

OUR Voices Matter: LGBTQIA+ Students Lived Experiences in Physical Education CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in Physical Education classes. The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students participating in PE classes, the coping mechanisms of LGBTQIA+ students with the challenges encountered in PE classes, and the insights participants can share with the academic community. The study is a qualitative phenomenological research design and draws on the experiences of twenty LGBTQIA+ participants coming from public and private secondary schools in Davao del Sur. Methods used include focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to explore the participants' experiences. Data were analyzed qualitatively using Colaizzi's method to derive the most emergent theme per research question. This study found that LGBTQIA+ participants experienced and felt acceptance played a vital role, had fun moments in PE classes, had uncomfortable moments in PE classes, and had unwanted physical activities. To cope with the challenges, LGBTQIA+ participants maximized their potential, gained a support system, and used adaptive strategies. Further, participants shared insights with the academe and the community, revealed the need to improve curricular offerings, create fair treatment, and adhere to self-preservation.

KEYWORDS: *Education, gender, inclusivity, curriculum, coping mechanism, phenomenology, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

The evolving recognition of the LGBTQIA+ community at present has raised issues of gender disparity in education, culture, the arts, and sports, leading to a growing number of studies pointing its attention to the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. LGBTQIA+ students are a population that is often marginalized based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Bacchini et al., 2020). LGBTQIA+ youth experience challenges in many

aspects of their lives, particularly in school, which is often one of the most significant contributors to developing gender role stereotypes (Russell et al., 2021). The challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth concerning their gender identities and gender expression also often extend to experiences in physical education (PE) classes. The physical education program promotes students' health, physical fitness, and overall well-being. It is believed to be beneficial to all ages as it supports the all-round development of an individual (Harold & Cook, 2013). However, reports on gender insensitive pedagogical practices in secondary education, struggles in understanding gender education, the absence of gender awareness and equality in classrooms, and poor participation in PE classes due to gender expression continue to rise and become more visible (Yuden et al., 2020).

In China, Deng (2023) stated that due to the absence of gender awareness and gender equality in classrooms, female students' participation in physical education has been noticeably lower than males'. Further, Ryan and Poirier (2012) assert that this disparity between the participation of the different sexes was also often attributed to impressions that boys dominated the field and that females may feel self-conscious about having to play and participate in front of boys. Similarly, in the United States, Catania (2020) also reported that LGBT individuals were also described as experiencing incidents of harassment and violence, as well as discriminatory policies and practices that marginalize them. LGBTQIA+ community, the physical and social discomfort (Greenspan et al., 2019) felt by the gender minorities in PE classes, and the derogatory and homophobic remarks lead them to inactive participation in physical activities.

In the Philippines, members of the LGBTQIA+ community in schools are also confronted by gender-based discrimination and social disapproval, which results in an inability to express one's identity and significant psychological issues. In a study by Ferrer et al. (2021), the gender expression of LGBTQIA+ students came out to cause their feelings of alienation and become subjects of verbal abuse and mockery. Equally, in Nueva Ecija, Santos and De Jesus (2020) cited that the emotional and mental well-being and academic performance of LGBT students are also compromised due to persistent instances of verbal aggression, taunting, and intimidating behaviors from their counterparts. In addition, Trinidad and Taragua (2020) explained that increased mistreatment among LGBT students was also attributed to discriminatory behaviors and rules regarding strict gender standards, ingrained gender norms, societal prejudices, and traditional expectations regarding masculinity and femininity, which resulted in LGBTQIA+ students being ridiculed during physical activities.

Further, a study by Capurihan et al. (2023) stated that LGBTQ students in the Davao region were also faced with verbal harassment and exclusion from peers. In response to gender discrimination surrounding LGBTQIA+, Pages (2016) reported the initiative of one private school in Davao City to establish an all-gender restroom as a way of providing a safe and supportive environment for its students, faculty, and staff, regardless of their gender identity or expression. However, White et al. (2020) asserted that the availability of school facilities is a major factor in creating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+, and not all may have the needed resources.

Furthermore, available studies examining the factors influencing the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students are centered on sports and athletics (Jaklitsch, 2017) and undergraduate settings (Tang & Ak Narayan Poudel, 2018). Furthermore, data on the positive experiences of PE students in PE classes, which also puts more emphasis on transgender and homosexual male students, appeared to be scarce, as shown in the systematic review of qualitative studies on physical education coming from the point of view of LGBT students. In addition, the data comprises perspectives from earlier decades that do not reflect current realities.

According to Müller & Böhlke (2021), this knowledge gap makes it difficult to fully comprehend the possibility of creating inclusive and secure PE environments. The lack of existing research that delves into the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of LGBTQ students in PE classes further calls for their experiences in contemporary physical education classes in the Philippines, specifically in Davao del Sur, to be navigated more. By bridging this knowledge gap, factors influencing the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students can be comprehended further and aid in formulating school policies and practices beneficial in creating gender-biased, free and inclusive PE settings in Davao del Sur.

Given these problems, careful, gender-sensitive, and gender-responsive actions, an improved pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, and a more inclusive educational setting should be offered. If gender equality, equity, awareness, and sensitivity are successfully practiced and observed, LGBTQIA+ students may receive the same physical, social, and emotional benefits from physical education classes. Likewise, it will improve their well-being and strengthen their positive connection to school, teachers, and peers. Furthermore, this study is bound to offer a profound understanding of gender-related issues or

contribute to promoting the well-being of the LGBTQIA+ community, teachers, school leaders, curriculum-makers, and agency members. Through this study's findings, PE instructors and school administrators will know the challenges and struggles of LGBTQIA+ students participating in physical education classes. This will inform the pedagogical practices of programs related to gender and development and improve the learning experiences of third-gender students. The findings of this inquiry will be disseminated by presenting the results at an international research conference and will be applied for publication in an international journal. Moreover, results will be shared during professional discussions and meetings, such as in school, seminars, and in-service training. Lastly, the study will be shared with groups of experts, administrators, and physical education teachers who are believed to be instruments in formulating solutions to the emerging challenges experienced by LGBTQIA+ students in physical education classes.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. According to Creswell (2013), the qualitative approach to research provides descriptive and vivid answers to research questions by conducting interviews or observations to explore and comprehend the experiences of individuals or groups of people over a particular phenomenon. In a way, individuals recount their experiences and engage in a detailed conversation wherein their interpretation of events or phenomena is expressed and delved into further. Moreover, phenomenological research design begins with the experiences described in individuals' lived and told stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This involves studying one or two individuals, gathering data by collecting their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2013). In addition, phenomenological research design delves into the subjective experiences of individuals regarding a specific concept or phenomenon. It seeks to capture the lived world of participants, exploring the meanings they attribute to their encounters with the phenomenon, and typically involves a shared experience among participants.

This research design is suited for and used in my study because it explores the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in a physical education class. As a result, a survey of this phenomenon described those episodes experienced by the participants that were directly investigated. It involved an IDI and FGD with the participants, wherein their perceptions, opinions, sentiments,

and points of view were analyzed.

Research Participants

The participants in this study are the 20 LGBTQIA+ senior high school students from two secondary private schools in Davao del Sur whose identities are known to the public. Snowball sampling was utilized to ensure that the selected participants were qualified based on the inclusion criteria. This sampling method was used to ask for referrals from the participants regarding LGBTQIA+ students who they believe can also best participate in the study. In this case, snowball sampling offered convenience since members of the LGBTQIA+ were acquainted with each other and possessed familiarity, allowing for a reliable recommendation. I used snowball sampling until I obtained 20 participants. These participants represented the different gender identities under the umbrella term LGBTQIA+. Ten participants underwent an IDI, and the other 10 underwent FGD. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies may have five to twenty-five participants. This information aided me as a researcher in determining the number of participants in my study. No additional participants were selected as the data gathered has been identified as having reached saturation. Data saturation occurs when sufficient data is gathered to conclude new-found knowledge. Hence, the study had a satisfactory number of participants, which helped obtain essential and meaningful data for analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used Colaizzi's method of data analysis. According to Wirihana et al. (2018), results derived from the use of Colaizzi's method of data analysis are reliable and credible. Through this method, participants' shared experiences can be structured into themes whose relationships can be understood and analyzed clearly and logically. Hence, using Colaizzi's process of analyzing data paved the way for an active strategy that enabled the exploration and description of the living experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in a physical education class. To execute Colaizzi's data analysis method, I began by transcribing the recorded in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the participants regarding their experiences in PE class. Once I was done transcribing, I read and reread the transcripts to establish familiarity with the data. Second, essential statements and phrases were identified, extracted, and coded with the assistance of a data analyst. Third, meanings were formulated and categorized to create themes. The themes that emerged were defined, and the structure of the phenomenon was described. Lastly, when themes and findings were finally derived, I provided the participants with a copy of the findings to

seek verification.

Trustworthiness of the Study

This research established its trustworthiness as it aims to provide results that help develop gender-responsive education. To demonstrate the trustworthiness of this study, it was anchored on the four criteria for trustworthiness: compatibility, transferability, dependability, and credibility, which are essential to maintaining a transparent and systematic approach throughout my research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, as a researcher, I ensured the trustworthiness of this study by following the methodology I reported in this paper and ensuring the techniques I used in this study were reliable and credible.

RESULTS

Profile of the Participants

Table 1.1

Profile of the Participants

Participant’s Code	Gender	Age
IDIP1	Gay	18
IDIP2	Gay	18
IDIP3	Gay	18
IDIP4	Gay	18
IDIP5	Gay	18
IDIP6	Bisexual	18
IDIP7	Bisexual	18
IDIP8	Bisexual	18
IDIP9	Bisexual	18
IDIP10	Bisexual	18
FGDP1	Gay	18
FGDP2	Gay	18
FGDP3	Gay	18
FGDP4	Gay	18
FGDP5	Bisexual	18
FGDP6	Bisexual	18
FGDP7	Bisexual	18
FGDP8	Bisexual	18
FGDP9	Bisexual	18

FGDP10	Lesbian	18
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Table 1.1 presents the profiles of the participants who took part in the study. For the in-depth interview, 10 participants took part in the process. Likewise, ten participants took part in the focus group discussion. The table clearly shows that bisexual and gay students comprise most of the participants. It also illustrates that lesbian participants were the least chosen, while other gender groups, such as transgender people, queers, intersexuals, and asexuals, were not represented.

Lived Experiences of Participants as regards Participation in Physical Education Classes

Table 1.2
Lived Experiences of Participants as Regards Participating in Physical Education Classes

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Feeling The Acceptance	Classmates are supportive of our gender identity Teachers are sensitive to our needs No discrimination felt during PE classes Classmates perceived versatility Parents are accepting our gender preference Classmate do not mind our gender preference
Playing an Important Role	Being a leader in the class Excel in dancing Help classmates learn dance Substitute for teacher presence
Fun Moment in PE Classes	LGBTQIA+ students enjoyed playing “laro ng lahi” Recreational activities are enjoyable and gender fair Having fun in swimming Playing volleyball and badminton gives more fun Students can move freely in dancing classes

Uncomfortable Moments in PE Classes	Changing clothes in front of other students Boys touched our body parts during activities Being excluded from a group Called out to be just flirting around boys Older people call out on us as “bayot” Confuse what to wear in swimming When asked to wear no shirts in swimming Hurtful teasing during activities Being laughed at during a basketball game
Unwanted Physical Activities	Playing basketball Doing push-ups becomes frustrating Difficulty to perform curl-ups PPFT activities do not seem to fit their body make-up

Table 1.2 presents the participants' lived experiences regarding participating in Physical Education classes. Thematic analysis generated the following themes: feeling acceptance, playing an important role, fun moments in PE classes, uncomfortable moments in PE classes, and unwanted physical activities. These experiences project positive and negative student life episodes as they participated in their PE classes.

Feeling the Acceptance. Students who claimed to be members of the LGBTQIA+ community shared experiences regarding participating in physical education classes. They experienced acceptance of their gender identity from their parents, classmates, and teachers. Participants also said that their classmates were versatile and did not mind their gender preference, just like their parents. Participants further shared that they have not experienced discrimination because of their gender choices. Rather, they have experienced support from family, teachers, and classmates. Moreover, participants also expressed that their teachers were sensitive to their needs and felt no discrimination during PE classes at all. As the participants expressed,

I have told my parents, my friends and others about my gender back in 2022. But now, it seems ok, I don’t notice anything like discrimination. (FGDP 4)

In terms of discrimination, I have not encountered it from my teachers and classmates...I really have not experience it during PE classes or PE activities that there is a discrimination or whatsoever. (FGDP 2)

Playing an Important Role. As LGBTQIA+ members, participants felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in playing an essential role in their PE class. Dancing activities allowed participants to excel, wherein they found opportunities to utilize their knowledge and skills to help and teach classmates how to dance. Being a class leader and being given opportunities to substitute for the teacher's presence made the participants feel proud and empowered. As told by the participants,

I really like joining dances Sir because I know I have the advantage and my classmates would like me to teach them. (FGDP 1)

Dancing because I feel that I could excel here because I have a background about it. (FGDP 6)

As a leader of the class, Sir, nobody is likely to contradict me since I have the authority. I am the brain. If the teacher is not around, I am the teacher. (IDIP 8)

Fun Moment in PE Classes. The participants also had fun moments in PE classes. These include times when they perform recreational activities such as playing “laro ng lahi”, dancing, playing volleyball and badminton, and swimming. One of the activities most enjoyed by the participants was dancing. Participants reasoned that they preferred dancing over sports, allowing them to act and move in any way they want without being too conscious of their gender identity. In addition, they also shared that dancing is really an enjoyable activity for oneself and for a group wherein their energy bursts out and they can just be careless with their movements without minding their gender. The activity also gave them the edge and allowed them to express their authentic selves and become creative. On one hand, recreational activities are also one of the most enjoyed activities by the participants as these allowed them to recount memories of their childhood, wherein they felt problem-free. They mentioned that

volleyball and badminton were two of these activities. As expressed by the participants,

I like dancing because I feel like when I am dancing, I can do whether it is a male or female dance. (FGDP 10)

It's badminton because there is no pressure when playing with friends or classmates. It is easy for us to understand each other. There is no pressure whether you are a female or if you are playing with a male. (IDIP 7)

Uncomfortable Moments in PE Classes. Despite the absence of feeling discriminated by the majority of the participants and their experiences of fun moments in their PE classes, participants still encountered several situations in their PE classes where they felt uncomfortable. These uncomfortable moments took place during their swimming activities and basketball games. Among the uncomfortable encounters by the participants was having to wear swimwear such as one-piece and swimming trunks, which made them hesitant and apprehensive to join. As expressed by the participants, the situation placed them in situations wherein their male classmates would touch their body parts, making them feel even more uncomfortable, anxious, and conscious of their body parts. Like swimming, participants also dreaded joining basketball activities due to several teasing incidents they had encountered. Participants also expressed that their participation often caused them to feel excluded due to their gender and become a laughing stock, causing them fear and shame every time they play. As unfolded by the participants,

When I first learned that it is prohibited, that men should be shirtless, I was having second thoughts because I already submitted my consent and I already agreed to join the swimming. (FGDP 1)

Whenever they see me taking off my shirt, especially the males, they would say "oy, oy, oy, let me touch your nipples", then I had a trauma about it sir. (FGDP 10)

It looks like the term basketball for us is a joke for others. If the gays like us would play, it seems like a joke for others. But for the males, it is a serious one. But if it is about us, it's funny. (IDIP 2)

Unwanted Physical Activities. A number of physical activities in PE classes appeared to be not really favorable to the LGBTQIA+ students. During the PPFT (Philippine Physical Fitness Test), conducted at the beginning of PE classes, participants voiced their aversion to activities such as pushing, curl-ups, and basketball. The participants perceived these activities to be difficult, frustrating, and awkward due to the different standards set for males and females. For instance, in performing push-ups and curl-ups, the form to be executed, the number of counts, and the amount of strength needed to perform such physical activities correctly vary. Likewise, when playing basketball, participants also expressed the underlying reasons for not wanting to play the game. These include having limited knowledge of the necessary skills to play basketball, viewing it as a harsh activity that may cause severe injuries, and perceiving their physical characteristics and capabilities unfitting to the game. As narrated by the participants,

It was really push up...then, and at that time I , really struggled how to do it because it seemed that my classmates were laughing at me, especially my teacher, because I was not able to do it. (FGDP 6)

Push ups because if you are a female, it needs only few push ups. They would say it's ok because you are a girl. There is a discrimination for me. (IDIP 8)

What I really don't like are the harsh physical activities like basketball because people are pushing. I don't like things like that, sir. Because I think those instances could lead to severe injury. (FGDP 3)

Coping with the Challenges in Participating in Physical Education Classes

In Table 2, it can be gleaned that the participants employed various coping mechanisms to keep up with the PE activities at school. In the analysis, three essential themes have emerged which are maximizing one's potential, gaining a support system, and using adaptive strategies.

Table 2
Participants Cope with the Challenges in Participating Physical Education Classes

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Maximizing One’s Potential	Doing one’s best in activities Encourage one-self Focus on your strengths
Gaining a Support System	Asking a family member for help Confiding with classmates about worries Talking to teachers Talking to friends
Using Adaptive Strategies	Awareness of strengths and weaknesses Do not listen to what other people say Accept and be true to your gender identity Resorting to crying Enjoying reading Putting myself to sleep Keeping oneself quiet Assert what you believe

Maximizing One’s Potential. In coping with the challenges participants faced in their PE classes, participants shared that not listening to what other people say, avoiding certain issues in order not to worsen a situation, and holding one's temper helped them withstand the difficulties. In addition, participants also added that encouraging oneself, doing their best in activities and focusing on their strength sustained them in all their activities amidst the challenges. As shared by the participants,

Don’t listen to other people’s comment, like just focus to your work. Because if you are going to pay attention to it, they will get worse. (*IDIP 2*)

I push myself to those activities. If I can't do it, I still bear with it so I can push myself sir. (FGDP 7)

Gaining a Support System. Through the different challenges, participants were also able to cope up by gaining a support system through their family, classmates, teachers and friends. Often, participants seek help from family members and friends on learning how to perform specific physical activities such as push-ups and basketball while they opt to confide their worries to their classmates and teachers. As shared by the participants,

I seek for help sir ... I have friends who would invite us to play basketball. I would say, I don't know how to do it, then they'd tell me that they will teach me. I said, ok then that's it, they were teaching me the basics in basketball. (FGDP 3)

I opened it up to my teacher and told him I am conscious of my body and asked if I could just wear t-shirt that is for swimming...I opened up about the LGBTs who are taking pills. (FGDP 2)

Using Adaptive Strategies. The LGBTQIA+ participants also find adaptive strategies as a crucial coping mechanism. As revealed by the participants, acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses helped them overcome people's criticism and understand their selves better. Though resorting to crying, reading, sleeping, and keeping quiet helped them control their emotions and keep situations from getting worse, participants believe that having a strong character and being assertive also helped them in challenging situations. As recounted by the participants,

Sometimes Sir, I wanted to cry, but I cannot cry because they might think I am really affected. So that's it sir, I just focus instead. When I get home, Sir, that's the time I get stressed with my emotions and cry. (IDIP 2)

Sometimes I just keep quiet so that my feelings won't worsen. It depends with who I am with, there are times

it’s easier if I keep quiet about it rather than telling other people. (IDIP 7)

I really fight, especially if what they are doing is no longer right. I am not the kind of person who would just smile. I am really a vocal person. If I can't agree with it, I really say it. Then this is easy for me because I am a vocal person. (IDIP 6)

Insights Participants Shared As Regards Physical Education Classes

Table 3
Insights Shared by the Participants as Regards Physical Education Classes

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Improving Curricular Offering	PE Activities should be inclusive Games in PE should be gender-biased free PE activities should promote fairness Give alternative activities
Creating Fair treatment	Teachers must understand the diversity of students PE teachers must be sensitive to the needs of students Treat LBGTQA+ normally No special treatment for LBGTQIA+ Not judging the capacity of LBGTQIA+ Not using gender as springboard to jokes
Adhering to Self-Preservation	Not allowing other people to define you Respecting other’s opinion Discovering and developing your potential Never minding others’ comments about your gender

Table 3 revealed the insights and perceptions of the participants as regards to physical education classes. The participants shared similar views on

how physical education classes can be better shaped to suit the needs of LGBTQIA+ students. In the analysis, three essential themes have appeared, namely improving the curricular offering, creating fair treatment, and adhering to self-preservation.

Improving Curricular Offering. According to the participants, creating inclusive PE activities and providing alternate activities are good ways to improve curricular offerings as they can minimize possible discrimination that may take place during PE classes. For instance, adding gender-biased free sports such as tennis could be included in the curriculum. In addition, participants also expressed that it would be helpful if LGBTQIA+ students' preferences were given consideration and that PE activities conducted are those that promote fairness among students regardless of their gender. As elucidated by the participants,

I think, Sir, in general, it should be inclusive. The genders in the LGBT should be given consideration. It should be for all genders. You won't feel left out. Like, there is a recognition. (FGDP 1)

The first is to talk and settle it with the teacher. Then, the teacher listens as to what the student can do. Then, if the student can't do it, he will be given additional task or alternative activities that is within his capacity. (IDIP 2)

Creating Fair Treatment. Participants have expressed the need to create fair treatment. To realize this, participants shared that teachers must understand students' diversity and have knowledge of students' backgrounds. The participants have also mentioned that teachers must be sensitive of the needs, which can be shown by being considerate and communicative with the students. Moreover, LGBTQIA+ participants have also expressed the need to be treated normally, that their capacity should not be judged, and that their gender expressions should not become a springboard to jokes. As participants conveyed,

I think the teacher should ask the opinion first and why, then maybe help motivate and let them not join the activity if the person can't, then let it be. Do not

force. I feel sir, like ask for suggestions coming from them instead. (*IDIP 4*)

Because sometimes they are underestimating the LGBTQIA+ when playing. Students should be encouraged to play. Not only focus the game on males but for everyone. (*IDIP 7*)

There are teachers who would joke, they are making it a joke. The teacher should be sensitive. (*FGDP 3*)

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings that emerged during the analysis, the participants of this study had varied experiences during their participation in their physical education classes. From what they have encountered, they felt accepted by the people surrounding them, played an important role, and had fun moments during their PE classes. On the one hand, participants had also experienced uncomfortable moments in PE classes and unwanted physical activities.

Feeling the acceptance. As LGBTQIA+ individuals rise, so does societal acceptance, evidenced by participants experiencing support from classmates, peers, and teachers in their schools. Despite different socio-cultural backgrounds, participants also attested to the absence of discrimination in their PE classes, their teachers' sensitivity to their needs, and their classmates' versatility towards them. This peer acceptance suggests that participants find support within their social circle and positively affect the LGBTQIA+ students' experiences, future health, and educational outcomes. This theme confirms the findings of Adams and Anderson (2012) and Oswalt & Vargas (2013), reporting that society is increasingly tolerant towards gays, lesbians, and bisexual individuals. This is also demonstrated through the findings of the survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019), which cited that 65 percent of LGBTI teenagers aged 15-17 report frequent support from peers or teachers, while 67 percent also say their school education has addressed LGBTI issues positively or in a balanced way. Thus, it is worth noting that the establishment of acceptance for LGBTQIA+ youth and providing them with a supportive environment is vital for their overall well-being and paves an opportunity for them to unhide their identities, helping family, peers, and teachers provide them with essential support and security.

Playing an important Role. The sense of acceptance from teachers and peers equated to participants having the opportunity to play an essential role in PE classes. As frequently pronounced by the participants, leading the class, mentoring peers, standing out in dance activities, and assuming the role of their PE teachers appeared to empower them, giving them a sense of pride and accomplishment. In addition, the phenomenon above also notably contributed to the increased self-esteem and activity engagement of the participants as teachers and peers entrust them to lead and model. Hence, the leadership opportunity the participants experienced contributed to developing their sense of self-acceptance, positive identity, and self-worth. This theme coincides with the study of Salvati et al. (2023) citing that the amount of confidence that participants received from people surrounding them made them feel improved self-acceptance and self-worth and that there is a strong correlation between positive LGBTQ+ community identification and improved psychological well-being. This suggests a powerful cycle – the more confident an individual feels within their group, the stronger their identification with that group becomes, further solidifying their sense of belonging and self-worth. Furthermore, the critical role LGBTQ students play, which is taking the lead in several activities, as highlighted in this study also parallels Terry's (2016) findings. In his study, participants defined leadership broadly, encompassing formal positions in organizations or committees and taking charge within friend groups, which requires organizational responsibility. This expansive definition underscores the diverse ways LGBTQ students can cultivate leadership skills and find opportunities to express themselves and view their sexual orientation. In the school context, classrooms as small units comprising different groups can enable students to showcase their leadership abilities through different classroom and physical activities, games, and sports if given the right opportunity.

Fun moment in PE classes. Incorporating enjoyable activities in PE classes not only increases engagement among students but can also give them positive experiences. Among the participants' positive experiences in their class are the fun moments, which, as they repeatedly stated, are drawn from participating in recreational activities, swimming, playing "laro ng lahi," volleyball, badminton, and dancing. Due to the recreational activities in their PE classes, participants mentioned having reduced gender consciousness, ease of movement, freedom to express themselves, and the chance to draw out their creativity. This result supports the study of Duncan et al (2023) wherein like volleyball, the enjoyment experienced from playing badminton also proves to provide a safe and supportive place for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals, considering

that it does not give any significant advantage to any gender and allow individual learners to play on equal footing regardless of their strength, agility, speed and endurance proving it to be a gender-neutral sport where it allows people to have equal access of participation where one can experience success and fun. Findings also affirm that of Gotfredsen and Linander (2023), citing that dance is among the essential sources of much fun and joy for several LGBTQ participants who especially brought to attention the importance of having a space where they could safely playfully explore gender expressions. Hence, it becomes a real drive for inclusion and social growth, to be able to consider the differences in individuals' gender, ability, intelligence, culture, ethnicity, language, and physical conditions.

Uncomfortable Moments in PE Classes. This theme reveals the uncomfortable moments of LGBTQIA+ students in PE classes that involved clothing, body image, discriminatory language, and exclusion from groups. In such cases, Queer theory enables understanding of these uncomfortable moments in PE classes, particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals who defy conforming to gender expectations which echoes the broader unsafe climate for them in schools. In a way, this challenges the need to ensure PE classes are safe and welcoming for all students regardless of their diverse expression of gender and sexuality. This resulting theme is parallel to the findings of Russell et al. (2021), who concluded that schools are often unsafe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning students due to their experiences of negative or hostile school climates, including bullying and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity which threatens as well LGBTQ students' well-being. This is further stressed by Burczykca (2020), explaining that LGBTQ individuals who experience prejudice of any kind may feel frightened, alienated, and disrespected. It also poses obstacles to full participation, jeopardizing students' achievement. Hence, despite perceived acceptance in other aspects of their lives, discriminatory language, exclusion from activities, and concerns surrounding body image and clothing create a hostile environment that hinders LGBTQ's full participation and well-being.

Unwanted Physical Activities. The physical education curriculum is sport-oriented and comprises numerous physical activities (Bailey, 2005). With the goal of physical education to provide mental, physical, social, and health benefits through its activities, there remain unwanted physical activities among the LGBTQIA+ participants, which, as cited by the participants, comprise playing basketball, doing push-ups, doing curl-ups, and PPFT activities. This

theme exposes that the nature of the activities and the necessity for specific physical characteristics to be present caused them to feel aversion and frustration from participating in PE activities. This aligns with Butler's (1990) concept of gender trouble, in which activities associated with specific masculine ideals are resisted by LGBTQIA+ individuals due to the discomfort and exclusion they experience. The unease around fitness assessments suggests that binary categories may impact physical education. Traditional male and female categories in test design may serve to reinforce this binary, further isolating the LGBTQIA+ individuals who do not conform to it. The findings of this study match the review of Alfrey (2023), positing that fitness testing can be a source of anxiety, fear, and overwhelm for some students. Similarly, findings also support Williams (2022), who noted that physical tests can damage students' self-esteem. This results in students not meeting the test's standards and feeling embarrassed or ashamed, especially as students watch each other complete the tests. As a result, it likely leads to bullying towards students who fail the testing, arguing that students should be given a variety of options to complete and the ability to choose their preferred form of exercise and be given the option to be tested out of sight of others. Further, this highlights the need to re-evaluate traditional fitness testing methods and suggests exploring alternative approaches that prioritize positive reinforcement and personal health goals. Hence, these situations and findings confirm the existence of a hostile climate, posing limitations and rejections towards homosexual individuals in the field of Physical Education.

Maximizing One's Potential. This theme discloses that LGBTQIA+ students ignore the opinions of those around them and exercise patience which helped them overcome their challenges. As a result, troublesome situations are prevented from escalating and worsening. This coping mechanism of the LGBTQIA+ participants is comparable to the participants in the study of Toomey et al. (2017), who responded to minority stressors through avoidance or ignoring stressors. As explained by Holahan et al. (2017), avoidance coping mechanisms like wishful thinking and denial are typically linked to higher levels of psychological discomfort, which can have an indirect impact on physical health through these psychological reactions. Furthermore, participants also revealed that doing one's best in activities, focusing on one's strengths, and encouraging oneself are ways of maximizing one's potential. This behavior of participants is demonstrative of resilience. It parallels the study of Kwon (2013), in which it was elucidated that resilience lies in the ability to tolerate stress by focusing on the future, envisioning a better life, and actively pursuing goals with

determination, characterized by hope and optimism. Through this, it allows LGB individuals to persevere despite encountering minority stress. Hence, this shows that maximizing individual potential serves as a potent catalyst for fostering resilience within this group of sexual minorities and that maximizing one's potential equips LGBTQ individuals with the necessary tools to persevere in the face of stigma and stereotypes.

Gaining a Support System. This theme shows that gaining support from one's family and friends helped LGBTQIA+ students cope with the challenges brought by their sexual orientation. Through this coping process, LGBTQIA+ students learned to perform physical activities, such as push-ups and basketball, that they find challenging to learn and perform at school. Based on what they disclosed, their family members, especially the male members who are into sports and physical fitness, could share knowledge and techniques on executing push-ups and curl-ups in a manner that fits them. The participant's acquisition of knowledge of playing basketball was also derived from their friends, who offered to teach them through actual play. Peers' volunteerism to teach them something they are having difficulty with appeared to ease their learning process and make them confident in playing basketball. This coping mechanism of the participants affirms the findings of Mulavu et al. (2023), who cited that gender and sexual minorities utilized strong peer support to face the hurdles relative to their gender. As discussed in the study, strong peer support provides a safe space for LGBTQ students to navigate challenges and find understanding, highlighting the vital role of affirming communities in building resilience. Gaining a support system as a coping mechanism by the participants also parallels the findings of Leung et al. (2022). According to the study, social support positively promotes positive socioemotional, behavioral, and educational outcomes for LGBTQ youth. For LGBTQIA+ students, having a reliable support group fosters a positive school climate and a sense of safety among the third genders. Hence, it is worth noting that support affirming one's sexual orientation and gender identity is beneficial for LGBTQ youth during their adolescence as this uniquely contributes to their positive well-being.

They are using Adaptive Strategies. This theme illustrated that participants coped with their challenges through adaptive strategies such as acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses, crying, enjoying reading, putting themselves to sleep, keeping quiet, and asserting, what they believed in to preserve their peace of mind. As explained by Oorthuys et al. (2022) adaptive strategy can be cognitive or behavioral, which depends on the individual, the

nature of the stressor, culture, and many other factors. However, coping strategies may also be maladaptive, wherein actions taken are often used unconsciously and unintentionally by the individual to alleviate feelings of stress, which is effective in the short term but impacts negatively in the long run. This phenomenon experienced by the participants supports the findings of Sumbane and Makua (2023), who mentioned that among the behaviors demonstrated by LGBT students to cope is going to sleep, withdrawing from the situation passively, and confronting others to raise awareness of their homosexuality. This also shared similarity with the study of Ryan and Legate (2017), who reported that LGBT people feel more motivated and self-confident when they credit their skills for their accomplishments. LGBT students can gain a sense of empowerment and resiliency by acknowledging their accomplishments, which can enhance their experiences in PE programs. However, despite the possible passing pleasure associated with excessing sleeping, eating, shopping, and superfluous self-care, these methods of coping, as asserted by Chinazzo et al. (2022), draw LGBTQ individuals away from a more mature solution to their challenges in dealing with general stress, and eventually compromises their mental health. Hence, schools and educators should foster inclusive, affirming settings that respect and validate LGBT students' adaptive strategies to boost and advance their general well-being in PE lessons and in general. They build confidence and overcome challenges by letting LGBTQIA+ attribute their success to their efforts.

Improving Curriculum Offering. This theme reveals the need of participants to have an improve curricular offering. To them, improving the Physical Education program involves several elements: ensuring inclusive activities, eliminating gender bias in games, delivering activities fairly, and offering alternative activities for students with differing abilities and characteristics. These insights are rooted in the different challenges and gender inequality experienced by the participants in their PE classes, which were also pronounced by Guerrero and Guerrero Puerta (2023), who cited that ensuring gender balance and equality through inclusive education remains a challenge all over the world and that Physical Education is a space producing gender inequalities due to its inherent biases and heteronormative structure that can create a space of exclusion and discomfort. Further, the perceptions shared by the participants in this study can also be associated as well with Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2021) in their analysis of LGBTQIA+ perceptions about sexual and gender diversity, wherein proposals and programs for inclusive education of sexual diversity are aimed at favoring the teaching-learning process of the

LGBTQIA+ population. Given this, professional teacher training on gender equity and sexual diversity should be provided upon developing an inclusive curriculum, as teachers can be promoters of programs and actions that promote equity and equal opportunities for all students. Hence, positive representations of LGBTQIA+ learners should be demonstrated through lessons and activities to ensure and keep the students' participation.

Needing Community Support. Alongside the call to improve the curriculum fitting to LGBTQIA+ participants is the need for community support. In this theme, the need for support from teachers is emphasized. These supports vary from understanding the diversity of students, sensitivity to students' needs, treating LGBTQIA+ usually, providing no special treatment, adhering to no judgment, and refraining from using their gender as a springboard to jokes. This theme concurs with the study of Russell et al. (2021), who found that LGBTQ students need to feel a sense of belonging to succeed academically and emotionally. A community that affirms and embraces LGBTQIA+ people can help fight feelings of exclusion and discrimination and feel more connected and at home in their community. Additionally, LGBTQ youth demonstrate stronger self-esteem and a more pleasant experience in school overall, boosting their educational experiences. Hence, secondary schools can foster a climate that supports the success and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students by offering an accepting and encouraging community (Cardinal, 2021). LGBTQIA+ people will benefit overall from positive development and educational outcomes if the community is supported and if inclusive policies and practices are implemented.

Adhering to Self-Preservation. Adhering to self-preservation also emerged among the themes. As revealed in this theme, self-preservation may be demonstrated by not allowing others to define a person, showing respect to people's opinions, discovering and developing one's potential, and ignoring people's comments regarding one's gender. This theme supports the study of Snap et al. (2015), stating that LGBTQ individuals are vulnerable and believe that physical education is a place where negative encounters are more likely to happen. Sports and activities that are gender-specific are frequently included in physical education classes, which reinforces binary standards. Students who identify as transgender or non-binary may feel uncomfortable, dysphoric, or at a higher risk of bullying or discrimination as a result of their gender identity. For an inclusive atmosphere to respect LGBTQ students' demands for self-preservation, it is essential to acknowledge and address these vulnerabilities and create welcoming places that cater to the particular needs of LGBTQ

students (GLSEN, 2023). Promoting their physical and mental well-being requires acknowledging their vulnerabilities, honoring their right to self-expression, and educating and empowering instructors. By implementing inclusive policies, organizations such as schools can encourage a sense of security and belonging, enabling LGBTQ individuals to participate fully in physical education, reap its benefits, and meet school goals (Chan et al., 2022). Hence, educational institutions must put LGBTQ students' self-preservation first and endeavor to create a climate that celebrates diversity and fosters the general well-being of all students.

Implications for Educational Practice

Due to the growing and emerging issues relative to gender and sexuality, the Department of Education sought to promote children's protection from all forms of gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying by enabling DepEd Order No. 32 s. 2017, titled "Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. This called for implementing gender equality, gender equity, gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and human rights in the delivery and governance of primary education. This policy, curriculum implementers, and school administrators expected strong support for the policy. In addition, its visible integration into school policies, classroom environments, classroom activities, and practices was also observed.

From the experiences shared by the participants, such as feeling a role, having classes, having acceptance, playing an important role, having fun moments in PE classes, uncomfortable moments in PE classes, and unwanted physical activities, it can be implied that PE teachers need to be more consultative and aware of their students' perceptions and needs upon doing physical activities. For intense physical fitness activities, teachers must primarily assess their students' gender-related preferences and capacities in order for them to be able to perform the physical activities accordingly and benefit from them.

Realizing that physical education aims to benefit one's health and overall well-being is vital. This means that the procedures for conducting physical activities match the learners' preferences, capabilities, and physical features about gender. This means that teachers need to tailor-fit the physical activities and consider how they might disadvantage learners belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. Teachers must be the primary source from which LGBTQIA+ learners can gain confidence and perform various physical activities.

Recognizing the unpleasant experiences of LGBTQIA+ learners while in PE classes calls for the need to increase teachers', parents', and stakeholders'

awareness of the issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ and their knowledge as regards the nature of different sexualities. Hence, the mechanics of facilitating physical activities in PE classes and the background must be assessed to ensure the activities' gender sensitivity.

The students' coping mechanisms with the challenges of participating in physical education classes showed that they maximized their potential, gained a support system, and had personal attribution. This can become even more effective if schools create clubs or organizations to help LGBTQIA+ students feel a sense of community and belongingness. With students often faced with gender crises during the stages of adolescence and early adulthood, clubs and organizations could help LGBTQIA+ understand and navigate their gender identities. They may also gain support and advice from people with similar experiences, which could help them become equipped with resources that they can utilize to deal with challenges.

In addition, LGBTQIA+ students' membership in clubs and organizations may assist them regarding their rights and needs. The establishment of policies that support inclusivity and implement gender equality and gender sensitivity may be assisted by school organizations for LGBTQIA+ students. Additionally, organizations can act as a forum for LGBTQIA+ students' voices to be heard, enabling the necessary guidance and counseling to be at work. This can be advantageous for parents and teachers.

The participants' Insights suggested that adopting better curricula, requiring community support, and upholding self-preservation should be done. Using this data to inform their decisions, curriculum developers in physical education must review the physical activities they have created to determine whether they are appropriate for all gender types. For LGBTQIA+ students to benefit from the benefits that physical education classes should offer, it may be possible to increase their participation in physical activity by reviewing how physical education is delivered. The community may benefit from an increased understanding of LGBTQIA+ people through educational initiatives, symposiums, and seminars to better support LGBTQIA+ learners.

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