. This underlines the importance of ensuring that all schools provide a safe and accepting space for LGBTQIA+ students (Jackson et al., 2021).

In this study exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students at Occidental Mindoro State College, there are notable limitations. Firstly, the small sample size of nine participants, selected through purposeful sampling from a single campus, raises concerns about representativeness and introduces selection bias. Potential researcher bias is another consideration, as the study does not explicitly address the steps taken to minimize the influence of researcher perspectives. The temporal limitation of data collection from March to May 2022 may not capture the most current experiences. Geographical limitations are also relevant, as findings may not be broadly applicable beyond the study location.

Additionally, ethical considerations could be further addressed regarding participant well-being and psychological impact. The study lacks detail on measures taken to enhance reliability and validity. Lastly, the absence of discussion regarding resource and time

constraints may have impacted data depth. Future research should aim for larger and more diverse samples, address potential biases, consider broader geographical and temporal contexts, enhance methodological transparency, and provide a more comprehensive ethical framework.

CONCLUSIONS

The themes that emerged from the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students at Occidental Mindoro State College underscore the profound impact of acceptance, the challenges faced in expressing their gender identity, and the role of support systems, especially within educational institutions. These findings emphasize the need for broader societal acceptance, the importance of supportive families, and the role of educational institutions in creating safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ students. Addressing these issues can lead to improved well-being and mental health outcomes for these students.

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