



Lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers: The case of basic education teachers in rural Philippines

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Abstract

This study employs a qualitative exploratory approach to examine the lived experiences in rural schools of gay and bisexual teachers. The informants who were purposively selected were ten gay and bisexual teachers currently teaching in rural elementary and secondary schools. Interviews, focus group discussions, and direct and participant observation were used in gathering data. Thematic analysis was utilized to understand their lived experiences in their workplace. The study reveals that the profile of gay and bisexual teachers varies from one another and contributes largely to their lived experiences, particularly along with the discriminatory practices they experienced in school. The absence of school policies and lack of knowledge on LGBT issues led to discrimination they experienced in their workplace. To combat the issue of their gender orientation, professional and personal responses were utilized to break stereotypes of the sexes. The study recommends that the school may strengthen training and seminars for teachers, school heads, learners, and non-teaching personnel on gender mainstreaming to capacitate them in handling emerging gender-related issues. Likewise, teachers must implement gender-responsive basic education by integrating LGBT concepts into teaching subjects. In addition, school policy may be formulated towards equality and inclusivity of the school environment.

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Introduction

Equity is important in all dimensions of life. As such, learning institutions as the home of learning can promote inclusive schools where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teachers are respected and

accepted, thus, leading to the development of learners' academic achievement (Wright et al., 2019). Since teachers are tasked to help learners acquire knowledge, skills, and competence, it is important to investigate their lived experiences in attaining their classroom goals and aspirations. In the Philippines, the teaching tasks

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include preparing lessons, restructuring classrooms, and assessing pupil progress. Their professional duties may extend beyond formal teaching which greatly affects students. In a sense, teachers in the Philippines are expected to abide by the traditional norms ascribed by the profession, with the educational system expecting teachers to create graduates who are responsive to the demands of the 21st century.

The prescribed roles and responsibilities that Filipino teachers have are, at times, in contrast to their everyday selves as private citizens, particularly among LGBTQIA+ teachers. Male teachers who identify as gay and bisexual feel that they are discriminated against in the workplace because of their perceived differences from their heterosexual colleagues. The conservative reinforcement of teacher roles and identities leads to an environment wherein paranoia, open hostility, and discrimination are still prevalent against gay individuals in schools (Tooms, 2007). Historically, the absence of educational policies has affected LGBT teachers. Added to that, religious beliefs are still practiced in the country, and old customs are kept. Likewise, the lack of policies to police discrimination and the lack of knowledge and resources to combat gender issues continue to hound LGBTQ educators in their workplace (Dela Cruz, 2015).

However, there has been increasing acceptance of LGBT educators in some societies compared to before where most teachers hide their identity to prevent themselves from any form of discrimination. This is because LGBT teachers nowadays are practiced at finding common ground with a diverse range of colleagues and stakeholders, and where LGBT educators reported closer working relationships and greater trust from the people around them despite the absence of LGBT teaching on gender and sexuality.

In the Philippines, there is still no bill that protects the rights of LGBT people. The SOGIE Equality bill has not even reached the plenary level in both the House of Representatives and the Senate because of strong opposition from religious groups (Labor & San Pascual, 2023). To address the increasing gender issues at school, the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) released various memoranda in 2013, 2017, and 2018. These memos have been deemed as bases for anti-discrimination in the basic education sector in the country but, as critics have mentioned, these are not sufficiently enforced by the DepEd. As such, they leave LGBT people in learning institutions without any protection from marginalization and stigma based on their gender identity or gender expression (UNDP Commission on Human Rights Philippines, 2018).

Given these concerns and considerations, this study investigates the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in rural Philippines. To investigate their lived experiences is a testament to how they have interpreted their existence both as humans and as teachers (Heidegger, 1962). Drawing from the everyday lives of these queer individuals, we assume that gay and bisexual teachers consider themselves as “being-in-the-world” where they have a hand in interpreting their experiences through historical meanings on socio-personal levels. After all, studying experience from a conscious and agentic manner enables humans to interpret their own identities and meanings (Kvale, 1996).

Given these concerns, the study wishes to contribute to the extant literature by describing the lived experiences of gay and bisexual male teachers in a rural basic education classroom. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What are the everyday experiences of gay and bisexual male teachers? (2) What are the support factors that enable them to live their truth? (3) What forms of hindrances have they experienced as gay and bisexual teachers? And, (4) what are their coping mechanisms in balancing their personal and professional lives?

Literature Review

Divulging sexual orientation among LGBT teachers is a big challenge because of the discrimination they experience from their environment. Morrison (2019) revealed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers experienced fear, anxiety, and depression due to a lack of privileges to speak about their sexual preferences and the incompatibility of their professional and personal at school. Some do not even show their personal experiences such as their partners and others because they are afraid of others' judgments. That is why only a few of them are out of their sexual orientation (Gan & Chen, 2017). LGBT teachers experience homophobia in their workplace. These individuals experience public ridicule, cyberbullying, physical assaults, and death threats mainly inside the school premises (UNESCO, 2016). Wright et al. (2019), found out that educators experienced bullying from students. Woods (2012) also found that their beliefs that they might be supported when they disclosed their identity to others led them to experience harassment from their environment and struggle with coming out to others. These experiences decided them to conceal their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination.

Teachers likely feel secure becoming completely visible if school leaders support them through strategic plans and action. Auciello (2016) found that eight administrators who were lesbian and gay experienced anxiety, willing to help others, were sensitive to diverse sexes, had resilience and integrity, and realized that respecting learners, members of the staff, and administrators promotes good linkages from each other. Administrative support within their schools is a vital component that affects their acceptance by peers, colleagues, and other stakeholders, and the school heads' attitudes about homosexuality have a big impact on making school a welcoming or discouraging environment among LGBT educators (Jackson, 2007). The enactment of LGBT policies and laws largely eradicates discrimination and bullying cases at school. United Nations Human Rights (2019) calls for states to create policy protection against bullying, harassment, and expulsion in the school to LGBT individuals. Such policies support LGBT individuals and save one's life suggesting protective policies at school and encouraging everyone to express their gender preferences without any hurtful judgments from their surroundings (Meier, 2018). School and district policy is vital to protect them from any forms of discrimination. More so, organizing training on gender issues and inclusion of LGBT issues promotes inclusivity and equality toward a better place for all LGBT educators. Teacher-training programs need to educate learners about their responsibilities as future citizens who are aware of all rights, including sexual minorities, and are accepted in emergent school-based educational research as a crucial intervention to enable good citizenship (Damante, 2016).

At the core of human existence lies understanding, a fundamental process that permeates every encounter and experience we have. As Heidegger (1962) asserted, our understanding is inextricably linked to our historicity, the tapestry of our experiences, background, and cultural influences. This entanglement of *Dasein* (being-in-the-world), as Heidegger (1962) termed it, forms the ontological foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology, where we interpret our lived experiences through the lens of historical meanings and their cumulative effects on both individual and societal levels. Delving into an experience requires an exploration of its interpretation, seeking the intended or expressed meanings behind it (Kvale, 1996). Furthermore, Laverty et al., 2003 elaborated the Heidegger's concepts by proposing that hermeneutics is an interpretive process of comprehending an experience through language. Hermeneutics, in this sense, is "non-foundationalist," emphasizing the emergence of

meaning from the dynamic interplay between historically produced texts and the readers understanding. A significant aspect of this approach lies in its emphasis on how units of analysis, the individuals being studied, perceive their lived experiences, rather than imposing a unilateral interpretation upon them. This fosters a dialectical relationship between the researcher and the informant, where meaning is co-constructed through reflexivity, a crucial element in analyzing temporal experiences. These things remind us that hermeneutic phenomenology is not an objective or value-free endeavor for the researcher. Our own biases play an essential role in the interpretive process, prompting us to examine our experiences and assess our connection to the research topic. It is through these relational experiences within the epistemology that reflexivity emerges, ultimately necessitating a social constructivist stance where both informant and researcher collaborate in constructing meaning using spatial, corporeal, temporal, and relational frameworks of data interpretation (Pineda, 2022).

Methodology

To study the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in their workplace, the researchers employed a qualitative exploratory approach. It is a methodology in research that allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon with limited coverage within the literature and allows the participants of the study to contribute to the development of new knowledge in that area (Reid-Searl & Happel, 2012).

The purposively selected informants of the study were 10 gay and bisexual teachers currently working in elementary and secondary education in the entire District of Irosin, Sorsogon, Philippines. Out of ten informants, seven of them disclosed that they were gays while three of them said that they were bisexuals. The main instruments utilized in this study were the researchers-made interview questionnaire and guide questions with an open-ended question for the focus group discussion.

During the data collection process, the researchers sent a letter of consent adapted from a state university in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines. It explicitly stated the purpose of the study, the reason why the researcher chose them to be the informant of the study, the risk of their participation, the right to ask questions, and the right to refuse to answer the questions. This was considered to avoid ethical problems in the conduct of the study. Interviews were conducted from November 2 to November 11, 2022, using the researchers-made

interview guide to gather data about the experiences of gay and bisexual teachers from both elementary and secondary settings, which lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each time. Moreover, a focus group discussion was also facilitated to gather an in-depth analysis of the collected data. The researcher conducted a group discussion with selected participants on November 12, 2022. Direct and participant observations were also used in this study. The researchers thematically analyzed the data gathered from the interviews and the focus group discussions (Strauss, 1987). As a phenomenological inquiry, this study centers around the lived experiences of gay and bisexual male teachers in rural Philippines. The central tenet of the study is concerned with unearthing the narratives of these teachers, making sense of the perceived factors that influence, enable, and disable their being gay and bisexual teachers.

Results and Discussion

The presentation of the data includes the following topics: (1) Everyday experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in the classroom; (2) Perceived factors that enable gay and bisexual teachers to live their truths; (3) Lived hindrances in being queer in schools; and (4) Coping mechanisms in balancing their personal and professional identities.

Everyday Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Teachers in School

The researcher had come up with three themes in this study. These included leading gay and bisexual teachers to break stereotypes of sexes, fulfilling the teaching roles provides a great sense of support for gay and bisexual teachers, and heteronormativity leads to discrimination of bisexual and gay teachers. In addition, these three themes are divided into subthemes which are presented below:

Leading gay and bisexual teachers break stereotypes of sexes

Leading gay and bisexual teachers to break stereotypes of the sexes is one of the themes in this undertaking. These are further divided into four sub-themes which are: dedicated to work and passionate in teaching, professionally and academically competent, creative, innovative, and resilient.

1. Dedicated to work and passionate about teaching

Based on the statements of the informants, they show that gay and bisexual teachers are dedicated and passionate about their work. Three elementary gay teachers stated their passion and dedication to work. These are shown in their responses: *Alam ng aking mga kasangga sa pagtuturo na ako ay may dedikasyon sa aking trabaho bilang guro (18)*. [My co-teachers know me very well. I am dedicated to my work as a teacher]. *Simula ng ako ay magturo, doon ko natutunan mahalin ang aking trabaho. Hindi ako nagsisi na ito ang propesyon ko ngayon kasi I love teaching (13)*. [When I started to teach, that was the time where my love of teaching became my passion. I love teaching, and I did not regret that I followed the teaching path.] *Gusto ko ang kareka na mayroon ako ngayon. I challenge myself na gawin ang best sa paaralan na aking pinagtatrabahuan (17)*. [I love my career, my work as teacher. I expect and challenge myself to perform better in school.] The lived experiences revealed that their teaching profession is their chosen path and they dedicate their lives to teaching. The shared responses were similar to the life story shared by one of the participants of the study conducted by Simons et al. (2021) who is identified as Latino and genderqueer. He stated that he loves teaching and that having a passion for teaching encouraged him to teach at a very young age.

2. Professionally and academically competent

Based on the responses of teachers, it revealed that teachers are competitive in all types of work. Some of them pursue their career by enrolling in master's and doctorate while some show their versatility and competency in different activities at school. Being professionally and academically competent is evident from their shared responses: *Sila ay mga modelo at insperasyon. Hindi lang tayo basta bakla lalo na't mayroon tayong mga pinag aralan. Teachers have master's and doctor's degree holders (14 & 16)*. [They are our model and inspiration. And that we are not just gay, especially since most LGBT teachers have master's and doctorate degrees.]

Meanwhile, one bisexual and three identified gay elementary teachers shared their ideas of being competent in the profession: *Ibig sabihin kaming mga bakla ay competitive, talented sa lahat ng aspeto kaya we excel. Nagsisilbing modelo din kami sa mga students and we are brilliant. We also served as coaches to our students, (11, 112, 13, & 18)*. [It only means that we are competitive, capable, talented in any aspect, and that we excel. We also serve as role models and LGBT teachers are brilliant.

We also served as coaches to our students.] By looking into their professional skills and capabilities as teachers and not as LGBTQ members, they were accepted and supported (Añonuevo & Digo, 2023). Moreover, the experiences of gays and bisexuals were the same as the findings of Simons et al. (2021) who were able to connect with their students effectively. He shared that he served as a coach in cheerleading, at junior colleges, high school, and even elementary school where he creatively showed his skills and talents to learners. Indeed, some of the values espoused by LGBT workers make them ideally placed to become transformational leaders.

3. Creative and innovative

Based on the shared experiences of the informants, it was found that they are talented and creative in school, particularly in organizing various affairs and events in school. A 34-year-old gay teacher shared their experiences of being artistic in school: *Inilalarawan nila ako bilang isang creative teacher, diligent and responsible. Maliban diyan very artistic din ako kaya they consult me kapag mayroong plans and activities ang aming paaralan (19)*. [I am very creative, that is how they describe me as a teacher. I am diligent and responsible. Aside from that, I am very artistic, which is why they always consult me in case we have school plans or activities]. Moreover, two gay teachers teaching in a rural elementary school expressed their experiences at school: *Kami ang nagsisilbing leader o tagapamuno kapag mayroong activities saamin, kapag may plagpapalano at maging sa pag-disenyo ng entablado (13 & 16)*. [In our school, as LGBT I am always the chairman in terms of planning activities, and decorating stage.] Two 38- and 32-year-old gay elementary teachers also responded that: *Kami ay hinahangaan at minamahal dahil sa malaking tulong na ibinubuhos namin sa pagpapaganda ng paaralan (14 & 11)*. [They love and appreciate me for making our school a better place.]

The statements of teachers in rural elementary schools are indications that they have proven effective in terms of creating positive changes in the entire school and community. In the same, Simons et al. (2021) revealed that one of their informants in an urban school used her art to heal herself and others through creating her art. She also used art to help others teaching them how to be creative and to express whatever they need to, to emote, so it becomes a cathartic experience for them. Moreover, leaders best serve their students as positive role models and advance the well-being of the entire school community (Wright et al., 2019). This implies that gay teachers in the Philippines who have artistic talent

are accepted by their peers, students, and administrators in terms of their social relationships in their workplace as teachers.

4. Resilient

Based on the shared experiences of the informants, it revealed that whatever challenges they face in their workplace, they continue to fight and do their work as the best they can to serve their learners.

One of the experiences of the elementary gay teacher is that he is resilient whatever challenges he might face as clearly stated in their response: *I proved to them na isa akong asset, na ako ay diligent at responsableng guro sa aming paaralan. I just keep doing my best to serve my school lalong lalo na ang aking mga mag-aaral kasi iyan ang pinaka the best response that you can give to them (16)*. [I prove to them that I am an asset in our school and that I am diligent and responsible. I do not tolerate others to discriminate against me. I just keep in doing my best to serve my school especially my students because that is the best response you can give to them.] Moreover, another 38-year-old who identified himself as gay also stated that: *Ang mga nararansan kong diskriminasyon ang nagsisilbing gasoline ko para ipagpatuloy ang laban to be promoted (12)*. [I use discrimination as fuel to keep going and fighting to be promoted.] These indicate that the challenges of rural LGBT teachers about their sexual preferences boost their unbreakable characters and personalities to continue fighting to best serve their purpose in producing quality learning for their pupils. The results were similar to the study conducted by Wright and Villafior (2019); and Auciello (2016), that despite the struggles they experienced with LGBT teachers in urban areas such as hostile discrimination, they were able to learn to adapt and perform well. Gay and lesbian leaders are courageous and risk-taker and are willing to listen and learn, fostering harmonious relationships and inclusion, and empowering others in contemporary workplaces (Coon, 2001). As such this proved, that being gay is not wrong and that gays are worthy, capable, and unbreakable.

Factors that Enable Gay and Bisexual Teachers to Live their Truth

Fulfilling the teaching roles provides a great sense of support for gay and bisexual teachers, which is another theme in terms of the lived experiences of informants in this undertaking. This is further divided into two sub-themes which are supportive school heads and colleagues and supportive community.

Supportive school heads and colleagues

Based on the responses of teachers, they were all accepted, respected, complimented, and given tasks that were appropriate to their gender abilities and skills. These are evident in the responses of two elementary teachers as shown in the responses: *Nirerespeto at sinusuportahan ako nila kahit bakla ako (I2 & I8)*. [They respect and support me for what I am.] Three gay teachers and one bisexual also shared that: *Napaka-supportive at sobrang bait ng mga guro sa akin. Tanggap nila ako at we are close to one another (I2, I4, I7 & I10)*. [Some are very supportive and kind to me. They accept me and we are close to one another.] Other informants who have more than 5 years in the service shared common experiences: *Napaka-supportive ng aming principal basta alam mo ang mga tama at mali bilang isang guro (I3, I4, I7 & I9)*. [My principal is very supportive if you know the dos and don'ts as a teacher.] The disclosed responses above show that gay and bisexual teachers in rural schools nowadays are well-supported by their school heads despite their sexual orientation. The findings are backed up by the study of Palkki (2015) who found out that two vocal and general music educators who sought support, and mentorship helped in building stronger relationships with students, faculty, staff, and administration. LGBT participants gained administrative support within their schools as a vital component that affects their acceptance by peers, colleagues, and other stakeholders (Jackson, 2007).

Supportive community

All stated that they are accepted and respected by some of the community members particularly learners' parents. Two informants who are already ten years in the service as teacher shared their responses: *Malaki ang pinagbago ng aming paaralan dahil sa akin kaya well-appreciated kami ng mga magulang ng aming mag-aaral (I1 and I4)* [I am well-appreciated by the parents because I am one of the reasons why our school changed so much.] Three elementary gay teachers shared their common experiences the support they received from their community in terms of being LGBT teachers: *Marunong akong makisama sa community kaya mayroon kaming magandang samahan sa bawat isa (I2, I3, & I6)*. [I have good relationships with some of the community members because I know how to get along with them.] Other gay teachers also responded that: *Sa kabila ng pagiging bakla, nagiging mabuting ehemplo ako sa mga kabataan kaya respetado ako ng mga parents ng pupils ko (I4 & I5)*. [My pupils' parents respect me very well because I serve as a good example to my pupils despite

my gender orientation.] The teachers' experiences who are identified as gay and bisexual teachers in rural elementary schools may be attributed to their characteristics as reading people which is an effective key leader attribute. The experiences of teachers in rural areas were the same as the experiences of LGBT students in urban areas and LGBT teachers can achieve high support from the community by discerning when interacting with a school stakeholder, particularly those parents with traditional perceptions of sexual and gender identity (Snyder, 2006).

Hindrances to Being of Gay and Bisexual Teachers

Another theme that occurred in terms of the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers is heteronormativity leads to discrimination of bisexual and gay teachers. This is further divided into four subthemes which are: level of gender disclosure, discrimination by colleagues, learners, and community, anxiety of rejection, and absence of policy.

Level of gender disclosure

Based on the responses shared by gay and bisexual teachers, not all teachers are open in terms of their identity as revealed in their responses. A bisexual teacher, one of the informants in this study, shared the level of outness of their sexual preferences: *I am bisexual alam mo iyan. Pero wala silang ideya kung ano talaga gender ko kaya we have normal or civil relationship. Walang nakakaalam that I am bisexual (I10)*. [I am bisexual and you know that. In terms of my gender, they have no idea so we have a normal or civil relationship. No one knows that I am bisexual.] Meanwhile, most informants who identified themselves as elementary and secondary gay teachers stated that: *Open ako with my gender identity. Alam ng buong paaralan na bading ako (I1, I3 & I4)*. [I am very open with my gender identity. 100% they know that I am gay.] Another bisexual informant revealed their gender identity and said: *Opo naman, alam nila ana bisexual ako, kahit na minsan kahit ako nalilito pa kung ano talaga pagkatao ko (I8)*. [Of course, they know that I am bisexual even though sometimes I am confused of my identity.] The result is congruent with the investigation explored by Trepanier (2018) who revealed that one of the informants of their study came "out" and both reported mostly having positive experiences in their teaching career after divulging their sexual orientation. Meanwhile, in the case of the bisexual informant, their sexual identity is not publicly open due to fear that they might be rejected or

discriminated against compared to gay teachers who are more open in terms of their sexual identity. This indicates that there are still some LGBT educators who keep their sexual identity due to fear of rejection from the people around them. This aligns with the ideas of De Leon and Brunner (2013) about the Cycle of Fear, stressing the negative emotional responses experienced by gay teachers who have experienced gender violence.

Discrimination by colleagues, learners, and community

Based on the shared responses by the participants, teachers experienced discrimination by some learners, colleagues, and other members of the community due to their sexual orientation. According to four gay and one bisexual informant who are all permanent or regular teachers in elementary school, they experienced discrimination as evidenced by their responses: *Naranasan ko ang ma-judge ng ibang magulang ng aking mag-aaral na sinasabing malaki ang posibilidad na maging bading ang kanilang anak dahil sa gender ko. Naranasan ko din ang cat calling sa kanila (11, 14, 16, 18 & 19).* [I was also judged by some parents saying that one of my pupils might have more possibility to become gay because of my gender. I also experienced cat calling from them.] Discriminations from their colleagues and members of community were also experienced by gay teacher as shown in their response: *May ibang mga kalalakihan na they discriminate me when they see you in school sa pamamagitan ng pag-aakto na bading din sila (15).* [Some men will discriminate against you when they see you in the school by acting as if they are also gay.]

Two secondary school teachers who are members of the LGBT also shared their experiences: *Opo, I am working in a big school na binubuo ng maraming guro. Ang iba sa kanila judge me as if kilala nila ako (12).* [Yes, I am working in a big school comprising many teachers. Some of them judged me without knowing you.] *Naranasan ko din ang ma-discriminate ng isang DepEd official during seminar na nag -aakto na kunwaring bakla siya and that situation insulted me (17).* [I also encountered one teacher during the seminar who is a DepEd official, who acted as if he is gay, and that situation insulted me.] These discriminatory practices may be attributed to predominantly religious society resulting in ongoing discrimination and marginalization to members of the LGBTQ+ community. The experiences shared by gay elementary teachers teaching in rural schools are similar to the experiences of LGBT teachers in urban schools based on the study conducted by Trepanier (2018). It was found that they were bullied by a student spreading rumors, despite not being open about

their status, and experienced fear, anger, and frustration. Meanwhile, a teacher who is identified as bisexual did not experience discrimination for not being out of their gender.

Fear of rejection

Another negative experience encountered by gay and bisexual teachers is that they are afraid of being rejected by school and society. One informant who is hiding their gender identity stated that: *Natatakot ako na baka pag-inamin ko identity ko sa edad na ito ay i-discriminate ako nila. Kahit sarili kong pamilya ay hindi alam ang tunay kong pagkatao in terms of my identity kaya iyan ang kinatatakutan ko (110).* [I have this feeling of fear if I openly disclose my identity at my age, I might be discriminated by others. My family does not even have any idea about my preferred orientation, and that is what I am afraid for.] Another informant who has been ten years in the service as an elementary teachers said that: *Isa sa mga mahirap maranasan ay magmahal sa isang lalake dahil maari kang batuhin ng negatibong isyu which is very difficult sa part naming as LGBT. Kaya pinipili kung itago if may karelasyon man ako for safety and security (11).* [One thing that is hard to face is when you are linked to a man you adore and love because there might be a negative issue about you. That is something very difficult on our part. So, I choose to keep it a secret whenever I have a boyfriend for safety and security.] It can be gleaned from the cited responses, that bisexual teachers had trouble in divulging their gender identity because of rejection from the people that surround them. These situations in rural elementary teachers indicated that even today there are still some people who do not accept LGBT individuals and that they continue to struggle with lack of support because of their sexual orientation. Meanwhile, gay teachers who are open about their identity experienced sexual discrimination in their workplace. The experiences shared by two participants is related to the ideas of Gan and Chen, (2017) that some LGBT teachers are not relationally authentic of their sexual preferences such as talking about their partners, being out of their sexual identity at school because they are afraid to be judged or rejected by others. As a result, all of them kept their sexual identities for fear of losing jobs.

Absence of school policy

Based on the responses of participants, one of the main reasons why they still experience discrimination is because no law or school policy protects them in school. Two secondary and three elementary teachers in rural public schools shared their experiences.

These are evident in their responses: *Kinakailangan ng isang paaralan ang magkaroon ng school policy na magpoprotekta sa mga LGBT teachers lalong lalo na sa mga mag-aaral (I2, I4 & I8).* [A school must have a school policy that protects LGBT teachers most especially LGBT students.] *Wala kaming policy kahit sa district naming. There are even cases kung saan ang mga discrimination cases were not recorded or hinahayaan lang dahil sa kawalan ng batas and grievance committee (I7 & I9).* [We have no school policy even in the district. There are even cases where discrimination cases are not recorded or were just tolerated due to the absence of laws and grievance committees.]. The situations are similar to the experiences of one of the participant teachers in the study conducted by Trepanier (2018). The identified gay teacher experienced bullying due to a lack of school policy that protects LGBT teachers from any marginalization at school. And since no policy protects them from any form of gender violence, it implies that there is no acceptance but tolerance because acceptance means that there are legal protections for the community.

Coping Mechanisms of Gay and Bisexual Teachers in Balancing their Professional and Personal Identities

Based on the data gathered, coping mechanisms were shared by gay and bisexual teachers on how they respond to their lived experiences as teachers in their workplace. These coping mechanisms are categorized as professional responses and personal responses.

Professional responses

Based on the data gathered, there were suggested ways or coping mechanisms shared by gay and bisexual teachers on how they respond to their lived experiences as teachers in their workplace, one of which is professional responses. Professional responses include: formulating school and district policies and LGBT coalition, attending trainings and seminars about LGBT issues, enrolling for further studies, and integrating LGBT issues in teaching.

1. Formulating school and district policies and LGBT coalition

According to the informants, the school and district policy and LGBT coalition are vital to protect them from any form of discrimination. These suggestions are presumed from their responses below. Four informants consisting of one bisexual and three gay elementary teachers suggested that: *District must have policy na nagsasaad ng Karapatan ng LGBT teachers as well as*

ang posibleng parusa sa mga nag-discriminate sa mga guro (I3, I5, I9 & I10). [District must have a policy stating the rights of LGBT teachers as well as possible consequences to those who discriminate against teachers.] Meanwhile, two secondary and one elementary gay teacher expressed their opinions on the importance of school policy to protect them from any forms of gender violence: *Kinakailangan magkaroon ng school policy with committee na siyang magbibigay ng aksiyon sa gender violence and abuses na nararanasan ng mga guro. (I2, I4 & I7).* [School must create school policy with committee that will undertake serious actions about gender violence and abuses experienced by teachers.] *Malaki ang naitutulong ng school policy in relation to LGBT rights kasi nawawala ang discrimination sa loob ng school (I10).* [When schools have policies promoting LGBT rights, discrimination disappeared.] Other gay teachers suggested that: *Kinakailangan natin magkaroon ng LGBT organization na magsisilbing proper desk assistance laban sa mga gender violence sa paaralan (I2, I7, & I9).* [We need to have LGBT organization that will serve as proper assistance desk against gender violence.]

The statements disclosed by participants emphasize the importance of having school and district policies and an LGBT coalition that will protect the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers. The presence of the club served as a powerful source of support, acceptance, and strength for all LGBT students and teachers (Wright, et al., 2019). Hence the need for the SOGIESC Law that would punish cultural and social discrimination against the LGBTQ. A proper protection desk that will respond to their legal needs regarding gender violence issues, such as discrimination to protect them from all forms of stigma. When schools have policies promoting LGBT rights and teaching sexual diversity, the situation of prejudice and discrimination disappears. because the formalization of the rights is a form of recognition.

2. Attending trainings and seminars about LGBT issues

Another concern to be considered is capacitating teachers in handling LGBT issues through training and seminars as recommended by gay and bisexual teachers. Professional development and training programs served as interventions to develop theoretical knowledge and practical intervention skills of teachers. These are apparent in the following responses of the participants: *Ang school, district, and division ay kinakailangan bumuo at magsagawa ng training about gender mainstreaming on LGBT issues upang mapalawak ang kaalaman ng guro kung paano ang pag-handle ng discrimination,*

bullying at iba pang gender cases (I2, I3, I5 & I8). [School and district even the division must organize training about gender mainstreaming especially about LGBT issues to capacitate us about how to handle discrimination, bullying and other gender cases.] The above-mentioned suggestions made by the informants imply that organizing training on gender mainstreaming served as an intervention to develop theoretical knowledge and practical intervention skills of teachers in making the school environment sexually inclusive to all diverse learners (Reygan, 2021). The suggestions were related to the study conducted by Marshall and Hernandez (2013) who found that organizing specific training about gender issues among school heads and teachers eradicated the bullying and discrimination among LGBT individuals particularly teachers in their workplace.

3. Enrolling for further studies

As supposed from the responses of informants, gay and bisexual teachers should grow professionally by enrolling in master's and doctorate degrees. Sevim and Akin (2021) found that teachers who continue enrolling in graduate education provided the opportunity to enhance their professional practices. Presented below is the response of a gay teacher who is a 36-year-old: *We must pursue our studies kasi the more na mas mataas pinag-aralan mo the more na mas titingalain ka din (I6).* [We must pursue our studies because the more educated you are, the more you will be looked up to.] Other gay and bisexual teachers who have more than 5-10 years in the service also suggested that: *Kinakailagan natin mag grow professionally sa pamamagitan ng pag-enrol sa masters and doctorate (I1, I2, & I8).* [Let us grow professionally by enrolling in master's and doctorate.] According to the respondents, enrolling in master's and doctorate degrees is important for LGBT teachers to grow professionally and gain more respect. This indicates that LGBT educators continue to upgrade their competencies and skills to be more academically and professionally competent in their workplace. Teachers who continue enrolling in graduate education provided them the opportunity to enhance their professional practices (Sevim & Akin, 2021). Moreover, it was found that they gained positive attitudes from their colleagues, and students' education and enhanced their professional lives.

4. Integrating LGBT issues into teaching

The participants believe that integrating LGBT issues is a way to mitigate stereotypical perceptions and discrimination within the school premises.

As recommended by Wright and Villaflor (2019), teachers must utilize inclusive pedagogy to break gender stereotypes in teaching. Two teachers identified themselves as gay and stated their responses: *Educating also students about sa mga isyu on LGBT can promote awareness para mabawasan ang diskriminasyon. I suggest, bilang isang guro huwag magdalawang isip na ipakita kung sino at ano ka (I1 & I7).* [Educating also students about LGBT topics can also promote awareness to eradicate discrimination. To LGBT teachers, do not hesitate to show what you are.] The findings are related to the experiences of the teacher-participant in the study conducted by Trepanier (2018) who was protested by their student because of being gay. However, to resolve the gender stereotypes in teaching he used the situation as a chance to educate learners about LGBT topics. In addition, Tang (2019) in their study suggested that to protect LGBT individuals at all costs in school, educating and sensitizing is necessary. As emphasized by Bhana (2012), discrimination and gender violence can be combatted by an inclusive education approach that can be taught by teachers among learners. Teaching sexual diversity allows learners to understand sexual differences leading to recognizing individuals' rights and the disappearance of discrimination.

Personal responses

There are personal responses that were employed by gay and bisexual teachers along with their lived experiences. These include love for the profession, self-acceptance, resiliency, modesty, and support of school heads.

1. Love of profession

One informant perceived the need for a love of the profession. This is evident in their response: *Magtulong-tulong tayo sa paaralan sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng best service-learning delivery sa ating mga mag-aaral. Sa pamamagitan nito we can prove na kahit na tayo ay bakla, malaking ambag ang maiaalay natin sa komunidad (I8).* [Let us work well in school by giving the best service-learning delivery to our learners. In this way, we can prove to other that even if we are gay, we can be of great help to our community.]. Based on the above statement, despite gender identity, gay and bisexual teachers are willing to offer themselves just to make a big difference in their chosen career, particularly in molding young minds. This is similar to the study conducted by Wright and Villaflor (2019) where a gay teacher said that despite being gay the challenges he experienced about their sexual identity,

led him to the greater realization of a meaningful purpose as an educator, and that is to do well in teaching, to love teaching. Thus, every LGBT educator must aim to give better service delivery in teaching, though the realization of this purpose is challenging yet fulfilling. Moreover, as honor and pride are offered by these educators, the school must also give their best support to make them feel that they are loved and accepted in their workplace.

2. Self-acceptance, modesty, and resiliency

Three gay informants shared their thoughts that can help to improve the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in school. This is clear in their responses: *Self-acceptance po para tanggapin ka din ng ibang tao. Kaya huwag tayong matakot na ipakita kung ano ka. Maging totoo sa sarili at never matakot na makaranas ng rejection. Prove to them na hindi ka lang basta bakla (I2, I3 & I7).* [Self-acceptance for you to be accepted by others. Do not be afraid to show what you are. Be yourself and never be afraid of rejection. Instead, prove to others that you are not just gay.] Other two gay and bisexual informants who are teaching more than 10 years in elementary school said that: *Maging careful tayo sa ating pananalita at gawin. Mahalin natin ang propesyon natin.* [We need to be very careful of our actions and words. Let us love our work.] Two other elementary teachers stated: *Kinakailagan nating maging matatag lagi. At maging maingat sa atin gawi (I8 & I9).* [You need to be strong always. Be careful in your actions.]. Based on the statements shared by participants all suggested the importance of being open, modest, and resilient. The results were related to the study found by Simons et al. (2021), that even though teachers had little support from their peers and community, they stayed strong. The little help he received from their community during adolescence contributed to their decision to become an educator, a decision that helped him realize that he loves teaching. Moreover, the experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in rural areas were similar to the statement given by one of the participants in the study conducted by Salazar et al. (2019) who said that to overcome the challenges experienced by being an LGBT teacher one must act normally, being true to oneself daily. Also, the responses of teachers teaching in rural schools are similar to the experiences of LGBT teachers working abroad as revealed in the study conducted by Wright and Villaflor (2019). One of them said that their social life is greatly affected because he must be very formal and sensitive to their actions. Other teachers who are identified as gay in international schools are very respectful of the diverse

sexual preferences if LGBT teachers are not insinuating and showing off to their students. He further said that professional ethics must be there always.

3. Support of school heads

One of the gay informants who is teaching at the elementary level expressed their thoughts about the need for support from school heads. This is evident in their response: *Suportado kami ng aming punong guro and malaking tulong ito sa amin bilang isang LGBT teacher (I3).* [We are supported by our administrators, and this is vital on our part as LGBT teacher.]. The response clearly shows the importance of the support of school heads to gay and bisexual teachers to be safe and protected while they are at work. The results are congruent with the study of De Leon and Brunner (2013) who found that the past experiences of LGBT school administrators of being marginalized heightened their sensitivity towards LGBT learners, staff, and all members of their learning environment. Teachers who felt safe had a higher level of efficacy (Wright et al., 2019). Both emphasized the essential of relational trust among LGBT teachers and administrators by making them a teacher-centered leader as someone who fosters a respectful place to work for LGBT educators. Thus, school heads must provide support to LGBT teachers to empower them, and make them feel that they are accepted, loved, and respected despite their gender orientation towards equality and equity at all levels. Hence, administrators need to become agents of change and be the ultimate advocates for LGBTQ allies. By doing this, they set a high example not only for teachers, staff, and the community but most importantly for their client's learners (Trepanier, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that most of the informants are gays, aged between 36 and 40 years old, have master's, have no seminars on gender-related issues, were 11–15 years in the service, were Teacher III, and were not handling GAD Coordinator in their respective school. There were three main themes which occurred in terms of the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers, namely, leading gay and bisexual teachers to break stereotypes of sexes, fulfilling the teaching roles provides a great sense of support for gay and bisexual teachers, and heteronormativity leads to the discrimination of bisexual and gay teachers. They also have professional and personal responses as their coping mechanisms to their lived experiences in school.

Based on the results and in the light of the findings and conclusions drawn, the study recommends that the Department of Education strengthen training and seminars for teachers, school heads, learners, and non-teaching personnel on gender mainstreaming education. Teachers must implement gender-responsive basic education by integrating LGBT concepts in teaching subjects to learners as a mechanism to promote a safe and nurturing environment among LGBT teachers and individuals. In addition, school leaders may establish supportive school policies that address gender-based barriers and protect LGBT teachers from any forms of discrimination. And LGBT Coalition may also be organized to serve as an outlet or proper protection desk to cater to their needs in mitigating discrimination they experience in school.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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