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## Caged Inside Old Traditions: Heteronormativity Faced by Students in the LGBTQIA+ Community

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This paper determined the effects of heteronormativity on students' confidence and competence in academe, including their adaptation towards sexual marginalization in society.

**Methodology:** This study used a qualitative case study design which focused on (1) weight of heteronormativity in the (a) academic confidence and (b) competence of LGBTQIA+ individuals and (2) their adaptation toward sexual marginalization. The research used a case study approach, utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews, to determine and explain the participants' lived experience in terms of receiving gender discrimination and traditional norms. Data gathered were from self-constructed, open-ended questionnaires reviewed and approved by the Central Luzon State University Ethics Research Committee.

**Results:** Findings revealed insights into the struggles faced by LGBTQIA+ students at Central Luzon State University such as deterioration of confidence, rejection of sexual diversity, inhibition of authenticity, LGBTQIA+ disparity, and overcoming bigotry. Religion showed significant results as a factor of heteronormativity, enclosed in five themes. In addition, heteronormativity was said to be a shared idea, which contributed to criticisms driven by prejudice. These traditions and practices were preserved in Filipino culture. Thus, incorporating a mindset that there should only be two genders. However, the study showed that a solid support system contributes significantly in embracing and expressing the genuine self and in learning the capacity in terms of competing in school academics while syncing to genuine self-being authentic.

**Conclusion:** Heteronormativity is a manifestation of influence of culture and religion. It prevails worldwide because religion, especially Christianity, dominates the population. Blind attachment to underdeveloped and outdated traditions and views from religion and culture generates grave impacts on the confidence and competence of LGBTQIA+ students. However, the results showed that a solid support system contributes significantly to their journey in embracing and expressing their genuine self, and in learning their capacity in terms of competing in school academics. Further, it is recommended to have a wider scope of the study, encompassing people outside Central Luzon State University with different reasons resulting from their struggles with heteronormativity and people who still consider the importance of practicing heteronormativity.

**Keywords:** *Academic Confidence and Competence; LGBTQIA+ Community; Heteronormativity; Obsolete Traditions; Sexual Marginalization; Sexual Bigotry; Negative Distinctions*



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## INTRODUCTION

Old traditions, customs, values, and perspectives scattered around the world unceasingly establish and paint heterosexuality as innate to men and the tallest among all other orientations of sexuality (Lasio et al., 2019). Primitive systems of ideologies seized since immemorial stemmed the upbringing of heteronormativity. These old-fashioned principles are hurdles in embracing and sheltering sexual diversity, a mountain of irrational beliefs that separates society and sexual inclusivity. A widespread battle between discrimination and the LGBTQIA+ community started long before and is yet to be severed, despite some progress in some countries toward recognizing LGBTQIA+ rights (Evangelista et al., 2021). Negative distinctions against sexual minorities are profoundly ingrained within society. It is a worldwide fear that prevails in most communities even to date. As if the situation is not bad enough, LGBTQ people often experience social invisibility (Coleman, 2019). Society resists their existence and gives them no proper representation—if there is, exploitation often accompanies it (Crees et al., 2022; Newton, 2021; Woods, 2022). Most do not feel safe in their workplace or even at home. They often receive harassment and are excluded and called names. The disparity is evident that one cannot deny it without seeming absurd.

The struggle of sexually diverse individuals continues to escalate inside Filipino society (Cornelio & Dagle, 2022). Religious ideologies circulating within the country constructed hurtful negative views toward the LGBTQIA+ community. Decades of recognition for these conservative religious ideologies and ignorance of their severe impact on the LGBTQIA+ community had planted anti-queer judgment deep inside Filipino society (Ortiz & Costigan, 2022). It is so deep-rooted that it is normalized. A factor in the firm opposition of religious groups to homosexuality is the concentrated influence of Catholicism that the Spaniard colonizers brought to the Philippines (Yarcia et al., 2019). The Philippine Catholic Church engaging in social movements and activities also added fuel to the burning resistance of people to sexual inclusivity (Abesamis & Siddayao, 2021).

Discussing gender in societies is a taboo for people who believe in old traditions, specifically in terms of religion. J.T. Spence (1993) presented a theory: Multifactorial Gender Identity Theory, whereas it states that such categories of traits, characteristics, and attitudes does not specify a factor in identifying gender thus, it should be under multiple independent factors. Further discussing, a consensus suggests that gender characteristics, masculinity and femininity, are not dependent on how a man and a woman show or act in public as it is incorporated into a person's self-concept (Koestner & Aube, 1995).

In comparison to heterosexuals and cisgenders, LGBTQIA+ youth are more prone and susceptible to physical, mental, and emotional bullying and harassment inside educational institutions (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Santos & De Jesus, 2022). Harbored internalized homophobia and homosexual discrimination lead to identity-based bullying, defined as any form of bullying transpiring solely out of the sexual orientation of an individual (Price et al., 2019). Selective oppression based on identity is encountered more than too many times by students with diverse sexual orientations. It encompasses physical and verbal assault. Regardless of the widespread information dissemination of bullying awareness and its prevention, research on the linkage between discrimination and bullying has little existence (Price et al., 2019). Subject to such negative attitudes, LGBTQIA+ students are reported to have yielded poor academic stances, higher susceptibility to acquiring depression, decrease in self-confidence, and increase in ideation and contemplation of suicide (Garvey et al., 2018; Nadal, 2019; Santos & De Jesus, 2020). The vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ Filipino youth to heteronormative attitudes in schools persists and is surging (Adeyemo, 2020). It is established that heteronormativity and sexual marginalization affect students, particularly their academic standing and esteem.



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Providing a wider assessment of old traditions caging numerous people, the study exhibits the impact of heteronormativity to students and overall view of sexual marginalization. It is an additional knowledge alerting the public regarding the gravity of the situation these people inside the LGBTQIA+ community face. Above all, this amplifies the voices of the sexually diverse community in hopes of reaching the empathy of policymakers—society as a whole—thereby contributing to the journey towards attaining a more inclusive space that harbors gender freedom for mutual growth.

### ***The LGBTQIA+ People in the Academe***

The LGBTQ+ community became huge in the past years, including not only adults, but also students who are still studying in different schools worldwide. Despite recent advancements on a worldwide scale that point toward LGBTQ+ equality, there are still institutional systems that uphold discrimination against sexual preference and the identities of their gender (Evangelista et al., 2021). The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) survey attests that most of the sexually diverse youth face discrimination because of their gender identity, expressions, and sexual preference causing them to feel uncomfortable inside their schools. These high rates of activity avoidance in schools show that the LGBTQ+ students are being deterred from fully participating in school life. As a result, their efforts to bring themselves to safety rob them of their education (Kosciw et al., 2020). Hence, a hostile school environment could affect their interaction with people inside and outside of educational institutions. Schools carry the responsibility in creating a welcoming environment that is able to provide academic, physical, and emotional support for LGBTQIA+ students (Cardinal, 2021). Universities worldwide are looking for a way and are trying to implement policies to protect the LGBTQ+ students. Educators and other school staff are taught skills needed for sexually diverse students to be protected and supported. Dissemination of accurate information about gender expression, gender identity, and sexual preference must be completely accessible to all students to benefit them. In addition, giving students the freedom to build LGBTQ+ clubs or organizations provides them with a positive school climate and improves their school experience (Russell et al., 2021).

In Asia, one of the most gay-welcoming countries is the Philippines that achieved significant advances for LGBTQ+ empowerment in recent decades and served as one of the earliest LGBTQ+ advocates in Asia (Tang & Poudel, 2018). Bullying and discrimination continue to be pervasive problems among LGBTQ+ students despite the efforts of their schools. These increase the student's vulnerability to depression and may impact their academic performance (Mutya et al., 2021). In some cases, schools promoting open-mindedness like the University of the Philippines (UP) have professors that discriminate against them and disrespect the LGBTQ+ students even though the students express their discomfort and dissatisfaction with those kinds of insults (Tang & Poudel, 2018). This should not be overlooked because social dynamics, stress, and particular developmental obstacles present some information about the nature of LGBTQ+ youth suicidality (Hatchel et al., 2018). However, there are schools that have the exact opposite results in assessing teachers' acceptance of LGBTQ+ students. Based on the confirmatory data, teachers are highly accepting—emphasized by other LGBTQ+ students (Hossain, 2021). In addition, most faculty and students claim that in addition to experiencing risks, genuine interactions with people and spreading goodwill are a few of the numerous benefits of being open about one's identity to others (Prock et al., 2019).

### ***Sexual Marginalization as Perceived by the Society***

People are often criticized because of the way they act. Society always observes gender, wherein their biological sex is only the one to represent their identity, and rule their bodies that influence how they interact with society. Sexual marginalization preserves the old traditions where women are nothing but housekeepers and child bearers, while men do hard and heavy jobs. Responsibilities are gender-divided in the world of labor. However, there are times when women receive tougher work. In indigenous and ethnolinguistic groups, women in labor require more



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strength on working in unfavorable fields, than men who pour physical activity into favorable fields (Meldozet al., 2020). Youth experiencing prejudice from their family, because of their sexuality, lead them to homelessness and poverty (Robinson, 2018). Rejection and marginalization are commonly assessed by their parents (Shelton et al., 2018). Acts and performances by an individual of the said community are limited by their sex, as the society influenced by the old traditions dictates what they believe. These gender issues concern how an individual lives. As an individual grows and blends into a heteronormative society, the LGBTQIA+ members' sexuality will justify their decision-making. Whereas, these individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community will be forced into acts against what they are.

Religion also modifies what society presumes: there is only a man and a woman. Patterns of belief and practices normalize official religious teachings to give honor and respect to the supernatural being who made the entirety of the universe, especially the people (Sumerau et al., 2017). Sexual ideologies from religion offer a kind of belief system to society, letting Christians be conservative in any activities including sexual well-being (Burke & Woodell, 2020). Given that, there are widespread sexual beliefs and principles, Christians who don't accept the LGBTQIA+ community. They tend to treat the said community as a mistake and a mere sin as it is against their teachings. Most conservative families have difficulties in accepting an individual part of the LGBTQIA+ community, even though one of their members in the family is one with the community (Estep & Mirman, 2022). It is the thought that sexual minorities are eccentric that there isn't a chance for a gay individual to have a part in society or even a group with old traditional norms.

Sexuality combined with religion is not a great alliance in terms of progression in social movements. People in the LGBTQIA+ community reject expressing their sexual orientation to the public as they fear backlash. Homosexuality is regarded as a threat as it influences and manifests the ideology of homogeneity and standardization for everyday practices (Shin, 2019). Movements led by the LGBTQIA+ community began as multiple debates commenced, subjecting sexuality and religion (Burke & Woodell, 2020). Their emotional well-being reflects concepts of social and community. It influences how they find a purpose in living, despite the stigma, discrimination, and marginalization. Their consciousness about the opinions of society and the known traditions will eventually affect how they improve themselves to integrate more into society.

### ***Heteronormativity as a Manifestation of Obsolete Traditions***

Primitive beliefs plot unconscious and automatic assumptions about the normality of heterosexuality while deeming all other sexual orientations as an anomaly. Unreasonable attachment to such ideas deliberately sprouts an obstructive system of norms, practices, and discourses against the sexual minority. Religion and tradition are often utilized as tools to inflict physical and mental harassment on sexually diverse individuals (Cornelio & Dagle, 2022). Analysis findings indicated that identity conflict and internalized homonegativity that seeps from discordance formed between religious beliefs and LGBTQIA+ identity were associated with higher susceptibility to suicide (Anderson, 2021; Lefevor et al., 2022; Rosik et al., 2021; Torres, 2022). Primordial ideologies become a breeding ground for heteronormativity. Heterosexism, cisgenderism, prejudices, and homophobia all sprouted from outdated traditions that harm the physical, emotional, and psychological health of sexual minorities (Casey et al., 2019). Continuous patronage for these underdeveloped ideals feeds and encourages heteronormative minds. It promotes hegemonic recognition of heterosexuality, further widening the disparity between heteros and homos—a gap that should not have existed in the first place.

Heteronormative ideologies are linked to anti-queer views and attitudes—argued to be the root of prejudice toward the LGBTQIA+ community (Habarth et al., 2019). Discrimination against sexual minorities can stretch from



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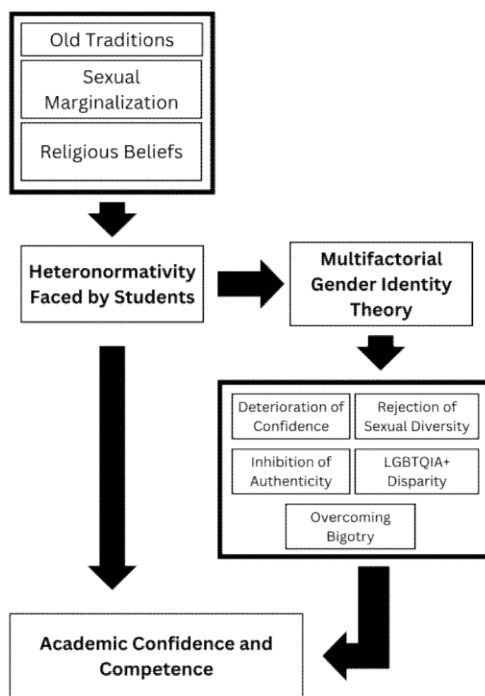


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unintentional misgendering of people and heteronormative assumptions to the extent of ferocious exclusionary behaviors (Bower et al., 2019). Individuals of diverse sexuality often end up denying and suppressing their own sexual identities as a consequence of minority stress that results from the negativity that heterosexism and cisgenderism forge (Kamen, 2018). Bringing heteronormativity into the limelight among LGBTQIA+ youth produces a crucial and much-needed opportunity to be knowledgeable on how these youth deal, fortify and summon gender, sexuality, and cultural norms among heteronormative society (Pollit et al., 2019). Awareness of the negative impact heteronormativity bears against a big portion of the population allows the public to destroy the prejudices and partake in a more inclusive society for the LGBTQIA+ community (Savage & Barringer, 2021; Smolle & Espvall, 2021; Westwood, 2022). Heteronormativity is disguised behind existing traditions, beliefs, and social structures that it is often left unnoticed, and people are unaware of its existence until they encounter similar circumstances that ignite reflection on the experience itself and the associated burden and distress (Rickards & Leaman, 2020). Most people who treat the LGBTQIA+ community with negative distinctions do not even recognize the fault in their actions.

Heteronormativity and cisgenderism have been the center of discussion in politics, media, and humanitarian movements in recent years (Salvati et al., 2022). Published works have established persistent disproportion in mental health, competence, and other characteristics of well-being and vigor among the LGBTQIA+ youth in relation to heterosexual and cissexual individuals (Mereish, 2019; Fish & Russell, 2020). As revealed by various research studies, the mental health of LGBTQIA+ people who receive coinciding expressions of support and nonacceptance from significant people in their lives is relatively poorer than that of those exposed to either tremendous encouragement or straightforward rejection (Allen, 2020). Behavior toward people of diverse sexual identities and their interconnection, however, has unwaveringly progressed over the last five decades, based on extensive social surveys (McCarthy, 2019).

**Theoretical Framework**





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## Objectives

This study explored the experiences of six (6) Central Luzon State University LGBTQIA+ students relevant to sexual discrimination and oppression.

It specifically determined:

1. the weight of heteronormativity in academic confidence and competence of LGBTQIA+ college students; and
2. their adaptation towards sexual marginalization.

## METHODS

### Research Design

The study followed a qualitative case study design focused on (1) the weight of heteronormativity in (1a) academic confidence and (1b) competence of LGBTQIA+ college students and (2) their adaptation toward sexual marginalization. The research used a case study approach to determine and explain the participants' lived experiences in terms of receiving gender discrimination and traditional norms.

### Population and Sampling

The target population of this study included six (6) LGBTQIA+ bona fide college students at Central Luzon State University (CLSU), Philippines. The selection of individuals eligible to participate was conducted through snowball sampling. They must (a) be at least 18 years old, (b) identify themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, (c) have encountered prejudice and bigotry, and (d) study at Central Luzon State University. Participants who failed to meet these criteria were disqualified to proceed with the study. The setting of the study was within the premises of CLSU, Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Philippines.

### Instrument

As an aide to the extraction of data, the study utilized semi-structured interviews. The research instrument was composed of three parts: (1) informed consent and data privacy clause; (2) demographic profile of the respondents; and (3) questions about the respondents' perspectives and experiences associated with heteronormativity. Specifically, the interview was guided by a set of six (6) open-ended self-constructed questions—reviewed and validated by the CLSU Ethics Research Committee. Further, all six (6) of the participants were well-informed and gave permission to have their interviews documented by means of written and audio recordings.

### Data Collection

Prior to the conduct of the study, a mandatory ethics review was followed to assess its plausibility, legality, and ethical considerations.

With an ERC approval code 2023-169, the subjects were selected. The first screening was done through snowball sampling. Individuals who accepted the invitation of participation went through the last screening, which was a part of the main procedures of the research.

Once the subjects were identified, the researchers gave out the informed consent forms. A semi-structured interview was facilitated and was done individually in a secluded area to maintain privacy on the process and of the participants. Interviews were conducted flexibly, allowing participants to choose between online and offline formats



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based on their preferences. Data collection was administered by recording their answers with a voice recorder, given that it was permitted by the participant.

## Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed thematically and were validated through data triangulation and cross-checking with the assistance of three (3) college professors whose majors were English Language Education, Psychology, and Social Science. Each of the participant's experiences was read, contrasted, and analyzed by the researchers through three levels of coding: assigning codes, classifying codes into categories, and classifying categories into themes, proceeding to conclusion—gaining an overview of the heteronormativity that challenges the college students in the LGBTQIA+ community.

## Ethical Consideration

The study prioritized ethical standards and participant confidentiality. The consent form was modified to provide participants with comprehensive information necessary for an informed decision regarding their involvement. In accordance with what is stated on the consent form, participants have the freedom to join or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

The study was approved and conducted according to the guidelines of the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) Ethics Research Committee (ERC), with the protocol approval code 2023-169 on March 7, 2023.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this research provided insights into the struggles faced by six (6) LGBTQIA+ students from Central Luzon State University, Philippines. With a thorough analysis of the available data, the researchers formulated five (5) themes: (1) Deterioration of Confidence; (2) Rejection of Sexual Diversity; (3) Inhibition of Authenticity; (4) LGBTQIA+ Disparity; and (5) Overcoming Bigotry.

### A. Deterioration of Confidence

Insensitive acts of others, specifically commenting on people's gender identity, contribute to factors generating a lack of self-confidence. Religion—as the most important advertising factor of heteronormativity worldwide—generally affects how people in the LGBTQIA+ community look at themselves, dictating their career and performance inside educational institutions.

*"Being told that I am different, my self-esteem or my confidence became lower than usual[]."*

Criticisms driven by prejudice took a toll on their self-esteem and how they looked at themselves. A person's self-satisfaction with their academic achievement might begin to fall because of the stress induced by the environment they are in (Watson et al., 2021). It is a great factor in one's mental health to perceive negative comments from society.

### B. Rejection of Sexual Diversity

Culture and religion are powerhouses of influence—they shape the cognition of the human mind to a certain degree. The indifference and rejection of the multitudes of sexuality emerged from cultural and religious structures more inclined to cater to cisgenderism.

*"Religion or specifically, the bible, is one of the reasons why they confuse sex with gender, thinking that the default orientation here in our world is a boy and a girl being straight."*



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*"Ideas are shared, and the mindset is passed on.....so, upon growth, the children bear the same ideas. So, it was really hard breaking that stigma."*

Religion feeds hegemonic ideas of gender binarism to its people. Defying time, heteronormative views are transferred from one generation to another through the preservation of culture. Thereby the built-up negative perspectives directed toward the LGBTQIA+ community. Culture and religion are mental handbooks that people utilize as a parameter to determine what is right and normal or otherwise. So, in an encounter with something that deviates from what they are accustomed to, individuals tend to perceive it as something faulty. In line with religion, a society tightly affiliated with gender binarism and cisgenderism further sinks people into the abyss of heteronormativity. People equip heteronormativity because of their upbringing—the existing ideas that surround them from when they came to be until the present. Primordial ideologies of culture and religion spews heterosexism, cisgenderism, prejudices, and homophobia that harms the physical, emotional, and psychological health of sexual minorities (Casey et al., 2019; Cornelio & Dagle, 2022; Lefevor et al., 2022).

### ***C. Inhibition of Authenticity***

A person may feel numerous uncontrollable sentiments and emotions throughout their life. One may possess the feelings and thoughts of one's opposite sex. This phenomenon was not studied and understood thoroughly until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Morris, 2023), and the lack of education regarding the condition of LGBTQIA+ community members resulted in people overlooking the situation and throwing unsolicited judgment at the community. The unjustifiable behavior towards the community sparked fear among its members, even among the others who were still confused about their sexual orientation, which led them to hide behind closets and keep their feelings and emotions to themselves. The hatred and violence thrown at members of the LGBTQIA+ community once came to the point of being ungovernable. While admitting that they are feeling what their opposite sex should be feeling is already wearisome, showing their sexuality is yet another immense hurdle.

*"How I also move (or act) in the community, it was hard because there are stereotyping, prejudices, and biases."*

*"Back when I was having my field study, it was hard because I was not able to express myself and because of that, I was not able to gain confidence...it was hard to express yourself fully if you're suppressing something within."*

*"Way back when I had my field study, I could not show myself with my students because I have to act manly, I have to act firm...because that is how I should be, they said."*

The inhibition of one's authentic self had led to poor performances both in school and at work of some of the respondents. To keep oneself unreachable by vague to excessive violent treatments, individuals of diverse sexuality often end up denying and suppressing their own sexual identities as a consequence of minority stress that results from the negativity that heterosexism and cisgenderism forge (Kamen, 2018). Homosexuality is regarded as a threat as it influences and manifests the ideology of homogeneity and standardization for everyday practices (Shin, 2019).





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#### **D. LGBTQIA+ Disparity**

When people encounter someone who is different from them, they tend to judge these differences, and they wonder why that person is different from them. People who think that man and woman are the only gender that is accepted by society is what they call heteronormativity.

*"The respect of others, because other people judge me as a person who is different from them."*

*"People who believe in heteronormativity are said to be found everywhere."*

*"Yes, there are many instances of verbal bullying, physical bullying, emotional and also cyber bullying. Within the school community...and with teachers also."*

It is inevitable to notice and criticize the differences between the people inside and outside the LGBTQIA+ community. Individuals from outside the LGBTQIA+ community discriminate against the people inside the community. The negative treatment ranges from verbalized judgments to physical bullying. To address this issue, paying attention to disparities is a must, instead of ignoring it. The biggest obstacle is the lack of sexual orientation or gender identity measures in significant data sets that track the students (Freeman, 2020).

#### **E. Overcoming Bigotry**

Overcoming bigotry towards LGBTQIA+ individuals is a critical issue that requires empathy, education, and advocacy. It requires ongoing efforts to educate ourselves, challenge our own biases and assumptions, and advocate for equality and justice for all individuals. The students chosen as respondents of the study overcame this adversity with the help of various relationships, such as their friends and family, who accepted and supported them from the start. They had a healthy educational environment where they were safe from abuse and discrimination, which helped them be proud and happy to be who they are without having to suppress or hide their sexual identity. To quote a response from one of the participants;

*"Having my friends beside me helped me a lot, because their support is a big factor, which made me realize that I don't have to earn the respect of others; I just have to be genuine with what and who I am."*

Transgender individuals are more vulnerable to mental health concerns and psychological distress. Increased social support and consultations with specialized practitioners in this field helps in improvement of the experiences regarding bigotry (Budge et al., 2013). In connection with all genders, prejudice that they receive from society affects their overall health, and to overcome this issue is for them to receive the main support from their family and friends—to realize their purpose in society and regardless of their gender.

#### **Conclusion**

Heteronormativity is a manifestation of the influence of culture and religion. It prevails worldwide because religion—especially Christianity—dominates the population of a country such as the Philippines. Blind attachment to underdeveloped and outdated traditions and views from religion and culture generates grave impacts on the confidence and competence of the students in the LGBTQIA+ community. However, the results of the study showed that a solid support system contributes significantly to their journey in embracing and expressing their genuine self, and in learning their capacity in terms of competing in school academics while syncing to their genuine self—being authentic.



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## Recommendations

The researchers recommend orchestrating and facilitating broader research on the relationship between the faced heteronormativity and the academic performance. Ultimately, this endeavor and its findings are limited as it only represents the students of Central Luzon State University, Philippines. It is recommended to expand the subject diversity to shed light to the heteronormativity in a different view other than the students' perspective. Specifically, to know their own reasons and opinions why it is hard for them to accept other genders, which are identified in the present.

## Funding

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors guarantee that there is no conflict of interest among them.

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