

Voices Unveiled: A Phenomenological Study on the Coming Out Experiences of Homosexuals to Their Families

Jamella Jolie P. Cordova¹, Paul Andrie B. Juanite², Gat Dion P. Sadangsal³, Pretty Joy E. Antallan⁴, Joriz Henry M. Ajoc⁵, Louredil F. Longos⁶, Renalyn B. Juanite⁷, Ezel G. Jainar⁸, Nikko T. Ederio*⁹

^{1,2,3,4,5} HUMSS Students, Caraga Regional Science High School

^{6,7,8,9} High School Teachers, Caraga Regional Science High School

⁹ Vice President for Academic Affairs, St. Paul University Surigao, Surigao City

ABSTRACT: The research “Voices Unveiled: A Phenomenological Study on the Coming Out Experiences of Homosexuals to Their Families” aims to delve into the personal journey of those individuals who have already gone through the process of coming out, whether by actions or verbally. The researchers used Van Kaam’s phenomenological method, which was modified by Moustakas (1994). The age of our informants ranged from 19 to 42. The research identified the key themes that can be concluded after analyzing the data gathered; it includes early signs of identity, emotional endeavors, family perceptions ranging from rejection to acceptance, the role of support systems — friends, families, colleagues, and personal growth through self-expression, self-acceptance. The research revealed the underlying challenges and triumphs experienced before and after coming out, which highlighted the importance of empathy, understanding, self-reflection, societal norms, acceptance, and support from friends or families. This research serves as a voice to those Homosexual individuals who are not understood by society and are treated differently by some communities, and a calling to those closeted individuals who are pushed back by the societal judgment. This research promotes understanding, empathy, awareness, and inclusivity towards Homosexual individuals.

KEYWORDS: Van Kaam’s phenomenological Method, Moustakas, Homosexuals, LGBTQ+ support, Surigao City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The perception and treatment of the LGBTQ+ community remain complex and multifaceted, often leaning toward negative societal attitudes. Based on observations, individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community tend to feel more open and comfortable expressing their authentic selves among friends than within their biological families. In the 21st century, society has begun to embrace a broader sense of open-mindedness toward diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Burand et al., 2023), serving as a catalyst for a more inclusive generation.

Globally, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals persists, often rooted in deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms (Mondaca & Lisboa, 2021). In several countries across Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas, identifying as LGBTQ+ remains criminalized—punishable by death, imprisonment ranging from one to fourteen years, or corporal punishment (Human Dignity Trust, 2024). These conditions reflect the strong influence of conservative ideologies that reinforce binary gender norms and limit the acceptance of sexual diversity.

In the Philippines, the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals from conservative families represent a complex and multidimensional social issue shaped by cultural, religious, and societal expectations (Pinaga, 2023). Understanding the underlying causes and phenomenology of their experiences—particularly during the coming-out process—requires examining the interplay of these social factors and the challenges that arise from them.

To effectively address the coming-out experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Philippines, a comprehensive approach is necessary—one that integrates educational initiatives, legal reforms, and community and family orientation. Advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and visibility plays a crucial role in challenging restrictive social norms and cultivating an environment that embraces all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people from conservative homes is driven by the goal of fostering empathy, awareness, and positive social transformation. By understanding the unique challenges faced by these individuals, researchers can illuminate the often-unseen struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, advocate for progressive legislation, and establish support systems that promote acceptance and inclusivity. This exploration highlights the personal journeys of individuals who have come out—whether through words or actions—while also challenging stereotypes, reducing discrimination, and nurturing a more compassionate society where people can live authentically without fear of rejection.

Philosophical Underpinning

The difficulties Homosexual people encounter while coming out, especially in familial settings, are examined in this study. According to research, LGBTQ+ people's self-esteem and general well-being are greatly impacted by elements including internal shame, discrimination, social support, and stress associated with their sexual orientation (Yakushko, 2005). The purpose of this project is to investigate how these elements, in addition to conservative religious and cultural influences, impact LGBTQ+ people's lived experiences as they go through identity development and self-acceptance.

This research, which is informed by constructivist ontology, is predicated on the knowledge that people constantly create and redefine their identities through their interactions with their families, communities, and society at large, and that reality is socially created. Constructivism acknowledges that LGBTQ+ people actively participate in meaning-making processes as they navigate their sense of self within diverse social contexts, as opposed to considering identity as static.

The researchers underpin the study in the concept of constructivist ontology, on which this approach is suitable for understanding the insights of LGBT+ individuals. Through this lens, the study values participants' unique stories and sees knowledge as something built together through conversation and shared meaning.

By asking questions like "why do LGBTQ+ people struggle in their coming out experiences as an Individual?" It is a helpful way to understand how LGBTQ+ people get affected by the underlying family structures and beliefs. LGBTQ+ have a hard time because their families have a multi-faceted factor in accepting them as people, which makes it tough for them to be themselves and figure out who they really are. This study is related to the fields of sociology, psychology, and gender studies, specifically focusing on LGBTQ+ identity formation and negotiation within familial contexts.

It also contributes to the broader understanding of cultural, social norms, geographical factors, and many underlying influences on individual identity. This integration enables us to delve deep into the intricate dynamics of LGTBQ+ Peoples' transition, identity formation, and social integration within the specific social context. Our aim is not just theoretical enrichment but also to offer practical insights that can inform the majority in the environment that this phenomenological method would help you explore

How LGBTQ+ individuals come to understand and open their sexual and/or gender identity, especially when faced with social, cultural, and familial pressures. It's about capturing their personal experiences of identity development, self-discovery, and the complexities of coming out.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedure

This study employed both purposive and convenience sampling techniques to identify suitable informants.

Purposive sampling was utilized based on the following inclusion criteria:

- a) Individuals who identify as homosexual and have come out or revealed their gender identity or sexual orientation in Surigao City;
- b) Aged between 18 to 42 years old; and
- c) Willing to be interviewed and to voluntarily participate in the study.

Convenience sampling was employed due to the following considerations:

- a) Accessibility of the researchers to the potential informants;
- b) The need to minimize expenses and time in conducting the study; and
- c) Availability of homosexual individuals who have come out as members of the LGBTQ+ community in Surigao City.



A total of seven (7) informants participated in the study.

Research Instrument

As a phenomenological study, the researchers themselves served as the primary instrument of data collection. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit the participants' lived experiences, thoughts, and emotions concerning their coming-out journey and family interactions.

The interview guide included the following questions:

1. When did you realize that you are part of the LGBTQ+ community?
 - 1.1 What made you realize that you are indeed an LGBTQ+ individual?
2. What did you feel when you acknowledged your sexual identity?
3. What made you come out to your friends and family?
4. What led you to reveal your sexual orientation to your family?
5. How are you treated by your family and friends now that they know your sexual orientation?
6. What advice would you give to individuals who are struggling to open up about their sexual identity to friends and family?

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant: Vice Ganda (Informant 1), Mari Jasmine (Informant 2), Mark Bautista (Informant 3), Michelle Dee (Informant 4), Bretman Rock (Informant 5), Boy Abunda (Informant 6), and Mikey Bustos (Informant 7). This approach safeguarded participants' privacy while maintaining the integrity of the data.

Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were conducted at venues chosen by the informants to ensure comfort and safety. Data collection was carried out through six interrelated stages:

- a) In-depth Interviews: One-on-one sessions were conducted to gather detailed narratives regarding participants' experiences of coming out, family dynamics, support systems, and challenges encountered.
- b) Audio Recordings: With participants' consent, interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and facilitate detailed analysis.
- c) Field Notes: Researchers documented non-verbal cues, behaviors, and contextual details that complemented the verbal responses.
- d) Transcriptions: All recordings were transcribed verbatim. Identifiable information was removed to ensure confidentiality.
- e) Consent Forms: Participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, their rights, and data protection measures.
- f) Ethical Considerations: Throughout the study, the researchers upheld ethical standards, ensuring respect, autonomy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Data categorization was deferred until all interviews were completed to minimize bias and maintain analytical neutrality. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), broad, open-ended questions were initially posed to allow participants to freely express their lived experiences before moving toward more focused questions for deeper understanding.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Van Kaam's Method (1966) as modified by Moustakas (1994), consisting of eight systematic steps:

1. **Listing and Preliminary Grouping:** Compilation of raw data and initial grouping based on commonalities.
2. **Reduction and Elimination:** Identification of essential elements and removal of redundant information.
3. **Clustering and Thematizing of Invariant Constituents:** Organization of related elements into emerging themes.
4. **Final Identification of Themes:** Refinement and validation of themes within the overall research context.
5. **Individual Textural Description:** Creation of detailed descriptive accounts reflecting each participant's experience.
6. **Individual Structural Description:** Analysis of the underlying structures and dynamics shaping these experiences.
7. **Textural-Structural Description:** Integration of descriptive and structural elements to articulate the essence of experiences.
8. **Composite Textural-Structural Description:** Synthesis of all individual accounts into a holistic representation of the phenomenon.

This systematic approach allowed the researchers to capture the essence and meaning of participants' lived experiences as homosexual individuals navigating the complexities of coming out within conservative family environments.

Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the following validation techniques were employed:

Member Checking: Participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcribed statements and interpretations.

- **Peer Debriefing:** Consultations with phenomenology experts were conducted to refine interpretations and enhance credibility.
- **Data Triangulation:** Observations, interviews, and document reviews were cross-verified to ensure consistency.
- **Reflexivity:** Researchers maintained awareness of personal biases, ensuring neutrality throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Ethical conduct was a priority throughout the study. The researchers strictly avoided deception, obtained informed consent, and ensured participants' privacy and confidentiality at all stages (Ederio et al., 2023).

FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Included in this chapter is a detailed phenomenological analysis of interviews with the Homosexual informants. The informants completed face-to-face interviews, which were conducted at their homes by the researchers. Due to the diverse experiences of the participants, their responses to the study questions varied. However, the coding of the interview transcriptions revealed common themes surrounding the informants' feelings, familial relationships, and the significance of coming out to their families.

The participants completed the face-to-face interviews with me as the researcher. The informants in this study were aged 19-42 years and represented a mix of gender identities, including gay, bisexual, and homosexual individuals. Each informant's sexual orientation and family background provided unique insights into the experience of coming out, which was a central theme of this research. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and organized to reflect the participants' experiences of coming out to their families. Responses to research questions were diverse because of the participants' respective experiences. From the coding of the interview transcriptions, common themes emerged regarding the coming out experience of Homosexuals to their families.

The six interview questions centered on the research questions: (1) When did you realize that you are part of the LGBTQ+ community? (2) What did you feel when you acknowledged your sexual identity (3) What made you come out to your friends & families? (4) What made you reveal your sexual orientation to your family? (5) How are you treated by your family and friends now that they know your sexual orientation? (6) What can you advise individuals having difficulties with opening up their sexual identities to their friends & families?

Using Van Kaam's approach as modified by Moustakas (1994), this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design, specifically Husserlian Transcendental Descriptive Phenomenology. The lived experiences of homosexuals in their familial situations during their coming-out journey are examined using this method. We found these eight-steps approaches effective in organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the qualitative data gathered. The interviews covered a period of within 5 hours on October 14, 2024. The study aimed to characterize participants' experiences without researcher bias by concentrating on transcendental phenomenology, guaranteeing that their voices are accurately conveyed. We appended the verbatim transcriptions of the in-depth interviews (Appendix A) and to emphasize unbiased analysis, We carefully and consciously set aside past observations and viewed the experiences as fresh and new. This study guarantees a thorough, methodical investigation of LGBTQ+ people's identity construction and self-disclosure within familial and cultural contexts by fusing Moustakas' modified Van Kaam method with Husserlian phenomenology. With this, we were able to interpret the data objectively.

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The findings are presented in a narrative format, exploring each theme, encompassing both core themes and sub-themes.

Core Theme 1: Self-Persistent Realization and Deep Introspection

The path to genuine self-acceptance and profound self-discovery is rarely simple, linear, or effortless; it is a winding, emotionally charged journey filled with uncertainty and introspection. It unfolds over time, often marked by moments of hesitation, silent revelations, and gradual clarity. For many, the first step toward understanding their true selves begins with a faint, lingering realization—an awareness that hovers quietly in the background of their thoughts, waiting for validation, understanding, and deeper comprehension. This realization is often subtle, persistent, and enigmatic, and it may not immediately make sense or align with societal expectations. It is not an instant breakthrough but rather a slow-blooming understanding that grows from a quiet, internal questioning.

For homosexual individuals, especially during childhood or adolescence, these moments of self-recognition can be significant yet subtle. It might start with a feeling of not quite fitting in—a disconnection from the roles, behaviors, or identities that others seem to adopt so easily. At these times, many young people first become aware of a difference in their emotions, interests, or sense of self. It is a gentle but persistent feeling of divergence, a quiet knowledge that they are somehow different from their peers. Yet, this awareness is often not fully understood or accepted immediately.

As “*Mikey Bustos*,” one of the study’s informants, reflects, “*I was aware from the beginning, even as a child, that I was different from the other kids I used to play with every day.*” This recognition, though significant, is not accompanied by immediate clarity or understanding.

The emotional landscape of this journey is often one of confusion, insecurity, and a deep, unspoken longing for answers. In the absence of language, representation, or supportive guidance, homosexual individuals are left to navigate these early realizations alone. Without the tools to fully grasp or articulate their identities, they often face internal battles—struggling to make sense of emotions they cannot yet name and dealing with the tension between self-awareness and societal pressures. The lack of external validation makes this path particularly challenging. As (McDermott et al. 2021) suggest, many LGBTQ+ individuals suppress their feelings during childhood or adolescence due to societal pressures, only to confront their identity more fully later in life.

The theme of self-recognition, however, does not always lead to immediate acceptance. The journey to self-understanding is often fraught with internal struggles and external expectations. Yet, despite these challenges, many individuals ultimately arrive at a place of self-acceptance and empowerment. As they navigate the journey of self-discovery, their mental health and self-confidence improve. Acceptance allows them to embrace their identity more fully, leading to a sense of empowerment and authenticity that fuels personal growth.

The role of supportive environments is central to this transformative process. Friends, online communities, and LGBTQ+ organizations serve as crucial spaces where individuals can find validation, build resilience, and navigate their emotional struggles. These support networks help individuals come to terms with their identity and develop a positive sense of self. As (Pinaga 2023) underscores, the affirmation and acceptance from these environments play a critical role in an individual’s journey toward self-empowerment.

However, for individuals raised in deeply conservative or religious households, this process of self-discovery can be even more complex and prolonged. These individuals often face additional barriers—fear of rejection, shame, or the need for constant self-reassurance—that complicate their path to self-acceptance. The journey is not only longer but may also require ongoing introspection and reflection to reconcile personal identity with deeply held beliefs or societal values. This makes the emotional journey of self-discovery both unique and transformative, demonstrating the resilience required to accept and love oneself in the face of adversity.

Sub-Theme 1: Becoming Me: The Quiet Journey Within

The journey to self-acceptance often begins quietly, unfolding in moments of reflection and introspection. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, this journey is less about dramatic realizations and more about the subtle, ongoing process of understanding who they truly are. It’s a path that doesn’t demand attention, but rather grows within, shaped by private thoughts and fleeting feelings that, over time, piece together a clearer picture of identity.

In the beginning, it’s easy to miss these moments—the quiet hesitations, the small but significant emotions that seem to set them apart. But over time, they build into a recognition, an understanding that something inside is different,

though hard to define. It's a journey marked by uncertainty, self-questioning, and a longing for something more—but also a longing for clarity that often remains elusive.

This process is deeply personal and usually hidden from the outside world, as many LGBTQ+ individuals lack the language or space to fully express themselves. Without visible role models or affirming messages, they often find themselves navigating this journey alone, piecing together their identity in silence. It's a slow unfolding, one that doesn't always have immediate answers but instead requires quiet patience and reflection.

As *Vice Ganda* puts it, “Ever since I was a child, I already knew that I was part of the LGBTQ+ community.” This sentiment speaks to the quiet, internal recognition that precedes full self-acceptance. It's a reminder that the path to understanding who we truly are is often a journey within—slow, steady, and deeply transformative.

The realization of one's sexual or gender identity is not always immediate or clear-cut. It can unfold gradually, influenced by social interactions, personal experiences, and, for some, exposure to LGBTQ+ representations in media. As (Rabins et al. 2024) suggest, the development of self-awareness regarding sexual orientation or gender identity is not uncommon, but the stigma that surrounds these identities often forces individuals to suppress or deny these feelings until later in life (McDermott et al., 2021).

Sub-Theme 2: Joy in the Mirror: Celebrating One's True Identity

The journey to self-acceptance is often marked by moments of profound joy, intimate discoveries, and a powerful reconnection with one's true self. For many homosexual's and LGBTQ+ individuals, reaching the point of self-acceptance brings an overwhelming sense of relief, emotional freedom, and a deep, unshakable joy. It's a victory over self-doubt, an act of rebellion against societal expectations, and a celebration of authenticity that goes beyond simply revealing one's sexual identity.

This turning point is often accompanied by a revitalized sense of connection to oneself. It's the realization that they no longer need to hide, conform, or pretend. Self-acceptance becomes not just a personal achievement, but a transformative experience—one that opens doors to a world where they are not just accepted, but celebrated for who they truly are.

As *Boy Abunda* reflects, “I thought it was just ordinary. I lived a life of happiness and contentment. I spent a day like that of any other kids of my age.” His words capture the simplicity and fulfillment that comes with embracing one's true identity, something once shrouded in uncertainty now felt as natural as any other part of life. Similarly, *Mari Jasmine* shares, “I feel happy at the same time grateful,” emphasizing the joy and gratitude that come with finally being at peace with oneself.

This stage of the journey represents not just an acceptance of self, but an invitation to live fully, unapologetically, and joyfully an invitation to celebrate who we truly are, both in the mirror and in the world around us.

Sub-Theme 3: Wearing the Mask: The fear Behind the Smile

For many homosexuals and LGBTQ+ individuals, the fear of rejection often takes the form of a quiet, persistent voice—a voice that insists something is wrong with them, even when they've done nothing to warrant that guilt. It's not just their own fear, but a mix of cultural expectations, family beliefs, and societal pressures that have been ingrained since childhood. This voice demands that they hide, suppress, and adapt to fit into a world that often feels like it doesn't fully accept them.

Over time, this internalized anxiety grows. It's fueled by the offhand remarks of parents, the careless jokes that seem to go too far, and the warnings that life will be harder for people “like that.” This fear, while often silent, is deeply paralyzing. The anticipation of rejection becomes overwhelming, with every step toward living authentically filled with uncertainty and a desperate need for acceptance.

The emotional toll of hiding one's true self can be immense. Behind the smile, the fear festers. As self-doubt creeps in, it begins to erode one's sense of worth and identity. The internal battle between authenticity and conformity is relentless, and each moment spent concealing one's true nature intensifies the agony.

Mark Bautista's words capture this internal conflict: “I'm scared to the point I feared of getting accepted. But, along the way, I was happy. Because there is such a difference that I let myself all out on who I really am.” His journey

speaks to the torment of wearing a mask of hiding in plain sight—only to find joy and freedom when he finally embraced his true identity.

This internalized homophobia, the weight of negative societal beliefs about LGBTQ+ identities, can have lasting psychological effects. Many LGBTQ+ individuals battle anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem as they hide who they are. Yet, studies show that embracing one's true self leads to improved mental well-being, helping individuals build resilience and confidence (McCurdy et al., 2023).

The journey to self-acceptance, while filled with fear and uncertainty, is ultimately a liberation from the mask—allowing individuals to step into their full selves with strength, authenticity, and the courage to live without apology.

Sub-Theme 4: Sacred Silence: When Culture and Faith Shape identity

Growing up in a deeply religious and traditional society can feel like walking a tightrope—one where every step is measured by unwavering expectations and cultural ideals. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, the journey of self-discovery becomes an internal battle fought in the shadow of these societal pressures. From a young age, they are taught that there are certain ways to be, certain identities to hold, and certain relationships to embrace. These teachings, often presented as absolute truths, leave little room for personal exploration or deviation. What is deemed “acceptable” becomes not just a guideline but a rigid framework that defines worth, belonging, and morality.

For those who feel the stirrings of something different within themselves—whether it's a growing awareness of their sexual orientation or their gender identity—the experience can be isolating and confusing. They find themselves trapped between two worlds: the one they've been taught to adhere to, and the one that is slowly emerging from within them. This internal conflict is not just a passing struggle but a profound, existential dilemma. As they try to reconcile who they are with what they've been taught, they often face theological gaps, emotional turmoil, and a constant stream of doubt.

It's a quiet war waged within, marked by an aching sense of uncertainty. The shame associated with "deviating" from the norm is a weight that hangs heavy, deeply intertwined with familial expectations, societal judgment, and spiritual condemnation. For many, this pressure breeds a sense of detachment from their true selves, creating a painful isolation that stretches across their identity and their sense of belonging in the world.

Mark Bautista, reflected on this very struggle when he recalled his early thoughts about his sexuality: "*I viewed my sexuality wrong, because I thought that being homosexual is a sin to the Lord, so yeah, that was the time.*" Mark's words are a stark reflection of the deeply ingrained belief systems that many LGBTQ+ individuals face in such environments. For him, and many others, the shame tied to their sexual orientation that it takes years to begin to unearth the truth of who they are beneath the layers of guilt and confusion.

The emotional toll is often enormous. Every moment of self-doubt becomes an act of quiet rebellion—against the beliefs that have been instilled in them since childhood, against the fear of rejection from loved ones, and, at times, even against the very God they were taught to worship. The disconnect they feel is palpable, as they try to reconcile their authentic selves with the versions of themselves demanded by the world around them. The journey toward self-acceptance, in this context, is not just an emotional one, but a spiritual odyssey that often requires shedding deeply rooted beliefs and confronting the quiet fear that has been cultivated over a lifetime.

This complex relationship between culture, faith, and identity adds layers of difficulty to an already challenging path. The experience is rarely linear, with moments of profound joy and clarity often interrupted by waves of doubt and fear. However, as individuals begin to embrace their true selves, there is an undeniable shift—an unraveling of the internalized shame and a new sense of freedom that is as much spiritual as it is emotional.

This journey, though fraught with difficulty, is one of the most powerful transformations an individual can undergo—a reclaiming of self that not only allows them to live authentically but to fully embrace the sacred truth of who they are.

Core Theme 2: The Moment After the Truth: Echoes of Coming Out

Coming out is never just a single act—it's a moment that resonates far beyond the words spoken. It ripples through the quiet corners of a home, lingers in the hearts of family members, and echoes within the person who finally speaks their truth. For

many LGBTQ+ individuals, this moment signifies the shift from internal acceptance to external exposure, and what follows can be a whirlwind of emotional, relational, and societal consequences.

In the stories shared, the "moment after" is often described as a blur—a heavy silence, a sharp shift in atmosphere, or even an emotional rupture. The responses varied greatly, but they all shared one undeniable truth: they left an indelible mark. Whether it was the weight of disapproval or the warmth of support, the aftermath of coming out shaped not only the individual but the relationships around them. Each story spoke to the emotional complexity of this pivotal moment, showing how it influences self-identity and familial bonds long after the words are said.

However, the echoes of coming out are not confined to personal reflection alone. The weight of societal expectations also casts its shadow. In communities where traditional beliefs, often centered around conservative or religious values, prevail, coming out becomes a challenge to long-held norms. These cultural and social pressures can affect how family members react—some may offer unwavering support, while others may struggle to reconcile their own beliefs with their loved one's truth. For some LGBTQ+ individuals, this moment leads to liberation, while for others, it brings fear, rejection, or even isolation. In either case, the echoes of that truth continue to reverberate within families, communities, and the individual, shaping the paths toward acceptance or resistance (Alday-Mondaca & Lay-Lisboa, 2021)

Sub-Theme 1: The Burden of Truth: How Families Respond

Coming out is not merely a declaration—it's a heavy burden that can feel like a shattering of self. The silence that follows, marked by hesitant pauses and searching eyes, can leave an individual feeling alienated and unworthy. This rejection, especially from family, can strip away a person's sense of self-worth, turning those who should offer unconditional love into sources of pain. Yet, amidst this turmoil, some families embark on a journey of gradual understanding, slowly transforming and embracing their loved one's truth despite the difficult beginnings.

Family responses can range from outright denial to total rejection, making the coming-out process an emotional minefield. In many conservative households, LGBTQ+ individuals face not only emotional distress but also physical violence. *"My father's world shattered into pieces,"* said Michelle Dee. *"He destroyed our stuff, he destroyed everything due to his anger."* Such stories reflect the intense emotional toll that family reactions can have on an individual, as deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs collide with the reality of a loved one's identity.

Research shows that many parents struggle with acceptance due to their own ingrained beliefs, leading to strained relationships. Yet, as seen in the stories shared, some families evolve over time. With patience, education, and emotional labor, these families can overcome their initial shock and fear, fostering understanding and, eventually, support. The emotional journey is never linear, but it highlights the resilience of individuals and the potential for transformation within families (Alday-Mondaca & Lay-Lisboa, 2021).

Sub-Theme 2: The Gradual Path to Understanding: Family's Journey to Acceptance

In many LGBTQ+ individuals' journeys, family responses start with deep-seated animosity, cold rejection, or piercing hostility. But what begins in darkness often shifts over time, transforming into growth, understanding, and heartfelt reconciliation. These initial reactions, filled with pain and alienation, are not the end of the story; instead, they set the stage for a more profound, often difficult evolution of familial bonds.

The process of change is not swift. It's a slow, emotionally charged journey where families must confront their own prejudices and untangle their misconceptions. The tension that once fills the home can only be eased through time, exposure, and candid conversations. Fear, confusion, and societal expectations often cloud initial reactions, but these emotional storms give way to curiosity, dialogue, and empathy.

"At first, my family struggled to accept me," Bretman Rock shared. *"I was the breadwinner, so my identity didn't fit the narrative they'd built. But with time, they started to understand and embrace me for who I am. My friends always knew I was part of the LGBTQ+ community, and they supported me from the start."* His story reflects the transformative power of patience and exposure to new perspectives. Over time, what was once fear and rejection turns into genuine acceptance. Families replace prejudice with compassion and conditional tolerance with unconditional support, thanks to love, communication, and a willingness to understand (Han et al., 2023).



This shift is often underpinned by educational efforts—whether that’s through LGBTQ+ stories, open dialogue, or lessons on gender and sexuality. Families that take these steps often emerge stronger, more compassionate, and more supportive than before, proving that, despite a painful beginning, love and understanding can triumph.

Sub-Theme 3: The Pillars of Support: The Role of Friends and LGBTQ+ Communities

When the world outside feels hostile or uncertain, friends become the lifeline many LGBTQ+ individuals desperately need. Unlike family, where the response to coming out can range from painful rejection to hesitant acceptance, friends provide a sanctuary—an immediate and unwavering support system. These are the people who stand by, offering comfort when fears and doubts take hold, and giving the validation needed to embrace one’s true self.

“I never had to explain myself to my friends,” Bretman Rock shared. *“They always knew who I was and loved me for it.”* For many, this kind of acceptance is a precious gift. Friends become more than just social companions; they’re safe harbors in a storm of uncertainty. When the weight of societal pressure and family judgment feels overwhelming, these friendships offer a sense of relief—a space to just be.

But the role of support doesn't stop there. LGBTQ+ communities provide a broader safety net, especially for those whose families cannot yet accept their identity. *“Surround yourself with people who will help you grow,”* advised *Boy Abunda*, emphasizing the significance of finding circles where individuals can thrive without fear of rejection. These communities create spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can connect with others who understand their struggles, offering strength in numbers and shared experiences.

And it doesn’t end with personal relationships. Workplaces can also become pillars of support. In inclusive environments, LGBTQ+ employees find validation and acceptance that boosts their mental health and job satisfaction. Research shows that when companies embrace diversity and implement non-discrimination policies, individuals thrive—both professionally and personally (McCurdy et al., 2023). These workplaces mirror the support found in friends and LGBTQ+ networks: they create environments where individuals are not just tolerated but celebrated for who they are.

The impact of this support is undeniable. It builds resilience, fosters empowerment, and shapes a future where LGBTQ+ individuals can step into the world unapologetically. It’s not just about survival—it’s about rising together, strengthening the fabric of society, and ensuring that no one ever has to face their journey alone (Boppana & Gross, 2019).

Core Theme 3: Beyond Boundaries: The Evolution of Emotion, Resilience, and Change

Coming out is not merely a one-time event but rather a courageous unveiling of one’s most sacred truth. At first glance, their stories may read like quiet tragedies, soft-spoken beginnings marked by internal wars, whispered fears, and the heavy ache of invisibility. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, the path to selfhood begins with constant introspection and contemplation. With the slow, suffocating realization that their truth may not be welcomed by the world they inhabit. But if you listen closely if you sit with their stories long enough, you’ll hear the shift. What begins as crippling self-doubt, overwhelming fear, and persistent insecurity begins to crack open. Beneath it, something luminous stirs.

Over time, they cultivate a kind of resilience that cannot be taught, only lived. Theirs is a strength forged in the quiet hours of introspection, in the brave act of choosing authenticity over acceptance, truth over safety. Through a thousand small acts of courage, a pronoun corrected, a partner introduced, a name reclaimed, they begin to shed the weight of other people’s expectations. What once felt like armor becomes dead weight. And they let it go. They learn to move through the world not with apology, but with audacity. This is not a linear journey, nor a simple transformation. It is a deeply personal revolution, but one that inevitably ripples outward.

Because from that pain blooms a powerful gift: compassion. The hard-earned kind. The kind that knows suffering intimately and refuses to let others suffer alone. Empathy, once a survival skill, becomes a superpower. And with it, a relentless drive to change the world that once told them they were too much, or not enough. In their truth, they carve space. In their courage, they light the path. And in their radical, unapologetic love for themselves, for each other they invite us all to imagine a world where authenticity is not a risk, but a right.

However, many Homosexual people enjoy personal growth, resilience, and strength despite the difficulties associated with coming out. Over time, they develop mental and emotional coping mechanisms that allow them to embrace their identity with confidence. (McDermott et al., 2021).



Sub-Theme 1: Beneath the Surface: The Mental Work of Living Authentically

In the quiet shadows of everyday life, where stares linger too long and silences speak volumes, countless LGBTQ+ individuals fight a battle few ever witness. Beneath the surface of what may seem like ordinary moments, there simmers a storm of unrelenting worry, crippling stress, and the deeply rooted ache of societal rejection. It's navigating a labyrinth of internal doubt and external pressure, all while trying to hold onto a sense of self that hasn't yet been allowed to fully bloom.

Many Informants described their experience as a transformative awakening, a shedding of fear, and a reclamation of self, *"I felt comfortable, secure, and confident in myself, such self-acknowledgment somehow removed my feeling of being isolated and allowed me to embrace my individuality with pride"*. Shared by *Mikey Bustos*

Mark Bautista also shared his feelings stating *"I turned to LGBTQ+ communities for support and they helped me feel less alone."*

To survive and eventually thrive many queer individuals develop intricate, deeply personal coping mechanisms. These are not just tools for getting by. They are lifelines. Quiet rituals of resilience. Mental scaffolding built under immense pressure. Emotional armor crafted from necessity.

What emerges from this process is not just survival, but transformation. This is an experience that demands extraordinary inner-strength, the kind that is cultivated in silence, under scrutiny, and often without support. It's socially complex, psychologically taxing, and emotionally exhausting. Yet somehow, from within this chaos, LGBTQ+ individuals summon grace, adaptability, and an almost defiant courage. It indicates that coping strategies such as self-affirmation, positive self-talk, and social support help LGBTQ+ individuals overcome stigma and build self-confidence (McDermott et al., 2021).

Sub-Theme 2: The Freedom in the Mirror: How Self-Acceptance Becomes a Revolution

In the quiet chambers of the heart, where self-truth first whispers before it roars, authenticity is often born not in bold declarations, but in trembling steps. For many homosexual individuals, the journey toward self-acceptance is not a straight line, but a winding path lined with hesitation, vulnerability, and the lingering shadow of fear. To live authentically in a world that too often demands masks is nothing short of radical. Each moment of truth, whether spoken aloud or held tenderly in silence, becomes an act of reclamation.

"Express what you feel and identify who you really are rather than have a problem with your gender identity" Stated by *Bretman Rock*. With every step forward, no matter how small, there's a subtle shift: shame gives way to stillness, fear loosens its grip, and in its place, something extraordinary blooms.

Confidence, contentment, liberation, was once a burden is replaced by a profound, soul-nourishing sense of alignment. *"I used to be afraid of judgment, but now I know that my happiness is more important than societal expectations"*, said by *Boy Abunda*. A lightness. The kind that comes from no longer running, no longer hiding, no longer pretending.

An energizing, affirming, and soul-nourishing sense of truth takes the place of the burden of hiding, faking, or denying one's identity. This is more than self-discovery. It is self-affirmation. A quiet revolution. Homosexual individuals who are able to live openly and confidently report greater life satisfaction and stronger relationship connections (McCurdy et al., 2023).

Sub-Theme 3: Scars That Speak: Empowerment Through Shared Truths

Coming out is not a single conversation, it is a continuous, evolving act of courage. As the beats echo through the mind, they use their experiences as a strong, motivating, and life-affirming force towards transformation rather than letting their agonizing, intensely personal, and emotionally damaging past traumas define them.

Their adversity turns into a motivating factor, a transformative catalyst, and a representation of fortitude, enabling individuals to overcome their difficulties and transform their suffering into meaningful, revolutionary, and influential activism. *"I want to inspire other LGBTQ+ individuals to be proud of who they are."* *Bretman Rock* shared, the world transformed into a living stage, as personal hardships are not just painful memories but powerful, transformative, and deeply motivating experiences that drive them toward advocacy, activism, and meaningful change.

“Know your core. Know your purpose and check on your readiness. Readiness in accepting how people would treat you as the world is sometimes cruel for persons like us”. Boy Abunda said. Their battles with prejudice, rejection, and repressed fear serve as the basis for their perseverance, empowerment, and unwavering will to support those who experience comparable difficulties. The past doesn’t leave quietly. It echoes sometimes like a whisper, sometimes like a war drum reverberating through the minds and hearts of LGBTQ+ individuals long after the moment has passed. Rejection, shame, fear, isolation — these aren’t just memories. They are emotional tectonics, shaping the very foundation of who someone becomes.

Rather than allow their deeply personal, emotionally wounding experiences to consume them, they gather those broken pieces and forge something fierce and life-affirming from the pain. Their trauma becomes more than a scar; it becomes a source of momentum. A spark that sets the soul on fire. A reason to rise. Shared LGBTQ+ advocacy helps create safer, more accepting environments, allowing future generations to come out with less fear and stigma (McCurdy et al., 2023).

TRANSFERABILITY OF FINDINGS

Coming out is a very personal and life-changing experience that is impacted by personal, family, and cultural variables, the study made clear. Religious convictions and traditional values frequently have a big influence on how families interact and respond in Filipino homes. Coming out is still a crucial step toward authenticity and self-acceptance in spite of these obstacles. The results showed that self-expression and having the guts to accept oneself as one are essential for emotional health, even when acceptance levels differ. These incidents highlight how crucial it is to help LGBTQ+ people by encouraging open dialogue, education, and understanding in families and society at large. This research journey has been transformative not only for the informants but also for us as researchers and individuals who can relate. The fact that this research exists means that there are still individuals who have fought their way to recognition and acknowledgment regarding their gender, and individuals who are still in the process of their upbringing. Our study revealed that we should never judge a book by its cover and never discriminate against those who are different because we never know what kind of experience they are going through at that moment. It reinforced the importance of understanding diverse lived experiences of our homosexual individuals and inspired us to continue advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Reflection

This study has been a humble and illuminating experience to conduct. A deep comprehension of the bravery and resiliency needed to negotiate the challenges of coming out was gained from hearing the informants' stories. Both their personal and external stories demonstrated the transformational power of acceptance and the strength of authenticity. The researchers reminded of their obligation to elevate underrepresented voices and promote equality and inclusivity towards a more compassionate society. This study demonstrates the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community and the significance of promoting empathy and understanding in all spheres and from all walks of life.

We were able to consider the function of researchers as change agents as a result of this study. It is our duty to apply this knowledge to promote empathy, inclusivity, and compassion in our communities rather than just sharing research results. The informants' stories act as a wake-up call for society to confront biases, prejudices, and foster a more welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

Our research went beyond the paper; it connected what we learned in class to the real world. We wanted to influence policies, create empathy in the community, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience. The homosexual individuals we spoke to trusted us with their stories, and our duty went beyond research to advocating for a more accepting and informed society. Finishing our research wasn't just the end of a school project; it was the beginning of a shared story. The tiredness and stress became symbols of our dedication to understanding the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community and growing as individuals determined to make a positive impact.

As we finish this chapter, we see ourselves not just as researchers but as advocates for empathy and positive change. The stories of the Homosexuals are now a shared example of resilience. Our responsibility is to make sure these stories reach society,

creating a more understanding and compassionate community. The journey was tough, but the lasting impact on each of us is beyond measure.

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