From Wounds to Wings: Lived Experiences of Bullying and Resilience Among LGBTQ+ Students in Tacloban City

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of bullying and resilience among LGBTQ+ senior high school students in Tacloban City, Philippines. Grounded in the descriptivism paradigm and employing a transcendental phenomenological research design, the study aimed to understand how LGBTQ+ students experience bullying and construct resilience within the context of their everyday school lives. The inquiry was anchored in Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Masten's Resilience Theory, and Meyer's Minority Stress Theory, which collectively guided the interpretation of how sexual and gender minority students navigate stressors related to discrimination and victimization. Using purposive sampling, fourteen (14) LGBTQ+ senior high school students aged 15–18 from Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City participated in the study. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews that enabled participants to narrate their personal experiences of bullying in various forms, including verbal bullying, physical bullying, social or relational bullying, and cyberbullying. Through the transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher bracketed personal assumptions in order to focus on the essence of the participants lived experiences. The study also examined the coping strategies utilized by students, the perceived challenges and impacts of bullying on their emotional and academic lives, their manifestations of resistance, and the support systems that contributed to their resilience and recovery. Findings revealed that LGBTQ+ students encountered multiple forms of bullying often rooted in prejudice toward their sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite these adversities, many participants demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping mechanisms and the presence of protective support systems such as peer acceptance, teacher encouragement, and family affirmation. These factors significantly contributed to the students' psychological well-being, sense of belonging, and capacity to recover from adverse experiences. By amplifying the voices of LGBTQ+ learners often underrepresented in educational research, the study offers insights that may inform inclusive school policies, culturally responsive counseling interventions, and targeted support programs that promote safer and more supportive learning environments for LGBTQ+ students in the Philippine educational context.

Keywords: *LGBTQ+ students, school bullying, resilience, minority stress, phenomenology, coping strategies, inclusive education*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains a pervasive issue in schools worldwide, particularly affecting students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexually and gender-diverse orientations (LGBTQ+) (Zhuo-Ying Han, 2025). It significantly influences students' mental health, emotional well-being, and academic to bullying due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and frequently experience verbal harassment, physical aggression, and cyberbullying. Such hostile school environments are consistently linked to negative mental-health outcomes, including heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, especially when students are exposed to repeated victimization or discrimination (Semprevivo, 2023). Moreover, the school learning environment plays a critical role in shaping learners' general health and well-being, making school-based bullying a serious educational and public health concern (Adewoye, 2022).

On a global scale, the magnitude of this issue is underscored by the size of the world's population, which exceeded eight billion in 2024 (United Nations, 2024). With schools serving as primary social institutions for children and adolescents, a vast number of LGBTQ+ youth worldwide are potentially exposed to unsafe and discriminatory environments. International studies consistently show that sexual and gender minority students experience higher levels of peer victimization than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, confirming that bullying against LGBTQ+ learners is a widespread global problem rather than an isolated occurrence.

In the Philippine context, the relevance of this concern is equally significant. The World Bank estimated that the Philippine population reached approximately 115.8 million in 2024, making it one of the most populous countries in Southeast Asia (World Bank, 2024). Recent global survey data further suggest that approximately 11% of respondents in the Philippines identify as LGBTQ+ (Statista, 2024). When this percentage is applied to the national population, it translates to an estimated 12.7 million LGBTQ+ individuals in the country. Although this figure is based on self-reported survey data and not on an official census, it nonetheless illustrates that a substantial portion of the Filipino population may be affected by issues of discrimination and bullying.

Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals in Philippine media and culture, social acceptance remains inconsistent, and legal protections are still limited. This creates a complex environment where affirmation and discrimination often coexist, particularly within schools where peer interactions, teacher attitudes, and institutional policies strongly shape students' sense of safety and belonging (OutRight International, 2023). As a result, many LGBTQ+ students may continue to experience exclusion, fear, and victimization in educational settings.

Although these challenges persist, emerging research emphasizes that many LGBTQ+ students demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resilience, understood as the capacity to adapt positively and recover in the face of adversity, is strengthened by internal factors such as self-acceptance, selfefficacy, and personal agency, as well as external supports including peer acceptance, protective school policies, supportive teachers, and affirming relationships (Fernandes et al., 2023). These protective resources play a crucial role in fostering psychological strength and emotional stability among LGBTQ+ youth.

Studies further indicate that resilience can serve as a mediating factor that reduces the harmful effects of bullying on mental health. Recent research demonstrates that resilient sexual and gender minority students tend to show healthier psychological adjustment, even when exposed to school-based victimization, compared to those with lower levels of resilience (Wang et al., 2024). This suggests that resilience does not merely coexist with adversity but actively buffers the negative emotional and psychological impacts of bullying.

Most existing research on bullying and LGBTQ+ students remains largely quantitative in nature, focusing on prevalence rates, statistical relationships, and outcome measures. While these studies are essential for establishing trends and risk factors, they often fail to capture the depth, meaning, and complexity of students' everyday lived experiences. Lived experiences related to identity formation, peer relationships, family acceptance, and coping strategies are best understood through qualitative and phenomenological approaches (Children and Youth Services Review, 2024).

This limitation is especially evident in the Philippine context, where phenomenological and narrative studies on LGBTQ+ students remain scarce. Without these in-depth accounts, educators, counselors, and policymakers may lack the contextual understanding necessary to design responsive and culturally sensitive interventions that truly address the needs of LGBTQ+ learners in local school environments.

Recent youth mental-health surveys in the Philippines also show that many LGBTQ+ students continue to experience school-related stress, emotional distress, and harassment, while at the same time reporting the importance of peer friendships and personal strength in coping with adversity (Trevor Project, 2024). These findings suggest that resilience and vulnerability often coexist in the lives of LGBTQ+ students, highlighting the complexity of their educational experiences

International evidence further emphasizes the critical role of schools in either aggravating or reducing bullying experiences. Inclusive school climates, clear anti-bullying policies, gender-sensitive practices, and supportive teacher-student relationships are consistently associated with lower levels of victimization and stronger psychological well-being among LGBTQ+ learners (Fernandes et al., 2023; Fernandes et al., 2024). Conversely, hostile and unsupportive school environments intensify emotional distress, fear, and disengagement from school.

Given the large number of LGBTQ+ individuals globally and the estimated millions in the Philippines, the need for localized, in-depth, and student-centered research is both urgent and justified (United Nations, 2024; World Bank, 2024; Statista, 2024). Bullying against LGBTQ+ students is not merely an individual problem but a serious educational, social, and public health issue with long-term implications.

Anchored in the framework, the present study seeks to occupy this important research gap by focusing on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students who have encountered bullying and demonstrated resilience. Rather than relying solely on numerical trends, this study aims to explore how students personally experience victimization, how they interpret these experiences, and how they actively construct resilience in their daily school lives.

Ultimately, examining the lived experiences of bullying and resilience among LGBTQ+ students who live in Tacloban City holds significant implications for education, mental-health services, and inclusive policy development. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the creation of safer school environments, more inclusive educational practices, and targeted support programs that not only protect LGBTQ+ students from harm but also promote their well-being, dignity, and academic success.

In line with these objectives, the present research seeks to explore the lived experiences of bullying and resilience among LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do LGBTQ+ students experience bullying in terms of:
   1.1 Verbal bullying?
   1.2 Physical bullying?
   1.3 Social or relational bullying?
   1.4 Cyberbullying?
2. How do LGBTQ+ students cope with and respond to experiences of bullying?
3. What are the perceived challenges and impacts that LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City encounter as a consequence of being bullied?
4. How do LGBTQ+ students' manifest resistance in response to the experience of bullying?
5. How do LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City perceive their ability to recover from potential future incidents of bullying?
6. What support systems do LGBTQ+ students identify as necessary in addressing and mitigating bullying toward the LGBTQ+ community?

Taken together, these guiding questions aim to provide a deeper and more holistic understanding of the realities faced by LGBTQ+ students who encounter bullying in school contexts. By illuminating both their struggles and their resilience, this study aspires to generate meaningful insights that can inform educators, school administrators, counselors, and policymakers in developing responsive interventions and inclusive support mechanisms that uphold the safety, dignity, and empowerment of LGBTQ+ learners.

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METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach anchored in the descriptive paradigm. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences by examining the meanings and interpretations derived from participants' perspectives. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explore the lived experiences of bullying and resilience among LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City. In particular, qualitative research was selected because it emphasizes words, emotions, and meanings rather than numerical data, allowing a deeper understanding of how individuals interpret their experiences within their social context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, the study utilized transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to describe the

essence of participants lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Through this approach, the researchers set aside personal assumptions and biases through a process known as epoche, enabling the phenomenon to be understood from the participants' own perspectives. Furthermore, the study was grounded in the descriptive paradigm, which focuses on describing experiences as they naturally occur without manipulating variables (Husserl, 1970). This paradigm values authentic narratives and aims to present participants' realities truthfully and clearly. Thus, by using a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design, the study was able to capture the authentic voices and shared experiences of LGBTQ+ students, providing meaningful insights into bullying, resilience, and the support needed to foster safer and more inclusive school environments.

Participants of the Study

The study involved fourteen (14) LGBTQ+ students from Sto. Niño Senior High School in Tacloban City during the School Year 2025–2026. They were purposively selected using the purposive sampling technique (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2011; Creswell, 2013) because they had direct experiences with the phenomenon under investigation—the lived experiences of bullying and resilience. This number aligns with Creswell's (2012, 2013) recommendation that 10 to 15 participants are sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative research. The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) identify as LGBTQ+, (2) be aged 15–18, (3) be enrolled in a public senior high school, (4) have experienced bullying, and (5) be willing to participate in in-depth interviews. Throughout the study, the researchers applied bracketing to set aside personal biases, assumptions, and prior experiences (Moustakas, 1994), ensuring that the participants' voices emerged authentically. This approach allowed the study to present the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students truthfully and from their own perspectives, highlighting their challenges and resilience.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Sto. Niño Senior High School (SNSHS) in Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines, a public senior high school offering both Academic and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) tracks, including the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program. Tacloban City, the regional center of Eastern Visayas, is a highly urbanized city with a strong focus on education and community development, supporting learners' recovery and inclusion following the effects of Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). SNSHS was considered a suitable research locale because it enrolls a diverse student population, including many LGBTQ+ students who may have experienced bullying. The school provides a learning environment that encourages safety, acceptance, and respect, making it appropriate for exploring students lived experiences of bullying and resilience. Furthermore, the school's accessibility and the cooperation of its administration facilitated smoother and more organized data collection. Conducting the study at SNSHS allowed the researchers to capture authentic accounts of LGBTQ+ students' challenges, coping strategies, and personal growth, providing meaningful insights into their experiences in Tacloban City.

Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview guide as the main instrument to collect in-depth information about the lived experiences of bullied LGBTQ+ students at Sto. Niño Senior High School. This instrument was chosen because it allowed participants to openly share their experiences while keeping the discussion focused on the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). The guide was organized into three parts: (1) the participants' demographic profiles, (2) general questions about their thoughts and feelings after being bullied, and (3) specific questions about coping strategies, sources of motivation, and factors that helped them stay resilient. To ensure clarity and relevance, the guide was reviewed by three experts, including two research teachers and a language specialist. Since some participants spoke Waray-Waray, the questions were translated to ensure comfortable and accurate responses, and the translations were checked for consistency with the original meaning. The instrument was validated with a Kendall's W coefficient of 4.93, indicating no revisions were needed. This approach allowed the researchers to capture authentic and detailed accounts of the participants' experiences with bullying and resilience.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers followed a systematic and ethical process to collect data for the study. First, a transmittal letter was drafted and submitted to the School Principal's Office, requesting permission to conduct the research and ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. After approval from the Research Coordinator, the researchers met with the school administration to explain the study's objectives, procedures, and inclusion criteria for participants, promoting transparency and cooperation. With the school's permission, the official lists of Grade 11 and 12 students were obtained, and the researchers reviewed these to identify students aged 15–18 who self-identified as LGBTQ+ and were willing to participate. Fifteen (15) qualified participants were purposively selected for their relevant experiences. The researchers then personally met the participants to introduce the study, explain their expected involvement, and discuss confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Interview schedules were coordinated to accommodate participants' availability and ensure a comfortable setting. On the scheduled dates, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using a validated guide, with permission to audio-record sessions and take field notes for accuracy. After each interview, participants were sincerely thanked and given tokens of appreciation for their cooperation. Overall, the data gathering process was conducted in an organized and ethical manner, ensuring the participants' rights were respected and that the collected data effectively addressed the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to understand the lived experiences of bullying and resilience among LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read repeatedly to familiarize the researchers with the participants' responses, while notes were made to capture key ideas, emotions, and experiences. Next, meaningful statements were highlighted and assigned short codes summarizing their main ideas, organizing the data into manageable segments. Related codes were then grouped to identify

common patterns, from which preliminary themes were formed to reflect shared experiences. These themes were carefully reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure clarity and alignment with the data, while overlapping or unclear themes were revised or combined. To confirm accuracy, the researchers performed triangulation by comparing responses across participants, ensuring the credibility and consistency of the findings. Finally, the themes and subthemes were presented using a Dendrogram Table of Analysis, illustrating the relationships between participants' statements and emerging patterns. Through this systematic process of transcription, coding, theme development, triangulation, and presentation, the researchers ensured that the findings authentically represented the experiences of LGBTQ+ students facing bullying and demonstrating resilience.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards in qualitative research by observing several key principles. To protect anonymity, participants' real names were replaced with aliases in all transcripts and reports, allowing them to share experiences freely (Orb, Eisenhaur, & Wynaden, 2001). Informed consent was obtained after explaining the study's purpose and emphasizing voluntary participation, with participants signing forms indicating their willingness to take part (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The accuracy and credibility of data were ensured through triangulation, comparing interview responses with field notes to strengthen trustworthiness (Patton, 2002). Proper in-text citations and complete references were used throughout to maintain academic integrity (Creswell, 2014). Audio recordings of interviews were conducted only with participants' consent, used solely for transcription and verification, and deleted afterward (Orb et al., 2001). Additionally, an audit trail was maintained, including consent forms, interview guides, field notes, and transcripts, ensuring transparency and accountability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By following these ethical procedures, the researchers upheld respect, honesty, and professionalism, ensuring that participants' rights and well-being were protected throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

LGBTQ+ Students Experience Bullying in the Form of Verbal Bullying

This section presents the findings related to verbal bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: (*1) Identity-Based Verbal Attacks and Misidentification, (2) Emotional and Psychological Impact of Verbal Bullying, and (3) Coping Strategies and Responses to Verbal Bullying.* These themes reveal how verbal harassment targets students' identities, affects their emotional and mental well-being, and shapes the ways they respond and build resilience.

Theme 1: Identity-Based Verbal Attacks and Misidentification

Identity-Based Verbal Attacks and Misidentification refer to experiences where participants were insulted, labeled, or demeaned based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The bullying often involved homophobic slurs, misgendering, and degrading remarks that directly attacked their sense of self.

These verbal assaults were not random but were clearly directed toward who they are as LGBTQ+ individuals.

Several participants shared experiences of being called offensive names and being misidentified. For instance, P1 stated, "I experienced it mostly at home. In school, sometimes I get called names like 'bayot.'" (L24–25). Similarly, P4 shared, *"Tinatawag nila akong 'bayot,' 'pipikat,' at '150.' Naiisip ko minsan kung ginagawa lang ba kaming katatawanan at kung bakit ganoon ang trato nila sa amin."* (They call me 'bayot,' 'pipikat,' and '150.' Sometimes I wonder if they just make us a joke and why they treat us that way.) (L26–28). In addition, P3 explained, *"Gin tatawag ako nira nga tomboy, which is diri man tinuod… Nakakaoffend la nga gin tatawag na tomboy kay diri man ako tomboy."* (They call me a tomboy, which is not true… It is offensive because I am not a tomboy.) (L22–25). Moreover, P5 added, *"Tinatawag nila akong 'salot' at 'bayot.' Para bang wala akong halaga at hindi ako tinatanggap sa komunidad."* (They call me 'salot' and 'bayot.' It feels like I have no value and am not accepted in the community.) (L). Taken together, these responses consistently demonstrate that verbal bullying was directed toward their identity and self-definition.

The participants' narratives reveal that verbal bullying functions as an attack on identity rather than merely casual teasing. Being misgendered or labeled with homophobic slurs created feelings of invalidation and humiliation. The repeated use of derogatory terms reinforced social stigma and positioned them as "other" within their communities.

These findings align with Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that sexual and gender minorities experience additional stress due to stigma and discrimination. The verbal attacks described by participants reflect distal stressors—external events of prejudice—that contribute to chronic stress. Similar findings were reported by Kosciw et al. (2022) and Poteat et al. (2021), who identified verbal harassment as the most common form of bullying against LGBTQ+ youth. The results also support local studies (Abesamis & Siddayao, 2023) showing that identity-targeted insults remain prevalent in Philippine schools.

In conclusion, Identity-Based Verbal Attacks and Misidentification highlight how LGBTQ+ students are verbally bullied in ways that directly attack their core identity. These experiences go beyond simple name-calling and reflect deeper societal prejudice. The repeated mislabeling and derogatory remarks contribute to feelings of exclusion and devaluation. This theme underscores the urgent need for identity-affirming school environments that respect diversity and promote inclusion.

Theme 2: Emotional and Psychological Impact of Verbal Bullying

The Emotional and Psychological Impact of Verbal Bullying theme captures how hurtful words affected participants' feelings, thoughts, and mental health. Although some students attempted to downplay the incidents, their narratives revealed deep emotional pain, overthinking, stress, and academic consequences.

Participants openly expressed emotional distress. For example, P1 stated, "I feel hurt. Even if it's true, I still have emotions, so it hurts." (L27). Likewise, P4 shared, *"Palagi kong naiisip ang mga sinabi nila, kahit bago ako matulog."* (I always think about what they said, even before I sleep.") (L31–32). In addition, P5 explained, *"Naapektuhan ang mental at emotional state ko pati ang academic performance ko. Nag-o-overthink ako."* (My mental and emotional state, including my academic performance, were affected. I tend to overthink.) (L71–72). Furthermore, P2 added that hurtful words, especially from parents, deeply affected them: *"Unforgettable talaga hiya is from my parents… mayda adto phase na apektado talaga ak."* (What was unforgettable was from my parents… there was a phase when I was truly affected.) (L67–68). Collectively, these statements illustrate the significant emotional burden carried by participants.

The narratives demonstrate that verbal bullying has lingering psychological effects. Hurtful words were internalized, replayed in their minds, and triggered stress and shame. For some, the pain extended into academic life, affecting concentration and performance.

These findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which explains that stress occurs when individuals perceive situations as threatening and feel challenged in coping. The participants appraised verbal bullying as harmful, leading to emotional distress. Additionally, the results align with Hatzenbuehler et al. (2021) and Meyer et al. (2020), who found that repeated exposure to minority stress contributes to anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion among LGBTQ+ youth. Local studies (Abesamis & Siddayao, 2023) similarly reported that bullying negatively affects students' mental health and academic engagement.

In conclusion, the Emotional and Psychological Impact theme reveals that verbal bullying deeply affects LGBTQ+ students' well-being. Hurtful words leave emotional scars that extend beyond the moment of insult. The psychological burden influences self-esteem, daily functioning, and academic performance. Addressing verbal bullying is therefore essential not only for safety but also for protecting students' mental health.

Theme 3: Coping Strategies and Responses to Verbal Bullying

This theme focuses on how participants responded to verbal bullying and the strategies they used to cope. Their coping mechanisms included avoidance, emotional suppression, seeking support from friends and family, and turning to spiritual faith. These strategies reflect both vulnerability and resilience.

Participants described ignoring or internalizing the bullying. For instance, P3 stated, "*Gin kukimkim ko nala or gin bab-alewala ko.*" (I just keep it inside or ignore it.) (L33–34). Similarly, P1 shared, "I told myself it's fine and that I shouldn't feel bad or mad about it." (L31). In addition, P4 explained, *"Nagpanggap akong hindi ko ririnig ang mga sinasabi nila… Sumama ako sa mga kaibigan kong pinaparamdam sa akin na ligtas ako."* (I pretended not to hear them… I stayed with friends who made me feel safe.) (L38–40). Moreover, P5 added, *"Lumalapit ako sa aking mga kaibigan at pamilya para sa suporta at payo."* (I go to my friends and family for support and advice.) (L98–100). Likewise, P7 stated, *"Maaro ako hin bulig ha ginoo para maka recover ako."* (I pray to God for help so I can recover.) (L97–99). Altogether, these responses show varied but intentional coping efforts.

The participants' coping strategies reveal a combination of emotion-focused coping and reliance on social and spiritual support. While some responses involved silence and avoidance, others reflected resilience through supportive relationships and faith. Social connections provided validation and safety.

These findings align with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which emphasizes that resilience develops through internal strengths and external support systems. The reliance on friends, family, and God demonstrates protective factors that buffer against adversity. The results also support UNESCO (2023) and De Torres & Alampay (2022), who found that peer and family support significantly strengthen coping among LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, the Transactional Model explains that students employed emotion-focused coping to manage distress when they could not directly change the bullying situation.

In conclusion, Coping Strategies and Responses to Verbal Bullying highlight the resilience of LGBTQ+ students despite adversity. Although some strategies involved internalizing pain, many participants sought support and affirmation from trusted individuals and spirituality. These coping responses reflect strength, adaptability, and hope. Strengthening social and institutional support can further enhance their resilience.

Overall, verbal bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students is deeply rooted in identity-based attacks that invalidate their sexual orientation and gender identity. These experiences result in significant emotional and psychological distress, affecting both mental health and academic performance. Despite the harm caused, participants demonstrate resilience through coping strategies such as seeking social and spiritual support. The findings emphasize the need for inclusive school environments, strong anti-bullying policies, and affirming relationships to protect LGBTQ+ students and promote their well-being.

LGBTQ+ Students Experience Bullying in the Form of Physical Bullying

This section presents the findings related to physical bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: *(1) Bodily Violation and Unwanted Physical Contact, (2) Fear, Shock, and Emotional Aftermath from Physical Incidents, and (3) Avoidance, Silence, and Passive Coping as Response.* These themes illustrate how physical bullying manifests through direct bodily harm, how it affects students emotionally and psychologically, and how they respond to such incidents.

Theme 1: Bodily Violation and Unwanted Physical Contact

This refers to direct physical acts inflicted upon LGBTQ+ students, often motivated by their gender identity or sexual orientation. These include hitting, pushing, groping, and other forms of boundary violations. The theme highlights how physical aggression is used to target identity and assert dominance.

P7 shared, *"So gin physical ako, gin yabo ako."* (So they physically hurt me, they hit me.) (L11–13). Likewise, P8 stated, *"Tinulak at binapasok sa gilid-gilid ng ilang kaklase, pero parang joke lang sa kanila."* (I was pushed and shoved into corners by some classmates, but it seemed like a joke to them.) (L28). In contrast, P5 explained, *"Wala akong naranasang pagtutulak o panakit, pero may mga*

pagkakataong hinahawakan ang aking private parts nang walang respeto sa aking boundaries ko.” (I did not experience pushing or hitting, but there were times when my private parts were touched without respect for my boundaries.) (L). Additionally, P10 added, *“Oo, may panahon na ginyabo ako ng kuya ko sa likod, pero may dahilan naman siya at sinabing honor ako.”* (Yes, there was a time my older brother hit me at the back, but he said he had a reason and that I should still honor him.) (L26–27). Collectively, these statements demonstrate that participants experienced various forms of physical violation, both in school and at home.

The narratives reveal that physical bullying is not limited to overt violence but also includes subtle yet harmful violations of personal space and bodily autonomy. Participants experienced aggression that was often minimized by perpetrators as jokes or discipline. These actions reflect power imbalances and identity-based hostility.

These findings align with Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that LGBTQ+ individuals experience additional stress due to identity-based discrimination. Physical aggression based on gender expression represents distal stressors that intensify minority stress. Consistent with findings by Kosciw et al. (2022) and Poteat et al. (2021), LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately targeted for physical harassment. The experiences also reflect the global concern identified by UNESCO (2023), which emphasizes that unsafe school climates increase vulnerability among marginalized students.

In conclusion, Bodily Violation and Unwanted Physical Contact highlight the harsh realities faced by LGBTQ+ students. Physical bullying goes beyond momentary harm; it directly attacks dignity and bodily autonomy. Whether occurring in school or at home, these incidents reinforce stigma and inequality. Addressing such violations requires stronger school policies and awareness to protect students' rights and safety.

Theme 2: Fear, Shock, and Emotional Aftermath from Physical Incidents

This describes the immediate and long-term psychological effects following physical bullying. Participants expressed fear, trauma, trust issues, and difficulty feeling safe in school. This theme captures the emotional burden that follows physical victimization.

P8 stated, *“Nasaktan ako at natakot. Ayoko nang magpatuloy bilang girl dahil hindi maganda ang ginagawa nila sa akin.”* (I was hurt and afraid. I did not want to continue expressing myself as a girl because of what they were doing to me.) (L21–22). Similarly, P5 shared, *“Ang paghawak sa akin nang walang pahintulot ay naging traumatic at hindi ko makalimutan. Kapag may lalapit o hahawak sa akin ngayon, umiiwas agad ako.”* (Being touched without consent became traumatic and I cannot forget it. When someone approaches or touches me now, I immediately avoid them.) (L). In addition, P8 added, *“Nagkaroon ako ng trust issues, lalo na sa mga lalaki.”* (I developed trust issues, especially toward boys.) (L30). Moreover, P5 further explained, *“Naapektuhan ang mental health at academic performance ko. Minsan nagfa-flashback ang trauma.”* (My mental health and academic performance were affected. Sometimes the trauma flashes back.) (L). Collectively, these responses show that physical bullying resulted in lasting fear and psychological distress.

The participants' accounts indicate that physical bullying leaves deep emotional scars. Fear, avoidance, and trauma extended beyond the moment of the incident. The school environment, which should be safe, became a source of anxiety and hypervigilance.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains that when individuals perceive events as threatening and overwhelming, stress responses occur. Participants appraised physical bullying as harmful, leading to emotional and psychological strain. Research by Hatzenbuehler et al. (2021) and Meyer et al. (2020) confirms that repeated victimization increases anxiety and trauma symptoms among LGBTQ+ youth. Local findings by Abesamis and Siddayao (2023) similarly report that bullying negatively impacts mental health and academic engagement.

Overall, Fear, Shock, and Emotional Aftermath emphasize that physical bullying has consequences beyond physical pain. Emotional distress, trauma, and diminished trust significantly affect students' well-being. These effects influence how they interact socially and perform academically. Thus, interventions must address not only safety but also psychological recovery.

Theme 3: Avoidance, Silence, and Passive Coping as Response

This describes how participants reacted to physical bullying incidents. Many chose not to confront perpetrators and instead protected themselves through silence, avoidance, or altering their identity expression. This theme reflects coping strategies shaped by fear and self-preservation.

P8 stated, *"Hindi ko masyado kinaya noon, mininduko lang at natakot din magsabi sa iba."* (I could not handle it before; I just kept my head down and was afraid to tell others.) (L24). Similarly, P9 shared, *"Pinapabayaan ko lang sila."* (I just let them be.) (L33–34). In response to fear of harassment, P8 explained, *"Natakot ako maharass kaya nag-boy cut ako at naging open bilang lesbian."* (I was afraid of being harassed, so I cut my hair short and became open as a lesbian.) (L18–19). Furthermore, P7 added, *"Nagin matatag ako bisan gin bubully ako, gin patunayan ko ha ira na sugad talaga ako."* (I became strong even when I was bullied; I proved to them that this is who I truly am.) (L14–17). Collectively, these responses reveal patterns of avoidance, concealment, and resilience in coping with physical bullying.

The narratives suggest that silence and avoidance were often used as protective mechanisms. While some students concealed their identity to reduce risk, others asserted their identity despite bullying. These varied responses reflect both vulnerability and resilience in navigating hostile environments.

According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, students may adopt emotion-focused coping when direct confrontation feels unsafe. Avoidance and silence may reduce immediate conflict but can increase long-term distress (Meyer et al., 2020). However, Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014) highlights that internal strength and supportive relationships help individuals adapt despite adversity. Studies by Johnson et al. (2023) and Garcia and Lee (2024) emphasize that identity affirmation and social support strengthen coping capacities among LGBTQ+ youth.

In conclusion, Avoidance, Silence, and Passive Coping illustrate the complex ways LGBTQ+ students respond to physical bullying. While some responses reflect fear and self-protection, others demonstrate courage and resilience. Coping strategies are shaped by perceived safety and available support systems. Strengthening supportive school environments can encourage more adaptive and empowered responses.

Overall, physical bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students involves direct bodily violations, emotional trauma, and coping responses rooted in self-protection and resilience. The findings reveal that identity-based aggression deeply affects students' safety, mental health, and academic engagement. Guided by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Resilience Theory, and Minority Stress Theory, the results show that while physical bullying creates wounds, students continue to develop strength and adaptive strategies. These insights underscore the urgent need for inclusive, trauma-informed, and protective school policies to ensure the well-being of LGBTQ+ learners.

LGBTQ+ Students Experience Bullying in the Form of Social or Relational Bullying

This section presents the findings related to social bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students. Based on the analysis, three major themes emerged: *(1) Deliberate Exclusion and Social Isolation Based on LGBTQ+ Identity, (2) Rumor-Spreading and Gossip as Tools of Social Humiliation, and (3) Resilience Through Selective Social Connections and Self-Focus*. These themes reflect how social bullying manifests through exclusion, humiliation, and damaged relationships, while also revealing how students respond by building resilience and protective support systems.

Theme 1: Deliberate Exclusion and Social Isolation Based on LGBTQ+ Identity

Deliberate Exclusion and Social Isolation refer to intentional acts of rejecting, avoiding, or distancing LGBTQ+ students from peer groups because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Participants described being removed from circles of friends, ignored in group activities, and treated as outsiders. This theme highlights how identity-based exclusion affects students' sense of belonging in school.

P2 shared, *"Gin exclude talaga ak nira nak circle of friends for example adto mag ka kalakat hira diri naak nira ig i-inform or may gc hira diri naak gin aapi."* (They really excluded me from our circle of friends; for example, when they went out, they did not inform me, and they had a group chat where I was not included.) — P2. In addition, P2 also stated, *"Amo ngani adto bagan para haira disgusting sugad na pag ka tawo."* (It was as if, to them, I was a disgusting kind of person.) — P2. Furthermore, P2 further expressed, *"At first hadton nagin avoidant tlga ako ha mga tawo bagan nagin loner mayda part ngadtu na nagin lowner tlga ak hin duro kay naawod naman ako nga what if masabtan nira nga sugad ak ini ngayan."* (At first, I became avoidant of people; I became a loner because I was ashamed that they might find out who I really am.) — P2. Similarly, P12 shared, *"Han high school ako… han nalaman nira nga sugad ako ti nutukso talaga ak nira gin yayaknan ak nira hin mga you know mga name nga dre talaga makuan."* (When I was in high school and they found out about me, they really teased me and called me names that

were hurtful.) — P12 (L23–28). Overall, these responses demonstrate that exclusion, avoidance, and labeling were common forms of social bullying experienced by the participants.

The participants' narratives reveal that exclusion was not accidental but intentional and identity-based. Being removed from group chats, avoided in social gatherings, and labeled as "disgusting" created feelings of shame and loneliness. Social isolation became both a consequence of bullying and a coping response to anticipated rejection.

These findings align with Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that stigma and rejection create additional stress for sexual and gender minorities. Social exclusion reflects distal stressors that contribute to chronic emotional strain. Studies by Kosciw et al. (2022) and Poteat et al. (2021) confirm that LGBTQ+ students frequently experience peer rejection and social isolation. Furthermore, UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that exclusion undermines students' sense of belonging, which is critical for academic engagement and emotional well-being.

In conclusion, deliberate exclusion and social isolation significantly affected participants' school experiences. Being treated as outsiders weakened their sense of belonging and increased emotional distress. Social rejection not only damaged peer relationships but also influenced how students perceived themselves. Addressing exclusion requires inclusive school climates that promote respect and diversity.

Theme 2: Rumor-Spreading and Gossip as Tools of Social Humiliation

Rumor-spreading and gossip refer to the circulation of false or exaggerated stories about LGBTQ+ students, often targeting their sexual orientation or behavior. Participants described how these rumors damaged their reputation and created distrust among peers. This theme highlights how social humiliation operates subtly yet powerfully within school communities.

P2 shared, *"Labi nan mga rumors nga kuan daw kuno bisan hin-o akon gin gagaran kay pansexual daw kuno ako amo ba ira pag kakaintindi pansexual bisan hin-o nala daw kunot gin gagaran ko."* (Especially the rumors saying that because I am pansexual, they think I flirt with anyone.) — P2. Similarly, P8 stated, *"May tsismis tungkol sa bestfriend ko at sa akin, pero natatawa ako kasi hindi totoo."* (There were rumors about my best friend and me, but I just laughed because they were not true.) — P8 (L40). In addition, P12 expressed, *"Yana na sasaktan gad ak hit ira mga gin nyayakan nga I feel lugod nga ya-abagat siguro dre ak tanggap kuna no ak nga sugad."* (Now I feel hurt by the things they say; I feel that maybe I am not accepted for who I am.) — P12 (L31–35). Furthermore, P13 shared, "It was mental draining and emotionally painful, especially knowing they had to change their perspective to accept me." — P13 (L28–29). Altogether, these statements show that rumors deeply affected participants' emotional well-being and sense of acceptance.

The narratives illustrate that gossip functioned as a mechanism of humiliation and character attack. Rumors distorted participants' identities and led to mistrust in relationships. Even when some tried to dismiss the gossip, the emotional impact remained evident.

According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), individuals experience stress when situations are perceived as threatening to their identity and social standing. Rumors challenged participants' self-concept and belongingness, leading to emotional distress. Meyer's Minority Stress Theory further explains that stigma-based gossip intensifies internalized stress. Studies by Espelage and Hong (2021) and Hatzenbuehler et al. (2021) confirm that social humiliation contributes to anxiety, depression, and reduced school engagement among LGBTQ+ youth.

In summary, rumor-spreading and gossip served as powerful forms of social bullying. These actions damaged participants' reputations, strained friendships, and weakened trust within peer groups. Although some attempted to ignore the rumors, the emotional toll was significant. Schools must actively address gossip culture and promote respectful communication.

Theme 3: Resilience Through Selective Social Connections and Self-Focus

Resilience Through Selective Social Connections and Self-Focus describes how participants coped with social bullying by choosing supportive peers, ignoring negativity, and prioritizing personal growth. Rather than allowing exclusion or gossip to define them, they redirected their energy toward safe relationships and self-improvement. This theme highlights adaptive coping and identity affirmation.

P5 stated, *"Pinabayaan ko lang sila. Alam ko ang halaga ko. Lumalapit ako sa aking mga kaibigan at pamilya para sa suporta at payo."* (I just ignored them. I know my worth. I go to my friends and family for support and advice.) — P5. Similarly, P9 shared, *"Tanggap naman ako ng pamilya at mga kaibigan ko."* (My family and friends accept me.) — P9 (L47–48). In addition, P2 expressed, *"Gin boost nira tak confident tas gin papa intindi nira haakon nga dri toud na gin yayaknan haakon ha iba nga tawo."* (They boosted my confidence and made me understand that what others say about me is not true.) — P2. Furthermore, P4 stated, *"Hindi ko sila pinansin at dumiretso na ako."* (I ignored them and walked away.) — P4 (L53–55). Altogether, these responses demonstrate that participants relied on trusted relationships and self-assurance to counter social bullying.

The participants' stories reveal intentional coping strategies grounded in support and self-awareness. By choosing affirming peers and ignoring negativity, they minimized the emotional impact of bullying. Social support became a protective shield against humiliation and rejection.

These findings strongly align with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which emphasizes the role of protective relationships in overcoming adversity. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping also explain that participants used emotion-focused coping by disengaging from stressors and seeking support. Studies by Johnson et al. (2023) and Garcia and Lee (2024) highlight that peer affirmation and inclusive environments enhance coping capacities among LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, Sulimani-Aidan et al. (2024) stress the importance of mentors and supportive communities in strengthening resilience.

In conclusion, resilience among participants was strengthened through selective social connections and self-focus. Support from family, friends, and trusted peers enabled them to maintain confidence despite

social bullying. Ignoring negativity and affirming self-worth became empowering strategies. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive networks within schools.

Overall, social bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students manifests through exclusion, gossip, and humiliation, which deeply affect their emotional well-being and sense of belonging. However, participants demonstrated resilience by seeking supportive relationships and affirming their identities. Guided by Minority Stress Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Resilience Theory, the findings reveal both the wounds caused by social bullying and the strengths developed in response. Creating inclusive and affirming school environments is essential in transforming these wounds into sources of growth and empowerment.

LGBTQ+ Students Experience Bullying in the Form of Cyberbullying

This subheading presents three emergent themes related to the cyberbullying experiences of LGBTQ+ students*: (1) Online Harassment and Homophobic Targeting, (2) Emotional and Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying, and (3) Resistance, Coping, and Resilience in Digital Spaces.* These themes collectively illustrate how LGBTQ+ students encounter identity-based attacks in online platforms, experience emotional consequences, and eventually develop coping strategies and resilience despite digital adversity.

Theme 1: Online Harassment and Homophobic Targeting

Online harassment and homophobic targeting describe the experiences of LGBTQ+ students who encounter offensive, discriminatory, and identity-based attacks in digital spaces. These include homophobic name-calling, spreading of false rumors, derogatory labeling, and exposure of one's sexual orientation without consent. The findings show that online platforms amplify discrimination because of anonymity and wide audience reach.

Several participants shared experiences that strongly support this theme. For instance, P2 stated, *"Mas dako talaga nak na experience ha cyber bullying… damo talaga tak na encounter na homophobic nga people ngadto… bisan ano nalat ira gin yayakan haimo."* (I experienced cyberbullying more intensely… I encountered many homophobic people there… they say anything about you even if they do not know you.) (P2, L76). In addition, P2 also shared, *"Damo na mga ngaran nga gin tatawag ha akon… diri na pan tawo tawo na ngaran…"* (They called me many names… even inhuman names.) (P2, L?).
Similarly, P8 mentioned, *"May tsismis tungkol sa bestfriend ko at sa akin, pero natatawa ako kasi hindi totoo."* (There were rumors about my best friend and me, but I laugh because they are not true.) (P8, L40). Furthermore, P8 recounted, *"Noong graduation pictorial… may nag-react sa GC, napaisip ako."* (During the graduation pictorial… someone reacted in the group chat, and it made me overthink.) (P8, L37–38). Altogether, these responses reveal how online platforms become avenues for homophobic targeting and unwanted exposure.

The narratives demonstrate that cyberbullying often centers on sexual orientation and gender expression. Participants experienced attacks not merely as students, but specifically as LGBTQ+

individuals. The online environment allowed aggressors to spread rumors, assign derogatory labels, and publicly question their identity without accountability.

These findings support Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that LGBTQ+ individuals experience additional stress due to stigma and discrimination. The identity-based attacks described by participants reflect distal stressors rooted in societal prejudice. Consistent with studies by Kowalski et al. (2022) and UNESCO (2023), cyberbullying extends harassment beyond school grounds, intensifying emotional strain. The results also align with Espelage and Hong (2021), who emphasized that lack of inclusive school climates allows discriminatory behaviors to persist both offline and online.

In conclusion, online harassment and homophobic targeting are prominent forms of cyberbullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students. The anonymity and accessibility of digital platforms increase the intensity and reach of discriminatory acts. These experiences reflect broader societal stigma and reinforce the additional burdens faced by sexual and gender minority students in digital spaces.

Theme 2: Emotional and Psychological Impact of Cyberbullying

This theme highlights the emotional and psychological consequences of cyberbullying among LGBTQ+ students. Participants reported feelings of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, trust issues, and mental distress. These impacts affected their daily routines, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being.

P2 shared, "*Naging anok adto mayda adto time na bagan diri nalak nakikig socialized… depressing gad ha feeling…*" (There was a time when I stopped socializing… it felt very depressing.) (P2, L67). Similarly, P8 stated, *"Nagkaroon ako ng trust issues, lalo na sa mga lalaki."* (I developed trust issues, especially toward men.) (P8, L30). In addition, P13 reflected, "If… I were to experience such online harassment, it would definitely affect one's mental health…" (P13, L78–81). Meanwhile, P1 noted, "It didn't affect me much. There are laws about cyberbullying that I could report." (P1, L44). Overall, these responses illustrate varying emotional reactions but collectively show psychological vulnerability linked to online harassment.

The accounts reveal that cyberbullying triggers both immediate emotional pain and long-term psychological effects. Some participants withdrew socially, while others developed anxiety or distrust. Even hypothetical reflections acknowledged the damaging mental health consequences of online harassment.

The findings align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which explains that stress depends on one's appraisal of a threatening situation. Participants who perceived cyberbullying as harmful experienced emotional distress, while others who perceived coping resources (e.g., legal protections) reported less impact. Research by Hatzenbuehler et al. (2021) and Meyer et al. (2020) supports that repeated minority stress increases risks of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, UNESCO (2023) emphasized that cyberbullying significantly disrupts adolescents' emotional security and academic focus.

In conclusion, cyberbullying has significant emotional and psychological effects on LGBTQ+ students. While responses vary, many experience depression, anxiety, and withdrawal. These findings underscore the importance of mental health support and inclusive policies to protect vulnerable students from digital harm.

Theme 3: Resistance, Coping, and Resilience in Digital Spaces

Despite experiencing cyberbullying, LGBTQ+ students demonstrated resistance, coping strategies, and resilience in digital environments. Participants described ignoring aggressors, blocking offenders, disengaging from social media, redirecting focus to hobbies, and seeking supportive communities.

P2 shared, *"Usually papabayan ko la… basta diri hira na contribute tak kinabuhi."* (I usually ignore them… they do not contribute to my life.) (P2, L49). Similarly, P13 stated, "To protect myself… I would avoid going to social media and avoid reading such commentaries." (P13, L78). In addition, P8 mentioned, *"Nakahanap ako ng lesbian friends na naging support system namin sa isa't isa."* (I found lesbian friends who became our support system for each other.) (P8, L44). Furthermore, P2 explained, *"Nag basa ako… gin libang ko tak kalugaingon para diri la huna hunaon it na mga butang."* (I read books… I kept myself busy so I would not overthink those things.) (P2, L56). Overall, these responses demonstrate intentional coping and support-seeking behaviors.

The narratives show that students actively resist victimization by protecting their mental health and seeking affirming spaces. Some used emotion-focused coping (ignoring, disengaging), while others relied on social support. These strategies indicate adaptive resilience rather than passive endurance.

The findings strongly align with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which emphasizes that resilience develops through internal strengths and external support systems. The use of peer support and hobbies reflects protective factors identified by Johnson et al. (2023) and Garcia & Lee (2024). Additionally, the coping behaviors reflect the Transactional Model's concept of emotion-focused coping strategies. Minority Stress Theory further contextualizes resilience as a response to chronic discrimination, showing how LGBTQ+ youth adapt despite systemic stressors.

In conclusion, LGBTQ+ students exhibit resilience in digital spaces through deliberate coping strategies and supportive relationships. Their responses reflect strength, adaptability, and agency in managing cyberbullying experiences. These findings highlight that while digital spaces can be harmful, they can also become sources of empowerment and solidarity.

Overall, cyberbullying among LGBTQ+ students manifests through homophobic targeting, emotional distress, and adaptive resilience. While digital platforms expose students to identity-based harassment and psychological strain, they also serve as spaces where coping, solidarity, and empowerment emerge. Guided by Minority Stress Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Resilience Theory, the findings reveal a journey from digital wounds toward digital strength. These experiences underscore the urgent need for inclusive school policies, mental health interventions, and safe online environments that affirm and protect LGBTQ+ learners.

Coping with and Responding to the Experiences of Bullying among LGBTQ+ Students

The findings under this subheading reveal three emergent themes that describe how LGBTQ+ students cope with and respond to bullying experiences: *(1) Social Exclusion and Identity-Based Ostracism, (2) Psychological Harm and Diminished Self-Worth, and (3) Resilience, Support Systems, and Recovery.* These themes illustrate the progression from experiences of rejection and emotional harm to the development of coping strategies and resilience. Together, they demonstrate how participants interpret, manage, and eventually overcome bullying within their school and social environments.

Theme 1: Social Exclusion and Identity-Based Ostracism

Social exclusion and identity-based ostracism describe the deliberate acts of isolating LGBTQ+ students from peer groups and spreading stigmatizing rumors about their identity. Participants shared experiences of being excluded from social circles, treated as invisible, and subjected to gossip that distorted their sexual orientation. These experiences reflect how bullying extends beyond direct insults and manifests through subtle but harmful social rejection.

One participant shared, *"gin exclude talaga ak nira nak circle of friends… may gc hira diri naak gin aapi kay amo ngani adto bagan para haira disgusting sugad na pag ka tawo."* (They really excluded me from their circle of friends… they have a group chat and I am not included because for them, it seems disgusting to be that kind of person) (P2, L18–20). In addition, another stated, *"Labi nan mga rumors nga kuan daw kuno bisan hin-o akon gin gagaran kay pansexual daw kuno ako…"* (There are many rumors saying that I flirt with anyone because they misunderstand that being pansexual means I flirt with everyone, which I do not do) (P2, L28–30). Moreover, a different participant expressed, "It's more on comments rather than direct name-calling. They share their opinions about who I am." (P13, L19–21). Meanwhile, one shared, "Those who do not know about my identity treat me as a normal friend." (P13, L22–23). Collectively, these responses consistently highlight experiences of exclusion, misrepresentation, and conditional acceptance.

Collectively, these narratives reveal that bullying often takes indirect forms such as social distancing, rumor-spreading, and subtle dehumanization. Rather than overt aggression alone, participants experienced identity-based rejection that weakened their sense of belonging. The accounts show how peer groups can become spaces of alienation instead of support.

These findings align with Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that stigma and discrimination create chronic stress among sexual minority individuals. Consistent with recent studies (Kosciw et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023), social exclusion and rumor-based harassment intensify feelings of marginalization. The experiences of participants mirror findings from Philippine studies (Abesamis & Siddayao, 2023) where LGBTQ+ students reported invisibility and peer rejection. Within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), such exclusion may be appraised as a social threat, triggering emotional coping responses.

In conclusion, social exclusion and identity-based ostracism represent a foundational form of bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students. These experiences undermine belongingness and distort identity through gossip and isolation. Although subtle, these acts carry significant emotional consequences. Understanding this theme highlights the importance of inclusive peer cultures and school climates that affirm diversity.

Theme 2: Psychological Harm and Diminished Self-Worth

Psychological harm and diminished self-worth capture the emotional and mental impact of bullying on LGBTQ+ students. Participants described lowered self-confidence, fear of judgment, avoidance behaviors, and emotional pain. These internal struggles reveal how bullying affects not only social experiences but also self-perception and psychological well-being.

One participant stated, *"It lowered my self-confidence and sense of security."* (P13, L25). Similarly, another shared, "at first hadton nagin avoidant tlga ako ha mga tawo… nahadlok naman ako nga what if masabtan nira nga sugad ak ini ngayan." (At first, I became avoidant of people… I was afraid that they might understand that I am like this) (P2, L30–32). In addition, a participant expressed, *"Nakakasakit ito sa damdamin ko. May mga pagkakataon din na binabastos ako."* (It hurts my feelings. There are times when I am disrespected) (P5, L27–28). Furthermore, another added, *"Hindi na ako gaanong komportable makisama sa mga lalaki… lumalayo na agad ako."* (I am no longer comfortable being around boys… I immediately distance myself) (P4, L30–31). Collectively, these responses emphasize emotional pain, fear, and withdrawal as consequences of bullying.

The narratives illustrate how bullying erodes self-esteem and creates anxiety in social interactions. Participants became cautious, withdrawn, and hyperaware of others' perceptions. Avoidance became a protective yet isolating response to repeated victimization.

These findings support research linking bullying to anxiety, depression, and reduced school engagement (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2021). Minority Stress Theory explains that repeated exposure to stigma results in chronic psychological strain. Within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, avoidance behaviors may be viewed as emotion-focused coping strategies aimed at minimizing distress. However, as Meyer et al. (2020) suggest, prolonged concealment and withdrawal may increase long-term psychological vulnerability.

In conclusion, psychological harm and diminished self-worth represent the internal consequences of identity-based bullying. Emotional pain, fear of rejection, and reduced confidence shape participants' daily interactions and self-concept. These findings underscore the urgent need for mental health support and affirming school environments. Addressing bullying must therefore include interventions that rebuild self-esteem and promote emotional safety.

Theme 3: Resilience, Support Systems, and Recovery

Despite experiences of exclusion and psychological harm, participants demonstrated resilience through support systems and identity affirmation. This theme reflects how LGBTQ+ students draw strength from peers, family, and self-acceptance to recover from bullying. Their responses highlight adaptive coping, empowerment, and personal growth.

One participant shared, *"mayda gihap ako mga friends… gin bboost nira tak confident."* (I have friends who are also part of the LGBTQ community and they help me and boost my confidence) (P2, L45–47). In addition, another expressed, *"Tanggap naman ako ng pamilya at mga kaibigan ko."* (My family and friends accept me) (P9, L18). Similarly, a participant declared, *"Nagin matatag ako bisan gin bubully ako gin patunayan ko ha ira na sugad talaga ako."* (I became strong even though I was bullied; I proved to them that this is who I truly am) (P7, L22–23). Furthermore, another reflected, *"you have to know yourself first… unless diri mo tanggap… diri ka makaka recover."* (You have to know yourself first and embrace who you are, because unless you accept yourself, you cannot recover) (P2, L52–54). Collectively, these responses consistently emphasize support, strength, and self-acceptance.

The accounts show that resilience emerges through relationships and identity affirmation. Peer solidarity and family acceptance function as emotional anchors. Self-acceptance transforms painful experiences into opportunities for growth and empowerment.

These findings strongly align with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which emphasizes the role of protective factors in overcoming adversity. Consistent with Sulimani-Aidan et al. (2024) and Ghabrial and Andersen (2023), identity affirmation and mentorship enhance emotional regulation and stress management. Within the Transactional Model, these supports serve as coping resources that shift appraisal from threat to growth. The findings also counter minority stress by demonstrating that affirmation reduces its harmful impact.

In conclusion, resilience, support systems, and recovery highlight the transformative journey of LGBTQ+ students from wounds to wings. Despite experiencing bullying, participants developed strength through community, family, and self-acceptance. Their narratives reveal not only survival but empowerment. This theme affirms that supportive relationships and affirming environments are essential in fostering long-term well-being.

The three themes collectively illustrate a journey from exclusion and psychological harm to resilience and empowerment. LGBTQ+ students initially encounter identity-based ostracism and emotional distress, yet they actively develop coping strategies and draw strength from supportive relationships. Their experiences reflect the interplay of minority stress, coping processes, and resilience-building mechanisms. Ultimately, these findings emphasize that while bullying inflicts deep wounds, affirmation, community support, and self-acceptance enable LGBTQ+ students to rise, recover, and thrive.

Perceived Challenges and Impact of Bullying Among LGBTQ+ Students as a Consequence of Being Bullied

The findings under this subheading reveal three major emergent themes: *(1) Emotional and Psychological Harm, (2) Damage to Social Relationships and Sense of Identity, and (3) Academic and School Life Disruption.* These themes describe how bullying affects LGBTQ+ students internally, socially, and academically. Together, they present a comprehensive picture of how lived experiences of victimization shape their well-being and educational journey.

Theme 1: Emotional and Psychological Harm

The first theme highlights the deep emotional pain, stress, and long-term psychological consequences experienced by participants. Bullying did not only cause temporary sadness but also led to mental exhaustion, trauma, overthinking, insecurity, and reduced self-confidence. These emotional wounds often extended beyond the immediate incidents and affected their overall mental health.

One participant shared, "I feel hurt. Even if it's true, I still have emotions, so it hurts." (P1, L27). In addition, another stated, "It made me stressed, but not to the point of crying." (P1, L62). Moreover, a participant described the experience as "Sometimes it is more mentally draining, instead of mentally painful and emotionally draining." (P13, L110–112). Similarly, P5 expressed, *"Nakaramdam ako ng lungkot, anxiety, at trauma."* (I felt sadness, anxiety, and trauma.) and further added, *"Naapektuhan ang mental at emotional state ko pati ang academic performance ko. Nag-o-overthink ako."* (My mental and emotional state, as well as my academic performance, were affected. I tend to overthink.) Furthermore, P14 admitted, *"Insecure ako noon at nabawasan ang confidence ko."* (I became insecure before and my confidence decreased.) Collectively, these responses demonstrate the emotional and psychological burden caused by bullying.

The narratives show that bullying triggered both immediate emotional pain and prolonged psychological distress. Feelings of hurt and stress gradually evolved into deeper conditions such as trauma, anxiety, overthinking, and insecurity. The participants' accounts reflect how repeated exposure to bullying weakens emotional stability and self-worth over time.

These findings align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that stress occurs when individuals perceive situations as threatening and overwhelming. The participants appraised bullying as harmful, leading to emotional-focused coping such as overthinking and internalizing distress. Furthermore, Minority Stress Theory by Meyer (2003) explains that LGBTQ+ students experience additional stress due to stigma and discrimination, intensifying psychological harm. Recent studies (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2020) also confirm that repeated victimization increases anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion among LGBTQ+ youth.

In conclusion, Emotional and Psychological Harm reflects the profound internal struggles experienced by LGBTQ+ students who are bullied. The pain extends beyond surface-level hurt and evolves

into long-term mental health challenges. These emotional wounds affect how students view themselves and interact with others. Addressing bullying therefore requires not only disciplinary measures but also mental health support systems that validate and protect LGBTQ+ learners.

Theme 2: Damage to Social Relationships and Sense of Identity

The second theme highlights how bullying disrupts peer connections and challenges identity acceptance. Participants described experiences of exclusion, avoidance, trust issues, and difficulty embracing their sexuality or gender identity. Bullying created barriers to forming meaningful relationships and expressing their authentic selves.

One participant stated, *"Gin-exclude talaga ak nira nak circle of friends."* (They really excluded me from the circle of friends.) — P2. Furthermore, the same participant added, *"Nagin avoidant tlga ako ha mga tawo bagan nagin loner."* (I became avoidant toward people; it felt like I became a loner.) — P2. In addition, another shared, *"Nagkaroon ako ng trust issues, lalo na sa mga lalaki."* (I developed trust issues, especially toward men.) — P8, L30. Moreover, P2 admitted, *"Nakurian gud ak pag embrace tak sexuality agi iton."* (I found it difficult to embrace my sexuality because of that.) Similarly, P13 revealed, "I was never really open about my gender orientation since I was in junior high." (L116–117) and reflected, "Maybe accepting myself was the biggest challenge I have faced." Collectively, these responses highlight social alienation and identity struggles.

The accounts illustrate that bullying led to social withdrawal, fear of trust, and concealment of identity. Participants often distanced themselves from peers to avoid further victimization. At the same time, discrimination made self-acceptance more difficult, reinforcing internal conflicts about identity.

This theme strongly reflects Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that stigma and rejection contribute to internalized stress and identity concealment among sexual minorities. Studies by Russell et al. (2021) and Meyer and Frost (2022) show that repeated discrimination reduces self-esteem and weakens social engagement. Moreover, Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014) suggests that supportive relationships are critical protective factors; when these are absent due to bullying, vulnerability increases. The participants' experiences confirm that social rejection intensifies emotional distress and identity challenges.

In conclusion, Damage to Social Relationships and Sense of Identity reveals how bullying affects not only friendships but also self-perception and authenticity. Participants experienced exclusion, isolation, and difficulty accepting themselves. The disruption of social belonging weakened their confidence and sense of security. Therefore, fostering inclusive school climates and affirming relationships is essential in supporting LGBTQ+ students' identity development.

Theme 3: Academic and School Life Disruption

The third theme describes how bullying interferes with students' academic focus, performance, and sense of safety in school. Participants reported losing concentration, experiencing declining academic

performance, avoiding participation, and in some cases, stopping school altogether. School, which should be a safe learning space, became a source of fear and insecurity.

One participant shared, "Sometimes I lose focus, but I try not to think about it so I can focus more." — P1, L70. In addition, another explained, *"Naapektuhan ang mental at emotional state ko pati ang academic performance ko."* (My mental and emotional state, as well as my academic performance, were affected.) — P5. Furthermore, P7 revealed, *"Actually grade 12 na sana ako yana, nag stop ako han grade nga amo adto nga gin bubully ako nira."* (I should already be in Grade 12 now, but I stopped during the year when they were bullying me.) — P7, L69–70. Similarly, P8 stated, *"Natakot ako maharass kaya nag-boycut ako at naging open bilang lesbian."* (I was afraid of being harassed, so I had my hair cut short and became openly lesbian.) — P8, L18–19, and further added, *"Tinulak at pinapasok sa gilid-gilid ng ilang kaklase, pero parang joke lang sa kanila."* (I was pushed and shoved into corners by some classmates, but it seemed like a joke to them.) — P8, L28. Collectively, these statements emphasize academic and environmental disruption.

The narratives show that bullying reduced concentration, motivation, and participation in school activities. Fear of harassment made students avoid certain spaces and limit self-expression. In extreme cases, bullying resulted in school discontinuation, demonstrating the severe educational consequences.

These findings align with research by Kosciw et al. (2021) and UNESCO (2023), which report that LGBTQ+ students experiencing frequent bullying show higher absenteeism, lower academic performance, and increased school avoidance. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping also explains that when stress overwhelms coping capacity, functioning in academic settings declines. Additionally, Minority Stress Theory situates these experiences within systemic discrimination that creates unsafe educational climates. The participants' accounts demonstrate how emotional distress and environmental insecurity directly hinder academic engagement.

In conclusion, Academic and School Life Disruption highlights how bullying undermines educational participation and achievement. Students lost focus, felt unsafe, and in some cases discontinued schooling. These disruptions reflect not only personal struggles but also systemic failures in ensuring safe learning environments. Strengthening inclusive policies and consistent protection mechanisms is therefore crucial to safeguard LGBTQ+ learners' educational rights.

Overall, the three themes collectively reveal that bullying affects LGBTQ+ students holistically—emotionally, socially, and academically. Emotional pain evolves into psychological distress; social rejection challenges identity formation; and academic engagement declines due to fear and insecurity. These interconnected experiences confirm that bullying is not an isolated event but a complex phenomenon shaped by minority stress and environmental conditions. Addressing these challenges requires integrated support systems that promote mental health, affirm identity, and ensure safe and inclusive school environments.

Resistance Manifested by LGBTQ+ Students in Response to Bullying Experiences

This subheading presents three emergent themes that describe how LGBTQ+ students respond to bullying and develop resilience: *(1) Active Self-Advocacy and Standing Up, (2) Anchoring in Support Systems, and (3) Inner Resilience and Identity Affirmation*. These themes collectively illustrate how participants move from experiences of victimization toward empowerment, strength, and personal growth. The findings highlight both external and internal factors that shape their coping processes and resilience development.

Theme 1: Active Self-Advocacy and Standing Up

This refers to the ways participants confront bullying through assertive responses, nonchalant deflection, or intentional disengagement. Rather than remaining passive, many students described learning to speak up, defend themselves, or emotionally detach from harmful remarks. These strategies reflect problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

One participant shared, "Before, I just stood there. Now, I respond and explain that bullying is not ethical." (P1, L72). In addition, another stated, *"Gin pakita ko talaga ha ira na kaya ko."* (I showed them I can handle it.) – P7, L77–79. Furthermore, P13 mentioned, "I tend to respond nonchalantly, since most of the time it's their own opinions." (P13, L87). Similarly, P2 expressed, *"Diri ko kasi hira gin babaton bagan waray la talaga ak labut haira so gin papabay-an ko nala hira."* (I did not fight back; I had nothing to do with them, so I just let them be.) – P2. Likewise, P1 added, "I joke around and remind myself that not everything they say is true." (P1, L74). Collectively, these responses demonstrate various assertive and adaptive strategies used to confront or manage bullying.

The participants' narratives reveal that self-advocacy evolved over time. While some directly confronted bullies, others used humor, indifference, or silence to maintain control of the situation. These actions signify a shift from vulnerability to agency, showing that students actively negotiated their responses rather than remaining powerless.

These findings align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that individuals evaluate stressors and choose coping strategies accordingly. Participants demonstrated both problem-focused coping (verbal confrontation) and emotion-focused coping (deflection and detachment). Additionally, Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014) emphasizes adaptive responses in the face of adversity, which are evident in students' assertive behaviors. Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) further contextualizes these strategies as responses to identity-based discrimination, highlighting how coping becomes a survival mechanism in stigmatizing environments.

In conclusion, Active Self-Advocacy and Standing Up reflects the participants' transition from silence to empowerment. Their willingness to speak up, ignore negativity, or assert boundaries demonstrates growth and confidence. These strategies illustrate resilience in action, showing that students do not merely endure bullying but actively resist and redefine their experiences.

Theme 2: Anchoring in Support Systems

This highlights the importance of family, friends, teachers, and the LGBTQ+ community in strengthening students' resilience. Participants emphasized that emotional validation, encouragement, and acceptance from trusted individuals helped them cope with bullying and rebuild confidence. Support systems served as protective factors that buffered emotional distress.

P2 shared, *"So an nag help talaga haakon is firstly nak Lola hiya talaga nak pa intindi haakon na I'm loved, I'm seen, I'm accepted, I'm validated."* (My grandmother helped me understand that I am loved, seen, accepted, and validated.) – P2, L109–110. In addition, P7 stated, *"Nak teacher ngan nak pamilya ngan gin yaknan ako nira nga kaya ko ini harapun."* (My teacher and my family told me that I can face this.) – P7, L83–85. Furthermore, another participant expressed, *"So may ada ko mga sangkay na bumulig haak pag intindi nga kun pano ko ig accept tak kalugaringon kay normal man la ghap kami na tawo."* (I had friends who helped me understand how to accept myself because we are just normal people.) – P2. Likewise, P1 added, "Mostly myself, and my friends." (P1, L76). Collectively, these statements emphasize the protective power of relational support.

The narratives show that participants did not navigate bullying alone. Emotional reassurance from family members, encouragement from teachers, and solidarity from peers created safe spaces where students felt valued. These connections restored their sense of belonging and reduced feelings of isolation.

This theme strongly supports Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which highlights the role of protective relationships in overcoming adversity. Research by Garcia and Lee (2024) and Johnson et al. (2023) confirms that inclusive school climates and peer networks strengthen coping abilities among LGBTQ+ youth. Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) also explains that affirming relationships counteract the harmful effects of stigma and discrimination. The findings demonstrate that resilience is not solely an internal trait but a socially supported process.

In conclusion, Anchoring in Support Systems underscores the vital role of relationships in fostering resilience. Family acceptance, peer solidarity, and teacher encouragement functioned as pillars of strength. These support networks helped participants transform emotional wounds into sources of motivation and growth.

Theme 3: Inner Resilience and Identity Affirmation

This captures how participants developed self-acceptance, confidence, and empowerment despite bullying experiences. Rather than internalizing negativity, students gradually embraced their identities and reframed adversity as an opportunity for growth. This theme reflects deep personal transformation.

P7 declared, "Hindi dahil kung anong tingin nila sakin okay lang kahit ganito ako." (It does not matter what they think of me; I am okay with who I am.) – P7, L94–96. Similarly, P2 expressed, *"Learn how to accept who you really are before ka mag seek validation it iba."* (Learn to accept who you really are before seeking validation from others.) – P2. In addition, another participant confidently stated, *"Very*

confident na ako na ma faface ko iton." (I am very confident that I can face it.) – P2. Likewise, P13 affirmed, *"100% confident that would not affect me in any other way."* (P13, L175). Collectively, these statements highlight identity affirmation and strengthened self-belief.

The responses illustrate that resilience became internalized over time. Participants shifted from seeking external validation to grounding their confidence within themselves. Bullying experiences, though painful, contributed to stronger self-awareness and emotional maturity.

These findings resonate with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which describes resilience as adaptive growth after adversity. They also reflect Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), where identity affirmation counters internalized stigma. Recent studies (Ghabrial & Andersen, 2023; Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2024) show that identity pride strengthens psychological well-being among LGBTQ+ youth. The participants' narratives demonstrate that embracing identity serves as both healing and empowerment.

In conclusion, Inner Resilience and Identity Affirmation reveals the profound personal growth that emerged from adversity. Participants cultivated confidence, self-acceptance, and emotional strength. Their journey from vulnerability to empowerment reflects the transformative process of resilience.

Overall, the three themes collectively demonstrate a movement from external confrontation to relational support and ultimately to internal empowerment. Active self-advocacy shows agency, support systems provide strength, and identity affirmation solidifies resilience. Together, these findings illustrate the transformative journey of LGBTQ+ students from wounds to wings, highlighting how adversity can lead to growth, empowerment, and sustained well-being.

LGBTQ+ Students' Perception of Their Ability to Recover from Future Bullying Incidents

This subheading presents how LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City perceive their ability to recover from possible future bullying incidents. Three major themes emerged from the data: *(1) Coping and Emotional Support, (2) LGBTQ+ Acceptance and Advocacy, and (3) Personal Coping and Resilience.* These themes reflect how participants rely on relational support, community progress, and personal strength to prepare themselves for future adversities.

Theme 1: Coping and Emotional Support

The first theme emphasizes the role of family, friends, and personal independence in strengthening participants' confidence to recover from future bullying. Students expressed that emotional validation and supportive relationships provide them with a sense of security and belonging. At the same time, some participants highlighted self-reliance as an important source of strength.

P9 shared, *"So an nag help talaga haakon is firstly nak Lola hiya talaga nak pa intindi haakon na I'm loved, I'm seen, I'm accepted, I'm validated… and what helps me is ano it ak mga interest nga namiling ak hin mga things na ma enjoy ko takon mga hobbies…"* (My grandmother helped me understand that I am

loved, seen, accepted, and validated… and I look for activities and hobbies that help me divert negative energy.) – P9, L109–110. Similarly, P4 stated, "*Wala po: Akin sarili ko lang, dahil walang ibang nakikialam.*" (None; only myself, because no one else intervenes.) – P4, L57–58. In addition, P4 also mentioned, *"My circle of friends, me and my childhood friends as well."* – P4, L183. Overall, these responses demonstrate that both relational support and self-dependence strengthen their ability to recover from bullying.

Collectively, the narratives reveal that participants draw resilience from both external and internal resources. Family members, especially grandparents and close friends, provide affirmation and emotional reassurance. Meanwhile, personal hobbies and self-reliance function as coping mechanisms that help them manage stress and negative emotions.

These findings align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), which explains that individuals assess stressors and utilize available coping resources. Participants demonstrated emotion-focused coping by seeking validation and engaging in enjoyable activities. Furthermore, Ann Masten's Resilience Theory (2014) supports the idea that protective relationships foster recovery from adversity. Minority Stress Theory by Ilan H. Meyer (2003) also contextualizes these coping strategies as adaptive responses to identity-based stress.

In conclusion, Coping and Emotional Support underscores that recovery is not an isolated process. Participants believe they can face future bullying because they are surrounded by affirming relationships and have developed personal coping strategies. Emotional validation and self-reliance together reinforce their sense of preparedness and resilience.

Theme 2: LGBTQ+ Acceptance and Advocacy

The second theme reflects participants' belief that increasing social acceptance and peer empowerment strengthen their ability to recover from future bullying. Students perceive gradual community acceptance and collective growth within the LGBTQ+ community as protective factors. Advocacy and peer encouragement further build confidence and solidarity.

One participant stated, *"I think an SOGIE naka build naka help talaga hiya… little by little magiging accepted na gud kami community agi hiton SOGIE."* (I think SOGIE has really helped; little by little, our community will become accepted because of it.) – L111. Similarly, another added, *"Slowly if akseptar anay nira kay feeling ko mag help nala hira mag pa samwak na normal man la kami na tawo."* (If people slowly accept us, it will help spread that we are normal human beings.) – L113–115. In addition, P7 expressed, *"Magyayakan gihap ako ha iba na tawo na sugad nga LGBTQ ako nga mag keep growing gihap hira na sugad ha akon."* (I tell other LGBTQ people like me to keep growing.) – P7, L111–112. Likewise, P9 also said, "I try to support others in my LGBTQ community so we can grow together." – P9, L114. Collectively, these responses highlight hope in societal change and peer empowerment.

The participants' narratives indicate that resilience extends beyond individual coping to collective empowerment. They believe that advocacy, representation, and community solidarity create safer

environments and reduce the intensity of future bullying. This collective mindset fosters optimism and preparedness.

This theme connects with Minority Stress Theory by Ilan H. Meyer, which explains that stigma-related stress can be reduced through supportive social climates. Recent studies such as those by Stephen T. Russell (2023) and Garcia and Lee (2024) emphasize that inclusive policies and peer networks lower victimization rates. Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014) further supports that community-level protective factors strengthen adaptive capacity.

In conclusion, LGBTQ+ Acceptance and Advocacy highlights that participants perceive recovery as a shared and evolving process. They believe that growing social awareness and collective empowerment reduce fear of future bullying. Through advocacy and solidarity, they gain confidence in facing potential adversities.

Theme 3: Personal Coping and Resilience

The third theme centers on self-acceptance, confidence, and assertiveness as foundations of recovery. Participants expressed strong belief in their capacity to handle future bullying because they have developed inner strength and emotional maturity. Self-affirmation and assertive attitudes empower them to remain unaffected by negative judgments.

P9 stated, *"Hindi dahil kung anong tingin nila sakin okay lang kahit ganito ako."* (It does not matter what they think of me; I am okay with who I am.) – P9, L72. In a similar vein, P4 expressed, *"Very confident na ako na ma faface ko iton… pabaye nala it hira kun amo man ira karuyag yaknon."* (I am very confident that I can face it… I will just let them say what they want.) – P4, L78–79. Together, these responses clearly demonstrate strengthened self-confidence and emotional independence.

The thematic narrative suggests that participants have internalized resilience over time. They no longer depend solely on external validation but ground their strength in self-acceptance and assertiveness. This internal transformation increases their readiness to confront future bullying.

These findings are strongly supported by Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which describes resilience as adaptive growth after adversity. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) also explains that confidence influences how individuals appraise stressors. Moreover, Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) emphasizes that identity affirmation reduces internalized stigma and strengthens psychological well-being.

In conclusion, Personal Coping and Resilience reveals that participants perceive themselves as capable and empowered individuals. Their confidence, assertiveness, and identity affirmation prepare them for possible future bullying incidents. Inner resilience becomes their strongest defense against adversity.

Overall, the synthesis of these three themes demonstrates that LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City view recovery as a multidimensional process involving relational support, community acceptance, and

personal strength. Their experiences reflect a journey from vulnerability to empowerment. Together, these findings illustrate that resilience is nurtured through both social connections and inner transformation, enabling them to face future bullying with courage and confidence.

Support Systems Identified by LGBTQ+ Students as Essential for Addressing and Mitigating Bullying in the LGBTQ+ Community

This subheading presents how LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City perceive their ability to recover from possible future bullying incidents. Three major themes emerged from the data: *(1) Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms, (2) Institutional Support Needs and Gaps, and (3) Community Acceptance and Social Change.* These themes collectively describe how students draw strength from personal relationships, recognize institutional limitations, and hope for broader social transformation as part of their recovery and resilience process.

Theme 1: Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms

Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms highlight the importance of family, friends, and personal strategies in helping LGBTQ+ students prepare for future bullying. Participants described emotional validation, peer solidarity, self-reliance, and hobbies as key sources of strength. These internal and external supports enhance their confidence and ability to cope with adversity.

P2 shared, *"So an nag help talaga haakon is firstly nak Lola hiya talaga nak pa intindi haakon na I'm loved, I'm seen, I'm accepted, I'm validated everything hiya talaga nag pa feel haakon iton"* (My grandmother really helped me understand that I am loved, seen, accepted, and validated; she made me feel all of that) (P2, L109–110). Similarly, P7 stated, *"It akon mga pamilya ngan it akon mga sangkay"* (My family and my friends) (P7, L109–110), while P4 mentioned, "My circle of friends, me and my childhood friends as well" (P4, L183). In addition, P4 expressed, "*Akin sarili ko lang, dahil walang ibang nakikialam"* (Only myself, because no one else intervenes) (P4, L57–58). Furthermore, P2 added, *"what helps me is ano it ak mga interest nga namiling ak hin mga things na ma enjoy ko takon mga hobbies mga hirimoon na makakapag avert haakon iton ngani na bad energy negative energy"* (What helps me are my interests; I look for things I enjoy such as hobbies that divert my bad or negative energy) (P2, L112-113). Taken together, these responses collectively show that both social support and personal coping strategies strengthen their resilience.

The responses indicate that LGBTQ+ students rely on affirming relationships and self-developed coping strategies to prepare for future bullying. Emotional validation from family and peers provides security and belonging, while hobbies and self-reliance offer psychological relief. Together, these supports enhance their resilience and readiness to face adversity.

These findings align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), which explains that individuals manage stress through emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Participants demonstrated emotion-focused coping by seeking emotional

validation and engaging in hobbies. Ann Masten's Resilience Theory (2014) further supports that protective relationships foster adaptive recovery. Moreover, Ilan H. Meyer's Minority Stress Theory (2003) explains that social support buffers the harmful effects of identity-based discrimination. These theoretical frameworks confirm that coping and support systems play a central role in resilience development.

In conclusion, Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms demonstrate that LGBTQ+ students' recovery is strengthened by both relational and personal resources. Family acceptance, peer solidarity, and self-directed coping strategies foster emotional stability and preparedness. These findings highlight that resilience is not developed in isolation but through meaningful connections and adaptive behaviors. Such supports empower students to face potential bullying incidents with confidence.

Theme 2: Institutional Support Needs and Gaps

Institutional Support Needs and Gaps reflect students' perceptions of limited school protection and inconsistent policy implementation. Participants expressed concern about the absence of inclusive policies and inadequate administrative responses. They also proposed the need for gender-friendly programs and stronger institutional action.

P12 stated, *"Waray man ha school, waray. Ha government, mayda like pwede na magsul-ot it mga LGBTQ hin mga kun ngain nira gusto nga mga like about ba sul-oton. Ha government yeah pero ha school? waray man"* (There is none in school. In the government, there are policies allowing LGBTQ to wear what they want, but in school? None) (P12, L189–191). Moreover, P12 also expressed, *"Uhm, base han ak experience, up until now waray man la gihapon like gin papasagdan man la gihap nera"* (Based on my 4experience, until now nothing has changed; they just ignore it) (P12, L194–196). In contrast, P4 suggested, "They schools should implement activities that are gender friendly, as well as communities and possibly also accepting the community as one instead of a different community" (P4, L192–194). Collectively, these responses reveal perceived policy gaps and highlight the need for inclusive reforms within school settings.

The participants' narratives reveal frustration over limited institutional protection against bullying. While some national protections exist, school-level implementation appears weak or inconsistent. Students therefore recognize that institutional reform is necessary to reduce vulnerability and enhance their confidence in facing future incidents.

These findings align with research by UNESCO (2023) emphasizing that ineffective policy implementation weakens student protection. Minority Stress Theory by Ilan H. Meyer (2003) explains that systemic discrimination intensifies stress among marginalized students. Studies such as Garcia and Lee (2024) indicate that inclusive policies significantly reduce bullying. Within the Philippine context, inconsistent enforcement of protective laws further reinforces vulnerability. Thus, institutional support plays a crucial role in resilience-building.

In summary, Institutional Support Needs and Gaps highlight the importance of policy enforcement and inclusive school environments. Students believe stronger institutional action would reduce bullying and increase their sense of safety. While personal resilience is important, systemic reform remains necessary.

Strengthening school-based interventions can significantly enhance preparedness for future bullying incidents.

Theme 3: Community Acceptance and Social Change

Community Acceptance and Social Change focus on students' desire for emotional validation and collective empowerment. Participants emphasized that acceptance and gradual societal change strengthen their confidence. They also highlighted peer encouragement and advocacy as important resilience factors.

P2 stated, "It ak la mayayakan about ito it ira kailangan man la talaga is mapa feel mo haira na accepted hira nga they're heard" (What I can say is that they just need to feel accepted and heard) (P2, L109–116). Similarly, P12 shared, *"Ano, actually simple man la like yeah. Uhm tanggapon kun ano ako tas suportahan kun ano tak mga gusto as part of LGBTQ"* (It's simple—accept me for who I am and support my goals as part of LGBTQ) (P12, L185–186). In addition, P7 expressed, *"Magyayakan gihap ako ha iba na tawo na sugad nga LGBTQ ako nga mag keep growing gihap hira na sugad ha akon"* (I tell other LGBTQ people like me to keep growing like I do) (P7, L111–112). Furthermore, another participant noted, *"I think an SOGIE naka build naka help talaga hiya regarding haamon na ano little by little magiging accepted na gud kami community agi hiton SOGIE"* (I think SOGIE has helped us; little by little we are becoming accepted because of it) (P9, L99–109). Collectively, these responses demonstrate the value of acceptance and the importance of fostering collective growth within the LGBTQ community.

The participants' accounts demonstrate that resilience is strengthened through emotional validation and advocacy. Acceptance fosters dignity and belonging, while peer empowerment builds collective strength. Students believe that gradual social change reduces fear and increases confidence in facing potential bullying.

These findings support Minority Stress Theory by Ilan H. Meyer, which highlights how supportive climates reduce identity-based stress. Research by Stephen T. Russell (2023) indicates that inclusive school climates improve well-being among LGBTQ+ youth. Ann Masten's Resilience Theory also affirms that social environments significantly influence adaptive capacity. The reviewed literature shows that advocacy, mentorship, and safe spaces promote empowerment and long-term resilience.

In conclusion, Community Acceptance and Social Change emphasize that resilience extends beyond individual coping to collective transformation. Emotional validation and advocacy strengthen students' preparedness for adversity. Participants view social progress as a protective factor against future bullying. Through acceptance and empowerment, they gain confidence and hope.

Overall, the three themes reveal that LGBTQ+ students in Tacloban City perceive themselves as capable of recovering from potential future bullying incidents. Their resilience is supported by personal coping strategies, affirming relationships, recognition of institutional gaps, and hope for social change. The integration of individual, relational, and systemic factors strengthens their preparedness. Grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Resilience Theory, and Minority Stress Theory, these findings demonstrate that recovery is both a personal journey and a socially influenced process.

SUMMARY

This study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students at Sto. Niño Senior High School during the School Year 2025–2026. It aimed to understand their personal stories, motivations, challenges, and coping strategies as they navigated school life as sexual and gender minority learners. Specifically, the study sought to examine how LGBTQ+ students experienced various forms of bullying, the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to overcome these challenges, and the insights they gained from their experiences.

A qualitative research design was employed, specifically the transcendental phenomenological approach, which focused on describing the essence of participants lived experiences. This approach allowed the researchers to capture authentic voices, emotions, and meanings from the students' educational journeys without manipulating any variables. By applying phenomenology and using epoche to set aside personal biases, the study highlighted the perspectives of LGBTQ+ learners, ensuring that the findings reflected their genuine experiences.

The study was limited to fourteen (14) LGBTQ+ students enrolled at Sto. Niño Senior High School and did not include teachers, administrators, or students from other schools. The findings depended on the participants' honesty and willingness to share their stories and may not be generalizable to all LGBTQ+ learners in the Philippines. Despite these limitations, the study provided meaningful insights into the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of LGBTQ+ students.

The results revealed that LGBTQ+ students experienced multiple and overlapping forms of bullying rooted in their sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants reported being subjected to derogatory labels, homophobic slurs, deliberate misgendering, pushing, hitting, unwanted physical contact, social exclusion, and online harassment. These experiences caused deep emotional pain, persistent overthinking, anxiety, trauma, and diminished self-esteem. They encountered challenges such as balancing personal safety with school participation, managing emotional stress, limited access to institutional support, and the difficulty of embracing their identity in an unsupportive environment. To address these challenges, students employed strategies including seeking emotional support from peers and family, practicing self-affirmation, engaging in hobbies, relying on spiritual faith, and developing assertive responses over time. Participants also gained valuable insights into resilience, self-acceptance, and the importance of community belonging, highlighting the transformative impact of affirming relationships on their personal and educational development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students at Sto. Niño Senior High School, focusing on their experiences with bullying, coping mechanisms, resilience, and support systems. The findings revealed that LGBTQ+ students face multiple forms of identity-based bullying, employ various strategies to overcome these challenges, and gain meaningful personal and educational insights. Based on the results, the following conclusions can be drawn in relation to each research focus.

Experiences of Bullying Among LGBTQ+ Students

The findings indicate that LGBTQ+ students experienced pervasive, multi-faceted, and identity-targeted forms of bullying that included verbal attacks, physical violations, social exclusion, and cyberbullying. These experiences are consistent with Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003), which explains that sexual and gender minority individuals face additional stress due to stigma and discrimination. The bullying directed at participants was not random but was clearly motivated by their sexual orientation or gender identity, confirming previous research that LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately victimized in school settings (Kosciw et al., 2022; Poteat et al., 2021), and underscoring that discrimination remains a persistent structural problem in Philippine schools.

Coping Strategies and Responses to Bullying

LGBTQ+ students employed diverse and adaptive coping strategies in response to bullying, consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Participants relied on both emotion-focused coping, such as seeking emotional validation and engaging in self-affirmation, and problem-focused coping, such as confronting bullies and reporting incidents. Family acceptance, peer solidarity, and spiritual faith emerged as strong protective factors that buffered against emotional harm. These findings align with research showing that peer support and affirming relationships are among the most effective mechanisms for helping LGBTQ+ youth sustain well-being despite repeated victimization (UNESCO, 2023; De Torres & Alampay, 2022).

Perceived Challenges and Impact of Bullying

Bullying exerted profound psychological, social, and academic impacts on LGBTQ+ students. Participants experienced anxiety, trauma, emotional exhaustion, social isolation, loss of concentration, reduced academic motivation, and in severe cases, school discontinuation. The cumulative nature of these impacts confirms the principles of Minority Stress Theory, which explains that chronic exposure to stigma and discrimination intensifies psychological distress over time. These findings reinforce that bullying is not a trivial peer conflict but a serious educational and public health issue that demands urgent and comprehensive institutional intervention.

Resistance Manifested in Response to Bullying

Despite enduring significant adversity, LGBTQ+ students demonstrated remarkable resilience and active resistance in response to bullying. Participants transitioned from initial passivity to assertive self-advocacy, grounding their identity affirmation in supportive relationships and personal growth. These findings align strongly with Resilience Theory (Masten, 2014), which emphasizes that resilience is a dynamic process shaped by both internal strengths and external protective factors. The narratives of participants reveal that adversity, when met with affirming support and self-acceptance, can become a catalyst for empowerment and personal transformation.

Perception of Ability to Recover from Future Bullying

LGBTQ+ students expressed strong confidence in their ability to recover from potential future bullying incidents. This confidence was grounded in developed self-acceptance, community solidarity, and awareness of growing social awareness and advocacy. Participants who had cultivated a positive sense of identity demonstrated greater preparedness and emotional independence in facing adversities. These findings support Ghabrial and Andersen (2023) and Sulimani-Aidan et al. (2024), who found that identity affirmation and self-efficacy are key components of long-term psychological resilience among sexual and gender minority youth.

Support Systems for Addressing and Mitigating Bullying

LGBTQ+ students identified family acceptance, peer solidarity, and personal coping strategies as their primary support systems. However, they expressed significant frustration over the absence of explicitly inclusive school policies and the inconsistent enforcement of existing protective legislation, including the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 and the Safe Spaces Act. These findings highlight a critical institutional gap that leaves LGBTQ+ students without reliable safeguards within educational settings. Stronger school-level policies, gender-sensitive programs, and broader societal advocacy are necessary to create genuinely safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers offer the following recommendations to support the continuous growth and well-being of LGBTQ+ students. These recommendations are directed towards the key beneficiaries identified in the Significance of the Study. LGBTQ+ students, teachers, parents, and future researchers.

1. **For LGBTQ+ Students**
   1.1. Engage with supportive peers, teachers, or school groups to share experiences and build resilience.
   1.2. Participate in programs or workshops that promote self-awareness, emotional well-being, and coping strategies.
   1.3. Advocate for safe and inclusive spaces within the school environment.

2. **For Students**
   2.1 Learn to recognize all forms of bullying, including subtle acts like exclusion, misgendering, and spreading rumors, because indirect bullying often causes the most harm.
   2.2 Choose to be an upstander by supporting bullied classmates, speaking against offensive behavior, and reporting incidents to trusted adults.
   2.3 Educate yourself about LGBTQ+ identities through reliable sources and respectful conversations to build understanding and prevent bullying.

3. **For Teachers**
   3.1 Implement classroom activities that promote empathy, respect, and understanding of diversity.
   3.2 Develop strategies to address bullying and create a safe, supportive classroom environment.
   3.2 Encourage open dialogue and provide guidance to students facing challenges.

4. **For Parents**
   4.1 Be attentive to signs of distress in LGBTQ+ children and provide emotional support.
   4.2 Promote open communication about school experiences and challenges.
   4.3 Collaborate with schools to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.

5. **For Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)**
   5.1 Develop programs that address bullying toward LGBTQ+ students and promote their overall well-being.
   5.2 Create awareness campaigns and peer support groups in schools to foster acceptance and empowerment among LGBTQ+ learners.
   5.3 Provide training for teachers, counselors, and school staff to recognize, prevent, and respond effectively to LGBTQ+ bullying.
   5.4 Collaborate with schools and local organizations to implement targeted interventions, counseling services, and advocacy programs that support LGBTQ+ students.
   5.5 Promote mental health and resilience initiatives that strengthen LGBTQ+ students' social, emotional, and academic development.

6. **For Policymakers**
   6.1 Strengthen and enforce anti-bullying policies that explicitly include protections for LGBTQ+ students.
   6.2 Ensure safe and inclusive school environments through regular monitoring and support programs.
   6.3 Support collaboration with NGOs and schools to provide comprehensive interventions for LGBTQ+ learners.
   6.4 Invest in policies and programs that promote mental health, well-being, and resilience among LGBTQ+ students.
   6.5 Encourage educational frameworks that integrate inclusivity, diversity, and equity into school curricula and culture.

7. **Future Researchers**
   7.1. Conduct further studies on LGBTQ+ experiences to expand understanding and inform interventions.
   7.2. Explore additional strategies to foster resilience and inclusivity in educational settings.
   7.3. Build on existing findings to create evidence-based policies that protect LGBTQ+ students.

In conclusion, this study highlights the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students, focusing on the challenges they face, particularly bullying, and their strategies for resilience. The findings help emphasize the importance of supportive environments, understanding from peers, parents, and teachers, and the value

of sharing experiences to foster growth. By acknowledging these insights, schools and communities can better promote inclusivity, empathy, and the well-being of LGBTQ+ students.

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Jeanelyn L. Andrade, School Principal II of Sto. Niño Senior High School, District Learning Center VI, Schools Division of Tacloban City, served as a research consultant for this study. As an educational leader who champions inclusivity, she provided invaluable guidance and expert insights, ensuring that the study remained grounded in the realities of the school setting while promoting a supportive and equitable environment for LGBTQ+ students. Her commitment to educational excellence and social equity significantly enriched the quality and relevance of the research.