

The Filipino Experience on Gender Expression in Surigao City

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Abstract

This study explored the Filipino experiences of LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) individuals in Surigao City. This qualitative study used Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenology. The researchers identified their informants based on the criteria such as: being part of the LGBTQIA+ community, residing in Surigao City, and are 18 years old and above; objectives of the study, and through the use of the snowball sampling method to find the ten (10) people needed for the study. The researchers' followed the process of the phenomenological descriptive method of Colaizzi's (1978), 267 meanings units were extracted from their responses which evolved into the development of emergent themes reflecting the experiences of the informants. From these meaning units, twenty-four (24) cluster themes and six (6) emergent themes were drawn from the informants' narrative data. Theme One: SELF-DISCOVERY: Shaping Oneself; is about the individual experiences that influenced their gender identity; Theme Two: DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES: Discrimination and Prejudice; Theme Three: CONCEALMENT: Preservation of the Self; Theme Four: COPING: Resilience and Positivity; which talk about the informants' experiences on creating coping strategies to battle against discrimination and prejudice; Theme Five: ACCEPTANCE: Its Complexities and Across Relationships; that talk about the informants' accepting themselves or receiving acceptance from others; and Theme Six: EXPRESSION: Authenticity and Liberation of the Self; which highlights the informants' gender expression: appearance, clothing, style, and attitude and behaviors. Hence, for someone to understand their gender expression, it is crucial to look into their journey of self-discovery, the obstacles encountered, and other circumstances that allows them to openly be the person they choose to be today. Indeed, the informants' experiences from their family, friends, or society has made a huge impact on shaping their choice in clothing, style, or their attitudes and behaviors towards themselves and other people.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual), Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenology, Self-Discovery, Difficulties and Challenges,

Introduction

The term “gender expression” is defined as the way in which a person conveys their gender to the world. It refers to how an individual chooses to present their gender identity, whether through their name, pronouns, appearance, clothing, hairstyle, actions, voice, or physical features (Amoah, 2022). It typically reflects a person’s identity, which makes it separated and independent from both sexual orientation and sex assigned at birth (Chies, 2020). While many people express themselves in ways that are consistent with societal expectations regarding sex and gender, others may choose to use expressions that defy those expectations. Globally, one percent (1%) of adults describe themselves as non-binary, non-conforming, gender-fluid, transgender, or “in another way”, rather than identifying themselves as male or female (Masterson, 2021).

In many cultures, social norms and beliefs about how people should behave, present themselves, and express themselves based on their assigned sex are still common. When a person exhibits their gender in a way that does not conform to social or cultural standards about gender, bullying, discrimination, and harassment may be used against them. Roughly, eight (8) in ten (10) adults in the United States of America said that there is some sort of discrimination against transgender in their society; sixty (60) percent stated that a person’s gender is determined by their sex at birth, up from fifty-six (56) percent in 2021 and fifty-four (54) percent in 2017. (Parker, et.al, 2022).

Gender expression is one of the many struggles, particularly for Filipinos who experience discrimination and prejudice in the Philippines itself. Not only do gender expression issues revolve around the stigma governed by individuals, especially Filipinos, but it can also form problems in their gender identity and gender roles that is still observable in today’s generation. In fact, according to the Psychological Association of the Philippines or PAP (2020), many Filipino LGBTQs still continue to experience stigma, prejudice, and discrimination and often struggle with social pressures to conceal, deny, or even try to modify their identities and expressions in order to be accepted by society and enjoy their rights. Furthermore, the Philippines is known to have a strong sense of Catholicism, which has perceived to become an adversity in queer individuals. This is due to the fact that it firmly holds on to traditional paradigms that prevent the acceptance of different gender identities and expressions (Chongbrian, et.al, 2021). Thus, this may lead to societal stigma and discrimination against these individuals and can manifest in different ways such as prejudice, exclusion, marginalization, and alienation. Furthermore, breaking free from deep-rooted beliefs takes time and effort, and progress may be slow in dismantling discriminatory attitudes.

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In Surigao City, Surigao Del Norte, the stigma on gender expression especially towards the LGBTQIA+ community is still evident. According to Sarmiento (2019), only two (2) of the twenty-seven (27) provinces, Agusan Del Norte and Dinagat Islands, and also only two of thirty-three (33) cities in Mindanao, Butuan City and Davao City, Surigao City not included, have anti-discrimination ordinances that offer protection and respect towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community. Moreover, there is only a considerable amount of literature in the world and only little can be found in the Philippines, that tackles gender expression.

In this study, the researchers sought to examine the Filipino experience on gender expression in individuals residing in Surigao City. The researchers believe that the relationship between the Filipino experience and gender expression must be studied because of prevalent issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and concealment that is experienced by men, women, but most especially the LGBTQIA+ community. Experiencing stigma and prejudice on an interpersonal level can affect how people, especially the LGBTQIA+ individuals, present and express themselves in both private and public spaces. Hence, this may lead to self-censorship and hiding which can cause emotional distress and internal conflict; can take a severe toll on their mental health, and can exacerbate feelings of shame, self-doubt, and low self-esteem due to fear, prejudice, and discrimination. Overall, the research paper aims to help in the progressiveness of the Filipino community on this residing subject, provide a solid foundation for Filipinos who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community in Surigao City, and to also contribute to the society at large by bringing awareness on how a person's experience/s in terms of their gender expression impact their decisions in life, mental health, social well-being, and most importantly their preferences when it comes to expressing themselves.

Philosophical Underpinning

Phenomenology was used in this research. Phenomenology is a research approach that aimed to describe the essence of a phenomenon by investigating it from the perspective of individuals who had experienced it (Teherani et al, 2015). Additionally, it is an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning formation that was used to understand human beings' lived worlds at a conscious level (Qutoshi, 2018). The purpose of phenomenology was to describe the significance of this experience, both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (as cited in Neubauer et al, 2019; Teherani et al, 2015).

Specifically, descriptive phenomenology was applied to this study. Descriptive phenomenology aimed to uncover the fundamental characteristics or core structure of any phenomenon being studied, focusing on the attributes that defined it as itself, as opposed to something different (Morrow et al, 2015). In topics with limited prior research, like the one explored, the Filipino experience on gender expression, descriptive phenomenology was particularly useful. Hence, the

researchers highlighted a technique presented by Colaizzi (1978), a seven-step process that ensured comprehensive analysis while preserving data precision at each step. Elaborate firsthand depictions of experiences were essential for this approach, which could be collected through various methods, including in-person interviews.

The following steps represented Colaizzi's process for phenomenological data analysis:

1. Transcribe and Familiarize: Each transcript was read several times to gain a general understanding of the data.
2. Extract Significant Statements: Significant statements that pertained to the phenomenon under study were identified and labeled.
3. Formulate Meanings: Meanings were formulated from the identified significant statements.
4. Cluster Themes: Meanings found throughout the data were clustered and categorized into common themes.
5. Create Exhaustive Description: The findings of the study were written into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.
6. Produce Fundamental Structure: Statements that described the essential structure of the phenomenon were developed.
7. Validate Findings: The fundamental structure was presented to participants, and results were verified with their experiences.

This study leaned on an ontological view. Ontology explored the nature of social reality. It maintained that reality was subjective and differed from person to person (as cited in Bradshaw et al, 2017; Parahoo, 2014). In this case, the researchers assumed that various realities or experiences occurred in the lives of the LGBTQs among Surigaonons.

Methods and Materials

This study utilized the descriptive phenomenological research by Colaizzi (1978). This phenomenological method was used to uncover the genuine experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Its purpose is to describe the universal essence of a lived experience, which embodied the phenomenon's real nature (Willis et al, 2016).

The researchers employed a qualitative approach using descriptive phenomenology. According to the phenomenological approach, the situation itself referred to the subjective perceptions, feelings, and reactions experienced by the participants in a specific life scene. This design was considered appropriate to use in this study, in view of the fact that it was employed in social psychology research to investigate and describe people's lived experiences.

The informants of this study were selected individuals who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community residing in Surigao City, and 10 were involved in the study. The researchers identified the informants using the snowball sampling method. Informants were chosen based on the criteria

established by the researchers. The following qualities were followed to fulfill the necessities of the study:

1. The informant was part of the LGBTQIA+ community.
2. The informant resides in Surigao City.
3. The informant was 18 years old and above.

An open-ended semi-structured interview was enacted as the primary data collection tool in this study. The formulated questions were based on the purpose provided to explore the lived experiences of individuals who belonged to the LGBTQ+ community regarding gender expression. Accordingly, the researchers utilized the following instruments in gathering the data:

Researcher-Made Interview Questions: During the formal interview process, this instrument was used to gather and comprehend what the respondents had to say by asking thought-provoking questions about their own experiences.

Recording Device: This tool was used to record the verbatim responses of the informants.

The researchers prepared a letter of permission to conduct the study to the Dean of the College of Health Sciences and to the Director of the University Research Institute and Development. Upon approval, the researchers proceeded to determine the informants through the use of the snowball sampling technique. The researchers ensured that the conduct of the study contained the informed consent of the informants during the one-on-one in-depth interview.

In the conduct of the interview, the experience of the informants was first identified by asking the grand tour question: “What were your experiences, being part of the LGBTQ, in terms of gender expression?”. Second, the researchers set their personal ethical guidelines in conducting an interview wherein confidentiality was of utmost importance and priority by maintaining to themselves that they knew nothing about the informants’ background, explicitly their feelings and insights. Third, the information acquired from the informants was secured, and a follow-up question was asked following the replies to the grand tour question. During the interview, an audio recording was done with the consent of the informants, and other information shared would be taken down as notes for additional reference. Informants were requested to respond honestly to the questions. The next step was arranging and transcribing the responses of informants obtained from the interview. The next process also included data analysis, and lastly, based on the transcribed data, the researchers deduced plausible solutions and constructed a conclusion for the study’s aims. Furthermore, the study’s discussions and implications were included in this stage.

Results and Discussion

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From the formulated meanings, 24 cluster themes, and 6 emergent themes were derived from the narrative data provided by the informants. The analysis focused on the most detailed and descriptive statements relevant to the study's objectives.

Table 1. *Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution of Profile of the Informants*

Profile	f	%
Sex at Birth		
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
Gender Identity		
Lesbian	2	20
Gay	1	10
Bisexual	4	40
Transgender	2	20
Pansexual	1	10
Age		
19 years old	2	20
20 years old	1	10
21 years old	1	10
23 years old	1	10
24 years old	1	10
25 years old	1	10
27 years old	1	10
50 years old	1	10
52 years old	1	10
Barangay		
Taft	3	30
San Juan	1	10
Washington	3	30
Sabang	2	20
Rizal	1	10
Religion		
Roman Catholic	9	90
Iglesia Ni Cristo	1	10
Educational Attainment		
Undergraduate	6	60
College	4	40
Total	10	100

Table 2. *Theme One: Self-Discovery: Shaping Oneself*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
A16	Acknowledged that some gays will pursue an open relationship but is not fond of it anymore.	Comparison	SELF DISCOVERY
A17	She does not like to pursue an open relationship in Surigao anymore, unlike when she was in Japan.		
A20	Suggested that those who are bullied are provocative in manner.		
A23	Acknowledged the diversity within the LGBTQIA+ community.		
A25	Does not consider herself as an easy target for bullying.		
A26	Compared herself to other gays.		
A34	Emphasized concerns with other gays engaging in negative actions.		
C65	Expressed that others are not aware that they did not want it to happen, but occurred because they feel that way.		
I218	Expressed that her father realized that she isn't the same as other gays.		
I219	Determined to not be treated in a derogatory manner unlike others.		
I237	Acknowledged that there are different variations to behavior or attitudes of bisexuals.		

I238	Expressed that there are certain other bisexuals who are professional, but do not act professionally in front of someone.		
A27	The shift in her gender identity was not forced compared to other bisexuals, gays, or transgenders.	Sense of Doubt and Identity Exploration	
C55	During her high school days, she began to question her gender identity.		
E118	Felt guilty and contemplated her gender identity when she was a child.		
F140	There was a period of confusion and questioning about their identity.		
G170	There is a transition from being heterosexual to bisexual.		
I208	At age 25, she started thinking about getting married to a woman.		
J265	She was in a state of wandering.		
J266	Expressed that there was a period of wandering and uncertainty about their identity, femininity emerged eventually.		
J254	Expressed how the journey starts with being gay before transitioning.		
A31	Stated that it is conservative in Iglesia ni Kristo.	Family and Social Expectations	
C66	She felt afraid because society considered it unconventional.		
D73	Expressed that people assume that she is bisexual and might be interested in men.		

D77	Expressed that her family expects her to end up with a guy.		
D85	Her family believes that she will get romantically involved with a guy.		
D86	Her family asks her why she has no boyfriend and compares her to her cousins who have boyfriends.		
D94	Expressed that being the youngest, all the pressure is left with her.		
D95	Her family emphasized that she should have a male partner.		
D96	Being the only girl, her family expects her to produce grandchildren.		
D97	The aunt exerts pressure by consistently emphasizing that she has to learn how to do things for her future husband.		
E125	Her grandmother expressed skepticism implying that her feelings might change in the future.		
E127	She told her grandmother that she does not want to have a child.		
F150	Parents expressed an expectation to marry.		
F151	Parents interfered in choosing a partner for him.		
I229	Expressed that her family became happier when she got married even though they knew she was gay.		
B42	Dressed up by the older sister and shaped their early perceptions on how to look good dressing up like a girl.	Influence	

B43	Highlights the gullibility as a young child to external suggestions and opinions.		
E119	Her sense of doubt comes from the influence of religion and her family		
H177	Adapted bisexuality from peers.		
H194	Describes her sexuality as hopping on the trend.		
I210	She got married to a woman at the age of 27 because they had a child.		
I216	Fell in love with her partner when she realized she was pregnant.		
H195	Envisions having a husband instead of a same-sex relationship.	Desire for a Family	
H196	Prefers having biological children rather than adopting.		
I209	Expressed that she wants to raise her own child and have her own family.		
I212	She started to have feelings for a girl, only because she kept in mind that she wants to make her own family and have her own child to take care of.		
I215	Her only intention was to have a baby with her partner.		
A2	Expressed that she acts differently because she is not attracted to girls but to guys instead.	Sexual Attraction	
A28	She confided with her mother about her gender attraction and suggests that she may be gay.		
C56	Expressed that she was in a romantic relationship and likes girls.		

C57	In high school, she was into girls more.		Self-Realization
D74	She has not dated men because it's usually girls.		
D76	Identified her attraction to girls in her 6 th grade.		
I205	She feels flattered towards guys.		
I206	Strongly expressed feelings of disgust towards girls.		
I214	Did not feel any romantic attraction to her partner one year after she got married.		
A1	Felt like a girl when she was younger; specifically during her kindergarten days.		
A3	She is self-aware that her gender identity is different from others.		
A5	She feels that she is a woman in the body of a man.		
C68	Acknowledged the inability to change because of how she truly felt.		
D75	Began expressing her true self around 8 th grade.		
E113	She identified as bisexual during elementary up until high school.		
E114	She only recently discovered that she is lesbian.		
I204	She identifies as gay not bisexual at first.		
I211	Identified herself as bisexual because she started to have feelings for a girl.		
I213	Realized she is bisexual at the age of 25.		

A19	She has no experience of getting bullied because she is a strong and intellectual person.	No Experiences of Discrimination	
G168	Did not experience any bullying or discrimination growing up as a bisexual.		
H185	Has not experienced any bullying or discrimination from being secretive.		
I203	She is aware of the struggles of other LGBT individuals but has not experienced the same hardships.		
I228	Has not experienced any familial pressure that they should get married or have a child.		
I233	She did not experience any discrimination.		
I236	Expressed that she does not get scared wherever she goes.		

Table 3. *Theme Two: Difficulties and Challenges: Discrimination and Prejudice*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
B48	Experienced discrimination and prejudice while growing up as an LGBTQ.	Interpersonal Bias	DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES
C58	Fear arises because fathers did not accept her since no one in her family conforms to non-normative gender identities		
C64	Guys ask her what she can gain from a girl, and how she's committing a sin against God.		
E116	She had challenges and difficulties because of her family and not from other people.		

F128	Discrimination is present in the household and is influenced by a set of values and religious beliefs.		
F130	His father struggled to come to terms with the way he expressed their gender.		
F132	People expressed that he doesn't fit in the society.		
F134	Feelings of shame and judgment are encountered while expressing their gender.		
F136	Faced rejection because of his appearance.		
F142	Underwent a period of guilt and discomfort influenced by the way his parents treated him.		
F161	Despite having different religious beliefs, there is no form of acceptance coming from his dad and grandmother.		
I217	Being gay, she already struggled with her family, especially her father.		
J247	Encountered stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with these labels.		
J255	Conveys the difficulty of transitioning when met with misconceptions and judgment.		
B49	Common experiences of discrimination in the LGBTQ+ community.	Injustice	
B50	Expressed that bullying is widespread with reasons relating to being gay or flirtatious.		
C63	Stated that she gets judged by men.		
D84	Expressed that her friends didn't mind her the next day, when they		

	found out she had a romantic relationship with a girl.		
D104	Expressed that she experiences discrimination because of her gender identity and the way she dresses.		
F129	His parents exhibit homophobia.		
F131	There is aggression and no acceptance.		
F145	Getting kicked out and having to finance one's education.		
I207	Noticed when her gay friends get older, they die without somebody by their side, since they became gay.		
J239	Experienced discrimination within society.		
J244	Expresses that discrimination is something unavoidable.		
J249	Highlights the challenges and pain of being generalized.		
J250	Faced unfair judgment based on the actions of others.		
J253	Has a strained relationship with her father due to his transphobia.		
A22	Addressed the stereotype that being gay does not mean you are gay because of the multiple facets that make someone gay.		
B51	Conveys the experience of normalizing labeling and dehumanization.		
C62	Expressed that people always say that she and tomboys are a burden to society.		
D79	Her family caught her in her recent relationship with her ex and labeled the ex partner as "tomboy".		

D80	She labeled her family as homophobic.		
D81	Her family called her a “demon” and that she’s committing a huge sin.		
D83	She cut off her friends because they were homophobic.		
E107	She feels uncomfy because she was surrounded by very close-minded people.		
J260	Encountered discrimination being labeled as a cross-dresser.		
J246	There is a generalization of the term gay and getting labeled.		

Table 4. *Theme Three: Concealment: Preservation of the Self*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
B45	Followed his parents' command on concealing his “gay” side.	Fear	CONCEALMENT
C59	In college, she did not reveal that she had a girlfriend because she did not want to be judged.		
D88	She is afraid of what her family will be saying about her if she reveals that she is not straight.		
D90	She is scared that she might be disowned or will lose support for her education if she will come out.		
H181	Doesn’t openly declare that she is bisexual.		
H183	Have no intentions of coming out to everyone.		
H186	Prefers to keep her sexuality hidden in order to feel safe.		

H191	There is questioning about her sexuality because of the fear of getting judged.		
C67	Attempted to conform to societal expectations by trying to be straight.	Conformity	
F141	Tried to conform and pushed themselves to like girls.		
F144	Pretended to be a heterosexual at home.		
C60	Gained newfound confidence to introduce her girlfriend to her parents when she graduated.	Coming Out	
D78	Her family is not aware of her gender identity and sexual orientation.		
D82	She denied her partner by telling her family that they are best friends.		
D87	She is currently in a relationship but has chosen not to disclose this information to her family because she is not ready.		
D89	Considering coming out to her family when she has a stable job and achievements to show.		
D99	Expressed that she does not want to come out because her family is close-minded.		
D100	Has a hard time expressing her feelings and gender identity to her family.		
E122	She sometimes feels that she has to suppress her feelings because of her younger brother.		
I220	Expressing her transition to bisexual when she got married, made her struggle even more.		
I232	She did not conceal her gender identity from her child.		

Table 5. *Theme Four: Coping: Resilience and Positivity*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
B37	Perceives it as normal because they have mentally framed it as a challenge.	Stabilizing	COPING
B52	Adopted a strategy of balance in their behavior to prevent being criticized as someone “dirty”.		
D93	She does not care what her father or someone else will think about her.		
E109	She became more open and did not mind what her family had to say.		
E110	Prioritized her own comfort until her family learned to accept her.		
E117	She fought to prove that there is nothing wrong with being the way she is.		
F149	Perseveres despite the blame and challenges related to his gender.		
F164	Remained resilient despite the mistreatment.		
I222	Attempted to explain to others who she is and asked for support.	Empowerment	
J245	Refusing to allow negative energy influence her.		
J251	Copes with challenges by seeking support from friends and expressing her feelings.		
J259	Prioritized success and stability in the future.		

Table 6. *Theme Five: Acceptance: Its Complexities Across Relationships*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
C61	Her family accepted their relationship even if they did not agree to it, because they could not do anything about it.	Forced	ACCEPTANCE
E112	Her mom found it difficult to accept her at first, but she feels that her mom is gradually accepting her for who she is.		
H190	Accepted her older brother from a fear that opposition might lead to suicide.		
B39	Family is not against being gay but does not approve of cross-dressing.	Conditional	
E123	Her grandmother accepts her for who she is regardless of their upbringing, but prefers if she gets married.		
E126	Her parents are supportive with who she is and who she is with, while her relatives are not.		
A29	Her mother stated that being gay is not a sin but becomes wrong if they're not good.		
A30	Advised her not to use make-up.		
A18	Her family accepted her and did not engage in physical violence, despite being aware that she's gay or transgender.	Social and Familial Acceptance	

A21	Her friends accept her for who she is.		
B38	The family expressed their acceptance and support for being gay.		
G167	Her family is aware of her identity and is fine with a boyish expression.		
G169	Friends are accepting of who she is.		
G172	Her parents observed the shift in their sexuality.		
H182	Family members expressed their acceptance of a potential partner.		
H189	Parents are religious but have not expressed disapproval of her identity.		
J252	Has supportive allies such as best friends, siblings, and mother.		
F156	Feels freely because of the support coming from friends and classmates.		
A4	Recognized self-acceptance to discuss the idea of homosexuality as abnormal.	Self-Acceptance	
C68	Acknowledged the inability to change because of how she truly felt.		
D91	She never tried to suppress her gender identity.		
D92	Found the idea of suppressing her gender identity as absurd.		
D101	Is happy with her gender expression.		
D106	Expressed that she feels great that she never thought about following what other people said.		

E120	Leaned more to her beliefs despite other religious beliefs..		
E121	She chose to believe in what makes her comfortable and that there is nothing wrong with what she is doing.		
E127	She accepted her transition immediately and did not find it difficult.		
F138	No longer sought validation from others.		
F143	Expressed himself freely outside.		
F147	Sees himself as a person with vast potential.		
F153	Proud to show oneself to other people.		
F154	Having no regrets about coming out because of self-acceptance.		
F157	Feels appreciated on how he expresses himself with makeup.		
F159	His aunt is accepting and encouraging his interests for dressing up.		
G176	Expressed comfort with their identity.		
B40	Expressed a sense of acceptance and positive attitude.		
J261	Never had doubts and regrets choosing to transition into a woman.		

Table 7. *Theme Six: Expression: Authenticity and Liberation of the Self*

Reference No.	Formulated Meanings	Cluster Theme	Emergent Theme
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A7	She brought her external appearance in harmony with her internal sense of being a woman.	Appearance and Objects	EXPRESSION
A9	She continued to express her gender identity through her appearance despite returning to her country.		
A8	She had a feminine appearance and style.		
A12	Changed the way she projects herself because she will be a teacher.		
A10	Underwent a shift in style especially in appearance, shifting away from a traditional feminine style.		
A11	Does not wear make-up anymore and chooses to wear t-shirt and pants.		
A14	She does not dress like a girl or wear make-up anymore.		
C54	Has a preference to wear comfortable clothing instead of a boyish attire.		
D69	Has a very feminine style and a friendly approach.		
D70	Her feminine style and friendly approach contribute to the misperception of her gender identity.		
D71	Emphasized enjoyment in makeup and fashion.		
D72	Chosen not to conform to a stereotypical masculine look on expressing herself.		
F155	Expressed himself freely, opting for an androgynous look.		
F135	Presented a boyish appearance and engaging in traditionally masculine activities.		

F160	Expressed happiness in his interest in makeup and skincare.		
G165	Her usual style of dressing is masculine but also incorporates feminine styles.		
H179	Clothing style emphasizes a much more feminine style.		
H180	Wears makeup to events.		
H187	Expresses herself in a feminine way.		
H188	Comfortable with masculine clothes but leans more towards expressing herself in a feminine manner.		
I198	Has an affinity for feminine fashion.		
I200	Dislikes wearing house dresses outside but loves wearing them only at home.		
I223	Expressed that wearing t-shirt and pants makes her comfortable and complacent.		
I224	She is not that comfortable roaming around outside wearing something casual and a house dress.		
I225	She is comfortable wearing blouses or spaghetti tops.		
I227	Sometimes goes out wearing spaghetti, shorts, and slippers with light-makeup and is comfortable facing people like that.		
J257	Began cross-dressing during high school.		
J267	Focused more on becoming feminine because of the broader		

	selection and designs available for women's clothing.		
A15	Expressed that in her younger years, she dressed like a girl to attract or be in a relationship with a guy.	Attitude and Behavior	
A24	Acknowledges the existence of discrimination and confronts those who oppose her.		
B41	Used their identity to express talent.		
B46	There is an intention of cross-dressing.		
J243	Knew she was a transwoman because she believes possessing the heart of a woman.		
A6	She expressed more of herself when she went abroad in Japan.	Freedom	
A32	She started to grow her hair in Japan because she was far from her mother.		
E108	Started to feel comfortable with the way she expressed herself, when she transferred location during her senior high school.		
H178	Expressed their bisexuality through actions instead of clothing.		
I230	She joined pageants before with her wife as her assistant.		
J241	Passionate for fashion and playing with Barbie.		
I231	Expressed that even though she is bisexual, she still fulfills her role as the head of the family.		
A36	Suggested that if you're gay you should be acting gentle or feminine, but also intelligent and audacious.	Preference	

D102	She thought about presenting herself to be more masculine but stated she can't because she really is feminine.		
D103	Attracted to both feminine and masculine styles.		
E115	She is more masculine but acknowledged that she can also be feminine sometimes.		
F139	Expresses a desire in exploring cross-dressing and participating in pageantry.		
G166	Identifies as a bisexual but acknowledges a preference for masculine qualities.		
I221	She had long hair before and disagreed being called "gay" by others.		

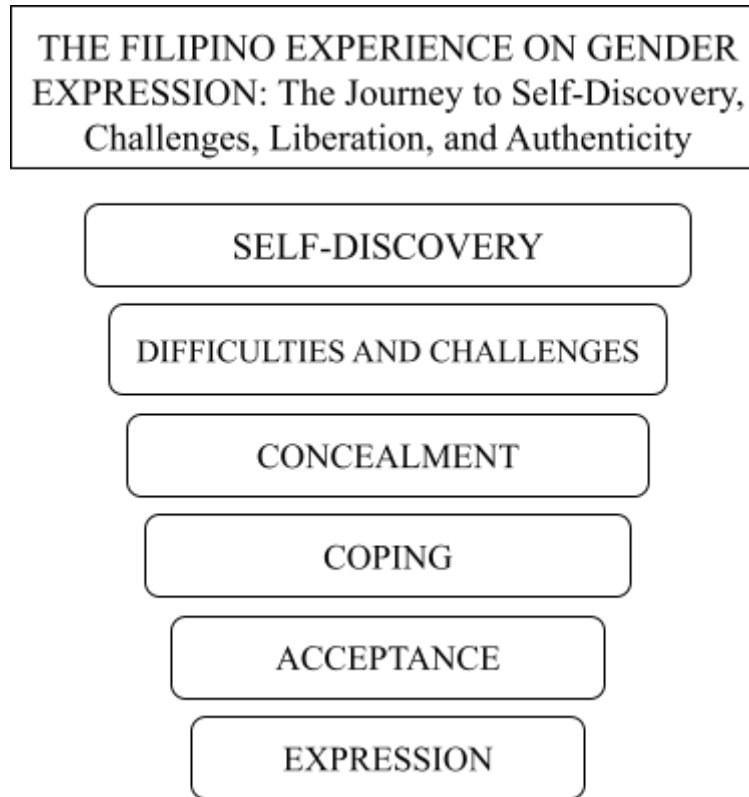


Figure 2. *Emergent Model of the LGBTQIAs Experience on Gender Expression*

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Many experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals residing in Surigao City varied from one person to another in some circumstances. However, most of the LGBTQIA+ individuals shared similar experiences, resulting in six (6) emerging themes such as self-discovery, difficulties and challenges, concealment, coping, acceptance, and expression. Hence, for someone to understand their gender expression, it is crucial to look into their journey of self-discovery, the obstacles encountered, and other circumstances that allows them to openly be the person they choose to be today. The external factors that influence their identity and their expression may also be related

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to their path to authenticity and liberation in the near future.

In accordance to the study's findings, it is confirmed that any type of discrimination and prejudice is inevitable for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and though there were informants who had not experienced any type of injustice or bias towards them, they acknowledged that discrimination and prejudice is still prevalent today for the LGBTQIA+ community. As a result, other informants described that they chose to conceal their gender identity and attempted to conform to heteronormative standards of their society. Some of the LGBTQIA+ individuals also mentioned that they transitioned from one gender identity to another later in their life. Moreover, some of the informants also expressed acceptance within their family, friends, and themselves while others were rejected and created coping strategies to feel secure. Indeed, the informants' experiences from their family, friends, or society has made a huge impact on shaping their choice in clothing, style, or their attitudes and behaviors towards themselves and other people. Moreover, while some of the informants have expressed liberation and others have not, the informants were capable of expressing their preferences, therefore, serving as their gender expression.

Implications

The following are the implications in light of the findings and conclusions:

LGBTQIA+ Community. The findings of this study would make it possible for them to feel seen, heard, supported, and understood. May this study serve as how they can be accepted in society and how they can foster a sense of belongingness. The idea would make it easier for the members to live without stigma, discrimination, and prejudice.

Families and Friends. The findings of this study would equip families and friends of the members of the LGBTQIA+ with insights that would empower them to create an environment where acceptance can foster. The findings would also serve as a guide, encouraging them to embrace diversity and contribute to the well-being and sense of belongingness of their LGBTQIA+ loved ones.

Surigaonons. The results of this research would enlighten the citizens of Surigao City regarding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and what they have undergone while coping with their negative experiences. The findings would also help them realize that homophobic and transphobic remarks are unacceptable therefore fostering understanding, empathy, and sensitivity would help reduce insensitive comments.

Government. The findings of this study could provide our local government units the information and knowledge they may seek about mental health regarding the experiences of the

members of the LGBTQIA+ community and help them understand and develop initiatives to prevent difficulties and challenges such as stigma, discrimination, and prejudice.

Psychology Students. The findings of this study would assist them in determining the effectiveness of mental health concerning the LGBTQIA+ members' experiences and encouraging the eradication of stigma and discrimination.

Future Researchers. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for future research. The results would also serve as a summary for topics related to the Filipino experience in terms of gender expression and encourage awareness on the struggles experienced by the members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

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