

Experiences of Homosexual Students towards Community Acceptance

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8120217>

Received: 05 December 2024; Revised: 12 December 2024; Accepted: 17 December 2024; Published: 13 January 2025

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experiences of homosexual students regarding community acceptance, a vital factor in their social integration and well-being. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the study explores how these students navigate discrimination and societal obstacles while providing insights to their communities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with twelve participants from a private institution in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental Philippines, identified through purposive sampling. The analysis revealed five major themes: Coping Mechanisms for Discrimination and Challenges, Acceptance and Support Networks, Sense of Belonging and Social Inclusion, Identity Exploration and Self-Acceptance, and Advice for Community Acceptance and Advocacy. These themes underscore the importance of strong support networks, open-mindedness, and education in fostering inclusivity. The findings emphasize that societal acceptance must extend beyond mere tolerance to encompass respect and understanding. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of identity complexities and highlights the essential role of community support for homosexual students. By amplifying their voices, the study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders to create environments that promote acceptance and equality.

Keywords: Community Acceptance, Coping Mechanisms, Homosexual Students, Identity Exploration, Inclusion, Lived Experiences, Support Networks

INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is a vital aspect of the LGBTQ+ community, represented by both lesbian and gay identities. The "L" stands for lesbian, referring to homosexual women, while the "G" denotes gay, typically for homosexual men (Ginsburg, 2023). The LGBTQ+ community also includes bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other non-heterosexual identities. Recognizing homosexuality as a natural part of human diversity is essential for fostering dignity and respect (Moreno-Tucker, 2022). In the Philippines, understanding homosexual identity and experiences is increasingly important (Adeyemo, 2020). Homosexual students often navigate unique challenges at the intersection of their identities and community dynamics, influencing their self-perception and well-being. While societal attitudes have evolved, significant barriers remain, particularly related to faith and acceptance (Braquet, 2019; Reynolds, 2023). This study focuses on the experiences of homosexual students in Ozamiz City, examining how they cope with challenges related to community acceptance, social interactions, and emotional well-being. By amplifying their voices and advocating for their needs, this research aims to inform policies that promote inclusivity within higher education institutions and foster broader societal change (McNair et al., 2022). The significance of this qualitative study lies in its potential to illuminate the complexities of identity expression and community building among homosexual students. Understanding their experiences can enhance prevention strategies against bullying and discrimination (Gauthier et al., 2021) while informing policies that protect LGBTQ+ individuals. Ultimately, this research seeks to validate the experiences of homosexual students and promote a culture of acceptance and belonging.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of homosexual students regarding community acceptance, emphasizing their academic, social, and personal development. Guided by Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology, the researcher aimed to gain an unbiased understanding of these experiences, (Husserl, 1994). Twelve homosexual college students from Misamis University in Ozamiz City, Philippines, were recruited through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews featuring open-ended questions were conducted, recorded digitally, and transcribed for analysis. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process, ensuring that participant consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were maintained. Data analysis involved bracketing, horizontalization, and clustering to synthesize a narrative of the participants' shared experiences. The study aimed to illuminate the complexities of their lived experiences and the impact of community acceptance on their personal growth and well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Participants

Twelve homosexual students participated in face-to-face interviews for the study, aged 19 to 24. The participants included three criminology students, three business and accountancy majors, two education students, one medical technology student, one nursing student, one dentistry student, and one social work student. Among them, eight identified as gay and four as lesbian.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Code Name	Age	Gender	Course
P1	19 years old	Gay	BS Med Tech
P2	21 years old	Gay	BS Social Work
P3	19 years old	Gay	BS Nursing
P4	21 years old	Gay	BSBA FM
P5	24 years old	Gay	BS Dentistry
P6	23 years old	Lesbian	BS Criminology
P7	19 years old	Lesbian	BSBA FM
P8	19 years old	Lesbian	BS Criminology
P9	20 years old	Gay	BS Criminology
P10	20 years old	Lesbian	BSBA FM
P11	22 years old	Gay	BS Education
P12	21 years old	Gay	BS Education

Acceptance and Support Networks

Support networks provide practical, social, and emotional assistance, while acceptance involves recognizing and respecting an individual's identity. These concepts are vital for gay students seeking community acceptance, as supportive environments can reduce stigma and foster a sense of belonging. Participants shared

diverse experiences with acceptance and support networks, revealing common themes. Many expressed gratitude for strong family support, which boosted their confidence (Participants 1, 5, and 8). Others noted that support networks helped them express themselves (Participants 4 and 9). While some faced societal discrimination (Participants 2, 3, and 6), they focused on staying true to themselves. Participants 7 and 10 are still exploring their identities and have not fully opened up to their families. Participant 11 highlighted how traditional views impacted their relationships, underscoring the need for understanding and resilience. Despite challenges, most participants found strength in supportive friends or family members. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview:

“From the start, I knew who I was, and my family did too. They have always supported and accepted me, which made me feel loved and strong. I never felt hate because I stayed true to myself and didn’t let others’ opinions bring me down. Instead of focusing on negative people, I chose to be myself and surround myself with those who care about me.” (P1)

“My family is okay with me and has no problem accepting who I am, which means a lot to me. However, I don’t like it when people use the word “gay” as an insult. It’s hurtful and disrespectful, and I believe everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and respect, no matter who they are.” (P2)

“Overall, things are fine, but I know that discrimination from society is something that can’t always be avoided. Even though it happens, I try not to let it affect me. I choose to show that it doesn’t bother me and focus on staying true to myself. By staying confident and positive, I rise above any negativity and continue to live my life with peace and authenticity.” (P3)

“It lets me be myself and gives me confidence because I don’t feel the need to hide or pretend to be someone I’m not. When I can just be myself, I feel more at ease and more comfortable in my own skin. This confidence helps me face challenges with a positive attitude, knowing that I don’t need to change for anyone.” (P4)

“It hasn’t been very difficult for me because I’m open about being gay, and my family accepts me for who I am. They’ve always been supportive, even though there are some limits on certain things. I feel fortunate to have their acceptance, and it’s helped me navigate any challenges with confidence. Despite some boundaries, I know I am loved and understood, and that gives me strength to be open about myself.” (P5)

“My parents are supportive and accepting. They’ve always been there for me, and their support gives me the confidence to be myself. Knowing that they accept me for who I am makes a huge difference in my life. Their love and encouragement allow me to face challenges without fear of rejection, and I feel blessed to have them by my side.” (P8)

“It helps me express myself, gain confidence, and socialize. Being able to be myself allows me to connect with others more freely. It boosts my confidence when I feel accepted for who I truly am. This self-expression opens up opportunities for me to interact with people in a way that feels natural, and it helps me build better, more genuine relationships with others.” (9)

The experiences of homosexual individuals navigating acceptance and support networks involve complex interactions between identity and social dynamics (Agueli et al., 2022). Teresa de Lauretis' Queer Theory (1990) challenges societal norms and emphasizes the fluidity of identity, advocating for environments that validate rather than restrict self-expression (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022; Castro and Collins, 2021). Support networks, especially from family and friends, are crucial for helping individuals resist societal pressures (Pascual-Bordas, 2024). Research highlights the significance of acceptance and support networks for the well-being of homosexual individuals. Social structures, particularly family and peer relationships, greatly influence identity navigation (Agueli et al., 2022). Supportive environments enable free expression and resilience against heteronormative pressures (Pascual-Bordas, 2024). Intersectional factors like culture can complicate these challenges, with systemic discrimination exacerbating personal struggles (Fynn, 2022; Kaur, 2024). Acceptance within families can buffer societal stigma, reinforcing the need for inclusive spaces (Zhang and Qin, 2023). The findings underscore the importance of fostering acceptance and building strong support networks to enhance the well-being of homosexual individuals. Families, schools, and communities must

create safe spaces that validate diverse identities and provide emotional support. Addressing intersectional challenges requires a holistic approach that considers cultural and social factors. Promoting acceptance at all societal levels can lead to a more equitable environment for all.

Sense of Belonging and Social Inclusion

A sense of belonging is the feeling of being accepted and valued within a group, while social inclusion ensures equal opportunities for all, regardless of differences. For homosexual students, strong belonging and inclusion foster respect and support, aiding their acceptance within communities. Participants reported experiencing belonging and inclusion when accepted without judgment. Many emphasized the importance of supportive relationships with family and friends (Participants 1, 8, 9) and mentioned friend groups and school organizations as key spaces for acceptance (Participants 3, 12). Equal treatment and freedom from prejudice contributed to feelings of inclusion, with some feeling "normal" regardless of their identity (Participants 2, 5, 7). However, a few noted that societal prejudice still impacts their experiences, particularly in school settings (Participants 4 and 11). Overall, shared themes highlight the significance of acceptance, equal treatment, and supportive communities in fostering belonging and social inclusion. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview:

"I feel accepted and welcomed in most social situations, and I haven't come across anyone who has been homophobic. The people I interact with are open-minded and respectful, which helps me feel at ease. It's reassuring to be in an environment where I can just be myself without fear of judgment or discrimination. I'm thankful for the supportive and kind people around me, and it gives me confidence to continue being authentic in all areas of my life." (P2)

"I feel a strong sense of belonging when I meet people who are like me, join friend groups, and participate in school organizations. Being around others who understand and share similar experiences makes me feel connected and supported. It's a great feeling to be part of a community where I can be myself, make meaningful friendships, and contribute to something bigger. These experiences help me feel valued and give me a sense of purpose, making me more confident and comfortable in who I am." (P3)

"I feel normal and like I belong in most places. Whether I'm with friends, at school, or in social situations, I don't feel out of place. I'm accepted for who I am, and that sense of belonging gives me the confidence to be myself. It's reassuring to feel comfortable wherever I go, knowing that I'm not being judged for my identity." (P5)

"I feel welcome and free from judgment. In the places where I spend time, I feel accepted and comfortable. There's no pressure to be anything other than who I am, and that freedom to just be myself without fear of judgment is a relief. I can relax and enjoy my time with others, knowing that I'm welcome just as I am." (P6)

"People treat me the same, even after learning I'm a lesbian. I'm happy to say that after others learned about my sexuality, they continued to treat me with the same kindness and respect. Nothing changed in how they viewed me, and that support has made me feel more comfortable and accepted for who I am. It's reassuring to know that my true self doesn't affect how people treat me." (7)

"I feel comfortable around friends who are like me and can show my true self without shame. Being with friends who share similar experiences makes me feel understood and accepted. I don't have to hide who I am or feel ashamed when I'm with them. Their support lets me express myself freely, and I feel at ease in their company." (8)

"I feel accepted when people accept me as I am without feeling anything strange. When others treat me without judgment and see me for who I am, it makes me feel comfortable and valued. I don't want to be seen as different or weird, so when people accept me without hesitation, it makes me feel like I truly belong." (9)

"I feel included and open with others. Being around people who accept me for who I am makes me feel welcomed and comfortable. I can express myself openly without worrying about judgment. This sense of

inclusion helps me feel connected and supported, allowing me to engage with others in a genuine way.” (10)

“I feel a sense of belonging when I am accepted in all-girl friend groups. Being part of a group of girls who accept and understand me gives me a feeling of belonging. It’s nice to be with people who share similar experiences and treat me like an equal. In these groups, I don’t feel judged or out of place, and that sense of inclusion is really important to me.” (12)

Responses highlight the importance of acceptance and belonging, particularly in social environments like family, friends, and school. According to Queer Theory (Teresa de Lauretis, 1990), identity is fluid and shaped by personal experiences and societal norms (Allen, 2023). Participants found belonging in accepting spaces where they could express themselves freely, aligning with Queer Theory's rejection of rigid categorizations. This freedom allows individuals to challenge heteronormative standards and emphasizes the need for inclusive communities (Vo, 2021). Related studies affirm that acceptance and belonging are crucial for the well-being of homosexual individuals. Allen (2023) underscores the role of supportive environments in fostering self-expression, while Saravi et al. (2020) highlight how freedom from judgment enhances inclusion. Additionally, Cerezo et al. (2020) and Ruberg and Ruelos (2020) note that overlapping identities can intensify discrimination challenges. Khan and Sultan (2023) emphasize that support from family and friends can buffer against societal prejudice, aligning with Ecological Systems Theory, which stresses the importance of smaller networks in navigating social exclusion. Creating supportive and inclusive environments is essential for overcoming societal discrimination. Families, schools, and communities must prioritize acceptance and provide safe spaces for individuals to express their identities without fear of judgment. Addressing intersecting factors such as gender, culture, and socioeconomic background is crucial for understanding diverse experiences of discrimination. These insights call for a societal shift towards inclusivity and equal treatment, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to belong and thrive.

Coping Mechanisms for Discrimination and Daily Challenges

Responses highlight the importance of acceptance and belonging, particularly in social environments like family, friends, and school. According to Queer Theory (Teresa de Lauretis, 1990), identity is fluid and shaped by personal experiences and societal norms (Allen, 2023). Participants found belonging in accepting spaces where they could express themselves freely, aligning with Queer Theory's rejection of rigid categorizations. This freedom allows individuals to challenge heteronormative standards and emphasizes the need for inclusive communities (Vo, 2021). Related studies affirm that acceptance and belonging are crucial for the well-being of homosexual individuals. Allen (2023) underscores the role of supportive environments in fostering self-expression, while Saravi et al. (2020) highlight how freedom from judgment enhances inclusion. Additionally, Cerezo et al. (2020) and Ruberg and Ruelos (2020) note that overlapping identities can intensify discrimination challenges. Khan and Sultan (2023) emphasize that support from family and friends can buffer against societal prejudice, aligning with Ecological Systems Theory, which stresses the importance of smaller networks in navigating social exclusion. Creating supportive and inclusive environments is essential for overcoming societal discrimination. Families, schools, and communities must prioritize acceptance and provide safe spaces for individuals to express their identities without fear of judgment. Addressing intersecting factors such as gender, culture, and socioeconomic background is crucial for understanding diverse experiences of discrimination. These insights call for a societal shift towards inclusivity and equal treatment, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to belong and thrive. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview:

“I feel energetic, and dancing is a great way for me to cope with everything. It helps me release stress, lift my mood, and stay positive. When I dance, I feel free and alive, and it allows me to express myself in a way that words can’t. It’s a fun and healthy outlet that keeps me focused, energized, and grounded, helping me stay strong and happy through any challenges I face.” (P3)

“I watch women’s wrestling and talk to friends. Watching women’s wrestling is something I enjoy, and I feel free to talk about it with my friends. Sharing interests like this allows me to connect with people who share similar passions. It’s a fun and positive way to bond with others and engage in conversations that make me feel included.” (P9)

“I like to read and talk to friends for advice. Reading helps me gain new perspectives, and talking to my friends for advice gives me a sense of support. My friends are always there to listen and offer guidance, which is reassuring. Whether I’m looking for insights or just need someone to talk to, I know I can count on them.” (P10)

“I cope by spending time with supportive people and writing. When things get tough, I turn to the people who make me feel safe and loved. Spending time with friends and family who accept me helps me recharge. I also find comfort in writing, as it allows me to express my feelings and reflect on my experiences, which helps me process my emotions.” (P11)

Responses emphasize the vital role of support networks in helping individuals cope with discrimination related to their sexual orientation (Mara et al., 2021). According to Queer Theory (Teresa de Lauretis, 1990), identity is fluid and shaped by personal experiences and societal influences. Participants reported that support from family and friends creates safe spaces for self-expression, allowing them to resist rigid societal norms and define their identities freely. This aligns with Edwards et al. (2023), who highlight that accepting environments foster a sense of belonging. Mara et al. (2021) found that familial and peer support buffers societal prejudice, reinforcing the importance of coping mechanisms. Studies like Preddie et al. (2021) and Emery et al. (2021) support Intersectionality Theory, showing how overlapping identities complicate experiences of discrimination. Ecological Systems Theory, as illustrated by Fantus and Newman (2021), emphasizes how various environmental factors influence an individual's sense of self and ability to navigate challenges. Gorman et al. (2022) stress the need for inclusive spaces to build resilience against discrimination. The findings suggest that creating supportive environments is crucial for helping homosexual individuals cope with discrimination and feel accepted. Families, friends, schools, and communities must provide safe spaces for self-expression without fear of judgment. Additionally, addressing discrimination requires considering intersecting factors like gender and culture. By fostering inclusivity at personal, social, and societal levels, we can help individuals build resilience, overcome challenges, and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Identity Exploration and Self – Acceptance

Identity exploration involves discovering and understanding one’s own identity, including sexual orientation, in a supportive environment. For homosexual students, self-acceptance means embracing their sexual identity without shame in accepting communities. Participants highlighted various aspects of identity exploration and self-acceptance, particularly regarding family and friends. Many (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 12) reported feeling accepted by their families or friends, often noting they were treated the same as before, indicating a positive environment for self-acceptance. However, some experiences were more complex. Participant 5 felt accepted but was reminded not to change their appearance, suggesting limitations on self-expression. Participant 11 noted some relatives distancing themselves while friends remained supportive. This indicates that while self-acceptance may be strong in certain circles, challenges can arise in more traditional environments. Overall, the common theme is that being treated equally fosters identity exploration and self-acceptance, though some individuals still face limitations and resistance from specific groups. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview:

“Take your time to understand your identity and don’t feel rushed. It’s a personal journey, and it’s okay to explore and learn more about yourself at your own pace. Trust the process, be patient, and allow yourself the space to grow and discover who you truly are.” (P1)

“Be self-aware and don’t let society’s opinions get to you. The key is understanding who you are and being confident in your choices, regardless of what others might say. Everyone has their own views, but those views don’t define you. When you are true to yourself and comfortable in your own skin, you can easily brush off negativity and live your life without being weighed down by others’ judgments. Trust in your own value and stay focused on what makes you happy, letting go of any external pressure.” (P3)

“Keep an open mind and remember we’re still seeking acceptance. It’s important to stay patient and understanding because not everyone is fully accepting yet. We need to keep pushing for more awareness and understanding, and staying open-minded helps us navigate these challenges. Acceptance is a journey, and it’s

important to remember that progress takes time.” (P5)

“Be open-minded to understand and avoid judgment. It’s important to be open-minded when interacting with others. By understanding different experiences and perspectives, we can avoid making judgments and foster more compassionate relationships. Being accepting of others’ differences helps create a supportive and inclusive environment.” (P10)

“Acceptance is important; people should live freely without fear. Acceptance is key to creating a world where everyone feels safe to be themselves. Everyone should be able to live their lives freely without fear of judgment or discrimination. When we accept each other, we foster a more inclusive and compassionate society, where people can feel confident and happy being true to themselves.” (P11)

“Be sensitive, accepting, and open to LGBTQ+ members. It’s important to be kind and open-minded when interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals. Understanding their experiences and showing empathy can make a huge difference. Acceptance and sensitivity are key to creating a supportive environment where everyone feels respected and valued, no matter their identity.” (P12)

Related studies confirm that family and peer acceptance are crucial for the identity exploration and self-acceptance of homosexual individuals. Research by Sumerau et al. (2020) and Stein (2023) aligns with Queer Theory, showing that individuals thrive in environments free from rigid societal expectations. Intersectionality studies (Brotman et al., 2021; Bowden, 2024) highlight how overlapping identities affect acceptance experiences, with some facing conditional support from family. Ecological Systems Theory (Wang et al., 2021; Guterman, 2020) emphasizes the influence of various environmental factors on personal identity development. The findings suggest that creating supportive environments is essential for homosexual individuals to explore and accept their identities. Families and friends play a key role in providing validation, helping individuals feel confident in self-expression. However, societal norms can create barriers, especially in traditional settings. Schools, communities, and workplaces must foster inclusivity through policies and programs that promote understanding and acceptance. Supporting diverse identities through education can help dismantle stereotypes and create a more inclusive society where everyone can thrive.

Advice for Community Understanding and Homosexual Advocacy

Advice for Community Understanding emphasizes creating an open, respectful environment that fosters acceptance of differences, including sexual orientation. Homosexual Advocacy aims to support the rights of homosexual individuals, ensuring they feel safe and valued, which enhances their sense of belonging. Participants highlighted the importance of open-mindedness, education, and respect in promoting community understanding and advocacy. Many participants urged individuals to be open-minded and accepting of diverse backgrounds. For instance, P1 and P5 stressed the importance of understanding one's identity and being unbothered by societal opinions. P4 and P10 encouraged others to challenge personal biases and avoid judgment. Additionally, participants like P3, P7, and P12 emphasized respecting differences and not judging others without understanding their stories. The need for more education was also a common theme, with participants advocating for increased awareness to reduce prejudice. Overall, the responses suggest that homosexual advocacy should focus on fostering social change through understanding, education, and respect, in addition to addressing legal and political issues. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview:

“Accept everyone, regardless of their background, because everyone deserves respect and kindness. It’s important to embrace diversity and understand that we are all unique in our own ways. By accepting others for who they are, we create a more inclusive and harmonious environment where everyone feels valued and supported. It’s a simple yet powerful way to build understanding and connection with those around us.” (P2)

“We need more education to help people understand and accept differences. The more people learn about others’ experiences, the more likely they are to be kind and open-minded. Education can break down stereotypes and help create a more inclusive world where everyone feels respected and valued.” (P4)

“Don’t judge people without knowing their story. Everyone has their own experiences, and it’s important to be understanding before forming opinions. We can’t truly know what someone is going through unless we take the time to listen and understand. Judging without knowing their full story only leads to misunderstandings, and it’s better to approach others with kindness and empathy.” (P6)

“Respect everyone’s differences. It’s important to respect and appreciate the differences in others. Everyone has their own unique experiences, beliefs, and identities, and that’s what makes the world interesting. By showing respect for these differences, we create a more inclusive and understanding environment where everyone feels valued.” (P7)

“Get to know people before judging. It’s important to approach everyone with an open mind. We can’t truly understand someone unless we take the time to get to know them. Everyone has their own unique experiences, and it’s better to show empathy and kindness rather than making assumptions about others. Building real connections comes from understanding, not judgment.” (P9)

The responses emphasize the need for greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ+ individuals across society. Communities, schools, and families must collaborate to create safe and respectful environments. Promoting education about diversity and sensitivity can reduce prejudice and foster inclusivity. Acceptance should be unconditional, rooted in genuine respect for individual differences. By embracing open-mindedness and rejecting judgment, society can empower LGBTQ+ individuals to live authentically and confidently.

CONCLUSION

The results underscore the importance of a strong support system, particularly from family and loved ones, in fostering resilience, emotional health, and self-worth. Such support enables individuals to express themselves confidently and navigate societal challenges. A sense of belonging and acceptance, despite some flaws in support networks, promotes deeper relationships and emotional growth. For homosexual students, belonging and social inclusion are vital for personal and academic success, enhancing mental well-being. The study highlights the need for empathy, understanding, and the creation of inclusive communities where everyone feels valued and can thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges faced by homosexual students, several recommendations are proposed. First, educational programs focusing on diversity, inclusion, and empathy should be implemented to reduce ignorance and bias, creating a more understanding society. Communities should offer spaces for open dialogue where people can share their experiences without fear of judgment, helping to foster empathy and stronger connections. Schools, workplaces, and organizations need to create welcoming environments that promote emotional well-being and prevent discrimination. Resources should be provided to help individuals, especially those facing discrimination, develop healthy coping strategies to build resilience. Lastly, individuals should be encouraged to explore their identity at their own pace, fostering self-awareness and acceptance, which contributes to personal growth and a more inclusive community.

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