

# Issues and Concerns of LGBTQ+ Community in the Context of the Academe: Bases for Policy Formulation in the University

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## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research was to assess the issues and perceptions concerning the welfare of LGBTQ+ community at the Bulacan State University. Many studies had been done to address the problems among LGBTQ+ community, however, there are only a few studies who promoted policies and programs for the development of LGBTQ+ students. Meanwhile, the study is anchored in Self-Identity Theory which was based on groups being an important source of pride and self-esteem for individuals. Descriptive case study method was utilized in the study and interview was used as a technique in data gathering. In addition, there were six self-confessed LGBTQ+ students who served as participants in the study. The results revealed the LGBTQ+ students of Bulacan State University were experiencing discrimination and harassment from heterosexual students, staff, and administrators at the university. Also, it was found out that the university lacks programs, policies, and measures in catering the welfare of LGBTQ+ students. In conclusion, the university's existing programs and policies about LGBTQ+ students should be revisited for the better understanding of the students, staff, administrators, and the university regarding the issues and concerns that LGBTQ+ students were facing.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ+, *sexuality, gender identity, heterosexual, sexual orientation, discrimination*

## INTRODUCTION

"A fixed definition of gender and sexuality" (Renn, 2010), such statement described the large paradox circulating in the world of educational institutions which has prevented deeper explanation regarding gender identity. In 2012, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) revealed that such belief to gender identity had caused marginalization among LGBTQ+ students wherein LGBTQ+

community and perception was being devalued inside the university. As a result, LGBTQ+ students with negative experiences inside schools or universities were seen dropping schools, had lower grades, and had poor mental health outcomes. As LGBTQ+ students' concerns were being neglected, the academe had still not done anything to solve this problem. Moreover, according to Kosciw (2010), there had been a distressingly high number of LGBTQ+ students reported struggling in various bullying and victimization from classmates and even teachers or administrators in connection with their gender orientation. In addition, LGBTQ+ youths were more likely to face harsh disciplinary actions including expulsions from school administrators (Hummelstein & Bruckner, 2011).

Throughout the past decades, there had been a considerable rise in a number of studies pertaining to LGBTQ+ students' experience in the academe (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016). However, despite the universities' attempts to initiate activities regarding the condition of the LGBTQ+ community, the university still shows hesitation for real assistance. This was not surprising considering how LGBTQ+ community was treated inside the academe. However, due to insufficient researches about the issues LGBTQ+ community were facing, the current phenomena became a problem which was called as heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a belief that it's normal for heterosexual individuals to engage in a relationship based on their sex and sexual desires but not homosexuals (Supporting LGBT Lives, 2008). Furthermore, discrimination among LGBTQ+ students still continues despite a number of researches regarding the issues they faced. In addition, the hostile school environment is believed to contribute to having higher rates of truancy, absenteeism and dropping out among them (Mitchum & Moodie-Mills, 2014). Thus, it is vital that a right and effective policy should be made to protect the rights and the welfare of the LGBTQ+ students.

This research offered initiated programs catering to LGBTQ+ welfare. Although the academe adamantly resisted the queering of higher level interventions to LGBTQ+ phenomena making the problem even worse, attempts were done to assist students with such struggles. However, in order to reach this turning point, the boundary that keeps the LGBTQ+ students below the line of academic research studies must come to an end in order to process more research focusing mainly on the rights and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community in general and the Bulacan State University (BulSU) students in particular. The study presents gender

identity issues in educational institutions while in the same manner, found ways to remedy the existing university gender problems.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study aimed to obliterate the line of discrimination and victimization of the LGBTQ+ students at Bulacan State University (BulSU) through policy formulation. Through such policies, the study intended to satisfy the needs and concerns of the main stakeholders of the study, which are the students. Mainly, with policies formulated in BulSU, issues of violations and social discrimination could be eradicated from the list of problems within the university and could create unity and enhancement on the relationships occurring among students, faculties, and administrators.

The research aims:

1. To assess LGBTQ+ students' perceptions on the issues concerning their welfare
2. To identify LGBTQ+ students' negative experiences and how they managed those struggles.
3. To identify and determine Bulacan State University (BulSU) existing policies, programs and measures to promote the LGBTQ+ students' welfare
4. To formulate proposed guidelines promoting LGBTQ+ student community's welfare and development brought about by the implications from the study results.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**Self-Identity Theory.** This theory was presented by Henri Tajifel in 1979 based on the ideology that one of the important sources of pride and self-esteem among individuals is their groups. Such groups are considered important for they give individuals a sense of social identity. The theory also states its purpose to increase an individual self-image by enhancing the status of the group and by holding prejudice and discrimination against other groups.

The Self-identity Theory was relevant in the study for it presented certain information relating to the explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon that the LGBTQ+ community was being

drawn out of the mainstream due to their unconventional sexual orientation caused them to be perceived as part of the out-group thus creating an imbalance and harsh treatment when these LGBTQ+ students touch the norm line.

### METHODOLOGY

This research utilized descriptive case study method. Such method is a purposive process of gathering and tabulating data about prevailing conditions, practices, beliefs, processes, trends and cause relationships; and then making an adequate and accurate interpretation of such data with or without the aid of statistical methods (Calderon & Gonzales as cited in Fajardo, 2010). In addition to that, it is a case study because it only focuses on LGBTQ+ experiences in Bulacan State University. Case study as defined by Zainal (2007) is a method that enables the researchers to closely examine the data with a specific context and selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as subjects of the study.

There were six self-confessed LGBTQ+ students of the University which served as participants of the study. Purposive sampling was the technique used in selecting the participants of the study. In purposive sampling, the participants are chosen based on set criteria.

The researcher gathered information through the use of interview as a technique, where the respondents were asked to provide information in the form of facts, attitudes, opinions and intentions to determine the school-related problems and to identify the concerns of the LGBTQ+ students. Furthermore, the researcher used an adapted checklist as an instrument to assess the views of selected LGBTQ+ students regarding the university atmosphere on the promotion of their rights and welfare. Finally, the researcher utilized content analysis to assess whether there are existing policies that cater to their needs and interests.

Descriptive statistics was used to interpret data relating to the assessment of LGBTQ+ students' perceptions on the issues concerning their welfare. On the other hand, data coming from the interview were analysed using thematic approach.

### **LGBTQ+ Students' Perceptions on Bulacan State University Atmosphere**

In the past decade, the university has not yet fully accepted the LGBTQ+ students' existence in the community. Despite this fact, queers

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had somehow assessed some descriptions regarding absent and present depictions in the various categories about LGBTQ+ under the University. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of policies and procedures, university events and celebrations, course content, and co-curricular activities regarding LGBTQ+ students inside the university.

**Table 1**  
LGBTQ+ Students Perceptions at Bulacan State University

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	PRESENT		ABSENT	
	F	P	F	P
Schools fairly enforced non-discrimination and anti-bullying or harassment policies.	0	0%	6	100%
School forms not just limited to having a male-female choice, but also included being a part of the LGBTQ+ community.	0	0%	6	100%
Requirement of students to only wear the uniform or dress codes deemed appropriate for their gender. Males should wear male clothing while females should only wear female clothing.	2	33%	4	67%
There were gender-neutral comfort rooms.	0	0%	6	100%
UNIVERSITY EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS	PRESENT		ABSENT	
	F	P	F	P
University and College nights were inclusive of LGBTQ+ students.	4	67%	2	33%
Events and competitions used gender-neutral alternatives for "King or Queen".	1	17%	5	83%
There were Valentines' day celebrations or events inclusive of LGBTQ+ students and couples.	0	0%	6	100%
COURSE CONTENT	PRESENT		ABSENT	
	F	P	F	P
Health and sexuality education or lessons included information of all sexual orientations and gender inequalities.	2	33%	4	67%

COURSE CONTENT	PRESENT		ABSENT	
	F	P	F	P
Instructors regularly included information in their lesson about LGBTQ+ community members, history and events.	1	17%	5	83%
Information regarding LGBTQ+ community members, history and issues were readily and immediately found on library resources and displays.	0	0%	6	100%
CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITES	PRESENT		ABSENT	
	F	P	F	P
LGBTQ+ students were allowed to enter athletic teams and events	6	100%	0	0%
There was a student organizations alliance between the LGBTQ+ students and heterosexual students.	6	100%	0	0%
There were organizations promoting the welfare of the LGBTQ+ students.	6	100%	0	0%
Student publications covered LGBTQ+ people and issues.	5	83%	1	17%

**Policies and Procedures.** Policies and procedures were considered to be important for they aim to include the rights of every individual. As shown in the table, results revealed that there was no enforcement of policies concerning non-discrimination and anti-bullying or harassment in the university. Also, the university excluded LGBTQ+ students in any school documents and requiring students to only wear a dress or uniform appropriate for their gender.

Based on this result, the researcher found out that the university lack policies and procedures to protect students who belonged to the LGBTQ+ community. In connection to McGuire (2008), such policies were needed to provide safety, sound practices or programs, and good environment to students. On the other hand, the university policy about LGBTQ+ students being part of any school measures or forms was not found in the checklist. This policy being absent in the policies and procedures could bring an impact to the performance of LGBTQ+ students in their studies or activities.

According to Crocco (2001), curricular innovations included LGBTQ+ students in school curricula for it was found to be an effective way

in creating positive school climates and students' well-being. Also in this way, the university promotes a meaningful and healthy environment for LGBTQ+ students as well as their heterosexual peers. On the other hand, the university strictly submitted on dress codes or uniforms and provision of gender-neutral comfort room remains to be absent. This kind of policy was important for it affected the welfare of the LGBTQ+ students. Some LGBTQ+ students felt freedom in expressing their right to wear clothes based on their choices and tastes (Supporting LGBT Lives, 2008).

**University Events and Celebrations.** The next part of the table presents the perceptions of the university events and celebrations in connection with LGBTQ+ students. As shown in the table, 100% of the LGBTQ+ students believed they were not included in any Valentines' day celebration or events, while 80% of them expressed that they were included in the college and university nights, and 90% showed allowance into events or competitions to use gender-neutral alternatives for King or Queen.

Based on the results in the checklist, the researcher found out that LGBTQ+ students were not included in any celebrations or events on Valentines' day. This could possibly hinder the developing personality and well-being of an LGBTQ+ student. In addition, this could also build social interaction anxiety. To Beidel and Turner (1999), social interaction anxiety was the fear and avoidance of an individual in social interactions, which could lead to other maladaptive behaviors like depression, refusal, and fewer friends. It is then important that LGBTQ+ students had a lower level of social anxiety for it could help them develop their self-esteem and meet personal goals.

Moreover, LGBTQ+ students' participation in college universities nights, events, and competitions was a good thing for it could enrich LGBTQ+ students' personality, well-being, and even health. With this, students could somehow feel freedom and could significantly contribute to their quality of life. Additionally, they [LGBTQ+ students] must learn how to balance the situation by exercising their freedom of expression in giving suggestions in policies and measures that could help them uplift their welfare and build their relationship with heterosexual students, faculties, staff, and administrators.

**Course Content.** The third part of the checklist presents the results on BulSU's course content adaption regarding LGBTQ+ community. Results showed that the existence of LGBTQ+ resources such as readings, history, and issues in the library was not found. Sixty-five percent (65%)

of the respondents revealed that discussions on sexual orientations and gender inequalities were not being recognized by instructors while 90% said that there was no involvement on LGBTQ+ information and issues dissemination.

Based on the findings of the study regarding the nonexistence of resources in the library about LGBTQ+ students, this only proved that most school libraries did not have access to information such as literature or materials about LGBTQ+ (Kosciw et al., 2010). Having LGBTQ+ resources in university libraries were considered to be important for LGBTQ+ students to feel that schools are a place for them or they could even think that their lives and concerns were valued. In addition, lessons and discussions on sexual orientations and gender inequalities were not recognized by instructors. Even information, history, and issues were not being addressed. There were many reported cases where universities did not disseminate information regarding the LGBTQ+ community. However, according to O'Shaughnessy et al. (2004), students who knew where to get information and resources at school about LGBTQ+ community felt safer and perceived that their schools were safe even with heterosexual people. In reality, BulSU did not include resources on LGBTQ+ issues in academic facilities like school libraries to help them develop open-mindedness and make awareness a norm in the university. The study also emphasized the inability of school libraries to provide access to LGBTQ+-related literature and materials. However, the current situation could only bring an impact of self-distance between the LGBTQ+ students and the school. Digging deeper, in order for this problem to be solved, school libraries must provide accessible materials to enlighten readers on LGBTQ+ students' lives and not only on heterosexuality among students.

**Co-curricular Activities.** The last part of the table shows the perceived responses of LGBTQ+ students regarding the checklist in co-curricular activities. One of the results revealed that there was indeed a 100% existence of students' organizations to incorporate LGBTQ+ students within the mainstream. However, 90% of the respondents said that LGBTQ+ issues were not covered in any student publication.

Based on the results, the researcher found out that student organizations included not only heterosexual students in their alliance but also LGBTQ+ students. Having to be included in this kind of organizations or alliances could protect the welfare of LGBTQ+ students as well as heterosexual students. According to Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer (2006), one of the strong factors that perceived school safety for LGBTQ+



students as well as heterosexual students was having an organization to depend on such as GSA or Gay-Straight Alliance. It was proved that the presence of organizations or alliances like GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) could lower LGBTQ+ students' engagement in health risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking or even risky sexual behavior. However, despite the fact that there was indeed an assessment of 100% participation or inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in the alliances and groups of the heterosexual students, similar to the results under course content, LGBTQ+ resources were not found in the university library. The university student publications also did not cover any issue or story about the LGBTQ+ community to possibly help LGBTQ+ students in enhancing their lives. This could mean that there was no assurance of such involvement to satisfy the LGBTQ+ students' rights and well-being. As according to Henderson (2015), there was a better alliance of heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students with the presence of LGBTQ+ stories and issues in student publications that could promote a good atmosphere among the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students.

### **LGBTQ+ Students' School-Related Problems**

Relating to what Remafedi (1987) said, there were approximately 28% of gay and lesbian youths who dropped out of high school because of discomfort due to verbal and physical abuse in the school environment. Catching up, the following school-related problems provided below were determined by the selected LGBTQ+ students during their interview with the researcher.

**Being bullied or harassed.** In the past years, school bullying had received significant public attention raising the concerns of many students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. According to Hong and Espelage (2012), bullying was often linked with emotions, behaviors, and sometimes even academic risk for school-aged youth. In this study, the researcher found out that most of the LGBTQ+ students in BulSU were being bullied either verbally or physically. One of the selected LGBTQ+ students of the University shared that *"pag lumabas po kami ng ibang department, halimbawa sa COPERS, COE, 'pag naglalakad ka po may maririnig ka pa din naman po talagang may nagbubulungan or may mga medyo foul po na salita"* (When we approach other colleges, like COPERS, COE, we could hear other students saying foul words on us). Also, *"para po sa'kin pinakaoffensive 'yung may marinig ka na 'salot'. Although 'di naman po siya ganun ka-loud pero makikita mo po talaga sa reaksyon ng ibang tao pag sinasabi nila 'yung salita na 'yon sa'yo"* (For me, the most offensive word I've heard

was the word “pest”. Although it was not verbally delivered to me, still I could figure out their reactions in expressing that word towards me).

In the case of the respondents, they perceived bullying, verbal and physical harassment as natural and inevitable phenomena inside the campus due to their non-conformity to conventional heterosexual norms, where most of the time heterosexual students found them as subjects of laughing stock. However, the situation must end to promote a healthy relationship among the student body composed of the heterosexuals and LGBTQ+ students. In this way, LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students could work together and be more productive. In addition, there could also be a chance of developing policies and practice for the school to reduce bullying and discrimination.

**Being discriminated by teachers, staff, and administrators.** Aside from being bullied and harassed by heterosexual students, it was more surprising that even teachers, staffs, and administrators had participation on this. As revealed by one of the students, *“mayron po kaming ka-org (organization) mate po nagtitiis na lang po siya ng ihi niya kasi nga ‘di ba nga na ano siya sa CCJE tapos parang from COED po siya then medyo mahaba na rin po ‘yung buhok niya kaya ginagawa niya po nagC-CR po siya sa CCJE na kasi may mga criminology po dun na ganun din po ‘yung buhok, parang medyo mahaba ganun po. Ang nangyari po ay pinalabas po siya ng isa sa mga personnel dahil ganun nga po siya, nasigawan pa po siya dun. After po ng incident na yun parang ayaw na po nyang mag-cr dun”* (We have this org-mate who was holding his pee because of what he had experienced on CCJE. He appeared to be from COED and he had long hair, then one time, he chose to take the comfort room on CCJE building because there were also students from the said college whose hair length is similar to him; making him feel comfortable to use the comfort room there. However, one of the personnel sent him out and shouted at him for using that comfort room. After that he no longer wants to use the comfort room again).

The University should ensure a safe environment for all their students. The teachers, staff, and administrators must become active contributors toward attaining this goal by being responsive to the needs and concerns of their main stakeholders, their students. Gage, Prykanowski, and Larson (2014) emphasized that teachers play an important role in promoting a safe environment in schools and also, in reducing incidents of bullying among students. Thus, they must encourage students to share their unpleasant experiences with them. Also, they should come up with probable solutions to problems being faced by their students. In relation to

this, Cortes, Kochenderfer, and Ladd (2014) stated that students feel better and safer when they perceive support from their teachers. For instance, is the guidance they tend to give whenever their students feel discouraged or down. Moreover, the teachers, staff members and/or administrators must build a welcoming atmosphere to both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students thus, promoting a healthier environment for all their students.

**Not having a sense of belongingness.** LGBTQ+ students who felt unwanted and as if they do not belong to any group can affect their lives negatively. They tend to feel isolated as others see and treat them differently. Relating to this problem, one of the respondents said *“di ko maintindihan bakit ‘pag nalaman nilang bakla ang isang lalaki lalayuan nila. Parang ang tingin nila sa’min hayop kami na may sakit, ganun po. Ang sa’min lang po nakakasakit po sa damdamin na wala kaming makasama na willing na tatanggap sa pagkatao namin, at ‘yung hindi po gano’n.”* (I do not understand why they avoid a guy when they found out he is gay. It is like we are animals or sick. For us, it’s just painful to think that no one is willing to accept us for who we are.) In addition, one of the respondents stated that, *“pag nakikita ako ng ibang tao o estudyante (tomboy), makikita ko sa kanila na pinag-uusapan nila ako minsan pinagtatawanan. Mas masakit pag naririnig ko na wala kaming laban (mga tomboy) sa mga lalaki kasi babae pa rin kami”* (Whenever other people or students see me (tomboy), they always talked about me and sometimes even laughed at me. What’s more painful is when we hear that we’re nothing compared to men because we’re still girls).

To address this problem, some schools form Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) to promote equity among heterosexuals and members of the LGBTQ+, and it is found to be effective. Fewer incidents of homophobic remarks, harassments and bullying against LGBTQ+ students were observed. As a result, students were less likely to miss school because they feel the sense of belongingness inside the school (Kosciw et al., 2008). And although a minority of students participate in GSAs in most schools, several studies showed the presence of the GSA - not necessarily participation in it - is associated with general school safety (Goodenow et al., 2006). It can be concluded that the type of school environment can determine the sense of belongingness of LGBTQ+ students within the school campus. This is why, there is a need for the school policies regarding the LGBTQ+ students to be made specific, in order to ensure a safe learning environment.

**Being unaccepted by heterosexual students.** Unacceptance may seem normal when an individual encountered something new to him. For instance is the unwelcome attitude being expressed among LGBTQ+

students due to their differences in sexual orientation and gender identity. Based on the respondents, *“hindi lang naman po kasi ‘yung pagrespeto lang ‘yung gusto naming matanggap kun’di ‘yung mismong pagtanggap nila sa’min kasi alam naman natin na kapag ang tao tanggap ka nila automatic na may kasamang respeto na sila sa’min.”* (It is not just the respect that we want but also their acceptance, because we know that when you accept a person, you would also respect him for who he is). Also, *“hindi ko maintindihan yung iba, na pag nalaman, for example na bakla or tomboy kami, linalayuan na kami. Pag ganun, tingin ko, hindi nila kami tanggap. Bakit hindi nila kami matanggap? Eh pare-parehas lang rin naman tayo na tao”* (I don’t understand why others, for example, when they found out we’re gays or lesbians, they distance themselves to us. When this happens, I think they do not accept us. Why can’t they accept us? After all, we’re all just the same, we’re all human beings.)

In the Philippines and in other countries, LGBTQ+ students find it hard to become friends and be accepted by heterosexuals as they are being viewed differently (Tobias, 2013). As for the LGBTQ+ students in the university, it is inevitable for them to be unaccepted, but the university must address this problem and help LGBTQ+ students be accepted in the growing community of the university. The participant as noted in their interviews, expressed their desire to be respected for who they are as a person. In simpler terms, a heterosexual student should learn how to treat others fairly, more importantly the LGBTQ+ students, who have the same rights and privileges just like any of them.

### **How LGBTQ+ Students Cope with the Identified School-Related Problems**

With the prevailing prejudices and discrimination against them, the LGBTQ+ can, in turn, be subjected to several mental health issues such as stress and depression that can eventually harm not just their psychological but also physiological well-being. The LGBTQ+ then continues with their active efforts to avoid circumstances where they know, they are at risk. Additionally, they tend to employ various coping mechanisms that can help them pass through this phase.

The following are the statements of the LGBTQ+ students of Bulacan State University, as to how they manage and handle identified school-related problems concerning their presence in the university.

**Sharing bad experiences with friends.** Since most students in the academe still have partiality against homosexuals, LGBTQ+ students tend to keep their circle of friends small and limited to people who understand and treat them fairly. They said *“syempre pag nalaman nila na ‘Ay gay ‘yan, or lesbian ‘yan, transgender gano’n, yung iba parang natu-turn off kasi parang di sila in sa mga friendship kasama kami, kaya ang nangyari parang ‘yung iba lumilipat ng friends, kaya ganon ang nangyari in the next day parang ‘pag hinanap naming sila parang wala lang daw gano’n pero obvious wala na silang pake sa ‘kin.”* (When they found out that we’re members of the LGBTQ+ community suddenly they won’t like to befriend us. So what happen is, some will leave us and find new friends. The next day, when we’re looking for them they would say it was just nothing, but obviously they don’t care about us anymore.) Understandably, an individual has the tendency to distance himself to anything or anyone that he considers different. However, if this gap continues to exist between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students, this might impair the relationships of the students. The academe, as part of their responsibility to ensure a healthy school environment for all its students, should start focusing on resolving this issue.

Nevertheless, as this situation is not yet fully addressed, for now, LGBTQ+ students resort on confiding their unpleasant experiences to their friends, mainly because they wanted to feel that somebody is willing to listen and support them all throughout these life difficulties. It is believed that sharing problems with other people can lessen the burden felt by the individual which in turn would make him feel lighter and less anxious. Moreover, studies show that provision of social support from their loved ones, result in higher levels of self-esteem and psychological well-being for LGBTQ+’s (McDavitt, Iverson, Kubicek, Weiss, Wong, & Kipke, 2008).

**Education.** By empowering themselves through education about the nature of their sexual orientation, gender identities, issues, and history; the LGBTQ+ students would have sufficient knowledge to teach others and feel less isolated to them (Henderson, 2015). One of the respondents revealed, *“pag may naririnig ako na nagsasalita ng masama tungkol sa ‘kin or pinag-uusapan ako sa likod ko, iniisip ko nalang yung mga bagay na alam ko tungkol sa gender identity ko. Somehow, nare-realize ko na mali yung sinasabi nila tungkol sa ‘kin kasi alam ko sa sarili ko na hindi naman ako katulad ng mga sinasabi nila”* (Sometimes when I hear someone badmouthing me, or is talking about me behind my back, I just thought about the things I know about gender identity. Somehow, I realize that what they are talking or saying about me is not true because I know for myself that I am not what

they think about me.) LGBTQ+ students sometimes educate themselves to support one another regarding their sexual orientation. By doing this, LGBTQ+ students hope to reduce the intensity of discrimination and negative comments they received from the group of heterosexuals. In addition, *“madalas sa mga ganong situwasyon, mas maganda na may alam tayo tungkol sa kung ano ba talaga tayo, makakatulong kasi talaga pag may alam”* (Oftentimes, with that kind of situation, it is a good thing that we know something about ourselves, because it can help us a lot.)

Furthermore, for many LGBTQ+ students, the internet served to be one of the most helpful materials to educate themselves regarding the issues they are experiencing. According to McDavitt et al. (2008), one of his respondents found help by receiving good comments and feedback on the internet. With positive comments, the individual gained confidence, increased his self-esteem, and also, lessen the feeling of isolation. On the other hand, some LGBTQ+ students educated themselves and at the same time modified their attitude and behaviors. With this, by honing and training themselves to have a positive attitude and good behavior, they could relate with heterosexual students well, and be productive and lead a normal and happy life (Blackman, 2017).

**Setting Boundaries.** LGBTQ+ students often protect themselves by setting boundaries or avoiding encounters with heterosexist individual. This means that discriminated LGBTQ+ students avoid situations that would scare and threatened them. One of the respondents revealed that *“ang mga babae laging naka-cat call kahit saan sila magpunta, kahit sa school. Alam ko yung pakiramdam ng naka-cat call kasi kahit yung damit ko pang-lalaki naman, mukha naman akong disente, tinatawag parin nila ko, example: “miss sexy mo naman”. Nakakatakot, yun lang ang nararamdaman ko. Kaya ginagawa ko pag ganun, binibilisan ko lakad ko”* (Girls always experience cat-calling everywhere they go, even in schools. I know the feeling of being cat-called, because sometimes even if I wear masculine clothes and I think I look decent enough, they still cat called me. Example, “miss you’re sexy”. Scared, that is what I always feel. Whenever I am in that situation, I just walk faster). According to Grossman (2007), most of the LGBTQ+ youths expressed confidence by wearing clothes they want. However, most heterosexuals discriminate LGBTQ+ youths more by disrespecting their choice of clothes. This could lead to additional physical and mental challenges for the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Moreover, LGBTQ+ students experiencing such discrimination and harassment do not just feel scared, but they also feel embarrassed

and disappointed. Because of this, they seemed to avoid sharing their experience with their family and friends. As a result, LGBTQ+ students tend to keep issues with themselves and just try to avoid another embarrassing and disappointing situation. According to Woodford, Han, Craig, Lim, and Matney (2014), one of the ways on how members of the LGBTQ+ people cope is by setting boundaries which could help them at first. However it could also lead to the feelings of captivity which could later on, lead to physical or mental problems. Therefore, it is important that the members of LGBTQ+ as well as heterosexuals, support each other by fighting for their rights.

#### **Conforming and Submitting to the University's Requirements.**

Most of them were forced to observe the rules and regulations being implemented in the university for them to avoid further discrimination. However this act further hinders their expression of their gender identity.. According to one LGBTQ+ student's friend, "*may problema pong kinakaharap ngayon sa Bustos Campus, na'kwento ko nga po sa inyo kahapon, si Rafa (gay), na kapag di raw po siya nag-cut ng hair, na mag-shift na lang daw po siya ng course and/or either mag-switch na lang siya ng ibang university*" (Currently there is a problem being faced in Bustos Campus, I have told you about this issue yesterday. It's about Rafa (gay), he was asked to cut his hair in a conventional style appropriate for a man; and accordingly, if he won't observe it, he was instructed either to shift on another course or might as well transfer to another university). According to American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2006), there is a clear indication from the psychological and health sciences that the youth should not be forced to hide their sexual identities. It is so for gender identity is something that is not fixed but rather fluid as surfaced in a heated discussion about LGBTQ+ adolescents' development happened in the United States. Also, Russel (2005) said that there is a need for a new field of studies that would chart the ways on how LGBTQ+ youth grow into resilience.

Although each individual must enjoy their rights and privileges offered by the university, as part of their share, every student should also learn to abide by the school's rules and regulations. The school should never encourage their students to hide their sexual orientations and gender identities as long as they follow the rules and policies being implemented; as schools are considered to be one of the organizations that must encourage different individuals to be themselves and to embrace diversity (Supporting LGBT Lives, 2008).

## The Interests and Concerns of the LGBTQ+ Students

Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, and Visscher, (1996) mentioned that the LGBTQ+ are prone and at risk of experiencing different forms of abuse, neglect, and discrimination due to being different from most people. With this imminent danger, just around the corner, the LGBTQ+ students then start to feel threatened about their safety and welfare. With that, the preceding statements, contain the interests and concerns of the LGBTQ+ students based on the interview conducted.

**Gender-related Character Assassination.** The case of character assassination of LGBTQ+ students in the University only escalates because the academe is not imposing any sanctions to those who are making character assassination. Amidst the issues and problems that surfaced, respondents wished that they could have a normal life as a student. Most of the respondents said, *“to think na ‘di naman sila kilala, parang ‘ok’ ... ‘di nga nila tayo kilala pero nando’n ‘yung judgment na sobra sobra pero nakikita lang naman nila tayo”* (People are so judgmental, that even they don’t know us personally still they judged us based only on how we appear to them). According to Kosciw et al. (2008), there are school reports about discrimination based on gender among students but because of school policies, LGBTQ+ students feel safe knowing that the school put an effort in protecting them.

In addition, it is also proved that having such school policies that protect sexual orientations and gender identities have fewer incidents of heterosexual bullying and harassment. With this, the respondents perceived such policies to increase awareness about their issues and help in opening the minds of heterosexual students, faculty members, and staffs that could help LGBTQ+ students to fight against discrimination, bullying and harassment.

**Respect and Support.** All knowingly to the conscious minds of heterosexual students who happened to encounter a member of the LGBTQ+ community, what they foremost wanted is to be respected and supported for who they are. Fervently, they said, *“pero since this is a state university, normal naman po ‘yun na walang budget, ok lang naman po sa’min (lack of LGBTQ+ related facilities and policies) basta ‘di po kami nababastos, tinataboy or anu man po ‘yung klaseng pagdidiskrimina na pwede pong ipataw po nila sa amin”* (Since this is a state university, it’s normal to have limited budget, which is fine with us, as long as we are not being maltreated, disrespected, avoided or discriminated in any form).



According to Griffin et al. (2004), in growing student-led school-based organizations, a club like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) should be a part of the educative norm, which in a positive way, provides students with access to the possibility of direct engagement and action for creating safe and supportive school climates for LGBT students and their allies. Fortunately, in the University, an LGBTQ+ organization like the *BulSU BahagHari* gave emotional shelter for LGBTQ+ students. This organization serves as a haven for the LGBTQ+ students for them to develop themselves and find comfort zones. In relation with Marzullo et al. (2007), this kind of organizations should encourage every LGBTQ+ students to participate, because having organizations that support different sexual orientations and gender identities could generate ideas and promote projects that could lessen the incidents of discrimination and harassment. With this, the organization like *BulSU BahagHari* should be acknowledged by the university, so they can help their fellow LGBTQ+ students in gaining respect and support from the academe.

**Gender Neutral Comfort rooms.** *BulSU BahagHari* was not in favor of having an LGBTQ+ comfort room, for according to them it was another form of discrimination. As one of the respondents said, *“What we want is an all-gender comfort room na lang po siguro parang mayroon po siguro na nagsu-support ng all-gender comfort room, na isa lang po siya kahit sino, all-gender, neutral ganun po”* (What we want is just an all-gender comfort room that everybody can use).

However, Gordon and Meyer (2007) found out that LGBTQ+ people suffer from prejudice, discrimination and violence due to gender non-conformity, which most likely to happen in a comfort room. The findings of this study only suggest that there is need for gender neutral comfort room rather than LGBT comfort room. It is because from the perspective of the participants, an LGBT comfort room would just further discriminate them on the basis of segregation policy. This will just further highlight, according to them, their difference with other forms of gender identity. So, it is more advisable to construct gender neutral comfort rooms for all gender identities rather than LGBTQ+ comfort room.

**Seminars about SOGI and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Awareness.** Over the past years, there is a constant battle about LGBTQ+ curricular inclusion that purpose is to promote health and well-being of the LGBTQ+ students. According to the LGBTQ+ students; it hurts to hear some students labeling them incorrectly by their sexual orientation. As one of the respondents said, *“Kung magkakaroon lang sana sila ng chance na*

*malaman kung anung SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) kasi 'yun actually isa sa mga gusto naming mangyari parang project po ng organization is mag-conduct po ng mga seminars about SOGI, HIV and AIDS awareness" (If only they could have the chance to know what SOGI is, which we actually wanted to have as a project of our organization – to conduct seminars about SOGI, HIV, and AIDS awareness)*

In accordance with Russel et al. (2006), conducting such seminars proved to be influential in effectively helping LGBTQ+ awareness in the academe. In addition, it was also important to explain sexual orientations and gender identities to school administrators as well. In general, any seminar regarding STIs could involve all classes of students, not only the LGBTQ+ but also the heterosexual's students should be informed about this. In this way, everyone could enjoy the same rights and also faculty members could address properly the problems not only with the LGBTQ+ students but as well other students who are part of the university.

### **Policies, Programs and Measures that Promote the Welfare and Development of the LGBTQ+ Students.**

Existing student handbook sustains its policies that are further unspecific on the matter relating to LGBTQ+ students' interests and concerns. Although, the Office of the Student Affairs and Services of BulSU opens door of possibilities for revision of the current student handbook by comparing it to the student handbooks of other universities with recognition on the rights and welfare of LGBTQ+ students. Below are the current measures provided by the university for the LGBTQ+ students, although they were not directly stipulated in the student handbook.

1. The Office of the Student Affairs and Services shared a measure, implemented by the university, which was the unrestricted cross-dressing, where LGBTQ+ students are allowed to wear their preferred clothes inside the campus, especially during wash days or any special events like foundation day.
2. The students were free to grow their hair in a manner they deemed desirable to them, regardless of the student's gender, as long as it is properly worn or dressed.

On the other hand, the following were the suggested policies, programs and measures for the welfare and development of LGBTQ+ students.

1. Conducting of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity-related programs which can bring awareness relevant to LGBTQ+ experience that can contribute to the promotion of their welfare and development as students and individuals.
2. Intervention programs must be launched for victims of bullying and harassment for them to fully recover and have their normal life back again.
3. Formation of Gay-straight alliances club similar to any clubs or organizations inside the university is important for it let students with the same interests be united whether they are members of LGBTQ+ community or simply heterosexual students. In this way, they can meet together, have discussions and activities that would lead them to achieve greater productivity and efficiency.
4. Revising the student handbook for the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community's concerns, issues, and interests. This is in a way will help them to secure their rights and welfares as students and individuals.

## CONCLUSIONS

In general, the LGBTQ+ students of Bulacan State University are experiencing discrimination and harassment in different ways and are also facing different problems. From what they are experiencing, LGBTQ+ students are having a hard time coming out and sharing problems to friends, professors, and school administrators. In addition, they are more exposed in having physical and mental problems. The lack of the university policies and consideration for LGBTQ+ students lead to a major barrier between heterosexual students, the university, and LGBTQ+ students. Thus, making more research and revision of existing university policies and programs regarding LGBTQ+ students are needed to understand their issues and to provide programs that will cater to their needs and interests.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. Diversify activities in order to keep themselves away from misleading behavior and from doing things which are risky for them. By doing and experiencing new things, LGBTQ+ students could enhance their daily lives and could possibly discover new talent or hobby.
2. Enhance the university policies and programs regarding LGBTQ+ students to avoid harassment and bullying.
3. Include all students, not just heterosexual students but also LGBTQ+ students in every school activities, organizations, and policies. In this way, LGBTQ+ students could feel they are welcome in the university and also would make them feel safe in staying here in the university.
4. Future researchers could evaluate the organization supporting LGBTQ+ students inside the university to see how effective they are in advocating for the rights and welfare of the LGBTQ+ community.

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