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Queer People in Business: An Exploration of their Lived Experiences in their Workplace

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Abstract: - The Philippines is known to have a high level of queer social acceptance, indicating higher inclusivity and equality. However, in the business sector, queer people often face unique challenges as they navigate their careers in the business world. Consequently, these queer employees pay a high price for defying gender and sexual stereotypes in their workplace. Through a phenomenological lens, this paper aims to comprehensively explore the experiences of these queer individuals in the business sector and the strategies they employ to navigate these difficulties. This study purposively selected seven participants of different work backgrounds to participate in in-depth interviews. The identities of these participants were kept confidential concerning the ethical considerations. After gathering the data, the researchers used thematic analysis to provide a deep understanding of the lived experiences of queer individuals in the business sector, encompassing issues such as discrimination, unfair treatment, and gender stereotyping. Major findings of the study revealed that while the participants perceived their workplace as inclusive, they had their fair share of negative experiences that hampered their mobility in their work environments. Furthermore, despite their negative experiences, these participants learned different coping strategies to manage their emotions and keep abreast with their work. Thus, the paper recommends that organizations with queer employees actively engage in symposiums and seminars to foster an inclusive workplace environment for all, as creating a safe and supportive workplace is essential for attracting and retaining employees, enabling them to thrive and contribute more effectively to the organization.

Keywords: Challenges, Coping Strategies, LGBTQ+, Lived Experiences, Workplace Inclusivity

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is known to have a high level of queer social acceptance, indicating higher inclusivity and equality. However, in the business sector, queer people often face unique challenges as they navigate their careers in the business world. Consequently, these queer employees pay a high price for defying gender and sexual stereotypes in their workplace. Queer Thai business owner Anne Jakapong [1] states in an interview that in everything she does, she has to be careful to avoid having backlash in her life and in the career she does just because of her gender. In addition, according to the StartOut 2016 survey [2], nearly 40% of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs preferred not to self-identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, either because it wasn't thought significant or because they were afraid doing so would hinder their prospects of acquiring funding.

An international study in the United States of America about queer discrimination in the workplace has looked at legal complaints made by LGBTQ++ workers. Drydakis' [3] study showed statistical comparisons of the opportunities and incomes of queer male and female workers compared to those of their straight counterparts, and it sought to quantify direct discrimination. Nationally, studies showed that around half of transgender people and bisexual women would experience sexual violence during their lifetime. Enriquez [4] reported that 25 percent of respondents have experienced harassment from their employers or superior officers, 33 percent have experienced harassment from co-workers, and 60 percent have been the subject of slurs and jokes in the workplace. The data clarifies the dominant attitude towards LGBTQs in the Philippines' professional world. In a study by Lugo and Comendador [5] at Davao Oriental, they indicated through the respondents of their research that queer individuals have tolerated the people who probe their gender indifference. They acknowledged that being tolerant and subject

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to prejudice is not a healthy resolution and may cause deep and long-lasting harm.

Given that this problem has been influencing people's lives for a very long time and that there are only a few studies that address gender identity, inequality, and discrimination, it is highly concerning. When it comes to employing personnel, there are still some workplaces in Davao City that are exclusively heterosexual. These workplaces are those where the social structures, legal frameworks, and cultural norms are predominantly heterosexual [6]. This research on queer business owners and employees is therefore vital, not only in providing insight into their struggles but also as a source of hope. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to explore and document the lived experiences of queer people in business contexts, with an emphasis on understanding the problems, opportunities, and coping mechanisms they use in their work environments. Specifically, this paper will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the queer community in the business sector?
2. What coping mechanisms have queer individuals used in dealing with struggles in life in the business sector?

II. STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION/METHODS

A. Statement of Contribution

JAN conceptualized the research topic, validated the findings, and prepared the manuscript according to the publication format, with all the contributions from the other authors. ZMV, MDB, and JM conducted the entire study by writing the entire manuscript, interviewing the participants, and performing an initial qualitative data analysis.

B. Methods

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which aimed to identify and analyze the fundamental cognitive processes of the participants in relation to a shared experience. The essence of the phenomenon was described as the outcome of phenomenological research. By reading a phenomenological composition, the reader should gain a profound understanding of the specific experience [7]. By utilizing this research design, valuable insights into the experiences of queer individuals in the business sector were sought, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences and achieve a cohesive integration of the study's components. In addition, the purposive sampling method was utilized in this study to gain insight into the selection of ideal and appropriate participants. Purposive sampling is employed to align the sample with the research goals and objectives, thereby enhancing the study's rigor and the reliability of the data and findings [8]. The researchers carefully selected seven participants for this study, ensuring that they met specific criteria, such as being 20 years old or above, residing in Davao City, and having experience as a queer business owner or employee.

In collecting the data, the researchers opted to identify suitable participants for this study using the purposive sampling method. Subsequently, a letter was composed to request permission for participation in the study. Once approval was obtained, in-depth interviews were conducted, guided by specific questions, and the necessary data was collected. After completing these tasks, data analysis was initiated, employing thematic analysis as the chosen approach to examine the data. After this, the collected data was thematically analyzed using the Colazzi method, comprising seven steps, involving a comprehensive review of transcripts, identification of significant statements related to the phenomenon, formulation of meanings from meaningful words, clustering words into themes and theme clusters, generating an exhaustive description of the essential structure or essence of the phenomenon, producing a comprehensive report of the phenomenon's fundamental nature, and validating the method [9].

III. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study were derived from a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the experiences of seven (7) participant-employees. Their profiles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participant	Occupation
Participant 1	Fastfood Chain Worker
Participant 2	Business Staff
Participant 3	Mall Staff

Participant 4	Call Center Agent
Participant 5	Mall Staff
Participant 6	Waiter
Participant 7	Freelance Makeup Artist

A. Lived Experiences of Queer Individuals in their Workplace

Presented in Table 2 are the collective experiences of the participants grouped into several themes. From these experiences, two main themes emerged: (1) workplace challenges and (2) a positive and inclusive workplace.

Table 2. Participants' Lived Experiences

Themes	Core Ideas
Workplace Challenges	Negative Experiences and Discrimination
	Personal and Work-relations in the Workplace
	Dealing with Judgements
	Varied Perceptions and Uncertainty in the Workplace
Safe and Inclusive Workplace	Positive Experiences and Supportive Environment

Based on the findings in Table 2, the lived experiences of the participants are classified into two contrasting milieus, the workplace challenges that include a variety of difficulties and impediments they confront as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, and the notion of safe and inclusive workplace, that refers to a work environment that fosters a sense of security, acceptance, and support for queer individuals, allowing them to navigate their professional roles without fear of discrimination or prejudice based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The following statements represent the perspectives and insights expressed by the participants: "*I can say that it's a little bit tough for me because my worries are doubled, and they occur at the same time. If I have personal challenges by not being straight, my challenge in the workplace adds up. It is like I am multitasking. It's a bit stressful, and I often question why I must deal with these problems in my work when I am just expressing who I am*"(P4-IDI4-Q1.2). "*Yes, I had negative experiences, and I also know many people who have experienced the same. Mostly discrimination about our gender and judgments from people around us*"(P7-IDI7-Q1.2).

There is a disparity in workplace satisfaction for sexual minorities due to unfair treatment of other employees, such as bullying and harassment, and discrimination in salary, promotions, and job assignments, which may affect their levels of job satisfaction [3]. Because of the stereotypes seen on TV, people tend to view queer individuals as having a different way of thinking than straight people. However, viewing a sitcom through the political lens of conservatism versus liberalism may stifle the challenges to the dominant ideological order that a certain program explores through its humor. This tension is more dynamic and instructive than invoking a simple interpretive binary the program attempts to avoid [10]. In consequence, to protect themselves from potential harassment and discrimination from superiors or co-workers, many queer people feel compelled to hide their true identities. As a result, this may create a hostile workplace and have a negative impact on employees' mental health and job performance. These prejudices can show up in a variety of typical workplace settings, affecting how queer people are treated and how they interact with their non-queer co-workers. Mattheis et al. [11] shared the same sentiment that queer employees would prefer not to come out at work because they do not want it to be a big deal and interfere with their work, unless the workplace is generally accepting of them. The study of Beeghly [12] provided that prior experiences frequently shape such prejudices and can be affected by the organization's cultural and demographic makeup. The remarks of IDI4 and IDI7 that prejudice and exclusion are relatively frequent everywhere but are most specifically experienced by them are supported by these remarks about this study. Thus, there is an obvious need for a safe and inclusive workplace to offset discrimination's negative consequences and build a more supportive professional atmosphere.

On the other hand, despite the negative experiences in their workplace, the participants also shared some positive insights into their day-to-day working conditions, such as having a positive and inclusive workplace. This

is evident in the following excerpts from their experiences: "*How do I feel? I feel happy knowing that I could be myself in the business industry. I do not have to pretend to be someone just to be in the business industry. I could be myself normally, so I feel happy*"(P2-IDI2-Q1.2). "*The positive experience I have is that I am close with my boss, and she treats me well*"(P6-IDI6-Q1.1). A comprehensive and strategic approach is essential to establish a positive and inclusive workplace culture. According to Pedulla [14], this involves articulating clear values, fostering a culture of open feedback, enforcing accountability, and actively celebrating diversity. These elements collectively shape an environment where every employee feels valued and included. Also supported by Mattheis et al. [13] in their research on workplace climate, queer people are more likely to come out in the workplace if they feel their co-workers are supportive and if their employer establishes and upholds rules protecting their identities and providing assistance for requirements specific to those identities.

In addressing workplace challenges for queer individuals, technology emerges as a powerful ally with the potential to transform workplace dynamics. Beyond operational efficiency, technology can be harnessed to confront unconscious bias, provide inclusive training programs, and institute equitable hiring practices. The World Economic Forum [14] emphasizes technology's transformative role in creating workplaces that actively promote diversity and inclusion, offering a promising avenue to mitigate negative experiences, discrimination, and varied perceptions faced by queer individuals in professional settings. Through strategic integration, technology becomes a catalyst for fostering a more supportive and inclusive workplace environment, aligning with the overarching theme of workplace challenges in the lived experiences of queer individuals. In a gender-inclusive workplace, participants' situations show a workplace where flexible work arrangements are encouraged, including flexible schedules and supportive work-life balance practices. As a result, traditional gender roles have less impact, and people of all genders can better balance their personal and professional obligations.

B. Coping Mechanisms of Queer Individuals

Presented in Table 2 are the coping mechanisms that the participants employed when they encountered challenges in their workplace. These mechanisms are grouped into several themes: (1) celebrating authenticity and individuality, (2) employing self-care, and (3) seeking social support and networking.

Table 3. Participants' Coping Mechanisms

Themes	Core Ideas
Celebrating Individuality through Self-Care	Being True to Oneself and Resisting Conformity
	Resilience, Self-Reflection, and Emotional Release
	Escaping Through Reading and Movies
	Seeking Distractions
	Setting Boundaries
	Positive Outlook and Confidence
Seeking Social Support and Networking	Having a Strong Support System
	Positive Interactions
	Seeking Comfort in Friends

Celebrating authenticity and individuality is an approach to coping used by the participants in their work environments that emphasizes recognizing and affirming their genuine selves as a means of traversing and accomplishing in work environments. Though most participants hid their true feelings, their coping mechanisms helped them conquer these situations and focus on themselves. The following statements represent the perspectives and insights expressed by the participants: "*My coping mechanism is reading or watching movies. Those are my coping mechanisms. So when I feel that I face struggles, I usually read or watch movies, either of the two or sleeping works just fine*"(P2-IDI2-Q3.1). The majority of our participants expressed a shared sentiment regarding their coping strategies as queer workers. The participants utilize coping mechanisms such as reading,

watching movies, and practicing yoga. These techniques promote relaxation, provide a mental break, and help regulate the body's response to stress, ultimately building emotional resilience.

Each participant shared who they contacted for social support and why they found that person helpful. Some mentioned close friends who provide a listening ear and emotional support, while others mentioned family members who offer practical assistance and advice. It can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase resilience. They identified relying on the support of their friends and family as a key component of their approach to managing challenges in the workplace. These individuals provide the participants with unwavering support and understanding, offering a vital source of encouragement and comfort. The participants shared their thoughts: "*I spend time with my friends because it gives me joy whenever they are around*"(P4-IDI4-Q3.1). "*I'm happy that I have a great support system, which is my boyfriend. I'm really glad to have him in my life, and he has been there ever since. Not just my boyfriend but also my friends and my family*"(P7-IDI7-Q3.1). In accordance with the results of Van et al., [15] study, their participants widely mentioned receiving social support from friends, family, and partners as a way of coping. Our participants' statements show that their friends, family, and loved ones have helped them overcome the challenges they face in the business sector. They have become their source of strength and happiness and a way of relieving stress caused by their workplace or the people involved in their jobs.

IDI7 had a great support system, which made him feel at ease whenever he encountered a problem in his workplace. On the other hand, IDI2 does the same by spending time with his friends to distract himself from the negativities; having a support network that comprehends the demands and pressures of the business world and can offer inspiration and motivation when required is crucial. Social support has also increased job satisfaction and decreased employee turnover. Companies must create an environment where co-workers can interact positively and support one another [16].

These coping strategies are crucial because they enable us to deal with conflicts that arise in daily life. Some of these processes take shape at a young age and aid in quick conflict resolution. They consist of things like effortful control and cognitive control. Other mechanisms, which require more sophisticated thinking, assist us in resolving potential conflicts. For instance, to control and manage these conflicts, we employ various executive functioning-related techniques and abilities [17]. IDI7 has mentioned that he survives through his challenges in the workplace by firmly believing that challenges should not stop his success in his career path. Meanwhile, IDI2 has shared a way of coping through finding comfort in leisure, such as watching movies and reading a book. Self-regulation controls our thoughts and emotions to help us take actions that align with our goals. It entails managing our actions, controlling our impulsive responses, and developing effective solutions to issues [18].

C. Conclusion

This paper provided a thorough glimpse into their perspectives as members of the queer community. They revealed that their experiences have significantly impacted their workplace performance, and the coping mechanisms they utilize helped them overcome. The lived experiences focused on finding out the challenges they face and whether they had positive or negative experiences in the workplace. Coping mechanisms focus on their strategies as they face these challenges and how they survive by seeking social support or self-regulation.

The findings of this paper have substantial implications for building inclusive workplaces and promoting the well-being of LGBT people. The study demonstrates the profound effect of queer community members' experiences on job performance by thoroughly analyzing their perspectives. Identifying and evaluating coping techniques, whether through social support or self-regulation strategies, provide light on effective ways individuals overcome problems. Recognizing the importance of these coping methods can inform workplace policies and practices that promote a friendly and understanding atmosphere, ultimately contributing to queer individuals' overall resilience and performance in professional contexts.

This paper, however, shall be interpreted with caution since the participants involved are from minoritized groups in the sector and do not generalize the population. Furthermore, institutions in the business sector should actively participate in symposiums and seminars to build an inclusive workplace for gay employees in management positions. It is critical to create a secure environment to attract and retain queer potential and allow them to participate productively. Queer people are encouraged to express their concerns in the workplace assertively to prevent future problems and promote awareness about gender issues. The dire need to address inequality in the business sector highlights the significance of future research on this topic. Given the scarcity of previous research, future researchers are encouraged to explore deeper, exhibiting adaptability in combining participants' interview schedules.

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AUTHORS PROFILE

Zheldrick Macascas Villarino is an 18-year-old Grade 12 student in Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao. He is taking the strand Accountancy and Business Management. He is an academically inclined student and an active student leader in his school community. Zheldrick serves as the Vice President of the Supreme Student Government and is recognized as a consecutive student leader. Beyond his academic achievements, Zheldrick is also a performer and deeply passionate about performing arts. He also participated in numerous community programs, particularly in his local barangay and church. Zheldrick's ambitions extend to his future endeavors. He aspires to pursue economics in college to contribute to his own country's economic development and gain a deeper understanding of the field. He embodies leadership, creativity, and a commitment to positively impacting the world.

John Albert M. Nares is a Licensed Professional Teacher with eight years of teaching experience specializing in Academic Writing for Senior High School students, including English for Academic and Professional Purposes and Research courses. He finished his Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English at the University of Southeastern Philippines. He is pursuing his graduate studies, taking a Master of English in Applied Linguistics at the same university. Last March 2022, he published a paper entitled, (De)Constructing Myths in Editorial Cartoons: The Case of Philippine Elections, in the International Journal of Language and Literary Studies. He is also a member of the prestigious linguistics organization in the Philippines, the Linguistic Society of the Philippines. Currently, he is teaching at the Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, where he consistently empowers students to excel in critical thinking, effective communication, and independent research, shaping them into proficient academic writers. Lastly, his interests in Applied Linguistics extend to the realms of Language Education, Philippine English, Academic Writing, and Corpus Linguistics. Beyond the classroom, he advocates for promoting literacy and communication skills, significantly impacting the educational community.

Modessa Dorothy A. Barbaso is a 17-year-old student. She was born on September 09, 2006, in Tagum City. She is a Grade 12 student taking the Accountancy and Business Management (ABM) strand at Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao. She is a consistent honor student striving to reach her goals and remain on the honors list. She enjoys learning and is improving her research techniques by participating in webinars like "Bakit baliw na baliw kayo sa research? Unveiling the secrets on acing your research paper." Dorothy is a committed student who actively seeks ways to broaden their horizons since she is eager to delve into the depths of her field. She is enthused about their business and accounting education and constantly looks for ways to apply concepts to actual issues. She welcomes advice and mentoring from expert academics and researchers. She recognizes the benefits of additional guidance from seasoned experts and is willing to participate in group projects or research activities to get practical experience in business-related things. In addition to their academic endeavors, Dorothy enjoys reading and writing, which promotes creativity, critical thinking, and a well-rounded perspective.

Jessameah C. Mutalib, 17 years old, was born in Zamboanga City on May 31, 2006. She is currently enrolled at Mapua Malayan Colleges. She has consistently achieved honors throughout her academic journey, reflecting her strong work ethic and unwavering commitment to her studies. Her dedication to high academic standards is a testament to her intellectual capabilities. Being recognized as an honor student and highlighting her relentless pursuit of excellence in her education. She is a well-rounded individual with diverse interests and a performer. She values a balanced life and derives enjoyment from activities that nurture her creativity and promote personal growth. Despite not being drawn to writing, she is deeply compassionate and ready to adapt and learn. Her open-mindedness and eagerness to acquire knowledge make her a unique and valuable individual in any setting. She, together with her group mates, are deeply committed to learning and have embarked on a research journey that we humbly vested together the life experiences of queer individuals in the business sector into an engaging narrative. Our research is not just an academic endeavor, but it is an opportunity to share a story that sheds light on the challenges, success, and resilience of queer professionals in the business world. Their work aims to foster understanding, inclusivity, and respect in society, highlighting the unheard voices and experiences.