

# True Colors: The Lesbian and Gay Youth

## Lived Experience of the Coming out Process in Aklan

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### Abstract

This study explored the coming out stories of 10 Aklanon gay and lesbian youth aged 18-22. Participants were asked about their experiences coming out to themselves as young gays or lesbians, friends, and parents. Colaizzi's phenomenological technique and frequency coding were used to categorize responses across narratives and better represent participant experiences. All participants acknowledged, labeled, and accepted themselves as gay or lesbians; however, two directly disclosed their gender orientation to their respective parents. One participant's parents verbally acknowledged and accepted her; the other participant's parents ignored her. Their narratives revealed that acceptance of friends and parents resulted in increased self-worth and self-acceptance, thus contributing to their development of a positive gay and lesbian identity. Silence from their parents, leniency and the belief that they should strive to be better sons and daughters are signs of parental acceptance; however, future research should look into if Aklanon gays and lesbians who are deemed to be "adolescents" or "young people" go through the same sexual identity development.

**Keywords:** gay; lesbian; Aklanon; coming out; lived experience; positive outlook.

### 1. Introduction

The question that is largely concerned with identity is "Who are you?". What does it mean to be who you are? Identity relates to our basic values that dictate the choices we make. These choices reflect who we are and what we [48]. Erikson proposed that identity formation is the key developmental task of adolescence [50]. During these years, adolescents are more open to 'trying on' different behaviors and appearances to discover who they are [29]. Furthermore, they are faced with physical growth, sexual maturation, and impending career choices.

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Adolescents experience identity crisis when they experienced temporary instability and confusion as they struggle with society's expectation and their identified self [30]. To avoid this crisis, individuals seek to achieve consistency among their identified-self and their behaviors [34]. Thus, individuals who are attracted to their same-sex may lead to adopt an identity consistent with such sentiments and behaviors (e.g. as gay and lesbian). Similarly, identification as gay or lesbian may lead individuals to engage in sexual behaviors consistent with the identity [33].

Human sexuality involves sexual attraction to another person, which for most part is to the opposite sex, some to the same sex, or some having both or not being attracted to anyone in a sexual manner [18]. The tendency of individuals to sexual impulses and follow the inclination of individuals that are of the same or opposite sex, also known as sexual orientation, can be viewed in two ways: 1) as biological or psychological property to be observed in all human populations, and 2) as an invention (label) specific only to those cultures which have deemed it an important distinction [23]. Since sexuality assumed to be at the core of human beings (i.e., as sexual beings), it is seen as a driving force that motivates humans to action particularly on the drive to procreate thereby stressing a heterosexual [8]. In the Philippines, one in every four Filipinos would not accept lesbian and gay individuals as neighbors. Approximately 28% of Filipino individuals' regard being gay or lesbian to be completely "unacceptable" [32] As a result, a variety of factors and their lived experience may influence the coming out process in young Filipino lesbian and gay individual.

## **2. Background of the Study**

Sexual identity development for LGBTQ+ individuals, also known as "coming out" has received considerable attention, resulting in numerous theoretical models. These theoretical models, taken together, describe a process of identity formation and integration as individuals strive for congruence among their sexual orientation (i.e., sexual attractions, thoughts, and fantasies), sexual behavior, and sexual identity. Identity formation and integration are involved in a reciprocal process. They share some common components, such as gay-related social activities, that serve as both a facilitator and outcome of identity development over time [33]. Furthermore, coming out is most typically defined as a resolution to the LGBTQ+ community's struggle to develop their identity as a person, with their life often distinguished by the markers "before I came out" and "after I came out." Additionally, coming out in a primarily Catholic country like the Philippines is made more difficult by religious influence and traditional family norms. There is still a stigma linked to being LGBTQ — a culture of tolerance rather than acceptance — which is why most Filipinos opt to keep this part of their identities to themselves [49].

Unfortunately, there seems to have a lack of published studies on the identity formation of Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals and even if there is, most LGBTQ+ research makes use of samples that come largely from the National Capital Region (NCR), especially from the Metro Manila areas. It could be debated that lesbian and gays from and outside the NCR differ from each other in terms of local culture, beliefs about lesbian and gays, experiences with stigma, access to LGBTQ+ information in the mass media, and exposure to LGBTQ+ affirmative groups, among other important factors [36]. Because of this, the researcher believe it is necessary to include the lives and experiences of lesbian and gay from other areas of the country to have a holistic picture of

LGBTQ+ psychology. Furthermore, the researcher wants to investigate the coming out process of lesbian and gay youth and focuses on the aspects of these young people's lives that have helped them in developing a positive lesbian or gay identity. In this research an emphasis is placed on examining and describing the coming out process of young lesbians and gays.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to explore the life of a lesbian and gay Aklanon youth what drives them to identify themselves as lesbian or gay. Specifically, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experience of the lesbian and gay youth in Aklan in terms of:
  - 1.1 coming out to oneself;
  - 1.2 coming out to one's friends; and
  - 1.3 coming out to one's parents?
2. What factors influenced them to develop a positive gay and lesbian identity in terms of:
  - 2.1 dispositional; and
  - 2.2 situational?
3. What are the educational implications of the results of the study in terms of:
  - 3.1 Safe and Inclusive Classroom?

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

This study made use of the following theories on identity formation. These theories are identity status theory and social cognitive model of identity.

**Identity Status Theory.** This theory was proposed by James Marcia who expanded Erikson's initial notion of identity crisis [25]. He suggested that the balance between identity and confusion lies in making a commitment to an identity. According to him there are two criteria for the presence of identity formation such as exploration and commitment. Exploration is referred to some period of re-thinking, sorting, and trying out several roles and life plans. Commitment used to mean how much an individual is personally invested in expressing their action or belief [17]. The end outcome of exploration leads to a commitment made to a certain role or value. Identity achievement status is developed when individuals formed clear identity commitments after exploring various alternatives meaning high in commitment and high in exploration. Moratorium status happens when individuals have not yet made clear identity commitments but are actively exploring various alternatives that is low commitment and high exploration. Foreclosure status occurs when individuals have made strong commitments

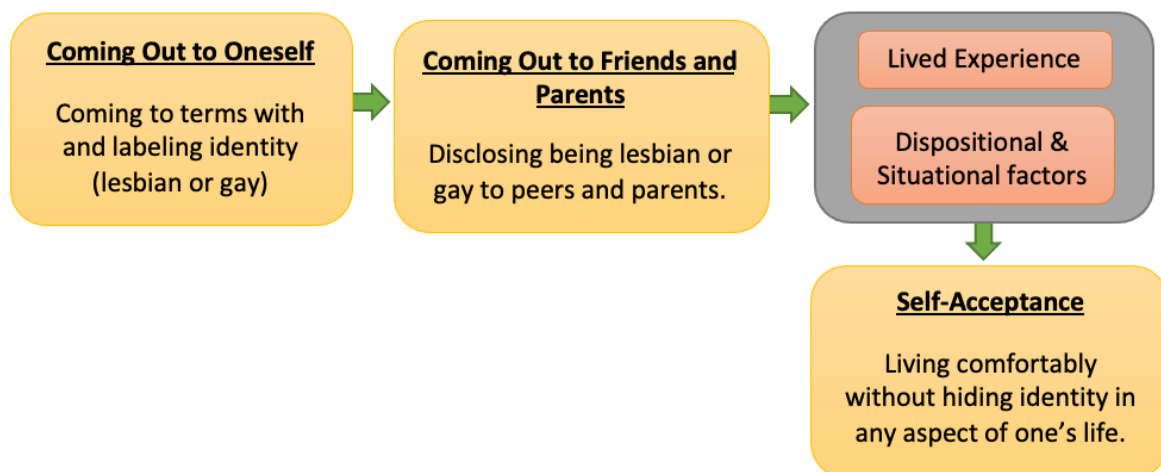
without going through a period of exploration that is to say high commitment and low exploration, and diffusion status is characterized by the absence of firm commitments and not actively exploring various alternatives meaning low commitment and low exploration [10]. This theory is related to this study since it suggested that the degree of exploration and commitment is crucial in identifying one's self.

**Social Cognitive Model of Identity.** This theory was introduced by Berzonsky [47]. It gives emphasis on the difference of sociocultural processes used by individuals to construct, conserve, and accommodate their identities. Beronzsky proposed three identity-processing orientations or styles: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant. Individuals with an informational processing orientation are uncertain of their own self-views and they intentionally seek out, process, and utilize identity-relevant information to personally resolve identity conflicts. The normative identity orientation describes those who conform to the expectations and desires of authority figures. These individuals tend to disregard information that conflicts with their beliefs or values and thus appear unreceptive to confront and face up to identity conflicts; their actions tend to be influenced more by immediate situational rewards and demands than personally informed decisions or normative standards. This theory is related to this study since formation of one's identity could also be influenced by the ideology of the group which the individuals belong to and the willingness of an individual to resolve identity conflicts.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated through the following paradigm (Figure 1).

The paradigm shows the identity formation process of lesbian and gay youth which consist of the coming out to oneself, coming out to one's peers and coming out to one's parents. It also shows how one's lived experience and, psychological and social factors influence oneself to commit to an identity. In this study, being lesbian or gay.



**Figure 1:** Schematic Diagram of the Study.

## **6. Significance of the Study**

The result of this study will be beneficial to the school as an organization especially to the policy-making body in promoting the use of gender fair language in classroom discussion, creating a safe and inclusive classroom, and the guidance services. Specifically, it would be beneficial to the following:

**Academic Heads / School Administrators.** After knowing the experiences of the lesbian and gay youth, the school may plan programs that may give students and teachers knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community and provide an environmental condition that support their needs.

**Guidance Counselors / Associates.** The outcome of this study will give them more information on the lived experiences of the youth so that proper recommendation can be made with school administrator, teachers, parents, and students on the resources or ways to understand LGBTQ+ students.

**LGBTQ+ youth.** By knowing that they are not alone and there are others like them, they will not feel ostracized and may organize support group/s which can help one another emotionally.

**Parents.** The result of this study will help them understand the reason on how and why their children chose to become the way they are and how it affects their day-to-day experiences.

They could also provide an environment at home where there is no discrimination and belittlement.

**Students.** The result of this study will give them idea on the hardships of some their LGBTQ+ peers experiences and, be more respectful and supportive.

**Teachers.** The outcome of this study will give teachers an idea on how and what LGBTQ+ students go through during their coming out process and be able to create a safe classroom environment by interrupting anti-LGBTQ remarks or comments and incorporate LGBTQ-Inclusive lessons and discussions.

**Workplace.** The result of this study will help them create a program where the workspace is safe and inclusive, and to boost the empathy, effectiveness, and productivity of their organizations.

**Future researchers.** The results of this study will encourage them to conduct research similar or related research to validate the findings of the study. Furthermore, this research can also serve as the basis of comparison to similar studies that can later be formulated into new theories.

## **7. Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study aimed to understand the identity formation process of Aklanon youth who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. This study focused on youth who identified themselves as lesbian or gay only.

It made use of the Identity Status Theory and Social Cognitive Model of Identity as the theoretical basis of the study.

## **8. Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for clarity and better understanding of the terminologies in this study.

**Age.** The period of time someone has been alive or something has existed.

In this study, it refers to the period of time the respondents have been alive during the interview.

**Aklan.** is a province in the Philippines situated in the Western Visayas region occupying the western section of the Visayas. Its capital is the Municipality of Kalibo.

In this study, it means the place where the study took place.

**Barangay.** It is the lowest level of administration in the Philippines. Barangays are the only administrative levels which are classified either as urban or rural.

In this study, it refers to the place where the respondents are currently living during the interview.

**Bisexual.** Someone who is sexually attracted to both men and women.

In this study, it refers to men or women who are sexually attracted to both sexes.

**Coming out process.** This refers to the process through which a person accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and shares it with others.

In this study, it refers to revealing if the respondents' sexual orientation/identity. It includes coming out to oneself, coming out to one's friends, and coming out to one's parents. Coming out to oneself means to accept one's sexual orientation, coming out to one's friends means the respondent has informed his/her friends about his/her sexual orientation, coming out to one's parents means the respondent has informed his/her parent/s about his/her sexual orientation.

**Dispositional factors.** Also known as Internal Factors, they are individual characteristics that influence behavior and actions in a person. Things like individual personality traits, temperament, and genetics are all dispositional factors.

In this study, it includes personality traits, efforts, moods, judgements, abilities, motives, or beliefs of the individual.

**Gay.** This refers to people who are characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's same sex — often used to refer to men only.

In this study, it means a homosexual man, or a man who is physically and sexually attracted to other men.

**Identity Formation.** It is the development of the distinct personality of an individual.

In this study, it means the development of personality of the participants who identified as lesbian or gay.

**Identity valence.** Refers to the extent to which an identity is positively or negatively evaluated by an individual.

In this study, it means the positive development of gay or lesbian orientation.

**Lesbian.** It refers to a homosexual woman, or a woman who is sexually attracted to other women.

In this study, it means a female who is physically and, sexually or romantically attracted to other females.

**LGBTQ+.** It is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning.

In this study, it includes youth from Aklan who identified as lesbian or gay.

**LGBTQ+ Community.** It is defined as a group composed of people who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and all the gender identities and sexual orientations that are not specifically covered by the other five initials. These communities generally, celebrate pride, diversity, individuality, and sexuality.

In this study, it means a group of people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer united by a common culture and social movement.

**Lived Experience.** It is the personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people. In this study, it means the situated, immediate, activities, encounters and choices given to an individual in everyday experience and the knowledge gain from these activities, encounters and choices.

**Rural Barangay.** A barangay is classified as rural if it does not have a population size of 5,000 or more, it does not have at least one establishment with a minimum of 100 employees, or it does not have five or more establishments with 10 to 99 employees, and five or more facilities within the two-kilometer radius from the barangay hall.

In this study, it means a barangay with a population of 4,999 or less based on 2015 Census of Population - Population of Region VI - Western Visayas.

**Safe and Inclusive Classroom.** It implies that the classroom environment is one in which all students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected.

In this study, it means a classroom environment that in which LGBTQ+ students feel safe, and their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected.

**Self-worth.** It is the internal sense of being good enough and worthy of love and belonging from others.

In this study, it means the inherent belief that one is deserving of the affection and acceptance of others.

**Sexual Orientation.** It is defined as an often-enduring pattern of emotional romantics and/or sexual attractions of men to women or women to men (heterosexual), of women to women or men to men (homosexual), or by men or women to both sexes (bisexual).

In this study, it refers to an individual's sense of personal and social identity and their attraction toward same-sex, that is being gay or lesbian.

**Situational Factors.** Also known as External Factors, are influences that do not occur from within the individual but from elsewhere like the environment and others around you.

In this study, it means the influences from the individual's family, community, school, or the people surrounding the individual, like having interpersonal relationship with his/her family and peers, gays and lesbians become more confident about their sexual orientation.

**Urban Barangay.** A barangay is classified as urban if it has a population size of 5,000 or more, it has at least one establishment with a minimum of 100 employees, or it has five or more establishments with 10 to 99 employees, and five or more facilities within the two-kilometer radius from the barangay hall.

In this study, it means a barangay with a population size of 5,000 or based on 2015 Census of Population - Population of Region VI - Western Visayas.

**Youth.** Define as those persons between the ages of 15 and 25 years.

In this study, it means a person who is residing from Aklan who is between the ages of 18 and 24 years.

## **6. Review of Related Literatures and Studies**

### **6.1 Identity Formation**

According to Erikson, adolescent is the stage where identity is formed. In this stage, individuals are influenced by how they resolved all the previous childhood psychosocial crises. Parents and family members continue to exert an influence on how individuals feel about themselves [26]. He further explained that identity formation is the primary indicator of successful development in contrast to role confusion, in which would be an indicator of not successfully meeting the task [29]. He argued that achieving a solid identity requires a period of psychosocial moratorium – a time when the adolescent is relieved from the obligations and responsibilities of adulthood that might restrict his or her pursuit of self-discovery. Adolescents who prematurely assume adult responsibilities, most often as parents or full-time workers, have a harder time achieving their own identity. They may prove fragile and immature later in life when faced with difficult challenges [1].

Expanding on Erikson's theory, [8], descriptively categorizes four main points or stations along the continuum of identity development. Similar to Erikson, Marcia believed that certain situations and events (called "crises")



serve as catalyst prompting movement along this continuum and through the various identity statuses. These crises create internal conflict and emotional upheaval, thereby causing adolescents to examine and question their value, beliefs, and goals. As they explore new possibilities, they may form new beliefs, adopt different values, and make different choices. Marcia used the term identity status to label and describe four unique developmental identity stations or points. These are: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. Each identity status represents a particular configuration of youth's progress with regard to identity exploration and commitment to the values, beliefs, and goals that contribute to identity. Though the different identity statuses are in some sense progressive (in the sense that they flow one to the next), Marcia's theory does not assume that every adolescent will pass through and experience all four identity statuses. Some youth may experience only one or two identity statuses during adolescence. Additionally, there is no assumption that a youth's identity status is uniform across all aspects of their development. Youth may have different identity statuses across different domains such as work, religion, and politics. In this sense it is possible for youth to have more than one identity status at a time. Furthermore, unlike Erikson's stage theory, Marcia's theory accounts for multi-directional movement between and among the various identity statuses. For instance, youth may experience a traumatic event such as parental divorce, or a violent assault, which may cause them to re-evaluate their understanding of the world and their value system. This type of crisis may cause them to retreat to a preciously enacted identity status as they integrate this new information.

[19] in his study about identity formation among ethnic minority groups in America suggested that ethnic identity is a central part of identity development, especially for those who are not in the White-Anglo majority. He further explains that ethnic minority adolescents generally have four possibilities for integrating their ethnicity into their larger sense of self. First, assimilation refers to trying to adopt the majority culture's norms and standards at the expense of those in one's own group. Second, marginalization means living within the majority culture but feeling estranged. Third, separation refers to associating primarily with members of one's own culture and rejecting the majority culture. Finally, biculturalism means maintaining ties both to the majority culture and one's own ethnic culture.

During adolescent, sexual changes occur and issues of gender identity and sexual identity become significant. These two forms of identity overlap somewhat. Gender identity refers to what it means to be male or female, which is linked to sexual expression, but also concerns broader issues of masculinity and femininity. Gender role socialization becomes very intense during adolescence. In early adolescence males and females are often especially vigilant to ensure gender role conformity [27]. Sexual identity is a matter of forming an enduring recognition of the meaning of one's sexual feelings, attractions, and behaviors [38] and often takes the form of labeling one's sexual orientation. Overall, issues of sexual, ethnic, and general identity intensify as children make the transition into adolescence. Although sexual identity exploration is critical on adolescence, it can also occur or re-occur in adulthood, especially if it was inadequately explored during adolescence [1].

## ***6.2 Sexual Identity Development among Lesbian and Gay individuals***

The development of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer sexual identity is a difficult and often complex process. Unlike members of other minority groups like ethnic and racial minorities, most LGBTQ+

individuals are not raised in a community of similar others from whom they learn about their identity and who reinforce and support that identity. Rather, LGBTQ+ individuals are often raised in communities that are either ignorant of or openly hostile toward homosexuality [33]. [22] suggested that society played a major role in the identity development and classification of LGBTQ+ individuals and outlined historical events that shaped the way LGBTQ+ community up until homosexuality was removed as a psychiatric disorder from the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic and statistical manual for mental health disorders (DSM) in 1961. Years after the DSM determined homosexuality was not a mental disorder, western researchers began to explore how lesbian and gay men develop their sexual identity. According to Clarke, Ellis, Peel, & Riggs, (2010) as cited in [36] sexual identity development imply that lesbians and gay men progress through different phases in a particular order as they make sense of their ability. They differ in some aspects but share four common elements: (1) an awareness of homosexual feelings; (2) exploration of homosexuality; (3) taking on board a lesbian/gay self-identity; and (4) integrating one's lesbian/gay self-identity into one's broader sense of self.

However, the stage models of sexual identity development in the psychological literature is not without its criticism. [36] argued that such models are being too firm in given their assumption that the process of sexual identity development is a linear, sequential, and unidirectional process given that not all gay adolescents share the same development trajectories. Furthermore, some scholars also cited that stage models of sexual identity development ignore the role of social setting and historical factors. Researchers of sexual identity development are faced with the challenge of integrating these stages models with the significant changes in the lives of sexual minority youth today (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009). One instance would be the increased exposure of society to LGBTQ+ experiences through various forms of mass media and the presence of LGBTQ+ support groups like the coming out process of the contemporary gay youth qualitatively different from that of other gay youth decades ago [36].

Because of the shortcomings of the stage models of sexual identity development, other researchers have come up with alternative approaches to the study of how lesbian and gay men make sense of their sexual identities. Hammack and Cohler, 2009 cited in [36] suggested for the integration of life course and narrative approaches in the study of sexual identity development while [38] employs a differential development trajectories approach.

### ***6.3 Lesbian and Gay (Homosexuality)***

Homosexuality means sexual attraction to and interest in one's own sex. Female homosexuality is usually referred to as lesbianism, while the word "gay" is sometimes used as a synonym for "homosexual" [53]. Karoly Maria Benkert, a psychologist of Hungarian descent who was born in Austria, first used the word "homosexuality" in the late 19th century [2].

Until the past century, same-sex attraction between women was viewed skeptically or ignored by society, with few terms to describe women who spent their lives adoring other women. Ancient Greece is where the earliest known literary allusions to lesbian or same-sex relationships between women may be found. While residing on the island of Lesbos in the sixth century B.C.E., Sappho (the eponym of "sapphism") penned poems that appear to have reflected her attraction to other women. As a result, women who engage in same-sex relationships are

referred to as "Lesbians" [28]. Lesbians have always thrived and survived amid the patriarchal oppression of women all throughout the world. If they could survive without a male, lesbians would occasionally move in together in "Boston Marriages" [54]. Boston marriages were dedicated and long-lasting, and they shared many characteristics with traditional unions. But not being married to males allowed women to retain enormous control over their own lives—control that, in a traditional marriage, they would have given up to their husbands. Since women were frequently thought not to have strong sex desires in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—sex for them was apparently a duty and designed primarily for procreation—nothing was regarded improper with women's public displays of affection. Their sharing residences and even beds were not regarded as suspicious. The presumption that the women involved did not engage in any sort of genital sexuality with one another was the foundation for the Boston marriage's social approval [55]. Meanwhile, the acceptance, toleration, punishment, and outright prohibition of male homosexual behavior has varied over time and across cultural boundaries. In ancient Greece and Rome, male homosexuality was common, particularly under the Republic. Even before Christianity became popular, Roman culture under the Empire gradually started to have more unfavorable attitudes regarding sexuality, most likely as a result of social and economic unrest (Homosexuality, 2022; Homosexuality, 2020). For centuries, religious prohibitions against sexual interactions between people of the same gender (especially gay men) have traditionally condemned such behavior, although most legal codes in Europe are mute on the question of homosexuality. Moreover, many sexual or quasi-sexual behaviors, including same-sex intimacy, were criminalized and subject to severe penalties, including execution, in the court systems of many predominately Muslim countries. At the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sexual encounters between males or male homosexuality are now classified by English politicians as criminal rather than simply unethical. Sodomy remained a capital offense punishable by hanging until 1861 in England and Great Britain. In 1885, Henry Du Pré Labouchere proposed an amendment to Parliament that established the crime of "gross indecency" for same-sex male sexual relations, making it possible to prosecute any type of sexual behavior between men only as lesbian sexual relations were not covered by the law because they were unthinkable to male legislators. Similar to Germany, which was unifying the civil codes of many independent kingdoms in the early 1870s, the final German penal code had Paragraph 175, which criminalized same-sex male relationships and made them susceptible to punishments like imprisonment and loss of civil rights [30]. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, an openly theological framework no longer dominated the conversation regarding same-sex attraction. Instead, secular ideas and interpretations grew more common. Most secular discussions of homosexuality likely took place in the medical field, especially psychology. The state's need for an expanding population, competent warriors, and intact families with clearly defined gender roles were connected to this discourse. It is obvious that the growth in the stature of medicine was influenced by science's growing capacity to explain natural events through mechanistic causation. Sexuality is either innate or physiologically determined in humans. People do not choose to commit evil acts. However, people may be displaying a disordered or pathological mental state, in which case medical intervention for cure is necessary. As a result, doctors, particularly psychiatrists, advocated for the abolition or lowering of criminal sanctions for consensual homosexual sodomy while intervening to "rehabilitate" homosexuals. They also strove to find strategies to prevent children from becoming homosexual, such as arguing that early masturbation produced homosexuality and hence must be avoided [2].

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, attitudes toward homosexuality are usually shifting, owing in part to greater political

action and efforts by lesbian and gay individuals to be viewed as "normal" people who differ only in their sexual orientation. Contrary views of homosexuality—as a variant but normal human sexual behavior on the one hand, and as mentally disordered behavior on the other—remain in most communities in the 21st century, but they have been largely addressed in most industrialized countries [56]. In its official list of mental illnesses, the American Psychiatric Association no longer includes homosexuality. Despite the two major setbacks of the AIDS crisis and an anti-gay backlash, the growing exposure of lesbians and gays has become an indelible part of life. In Western Europe, anti-sodomy laws were repealed and legal equality for gays and lesbians became the norm. Same-sex marriage is now widely accepted legally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century [2].

## **6.4 Homosexuality in the Philippines**

### **6.4.1 Pre-colonial era**

In the Philippines during the pre-colonial era, homosexuality was seen as normal. The first account of women and gender crossing men playing major roles in the Philippine society was the *Babaylan*, a priestess who was a bounty of knowledge and spirituality. The *Babaylan* even has the power to take charge of the *barangay* (community) in the absence of the *datu* (community leader). There were some *babaylan* who were male called *asog*, who were free to have homosexual relations without societal judgement. However, the *asog* were not cross dressers but rather gender crossers as they were granted the same spiritual recognition as the female *babaylan* [7].

### **6.4.2 Spanish – American colonial era**

When the Spaniard came and colonized the Philippines for 300 years, a change in ideology was imminent. From the indigenous matriarchy, the Spanish colonizers introduced the patriarchy and the machismo concept which made gender crossing a ridiculed practice. Not long after, effeminate men were called *bakla*, a word that also mean ‘confused’ and ‘cowardly,’ and were looked down upon. In the American period, the idea of Western conceptualizations of gender and sexuality were further reinforced, cementing it in formal education [7].

### **6.4.3 Post World War II – Present**

While the Philippines has no law against homosexuality, many Filipinos still consider being lesbian or gay a sin due to the teaching of the Church. According to the survey done by the Pew Research Center in 2013, 73% of the Filipino respondents said that “homosexuality should be accepted by society” with even higher percentage (78%) of younger respondents in the 18-19 age group. [5] and most of all the LGBTQ+ Filipinos are tolerated only if they fit certain stereotypes. According to Ron De Vera of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) Manila Network, the result of the survey should be taken “with a grain of salt.” He also said that:

*“Majority of the Philippine society has typified LGBTQ+ people as creative, talented, loud entertainers who are expected to stay near their little boxes... stereotypes that LGBTQ+ people are expected to conform to.”*

De Vera also added that while the stereotypical butch lesbian security guards and effeminate male comedians are accepted, an effeminate gay male wanting to join the nation's premier basketball association would be a totally different story. He also stated that:

*“The moment that we step out and demand rights that heterosexuals enjoy, we become a threat because we no longer fit the stereotype”*

## **6.5 Lesbian and Gay Rights Movement in the Philippines**

### **6.5.1 Metro Manila**

On June 26, 1994, the Progressive Organization of Gays in the Philippines (Pro Gay Philippines) and Metropolitan Community Church organized what came to be known as the first Pride March in the Philippines and in Asia [37]. After that, various lesbian and gay organizations had begun appearing in the country. The University of the Philippines' Babylan, for instance, claimed itself to be the country's oldest lesbian and gay student organization in 1992 [35]. In 1993, a year before the first Pride March took place, UP Babylan marched for the first time in the university's Lantern Parade. “Out of the closets, into the streets!” was their rallying cry. Where they met jeers as they passed certain areas, the general reception to their participation was positive. This experience emboldened succeeding members to join the parade in the succeeding years. Since then, the participation of UP Babaylan in the University of the Philippines-Diliman's Lantern Parade has become a tradition for this organization, and in 1996, the Philippine Gay Culture Magazine was released. During the same year, all active queer activists and activist groups in Metro Manila gathered for the Metro Manila Pride March spearheaded by Reach Out Foundation. This event was the first time the entire Filipino lesbian and gay community came together and presented themselves as such to the broader Philippine society. After three years of leading the Metro Manila Pride March, Reach Out Foundation handed its organization to Task Force Pride, a collective of unaffiliated individuals and representatives from different groups founded in 1999. They shepherded these marches for around two decades before the Metro Manila organization took over in 2017 [51].

### *Visayas*

For the last decade, many Pride Marches had been organized, not only in Manila, but all throughout the Visayas. Major citieslike Tacloban City in Leyte celebrated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eastern Visayas Pride Week from March 13 to 17, 2017 [52]. On June 14, 2019, Mandaue City, which is located in Cebu province, hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> LGBTQ+ community gathering dubbed as “6014 Pride Parade,” the gathering drew a least 85 LGBTQ+ organizations from over the province. In 2018, the Mandaue Pride March drew close to 4,000 attendees [42]. In Bacolod City, members, and allies of the LGBTQ+ community gathered for the Pride Parade to show solidarity and celebrate the annual pride month on June 22, 2021. The parade was dubbed “The Return of Pride” to Bacolod City after 1 4-year hiatus and was organized by Tribu Duag, an LGBTQ+ organization led by various youth leaders with the coordination of humanist Alliance Philippines, International (HAPI), Negrosanon Youth Leaders Institute (NYLI) and Rekindle Ph [21]. In the nearby province of Iloilo, which is one of the provinces that made up the Island of Panay, the 2019 Iloilo Pride March was held on October 12, 2019, it was participated by some 5,000

participants from the LGBTQ+ community and their allies according to the organizers' estimates. With chants like "LGBT rights are human rights" and the more playful "Maki-beki, wag ma-shokot (Fight, don't be scared)!" participating Ilonggos celebrated love and called for the passage of the SOGIE equality bill. The turnout smashed the previous record attendance of 3,000 registered participants in the 2018 Iloilo Pride March [43]. In Aklan, a province located northern part of Panay, the first ever Pride March was held on January 17, 2019 called KULAY: The Aklan's First Grand Pride Parade with the theme "Unfold your true colors." The event was organized by the Aklan Butterfly Brigade who promotes HIV and AIDS prevention and control [11].

#### *Discrimination Protections and Politics*

With all the Pride Marches being done around the Philippines there are still no laws existing to protect the LGBTQ+ community. The late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago and former Akbayan representative Loretta Rosales filed the earliest version of SOGIE equality bill way back in 2000 under the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress. SOGIE means Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression.

The SOGIE bill is basically an anti-discrimination bill. It recognizes that many people whether they are LGBTQ+ or cisgender, experience discrimination based on their SOGIE. The bill seeks to protect all people from this kind of discrimination. The bill was forgotten for almost 17 years. The first Senate version of the anti-discrimination bill was filed on August 11, 2016 by Senator Risa Hontiveros, while its House counterpart remains pending. Between the year 2000 and 2016, there had been numerous crimes committed against the LGBTQ+ community, but also winning moments.

During the 2010 National Election, Ang Ladlad became the first Partylist in Asia and around the world that represented the LGBTQ+ community to be recognized by the Supreme Court. On May 2012, the Department of Education issued an order for the protection of children, including their sexual orientation and gender identity. The murder of Trans woman Jennifer Laude on October 11, 2014 by a US Marine catalyzes the discussion and action toward advancing transgender rights. In Quezon City on November 28 of the same year that Laude was murdered, former mayor Herbert Bautista signs the gender-fair ordinance where prohibited acts included discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the workplace, educational institutions, and in delivery of goods, services, and accommodation. The ordinance also includes affirmative acts, such as equal pay and sensitivity training in the workplace.

Then during the 2016 National Election, history was made again when Geraldine Roman, a female transgender run for office and got elected at the lower house seat for Bataan province, north of the capital Manila. She became the first transgender person to hold office in the Philippines [13].

A year after, the anti-discrimination bill was passed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress on its third and final reading on September 20, 2017 in the House of Representatives. Up until now, the bill has been in standstill, five senators who include Risa Hontiveros, Loren Legarda, Ralph Recto, Franklin Drilon, and Juan Miguel Zubiri expressed support for the bill while opposing senators include Manny Pacquiao, Joel Villanueva, and Senate President Tito Sotto who vows to never approve the bill [20].

## **7. Research Design**

This study used a qualitative method. As [16] suggested, qualitative research is the best method to conduct when a problem or an issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study group of population, identifying variables that can be measured or hear silenced voices. “We conduct qualitative research because we need a complex detailed understanding of the issue.” This design of the study is selected in the belief that this will be the best approach to address the issue and add breadth and depth to the study.

As defined by [16], qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes.

## **8. Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted in the Province of Aklan. It is situated in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. It is divided into 327 Barangay grouped into 17 Municipalities of which Kalibo is considered the Capital Town.

The province has become famous for the immaculate exquisiteness that nature has imparted to it and its people, a remarkable place in the Philippines that has made a clear-cut mark in the world map when it comes to luring in tourists.

Aklan province’s claim to fame in Boracay, an island that can be found approximately one kilometer away from the north-western tip of the province. Boracay Island is among the best beaches well known globally for its sugar fine white sand, sapphire waters, amazing coral reefs, and exceptional seashells.

Besides the beaches, Boracay upholds its legendary status for its fun and exciting nightlife.

The province is also known as being gay-friendly. In 2001, some gay men and transgender women in Aklan partnered with the provincial government to provide services related to sexually transmitted infectious (including HIV) particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM). The group together with the provincial project coordinator of United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) held peer educators’ trainings, guided by its motto: “Safety first: Mine and Others”.

The group combined entertainment and information to communicate its message has been considered as a best practice for reproductive health programs in the Philippines and in 2007, the group was nominated by UNFPA-Manila for the prestigious Felipa de Souza Award.

It is now considered a prime mover for the “beneficiaries of implementers” concept of RH and has since replicated the concept for other provinces in the country.

## 9. Participants of the Study

In this study, there were 10 respondents composed of five gay and five lesbian youth whose age ranges from 18 to 22. The participants were individuals who reside in Aklan, identifies as lesbian or gay and, have come out to peers and opened up to either one of their parents.

Table 1 presents the profile of the participants in terms of age, sexual orientation, and area classification.

Data showed that when participants were grouped according to age, half of the number belonged to 20-21 years old (50%), and the least was that of 22-24 years old (10%). As age indicates, half of the participants were young adults.

When the participants were grouped according to their sexual orientation, 50% identified as Lesbian, the same as those who identified as gay (50%). Data indicates that the participants were equally distributed.

Regarding the area classification where they live, data revealed that half (50%) of the participants live in an urban area, and half (50%) live in a rural area. It showed that the selection of participants was evenly spread out.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Participants according to their Profile.

<b>Age</b>	<i>f</i>	%
<b>18-19</b>	4	40
<b>20-21</b>	5	50
<b>22-24</b>	1	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	100

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Gay</b>	5	50
<b>Lesbian</b>	5	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	100

<b>Area Classification</b>	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Rural</b>	5	50
<b>Urban</b>	5	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	100

## 10. Sampling Procedure

The researcher used the purposive sampling method and snowball technique to identify participants. The respondents must identify as lesbian or gay to be part of the study. The researcher employed the help of faculty members from Higher Education Institutions around Aklan that she knows to help recognize individuals that



identify as gay or lesbian. The researcher then took the information gathered from different faculty members and contacted students that fit the criteria as respondents of the study.

### **11. Data Gathering Instrument**

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method through in-depth interview.

The in-depth interview was guided by a modified version of Life Story Interview questionnaire by Pierce Docena [36], to illicit information and generate knowledge to discuss different factors contributing to the coming out process of gay and lesbian Aklanon youths. A modified version of Life Story Interview questionnaire by Pierce Docena [36], for an in-depth interview, tape recorder and camera was used as the instrument.

### **12. Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument**

The researcher emailed and asked for permission from Mr. Pierce Docena, an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of the Philippines Visayas, Tacloban Campus, to use a modified version of his Life Story Interview questionnaire from his research which he gave.

### **13. Ethical Considerations in Data Gathering Procedures**

The ethical considerations in gathering the data needed from the participants were observed. The researcher took the following ethical actions: First, in order to protect the human rights of the participants, the researcher approached the participants with dignity was mindful of patience while the participants were answering the questions being asked. Second, the researcher ensured that the participants were protected from psychological, social, physical, and legal harm. Third, the researcher made sure to tell the participant that the study was a part of her academic requirement, how he/she were chosen, and that they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the interview process if they need to. Fourth, to ensure that a high level of confidentiality was observed, the researcher labeled each transcript with numbers and not their name. Fifth, after each interview, the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions, clarifications, or needed further explanation to ensure that they understood their participation in the study. Sixth, the researcher informed the participants that there were no financial incentives and that the participation was voluntary. Seventh, since the study was purely for academic purposes, the researcher explained the purpose of the study thoroughly and honestly to the participants and the significance of their participation. And lastly, the researcher thoroughly explained how they were identified as participants and asked whether they can refer to her of someone they know that fit the criteria.

### **14. Data Gathering Procedure**

The data gathering procedure was done from the account of the participants using in-depth interviews. The researcher knew some of the participants and messaged them if they are willing to be interviewed. Upon agreeing, the researcher then asked the participants at what time will they be convenient to be interviewed and what kind of video conferencing service they prefer. Before the online interview, the participants were brief

about the purpose of the study. The researcher then sent the consent form through the video conferencing service and asked the participants to read and sign a consent form electronically to record the interview. After the interview, the researcher then asked the participants if they can refer individuals that match the criteria to her. Aside from that, the researcher also asked for referrals from instructors that she knew from different Higher Education Institutions in Aklan that she can interview for the study. The interviews collected were transcribed verbatim and translated to English.

## **15. Data Analysis**

The researcher used the QDA Miner Lite software program which was the free and easy-to-use version of the computer-assisted qualitative analysis software developed by Provalis Research. It was used for the analysis of the interviews and open-ended responses. The researcher used Colaizzi's method of data analysis. It has a distinctive seven step process that provides a rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data. The result is a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants. The method depends upon the rich first-person accounts. These may come from face-to-face interviews but can also be obtained in multiple other ways; written narratives, blogs, research diaries, online interviews and so on [41]. The following steps were done by the researcher: First, to make sense of the interviews, the researcher printed, read and re-read all the transcripts. Second, the researcher then extracted significant statements, phrases or sentences that directly pertain to her research. Third, the researcher gave meaning to the extracted statements by broadly categorizing each upon careful consideration of the significance of the statements. Fourth, the researcher then grouped multiple statements that convey similar meanings from across all narratives. Fifth, the researcher used all the themes generated in step 4 to create a comprehensive and all-encompassing description of the phenomenon. Sixth, in order to capture only the aspects believed to be crucial to the phenomenon's structure, the researcher reduced the exhaustive description into a brief, dense statement. Lastly, in order of the credibility of the data was insured, the researcher then contacted the participants again asked them if it accurately described their experiences.

Furthermore, frequency coding was also used to categorize replies across narratives to better represent the participant experiences. This process involves creating criteria for valid response units and counting the number of instances of these units in the data [22]. Respondents were tabulated for each question following the transcription of the interviews. Similar remarks were grouped in the table of responses, noting how frequently they appeared. Next, themes were developed using these groups of statements as the basis. This does not necessarily imply that only the most frequently cited responses were used to generate themes; there were instances where a striking, albeit uncommon, response was developed into a single theme.

## **16. Presentation, Interpretation, and Analysis of Data**

### ***16.1 Lived Experience of the Participants***

The participants' lived experiences were examined to draw out the meaning of their narratives on their coming out to oneself, coming out to one's friends, and coming out to one's parents. These were identified based on the

narratives; implications were drawn, and dispositional and situational factors were noted.

### ***16.1.1 Coming Out to Oneself***

Consistent with the Identity Status Theory [17], almost all participants went through a period of certain degree of exploration and commitment, and are aware of their homosexual feelings. Nine participants claimed to have felt different from other boys and girls as early as elementary school. Feeling different included gay participants preferring female friends over male friends and lesbian participants preferring male friends over female friends. According to one of the participants he already had a preconceived notion that when you befriend guys, it would soon be followed by vices, brawls, and fistfights.

*“...bukon abi ako it masyadong ano, approachable pag abot sa eaki kasi do ang concept it pag barkada sa eaki hay, duyon gani mga vices, tapos gainaway, gabaeywan and all that...”* (I was not welcoming when it came the idea of befriending guys because of the idea of vices, brawls and fistfights)

However, naming this experience of being different as gay or lesbian happened much later and was a part of numerous events. This act typically occurred near the conclusion of elementary school and junior high school or the beginning of senior high school. For example, Quinn identified herself as a lesbian during her junior high school when she learned the term “lesbian.” Conversely, Peyton committed to the label lesbian after researching and exploring all the possible labels that would suit her:

*“Yung first kong nalaman yung LGBTQ parang “ah okay” parang mga kasama ko lang. Tapos noong nag start ko na pinapansin na sa akin na parang “Ah, parang kasama ako sa community na to ah” So nag experiment (explore) sa lahat ng labels na bagay sa akin, Pansexual, Omnisexual, haggang sa nakadating ako sa Lesbian. Yun yung pinaka maganda (sakto) na label para sa akin.”* (When I learned that there is an LGBTQ, I was like, "ah, okay," just like my friends. Then I started to notice, "Ah, looks like I'm a part of this LGBTQ community. So, I experimented and explored all the labels that would suit me. Pansexual, Omnisexual, until I arrived at being Lesbian. That was the most suitable label for me).

Most of these lesbian and gay Aklanon youth did not identify a specific moment when they came out. Instead, they frequently asserted that they have been gay or lesbian their entire lives despite the reality that many of them did not identify themselves as gay or lesbian until the beginning of puberty. In other words, being gay or lesbian was not always accompanied by self-identification as gay or lesbian. Some participants used the term more as a formality, particularly those who affirmed, "I have already known that I am a lesbian or gay" or "Ever since I was young." Avery, another person who did not specify when he came out to himself, remarked:

*“Confident eot-ang nga gakaila ako sa eaki Ma'am. Duyon ag uwa tang na aattract sa baye, eaki gid ah.”* (I am confident that I am attracted to guys, Ma'am. I do not get attracted to girls, just guys).

Six people mentioned a specific time in their lives when they were confident of their sexual orientation. Before coming out as gay or lesbian, there was a time when they were unsure about their “true” sexual orientation. This is the stage which Erikson call an identity vs identity confusion. During this stage, it was common to question

one's sexual orientation due to feelings of attraction for both men and women and the implication of such admittance due to moral values one's parents instilled in their children. As [37] pointed out, identity can also be influenced by the ideology of the family and the willingness of the individual to resolve it; Finley, Gray & Shae, respectively, said:

*“Ag si manang abi hay uwa it manghod nga baye so ako anang gina-inilisan ag napinasuksok nana it palda, naubra nana nga buhok ko hay tuwalya which is kakon sayod ko eot-a gay kasi during that time man, gina-enjoy ko man.”* (“Since my older sister does not have a younger sister, I was the one whom she used to dressed up. She always made me wear skirts and used to make my hair like a towel, and for me, that was okay. I already already had an inkling that I am gay because I enjoy it too.”)

*“Paano ko madescribe, sanda ro kind of parents nga from the start, pag unga pa abi ako hay, feel eota nanda nga, kumbaga hay part eot-ang LGBT. Sanda nga parents, gina suporthan nanda ako, tanan nga needs hay gina provide man nanda.”* (How will I describe them... they are the kind of parents that from the start, since I was young, they already felt that I was a member of the LGBTQ. They are the kind of parents that supports me, all the things I need, they try to provide).

*“I didn't even say that I'm a lesbian but nahahalata din po siguro nila and it's fine with them naman po. Hindi naman po kami yung super religious na pamilya. Basta sabi nila mama at papa sa amin, basta wala daw kaming inaagrabyadong tao okay lang po sa kanila kung ano po yung choice namin.”* (I didn't even say that I'm lesbian, but I think they can already notice it and it's fine with them. We are not the very religious type of family. My mother and father always remind us that they are okay with whatever as long as we don't aggrieve someone).

It is also interesting to note that most gay participants experienced such a crisis. Zion shows this point by his experience: He had several crushes who are girls and at one time got a mutual understanding with a girl. He started thinking of himself as bisexual because he felt attracted to boys and girls at the same time. Eventually he considered himself gay during his senior high school because he came to an understanding. He came out of his comfort zone and explored who he was. From then on, he only had relationships with men. Riley and Morgan mostly shared similar crises. They have been taught by their parents that being homosexual is a sin. They were afraid to admit it to themselves for fear of their parents and community reproach. Then they started thinking that it is for themselves and not for others' peace of mind and that you cannot teach yourself to feel otherwise. Since then, they have been living their true self.

Aside from the role of same-sex attraction and relationships in aiding identity crisis resolution, participants felt more at ease with their sexual orientation when supportive friends surround them.

All ten participants said they felt good about accepting their sexual orientation. Many said they had accepted this as a component of their identity. According to Shae, being a lesbian was just average, like a normal person living in this world. The only difference is who they felt attracted to. Kyle said he felt empowered because he at first felt like he needed the validation of the people throwing homophobic slurs at him. When he accepted

himself, the opinion of others did not matter anymore. Zion expressed his contentment by saying that being gay is an advantage because he was able to become somewhat popular. If there is an event in their barangay that needs the stage in their covered court to be decorated or needs a host, most people ask for his help, the same could be said if there was an event in their house.

Thus, in terms of coming out to themselves, the Aklanon young lesbian and gay individuals experienced the same feelings of being different from other boys and girls at a young age. However, they differed in terms of the time frame, factors that led to the designation of their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian. Almost all of the participants went through a period of exploration and commitment as suggested by Marcia's Identity Status Theory. Figure 2 shows the themes developed concerning the category of coming out to oneself.

THEME	CHARACTERISTIC RESPONSES
Feeling different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've always like hanging out with girls more than boys (gays) and vice versa (lesbian).</li> <li>• I already have this notion that when you befriend guys there are vices. You get into brawls and fistfights.</li> <li>• I knew I was different from other girls.</li> </ul>
I have always been gay or lesbian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is because of the way I dress and act.</li> <li>• Ever since I was young.</li> <li>• I am confident that I am attracted to guys.</li> <li>• I kind of had a knowledge.</li> <li>• I did not have any doubt of who I really am.</li> </ul>
Experiencing confusion of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I initially felt attracted to both guys and girls.</li> <li>• I felt confused of who I really am.</li> <li>• I don't feel attracted to my opposite sex partner.</li> </ul>
I explore about myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, I explore all the labels that would suit me.</li> </ul>
Acceptance of chosen identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The opinion of others did not matter anymore.</li> <li>• I feel relief knowing that you don't need to hold back yourself.</li> <li>• I became more confident in what I do.</li> </ul>

**Figure 2:** Themes Developed from Coming Out to Oneself Category from Participants' Narratives.

### **16.1.2 Coming Out to One's Friends**

After recognizing, committing to a label, and accepting oneself as gay or a lesbian, coming out to one's friends is the next hurdle for them. According to authors [41], when LGBTQ+ member chooses to acknowledge their identity publicly and reveal it to their friends, they often are met with threats, attacks, harassment, and hostility. Almost all of the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth did not open up to their friends. Morgan, Zion, Avery, Gray, Peyton, Shae and Quinn, respectively said:

*"It is nothing to them. For them, it is okay. They accept me for me. In fact, they give me words of encouragement when things get too hard for me."*

*"...Uwa gid ako nag open-up Ma'am, sayod man eagi nanda nga makara ako kaya okay mat-a."* (...I did not open-up to them. They already knew that I am like this, and they are okay with it).

*"Knows eot-a namon nga agi kami."* (We already know that we are gay).

*"Uwa Ma'am kasi... Uwa, kasi mana hay nang ano bago ko sanda naging friend abi hay, kumbaga hay, sanda man eagi do nakapansin kakon baea, sa akong identity, sa akong ano baea Ma'am."* (None Ma'am. They were the ones who already knew or noticed what my identity is, what I really am).

*"Parang na hint ko dati, noong nag eexplore pa ako ng labels ko, na hint ko sa mga friends ko pero hindi talaga ako (totally) nag come out sa school. Noong nag pictorial na kami ng graduation."* (I think I gave them a hint. Back when I was still exploring the different labels, I give a hint to my friends, but I did not totally come out in school. They only found out when it was time to have our pictures for graduation).

*"Wala pong ganyan na nangyari."* (There is no such thing).

*No, there wasn't any. They treat be just the same.*

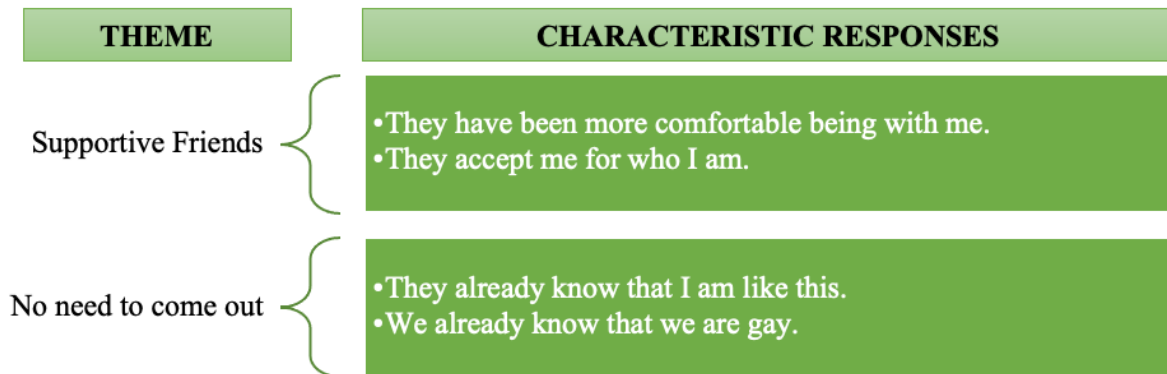
They all claimed that their friends had an idea that they were gay or lesbian due to how they talked or behaved; still, two participants revealed that they came out to their friends. Riley said that since she is not a stereotypical lesbian that dresses masculine, she had told her group of friends that she is dating a girl. Her friends reacted at first and, curiously asked why when she explained to them, her friends were just okay with it. Similarly, Kyle also shared the information to his friends that he is gay. He said that even though his friends assume that he is gay, he still shared it to affirm the idea after discovering more about himself:

*"In terms of assumption nalang guro, assumptions nila yes they assumed of a specific label, but I also had to share them na "ay ito na pala ako" or after discovering more about myself."* (In terms of assumption, then yes, they assumed of a specific label, but I also had to share to them that "This is who I am now" or after discovering more about myself).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all of them claimed that their friends still accept them and treat them

normally after learning or discovering their sexual orientation.

Thus, having a supportive group of friends further reassures one’s commitment to one’s sexual orientation. Figure 3 shows the themes developed with the category of coming out to one’s friends.



**Figure 3:** Themes Developed from Coming Out to One’s Friends Category from *Participants’ Narratives*.

### 16.1.3 Coming Out to One’s Parents

After coming out to one’s friends, the next would be coming out to one’s parents. Most participants did not directly disclose their sexual orientation to their parents. However, two participants did come out to their mothers. When asked about the process of their coming out, Kyle shared that he acts impulsively during big decisions and that he decided to inform his mother via text while walking back to his dorm after class. His mother then replied with support, and because of that, he claimed that their relationship had become better. Peyton also mentioned that she came out to her mother and that her mother responded by saying that she would still love her and support her. When asked if she considered it a difficult phase, she responded by saying:

*“Very po. Kasi mostly sa nakikita ko, especially since age of internet, marami talaga na tao na ayaw talaga sa LGBTQ, napapansin ko rin sa Pilipinas na parang meron talagang tao na against, depende rin sa kanilang reason. So parang natakot ako kasi baka ganun din si mama, baka ganun din si papa.”* (Very po. Because mostly I see, especially since the age of internet, that many people do not like LGBTQ, I noticed that in the Philippines, there are people who are against [LGBTQ community], whatever their reasons. So, I was scared that my mom was just like those people, my dad also).

Lesbian and gay youth differed in their experience of not coming out to their parents. Riley said that her parents only learned about it because they had observed that when they were always together and that she always brought the girl to their house:

*“Nasayran malang nanda is dahil sa akon nga recently nga relationship so parang na observe malang nanda nga pirme kami magkaibahan, permi ko imaw nadaea igto pero uwa gid it confrontation mana nga abi hay “kami” or ano or makara ta.”* (They only found out because recently they’ve observe that I we’re always together. I always bring her to our house but we didn’t have any confrontation like “we’re together” or

something like that).

While Gray said that his parents already had an idea since he was young, stating:

*“...sanda ro kind of parents nga from the start, pag unga pa abi ako hay, feel eota nanda nga, kumbaga hay part eot-ang it LGBT. Sanda nga parents, gina suporthan nanda ako, tanan nga needs hay gina provide man nanda.”* (... they are the kind of parents that from the start, since I was young, they already felt that I was a member of the LGBT. They are the kind of parents that supports me, all the things I need, they try to provide).

According to their narratives, many participants felt their parents accepted them for being gay or lesbian. However, none of the other participants revealed their sexual orientation to their parents, except for Kyle and Peyton, who came out. Interestingly, this was due less to a lack of opportunity and more to their perception that telling their parents they were gay was not required.

Due to their perception that their parents already knew they were lesbian or gay, eight participants had not come out to their parents about their sexual orientation. Furthermore, most of them claimed they did not discuss their sexual orientation at home. As Avery put it:

*“Uwa it official nga naghambae ako Ma’am, sadyang sa mga hueag ko eata gid nakon ag sa mga activities nga mga gina intrahan ko. Karon eat-a nanda nga agi ako. Uwa ta it aeaminan nga natabo Ma’am. Basta garinampa rampa eotang iya sa amon.”* (There is no official declaration from me, Ma’am. The way I acted, from the activities I joined, was when they found out I was gay. No confrontation happened. It is just the way I present myself in our house).

Most Aklanon lesbian and gay youth had no reason to worry about coming out to their parents because they assumed that they were already aware of their sexual orientation. Given that they did not discuss such a delicate subject at home, it was also a convenient excuse to avoid this potentially unpleasant situation. However, Morgan was the only one who said that she tried to come out to her parents but her parents did not believe her. She shared,

*“I think they are still in denial”*

She considered it a difficult phase because, for her, it involves admitting that you are what your parents do not expect you to be. Nevertheless, this desire to be acknowledged was eclipsed by a deep fear of being rejected because of her parents' homophobia according to her. Morgan thought that her parents' anti-homosexual religious beliefs played a significant role in this:

*“My family is very religious. They instilled in me that being a lesbian or homosexual is not allowed. That it is a sin being one.”*

Like many other participants, Morgan assumed her parents were aware of her sexual orientation but refused to accept it according to her. When asked whether her parents would someday accept her being a lesbian, she



answered with a “Never in my dreams.”

So far, the narratives of the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth have revealed that their nondisclosure to their parents was primarily motivated by their belief that their parents already knew they were gay or lesbian. However, it is interesting to note that, except for Kyle and Peyton, their sexual orientation was never discussed at home. Even more intriguing was how they assumed parental acceptance without visible support for their sexual orientation.

Nearly every participant reported that their parents had accepted them for being gay or lesbian. Quinn thought that although her parents have not entirely accepted her sexual orientation, they are making steady progress to accept her little by little, especially since they know there is no chance of them making her straight. Peyton felt that her parents still have reservations about her sexual orientation, but due to her being their child, she thinks that they are compelled to support her. The same can be said about Avery, who remarked that his parents only accepted him because he did not cross dresses.

Zion’s experience is particularly fascinating. Thinking that his parents had already accepted him as gay, he also believed that his mother has significantly influenced him on how he came to understand his sexual orientation. Zion recounted that when his father was away, he and his mother would often joke about him wearing her heels and clothes and would catwalk in their house. His mother would often affirm to herself that her son is gay and would be the first one to explain to other people:

*“Ginahambae nana nga “ay bakla gid-a ang unga ngara”. Ag kung parang ano Ma’am nakikita it iba “Ay unga mo dun? Ay kagwapo ta ing unga” makaron-makaron “kakinis ta it tsura, pero medyo maano gid ing unga, something ano gid-a” makaron, alam mo na yun Ma’am “Ay hoo, sobra pa mana sa daeaga ang unga ngaron, kaya makaron gid mat-a mana run ang unga ngaron, nawa makara mana da kutis karon hay maarte, maalaga” makaron makaron.”* (She always says that “Oh, my child is really gay.” Whenever I go to her, people would often say “Is that your child? He’s so handsome,” “his skin is so smooth, but I think he is something else” like that. My mother would then respond like this “Ah yes, my son acts more girlish than a teenage girl. He’s always been that way. Just look at his skin, he is very careful with his complexion.”)

Additionally, a few participants claimed they were particularly good at reading their parents’ comments to affirm their sexual orientation. For example, Finley had overheard his mother warning his father not to bully or harass him regarding his sexual orientation. He interpreted it to mean that his mother was aware of his sexual orientation and had come to terms with it.

The other participants cited their parents’ lack of hostility toward their sexual orientation as an indication of acceptance. None of the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth reported receiving physical punishment for being gay or lesbian, despite most of their parents’ varying degrees of negative opinions toward homosexuals. Instead, their parents used jokes, sarcastic remarks, or discussions about the disadvantages of being gay or lesbian to convey their unfavorable attitudes toward homosexuals. Quinn, explained that:

*“... as I said my father was not a fan of homosexuality. So, there are times when he would scold me for acting*

*like a “boy” and would tell me negative things that would happen if I happen to be one. Up until now, they are still in that process, in some cases, I would announce having relationships with another girl and they would subtly disapprove or reply with disgust on their faces, but they’ve come to term that I am a lesbian. The process is a bit slow since I have only pushed my identity towards them bit by bit to make them accept me. It may not be as healthy as it seems but they are getting used to it.”*

Some participants interpreted this as indicating that their parents solely had their best interests in mind, even though these were implicitly subtle attempts to discourage their sons and daughters from being gay or lesbian. Riley & Avery shared that:

*“...So una hay may alanganin sanda at ginahambaean ka man dun it ham-an makaron, dapat hay daya eang pero ko ulihi man hay uwa man sanda it nahimo kasi sayod man nanda nga bukon , sayod man nanda wa man ako it saea ag di man nanda mapilit nga makaron kating hay makron kat ing. So batunon eang gid nanda.”* (At first, they were kind of doubtful and they always asked me why it became so and that I should know where I should be. But, at the end, they couldn’t do anything about it because they know I did nothing wrong. They could not push you to be somebody that you’re not. So, they could only accept it).

Most of the young lesbian and gay Aklanon also stated that, while they did not receive direct support for their sexual orientation, they also did not believe their parents were attempting to change who they were. However, some participants believed their parents still wished for them to be straight. Being the eldest and a son, Zion believed that his father wanted him to be straight so that he could marry a heterosexual woman, have children, and carry on the family name.

Overall, despite their parents' typically negative sentiments toward other heterosexuals, the participants took their parents' general apathy toward their gender orientation as an indication that they were welcomed for being gay or lesbian. However, their narratives also showed that their experiences of parental acceptance were not free of cost.

The young Aklanon gays and lesbians interpreted their parents' leniency of their sexuality as acceptance. Most participants said they were talented, hard workers, or responsible kids, among other favorable traits. Many of the participants were either academically gifted or athletically gifted. Zion would frequently hear their neighbors reassure his mother that despite being gay, he is intelligent and responsible:

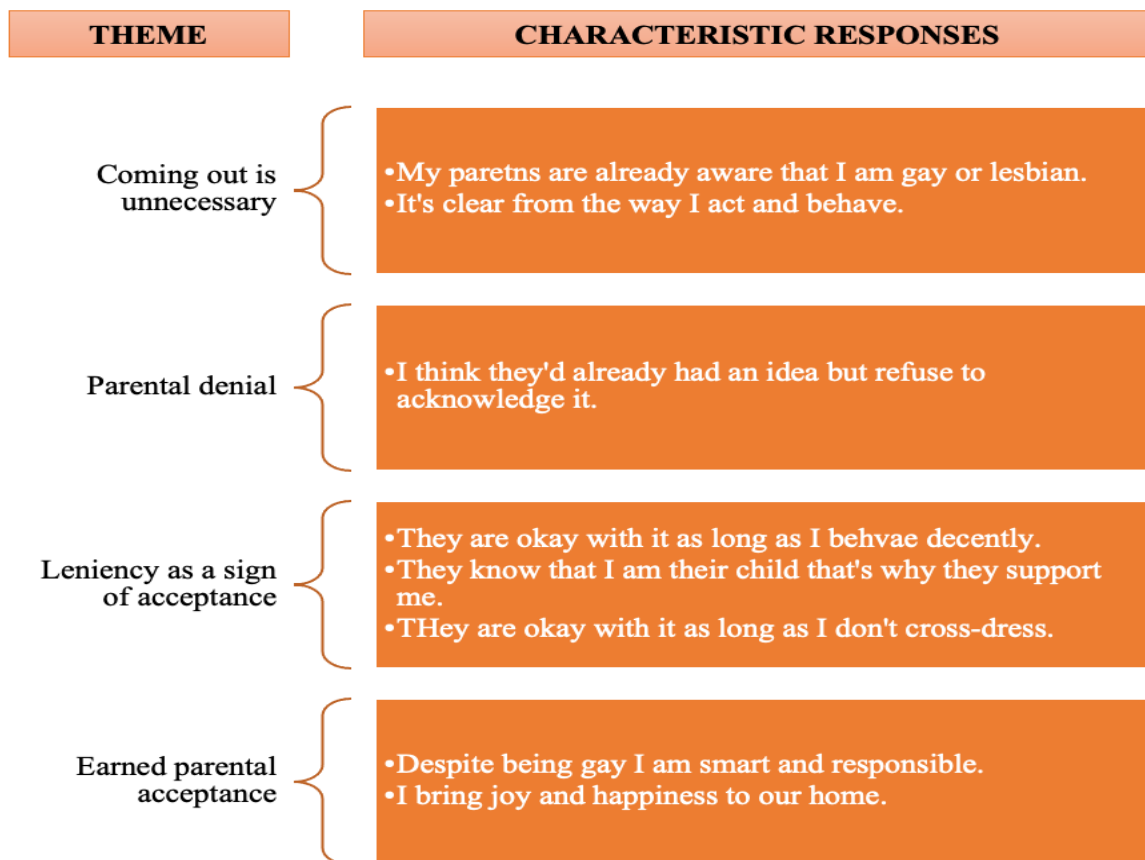
*“Kaeabanan nga ginahambae nanda hay “ay okay lang dun, maaeam man abi ing unga, okay lang nga mag makaron ag medyo matino man, uwa man ga ano sa mga eaki, bukon man mana ma ano sa mga eaki, hay okay eot-a do makaron” mga makaron andang ginahambae Ma’am.”* (Most but not all they say is that “It’s okay if your child is like that because he’s also smart, it’s okay if your child is like that because he seems decent and does not flirt with boys, it is very much okay” they say things like these).

Avery agreed with this idea, claiming that despite being gay, he is talented and brings joy and happiness into their home.

Many participants saw themselves as reliable, responsible sons and daughters; some were even viewed as the "hope" of their families, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds like Finley, Zion & Gray. For example, Finley's mother considered him a good luck charm. According to her, he might be the one who will lift them from poverty one day. He believed that this incident aided his family's acceptance of his sexual orientation:

*“Naghambae si nanay dati kay tatay before nga “Ay di ta mana pagsakita ang unga ngaron hay bisan agi ta mana run bisan ganyan hay swerte ta mana sa pamilya run ag malay mo mana sa future, imaw ta gaahon katon sa hirap,” something like that so kato paeang, never gid ang nakasamit Ma’am it ano, bardagulan or harass halin sa family.”* (As for my family, my mother already told my father, "Don't hurt him, you never know, maybe in the future, he will be the one who will lift us from poverty," something like that. From that, I never met any harassment from my family.)

Therefore, the young gays and lesbians of Aklan believed their parents' apathy about their sexual orientation was due to their talent and other desirable traits. The participants subsequently perceived this assumed toleration as being equivalent to parental acceptance. The Aklanon lesbian and gay youth are further encouraged by these unsupported assumptions to strive to be better students, sons, and daughters to feel deserving of their parents' acceptance. Figure 4 shows the themes developed with the category of coming out to one's parents.



**Figure 4:** Themes Developed from Coming Out to One's Parents Category from Participants' Narratives.

In the Philippines, where the family is seen as the fundamental unit of society and the primary socializing force for children and adolescents, the role of the family in developing lesbian and gay youth's sexual identity cannot be overstated. According to Filipino researchers, parents are crucial in their children's gender socialization [8]. Furthermore, Filipino adolescents regard their parents as appropriate sources of information on sex and sexuality. However, if the parents are not open, and children are often too afraid or shy to ask them [31]. It implies that parents' ambivalent heterosexism is why lesbian and gay children choose not to tell them about their sexual orientation. The lesbian and gay youth in Aklan who participated in this study expressed positive feelings about their sexual orientation. However, they also noted that it would be essential to come out to their parents and not just rely on their unproven assumption that they are already accepted for being gay or lesbian.

## **16.2 Positive Outlook on Chosen Identity**

The factors that influenced the participants to develop a positive gay or lesbian identity can be classified into two: dispositional and situational.

### **16.2.1 Dispositional Factors**

Participants develop a positive gay or lesbian identity despite the challenges most of them face. Most of them stated that being gay or a lesbian is not a disease and that individuals should be proud of who they are. Finley mentioned that he is proud of being gay because he believed that gays are multi-talented and optimistic in every situation. The same can be said with Zion, who indicated that being gay is advantageous because he was blessed with skills and talents. Likewise, Avery stated that individuals should be true to themselves and not hide so that other LGBTQ teens will know that they are not alone.

This is consistent with the study of [40], that identity valence is more predictive of psychological well-being than social well-being, all of the participants regarded themselves highly positive.

Participants who explored and dated both men and women said they were more comfortable dating their same-sex partners. For example, Riley believed that the reason their same-sex relationship lasted long was that they treated each other as more than lovers. On the other hand, Shae deemed that being a lesbian equates to indistinguishable roles of partners in a relationship:

*“The best thing about being a lesbian is that the relationship hay equal kamo. Owa it like, kasi eaki imaw hay dapat daya anang ubrahon, bayi imaw kaya makara man dapat ana. Less drama kasi pareho kamong bayi so gets ninyo ro isa't isa.”* (The best thing about being a lesbian is that the relationship is more equal. There is no sense of gender roles like when you are in a heterosexual relationship. There is no notion that if you are a man you should do this, or if you are a woman you should do this, and you have less drama because you're both girls to you understand each other more).

Thus, in terms of dispositional factors, Aklanon lesbian and gay youth regarded themselves with high self-worth which contribute to the development of a positive gay or lesbian identity.

### 16.2.2 Situational Factors

It cannot be denied that situational factors can also influence the development of a positive gay or lesbian identity. Most of the participants reported that they felt good and happy knowing that their family had accepted them for who they are. Finley shared that:

*“Masadya. Happy Ma’am kasi diba sa mga makaraya nga sitwasyon hay bihira ka malang maka-agi it supportive nga parents ag family.”* (I felt happy Ma’am because you can only encounter seldom situation like I have that the parents and family are supportive).

This is similar to the study of [9] that one of the positive factors associated with the well-being of an LGBTQ youth is the acceptance and support of family members, whether it is conditional or not. Gray indicated that his parents supported him since he was young:

*“...since tag unga pa ako hay nang, nakita eon nanda kakon, ag sanda man do ano, parang supportive sanda since unga pa ako kasi, tag unga pa ako kato hay nasuksukan nanda ako it pang baye”* Since I was young, they already saw something, and they were the one who were very supportive of it. Since I was a child, they already dress me up with girl clothes.

Aside from parental acceptance and support, all of the participants conveyed that friends were an essential source of social support for them, who claimed they went to them for advice or just someone to talk to. For example, Morgan remarked that even though her parents chose to ignore her coming out to them, the acceptance of her friends is enough for her to live comfortably with her chosen identity.

*“...for them, it is okay. They accept me for me. In fact, they give me words of encouragement when things get too hard for me. Their acceptance and support are enough for me to keep living my true self even if my parents do not support it.”*

Furthermore, most participants also shared that they felt safer and more confident to come out knowing that there is a community who accepts and protects them. One participant explained that he felt secure because of the existence of the LGBTQ+ community. Another participant said that she is glad that there are people whom she can sympathize with and asks for advice. Kyle commented that he is thankful that there are pioneers that created the community which help them embrace who they are:

*“...may ina gid ah nga may mga pioneers nga gin buo daya nga community which kung siin kami na-belong ag sa duyong way na-eembrace namon among sarili ag nagiging open kami sa society, mas na eexpress namon ro among kaugalingon kasi sayod namon nga may kaparehas kami nga ibang tawo nga iba iba man among gin umpisahan ag ginpag agyan before but then ga-end up kami sa conclusion nga we are part of LGBTQIA+++++ nga community nga mga talented, mga open-minded ag loving, caring and all that.”*(... Some pioneers made the community to which we belong. In that way, we embraced ourselves and became open to society. We can express ourselves because we know that other people are like us even though we came from different backgrounds before, but then we conclude that we are part of the LGBTQ+ community. We are

talented, open-minded, loving, caring, and all that).

Kyle further reiterated this idea by saying:

*“I remember this line daya sa pelikula nga “You have to be seen. The world out there needs to see you.” So I think nga the fact that there is a community out there makes other people who are hiding in their closet be happier and more confident that one day they will be able to come out also. So I think that’s the importance of having a representation, a visual, something that nakikita mo nga pushes you or inspire you.”* (It is good in the sense that people are more aware. I remember this line from a movie, “You have to be seen. The world out there needs to see you.” So, I think that an LGBTQ+ community out there makes other people hiding in their closets happier and more confident that one day they will also be able to come out. So, I think that is the importance of having a representation. A visual or something that you see that pushes you or inspires you.)

Thus, situational factors that contribute to the positive development of gay or lesbian identity among Aklanon youth are parental acceptance and support, whether it is conditional or not, peer support, and support from the LGBTQ+ community.

### **16.3 Educational Implication**

#### **16.3.1 Safe and Inclusive Classroom**

As stated by [57], many LGBTQ students experience bullying, harassment, and exclusion in school settings on a global scale. It is frequently motivated by stigma and prejudice based on ingrained societal ideals of gender roles, masculinity, and femininity. Students who identify as LGBTQ experience bullying that includes name-calling, public mockery, rumors, intimidation, shoving and beating, stealing from or damaging property, writing derogatory notes and graffiti, social exclusion, cyberbullying, physical and sexual assault, and even death threats. This statement corresponds to the responses of the majority of participants when asked where they experienced the most bullying. Shae stated:

*“...Mostly sa school... hindi naman kasi mawawala yung mga kutya sa school eh, lalo na sa mga bata. Pagnakikita nila ako, kasi medyo boyish ako gumalaw sinasabi nila palagi na “tomboy, tomboy,” ayun.”* (Mostly in school and in my family because my older brother is homophobic. Teasing and throwing insults in school will not go away, especially from children. Whenever they see me, because the way I move and talk can be considered boyish they would say “tomboy! tomboy!”)

Although some disregard bullying as a normal occurrence among children it is very alarming to know at a very young age that children already have a preconceived notion that being gay or lesbian is terrible and should be looked down on. Four participants shared the same experience that they had been bullied in elementary school by kids calling them names and publicly mocking them. Zion shared his experience:

*“Ano man Ma’am like mga pupils, kasi sa KISEC abi Ma’am hay may integrated, may high school ag may elementary ag may special ano, special children. Hay parang duyon Ma’am, dikaron ako nakaka experience it*

*mga gina kutya it mga unga, mga unga ga kutya kimo. Mga makaron malang Ma'am like dadaan ka lang may bibilhin, mga makaruyon basta duyon ing mabatian...*" (Like the pupils, because in KISEC [Kalibo Integrated Special Education Center] is integrated so there is a high school, elementary and special children. So, there Ma'am, I experienced a lot of ridicule from kids. Kids mocking you. Like, you're only passing-by to buy something then you'll hear nasty things about you...)

In order to not get hurt emotionally, two participants stated that they would mock the bullies in return or physically harm them. Avery shared that he got into a fight in Grade 7 because he was mocked by his boy classmate. He shared:

*"...Yata pag grade 7 yata to maam, may naka ano nga eaki. May naka spating-spating ako it walis tingting."* (Well, I think there was when I was in Grade 7. I got into a sort of broom fencing with a guy).

These discriminations in school can result in LGBTQ+ youths skipping classes, getting into fights, or dropping out entirely.

Furthermore, the assumption that heterosexuality is the preferred or natural form of human sexuality, as noted by scholars, can manifest itself in educational settings in one of two ways: (1) denigration, including overt discrimination, anti-gay remarks, and other forms of explicit homophobia against lesbian and gay students and teachers, or (2) denial, the presumption that lesbian and gay sexualities and identities simply do not exist and that heterosexual concerns are the only valid [44], harms the rights and well-being of LGBTQ students.

The Department of Education (DepEd) issued DO 32, S. 2017, to address this. According to its Gender and Development mandate, the Gender-Responsive Basic School Policy intends to ensure that men and women have equal access to education and other learning opportunities by removing gender-based barriers such as gender-based discrimination and violence. Although this policy appears robust on paper, it has not been adequately implemented.

Many LGBTQ+ adolescents still encounter bullying and harassment at school because there is insufficient implementation and oversight. Due to discriminatory policies that stigmatize and disadvantage LGBT students, as well as a lack of knowledge and resources about LGBT issues in schools, the adverse treatment they receive from peers and teachers is exacerbated [44].

Therefore, safe, welcoming, and inclusive classrooms provide students with a comfortable environment in which they can be themselves while also learning to value others.

It is critical to encounter diversity and inclusivity inside the classroom because, during these years, children learn the most about themselves and the world around them.

In addition to promoting the wellness of those who identify as such, anchoring a culture of supportive messaging on LGBTQ+ identities and issues will help encourage empathy, tolerance, and respect among the general student body.

## **17. Summary**

This study aimed to explore the life of a lesbian and gay Aklanon youth and what motivates them to identify as lesbian or gay through the following four questions: What are the characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, sexual orientation, and area classification where they currently live; What are the lived experiences of the lesbian and gay Aklanon youth in terms of coming out to oneself, coming out to one's friends and coming out to one's parents; What factors influenced them to develop a positive gay or lesbian identity in terms of dispositional and situational factors, and what are the educational implications of the results of the study. Identity Status Theory by James Marcia and Social Cognitive Model of Identity by Berzonsky was utilized in this study. The result of this study shall be one of the bases for forming some Gender and Development programs that would help LGBTQ+ youths to feel welcome and safe in school. The qualitative approach was utilized to meet the research objectives. The phenomenological research design was used as it aids us in our understanding of the significance of the lived experience. The data collection method was through a modified version of the Life Story Interview questionnaire by Docena [36]. Following Covid-19 Health Protocols, online interviews were conducted and recorded using video conferencing services, such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams & Zoom, at the participants' most convenient time. Data were gathered from five youth who identified as gays and five as lesbians around the Province of Aklan. Purposive sampling method and snowball technique was used to identify participants. Consent letters were adequately drafted and distributed to participants to ensure that this study was conducted ethically. The respondents were well-informed about the study's processes and procedures, and their responses and identities were kept strictly confidential and for research purposes only. The participants' responses during the interview were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded to form themes. The data displayed concerning the questions on the participant profile were classified in terms of age, sexual orientation, and area classification. The coming out process was categorized in terms of coming to one's self, coming out to one's peers, and one's parents. The responses were categorized across narratives using frequency coding to reflect participant experiences better. Following the transcription of the interviews, participants were tabulated for each question. Similar comments were grouped in the table of responses, with the frequency of appearance noted. Then, themes were created using these groups of statements as the base. It is not to say that only the most frequently cited responses were used to generate themes; there were instances where a striking, albeit unusual, the response was developed into a single theme. The factors that influenced the development of a positive outlook on chosen identity by the participants can be classified into dispositional and situational factors. Educational implications were formulated based on the narratives of the participants.

## **18. Findings**

Based on the results, the following findings were arrived at:

Half (50%) of the participants were at the intermediary level, aged between 20-21 years old, with the least (10%) aged between 22-24 years old. The participants were equally distributed with 50% identified as lesbian and 50% identified as gay. Furthermore, the selection of the participants was evenly spread out with half (50%) of them live in an Urban Barangay area and half (50%) of them live in a Rural Barangay area.



All of the lesbian and gay youth in Aklan initially felt distinct from their peers of the same gender at a young age, however their developmental paths differed. Others had to consider interactions between members of the opposite sex before accepting their gay or lesbian identity. For some, recognition and acceptance occurred nearly instantaneously. Some participants knew they were gay or lesbian even before labeling themselves. In contrast, others had to identify as bisexual or straight before finally calling themselves gay or lesbian. Furthermore, most of the participants in this study did not express an active concern about the development of their sexual orientation, instead claiming that they had always known they were gay or lesbian, supporting the views of [17]. According to the Aklanon lesbian and gay youths' narratives, one of the things the participants value is their friends' opinions. Most Aklanon lesbian and gay youth regard their straight friends as allies or people who advocate for the equal and fair treatment of people who are different from themselves. For Aklanon lesbian and gay youths, deciding whether to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents entailed resolving several complex issues after recognizing, labeling, and accepting oneself as gay or lesbian. More significantly, this required putting their sexual orientation in the context of a family, as represented by their parents, that was significant to lesbian and gay youth yet maintained beliefs that were essentially in opposition to their sexual orientation. This also entailed balancing the desire to uphold their positive sexual identity, which in part required being out to close friends and partners, with the need to safeguard their family from any potential "disruption" that would arise from their coming out. Thus, the necessity for the Aklanon lesbian and gay youths to manage their sexual orientation appeared to be a result of two factors: the heterosexism of their parents and the family's culture of silence about sex and sexuality. Self-reflection and connection with other lesbian and gay, and occasionally straight, friends were the main ways that the majority of Aklanon lesbian and gay youth came to terms with their sexual orientation. "Don't ask, don't tell" seemed to be the unspoken rule in the household when it came to handling a gay or lesbian family member. The Aklanon lesbian and gay youth may have been compelled by this culture of silence to suppress their sexual orientation from their parents and settle for the notion they already knew. Conversely, the participants felt more at ease because they believed they were no longer required to come out to their parents. This encourages the youths to believe their parents have already embraced their gender orientation. However, some of them still felt the need to come out to their parents, proving that this culture of secrecy did not inevitably lead to feelings of security. Two factors are implied by these compensatory processes. First, the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth continue to believe that society—not just the family, but society at large—undervalues their sexual identity. Second, the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth are not genuinely safe in their assumption that their parents have already accepted them for being gay or lesbian; rather, they feel that they must flourish in some other area of their lives in order to make up for their "deficient." To support their belief that their parents would accept them, they must consequently be viewed as excellent sons and daughters.

The factors that influenced the development of positive gay or lesbian identity is categorized into two: dispositional and situational. Participants indicated that they value themselves highly positive by believing that gays are multitalented and being one is an advantage, and having a same-sex partner leads to a more harmonious relationship. In addition, participants also implied that their parents' acceptance and support, whether it is conditional or not, peer support, and the support from the LGBTQ+ community greatly influenced the development of their positive gay and lesbian identity.

The result of this study has two educational implications: the need of a safe and inclusive classroom, and a need of an LGBTQ [14]. Although the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DO 32, S. 2017 to remove gender-based discrimination and violence, many LGBTQ+ still experienced bullying and harassment at school due to the lack of implementation and oversight. Furthermore, because of the lack of knowledge and resources about LGBT issues in schools, the discriminatory policies that stigmatize and disadvantage LGBT students, and the unsupportive or untrained teachers lead to hostile learning environment.

## **19. Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were arrived at:

1. By the age between 20-21 years old an Aklanon lesbian or gay youth have already explored and committed to an identity. Moreover, there is no correlation between the number of gay and lesbian residents and the area which they live.
2. The coming out process of the Aklanon lesbian and gay youth is grouped into three categories. The first category that most Aklanon lesbian and gay youth lived experience is the coming out to oneself and learning to accept their chosen identity. Individuals may initially experience confusion or feel different from their same-sex peers. At the same time, some may have already known their sexual orientation and did not experience confusion or feeling different. If an Aklanon gay or lesbian youth experiences confusion or feeling different, they would then resolve it by exploring all the different labels before committing to a chosen identity. In contrast, if an individual has already known their sexual orientation without experiencing confusion or feeling different, then that individual has already committed to a chosen identity. After coming out to oneself, the second category than an Aklanon gay or lesbian youth experience is the coming out to one's friends. Disclosure to their friends about their gender orientation. Rejection may result in a friendship being over. However, a supportive reaction from friends might result in increased self-worth and self-acceptance. The third and last category in the coming out process of Aklanon lesbian and gay youth is the coming out to one's parents. The disclosure of one's gender orientation to the said youth's parents. Silence from their parents, leniency, and the compensatory belief that they should strive to be better sons and daughters are signs of parental acceptance. Contrariwise, parents ignoring their children's coming out process and treating it as nonsense signify parental denial.
3. High self-worth, acceptance and support of parents, whether conditional or not, support from friends and from the LGBTQ+ community contributed to the development of positive gay and lesbian identity among the lesbian and gay Aklanon youth.
4. To foster a supportive environment and implement social and emotional supports that promote positive developmental outcomes, schools should work to build a safe and inclusive classroom and an LGBTQ [14].

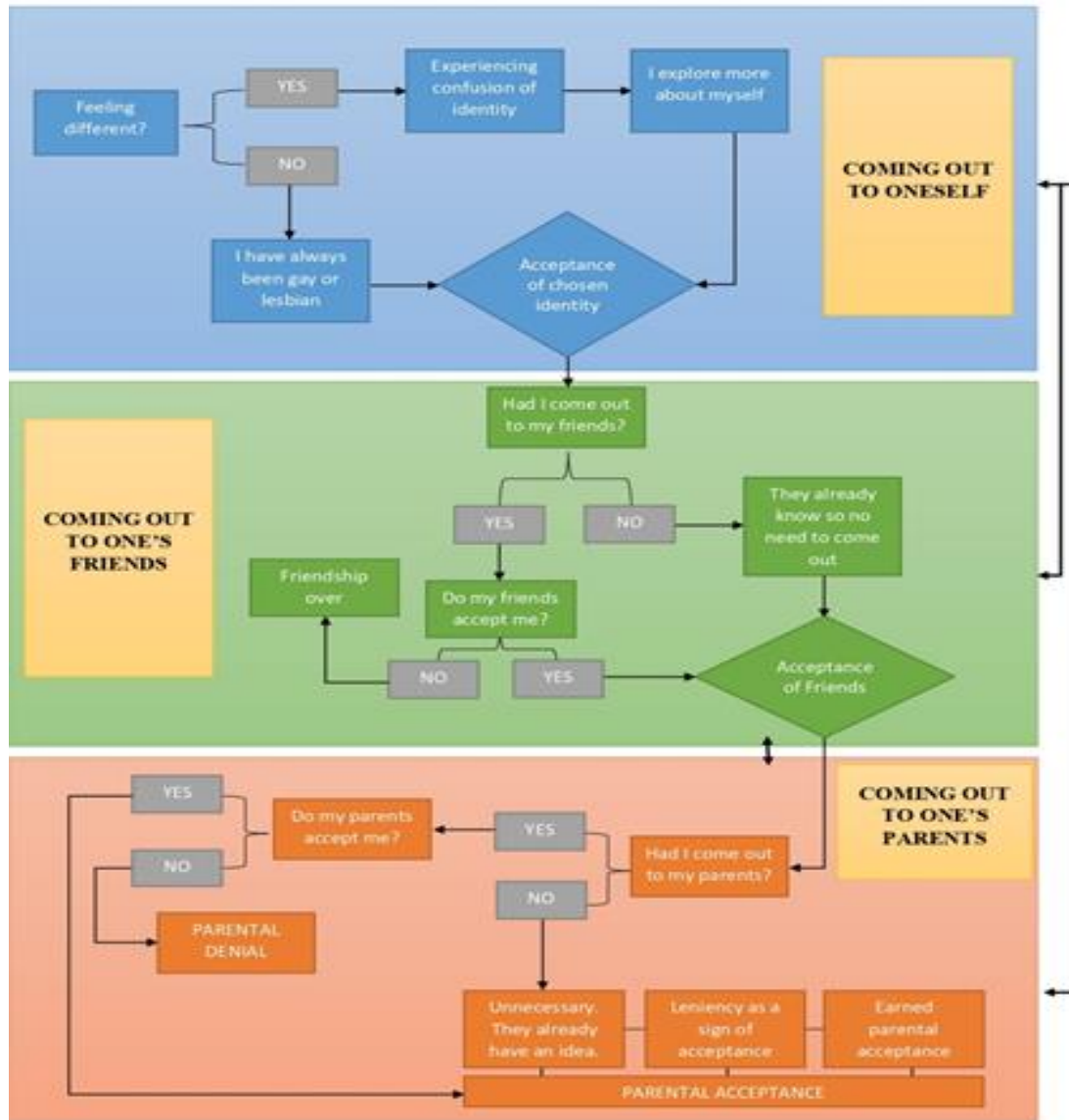


Figure 5: Flow Diagram of the Coming out Process of Aklanon Lesbian and Gay Youth.

## 20. Recommendations

The following were the recommendations of the researcher based from the results of the study:

1. The study's findings are limited in their generalizability due to the sample's purposive design, even though it provides important insights into the development of lesbian and gay youth sexual orientations. Due to the wide variety of behaviors across the "lesbian and gay spectrum," the narratives in this study may not accurately represent the lives and experiences of all men and women who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. The participants were also individuals who are considered 'youth' who may not have had similar experiences as other lesbian and gay from other age group in Aklan. As a result, future researchers should consider whether other Aklanon lesbians and gays from other age group, such as those are considered 'adolescent' and 'young people' go through the same sexual identity development process.

2. Parents should try to convey to their lesbian and gay children by talking to them and reassuring them that they are valued members of the family, regardless of their sexual orientation. Parents can also support their gay and lesbian children by asking them about their experience and how they can help them feel supported, by learning together about issues LGBTQ youth face by joining an LGBTQ family support organization, standing up for their gay and lesbian children when they are mistreated and not minimizing the social pressure or bullying that they may be facing. Parents should also make it clear that slurs or jokes based on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation are not tolerated and should express their disapproval of these types of jokes or slurs when they encounter them in the community or media, support their gay and lesbian children's self-expression by engaging in conversations with them around their choices of clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, friends, and room decorations. Finally, parents should also reach out for education, resources, and support if they feel the need to deepen their own understanding of LGBTQ youth experiences.
3. Lesbian and gay youth from Aklan should surround themselves with supportive and accepting people. School counselors can organize gender sensitivity trainings and seminars that promote safe and inclusive school for all students, including LGBTQ+ students, and LGBTQ+ ally training that aims provide factual information and dispel myths about LGBTQ+ individuals and train safe and knowledgeable people to act as allies who are willing to provide support and information for LGBTQ+ students. Friends should strive to be an ally by: First, educating themselves. Make an effort to learn more about the rich history and diversity of the LGBTQ community. One should devote time and effort in learning about the issues that their LGBTQ+ friends care about. Second, do not make stereotypical assumptions. Avoiding stereotypes is a crucial component in assisting the LGBTQ+ individuals. The mere fact that someone comes out does not mean they will immediately start acting like a stereotypical character from a hit movie or television show. Contrary to what is frequently shown in fiction, LGBTQ+ individuals come from a variety of backgrounds and can be of any race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or financial status. Additionally, they display femininity and masculinity in ways that aren't always connected to their sexual orientation or gender identity. They also dress differently, speak differently, and display both gender identities in diverse ways. Third, do not out LGBTQ+ friends or acquaintances to anyone. Coming out is a highly personal experience that can sometimes result in conflict. This is why it is critical to respect LGBTQ+ individuals and allow them to come out whenever they want. Outing someone is both disrespectful and potentially dangerous. This is due to the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. Fourth, be inclusive and open-minded. It can be lonely in a world that isn't as accepting of LGBTQ+ people as it ought to be. Include LGBTQ+ friends in planning events and generally hang out with them like one would with any other friend. Do not give them the impression that they are someone that people wish to keep "hidden" from friends or family. Fifth, defend LGBTQ+ friends. Unfortunately, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is common. It is crucial to defend LGBTQ+ friends and make an effort to educate the offender. More importantly, LGBTQ+ friends need to know that they are loved and respected. Sixth, listen. Sometimes all one can do to show support is simply listen. It's a lot more useful than one would imagine to listen to someone rage or talk about their issues and feelings. Avoid comparing traumas or making an attempt to disprove their experiences. Be as encouraging possible. Additionally, keep in

mind that it is crucial to respect others' privacy and keep whatever that was disclosed in confidence to oneself. Seventh, wear or display LGBTQ-friendly buttons, stickers or posters.

4. School administrators, principals and teachers should seek to provide a safe and inclusive classroom in order to foster a supportive environment and employ social and emotional supports that facilitate favorable developmental outcomes. Teachers can provide a safe and inclusive classroom by identifying their classroom as a "safe zone" with stickers or signs on their classroom door, teachers can promote a more accepting environment for LGBTQ+ students. This communicates to students that their teachers are accepting of LGBTQ people and are prepared to confront anti-LGBTQ language or harassment.

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