



**UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**MASTER OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

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**COMMUNICATION FOR SAFE(R) SPACES IN COMING OUT AMONG FILIPINO  
QUEER YOUTH**

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14 June 2024

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**Acceptance Page:**

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bea Roseanne V. Gaza was born on September 21, 1991. She was raised in Itbayat, Batanes—a place where courage is learned through the ways of the wind and the waves. Where nature's favor is in the lush fields and the blue ocean. Where the way of life is both self-reliance and the sense of community in an isolated island.

Bea is a radio broadcast journalist at Radyo Pilipinas, a government radio under Philippine Broadcasting Service (PBS) an attached agency of the Presidential Communications Office (PCO).

Through the University of the Philippines Open University's (UPOU's) program Master of Development Communication (MDC), Bea came up with #WarmHeart which was originally a personal and independently produced podcast centered on mental health advocacy. #WarmHeart eventually became a radio program focused on tackling issues on mental health, promoting mental health awareness and education, as well as sharing heart-warming personal stories of depression survivors and similar inspiring stories. #WarmHeart currently airs locally in Metro Manila on Radyo Pilipinas 3 Alert 1278kHz and worldwide over Radyo Pilipinas World Service in partnership with U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) through shortwave radio 9.925MHz, 12.120MHz, and 15.190MHz.

In 2012, Bea graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication degree at the University of the Philippines Baguio. She was the Salutatorian in both class of 2008 of

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge and give my sincerest gratitude to my Thesis Adviser Dr. Serlie B. Jamias and the members of my MDC Graduate Advisory Committee, Dr. Jean A. Saludadez and Dr. Benjamina Paula G. Flor. Your patience and guidance have made this work possible.

Special thanks to my husband Kester RDG and my family—Pa, Ma, Yaci, & Jet for their support, understanding, and prayers.

Above all, thank you to the true Source of light, wisdom, truth, and understanding. May this literary labor contribute to your glory.

Nu Dios mamaxes!

***Dedicated to:***

Maran Tiiyo

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the Filipino queer youth's communicational perspective of safe spaces for coming out in the Philippine context. Guided by Blumerian Symbolic Interactionism, it uses Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as methodology. A theoretical sample of six Filipino queer youth from official queer student organizations in two universities in Metro Manila were interviewed in-depth online via Zoom from October 2022 to March 2023. Comparative analysis of data, concepts, and categories through reiterative coding steps was done.

The Filipino queer youth identified *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, *tambayan/takbuhan* as the safe spaces because these are where they feel most honest to themselves, accepted, comforted, protected, empowered, and excited. Safe spaces are characterized as *chosen* (gender identity disclosure is solely their decision), *established* (initiating disclosure before they expect disclosure from others), *all-encompassing* (safety must be existent in all social institutions), and *indefinite* (a safe space can be a person/location or both). Safe spaces also have internal and external layers of safeness. Internally, a space is safe if there is no experience of gender dysphoria or self-harm ideations and if their disclosure were decided based on the elements of *choice*, *readiness*, *timing*, and *relationship*. Moreover, a space is externally safe if religious, socio-cultural, political, educational, and financial factors are all gender-affirmative.

Communication plays a crucial role in creating safe spaces for the Filipino queer youth because it is through verbal and non-verbal communication that they get

signs and symbols of whether they are accepted or not. Safe spaces are introduced, disseminated, and negotiated through interactions. The symbols of safe spaces and their meanings are continuously transformed and can produce a universally understood meaning of safe spaces for the queer community through Symbolic Interactionism.

Keywords: Safe spaces, Coming out, Filipino queer youth, Symbolic Interactionism, Grounded Theory

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Rationale of the Study**

The coming out of the LGBT people—the process of becoming aware and disclosing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity has always been an interesting communication phenomenon that has engaged several researchers from different areas of discipline including family communication, dialectics, and psychology (Guenzi, 2015; Rodriguez, 2014; Van Bergen et al., 2020; Coolhart et al., 2017). Communication plays a crucial role in the coming out process because it determines the experience of ‘freedom’ or ‘liberation’.

In relation to this, one could ask what is a safe space for the LGBT people or what characterizes a safe space for coming out? Safe spaces are places where LGBT people can be at ease and be free from both emotional and physical harm. Several types of safe spaces have been applied in different contexts such as emotional safe space, academic safe space, physical safe space, and technological safe space (Morton, 2020; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Ho, 2017; Crockett, 2016; Grieve, 2016; Belkin, 2017; Ali, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2015). This is where the communicative aspect manifests itself. The communicative is also integrated in positive and negative communicative behaviors among participants of the coming out conversation (Manning, 2016). Based from the study of Lewis et al. (2015), LGBT individual people feels safe to express when they are free from communication stress factors.

Internal and external challenges determine the safeness of a space. The lack of or inadequacy of safety in a space makes the Filipino queer youth's becoming unsafe. Gender dysphoria, homophobia, and transphobia do not form safe spaces. Belief systems that are against the queer community; societies and cultures that are gender-prejudiced; legal, academic, economic or financial policies that are gender minority oppressive; as well as inadequate or lack of gender education do not create safe spaces.

Safe spaces are places where LGBT people can be at ease and be free from both emotional and physical harm. Several types of safe spaces have been studied and applied in different contexts and can be classified as emotional safe space, academic safe space, physical safe space, and technological safe space (Morton, 2020; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Ho, 2017; Crockett, 2016; Grieve, 2016; Belkin, 2017; Ali, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2015).

Safe spaces for LGBT people is understood based on how they conceptualize its meaning, how they interpret it, and how they negotiate and communicate it to other people. More importantly, the communicative is present in the coming out process of LGBT where they conceptualize safe and unsafe spaces through communication stress factors, communication stress responses, and communication effect of being an LGBT (Heinz, 2018).

The role of communication in creating safe spaces for coming out lies in the conversation and narratives of both the speaker and the listener of the gender

identity disclosure. Communication is seen in the communicative acts—gestures and speeches—of conversation participants that either create safe spaces for coming out or reinforce barriers that prevent coming out. The kind of life that the LGBT people experience is determined by the kind of communication they experience. Hence it is important to look at the communication aspect of their lives.

Studies about positive and negative communication behavior in coming out conversations have provided a substantial information about coming out and the communicative features of safe spaces for coming out. However, most of the studies on coming out have been framed from a Western perspective from definitions, to conceptual models, typologies, goal types, barriers, and responses to coming out (Guenzi, 2015; Rodriguez, 2014; Van Bergen et al., 2020; Manning, 2014; Li & Samp, 2018; Li & Samp, 2019). Most materials regarding safe spaces also come from the Western perspective (Morton, 2020; Gayle et al., 2013; Arao & Clemens 2013; Ho, 2017; Crockett, 2016; Grieve, 2016; Belkin, 2017; Ali, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2015; Glassman, 2012).

The safe spaces explored in this study are different from that experienced by feminist women in a women only feminist gathering in the study of Lewis et al. (2015). Feminist women and the LGBT people have different and unique experiences.

Communication stress factors, communication stress responses, communicative behaviors, and communication effect of being an LGBT have been explored and analyzed (Heinz, 2018). Accommodative and non-accommodative

communication toward the LGBT and its connection to relational satisfaction have also been examined (Soliz et al., 2010). While there are many types of safe spaces, this study is particularly interested in the communication of safe space for coming out.

Among the relatively close studies connected to the topic of coming out and safe spaces that were conducted in the Philippine context include the attitude towards sexual minorities and how it affects international students, the discrimination experiences of LGBTs in the Philippine employment and labor sector, and the Filipino LGBT-affirmative church members and how they integrate their sexual and religious identity (Adeyemo, 2020; Enriquez, 2017; Evangelista et al., 2018). In an exploratory study on the importance of archiving to queer Filipinos, it was pointed out that there is a scarcity of queer materials in mainstream archives (Masilungan & Barcelona, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

To fill this gap, this study aims to provide a non-western perspective on how LGBT people in the Philippines give meaning to communication for safe spaces in coming out.

## **Research Questions**

The general research question of this study is: How do the Filipino LGBT youth make meanings of communication for safe spaces in coming out?

Specifically, these are the specific research questions:

1. How do the Filipino LGBT youth construe communication for safe(r) spaces in coming out?
2. How can communication develop safe spaces for coming out among the Filipino LGBT youth?

## **Significance of the Study**

This can contribute to the body of literature on queer studies in the Philippines, thus contextualizing findings in a non-Western culture.

This study hopes to contribute to providing visibility to the Filipino LGBT especially the youth by uncovering their narratives.

The results and findings of this research could add voices and visibility to the vulnerable LGBT youth.

In the long run, findings can hopefully contribute to facilitating a more supportive interaction with the LGBT people as well as start dialogs that could create safer places for them.

## **Scope and Limitations**

This research has its own limitations. It does not claim to be perfect but rather offers transparency in its imperfections. Therefore, it is important to consider these two things.

First, this study was conducted in two universities in Metro Manila with official queer student organizations. The youth in an academic institution in an urban setting may be more liberal and open to the LGBTQIA+ than if in a rural setting and not among academic students. Other universities or schools outside Metro Manila or another participant profile such as young adults or adults in the work place, in advocacy groups, or in other queer-affirmative communities such as queer clubs with drag performances may provide different perspective on queer becoming and the production of safer spaces.

Second, due to practical constraints such as access, time, and the challenge of execution especially during the pandemic, field observations in actual spaces considered safer by participants were not conducted. It is also necessary to mention that all in-depth interviews in this research were done through online Zoom interview.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

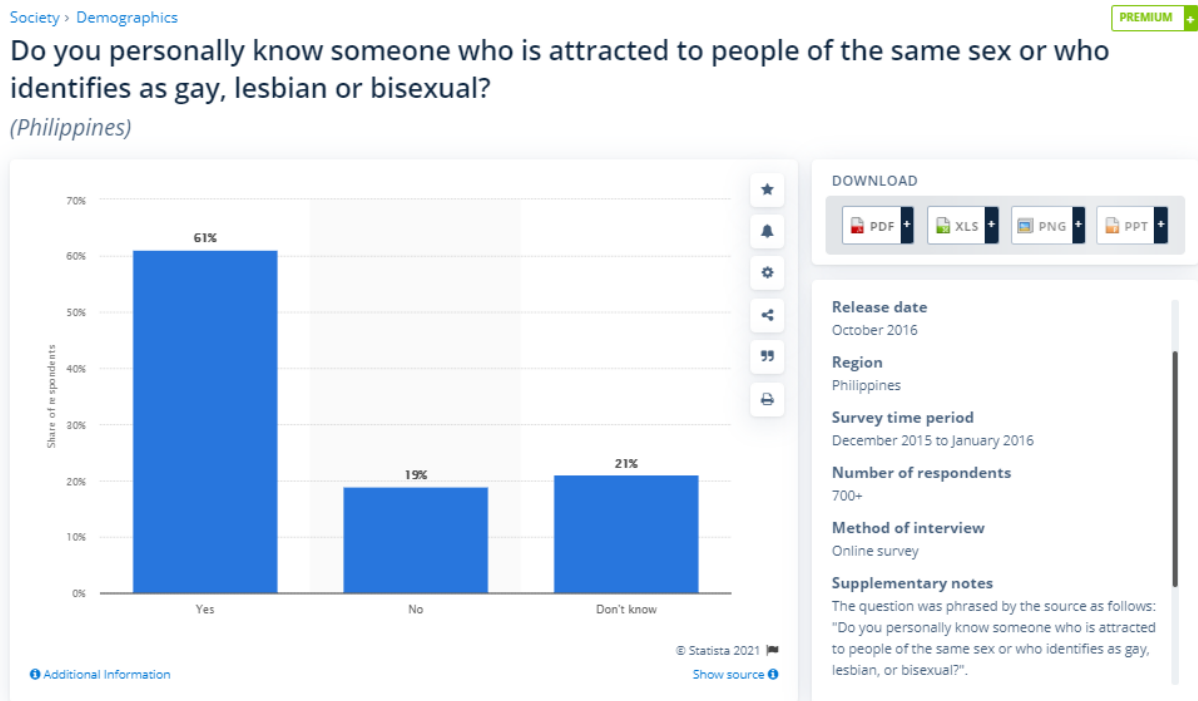
The literature is divided into three major headings as related to the research questions of the study. The first part provides a background on the LGBT climate in the Philippine context. The second part discusses their concept of communication for safe spaces in coming out in the LGBT community. The third part discusses how communication can develop safe spaces for coming out among the Filipino LGBT youth.

#### **Climate for LGBT Community in the Philippines**

According to a 2016 online survey of Statista on the Philippine's familiarity with LGBT community to over 700 respondents, more than 60 percent of the respondents personally know someone who is attracted to people of the same-sex or identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual as seen in Figure 1 (Statista, 2016a). Twenty-five percent of the respondents agreed to the legalization of same-sex marriage (Statista, 2016b). Yet, 13 percent respondents believed that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex should be a crime in the Philippines (Statista, 2016c).

## Figure 1

### Screen grabbed Image of Statista's 2016 Familiarity with LGBT in the Philippines



Meanwhile, a 2019 Pew Research about homosexuality acceptance among 38, 000 respondents across 34 countries reported that 73 percent of Filipinos think homosexuality should be accepted (Abad, 2020). The report showed that the more accepting respondents were the ones with higher education. The report also revealed that countries with higher gross domestic product (GDP) displayed greater acceptance. But the Philippines is an exception because despite it being a developing country, many Filipinos supported the acceptance of homosexuality.

## Discrimination

While familiarity and acceptance were reported in surveys, the actual situation seemed to be different. In Philippine schools, the Human Rights Watch (2017) reported that LGBT youth lack access to LGBT-related information and experience discrimination, bullying, and some cases of physical or sexual harassment.

In the Philippine military, the LGBT can only join the armed forces if they follow rules that hinder gender expression (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, 2012). The HIV and AIDS monitoring of the Philippine health sector only reflected men, women, or men and women without reports on transgenders (Bumanglag, 2018).

And the Philippine corporate industry is still seem not to be ready for an LGBT accepting culture based from the survey conducted by Philippine LGBT Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Cogencia (Casal, 2018). The survey among 100 companies showed that not one Philippine-based company manifested policies benefitting LGBT people in the workplace. There is also a data on the occurrence of discrimination in employment and in the labor market in the Philippines (Enriquez, 2017).

In the religious setting, the Philippines is known to be a Catholic country, hence the LGBT people are prone to harm because of bigotry (Varona, 2015). This even after Pope Francis expressed support for the LGBT community in 2013 (Hale, 2015). The Catholic Church was also said to have opposed the passing of an anti-

discrimination bill because it is believed to be a precedent to legalizing same-sex marriage (Rodriguez, 2015). But there are also church communities in Metro Manila that are LGBT-affirmative (Evangelista et al., 2018). The Philippine Muslim community, on the other hand, still do not accept the LGBT people as invisibility is forced among them as materialized by ordinances that ban public display of homosexuality (UNDP, USAID, 2014).

In relation to this, Human Rights Watch research investigated the general status of LGBT climate in the Philippines, and it was observed that hate speeches are experienced by LGBT youths in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017). There are rules in writing that prohibit gender expression in the military academy as well as ordinances that penalize public display of homosexuality in Muslim communities in the country (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, 2012; UNDP, USAID, 2014).

But there are also Church communities that foster positive environment and support for LGBT people (Evangelista et al., 2018). LGBT people are also increasing visibility across several sectors such as politics and entertainment industry (Coloma, 2013; Dela Cruz, 2017). These reports provide a background of both positive and negative communicative experiences of LGBT people in the country.

## **Violence**

LGBT people especially the young in the Philippines also experience physical harassments, attacks, and even murder. A teen was scalded by his father with

boiling water for being gay (Huffpost, 2012). LGBT youth in schools experience hateful language and physical bullying such as hitting, punching, and shoving (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Cases of murder against transgender people are also reported (Redfern, 2021).

According to the Philippine LGBT Hate Crime Watch in 2012, there are 164 cases of LGBT murders since 1996 (Bernal, 2012). Other cases of violence against LGBT (which reported kicking, slapping, rape, stalking, etc.) were compiled in a report by International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (2015).

## **Pride Events**

These experiences of discrimination and violence, have moved the LGBT community to strive for more visibility and equality. Pride events are increasing in popularity in the Philippines. Pascual (2018) provided a brief history of the Pride march in the country. The event began in 1994 when the first Pride March was organized by various advocates like Fr. Richard Mickley and ProGay Philippines' member Oscar Atadero. In 1996, a Task Force Pride (TFP) was created which is responsible for the yearly Pride March in Manila.

A more recent Pride March garnered a record-high participation with 70, 000 attendees in 2019 (Jaucian, 2020). In 2020, Pride activities were held online because of the COVID-19 pandemic with some who still marched in Mendiola. Those who went to Mendiola were dispersed by the police, 20 attendees were arrested and

charged with unjust vexation, illegal assembly, and violation of RA 1132 (Jaucian, 2020).

### **Coming out in the Entertainment Industry**

The challenges for the LGBT people in the Philippines are also highlighted in different industries. A lot has happened since the first Pride March in 1994. In the entertainment industry, popular celebrities and artists who are proud LGBT members like Bb Gandanghari (formerly known as Rustom Padilla) came out as gay on national TV in 2006 and is legally recognized as female since 2016 (Siazon, 2020). Jake Zyrus (formerly known as Charice Pempengco) came out as lesbian in 2013 and transitioned as a transgender man in 2017 (Tantuco, 2017). Singer Aiza Seguerra and Liza Diño got married in California in 2014 (Rappler, 2014). The Mead couple —Angelina King and Joey Mead—also became famous with their unconventional relationship (ABS-CBN, 2016). And just recently Raymond Gutierrez came out in an interview with Mega magazine in August 2021 (Rappler, 2021).

### **LGBT and Philippine Politics**

In 2010, Ladlad was recognized as the first LGBT political party in the Philippines and the whole world (Coloma, 2013). Later in 2016, Bataan Rep. Geraldine Roman became the first elected transgender politician in the Philippines (Chen, 2016). It was also in 2016 when Erick Habijan—a gay man—ran for public office and went viral in social media because of a catchy tagline but lost in the election (Dacanay, 2016).

Meanwhile, boxer turned politician Manny Pacquiao also in 2016 received ire for homophobic remarks (The Guardian, 2016). On a more profound discussion about LGBT and politics, Gamboa et al. (2020) studied LGBT identities and how it affects public leadership.

## **LGBT and Ph Anti-Discrimination Policies**

The Philippines has created policies for the protection of LGBT youth like the Department of Education (DepEd) Child Protection Policy crafted in 2012 and the Anti-Bullying Law that took effect in 2013 (Human Rights Watch, 2017). There is no national pro-LGBT law yet in the Philippines but as of May 2017, there are 24 local government units that have adopted ordinances championing LGBT protection (Manalastas, n.d.).

The development of House Bill 4982 or the SOGIE Bill is a compilation of various versions from several lawmakers passed in the Philippine congress from different years (Abad, 2019; Philippines House of Representatives, 2017). Until it is passed and effective for implementation, this Bill remains an almost national policy for LGBT protection.

In summary, an overview of the Philippine climate for LGBT people showed that Filipinos are familiar to and accepting of homosexuality. But various forms of discrimination and violence against the LGBT people are still prevalent in schools, the military, as well as in the healthcare and labor sector. Even with initial policies

that cover LGBT people protection, deeply-rooted factors such as heteronormativity and religious fundamentalism are embedded in the patriarchal and highly religious Philippine context. But this is not to say that there is a lack of LGBT visibility. The Philippine entertainment industry and political arena are slowly and increasingly manifesting LGBT representations. The SOGIE Bill is also already pending in the Philippine Congress and if passed, it will become the national policy supporting the LGBT people.

### **Coming Out Among LGBTs**

There are various definitions of coming out as interpreted by researchers who have delved into and explored the phenomenon. Coming out can be seen as an act of self disclosure and a developmental process (Blair, 2017; Guenzi, 2015). It is a process of realization and acceptance of one's non-heterosexual identity or a process of identifying one's self as belonging to a non-heterosexual identification and disclosing one's attraction to others (Manning, 2014; Van Bergen et al., 2020).

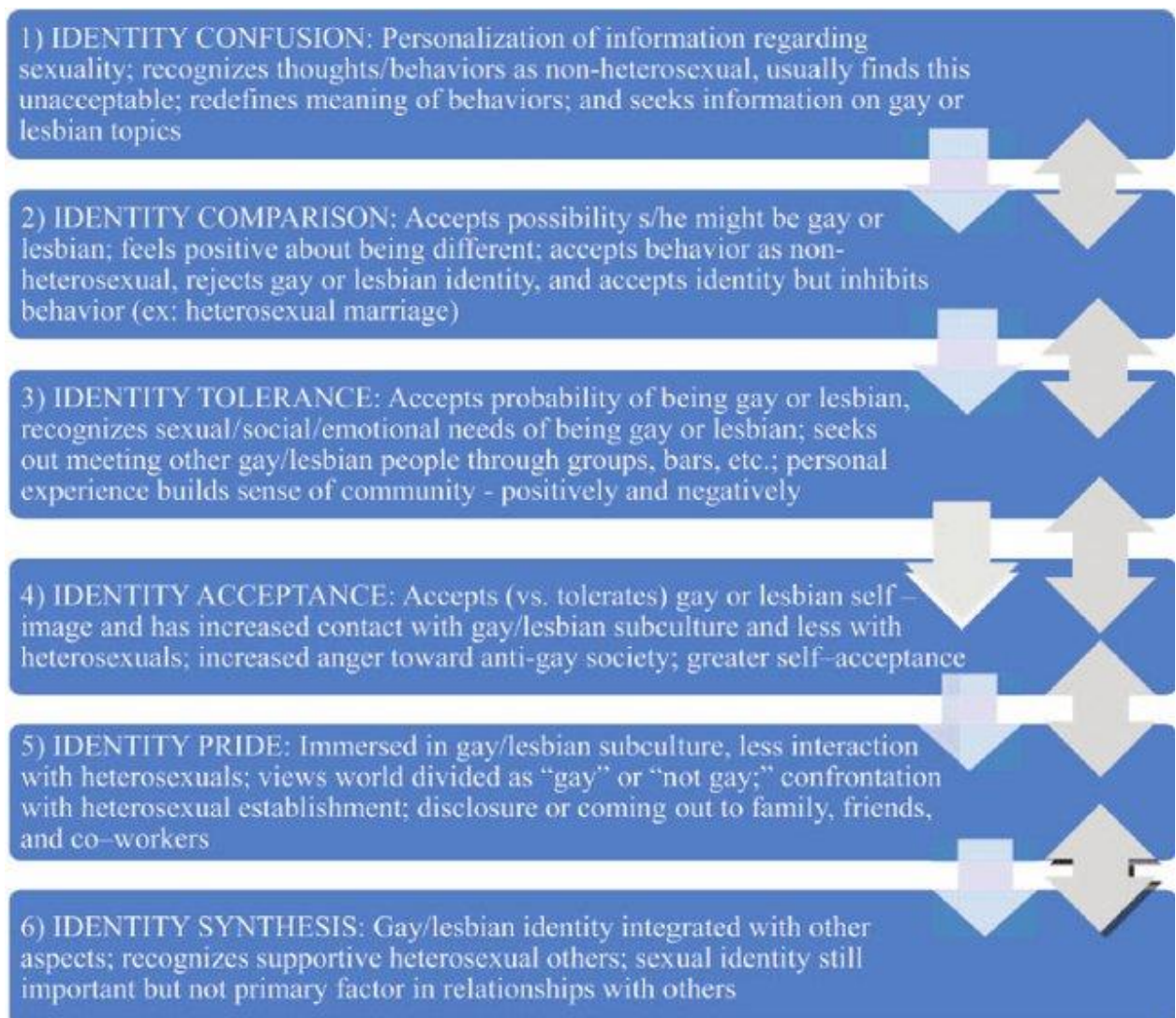
### **Models of Coming Out**

If coming out is viewed as a process or a series of actions, what then are the processes of coming out? Scholars have proposed some models of coming out that can explain the process experienced by LGBT in their identity formation. One such model is Vivienne Cass's Identity Development which is composed of six stages (Kennedy & Oswalt, 2014). Stage one is identity confusion where an individual

notices that his/her behaviors are different from prevailing heterosexual norm and doubts whether they are heterosexual and non-heterosexual. Stage two is identity comparison where an individual sees clearer the distinction of self compared to heterosexual individuals and thinks of the possibility of having a non-heterosexual identity. Stage three is identity tolerance where an individual already acknowledges one's non-heterosexual identity and seeks interaction with other non-heterosexual individuals as s/he tries to feel less isolated. Stage four is identity acceptance where an individual gains clarity and feels more positive with one's non-heterosexual identity. Stage five is identity pride where an individual feels pride with one's non-heterosexual identity and feels a sense of belongingness with the non-heterosexual community. And stage six is identity synthesis where an individual harmonizes one's personal and public non-heterosexual identity and where coming out comes naturally in his/her interactions as s/he gains more self-confidence. An LGBT individual lives through these stages as s/he forms his/her identity (Kennedy & Oswalt, 2014; Strickland, 2019; Ferdoush, 2016).

**Figure 2**

*Cass's LGBT Identity Development Model*



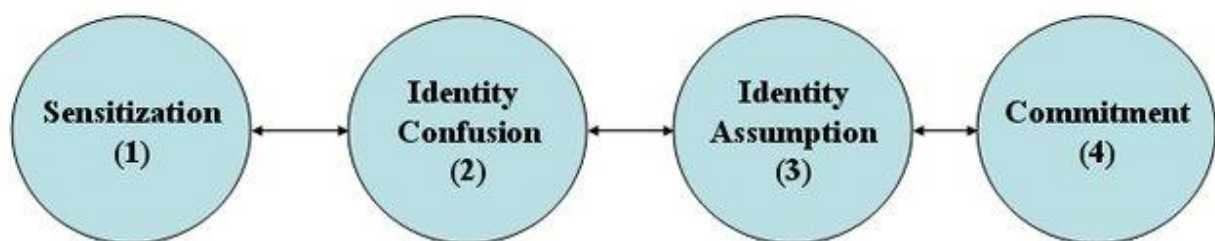
*Note.* From Walker, M.D., Hernandez, M.A., and Davey, M.P. (2012). Childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual identity formation: Intersection of gender, race, and sexual orientation. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 40(5), p. 389.

Since Cass's coming out process is a linear path, other researchers attempted to explain it in a non-linear path such as Richard Troiden's Model (Manning, 2014). Troiden's model consists of four stages which includes: a) sensitization where an individual feels different; b) identity confusion where an individual feels anxious due to their perceived difference; c) identity assumption where an individual takes a sexual minority identity; and d) commitment where an

individual embraces one's sexual minority identity as a way of life (Simons & Beck, 2020). This model presents a more flexible process in which coming out does not necessarily follow the sequence of the stages (Manning, 2014). This means that an individual can take any stage going back and forth or up and down.

### Figure 3

*Troiden's LGBT Identity Development Model*



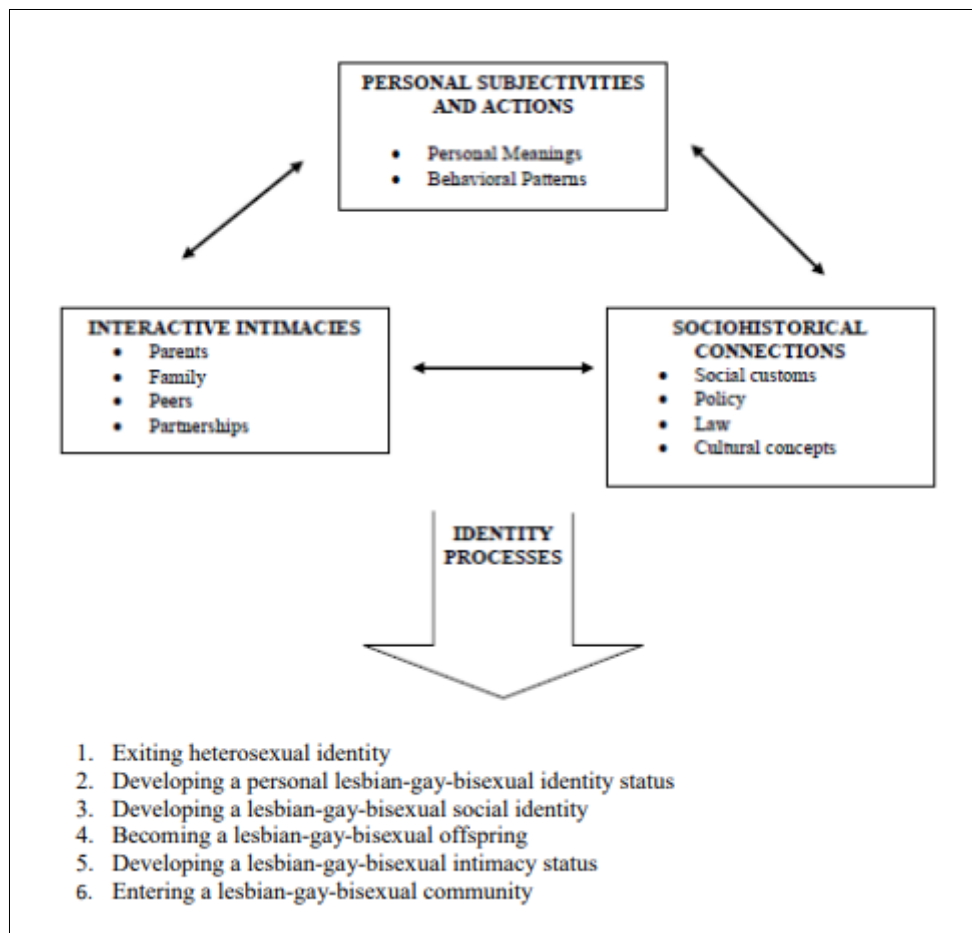
*Note.* From Lemery, R.L. (2008). *Development and Validation of the Internalized Sexual Prejudice* (Doctoral Dissertation, p. 24), Walden University.

Anthony D'Augelli had another perspective that elucidated the coming out process when he introduced the lifespan model of identity development for lesbian, gay, and bisexual or LGB (Huang, 2017). It is called a lifespan model because it presented coming out as something that occurs in the entire life of an LGB across different contexts. This model is interactive which means—like Troiden's model—it does not follow a certain sequence. It incorporates six processes, namely: a) exiting heterosexual identity or recognizing one's self as non-heterosexual individual and sharing this to other people; b) developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity status or constructing what it means to be a non-heterosexual and manifesting it; c) developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual social identity or creating close allies and supporters; d) becoming a lesbian, gay, or bisexual offspring or coming out to parent's and managing parent-child relationship after coming out; e)

developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual intimacy status or seeking same-sex partner; and f) entering a lesbian, gay, or bisexual community or engaging in non-heterosexual activities and even movements (Glassman, 2012).

**Figure 4**

*D’Augelli’s LGBT Lifespan Identity Development Model*



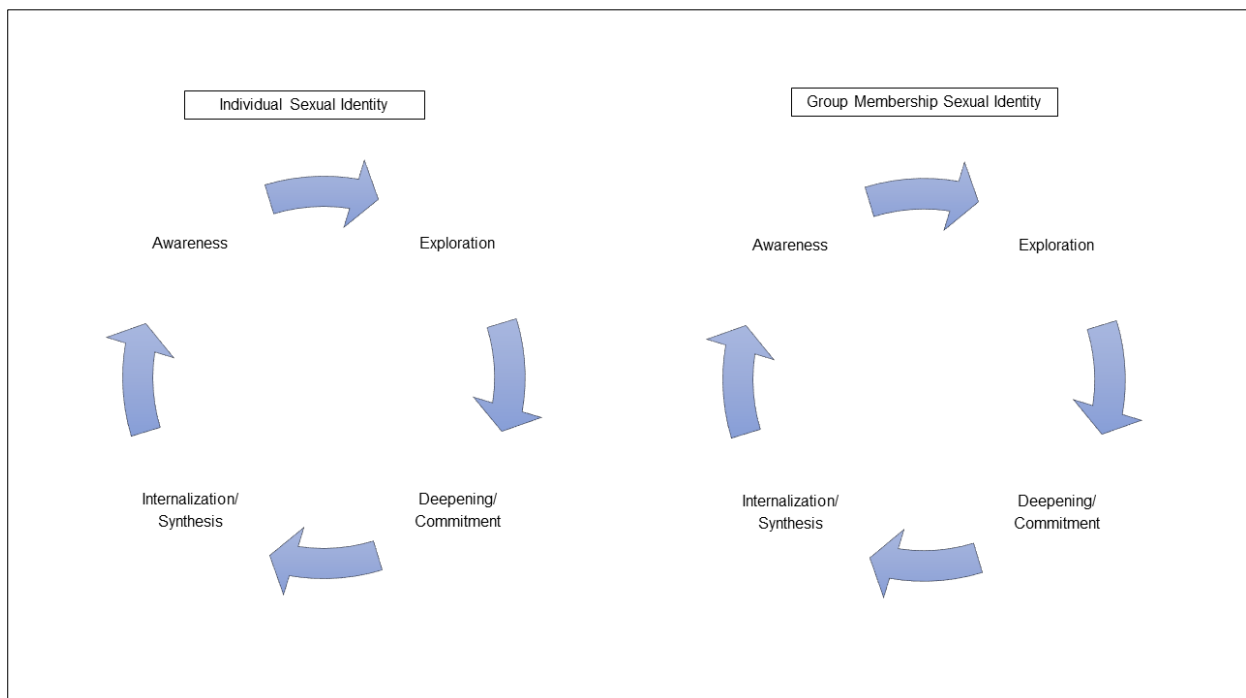
*Note.* From Reddick, R.L. (2012). *Sexual encounters: Gay male college students’ use of the Internet and social media* (Doctoral Dissertation, p. 19), Iowa State University.

D’Augelli’s model emphasized on exiting a heterosexual status and entering an LGB community which can happen at any time in the life span of the individual. McCarn and Fassinger, on the other hand, proposed that identity development happens in two areas such as the individual aspect and the group membership

aspect which was proven by a later study of Fassinger and Miller (Glassman, 2012). The phases of coming out that occur in these two areas were suggested to be a) awareness which incorporate feelings of being different and feelings of desire for the same-sex, b) exploration which manifests the same-sex attraction and attitudes and behaviors of a non-heterosexual, c) deepening/commitment where the individual slowly accepts and fulfills the non-heterosexual identity as well as involve one's self in the non-heterosexual community, and d) internalization/synthesis where the individual fully accepts the new identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). McCarn and Fassinger's model highlighted the use of the word phases instead of stages because the development process is believed to be circular and flexible rather than linear.

**Figure 5**

*McCarn and Fassinger's LGBT Identity Development Model*

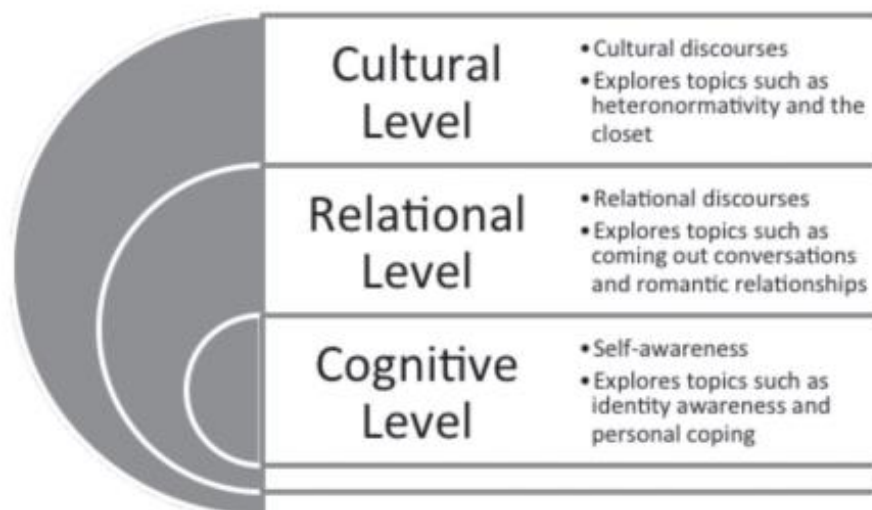


*Note.* Adapted from McCarn, S.R. and Fassinger, R.E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24(3), 521.

The more recent Constitutive Coming Out Model of Manning (2016) argues that coming out happens simultaneously in three levels identified as cognitive level, relational level, and cultural level. Both Manning and McCarn and Fassinger's model are flexible. But unlike McCarn and Fassinger's proposal that identity formation happens separately in two areas, the Constitutive model describes how coming out coincidentally occurs in three areas. According to Manning, coming out is influenced by culture, relationship, and psyche. He explained that coming out as an individual process is not completely detached from coming out as a group or social process. Society and culture are developed through interactions and interactions are shaped by individual's thoughts. Therefore, the coming out phenomenon is affected by the meaning-making of the community and the society, affected by people's conversations, and affected by one's personal beliefs, attitudes, or practices.

**Figure 6**

*Manning's Constitutive Model of Coming Out*



*Note.* From Manning, J. (2016). *Identity, Relationships, and Culture: A Constitutive Model of Coming Out* (p. 96). Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

In relation to Manning's three-level coming out model is the study of theorists Li and Samp (2018), which explored the communicative aspect of coming out in the cognitive level. Li and Samp enumerated five goal types that affect the coming out of an LGBT individual. This theory is called the Coming Out Message Production (COMP). It posits that the more salient the goals are, the more an individual will disclose to go after the goals. These goals are a) self-oriented goals, b) disclosure target-oriented goals, c) non-romantic relationship management goals, d) romantic relationship management goals, and e) task-oriented goals (Li & Samp, 2018).

Self-oriented goals refer to goals that focus on the concerns for the self. These goals are manifested in situations where coming out is intended to project an authentic self, to ask for support, or to express emotional attraction. Disclosure target-oriented goals are concerns for the receiver of the disclosure. These are seen in situations where an individual comes out because others are indirectly or directly asking for the disclosure. Non-romantic relational goals are displayed in coming out conversations done to maintain relationship with friends or family members. Romantic relational goals are for managing romantic relationships. And task goals incorporate an individual coming out because it is needed in receiving resources and other services like healthcare. In contrast with the self-oriented goal of coming out so that one can be honest to one's self, one might also decide not to disclose one's sexual minority identity, might deceive other people, or pass as heterosexuals to prevent themselves from experiencing the mental stresses that go with coming out. Berger's passing or pass—the way non-heterosexual individuals present themselves socially as heterosexual individuals—was argued by Li and Samp and they

suggested a more appropriate term called sexual orientation deception (Li & Samp, 2019).

### **Barriers in Coming Out**

Some of the negative experiences that were cited and linked to coming out were studied by Guenzi (2015) in the context of the workplace. Guenzi's research identified fear of alienation, lack of control, fear of losing credibility, and fear of job loss as barriers for coming out at work. The study claims that these barriers are reinforced through organizational cultures of heteronormativity, gay invisibility, and gossip. Heteronormativity refers to the set of beliefs that devalue, disempower, or discriminate non-heterosexual individuals while gay invisibility refers to the state of non-heterosexual individuals staying quiet regarding their identity (Guenzi, 2015). Barriers to coming out in the workplace reflect a connection to goal types of coming out particularly self-oriented goals and non-romantic relationship management goals.

In summary, there are many ways we can look at the coming out process. It can be considered as having stages or phases. It can be linear or circular. It can be seen as a one-time event or an event that lasts a whole lifespan. And it can also be an event happening in two separate areas (individual and group) or happening simultaneously in three levels (cognitive, relational, and cultural). Coming out is also seen as a production of message that incorporates different types of goals. The more important the goals are, the more likely that an LGBT individual comes out. However, in most instances LGBTs decide not to come out and sometimes they even intentionally deceive others by passing as heterosexual. This happens because

of the negative experiences they associate with coming out also known as barriers in coming out.

### **Creating Safe spaces**

The LGBT people already face many challenges and stressors that go with their sexual minority identity. And coming out may be one of the most stressful because of its numerous risks. These risks could be rejection, violence, and discrimination among others. All of which affect how LGBTs perceive their safety or how they create their personal notions of safe and unsafe spaces.

### **Minority Stress and Risks of Coming Out**

Different factors affect the opposition of society towards the LGBT people. Manifestations of this opposition whether in the form of discrimination or violence influence how the LGBT people experience emotional and physical safety. Scholars even labelled the LGBT stress experience as minority stress. Whether an LGBT individual experiences breach in the confidentiality of sexual orientation disclosure, verbal harassment, or negative nonverbal communication in coming out conversations, it clearly underscores how communication is a critical concept for discussing safe spaces.

A lot of researches have presented data that mental disorders are common in non-heterosexual individuals compared to heterosexual individuals (Pitman et al.,

2021; Trevor, 2020; Trevor, 2019; Bacerra-Culqui, 2018; Semlyen et al., 2016).

There was even a time in the past when non-heterosexual identity is considered as pathological or a mental disorder (Moleiro & Pinto, 2015). Since then, scholars theorized on this phenomenon and attempted to provide an improved and less offensive explanation.

The widely accepted theory that described why non-heterosexual individuals are more likely to develop mental health concerns is the Minority Stress Theory (MST). Minority stress is the disproportionate stress experienced by individuals who are stigmatized because they are a minority (Meyer, 2003). The Minority Stress theoretical framework or conceptual model illustrated the types of minority stress experienced by LGBT people within their social position (Meyer & Frost, 2013). These are distal or external stressors like discrimination and violence and proximal or internal stressors like perceived stigma, expectation of rejection, and internalized homophobia.

Discrimination is manifested in situations where LGBT people are unequally treated in terms of employment, resources, services, and civil rights. In the 2017 Workplace Equality fact Sheet of Out & Equal, they showed that one in four non-heterosexual employees experience employment discrimination in the last five years and they also reported that some countries still criminalize being a non-heterosexual (Out & Equal, 2017). Wage inequality is also observed between non-heterosexual individuals and heterosexual individuals (Ozeren, 2014). A lot of non-heterosexual individuals are hindered to avail medical care when they disclose their sexual

minority identity (Mirza & Rooney, 2018). Non-heterosexual youths are also bullied in educational settings (Aranmolate et al., 2017).

Violence can be associated with hateful languages towards non-heterosexual individuals (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009; Article 19, 2013; Article 19, 2018). It is most evident in cases of assault, rape, unreasonable police arrests, and homicide (Batni et al., 2013; Equality & Justice Alliance, 2020; Free & Equal, n.d.).

Perceived stigma refers to the condition wherein an LGBT individual thinks that a heterosexual individual is prejudiced against LGBT based from an observed or imagined negative response (Meyer, 2003). This is related to the concept of expectation of rejection which refers to the LGBT individual's act of anticipating nonacceptance of society due to one's sexual minority identity. Internalized homophobia is self-actualizing the negative responses from other people by thinking less of one's self or by physically harming one's self among others (Meyer, 2003). For example, suicide attempts—a form of self-harm—among LGBT youths were reported to be four to six times more likely to happen (Aranmolate et al., 2017). Other forms of self-harm were seen in studies that focused on the relationship between stress and substance abuse or stress and sexual risk behavior while under the influence of drugs (Parent et al., 2018; Dentato et al., 2013).

These are the risks of coming out experienced by non-heterosexual individuals which greatly affect how they experience a quality life. Citing all these studies that showed a connection between minority stress and LGBT people's

physical and mental health, it is reasonable to consider that minority stress can be associated to notions of safety. Therefore, one can formulate the concept of safe spaces based from the exemplification of unsafe spaces.

### **What are Safe spaces?**

Merriam-Webster defined safe space as a place (e.g., school) that is free from prejudice, hostility, judgement, or likely harmful actions, thoughts, or talks (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n.d.). A safe space is also a setting which gives emotional and physical safety to an individual or a group of individuals (Oxford Online Dictionary, n.d.). A safe space, based from these definitions, is a place where an individual is encouraged to be confident and authentic and where harmful criticisms or other forms of harassments are not displayed.

Oxford Online Dictionary emphasized the depth of the concept of safe spaces with the mention of emotional and physical safety. For example, one can be physically unharmed but emotionally hurt.

Morton (2020) probed aspects of safe spaces when he pointed out two ways in which people conceptualize safe spaces. These are the ideological safe space and the physical safe space. Both the Oxford Online Dictionary and Morton distinguished safe spaces into abstract and concrete categorization. However, one can say that an ideological safe space may not be an emotional safe space. Morton recognized issues on the definition of safe space emerging from contradicting interpretations of the word. He suggested that an understanding can be achieved

when people examine the context where the word safe space is used. He explained that a safe space in an educational setting is where learners can engage in open conversations surrounding difficult subjects.

Gayle et al. (2013) explored the ways students think of and create safe spaces as well as analyzed their narratives and fit them in existing conceptual frameworks of effective and inclusive education setting. Other researchers elaborated on the concept of safe space grounded from the idea that learning requires a certain level of bravery because one must leave one's comfort zone to understand a different perspective thus a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

Furthermore, according to Arao and Clemens, a brave space values ground rules to help learners manage tensions in engaging to difficult dialogues. These rules include welcoming opposing ideas and agreeing to disagree, not taking things personally, choosing to engage or not to engage to challenges, showing respect and avoiding personal attacks. Ground rules to facilitate safe spaces in education setting is also tackled by Kay (2019) who presented three discussion guidelines in the classroom such as listening patiently, listening actively, and policing your voice. These are communicational in nature.

Based from the studies, a clearer distinction is presented between an emotional safe space and an ideological safe space. Ho (2017) described that these two spaces provide different things in that emotional safe space provides support and reassurance while ideological safe space also known as intellectual safe space,

academic safe space or a brave space provides freedom for all sides to express ideas especially regarding but not limited to difficult topics.

Emotional safe spaces are embodied in student support services where the oppressed and marginalized (e.g., gender minority, race, ethnicity) are secure and represented and where facilitators of these spaces undergo training regarding sensitivity and diversity (The Best Schools, 2021). This type of safe space—which is also called a psychological safe space—is criticized as it represents coddling or sheltering people from expressions of opposite ideas (Crockett, 2016). Coddling is likened to the definition of Ellison which associated safe spaces to venues where people can go to avoid encountering ideas and views that are uncomfortable and are different from their own (Grieve, 2016).

Similarly, Schapiro refer to safe spaces as places where one can find comfort, one can be at ease, regain energy, and relax (Belkin, 2017). The difference is that Ellison interpreted safe spaces as hindering intellectual debates that facilitate learning among students while Schapiro interpreted safe spaces as a means for students to motivate them to participate in uncomfortable learning.

Ali (2017) proposed that safe spaces and brave spaces albeit alternately, can be used together. She explained that while safe spaces provide support services for the minority, this is not intended to prevent but to help them to learn.

Van Leeuwen (2015) also introduced the term safe-being space and safe-talking space to label two types of safe spaces. According to him, safe-being space

is a place where one does not experience prejudice or discrimination while a safe-talking space is a place where one can practice free speech without being told as disrespectful. He recognized the room of a psychotherapist as both a safe-being space and a safe-talking space. Morton (2020) and Van Leeuwen both agreed to consider context to achieve a common ground. However, Van Leeuwen said that in instances where this is not feasible, he cited living context as safe-being space and research context as safe-talking space.

Another type of safe space is the technological safe space. Technological safe space or virtual safe space include social networking sites, websites, and chatrooms among others (Glassman, 2012).

For example, Facebook social media platform is a virtual safe space for young LGBTQ individuals (Lucero, 2017). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools, LGBTQ students started to hold their events and activities in social platforms to cultivate and maintain the sense of community in place of face-to-face socializations (Venkatraman, 2021).

Mobile applications are also considered as safe spaces like the clinical management of rape (CMR) mobile apps intended for women and girls under the UNICEF's gender-based violence service provision programs (UNICEF, n.d.).

Safe spaces can also be seen as social spaces (Meskell-Brocken, 2020). Soja looked at spaces based from the idea of Lefebvre who claims that spaces can be understood in multiple types. Soja, however, focused on the three types of

spaces: the firstspace refers to the real and material space, the secondspace is the representational space, and the thirdspace is the fully lived space (Meskell-Brocken, 2020; Lefebvre, 1991).

In Table 1, I summarized the categorization of safe spaces based on the researches mentioned in this section (Ho, 2017; Crockett, 2016; Van Leeuwen, 2015; Morton, 2017; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Glassman, 2012).

**Table 1**

*Types of Safe spaces*

Classifications of Safe spaces	Other terms used	Examples
Emotional safe space (Ho, 2017)	Psychological safe space (Crockett, 2016) Safe-being space (Van Leeuwen, 2015) Safe space	Student support service centers
Ideological safe space (Morton, 2020)	Intellectual safe space (Ho, 2017) Academic safe space (Ho, 2017) Safe-talking space (Van Leeuwen, 2015) Brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013)	Classrooms Workplaces
Physical safe space (Morton, 2020)		Psychotherapist's room Gay bars
Virtual safe space (Glassman, 2012)	Technological safe space (Glassman, 2012) Online safe space	Websites Chatrooms Social Networking Sites Pornography

**Why LGBTs Need Safe Spaces?**

For marginalized people such as the LGBT who experience minority stress, it is difficult to say that safe spaces are indeed safe. As Ali (2017) puts it safe spaces

are never actually safe. Crockett (2016) agreed when she said that safe spaces are not a 100 percent safe. It is hard for LGBT people to feel emotionally and physically safe. This idea was established in the Minority Stress section of this study.

Discrimination, violence, perceived stigma, and anticipated rejection are linked to poor health among the LGBT people. It is sound to say that emotional conditions and physical conditions are connected. Moreover, when one is affected by poor mental and physical health, one does not feel safe.

Safe spaces are platforms for helping the vulnerable people with their mental health concerns (Yee, 2019). It is also a place where conflict transformation can be facilitated into new relationships (Hunter, 2008). Aside from support, other benefits of safe spaces such as empowerment, sensitization, and reinforcement of self-confidence and self-esteem were found out in the study of Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019). Researchers also suggested that vulnerable people feel safe to express themselves when they are safe from discrimination and violence (Lewis et al., 2015).

A sociological research conducted among South African postgraduate lesbian and gay college students suggested the importance of formal policies in deciding the need for safe spaces (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

However, in Philippine elementary and secondary schools with existing Child Protection and Anti-Bullying Policies, adequate implementation becomes the issue as discrimination and harassment persists (Human Right Watch, 2017). This study

explores how do LGBT students conceptualize and communicate safe and unsafe spaces in the context of Philippine schools?

Glassman (2012) analyzed physical and virtual safe spaces among LGBT college students in the United States and participants of this study revealed that there are few safe spaces to none in middle and high schools and suggested future research in this area. Similarly, there is an observation that pro-LGBT organizations—which could be considered as safe spaces for LGBT youth in Philippine campuses are mostly in college rather than in high school (UNDP, USAID, 2014).

### **Communication for Safe spaces for Coming out**

While there are many types of safe spaces, this study is particularly interested in the communication for safe space in coming out.

Communication stress factors, communication stress responses, communicative behaviors, and communication effect of being an LGBT have been explored and analyzed (Heinz, 2018). Accommodative and non-accommodative communication toward the LGBT and its connection to relational satisfaction have also been examined (Soliz et al., 2010).

A study among Canadian transgender people and their interpersonal communication identified communication stress factors, communication stress responses, frustrating behaviors (of cisgender people), and communication effect of

being a transgender (Heinz, 2018). Simply put, stress factors are the causes of stress of transgenders when they communicate with other people. Stress responses are the noticeable communicative acts of LGBT individual because of stress factors. Frustrating behaviors refer to the behaviors of cisgender people or heterosexual individual that causes frustration to LGBT people during communication. And effect is the perceived impact of being an LGBT individual to one's interpersonal communication.

Heinz (2018) listed a substantial coding category in each of these themes. Communication stress factors include fear of judgement, being belittled, being outed, not being accepted, and worries for one's physical safety. Stress responses consist of increased self-monitoring, communication avoidance or withdrawal, quietude, and physiological responses. Frustrating behaviors are intrusive questions, dismissal, pity, defensiveness, and enforcement of gender norms among others. Effect incorporates increased caution and monitoring of others, increased sensitivity to other's gender, exhaustion, anxiety, and withdrawal. Based on Heinz's study, these recommendations are useful among transgender people:

1. Following communication cues
2. Signaling warmth and openness
3. Displaying basic human respect first
4. Recognizing or avoiding cisgenderism
5. Using appropriate name and pronouns
6. Educating oneself on gender diversity
7. Displaying lack of judgement

Rodriguez (2014) cited risk factors or stressors for young lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals which composes of: a) the difficulty they experience in being recognized as socially inferior to heterosexual people, b) the strain in coming out conversations, and c) the violence against LGB youth.

Manning (2016) meanwhile revealed the types of positive and negative communicative behaviors in coming out conversations. The positive communicative behaviors are affirming direct relational statements, nonverbal immediacy, open communication channels, laughter and joking. The negative communicative behaviors are inappropriate questions, comments, or concerns, aggression, expressing denial, and shaming statements.

In addition, Soliz et al. (2010) investigated perceptions of family communication among family members with LGBT. They attempted to understand how accommodative and non-accommodative communication determines relationship satisfaction among family members. It showed opportunities of family communication as a means to bridge differences among members especially LGBTs and non-LGBT family members.

Three topics or dimensions were used to measure behaviors and their association to communication or relational satisfaction. These dimensions are avoidance (refers to how family members and the LGBT individual make an effort to avoid controversial topics in interactions); respectful accommodation (refers to how non-LGBT family members show respect to the LGBT individual and consider their

opinions in interactions); and self-disclosure (refers to the existence or non-existence of sharing personal thoughts and feelings) (Soliz et al., 2010).

Soliz and colleagues found that avoidance does not result into relational satisfaction while respectful accommodation and self-disclosure are positively associated to relational satisfaction. It demonstrated how tension in the relationship among family members could occur as a result of non-accommodative communication. Avoidance is a non-accommodative communication while respectful accommodation and self-disclosure are accommodative communication.

### **Conversation Typologies**

Although evident barriers to coming out exists, the occurrence of the phenomenon remains as LGBT people strive for self-oriented goals such as visibility and authenticity. Some come out because they were asked to or they need to. And some come out because they were outed.

Manning (2014) analyzed from the narratives of LGB that there are seven typologies of coming out based on how the conversations took place. These are pre-planned conversations, emergent conversations, coaxed conversations, confrontational conversations, romantic/sexual conversations, educational/activist conversations, and mediated conversations.

Based from the study conducted by Manning (2014) pre-planned conversations are carefully thought of in advance by the individual coming out and

eventually initiates the disclosure. Emergent conversations happen naturally within interaction and is also initiated by the person coming out. Coaxed conversations are indirect communication that asks the individual to come out during interactions. Confrontational conversations are direct messages demanding the individual to come out. Unlike emergent and coaxed conversations where disclosure is natural, coming out in confrontational conversations is uncomfortable and disorganized. Romantic or sexual conversations of coming out are secondary messages to communicating same-sex attraction. This happens when an individual expresses desire for another person resulting to the reveal of the non-heterosexual identity. Educational or activist conversations are experiences of coming out in a formal setting like LGB discussion sessions or requests of institutional protection for LGB in the workplace. And mediated conversations are coming out experiences that happened outside face-to-face interactions.

### **Coming Out Responses**

Coming out conversations are difficult for LGBT people because often they are considering relationship management especially with their family members, friends, or workmates. As Li and Samp (2018) explained in their COMP theory, coming out is influenced by the type of goal one has. Studies have explored and revealed certain responses to an LGBT coming out in several contexts. These studies provided further insights on the coming out experiences as well as the effect of coming out conversations to the listeners.

Rodriguez (2014) reviewed several models of family responses to coming out and studied the adjustment process of families with a young family member who came out. One clear depiction of the emotional stages experienced by family members as a result of coming out is the grief model. This is originally applied by Kubler-Ross to death and the grieving process hence the model follows the stages of shock, denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Holland, 2014). Coolhart et al. (2017) explored feelings of ambiguous loss—uncertain or incomplete loss—among parents of young transgender male. Boss, the proponent of the concept of ambiguous loss explained that this is an incomplete loss because one might be physically present but psychologically absent or one might be physically absent but psychologically present (Coolhart et.al., 2017).

In relation to this, Norwood (2012) revealed the coping mechanisms of loved ones to experiences of ambiguous loss as a result of coming out which entail replacement, revision, evolution, and removal. Replacement is understanding gender identity change to be a biological change as in transgender persons; revision is seeing gender identity in a different perspective which is compared to the creation of a different image; evolution is coping to feelings of loss by appreciating a loved ones' new gender identity and seeing it as an upgraded version of one's self; and removal is like loving the identity of a loved one as a person without considering socially constructed concepts of gender (Coolhart et al., 2017).

Michael LaSala suggested that a family's coming out process undergoes four stages labelled as a) sensitization where the non-heterosexual individual feels isolation and anxiety, b) discovery where the family members empathize and shares

the feelings of anxiety that the non-heterosexual individual experiences, c) recovery where the family learns to cope, and d) renewal where family bond strengthens and understanding of each other widens (Wheeler et al., 2011).

Another perspective that showed coming out reactions is D'Amico's three-dimension parental responses composing of parental support (parents offer support to their child), parental struggles (parents feel hurt, upset, sad, or angry), and parental attempts to change their child's sexual orientation (parents tell their child to change their gender identity) (Van Bergen, 2020; Rosenkrantz, 2018). Other variables of parental responses like parental acceptance, parental support and parental ambivalence were validated in a recent study of parental reactions to youths who assume a sexual minority identity (Wigderson et al., 2019).

Chrisler's framework of parental responses to coming out conceptualized an overarching theory suggesting that certain factors influence parental reactions to coming out and these factors are a) cognitive flexibility or being able to alter how you see things to adapt to a different condition, b) emotional regulation or being able to control intense feelings, c) religious fundamentalism or believing that there is one true way to follow religious teachings, and d) parental sanctification or viewing parent-child relationship as a spiritual task (Rosenkrantz, 2018).

The first two factors can be seen in the study of Van Bergen et al. (2020) which talked about the varying reactions of parents of three cohorts of non-heterosexual individuals across different age groups. Cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation in this study translates to how parents either reject, accept,

support, struggle, or try to change their child's sexual minority identity. Cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation are seen in suspecting or nonsuspecting parents. For example, nonsuspecting parents are mostly shocked upon disclosure and display nonaffirmative reactions like screaming and anger (Van Bergen et al., 2020).

Religious fundamentalism and parental sanctification are demonstrated in the study of Rosati et al., (2020) which explored the coming out processes in family, social, and religious contexts. The study revealed that participants who come out to a Catholic community received a spectrum of reactions from unconditional acceptance, invitation to change, and open rejection. Religious parents are challenged greatly when it comes to accepting their non-heterosexual children especially if they subscribe to typical religious beliefs.

A study in the Healthcare context also investigated the coming out process of non-heterosexual people and revealed factors that can either prevent or facilitate the disclosure of an individual's sexual minority identity (Brooks et. al, 2018). For example, patients are more likely to come out if they perceived the healthcare professional to be either a member of or is accepting of the LGBT community. The four major themes that Brooks and fellow researchers uncovered which either facilitate or hinder gender identity disclosure in the health care setting were moment of disclosure (refers to communication skills of healthcare professional, inclusive language and open body language); perceived outcome of disclosure (refers to patient-provider confidentiality and good or open healthcare professional response); healthcare professional factors (include perceived accepting of LGBT and long or short relationship with patient); and environmental factors (refers to location or

setting and whether the healthcare community in the setting is supportive or unsupportive of the LGBT people).

This literature review offered different definitions of coming out, explained the models of the coming out process, revealed the goal types that influence coming out, identified the typologies of coming out conversations, ascertained some of the barriers to coming out, and recognized impacts to the receivers of the disclosure. Barriers to coming out and typologies of coming out conversations provided background to the challenges faced by LGBT people when coming out. These experiences were further explored through the researches on the processes of coming out in the family, society, religious community, and healthcare environment. These responses centered on the impact of coming out to both the speaker and receiver of the disclosure.

Focusing on the actual experiences of LGBT people and the dynamic aspects of coming out, this study further examined the researches about the stress experienced by LGBT people. It is important to investigate LGBT stress during interactions, the communication behavior they manifest in response to the stress during the conversations, and the risks linked to both disclosure and non-disclosure as these factors affect how they interpret safe or unsafe spaces for coming out.

## **Synthesis**

The coming out phenomenon among the LGBT people is indeed a unique process. Researchers proposed several models to describe it. There are opposing

ideas on whether to look at coming out as a single act of disclosing one's identity, a development process with various linear stages like Cass's model or with phases happening over an individual's life without sequence like Troiden's and D'Augelli's models (Blair, 2017; Guenzi, 2015; Kenneady & Oswald, 2014; Strickland, 2019; Ferdoush, 2016; Manning, 2014; Simons & Beck, 2020; Huang, 2017; Glassman, 2012; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

On a more structured approach, the coming out process was proposed to be happening at three levels not only intrapersonally (within the individual) but also interpersonally (between dyadic relations) and systematically (within social systems and culture) and this is called the Manning's Constitutive Coming Out Model (Manning, 2016).

It was studied in the intrapersonal level that the likelihood of an LGBT individual to decide to come out depends on the types of goals they have (e.g., self-oriented, disclosure-target oriented, nonromantic/romantic relationship management-oriented and task-oriented) and how important these goals are (Li & Samp, 2018; Li & Samp, 2019).

On the interpersonal level, coming out conversations were categorized based on how they occur and they were labelled as typologies of coming out (Manning, 2014). These various types of conversation reveal how coming out can emerge naturally or it can turn quickly into chaos. They can also be face-to-face or mediated.

On the sociocultural level, a study revealed that specific activities and practices within organizations—organizational culture—can hinder one’s coming out (Guenzi, 2015). Some practices in the health sector also prevent sexual orientation disclosure (Brooks et al., 2018). The responses experienced by families like parents or siblings to the coming out process as observed in studies are colorful compared to a spectrum that is not limited to the black and white rejection and acceptance usually believed to be (Rodriguez, 2014). Chrisler presented a framework in understanding the determinants of these reactions which consisted of emotional attitudes, belief systems, and ideologies among others (Rosenkrantz, 2018).

While some researchers analyzed the responses of the receiver of the disclosure, others focused on the LGBT people’s collective experience as belonging to the sexual minority identity. Researchers presented data showing the prevalence of poor mental health among LGBT people and explained that this is a result of minority stress—the excessive stress that LGBT people experience because of internal and external stressors like discrimination and violence or internalized homophobia (Meyer & Frost, 2013).

Studies have also shown how mental health and physical health are linked. Consequently, one can conclude that it is hard to feel safe when both or either mental safety or physical safety of an individual is compromised. The vulnerable people’s safety affects their expression, in fact, a study claimed that vulnerable people feel safe to express themselves when they are safe from violence and discrimination (Lewis et al., 2015).

In relation to this, one could ask what is a safe space for the LGBT people or what characterizes a safe space for coming out? Safe spaces are places where LGBT people can be at ease and be free from both emotional and physical harm. There are several types of safe spaces applied in different contexts and can be classified as emotional safe space, academic safe space, physical safe space, and technological safe space (Morton, 2020; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Ho, 2017; Crockett, 2016; Grieve, 2016; Belkin, 2017; Ali, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2015).

Sometimes misunderstanding arise when a type of safe space is applied in a context that is otherwise unfitting as in the misuse of academic safe space to diminish emotional safe space or vice versa. This is where the communicative aspect manifests itself. The communicative is also integrated in positive and negative communicative behaviors among participants of the coming out conversation (Manning, 2016). Based from the study of Lewis et al. (2015), LGBT individual people feels safe to express when they are free from communication stress factors.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study**

This section presents the theoretical perspective utilized for this study. The study would fall under the socio-cultural tradition of theory (Craig, 1999), which posits that communication can (re)create reality and the truth. Thus, how safe spaces is talked about at various levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and with the public) can (re)create a certain reality, and consequently any emerging culture.

Under the socio-cultural tradition is the theory of Symbolic Interactionism, that may best capture the essence of the research.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

Herbert Blumer is the scholar known to have coined the term Symbolic Interactionism to explain the ideas about the self, meanings, and interaction. But he mainly based these from his mentor George Herbert Mead's work on *Mind, Self, and Society* (Fink, 2016; Griffin, 2012). Symbolic interactionism is largely attributed to Mead, but other scholars contributed to his ideas, namely: Charles Horton Cooley and John Dewey at the University of Michigan, William James and Josiah Royce at Harvard, and Charles Sanders Peirce at Johns Hopkins University (Fink, 2016; Lal, 1995).

Blumer explained that Symbolic Interactionism revolves around the three major concepts of meaning, language, and thinking (Griffin, 2012). Relationships of these concepts culminate with the idea on how the self and the society came to be.

Blumer begins with the premise that *humans act toward people or things on the basis on the meanings they assign to those persons and things*. The interpretation or meaning making, according to Mead is not an individual venture but a joint venture (Griffin, 2012).

Blumer's second premise is that *meaning arises out of the social interaction that people have with each other*. Meaning is negotiated through the use of

language- hence the term symbolic interactionism. [Language can be verbal or non-verbal; it is also a symbol.] A symbol is a “stimulus that has a learned meaning and value for people.” Symbols can be nonverbal or linguistic (Griffin, 2012).

Hence, meanings emerge from the social interaction of one individual to another. Through shared meanings comes the potential of universal symbols and discourse. The emphasis on language reflects Mead’s belief that the human society relies on symbolic naming in the sense that it helps people to intelligently express themselves and interpret the world they live in.

How humans give meaning to things is always unpredictable because it can change based from the context or location of the thing being defined and because humans have the capacity to find new ways of interpreting them (Lal, 1995). However, Lal emphasized that while meanings happen within an environment or context it does not focus on social structures but social process.

Blumer’s third premise is that *an individual’s interpretation of symbols is modified by his or her own thought processes*. Mead called this inner dialogue *minding* —an internal dialogue that assesses one’s succeeding actions, mentally tries out options, or reflects possible reactions of other people (Griffin, 2012). Minding or internal conversation, however, requires an individual to learn language. Consequently, this idea forwards the argument that individuals only have the capacity to think if they know how to interact symbolically.

Mead's greatest contribution in understanding the way we think is his notion that we human beings have the *unique capacity to take the role of the other*. The tight interconnection of meaning, language, and thinking leads to Mead's concept of the self. The notion of the self is based from how we think people think of us. Cooley called this idea the *looking-glass self* which posits that our self-concept is affected by the views of the society (Rahim, 2010). The self is always changing and reinventing through the relationship between the "I" and the "Me". Unpredictability and novelty are manifestations of the "I" while conventionality and certainty are manifestations of the "Me" (Griffin, 2012).

Three major concepts on meaning, language, and thinking explain the emergence of the Self. The Self is multifaceted consisting of the "I" and the "Me". Through role-taking and the internal conversation called minding, the Self is able to share, shape, and even modify meanings during social interaction.

People constantly perform minding to guide their social interactions, hence there is this basis on the mental image of a group of people and their views about ourselves. Mead explained this as the generalized other, the social group, the community or the society as a whole. Interactionists say people construct the society through interaction (Griffin, 2012).

As Griffin (2012) summarized it: In Symbolic Interactionism, there is no "me" at birth because the "me" is formed only through continual symbolic interaction – first with the family, next with playmates, and then in institutions such as schools. As the generalized other develops, this imaginary composite person becomes the

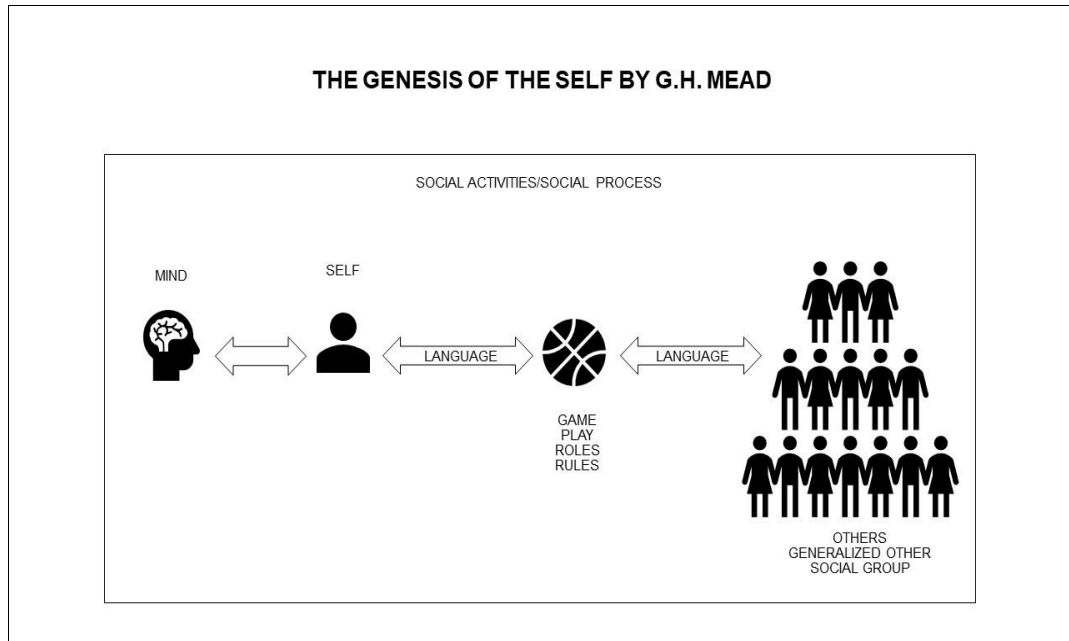
conversational partner in an ongoing mental dialogue. In this way, kids participate in their own socialization. The child gradually acquires the roles of those in the surrounding community. Mead would term “me” as the organized society within the individual.

The Symbolic Interactionism theory is an appropriate framework for this study because communication for safe spaces are centered on the self, meanings, language, social interaction, and communication. Reck (1963) may summarize it best this way. It is meaning that makes symbols significant. Meanings have the capacity to be universal. This happens only because individuals have the ability to place themselves in the position of others while still being themselves. Meanings also show the connection of the mind to language. Language is a set of symbolically significant gestures and the mind manifests itself through the occurrence of conversation of gestures in a social process (Reck 1963). The mind of an individual can change because of symbolic symbols, their meanings, how they are used during conversations in a social process, and how the individual reflects on these meanings.

The Self arises from the evolution or the changes of the mind through the social process (Reck, 1963). As Mead puts it, self is an organization of social experience. When does the self begins to emerge? Here is the researcher’s visual representation of Mead’s Genesis of the Self.

## Figure 7

*Mead's Genesis of the Self (adapted from Reck, 1963)*



As seen in Figure 7, the mind evolves and becomes the self upon participation in a social process (Reck, 1963). The individual uses language to collaborate with other individuals in a game where roles are played and rules are followed. The roles and rules are all based on the point of view of others. Mead called these others the generalized others or the social group. The arrows used are double ended to show the relation of mind to self, to language, to play and game, and to the generalized others and how this overall process can change the mind and gradually evolves to become the Self. The Self has two compositions, the I and the Me. This is so because while the self is social it is also individual. The "I" is the individual characterized by its novelty and progress while the "Me" is the social and is characterized by its conventionality and habituality (Reck, 1963).

Symbolic Interactionism posits that people act based on the meanings they associate to things or phenomenon: therefore, through the Symbolic Interactionism lens, the manner by which LGBT youths present themselves depend on how they interpret communication for safe spaces in the coming out process as seen through a looking glass self. Communication and interpretation of safe spaces is created and recreated through social interaction or social process.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

My research paradigm is interpretivist, specifically social constructivism (Chen et al., 2011). Hence, I hold a relativist ontology, a subjective epistemology, and a value-laden axiology.

### **Ontology**

I am looking at a relativist ontology. I look at communication as the process of meaning making where individuals participate in the construction and reconstruction of realities. This process is determined by social interaction and cultural context. It follows then that this study subscribes to multiple realities. The research participants' coming out stories reflect their own experiences and personal notions of safe spaces, which are multiple viewpoints.

## **Epistemology**

Knowledge are revealed through actual stories of research participants as well as the analysis and interpretations of the researcher. The interpretations and analysis of research data uses a subjective approach which means that I employed the subjective reasoning paradigm (Aliyu et al., 2015).

## **Axiology**

The findings of this study rely on how I, as the researcher, understand, interpret, and put value on the coming out experience and safe space communication of the research participants. Therefore, my values will not be detached as a researcher.

## **My positionality**

I was born and raised in Itbayat, Batanes, a small island in northern Philippines, which I consider to be a highly religious province just like the rest of the country. I grew up with conventional beliefs and values and a traditional Filipino culture. I only started to widen my perspective when I learned about progressive ideas through my educational career from an institution that upholds pluralism.

For two years, I worked in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, a workplace, which I personally consider to be relatively supportive of gender-nonconforming people. And for almost half a decade and continuing, I work at a

broadcasting industry which—although not a perfect example of a gender inclusive environment [I have few LGBT colleagues based on observation]—strives to practice gender-fair principles as integrated in broadcast contents, portrayals, and representations.

I have acquaintances, colleagues, friends, and relatives who identify as LGBTs. My personal experience regarding gender discrimination whether it be directed to me as a woman or directed among the LGBT people close to me has pushed me to reflect critically about defining safe spaces and how it can be created and maintained through communication to foster gender equality. This position reflects my biases on the discrimination of the LGBTs as well as my desire to give them an opportunity to express their voices through this research.

In admitting my values and assumptions, I aim to be reflective and fair in the interpretation and analysis of my research data.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the methodology, which is the Grounded Theory. The design, locale of the study, the research participants and sampling procedures, the data collection procedures, and data analysis, are all aligned with the principles of Grounded Theory.

#### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was developed since the 1960s and is mostly used as a methodology in understanding qualitative phenomena (Briks et al., 2019). Its originators were Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Mills et al., 2006; Bryant, 2002).

These two originators adhere to different ideas: the Glaserian strategy which is also called the critical realist, modified objectivist, or the classic grounded theory; and the Straussian strategy which is more of a relativist and subjectivist also known as the reformulated classic mode (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). From the latter which is the reformulation of the classic mode came Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory.

No matter the approach of grounded theory, Orlikowski (1993) claims that grounded theory methodology has three major characteristics, namely: inductive, contextual, and processual. Inductive means that grounded theory provides methods

that permit researchers to develop conceptual frameworks based from actual data. Contextual means that grounded theory method guides the analysis of concepts based from the context of the phenomenon being studied. And processual refers to grounded theory methodology generating theories about process, sequence, and change.

Grounded theory methodology underscores that it is important to build theory from data—one that measures up to certain criteria (Bryant, 2002). These criteria include fit, work, relevance, and modifiability (Bryant, 2002; Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). Fit refers to grounded theory research that diligently surfaces categories from data and develops a theory that are not copied from previous theoretical perspectives. Work means that the grounded theory explains and presents predictions of real situations on the ground. Relevance refers to grounded theory offering solutions or plans of actions helpful to the area under study. And modifiability includes the flexibility of a grounded theory in relation to new data.

What sets apart the grounded theory from other methodologies is its ultimate aim of coming up with a theory which is grounded in the data (Birks et al., 2019). Glaser (2002) pointed out that *conceptualization* is the heart of grounded theory because it helps in differentiating which is fact, which is an interpretation, and it also shows how the data is produced.

Glaser claimed that conceptualization is not description. Another important thing to highlight, he said, is *theoretical sensitivity* (Glaser 2002). This means that concepts that generate grounded theory must be from the ideas or notions of the

research participants. However, Glaser clarified that concepts should not be in vivo or mere language lifted from the answers of research participants and presented as concepts but rather it should be notions that were elevated to an abstraction that can explain the phenomenon being studied.

In relation to theoretical sensitivity is the *constant comparative analysis* (Glaser & Holton, 2005). This is a process of continuously comparing categories from one data to another to validate concepts. It is a method that ensures the identification of concepts from all data sources, categorize these concepts, describe their properties, analyze them, relate it to the main phenomenon being explored, and eventually generate a theory from these concepts that explains the phenomenon.

There is also the principle of *theoretical sampling* which refers to the process of data gathering based on concepts from initial data (Hull, 2013). Theoretical sampling is dependent on the prime categories identified and the researcher's interpretation of the emerging theory. Initial categories and interpretations start with initial data collected and analyzed from a small purposive sample of research participants (Birks et al., 2019). As Corbin and Strauss posit, it is basically the research guiding the data collection (Hull, 2013).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) claimed that in grounded theory, there can be no definite, prescribed, pre-planned set of groups compared during the comparative analysis and that a researcher cannot cite the numbers and types of groups from which s/he collected data until the research is completed.

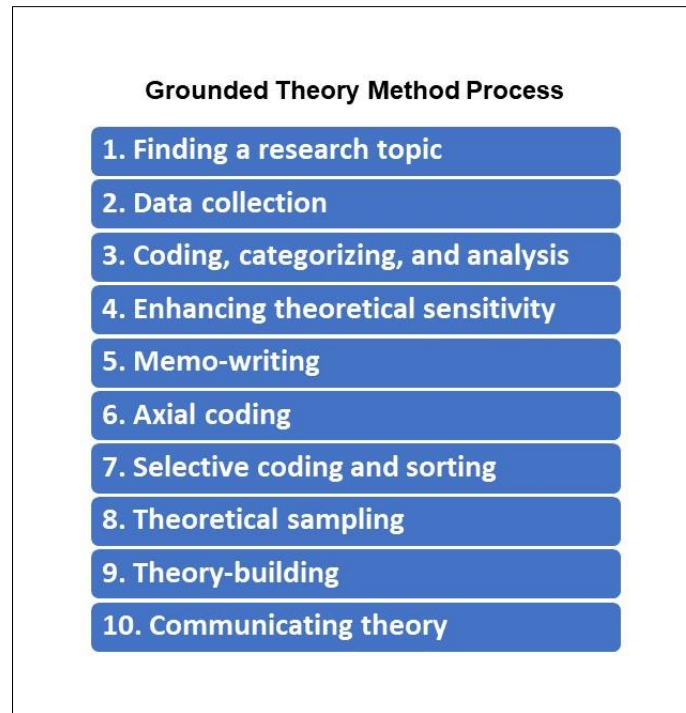
## Steps

This study is guided by Patzelt's 10-step process of doing grounded theory (Hull, 2013). It starts with the process of (1) establishing valid research problems. Based from the research questions, a researcher can (2) gather data. The data can then be (3) coded, categorized, and analyzed by the researcher while applying (4) theoretical sensitivity.

Theoretical sensitivity is aided by (5) writing memos about the concepts being coded. After open coding, the researcher employs (6) axial coding or finding relationships between the coded elements and then (7) selective coding or refining coded categories (Gasson, 2003). The next step is doing the (8) theoretical sampling. Steps two to eight (see Figure 9) are repeated until theoretical saturation. Gasson (2003) explained that theoretical saturation is achieved when the researcher no longer finds new themes, categories, or relationships and no new data. Subsequently, the researcher can now (9) build the grounded theory and (10) write about it.

## Figure 8

### *Patzelt's Process of Doing Grounded Theory*



*Note.* From Hull, S. (2013). *Doing Grounded Theory* (p. 2), University of Cape Town: Division of Geomatics.

## Research Design

This inquiry is qualitative in nature. It has an interpretive research design with the goal to make sense of [interpret] the situation.

A qualitative design, according to Merriam (2002), have four key characteristics: 1) the researcher seeks to explore and analyze the process of meaning-making of the research participants, 2) the researcher serves as an instrument for gathering and analyzing data, 3) the researcher follows the inductive

process to contribute to knowledge generation, and 4) the researcher produces a richly descriptive output.

### **Locale of the Study**

The locale of the study were two universities in the Philippines. The school was chosen to be the setting of the study as it considers data of the Human Rights Watch (2017) that reported discrimination and harassment among LGBT students. This study also considered educational institutions that are LGBT-affirmative (Llaneta, 2019). There are established LGBT student organizations in college campuses that offer support services for sexual minority or encourage LGBT activism (De Vera, 2018). The universities that were chosen in this study have one LGBT student organization which is important for participants to provide a more analytical aspect of conceptualizing safe spaces.

### **Research Participants**

The theoretical sampling technique was used to look for research participants. The study was conducted among self-identified LGBT college students. With the implementation of K-12 program, most students in the Philippines started their college at age 18 years old. Also, United Nations define youth as persons 15 to 24 years old (UNDESA, n.d.). Hence this study limited the research participants to college students ages 18-24 years old.

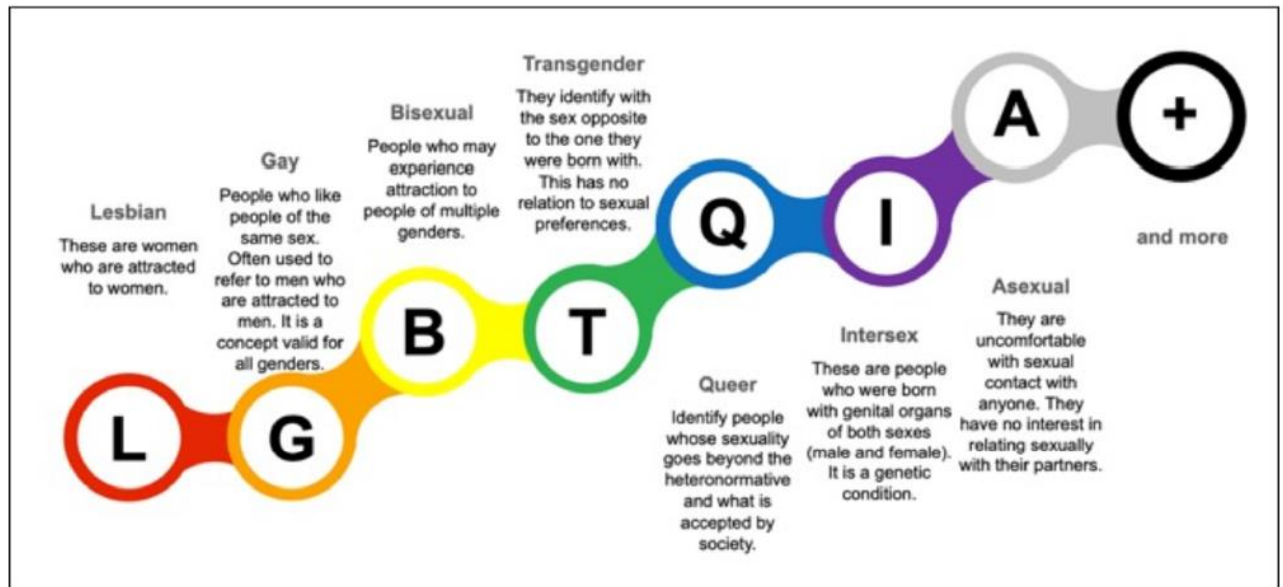
Participants of this study included college students who are at least 18 years old to 24 years old, Filipino, and residing in the Philippines. They are self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning. Research participants in this study (at the time of research) were studying in college in the Philippines that have at least one LGBT student organization and were also a member of an LGBT student organization. The study emphasized this context because it is an important factor in acquiring in-depth data relevant to the study's objectives.

The researcher started data collection with one qualified research participant who provided rich data about a safe space for coming out. After collecting data for this one particular research participant, I began coding and analyzing the data. From this initial coding and analysis, I decided which data to gather next and where to look for them. The sampling unit in grounded theory can be the data source or the example of concept or category (Gentles et al., 2015).

A qualitative designed study can have a small sample size since its aim is not to generalize populations, although through inductive process it can come up with a generalizable theory or proposition (Yin, 2003). I used *theoretical sampling* with participants coming from the LGBT community who identified their orientation in the LGBT spectrum. I continued sampling from the LGBTQIA+ spectrum (Figure 8) until the study reached *theoretical saturation* or informational redundancy (Gentles et al., 2015).

**Figure 9**

*The LGBTQIA+ Acronym*



*Note.* Adapted from “An Analysis of LGBTQIA+ University Students’ Perceptions about Sexual and Gender Diversity,” by H. Tinoco-Giraldo, E. M. T. Sanchez, and F. J. Garcia-Peñalvo, 2021, *Sustainability*, 13(21), p. 4.

### Collection of Data

Through the stories of the research participants, this study was able to develop a deeper understanding of communication for safe spaces in coming out. Research participants’ experiences were elicited through semi-structured interview with open-ended questions (see Appendix E for the sample interview guide). The recruitment materials started the recruitment process (see Appendix A, B, and C for sample recruitment materials).

## **Interview**

The interview served three main purposes for the study which were a) getting basic information or profile of research participants, b) building rapport between researcher and research participants, and c) obtaining in-depth data relevant for the research inquiry (see Appendix E for the sample interview guide).

## **Personal Journal**

I kept a journal to take note of personal insights and reflections about the research. This helped me practice mindfulness of my own opinion or prejudices that might affect the study in anyway.

## **Analysis of Data**

The unit of analysis was the data from the LGBT youth qualified research participants. A detailed analysis of the experiences of these research participants was done through the help of the transcriptions and recordings of the interviews.

There are three stages of analysis in this study, namely: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding started with open codes which refer to the general understanding of the types of categories relevant to the study in question (Gasson, 2003). The general understandings on the open coding of this study were based from literature review, but I applied theoretical sensitivity to avoid forcing pre-

understood concepts. Open codes were elicited by asking what the data was about, what categories were there, or what processes were there. It was crucial to allow the emergence of data during the research. The unit of analysis used were lines or sentences from the interview transcripts.

Axial coding was the second level of analysis in this grounded theory research which dealt with the process of examining the similarities and differences of one category to another, one subcategory to another subcategory, properties of a category or properties of a subcategory (Gasson, 2003). This process helped in explaining the relationship of the open codes from the data. Relationships of open codes uncovered in this research were causal, contextual, contingent, consequential, covariant, or conditional.

The third level of analysis in this grounded theory study was selective coding. This was the process where categories were refined and core categories were selected (Gasson, 2003). Codes in this level eventually became the basis of this study's conceptual model.

Memo-writing was conducted simultaneously with data analysis coupled with notes on personal insights to record my thoughts and views as well as problems identified and decisions undertaken during the process of research. Issues that arose during data analysis were crystalized with a follow-up interview with the participants and consultations to relevant literature while also taking into consideration the balance of emergence of concepts rather than forcing these from preconceived notions of literatures.

Further analysis was derived from my notes and documentations. I conducted the grounded theory steps two to eight until theoretical saturation was achieved (see Figure 9).

To validate this grounded theory research, I used the combined criteria of Korstjens and Moser (2018) and Gasson (2003).

**Table 2**

*Combined Validating Strategies based from Korstjens and Moser (2018) and Gasson (2003)*

Quality and Rigour in Grounded Theory Research			
<i>Issue of Concern</i>	<i>Interpretive Worldview</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Procedure</i>
<b>Representativeness of findings</b>	Credibility: conclusions depend on subjects and conditions of the study, rather than the researcher.	Prolonged engagement  Observation	Long and in-depth Interviews
<b>Reproducibility of findings</b>	Dependability/Auditability/Confirmability: the study process is consistent and reasonably stable over time and between researchers.	Audit Trail	Description of methodological procedures in methods section
<b>Rigor of method</b>	Internal consistency/Fit/Work/Relevance: the research findings are credible and consistent, to the people we study and to our readers. For authenticity, our findings should be related to significant elements in the research context/situation.	Audit Trail  Thick description	Description of methodological procedures in methods section  Documentation (videos, recordings, transcripts)  Theoretical Memos
<b>Generalizability of findings</b>	Transferability: how far can the findings/conclusions be transferred to other contexts and how do they help to derive useful theories?	Grounded theory	Grounded theory methods
<b>Subjectivity of findings</b>	Reflexivity: the ability of the researcher to recognize own biases and the sensitivity and openness to the interpretations of research participants.	Diary  Researcher Journal	Journal reflection regarding research

To validate the findings, I used the combined Korstjens and Moser’s (2018) and Gasson’s (2003) criteria and followed some of the procedures.

For internal consistency, I diligently used words of the research participants to tell their story. I was able to conduct full member check with the participants sending

them back the complete transcriptions of the interviews including follow-up interview for the participant's validation.

For dependability, I thoroughly kept documentation of the study such as the recordings and transcripts of the interviews. I also kept a theoretical coding notebook where I wrote my insights about initial codes, themes, and even my methods and rationales behind decisions pertinent to my findings.

For transferability, I came up with a conceptual model of a communication for safe space grounded from data that is useful to explain the role of communication in facilitating or hindering the creation of safe spaces for coming out. It is a conceptual model consistent to the purpose of grounded theory which is not necessarily the production of scientific truth statements but rather to draw out a new way of understanding social processes.

For reflexivity, I kept a journal to note the daily progress of my research, my personal reflections, and internal dialog regarding my values and interests in relation to the research.

Essentially, the interview recordings and transcripts, theoretical coding notebook, and personal journal served as audit trails.

## **My Role as Researcher**

I, as the researcher, is the primary data gatherer and at the same time the actual instrument who interpreted the data gathered in this study. I came up with a plan of action that allowed for a closer look and thorough investigation of the research participant's thoughts and feelings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This action plan was able to help me answer questions relating to how the participants think of a particular concept and why they think the way they do.

I engaged with the participants to acquire a trustworthy data. While the analysis and interpretation of the data was primarily derived from the responses of the participants, the meaning-making was anchored on my educational background and experiences. My interpretation was enhanced and balanced through a collaboration with research participants. There was a need for reflexivity since I play the role of a human research instrument. Reflexivity is the principle of mindfulness of one's own biases and prejudices (Willsher & Goel, 2017; Holmes, 2020; Walshaw, n.d.). I strove to be reflexive while doing this study to uphold a certain level of trustworthiness because I believe that the integrity of the research is the integrity of the researcher.

Moreover, Strauss and Corbin (n.d.) has laid out the responsibilities of a researcher in grounded theory which includes the commitment to knowledge contribution, the obligation to give voices to the research participants, and the responsibility to use the theory—discovered from grounded theory research—in the

service of society. Whether this be among the research participants studied, scholars, or policy makers. In line with this I did my best to fulfill this as a researcher.

## **Reflexivity**

I grappled with overwhelmness and confusion on the practice and adherence to the Grounded Theory Method in the early stages of data gathering and data analysis. I was supposed to start with one participant and following Patzelt's process of doing Grounded Theory Method including 2) data collection; 3) coding, categorizing, and analysis; 4) enhancing theoretical sensitivity, 5) memo-writing; 6) axial coding; 7) selective coding and sorting; 8) theoretical sampling).

However, there were times when I became more focused on data collection such as seeking participants and conducting their interviews instead of diligently following the respective Grounded Theory process from steps 2 until 8 particularly arriving at theoretical sampling first before looking for another participant. This is due to the concern in access. Despite such tension in the grounded theory method, I made sure to practice theoretical sensitivity by identifying relevant data helpful to the emergence of conceptual models. Patterns of meanings were validated through comparative analysis which gradually led to the identification, categorization, description, and analysis of concepts. Comparative methods were done through comparison of one interview data from the same interview, comparison of interview data to another interview, and comparison of data in earlier and later (follow-up) interview.

I strove to balance not forcing personal and prior assumptions with maintaining the emergence of concepts through conceptualization and analysis. At first, I was afraid to change the words used by the research participants resulting to coding the data that is focused on identifying topics instead of actions or processes. Exercising analytical skills in grounded theory meant naming codes based on my interpretation while being true to the data.

My reflexivity was demonstrated on personal insights such as the realizations on the differences between initial understanding to a more developed analysis of data. For example, initially, I thought that safe spaces are sites or locations but what emerged from the data was that safe spaces can be people.

I admit to having a strong desire to come up with a conceptual model of communication for safe space. The difficulty was to balance not just providing a visual representation but an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon.

And finally, theoretical saturation served as a core principle that guided this research. However, it is arguable if real saturation could have been and is ever achieved. This research acknowledges the need to further develop the emergent concepts with the possibility of different theoretical understanding upon application of constant comparison with new data. More importantly, the findings revealed, organized, and produced from this research is a communicational framework that provides a possible theoretical explanation but is not a generalization.

## Ethical Issues

This study adhered to moral principles and applied them on the overall aspects of the research including on the data, the participants, and the audience.

On the data, this research strove to develop concepts grounded on data true to the method it used which is the Grounded Theory. The practice of Grounded Theory method in this study diligently followed its main criteria of fit which refers to surfacing abstraction that explained the studied phenomenon based from the answers of the research participants. Before starting the analysis of the data, the Zoom recorded interview and the transcription of interview for each of the participants were sent to them, respectively to be validated. As soon as validation was completed, coding of the data began.

For the participants, coming out is a sensitive topic because it is disclosing one's gender identity. This study has established in the earlier sections the risk factors for the LGBT people's coming out. Their hesitations are rooted from experiencing feelings of unsafeness. Thus, this research strictly conformed to the proprieties of sensitive information. All research participants completed the consent form before the conduct of the interview. They were informed that all interviews conducted were recorded, transcribed, and would be kept confidential. The research participants were assured that their identities would not be revealed for their protection.

The answered consent forms, recorded Zoom interviews, and interview transcriptions were all stored in a password-protected device that only the researcher can access. The researcher has sent audio recordings and transcriptions of the interview to the Chair of the Thesis Advisory Committee only for validating and credibility checking of the research. All these steps were in adherence to the data privacy policy.

Finally, for the audience, I have disclosed my positionality, the scope and limitations of this study, the context, the method, as well as the references so as to be transparent to the readers of this research.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results and discussion is divided into two major headings as aligned with the research questions of the study. The first part discusses the meaning of safe space among the participants which revealed the spaces identified as safe, characteristics of a safe space, and the layers of a safe space. The second part explains the social production or in this case, communication, of safe(r) space for coming out among the Filipino queer youth. Lastly, it unveils a conceptual model of communication for developing safe(r) space.

#### **Meaning of Safe space Among the Filipino Queer Youth**

What is the Filipino queer youth's conceptualization of a space deemed safe for their becoming? This section elicited how the Filipino queer youth define a safe space. Knowing what safe spaces mean through the perspectives of the Filipino queer youth uncovered the things that facilitate or hinder safe spaces which makes their becoming safer compared to the unsafeness they experience within the real spaces they are living through.

The meaning of safe spaces among the participants elicited three subheadings, namely: spaces identified as safe space, characteristics of a safe space, and layers of safe space.

Exploring the experiences of the participants of this study is understanding the safer spaces considered by the Filipino queer youth in their becoming. The following are the abridged narratives of the Filipino queer youth which better describe the context of their becoming in relation to their personal rooms, families, and advocacy organizations both in school and work which are considered to be safer spaces and spaces of interaction.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 is a transgender woman (she/her) and a student at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP)-Sta. Mesa in Manila and a Bahaghari PUP member. The becoming of Participant 1 is described as *pagpapakatotoo sa sarili*. She began to actively explore her gender identity during the pandemic. Like everyone else during the isolation period, she experienced being alone a lot. She recounts that her solitude somehow stirs her up to overthink. This made it even harder because she mentioned that she was already battling the suffocation of gender dysphoria and the repression of the belief systems of her very conservative and traditional family. But this did not stop her in her journey to pursue authenticity.

Initially in her becoming, she identified as gay but later she transitioned as a transgender woman. Asked why she finally came out, she explained that she wanted to save herself from depression, she wanted to be true to herself and show her true self to the outside world while empowering the queer community by representing transwomen. Part of her becoming is educating herself by browsing the Internet and looking for safe options to transition physically or medically. Financial difficulty, however, has challenged this transition process.

With all these internal and external challenges faced by Participant 1, she described her safe space as *kanlungan*. The materialized *kanlungan* as a safe space is her room. She said that personality wise, she is an introvert. She enjoys being alone, but at the same time, she wants to balance this by going out and meeting new people. After a long day of socialization, it makes her feel safe to go home and find comfort in her room.

*My room. Ayun talaga 'yung pinaka safe, kasi...kung may mata man 'yung kwartong ito siya yung nakakita kung ano 'yung napagdaanan ko lahat lahat.*  
(My room. That is really the safest, because...if my room has eyes, it witnessed everything I have been through). (Participant 1, Interview 1)

Participant 1 also considered certain spaces in her university (Polytechnic University of the Philippines/PUP) as safe spaces. She said there was a year when their student council president was a transwoman. This made her feel more empowered to continue her study in her university. Participant 1 is taking Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) and according to her, Department-wide, referring to the Department of Public Administration, it is a safe space. She affirmed that her seniors in the department were very welcoming.

At first, she was shy and cannot come out as a transgender woman because she was under the impression that since their department is all about policies that they should abide by the rules. But the Department Chairperson assured that it is

okay for anyone to express themselves in anyway based on their gender identity whether this be through hair color or clothing.

Participant 1 mentioned that her university has an existing LGBTQ student organization—the Bahaghari PUP. This is where the queer community in the university are able to know each other more. They welcome the newcomer queer students warmly and treat them as family. Some people view the joining of LGBTQ student organizations to be nonsense because they see the members to be always laughing and being silly, but for Participant 1, queer student organizations offer more than nonsense and silliness. These organizations serve as a platform to forward their advocacies.

*They make yourself na family kaagad nila. And that's what the community is about. Akala kasi ng iba na kapag nag-join ka ng LGBTQIA organization parang they thought na puro kalokohan lang kayo, ganon. Kasi LGBT kayo di ba? Lagi kayong tumatawa? Ganon. Pero hindi. We have much more than to offer, we have much more than to fight for. Kasi nga hindi lang naman tumitigil doon eh. Hindi lang naman tumitigil sa surface level, may mas pinaglalaman tayong community under that.*

(They make you [feel] you are their family right away. And that's what the community is about. They think that when you join LGBTQIA organization, it's preposterous because you are all LGBT, right? Always laughing. But, no, we have much more to offer, we have much more to fight for. Because it does not end there; it does not end in surface level. We are fighting for a community under that). (Participant 1, Interview1)

Bahaghari PUP is a university-wide organization. Participant 1 said that one would expect to meet members from different levels, hence treat them as higher in the hierarchy. But she said that there is no feeling of superiority complex within the organization. Before joining the organization, one will be briefed about the dos and don'ts.

*You feel safe talaga. Kasi usually kapag ano, regardless of gender muna, iisipin niyo 'yung year-level kung sinong mas matanda, sinong mas bata diyan. Walang ganon sa org. namin kasi we were able to treat each other fairly, we just call some of us, some ate, some kuya if they want, but if they don't want, we understood na lang. And number one din kasi before you join the org... they will brief you na ito 'yung mga puwedeng mga sabihin and of course we don't tolerate the internalized homophobia kung meron man sa org. We practice always safe space kasi that's what we uphold. We treat each other regardless of who we are na fair lang.*

(You really feel safe. Because usually, regardless of gender, you would think of the year-level and who is older or younger. There is no such thing in our org[anization] because we treat each other fairly. We just call some of us sister or brother if they want, but if they don't want, we just understand. And before you join the org[anization] they will brief you on the things you are allowed to say. Of course, we don't tolerate the internalized homophobia if any in the org[anization]. We always practice safe space because that's what we uphold. We treat each other regardless of who we are fairly). (Participant 1, Interview1)

If the *Kanlungan* as a safe space can be created with the help of the people around her, she imagines these people to embody universally accepted social values, good behavior, or positive attitude. She hopes that cisheterosexual people would stop treating queer people differently. She believes that regardless of gender identity, people are all the same. She adheres to the golden rule in a sense that when you treat other people well, the same is expected of them—that is to treat you back well. She borrowed the proverbial wisdom: “Do not do to others what you do not want to do unto you.” In addition, she said giving safe spaces starts with making the queer people comfortable and giving them a sense of privacy.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 is a Queer (they/them) student in the University of the Philippines Diliman and a member of UP Babaylan. They recently came into terms with their queer gender identity which do not necessarily associate with one strict sexual orientation and is a culmination of all possible sexual orientations in the spectrum.

They described their becoming as *paglaladlad* which is a symbolic process of unveiling oneself like the blossoming of a flower and a social process of asserting oneself within a society or an environment. The process involves identity crisis wherein they are angered by the confusion of being unable to assert their own identity. They wanted to know themselves and they do not want others to be dictating that they are gay just because they sometimes express themselves femininely and at the same time have a stable relationship with a woman.

In an unexpected turn of events as opposed to the usual media representations of dramatic coming out, Participant 2 came as they are in a self-assuring and self-confident way. One morning when they woke up, they just happened to ask themselves: “what is a beautiful word that describes me?” And right there and then they chose the word queer.

Participant 2 places importance to human agency as this is one of the main characters that determines the ability of a queer individual to survive in the harsh environment that Filipino queer youths are living in. They described the Filipino queer climate to be very conservative and cisheteronarmative which means it favors the straight people. This tough culture even became the basis of the mass media in their representations of reality.

Participant 2 cited that we often see Filipino made movies or drama series that portray the coming out process of the queer people to be always dramatic, heavy hearted, and a result of compelling events that forced one to come out. That is why Participant 2 prefers to describe their becoming as ‘coming as you are and not coming out’. What is the difference? For them, coming out is an external process wherein other people forces a queer individual to come out. Coming as you are, on the other hand, is more of an internal process. Regardless of outside forces, it is coming to terms with the truth of oneself and you validate yourself instead of the environment validating or invalidating you. Participant 2 summarized their coming out as ‘coming out to themselves and not to anyone else.’

Since human agency is emphasized in *paglaladlad* and coming as you are, it is equally important in safe spaces. Participant 2 described a safe space to be a chosen space. One must have the agency to be who they want to be, the agency to come out or not to other people, and most of all the agency to choose a space they consider to be safe in their becoming. What are actual safe spaces for Participant 2?

A safe space can be a room that have walls that can hear but not tell. The fight for coming out in public is traumatizing and antagonizing, but a room can be very comforting because it is definite, intimate, and close.

*A safe space is a simple room lang talaga. I think the room is a good representation of the very sensitive nature of coming out kasi the walls hear you but the walls can't say anything about it. Because you get to see na kahit anong physical space. Right now, hindi pa natin maipaglaban 'yung coming out in public. Many people can do that. Some people have done that. Pero others have been traumatized as an effect of coming out in public kasi hindi nila kaya 'yung pressure. Much as may nag-a-accept, may nag-a-antagonize rin kaya maganda 'yung fact na it's a room lang kasi it's definite, it's chosen, it's intimate. That's an interesting way to put it. So kahit medyo abstract siya, pwede na lang natin siya i-put into concrete terms as a room. As simple as a bedroom, as simple as you know a janitor's room, a quartel, or whatever as long as it's an intimate space, it's a definite and close space. I think that's a safe space.*

(A safe space is really just a simple room. I think the room is a good representation of the very sensitive nature of coming out because the walls

hear you but the walls can't say anything about it. Because you get to see that any physical space. Right now, we cannot fight for the coming out in public yet. Many people can do that. Some people have done that. But others have been traumatized as an effect of coming out in public because they cannot take the pressure that much as there are those that accept, there are also those who antagonize, that is why it is good that a safe space in fact is just a room because it's definite, it's chosen, it's intimate. That's an interesting way to put it. So even if it is abstract, we can just put it into concrete terms as a room. As simple as a bedroom, as simple as you know a janitor's room, a quartel, or whatever, as long as it's an intimate space, it's a definite and close space. I think that's a safe space). (Participant 2, Interview 2)

Participant 2 believes that a safe space can be an organization—an LGBT student organization where there is herd mentality. This means that one can feel normal because one belongs in a community that ascribe to diverse SOGIESC. Joining a community is choosing a family. The idea of choice underscores the value of agency. A community is strengthened by collective struggle. A unifying experience solidifies a support system. Participant 2 asserts that a safe space is a support system.

*Precisely because 'yung herd mentality ng tao. Of course, if you are within a community that is ascribing to a diverse SOGIESC you can think na a normal lang pala siya kasi may mga tao palang ganito, hindi pala ko abnormal, I hindi pala ako may saki, t di ba? Being part of an organizatio, itself helped a lo, kasi that's your chosen family na. Agai,n we go back to the discussion on agency. I*

*think most of the organizations are...it's not necessarily a self-serving fact pero it's a given fact that majority of organizations are built with a sense of establishing a concept of belonging for other people, right?*

*You know the history of UP Babaylan came about from a very harsh history of a gay man who was harassed in a dorm. So of course, they wanted to have a sense of community na ay, hindi puwedeng ako lang eh, hindi pwede na sasaktan ako. Hindi lang ako yung puwedeng masaktan to represent the struggle of the entire community. So, you have you to have that sense of community. If you want to identify, you want to come out as who you are, you have to have a sense of support system. That's why a safe space is also a support system. That's why or I personally chose to join UP Babaylan precisely because I saw the opportunity to have a support system beyond just my intimate circles that I primarily trusted.*

(Precisely because of the herd mentality of people. Of course, if you are within a community that is ascribing to a diverse SOGIESC you can think that it's just normal because there are other people too, I am not abnormal, I am not sick, right? You can see that being part of an organization itself helped a lot because that's your chosen family. Again, we go back to the discussion on agency. I think most of the organizations are... it's not necessarily a self-serving fact, but it's a given fact that majority of organizations are built with a sense of establishing a concept of belonging for other people, right?

Because you know the history of UP Babaylan came about from a very harsh history of a gay man who was harassed in a dorm. So of course, they wanted to have a sense of community that no, it's not just me, no, I cannot be hurt. I cannot be the only one hurt to represent the struggle of the entire

community. So, you have you to have that sense of community. If you want to identify, you want to come out as who you are, you have to have a sense of support system. That's why a safe space is also a support system. That's why I personally chose to join UP Babaylan precisely because I saw the opportunity to have a support system beyond just my intimate circles that I primarily trusted). (Participant 2, Interview 2)

Participant 2 also believes that a safe space can be a school like UP, which is considered a *mapagpalayang espasyo* (open, freeing, liberating space). This means that it enables you to decide on your own, think critically, practice rationality, and shape your environment. This puts emphasis on the relationship between the person and the environment where one should dominate the space and not the other way around.

*As for the LGBT climate in my school, I think it is definitely far different from the one in UP Diliman because it is a very royal pontifical catholic university. It's integrated in their system that there are remnants of patriarchal thinking. Everything is very dogmatic. So parang nawawala 'yung humanistic sense natin towards understanding people. Na hindi nga naman na-e-encapsulate ng Bible 'yung experience ng LGBTQI members precisely because walang LGBTQI member there. Ang teaching ng church ay very hard especially for queer individuals that they feel demonized and antagonized. Whereas here in UP...I don't really say open, but more of a mapagpalayang space. It's an espasyong mapagpalaya in a sense that it's the person deciding. Your critical thinking must work, your rationality must accompany your every step. And*

*ultimately, your environment is something that you shape with you. Dahil sa hindi siya 'yung nagshe-shape sayo, you shape it. So parang makikita rin yung relationship ng space to the person. That the person masters the space, not the space dominates the person.*

(The LGBT climate in my school is definitely far different from the one in UP Diliman. This is because it is a very royal pontifical catholic university. So, it's integrated in their system that there are remnants of patriarchal thinking. Everything is very dogmatic. So, it is like we are losing our humanistic sense towards understanding people. The Bible cannot encapsulate the experience of the LGBTQI members precisely because there are no LGBTQI member[s] there. The teachings of the church are very hard especially for queer individuals that they feel demonized and antagonized. Whereas here in UP...I don't really say [it is really] open but more of a mapagalayang space (freeing space). It's a space that is liberating in a sense that it's the person deciding. Your critical thinking must work, your rationality must accompany your every step. And ultimately, your environment is something that you shape with you. Because it does not shape you, you shape it. So, we can see here the relationship of the space to the person - that the person masters the space, not the space dominates the person).

(Participant, Interview 2)

For Participant 2, a chosen space is a safe space with the help of the people within the space. These people practice universally accepted attitudes that make the space safe like being a conversationalist, sensitive, and open-eared. An unsafe

space can further be made a safer space through policies that are gender sensitive, gender consultative, gender responsive and gender transformative.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 is a straight transexual woman (she/her), a student in UP Diliman, and a member of UP Babaylan.

She described her becoming as living her truth or *pagpapakatotoo sa sarili*, it is more of a natural occurrence rather than a decision. It is as natural as a queer feeling of being feminine since she was young, people noticing her to be so feminine, or she trying out stereotypical feminine things such as dressing up even though these “stereotypical feminine things” are just socially constructed.

She also considered her becoming as a process of metamorphosis. As a straight transexual woman, becoming for her is a journey of reaching a certain femininity that one wants. However, not all queer becoming undergo the transition process from being masculine to feminine. For those who do transition, there are four types of transitioning, namely: personal, social, legal, and physical. A queer can transition under one type over the others or all at the same time if the conditions allow. This only goes to show that while becoming is relatable it is also subjective.

Participant 3 felt lucky to have family members and first line of relatives who emotionally supported her growing up. She mentioned that she has three other transexual cousins who are ten years and 5 years older than her. She also has cisheterosexual aunts whom she described as “*baklang babae*”. With the help of

these people, Participant 3 felt normal growing up to becoming a straight transexual woman.

She did not experience any physical abuse at home but she did mention that she has a problematic relationship with her father because of her gender identity. She remembered being scolded by her father when he started noticing that Participant 3 was becoming more and more feminine. Her father restricted her from wearing revealing clothes. At first, she did not understand why but she realized later that it was probably because her father did not want her to be bullied. She explained that she grew up in a rural area where only a few are transexuals compared to gays because in the Philippines, gay is the majorly viewed identity in the spectrum that is why even the transexuals are also called gays. She described her father as the typical father who cares but does not show it or if he shows it, it is in the form of anger.

While there is no physical abuse at home, most of the struggles of Participant 3 are in school. She recounted that after her moving up ceremony in Junior high school in Grade 10, she was able to grow her hair long. When she entered senior high school, her hair was shoulder length. She started taking hormones when she was 12 years-old, so by that time, she already had a very feminine body. And even before taking hormones, she has always been feminine to the extent that some people thought she is a tomboy (lesbian) from behind because of her physical appearance. Her senior high school thwarted her. They wanted her to cut her hair short and prohibit her from wearing earrings.

Participant 3 resisted these forms of discrimination, which made her do a research study of their school, but the results did not become formal because she was covertly overruled. She said it was back in 2017 or 2016 when she got in touch with a city councilor to submit a policy proposal for students like her. But the proposal was dismissed. Instead, the school allowed her to do what she wanted with regards to her SOGIESC like growing her hair to pacify her to not push through with her policy process. The principal of her school at that time repulsed her to the point that he colluded with Participant 3's father who surprisingly took the side of the principal. She found this very conflicting. Why would her father agree with the principal without saying anything to her? For her, this question posed a problem, and she came to a conclusion that she would not describe her father as very caring but he was not very restrictive either.

Another clear example of this problematic behavior of her father was during Participant 3's senior high school graduation. She was refused to enter the venue because she looked feminine. She was wearing a school uniform for boys, but she had it altered to fit her body. But they still refused to let her go inside even when she was already wearing a toga. The school gave a condition that she would have to buy long socks to gain entry. Her father at that time accompanied her to buy the socks making her feel that he supported her but actually, he was also supportive of the oppressors.

These experiences made Participant 3 determined to get out of elementary and high school and go straight to college in UP where there is an LGBT student organization—UP Babaylan.

*I really wanted to get out of elementary and high school kasi at a very young age alam ko [na] in UP Babaylan, they champion 'yung sa buhok and things like that. As a kid, I wasn't really able to enjoy much of my high school or elementary days kasi I was always fighting for my hair, this and that.*

(I really wanted to get out of elementary and high school because at a very young age, I knew that in UP Babaylan, they champion the [growing of] hair and things like. As a kid, I wasn't really able to enjoy much of my high school or elementary days because I was always fighting for my hair, this and that).

(Participant 3, Interview 3)

While Participant 3 considers UP to have a generally supportive queer climate that champions equality and diversity, she pointed out that the institution still has people who are cis-sexist or who are prejudiced against pansexual people. In her experience, a lot of people, professors, and students alike are very open minded. She lives normally in UP. However, there are still some professors who are not progressive enough to be accepting despite an existing policy for transgender and nonconforming students.

Participant 3 is referring to the Guidelines on Affirming Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming students (TGNC Guidelines), which includes allowing the queer people to use their lived name in school, in papers, in accounts etc. She said they are currently advocating this to be implemented in all UP Campuses because apparently, right now, it is only implemented in UP Diliman.

For participant 3, the space that she lived through at that time could not be considered as a total safe space. A true safe space for her is a space where one can live their truth without fear and shame. Contrary to this, she said she really felt ashamed when her senior high school started to question her, and her father took the side of the school. She added that a safe space is also an all-encompassing space. It must start at home and extend to schools, establishments, institutions, and the whole society.

Participant 3 imagines a safe space to be anywhere as long as it is with people who are sensitive and supportive. Generally, most student and most people go to school and majority of their time are spent in schools, so she believes that people and society should focus on making schools a safe space.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 is a panromantic gay asexual (they/them) student at UP Diliman and is a member of UP Babaylan. Participant 4 described their coming out as *paglaladlad* or showing the real you to other people. They considered coming out as a passive term to describe their becoming unlike *paglaladlad* which connotes freeing yourself.

Participant 4 said they first came out to friends within UP Babaylan which is an LGBT student organization and then to their family. Coming out to their family was more of an experience of being outed and not their own decision. They recount disclosing to their sibling that they were a member of UP Babaylan. At first, they explained that this is a human rights organization but their sibling irked them in front of their father asking what UP Babaylan is, so they were forced to come out to them.

Being outed felt being powerless, so Participant 4 decided to come out to her mother on their birthday as a gift to themselves. They made an infographic about the disclosure, but the mother's reception to their gender identity was dismissive.

Participant 4 has always been reluctant to disclose their gender identity, which was compounded by the coming out experiences they faced with family members. As a result, they always considered safety, timing, and connection or relationships before deciding to come out. In the case of their family, relationship outweighed safety only because they did not mind the unsafeness of coming out to parents. They emphasized that the goal of this disclosure was primarily so as not to be misgendered or deadnamed by family members instead of being comforted. Deadname means being called by past name before they transitioned.

As for their university's queer climate, Participant 4 considers UP as a generally accepting space for the queer community, but they still experience discrimination in some case like in restrooms and/or with professors. One experience that they never forgot was during the pandemic. Participant 4 said they made it a habit before the start of class to email their professors and inform them that they would rather use their lived name instead of their legal name, disclose their pronouns to avoid misgendering, and not be called on the roll call by their dead name. A certain professor that time replied to them saying that using they/them as a pronoun to refer to a single person is not grammatically correct and that he has not undergone a change of name legally, hence they would have to use their legal name in class. There was a back-and-forth correspondence regarding this where they remembered the professor telling them that there are other pressing issues in the

Philippines that deserve more attention than being upset about their name and pronouns. Participant 4 said they felt really hurt by this considering that the professor was a media ethics professor and a lawyer.

To gain a semblance of fairness, they reported this professor to the offices in UP like the Center for Women and Gender Studies. The Director of this College is a friend to UP Babaylan so on the same week upon incident report, they drafted the TGNC Guidelines. Participant 4 believes that UP as a microcosm of the society is similar to the Philippine LGBT climate. UP feels accepting because being gay is not penalized, but at the same time, it still is not a total safe space because of the existence of discrimination.

For Participant 4, safe space is more than a physical space, it is establishing a person to be a safe space which means it is a two-way sharing. They imagine safe spaces to be spaces where there is no judgement and no questioning. If one questions, it must come from a place of respect and a genuine intent to understand rather than doubt and show prejudice.

While Participant 4 recognizes the imperfections of their university as a safe space, they materialized their safe space to be the UP Babaylan tambayan (both the physical space in Palma Hall, UP Diliman and online in Discord). These spaces, according to them, are the spaces where they first felt accepted and comfortable enough to be themselves.

*Even before joining UP Babaylan, sobrang uncomfortable ako coming out to other people. I feel like 'yung safe space na na-build ko doon sa organization outside doon sa physical space even 'yung pagiging safe space to other people ay nakatulong sa pag come out ko like pagbui-build ng confidence para maging comfortable enough and brave enough para mag come out to other people.*

(Even before joining UP Babaylan, I was very uncomfortable coming out to other people. I felt like the safe space I built in the organization was outside of it being a physical space. Even being a safe space to other people helped in my coming out like building my confidence so I could be comfortable enough and brave enough to come out to other people). (Participant 4, Interview 4)

Another real space they considered to be safe is the condominium of their partner where they can stay and not fear for their safety

*Nasa condo ako with friends and jowa so parang 'yung safe space na ito. Comfortable ako na hindi ako natatakot for my safety, hindi ako natatakot na maging sarili ko dahil kilala ko 'tong mga taong 'to and comfortable ako with them.*

(I am at a condo with friends and partner so this is a safe space. It is where I feel comfortable and not scared for my safety, not afraid to be myself because I know the people here and I am comfortable with them.) (Participant 4, Interview 4)

Participant 4 also considers their workplace to be a safe space. Safe spaces can be sites where people cultivate their advocacies and work toward achieving them.

*Safe space sa'kin ay yung work place ko. Kasi like nagwo-work ako sa isang NGO na advocacy nasa HIV-AIDS. Very close sa LGBT rights advocacy din 'yung mga tao. I feel like nasa safe space ako and comfortable ako enough dahil kilala ko 'tong mga taong 'to ayun.*

(One other safe space for me is my work place. Because I work in a [non-government organization] NGO whose advocacy is HIV-AIDS advocacy. The people here are also very close to the LGBT rights advocacy. I feel like I am in a safe space, and I am comfortable enough because I know these people).

(Participant 4, Interview 4)

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 is a pansexual (they/them) student in UP Diliman and is also a member of UP Babaylan. They described coming out in general as *pakikiramdaman* where queer people do not verbally disclose their SOGIESC. But people around them feel them out and somehow know.

On a more personal note, Participant 5's coming out was not decided on their own time. They were outed. This happened when Participant 5 was still studying in a Catholic all-girls school where they have a little community. The members of this little community felt out each one's SOGIESC, hence even without verbal disclosure, they already knew those who were in a relationship. There was an understanding and

acceptance, and there was no need to confirm or to come out. Some of them were pansexual, bisexual, and lesbian.

They said their parents and the school administration did not know this. But eventually Participant 5 was caught and got sanctioned for being queer. Their parents got called to the school's administration office. She was left with no choice but to explain to their parents what being pansexual is. Their parent's reception was accommodating, but they gave a condition that they should study well.

Participant 5 described a safe space to be comparable to *tahanan*, which literally meant in English, a place where you can "stop crying" (*tahan*) or a place where you find comfort. They also asserted that safe spaces are not necessarily a question of where but of who. While there are designated LGBTQI-friendly spaces, Participant 5 emphasized that you do not come out in a place but you come out to a person.

Participant 5's concrete safe spaces are advocacy organizations because they are the spaces which have both people and designated locations that are safe.

*'Yung org namin ay UP-based, so masasabi namin na at least for the most part, ang UP ay safe space kasi nga it fosters these kinds of organizations. Hindi natin idi-discount if merong mga discrimination din na nangyayari. Pero 'yung the fact na may presence of LGBTQI organizations in an institution, it says a lot about how maybe they are more accepting than others. 'Yun, kinu-qualify ko na 'more' kasi baka hindi rin siya fully accepting.*

(Our org[anization] is UP-based, so we can say at least for the most part, UP is a safe space because it fosters these kinds of organizations. We do not discount that there may be discrimination happening too, but the fact that there is a presence of LGBTQI organizations in an institution, it says a lot about how maybe they are more accepting than others. I am qualifying here as 'more' because maybe the [university] may still not be fully accepting yet).

(Participant 5, Interview 5)

Participant 5 considered UP as a safer space compared to others because it advocates the queer community. But it is still not a totally safe space because it is not a fully accepting space yet. There are cases of discrimination and instances of dead naming and misgendering. A SOGIESC policy University-wide is yet to be realized.

Participant 5 recalled that her advocacy organization, UP Babaylan, on a previous graduation ceremony had to reassert for the transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to be allowed to wear clothing that expressed their SOGIESC in the graduation rites. They believe that this is a rule and not an exception to the rule. Participant 5 explained that to say that UP is an accepting University means it should have a SOGIESC policy, and that the transgender and gender non-conforming guidelines should not only be guidelines but a mandate to all professors. UP Babaylan has lobbied the TGNC Guidelines that recognize transgender and non-conforming students in the University.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 is a panromantic gay sexual cisgender woman (they/them) student in UP Diliman and is a member of the UP Babaylan. They described coming out as *paglaladlad* or *pagpapakatotoo*. But in a way, their becoming was more of *pakikiramdaman* in the context of their friends who are also their schoolmates.

They said they did not have to come out because they studied in an all-girls school where being queer was normalized. There were girl-on-girl relationships, thus there was no longer a feeling of nervousness that usually goes with coming out. In this context or setting, being queer was nothing to be ashamed of. Participant 6 considered themselves to be fortunate because of this type of environment that did not let her go through internalized homophobia phase.

While the schoolmates in this school normalized being queer, Participant 6 remembered that in another school they attended, the school administration was not as receptive of the queer community, and they even had oppressive measures against the community like the haircut policy. They had transgender classmates being threatened by some teachers to cut their hair or else they would not graduate. The school even had a figure in-charge of a student's behavior watchlist. Girl-on-girl relationships were being monitored, which they said was weird, because they also had watchlist for students who were in hetero relationship.

Their coming out to parents was a comical experience inside a car on a Pride Month in June 2018. It was symbolical that the actual disclosure was chosen to happen after the car they were riding passed a bridge.

Participant 6 considered their safety before coming out to their parents. While their parents were unenthusiastic about the disclosure, they did not repudiate them or abandoned their parental duties. This is relatively safe compared to other becoming experiences. However, it is still not considered by Participant 6 as a total safe space because their parents would rather not talk about their SOGIESC in any conversation. They said their father noticed how them and their partner were always together and felt that there was something going on. This feeling out made their relationship with their father strained in some way.

For Participant 6, UP is considered a safer space because it is more open considering that there is no specific religion being followed unlike in a Catholic all-girls school. People in UP come from different walks of life, thus it feels freer for someone to come out. However, this is also a double-edged sword because you do not really know where these people from all walks of life stand. So far, the professors that Participant 6 came across within UP are also part of the community or are allies. But they heard of reports that some professors are making microaggressions and being homophobic. There are also those who misgender even if there is a lived names section and preferred pronouns in the Computerized Registration System (CRS) of UP.

Participant 6 considered their partner as their safe space saying their being queer is just like a normal thing with them. It is like the experience they have in UP Babaylan where they can just exist. That while their gender identity in UP Babaylan is revealed, the totality of their identity does not revolve around them being queer.

*I do consider UP Babaylan as a safe space kasi my being queer is not something I have to worry about. Parang hindi ko po kailangan mag-worry na mahe-hate crime ako especially when I'm with my partner. Parang my being queer is just like a normal thing in UP Babaylan. I can just really exist. So parang 'yung identity ko din po in UP Babaylan. While I am queer, my identity does not revolve around me being queer.*

(I do consider UP Babaylan as a safe space because my being queer is not something I have to worry about. It's like I do not need to worry that I will be subjected to hate crime especially when I'm with my partner. So, my being queer is just like a normal thing in UP Babaylan, and I can just really exist. While I am queer, my identity in UP Babaylan does not revolve around me being queer). (Participant 6, Interview 6)

Participant 6 also considers UP Babaylan as a safe space because their being queer is not something they have to worry about especially regarding hate crime. This organization made them more comfortable about being more open about their sexuality.

They recalled that the first time they were invited to join UP Babaylan, they deferred because they felt that they did not yet have the guts to join. They thought that these types of student organizations usually have publication materials being shared in social media platforms. They admitted that they did not feel like sharing these materials. But they now know that these publications are not required because

UP Babaylan understands that some of its members are not out and sharing of publications would out them.

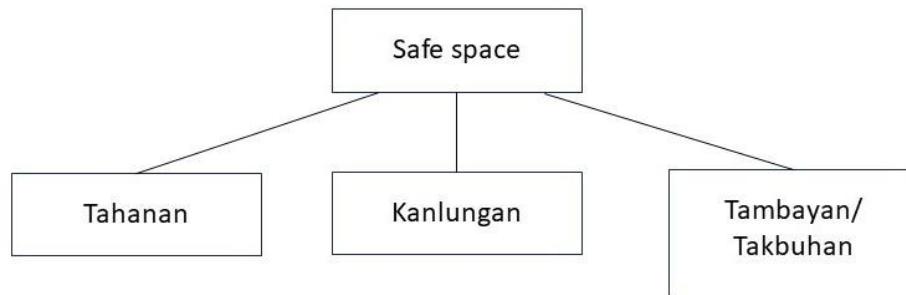
Other spaces that come to mind according to Participant 6 are Queer Clubs with drag performances.

Overall, Participant 6 reiterated that safe spaces depend on people, it is a space where you can be true without being harmed. They explained that they get real with people and not necessarily in places, thus safe spaces are not only places but also people.

## Spaces Identified as Safe

Figure 10

Meaning of safe spaces considered safe by the participants



It is revealed in this study that the Filipino queer youth associate certain characteristics of a space that is safe to the positive characteristics of physical spaces like a *kanlungan* (sanctuary), a *tahanan* (home), a *takbuhan* (refuge) or a *tambayan* (hangout).

Notice that the words used to define a safe space is not necessarily the words *ligtas na lugar* in the Philippine context. It appears that the direct translation is too shallow a term for the Filipino queer youth to define safe spaces.

***Kanlungan.*** A safe space according to Participant 1 is a *kanlungan* where one feels at home. It can be one's personal room where one can be who they really are. A personal room witnesses the journey, hence it gives feelings of safety or safeness. It is a space that one wants, hence it must be nurtured. Based from the narration of Participant 1, there was a time when their personal room was

disorganized and it did not emit a desired vibe. But one can always transform a space to one's liking.

*I started to nurture that safe space of mine, which is my room. Kasi dati it was disorganized. Parang I did not know what this room emitted. Parang 'yung vibes na sinasabi nila, ano ba talaga? ...Once I have decided na I was going to transition, parang ni-remodel ko talaga siya. Sinabi kong if I want this feminine, I will make this feminine, di ba? It actually empowers you. Kung ano 'yung nakikita mo, it feeds yourself to grow more and push.*

(I started to nurture that safe space of mine, which is my room. Because it used to be disorganized. I did not know what this room emitted. It's like the vibes they say, what is it really? ...Once I have decided that I was going to transition, I remodeled it. I said to myself if I want this to be feminine, I will make it feminine, right? It actually empowers you. What you envision feeds yourself to grow more and push). (Participant 1, Interview 1)

**Tahanan.** Safe spaces for Participant 5 mean *tahanan*. Tahanan means home but not necessarily the idea of home being just a physical house or *bahay*. It goes beyond the literal meaning. It further deepens the meaning by digging into the root word *tahan*, which means a place where you feel comfort. According to Participant 5, a safe space has no Filipino translation, but it can mean *tahanan*.

*'Yung unang-una na nag pop sa utak ko ay parang tahanan ... home.*

*Pero...hindi siya necessarily nagta-translate to home kasi minsan 'yung home*

*bahay or something. Pero 'yung root word ng tahanan ay tahan. So it is a place kung saan ka tumatahan or saan may comfort.*

(The first one that pops in my mind is tahanan...like home. But...it does not necessarily translate to home because sometimes home is *bahay* or something. But tahanan is from the root word *tahan*. So, it's a place where you calm yourself—*tumatahan*—or where there is comfort). (Participant 5, Interview 5)

***Takbuhan/Tambayan.*** For Participant 4, a safe space is a *takbuhan*. Like the word safe space, *takbuhan* also connotes layers of safeness that makes up a safe space. Participant 4 asserts that for a space to be safe, one must feel no judgement and questioning, one must feel respect, and one must feel that the receiver of disclosure is receptive and understanding.

*I feel like 'yung safe space na mako-consider ko ay una siyempre 'yung tambayan namin sa UP - sa organization ko. Parang 'yun 'yung space na una kong na-feel na accepted ako and comfortable ako enough to be able to be myself...I feel like 'yung pagiging safe nung tambayan namin ay not about its physical aspect kasi admittedly 'yung tambayan naman namin ay hindi naman siya ganon kaganda. Pag summer ay puro higad and malalaking langgam. Naging safe space siya sa akin dahil dun sa memories associated with that place. Ang tambayan na 'yun ay na a-associate ko sa mga tao na nakasalamuha ko in that space. Tapos, naging takbuhan na lang din siya ng kahit anong experience mo or kahit anong masamang nangyari sa'yo. Parang kapag pumunta ka dun ay alam mong magiging comfortable ka. Alam mong*

*meron kang maaabutang tao na kakausap sa'yo or iko-comfort ka sa kung anuman 'yung bad thing na nangyari.*

*Natandaan ko lang na story nung best friend ko dati. Sa Marikina siya nakatira. Kapag trigger warning like kapag suicidal siya, pupunta siya sa tambayan namin kahit madaling araw. Super wala namang ilaw dun sa tambayan namin, super dilim. Pero pupunta siya dun and dun siya matutulog. Kahit semento 'yung upuan. Magiging comfortable siya and mawawala yung iniisip niya kasi nakikita niya na 'yung tambayan namin na safe space.*

(I feel like the first one I can consider as a safe space is our hangout place in UP, in my organization. It is the space where I first felt that I was accepted and where I felt comfortable enough to be able to be myself. The safeness of our hangout is not about its physical aspect because admittedly our hangout is not that pleasing. During summer, it is filled with caterpillars and ants. For me, it became a safe space because of the memories associated with that place. I also associate our hangout with the people I socialize with in that space. It also serves as a refuge that whatever experience you have or whatever bad thing happened to you, when you go there, you know that you would be comfortable. You know that there would always be a person who you could talk to or who would comfort you through all the bad things happening to you.

I remember the story of my best friend who lives in Marikina. If they experience a trigger warning and become suicidal, they would go to our hangout even at dawn. There are no lights so it would be very dark. They would go there and sleep. Even if the bench is hard cement. They would feel

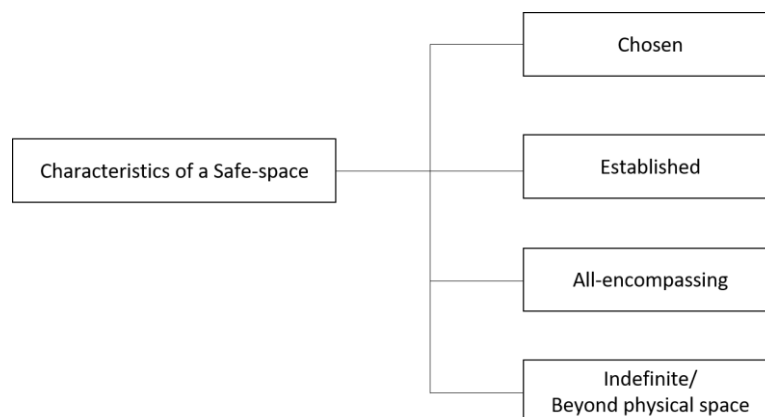
comfortable and they would forget their suicidal ideations because they would see our hangout as a safe space). (Participant 4, Interview 4)

### Characteristics of a Safe space

The Filipino queer youth gave four major characteristics that make a safe space (Figure 11). It must be chosen, established, all-encompassing, and it is indefinite.

**Figure 11**

*Characteristics of a Safe space*



**Chosen space.** A safe space is a chosen space. Participant 2’s definition of a safe space once again underscored the concept of human agency, influence, or power to decide on one’s own. Power in this context is asserted in terms of choosing a space where one can disclose one’s gender identity and where they can own their story. Having the choice to decide if, when, and how one discloses one’s SOGIESC is important.

However, not everyone understands this because the Philippines is still a conservative country with heteronormative bias, hence wanting to be a loud and proud queer is not without its consequences. Nevertheless, being silent and hidden does not always mean being closeted. While self-identity is both *being* and *showing*, which means it is within the self and seen by others, it does not necessarily mean that it is for the world.

*'Yung safe space, siguro 'yun 'yung espasyong pinili ko. A safe space is a chosen space. I've been emphasizing agency every time. I think you've heard agency recurringly. So, I must have the agency to who I want to be. Lagi kong iniisip na siyempre I have to factor in din kasi 'yung fact na not everyone will understand. It's not a very progressive country, so not everyone understands the concept of gender diversity. So, maraming loud and proud, pero marami ring silent and hidden. Hindi naman ibig sabihin na lahat ng silent at hidden ay laging closeted. Hindi naman lagi kailangan na alam ng buong mundo kung ano 'yung pagkatao because sometimes identity is always within the self.*

(A safe space is a chosen space. I've been emphasizing agency every time; I think you've heard agency recurringly. So, I must have the agency to be who I want to be. I always thought that of course I have to factor in the fact that not everyone will understand. It's not a very progressive country so not everyone understands the concept of gender diversity. So, many are loud and proud, but there are also many who are silent and hidden. But it does not mean that all silent and hidden are always closeted. It is not always necessary

to let the whole world know your identity because sometimes identity is always within the self). (Participant 2, Interview 2)

**Established space.** Another characteristic is that a safe space is an established space. A safe space can be the presence of a person. They can or may establish one person who they can feel at ease and comfortable with. This established person is a safe space because they feel they are true to themselves and they can be themselves in the presence of these persons.

Establishing a person as a safe space means initiating conversations. One must first disclose one's own preferred pronouns and SOGIE in conversations, after which, they can ask the other person of their preferred pronouns and their SOGIE. All these things are done only if and when they are okay with it or feel comfortable with it. Most importantly, a safe space is two-way. Establishing safe spaces involves initiating first one's own disclosure or coming out before expecting others to disclose their SOGIE or come out.

*'Yung safe space ay parang establishing ng isang person na puwede kang maging at ease, puwede kang maging comfortable, puwede kang maging ikaw sa conversation sa presence ng tao ito. [in] establishing a safe space, kailangan two-way 'yung sharing. ...Ang natatandaan kong ginagawa namin sa Babaylan ... to establish a safe space... kung gusto mong itanong 'yung pronouns or if necessary kung gusto mong itanong 'yung SOGIE ng isang tao, parang kailangan sa'yo muna manggagaling. Kunwari: "Hi I'm \*\*\*\*, my pronouns are they/them." ...Parang ganon 'yung pag-establish ng safe space*

- *na kailangan ikaw muna 'yung mag laladlad ng sarili mo bago mo i-expect 'yun sa kausap mo.*

(Safe space is like establishing of a person who you can be at ease with, you can be comfortable with, you can be the real you in the conversation with this person or in the presence of this person. And establishing a safe space means there is a two-way sharing....I remember what we did in [UP] Babaylan...to establish a safe space. If you want to ask another person's pronouns or if you want to ask the SOGIE of an individual, it needs to start with you. For example: "Hi I'm \*\*\*\*, my pronouns are they/them." So, that is how one establishes a safe space. It needs for you to unveil yourself first before you expect the same from another person). (Participant 4, Interview 4)

***All-encompassing space.*** A safe space is an all-encompassing space where someone can freely live their truth without fear and shame. According to Participant 3, all-encompassing means it must be existent in spaces like homes or houses, school, establishments, institutions, and the society or collectively and comprehensively speaking—social institutions. But most importantly, safe spaces should exist at home where it all starts.

Just like Participant 3, Participant 6 also defines a safe space as a space where one can be true and not be put to harm. There is an emphasis on the space to be safe to live one's truth. Participant 6 explained their situation in which their SOGIE is not being acknowledged. They described it as a 'let's just not talk about it' situation, meaning it is not being discussed. Participant 6 also describes a safe space to be a space where one can explore one's sexuality.

***Indefinite and beyond physical spaces.*** Safe spaces are not definite spaces. It depends on the person who one considers as a safe space to come out to. Safe spaces according to participant 5 is a question of who not where. And it is us who determine who these people are. They are not necessarily one's biological family. Participant 5 underlined the existence of chosen families. When your biological family does not act as a family, it is you who assesses who you consider as family. Chosen families are like friends, cousins, or can even be an organization.

*Kasi 'di ba in normal everyday conversations, kapag sinabi mong safe space, ito 'yung mga institutions or infrastructure na ginagawang LGBTQ- friendly. We need safer spaces in schools, what does that mean? Di ba parang you want to make the educational institution safer, more accepting, kaya we need more safer public spaces. Gusto mo na 'yung parks walang discrimination o kaya kapag pumapasok ka ng mosque hindi ka nadi-discriminate. Parang ang hirap niyang i-grasp...kasi when you come out, hindi ka naman nagka-come out sa lugar, nagka-come out ka sa tao.*

(In normal everyday conversations, when you say safe space, these are the institutions or like infrastructure that you make LGBTQI-friendly. We need safer spaces in schools, what does that mean? It's like you want to make the educational institution safer, more accepting, so we need safer public spaces. We want the parks without discrimination or if you go inside a mosque you don't feel discriminated. It's very hard to grasp what we mean by safe spaces because when you come out, you do not come out to a place, you come out to a person). (Participant 5, Interview 5)

The fact that safe spaces can be people means they go beyond physical spaces. Being a safe space to other people helps with coming out. It comes with the idea that if one is a safe space to other people, other people can be a safe space for them to come out to. Embodying safe spaces to others gives one comfort and bravery to come out to other people. If one is a living, breathing safe space, then other people can be too.

Spaces go beyond physical spaces just like what Participant 4 told in their story. The safeness of a space is not about its physical aspect pointed out the participant. Their UP Babaylan's hangout may be filled with caterpillars and ants during summer, dark at night with no lighting, and has hard and cold cement for seats. But this is outweighed by the people, memories, and the feelings of acceptance and comfort associated with the place, s/he attested.

The the internal and external challenges of a Filipino queer youth helped us identify what makes a space unsafe and the barriers that hinder their becoming. Their description of a safe space, on the other hand, made us recognize what makes a space safe and the factors that facilitate their becoming. There are unsafe spaces and safe spaces, and then there are safe(r) spaces.

Emergent from the participants' narratives are perceived (room), conceived (ideal), and transformed (advocacy organizations) spaces.

A deeper understanding of spaces for the becoming of the Filipino queer youth may be interpreted similar to Soja's triple consciousness of space (Soja, 1996). According to Soja, the three types of spaces is composed of the Firstspace which is the concrete, material, and real space that serves as a site for occurrences and happenings; the Second space which is the conceptual and imagined space where mental representations are formed; and the Thirdspace which is the combination of the firstspace and secondspace that allows for conceptualization, actualization, and transformation.

Emanating from this study is an application of Soja's triple consciousness of space in the Filipino queer youth's becoming. The unsafe spaces where the Filipino queer youth experienced the internal and external challenges of becoming is the Firstspace. It is the space where they move around and live in and where they encounter real violence and oppression in various forms.

The safe spaces which is the conceived ideal space where the Filipino queer youth can live normally is the Secondspace.

There is also the safe(r) space that is the lived spaces of Filipino queer youth where they acknowledge the problems of their firstspaces, hope for the solutions in their secondspaces, and negotiate and struggle to produce the thirdspace they believe they deserve all at the same time. Lived spaces are safe(r) space and are examples of a thirdspace.

The safer spaces that are experienced by the participants of this study display both internal (emotional and mental/psychological) and external (religious, socio-cultural, political, educational, and financial) layers of safeness. They make up both the real and the conceptual space. This study affirms that safer spaces are sometimes places, other times people, and in more fortunate circumstances they are both people and places.

### **Layers of a Safe space**

The Filipino queer youth's conceptualization of a safe and an unsafe space in their becoming is revealed through the accounts of their internal and external challenges. Based from the participant's experiences, the safeness and/or unsafeness of the space where the Filipino queer youth's becoming happens is determined by internal and external factors. Therefore, this study suggests internal and external layers of safe space for Filipino queer youth's becoming based on their narratives.

### **Internal layer of safeness**

The internal safeness of a space for a Filipino queer youth's becoming shows that safety may start within the self. In gender dysphoria, it poses the question of safeness as to whether they would wish to harm themselves or not. This is very much tied up with external safeness since gender dysphoria is a result of an oppressive environment.

### *Elements in the act of disclosure*

The act of disclosure, should they decide to do so, poses the question of safeness as to whether the person they are going to disclose their SOGIESC with will harm them or not for being queer. The four most important element in the act of disclosure is choice, readiness, timing, and the relationship to the receiver of the disclosure.

**Choice.** This study revealed that being outed is an indicator of unsafeness of a space for the Filipino queer youth's becoming. It is connected to politics because there is an unfair display of power and control. The person who outed the queer controlled the disclosure and not the person who more than anyone else should be the one to decide the disclosure if, when, and how it is done.

**Readiness.** This refers both to the mental and emotional readiness of the queer who decided to do the disclosure. Mental readiness can be manifested through the idea of organization like in the case of Participant 4 who prepared an infographic. Emotional readiness meanwhile can be manifested through the idea of focus with the same Participant 4 who said that one cannot really control how the receiver of the disclosure will react especially if their views about the queer community is negative. But they are already emotionally prepared for this, thinking that it does not matter because the goal is not to please the receiver of the disclosure but to be respected for living their truth.

*Hindi ko goal na i-please 'yung other person pero ang gusto ko lang ay tanggapin niya 'ko doon sa pagka-come out ko. At the very least, respect 'yung hinahanap ko (My goal is not to please the other person, but I only want them to accept me in my coming out. At the very least, I expect them to show respect). (Participant 4, Interview 4)*

**Timing.** Defining the right timing to disclose one's SOGIESC is subjective because it is a very personal experience. Participant 4 gave examples of feeling out the right timing in disclosing such as time and change. They felt the need to tell friends when they meet after a long time because it is at this time when they really feel different from the person that their friends last saw.

Also, timing for disclosure in the context of family members could mean doing it upon reaching a certain age when one can say that they are old enough to decide their own SOGIE for themselves.

**Relationship.** The relationship of the queer to the receiver of the disclosure is an important element. The coming out experience differs in different contexts depending on the person—a family, friend, colleague, or stranger.

Participant 6 said when they came out to parents, they had to consider first their safety by asking themselves if they would be harmed or if their parents would cast them out. They had to make sure that their parents were not that kind of people. During their assessment, they thought that if their coming out were to go wrong, only

the parent-child relationship would be strained. But their parents would not escape, revoke, or renounce their parental duties just because their child was queer.

They also considered their parents' opinion about the queer community. Participant 6 gauged his/her parents' reactions when bringing up the queer community and tried to feel how their parents would receive their gender identity disclosure.

Taking into consideration how safe the parents were, Participant 6 said that they did not experience physical harm, they did not get cast out, they were not deprived of food, and they were not grounded. However, the parents' attitude towards the queer community in terms of complete acceptance still reflects lack of information, knowledge, and understanding. Participant 6 resolved this gap by saying they are trying to educate their parents more about gender concerns.

### **External Layer of Safeness**

Meanwhile, the external safeness of a space for a Filipino queer youth's becoming is influenced by personal belief, socio-cultural, political, educational, and financial systems. These factors pose the safety questions on whether an individual's beliefs accept or reject the queer community, whether the socio-cultural influences are inclusive or not, whether the political system protects the gender minority or not, whether the education system is developing to be responsive to the needs of queer students or not, and whether financial and economic systems are reforming to support the disadvantaged queer community.

Participant 5 elucidated that factors in the environment that affect the Filipino queer youth's becoming such as religious factors may refer to Muslim laws and Catholic beliefs and fears of being condemned. The social factors include wearing of different clothes, using different pronouns, and using one's lived name instead of birth name. Political factors are visible in cases where queer people have fears of sanctions for being a deviant. Academic factors cited are when a queer student might be forced to cut their hair and wear a uniform that do not coincide with their gender identity and expression. And economic factor can be seen for instance where a queer may be threatened of being laid off or demoted if the SOGIESC they identified with was not accepted in the workplace.

In internal safeness, the act of disclosing in some cases is likely to happen if they choose to do so (choice), if they are ready to do it (readiness), and if they feel the timing is right (timing). All three elements are impacted by external safeness.

In other cases, even if external safeness like personal beliefs indicate unsafeness, the act of disclosure can still happen especially if the receiver of the disclosure is family (relationship to the receiver of disclosure). What changes the circumstance is the element of relationship. For example, a queer may still do a verbal disclosure of their SOGIESC to a parent even if they have negative views about the queer community because this queer considers family relationship to be a significant part of their life. Participant 4 puts it this way:

*Nagfa-factor in din for me na 'yung person na 'to ay nagpe-play siya ng huge part sa life ko para maging deserving enough ang pagka-come out ko sa kanya* (For me, I also factor in if the person [receiver of disclosure] plays a huge part of my life to be deserving enough that I come out to them).

(Participant 4, Interview 4)

Relationships with family members have levels of safeness and can be changed through knowledge as in the experience of Participant 6. Despite having parents who lacked proper information about gender and had the tendency to denigrate the queer community, they still negotiated through gender education. Gender education helped expand the parents' limited understanding or misunderstanding of gender identities.

### **Role of Conversations/communication**

Communication either hinders or facilitates safe spaces for coming out depending on which is being perpetrated. Socializing is communication. Norms are proliferated through socialization. How then are we socialized into believing the norms? Norms are communicated to us early on. Being exposed to norms may lead to internal hesitations and internal homophobia, internal biphobia, or internal transphobia. This means that queer people may be thinking, questioning, or fighting themselves and not allowing themselves to "be" because norms dictated how they are supposed to be.

Communication plays an important role in the production of safe spaces for queer people to come out or to live their truth. One factor that facilitates this safe space is to have elders who give guidance and advice. Participant 3 considers herself to be fortunate to have affirming elders. She had an aunt who is very supportive of her who talked to her parents and told them that there is nothing wrong if Participant 3 decides to do undergo feminization in her transition journey. However, while there is an affirmation from elders, Participant 3 cannot escape from the overcompensation narrative. She thinks to herself that she must be excellent in school especially for her father not to notice her transition.

It is important to point out that tolerating and accepting are two different things. One is conditional, the other is unconditional. Conditional means meeting certain requisites to be accepted such as overcompensating. Diversity has no conditions. However, we cannot control the reaction of other people during conversations (communication). The goal therefore of communication is not to please the other person. It is to make them understand and, in the process, get acceptance and respect for living one's truth. Respect shown in communication is defined by Participant 4 in two types—verbal and nonverbal communication signs of respect or disrespect. For nonverbal, it is reactions such as frowning (*kunot noo*), shaking of head (*iling*), and the tone of voice (*tono ng boses*) that show disrespect. For verbal, to show respect, remarks should not be questioning and doubting but understanding.

Participant 6 defined safe spaces based from conversations with people. They said it would make them feel that it is okay to disclose they are part of the queer

community if they were asked of their pronouns and if people use gender neutral honorifics citing UP Babaylan organization that use Mx. for honorifics. Using gay lingo also affirms queer people as it sometimes serves as an indicator that they are part of the community.

Participant 6 would also feel safe if people affirm them, manifest they are allies, and make them feel they can come out. Participant 6 cited doubting statements or questioning remarks in what they described as an example of an invalidating parent-child conversation. Doubting statements or questioning remarks are as follows:

- *What do you mean? Phase lang 'yun. Paano? Sure ka nang girls e hindi ka pa naman nagkaka boyfriend?* [What do you mean? It is just a phase. How? Are you sure you like girls when you have not even had a boyfriend?]
- *Are you dating ba like this person kasi wala kang guy na mahanap?* [Are you dating this person because you cannot find a guy to date?]
- *Are you dating this person kasi nasa UP Babaylan ka kaya parang feeling mo kailangan mong panindigan yung pagiging bakla mo?* [Are you dating this person because you joined UP Babaylan and you felt you need to prove/stand for your being gay/pan?]
- *Sino yung guy at tsaka girl dun sa relationship?* [Who is the guy and the girl in the relationship?]

Participant 4 similarly cited doubting and questioning statements in conversations that do not help facilitate the production of safer spaces. These are the following:

- *Sure ka ba?* [Are you sure?]
- *Sigurado ka ba na ganyan ka?* [Are you sure that you are like this?]
- *Eh sa dulo naman magse-settle ka din sa lalaki or babae.* [In the end you will either settle for a boy or a girl.]
- *Baka naman phase lang 'yun.* [Maybe it is just a phase.]

Participant 1 and Participant 3 cited these statements which they classified as offensive and insulting statements:

- You will go to hell (for being transgender).
- *Uhaw na uhaw sa lalaki.* [Thirsty for guys.]
- *Kailangan mo raw magpagupit ganyan ganyan...*[You should cut your hair...]
- *Oh yung tatay mo pala hindi pala agree sa pinag-gagagawa mo.* [Oh your father does not seem to agree with what you are doing.]
- *Oo nga bakit nakapagpahaba ng buhok 'yan kung ayaw ng tatay?*  
[Right, how was he able to grow his hair long when his father does not agree?]

Participant 2, have conditional statements as an example of negative communication:

- *Mahal kita pero hindi ko tinatanggap na bakla ka. [I love you but I do not accept your being gay.]*
- *Kaya kung tanggapin na bakla ka pero dapat mataas 'yung grades mo, dapat kung ikaw 'yung panganay dapat mataas 'yung grade mo, dapat ikaw 'yung unang magtatrabaho, dapat ikaw 'yung caregiver ng pamilya, dapat ikaw 'yung ipapadala abroad para pag-aralin 'yung mga kapatid mo. [I can accept that you are gay but your grades must be excellent, if you are the eldest you must have high grades in school, you must be the caregiver in the family, you must go abroad and finance your siblings' schooling.]*
- *Pinalaki kita kaya mahal kita. [I raised you that is why I love you.]*

Participant 3, also have examples of conditional statement:

- *Oh 'yung Papa mo kainuman 'yung Papa ko tas sinasabi na ayun nga bakla ka daw ganon pero okay lang kasi okay ka daw sa school ganon ganon...[Your father is my father's drinking buddy and he said you are gay but it is okay because you are performing well in school...]*
- *Okay lang na bakla 'yan kasi makakapagbigay naman sa pamilya niya...[It is okay that she is gay because she is generous to her family...]*

Meanwhile, Participant 3 and Participant 6 have these affirming statements as an example:

- *Wala namang masama. Ang ganda ganda naman niya.* [There is nothing wrong. She is very pretty.]
- This is your sexuality *pero* [but] if you are to question, that's okay.
- *If ever you are to question ganon like okay lang 'yan I'm here to help you with the process...*[if ever you are to question, it's okay, I'm here to help you with the process...]

The role of communication in creating safe spaces is essential in the negotiation of inclusivity, diversity, and equality. Dialogues are seen from simple face-to-face daily conversations, email correspondences of queer students with professors requesting not to be misgendered and deadnamed, up to crafting real policies.

Safe spaces can be facilitated to allow less difficult if not easier coming out by willingness to understand and being trustworthy, supportive, and accepting. It can also be by stopping the display of negative and disagreeable attitudes. In conversations, we can be more aware by not assuming one's gender identity, by proper usage of pronouns, salutations, or honorifics, and lived names, sharing affirming and comforting words, not saying negative, curse words or bad jokes and offensive or insulting words, allowing the queer people to freely express their SOGIESC, and generally creating a positive environment that assists and enables their active identity production.

People must be mindful of their language. Queer people feel unsafe when they hear unsafe words. Safe spaces start in conversations so people must learn to communicate properly.

It appears in the study that Filipino queer youth can practice self-love, consider choice, readiness, time, and safety during SOGIESC disclosure, and emphasize communication and education when negotiating their becoming and safer space experiences. Other people can help establish these safer spaces by becoming allies not only in words but in action. This can be demonstrated in recognizing and affirming the queer community, respecting and understanding them, and most of all educating themselves on how to foster safe spaces.

## **Summary**

Looking back at the participants' experiences of unsafe spaces, they vividly described the spaces which they considered to be safer spaces for their becoming. In the Philippine context, *ligtas na lugar* is too literal a word to encapsulate the meaning of safe spaces for the Filipino queer youth. A more resonant representation of safe spaces to them are *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, *takbuhan*, and *tambayan*.

Genuine safe spaces are characterized to be chosen, established, all-encompassing, indefinite, and beyond the physical space. However, unsafe spaces are transformable. They can become safer spaces if not a total safe space. As the

Filipino queer youth are changed by their spaces, the spaces are also changed by them.

### **Communication Model for Safe(r) Spaces**

This study poposes a Conceptual Model of a Communication Safe Space (CMSS) grounded from data. It introduces the spaces identified as safe in the Philippine context, the characteristics of a safe space, and the layers that make a space safe. All of which become known from the answers of the research participants—the Filipino queer youth.

The Conceptual Model of a Communication Safe space (CMSS) is illustrated in Figure 12. This model depicts the social production of a safer space.

There are three main spaces identified as safe in the Filipino queer youth context which are the *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, *tambayan/takbuhan*. The darker blue square in the center of the figure represents these spaces.

The emergent characteristics of a safe space as described by the participants of this study includes being chosen, established, all-encompassing, and indefinite. A space must be chosen for it to be considered as safe. With the risks that comes from disclosing gender identity, it is important that the Filipino queer youth chooses whether to disclose or not their gender identity, when to disclose their gender

identity, and how to disclose their gender identity. Any situation where their control or influence is lost within these conditions of choice means that they were forced to do it as in the case of being outed. A feeling of loss of control means a feeling of unsafeness.

A space must be an established space for it to be safe. It involves revealing one's gender identity first before expecting others to reveal their gender identities as well. What is essential here is the two-way process that involves conversations. It is in this conversations that a Filipino queer youth can establish these safe spaces.

A safe space according to the research participants must also be all-encompassing. In an ideal world, this is easy to imagine. However, in the real world there are so many factors that hinder this characteristic of a safe space. A space is an all-encompassing safe space if the feelings of safeness are felt in all social institutions including homes, schools, establishments, institutions, and societies in general.

And lastly, safe spaces are indefinite in the sense that it can be a person or a location or it can be both. It also goes beyond the stereotypical idea of safe that is cozy or home-like. Some spaces are considered safe even with cold benches under the shade of the trees with ants and caterpillars. All of these characteristics of a safe space are illustrated in the four triangles diverging into the center of identified safe spaces in Figure 12.

The spaces identified as safe and their characteristics are introduced, disseminated, and negotiated in daily conversations to other people especially those who are not members of the queer community. The personal struggles and outside challenges of the Filipino queer youth provide clarity on the layers of safeness of a space.

The layers of a safe space are also illustrated in Figure 12. The white smaller spherical liquid drop shape signifies the inner layer of safe space where self-validation and self-assertion happens. This is the space where queer individuals talk to themselves regarding identity crisis, gender dysphoria, and decisions on identity disclosures. There are four elements in the internal safety of a safe space particularly in matters of the act of disclosure. These are choice which answers the question of whether to disclose the gender identity or not; readiness which answers the question of emotional and mental readiness; timing which refers to feelings of having the “right time” to do the disclosure; and relationship which pertains to the question of emotional closeness or worthiness of an individual as a receiver of the disclosure. Meanwhile, the gray larger spherical liquid drop shape signifies the outer layer of a safe space. It refers to the outside environment safety of a space composed of accepting beliefs, inclusive socio-cultural influences, reformative political system, supportive economic system, and responsive education system.

The integration of the white and gray spheres show how the internal and external determinants of a safe space are interdependent and interrelated. The process by which we construct the safe space is through interaction within these spheres. The spheres also represent the social production spaces where real

dialogue and exchanges of safer space meanings happen. It is in these spheres where the interaction of the unsafe space, safe space, and safer space occur. It signifies the social production of a safe space as a process that is continuously transforming and developing. The social production happens through communication.

It is important to recognize that this Conceptual Model of a Communication Safe Space (CMSS) comes from the perspective of the Filipino queer youth. This means the source of the message is the queer community; the ideal safe space is the message; interactions get the message across; the society as a whole composed of religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, and educational institutions is the receiver of the message; and the desired goal or effect is the production of a safer space.

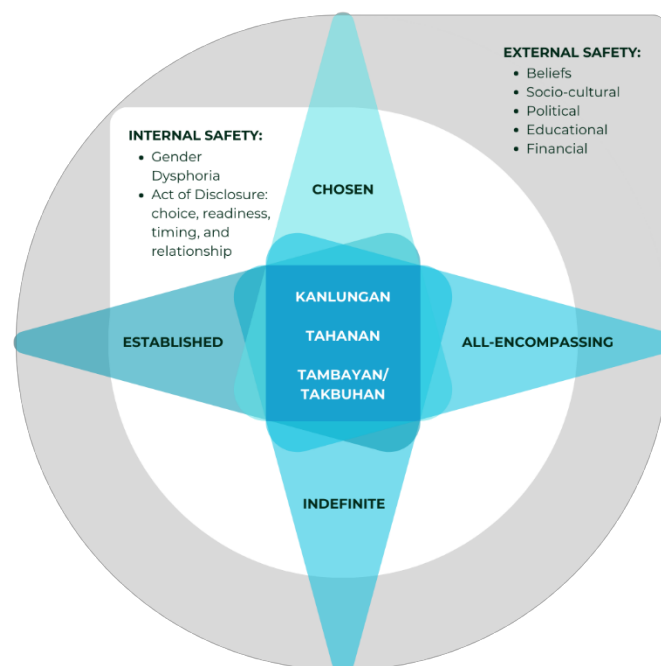
From the Symbolic Interactionism sense, this can only be realized if there is a universally understood meaning of safe space. This can eventually result into mutual understanding and collective action to embody affirmative communication to create safe spaces for the queer community.

The modifiability feature of the Conceptual Model of a Communication Safe Space (CMSS) which emerged from this research can be taken advantage of by future researchers. The limitation of this conceptual model points out to its transactional feature because it argues that the definition of safer spaces should only come from the queer community. The rationale behind this is that the minority is trying to change the oppressive hegemonic cis-heteronormative biases prevalent in the society.

The transactional model can be modified into a systems model, but the question posed by this would be on concerns of maintaining the ideal safe space as defined by the queer community against the possibility of alteration as a result of the influence of other systems within the social process reverting it back to a hegemonic ideology that is again oppressive to the gender minority. This remains to be known and is a potential interest for future research.

**Figure 12**

*Proposed Communication Model for Safe(r) space (Gaza, 2024)*



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the Filipino queer youth's communicational perspective of safe spaces for coming out and the role of communication in engendering safe spaces in the Philippine context. Guided by Blumerian Symbolic Interactionism, it uses Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as methodology. This research used theoretical sampling among six Filipino queer youth coming from identified official queer student organizations in two universities in Metro Manila. They were interviewed in-depth online via Zoom. In accordance with Grounded Theory (GT) methods, I did a comparative analysis of data, concepts, and categories through reiterative coding steps: initial open coding using the line-by-line coding approach, axial coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Highlights of the results are the following:

#### **Meaning of Safe Space for Coming Out**

The Filipino queer youth conceptualized safe spaces by identifying Filipino notions of warmth, comfort, and care associated to the characteristics of *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, and *tambayan/takbuan*. *Kanlungan* is a place that offers acceptance no matter who you are. *Kanlungan* nourishes an individual with its peace and protection. It is where the Filipino queer youth feel they are taken care of. *Kanlungan* can be a personal room. *Tahanan* is home but more importantly, aside from the literal

description of a four cornered building, it offers a place to endure pain, gain recovery, or accelerate healing.

From the words of one participant of this study, sometimes the world hurts you and makes you cry but *tahanan* is where you are comforted and where you stop crying (*tahan*). And then there is *tambayan/takbuhan*, a place to hang out and have fun and enjoyment. It is also where one finds people who can assure them after having a bad day.

But more than the gentle notions associated with *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, *tambayan/takbuhan*, the Filipino queer youth also argued that safe spaces must always be *chosen* (I alone decide the answers to the following concerns: should I disclose or not?, when/where can I disclose?, how will I do the disclosure?); *established* (I am disclosing first so you can disclose back); *all-encompassing* (all social institutions must be safe for my becoming); and *indefinite* or beyond the idea of a physical space (my safe space can either be a person or a location or both and if it is a location, how it makes me feel is more important than its material/physical description).

The layers of safeness of a space is two-fold: internal and external. Internally, the space for becoming is determined with the lack of self-harm ideations and if the act of disclosure has the elements of *choice*, which means the agency to do the disclosure lies solely on the queer individual, *readiness* which means that feelings of emotional and mental readiness are present, *timing* is defined by feelings of having the right time to do the disclosure (e.g. in some cases, reaching the age of 18 or

meeting old friends who they have not seen for a long time), and *relationship* refers to the proximity of a person in terms of kinship, affinity, or attraction (e.g. disclosure still happens among unaccepting parents even if it feels unsafe because they are family by blood).

Externally, a space is safe when religious, socio-cultural, political, educational, and financial factors are all gender-affirmative. For the religious aspect, in muslim communities, there are ordinances that punish the public display of homosexuality (UNDP, USAID, 2014) while the Catholic church do not support the anti-discrimination bill for the queer community because it might push the same-sex marriage legalization (Rodriguez, 2015). In socio-cultural setting, misgendering and deadnaming are common because most people are still assimilated with the heteronormative culture. Politically speaking, the legislators in the Philippines have yet to create and implement national laws that promote the welfare of the queer community. And if there are local laws protecting the queer people, these have yet to be improved as well. For the academic or educational setting, more gender information are needed to promote inclusivity and diversity. Also, school policies must cater to the needs of the queer students. And in the economic or financial aspect, workplaces should foster an environment and culture that is friendly and fair to the queer community especially those that are members of the labor force. If these areas all uphold and promote the welfare of the queer community, then it could be said that there is a complete external layer of safe space for them.

This study assertively introduces that the domination of a safer space as guided by the imagined safe spaces of the queer community helps in a more

established production of diverse gender identities. In other words, a universal safe space for queer people normalizes their gender identities and makes the social experience of their identity production easier. The relationship between gender identity and lived space is crystallized when we look at each gender identity as not just belonging to the gender minority but a colorful life story as lived by each queer individual.

Rick Allen (1997) who explained the active production of identities aligned Soja's idea of thirdspace as a symbolic interaction space where identities are produced from the interaction between the prevailing perceived space (real unsafe space), conceived space (imagined ideal safe space), and lived space (combination of the experienced unsafe space, imagined ideal safe space, and lived social production of safer space).

The gender minority identity is the marginalized identity while the heterosexual identity is the dominant identity. The latter dominates the spaces which makes it unsafe for the former. In development communication, unsafe spaces are an underdevelopment issue that needs to be addressed. In symbolic interactionism, social spaces can be re-imagined as being actively produced and reproduced through communication. It is in social spaces where the queer community's identity emerge and is maintained, their resistance nurtured, and social transformation incited.

## Communication Model for Safe(r) space for Coming Out

Symbolic interactionism or communication plays a major role in the production of the self among Filipino queer youth as well as in the production of safe(r) space for their becoming. Symbolic interactionism explains safer spaces for coming out through its three major concepts of meaning, language, and thinking. The Filipino queer youth revealed *kanlungan*, *tahanan*, and *tambayan/takbuhan* as the symbols for safe spaces in the Philippine context. How they give meanings to these symbols depends on their personal thoughts and experiences. In their struggle to create safe spaces for their becoming, they share these meaning through conversations. The meanings of these symbols of safe spaces are altered every after conservation because personal thoughts can be modified depending on the interaction one has with other people. Essentially, the Filipino queer youth disclose and negotiate their SOGIESC and the safe spaces that they rightfully deserve through their interactions, hence Symbolic Interactionism.

Lifted from the experiences of the participants is this study's grounded conceptual model of communication safe space. Safe(r) spaces are achievable provided that the characteristics of safe spaces are achieved and that the requisites of safeness in both internal and external layers of safe space exist.

The Communication Model for Safe(r) Space developed in this study offers a communication explanation of the Filipino queer youth's definition of safe spaces for the process of their becoming. This may be used in social institutions especially in universities or schools for Filipino queer youth as this study recognizes that

Philippine schools have inadequate access to queer-related information with bullying, discrimination, and some cases of physical or sexual harassment still existent (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Symbolic Interaction creates Safe(r) spaces for Filipino queer youth's becoming. Creating ideal safe spaces is workable and transforming unsafe spaces into safe(r) spaces is attainable. Social acts, social process, and social transformation allows for the becoming and the production of safer spaces for the Filipino queer youth.

There are three Symbolic Interaction principles that are relevant to this study which are meaning, language, and thinking. The center of the participants' social acts in this study is their becoming and their construction of safer spaces. These social acts become social processes through communication or symbolic interaction. The participants' interpretation of their becoming and their safer spaces changes depending on their thoughts and the way they think about their self and their circumstance. How their thoughts came to be and why they think the way they do depends on their interaction with other people and with their environment.

Becoming and building safer spaces are social acts because it involves other people. Creating safer spaces for the Filipino queer youth's becoming demands assistance or collaboration from other people. There is a need for safe space hence a demand for safe space. The act of participating to produce safer spaces is a social

act. This social act further becomes a social process as it gradually expands from one community to another. Gender identities arise from the social process of becoming. Each SOGIESC is an organization of one's respective social experiences.

Moreover, the meaning of a safe space emerges from the social interaction or communication of one queer individual to another. Shared meanings of safe spaces have the potential to become universal symbols and discourse. Thus, a largely heteronormative society oppressive to the queer community also has the potential to develop into a diverse and gender-inclusive society.

The Filipino queer youth's becoming and the spaces for the queer community is shaped through communication or Symbolic Interactionism. Safer space for Filipino Queer Youth's becoming is socially produced which suggests that unsafe spaces are not static. They do not remain unsafe. They can be transformed into safe spaces as the queer community and the society continuously find solutions to make it safer. Essentially, from the Symbolic Interactionism point of view, becoming queer and the search for safer spaces is a social phenomenon emerging from communication.

The places for symbolic interaction are lived spaces or social spaces. These are spaces of struggle, oppression, and transformation. These are the spaces where the queer community interact to produce safe spaces. This is called the phenomenon of socially transforming spaces to be safer spaces through communication.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

Some findings of the study can be useful as recommendations.

The study showed that there are internal and external safety layers of a space. Subsequently, we have internal and external components for the social production of a safer space. The internal and external safeness of a space can be facilitated by the right attitudes and policies, respectively. The instrument to form the right attitude and policies to construct safer spaces are conversations.

### **Developing the Right Attitude**

It is the attitudes of people that is the root of disclosure hesitancy among the queer community. It is through observable attitudes that safer spaces are identified because one cannot just outright ask if someone is homophobic or transphobic. Since coming out is done to people and not to places, there are certain attitudes of people that make them safer spaces to come out to.

Safe spaces can be facilitated by embodying attitudes of empathy and being non-discriminatory. It may begin with a simple act of not cracking bad jokes about the queer community. The queer community expect fairness which can be shown through equal treatment. That is to not make them feel weird, they have illness or disease or that you are superior to them. They want people to make them feel comfortable by practicing the golden rule and giving them privacy.

Safe spaces can also be facilitated by embodying attitudes of being a conversationalist, sensitive, and open-eared.

Being a conversationalist is allowing the queer community to speak for themselves in a society of cisheterosexual people who speak for them. Being mindful of carrying out and spreading the cishetero privilege—believing that straight people are freer, more acceptable to speak, and more listened to when they speak. When a queer person speaks, it is not just telling a singular story but it is a community story.

Being sensitive is being mindful that gender issue is a difficult topic. When queer people disclose their sexual orientations (SOs) or gender identity (GI) it is them entrusting the information to the receiver of the disclosure. It does not automatically mean they have the right to let other people know about it. It is very important to apply courtesies or proprieties of sensitive information.

Being open-eared means willingness to hear a lot of struggles no matter how difficult it is to listen. It is a fact that usually, when we receive negative messages, it gets annoying or irritating. It is important to understand that for the person who is disclosing or telling the stories, it is therapeutic or cathartic. Offering solution to problems is not necessary during venting. Just listening is enough when queer people have lived so long in their immediate spaces, voiceless, unheard, invisible, unseen, and ignored. They even have to overcompensate to be noticed. Listening to them is giving them the power to speak.

## **Institutionalizing Policies**

For policy consideration, the participants of this study pushed for the institutionalization of SOGIESC Bill on the national level and the need for proper implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Ordinance (ADO) on the local level. According to the research participants, there is a need to review these policies to ensure that the rights of the queer community are protected. Meanwhile, there is an opportunity for the Guidelines on Affirming Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming students (TGNC Guidelines) to not just remain as guidelines but to become a mandated policy in schools and universities.

Creating safer spaces means making people understand and teaching them so that they can participate in establishing policies that enable and support the queer community.

Policies for safe spaces must be gender sensitive that is to incorporate the principle of gender neutrality and fairness in language and communication. An example is the use of gender-neutral words, phrases, and approaches or indigenizing words in broadcast communication.

Safe spaces policies must be gender consultative. Policy-makers must consult the queer community in policy-making because first-hand and on-the-ground experiences have more weight compared to varying cishetero perspectives.

Safe spaces policies must also be gender responsive and gender transformative which means it must be adaptive to the changing needs of the queer community. Gender diversity is developing hence policy-makers should make room for these developments.

Some schools like the University of the Philippines (UP) have policies fostering safe spaces like providing guidelines in the use of queer people's lived name and preferred pronoun in school documents and wearing clothes that affirm their gender norm during graduation rites. It is indeed daunting to come out to teachers. Hence, it makes it easier for them not to personally come out to teachers, but instead, it can happen through the Computerized Registration System (CRS). This means having records available to teachers regarding students' SOGIE.

Participant 4 shared that UP Center for Women and Gender Studies collaborated with UP Babaylan in drafting the Transgender and Gender Non-conforming (TGNC) Student Guidelines. If properly implemented, it can transform universities to be safer spaces. Participant 4 believes that the TGNC guidelines can give queer students a blanket feeling that if and when they experience discrimination in universities, there is an existing policy that supports them to get justice in whatever form. The guidelines define discrimination and specifies penalties for perpetrators of discrimination. Policies give power to the minority to go after certain offices. It allows queer people to stop feeling pitiful and turn their stories from being oppressed to survivors. It means just because perpetrators hold higher positions or are members of established offices does not mean the queer community cannot fight them. They can use policies for their protection. The existence of a document

showing how fairness to all must be upheld including to the gender minorities is powerful. It is empowering.

For Participant 3, creating safe spaces means fighting for policies like the Anti-Discrimination Ordinance (ADO). Some Local Government Units (LGUs) already have their versions of ADO: however, it is still lacking in mechanism. Unsuccessfully, for those LGUs with existing ADO, adherence is a completely different matter. This ordinance according to Participant 3 needs to be solidified through nationalization. Doing so would reinforce the policy more. Passing the ordinance on the national level allows for follow through on gender responsive policies and inclusivity for transgenders and other nonconforming genders in schools.

Participant 5 proposes a similar plan of action saying that safe spaces can be created with the help of policies like the SOGIESC equality bill. This maybe the first comprehensive bill that recognizes marginalization and discrimination of the queer people according to Participant 5. They explained that fundamentally, people can only create safer spaces once they acknowledge that there is discrimination and inequality. Therefore, the SOGIESC equality bill must be recognized legally on the national level. It starts with acknowledging inequality, recognizing the marginalized minorities, and then advocating the establishment of minority people's rights and then extending and upholding these rights.

Participant 5 added that passing the SOGIESC equality bill paves a stepping stone for further legislations and addressing more inequalities. It can be a precedent to crafting supporting bills such as legal gender recognition, changing sex/gender

markers/names, institutionalizing marriage equality bill and even forwarding policy reforms such as choosing beneficiary in banks as in finance or monetary policies and giving waiver in health care settings. All these policies help recognize and create safe spaces only when SOGIESC equality bill is passed.

Participant 6 said Bills give courage to the queer community to come out in public spaces like schools and workplaces. To make discrimination on the basis of SOGIE as illegal would be very helpful.

### **Filipino Queer Youth's Advices for Coming Out**

This study also shares practical tips from the participants intended for queer youths who are thinking about their becoming process and the challenges that the queer community is facing as well as for allies who want to help in fostering safer spaces for the queer community.

Facilitating safer spaces through communication can be in the form of instructions. In line with this, this study surfaced from the participants a total of forty-four practical advices for coming out. Some of them are recurring from each participant thus the researcher consolidated it and made it more concise and comprehensive. The research has arrived with this helpful tips from the participants.

The first set of tips are intended for queer individuals who have not disclosed their gender identity yet. These are based from the subjective experiences of the participants hence can only be taken if suitable.

## Tips for Queer Siblings

1. Practice self-love. Prioritize yourself.
2. Come out on your own time. Come out on your own terms. Do it only when you are ready. You must know that no one should force you to come out. It is not a requirement. Also, not coming out does not take away one's queerness in the same way that coming out does not change the essence of a person. Do not rush the process and live in the moment.
3. Consider safe spaces in coming out. Identify possible risks before you come out. Make sure that no harm will come your way. Find safe spaces. Find chosen families and support systems. You can join queer student organizations that champion inclusivity.
4. Communicate. Connect to people and bridge the gap but choose to disengage in close-minded people as well.
5. Educate yourself and others. Understand that non-members of the queer community's oppressive and discriminatory attitude are not all their fault but rather it is a systematic problem that needs to be addressed.

Meanwhile, the second set of tips are intended for Queer community allies and even non-members of the queer community. Just like the Queer Sibling Tips, these are based from the subjective experiences of the participants hence it only serves as guide instead of an enforced practice.

## Tips for Non-members and Allies

1. Let them be. Do not force them to come out. Let them do it in their own time.
2. Acknowledge, recognize, and affirm them. Use their lived name and preferred pronouns.
3. Respect them by not talking over them or judging them. Do not question them with hints of doubt, should you wish to ask them about their SOGIESC, ask them with the intent to understand and not to incite aggression.
4. Understand them. Reach out to them first instead of waiting for them to initiate conversation. When they do engage in a conversation with you, listen to them.
5. Educate yourself. Study about them but do not think you know more than them. Recognize, question, and use privilege so that you can be aware and empathize with them.
6. Foster safe spaces. Help them improve their quality of life. Qualify the word help. Fight alongside the community but do not solve their struggles rather be with them as they overcome them. Become their ally and encourage others to be allies. Remember that ally is an action and not a noun so break walls, push for equality, and stand up against discrimination.

## **Suggestions For Future Research**

For future research, it was learned in this study that all-girls-school somehow exhibit the characteristics of safer spaces and advocacy organizations and queer clubs are considered as safer spaces. However, these findings need further

exploration to validate the observation especially with the conduct of actual field observation which is lacking in this study.

Future research can also distinguish the degree of the safeness of these spaces considering the layers of safe space identified in this study.

It appeared in this study that 'bakla' is the label for all SOGIESC in the Philippine context, but it did not delve on the in-depth understanding of this phenomenon hence future queer studies can use this as basis for an emerging interest of research.

This study also discovered a common queer narrative of overcompensation. Further understanding of this phenomenon can be a great addition to the body of knowledge in queer research in the Philippines.

This study was informed by Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory. An alternative framework and method (such as phenomenology) might offer a different interpretation or understanding and even further analysis of the studied social process of queer becoming and production of safer spaces.

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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Flyer/Facebook & Instagram Posters

# RESEARCH STUDY

This study is being conducted to find out how Filipino LGBT youth give meaning to safe-spaces for coming out.

### Who is eligible to participate?

- 18-24 years old
- Self-identified as LGBT
- Filipino
- Studying in college in the Philippines
- A member of at least 1 LGBT student organization

### What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an open-ended interview. Interviews will be conducted over the phone or online through skype or zoom.

**If you are interested in participating, please call or e-mail to learn more:**

**Bea - 0921 921 2493**  
**bvgaza@up.edu.ph**



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN LGBT+ COMMUNICATION STUDY:

# COMING OUT, SAFE-SPACES, & COMMUNICATION

BEA GAZA  
MASTER OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION, STUDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY



## WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?

This is a grounded theory research on the Filipino LGBT youth's communication safe-spaces for coming out.




## THE RESEARCH AIMS TO:

- Describe your coming out experiences.
- Conceptualize your notions of a safe-space and an unsafe-space for coming out.
- Produce and propose a model of a communication safe-space for coming out.


## WHAT WILL YOU DO AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

- Participate in a semi-structured, open-ended, and recorded interview. The interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour depending on how much of your experiences you choose to offer.
- Review the transcript of interviews and the findings to validate the study's data.

## I AM INTERESTED IN:

- How you describe your coming out experiences.
  - How you conceptualize your notions of a safe-space and an unsafe-space for coming out.
  - What you think is the role of communication in creating a safe-space for coming out.
- 

## IN ORDER TO QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY, YOU MUST:

1. Be at least 18-24 years old.
  2. Self-identify as LGBT.
  3. Be a Filipino student in a college in the Philippines.
  4. Be a member of at least one LGBT student organization.
- 

## CONSENT AND DATA PRIVACY

I will be obtaining an informed consent from volunteer participants.

A participant can withdraw at any time upon deciding to discontinue at any stage of the research.

Rest assured that participants' personal information will be kept confidential.

## WILLING TO JOIN?

You can reach me through  
Facebook: [Bea Gaza](#)



**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN  
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Instagram: [beavatan](#)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Facebook Recruitment Script**

Hello! My name is Bea Gaza and I'm a student of Master of Development Communication in the University of the Philippines Open University. I am conducting a research that explores how Filipino LGBT youth define safe spaces for coming out. Specifically, this study aims to describe the Filipino LGBT youth coming out experiences; to understand their notions of safe and unsafe spaces for coming out; and to identify the facilitators and barriers to Filipino LGBT youth's coming out. I believe that communication is a crucial part of LGBT people's coming out experiences. I need your insights in studying this particular communication phenomenon.

In order to qualify for this study, you must:

- Be at least 18-24 years old.
- Self-identify as LGBT.
- Be a Filipino student in a college in the Philippines.
- Be a member of at least one LGBT student organization.

I will be obtaining an informed consent for your participation. This is voluntary and should you wish to discontinue, you can withdraw from the study at any time. Rest assured that your personal information will be kept confidential. If you are willing to participate in or have questions about my study, you can reach me through these contact details:

Contact no.: 0921 921 2493

Email address: [bvgaza@up.edu.ph](mailto:bvgaza@up.edu.ph)

## APPENDIX C

### Email Recruitment

Dear Student,

Greetings!

This is Bea Roseanne V. Gaza, a student of Master of Development Communication in the University of the Philippines Open University. I am conducting research to complete the requirements in my master's degree. In line with this, I am kindly requesting for your participation in my qualitative study entitled *Safe(r) space: Revisiting Coming out Spaces of Filipino LGBT youth From a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective*. The purpose of this research is to find out how Filipino LGBT youth define safe spaces for coming out. The main inquiry of this research asks the question: *How do Filipino LGBT youth give meaning to safe spaces for coming out?* I am interested in your coming out experiences and how you describe spaces you consider to be safe or unsafe for coming out. I am also interested in identifying the facilitators and barriers to Filipino LGBT youth's coming out.

In order to qualify for this study, you must:

1. Be at least 18-24 years old.
2. Self-identify as LGBT.
3. Be a Filipino student in a college in the Philippines.
4. Be a member of at least one LGBT student organization.

This study will conduct a semi-structured, open-ended, and recorded interview. The interview will establish basic information, build rapport, and eventually gain in-depth information from you as a research participant. The interview will be done in your convenient time over the phone or online through skype or zoom. I will also request you to review the transcript of interviews and the initial findings to validate the study's data.

I will be obtaining an informed consent for your participation. This is voluntary and should you wish to discontinue, you can withdraw from the study at any time. Rest assured that your personal information will be kept confidential. If you are willing to participate in or have questions about my study you can reach me through these contact details:

Contact no.: 0921 921 2493

Email address: bvgaza@up.edu.ph

Sincerely yours,

Bea Roseanne V. Gaza

Master of Development Communication, Student  
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies  
University of the Philippines Open University  
Los Baños, Laguna

## APPENDIX D

### Consent Form

<b>Consent Form</b>	
<b>Title of the Study</b>	Safe(r) space: Revisiting Coming out spaces of Filipino LGBT youth From a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	The purpose of this study is to define safe spaces for coming out among the Filipino LGBT youth. This main inquiry will be answered by exploring the coming out experiences of the Filipino LGBT youth, uncovering their notions of safe and unsafe spaces for coming out, identifying facilitators and/or barriers to their coming out and describing the role of communication in the creation of safe spaces for coming out.
<b>Procedures</b>	Semi-structured, open-ended, and recorded interview. This study will record the interview for purposes of playback and transcriptions. Hence agreeing to participate in the study includes two activities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actual interview</li> <li>2. Review of transcripts of interview</li> </ol>
<b>Privacy/Confidentiality/ Voluntary Nature of Study</b>	All personal information will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be selected by the research participant and will be used during the interview and in the transcript of interviews. Participation is voluntary and the research participant can withdraw their consent any time during the study. All data collected will be secured. For digital files it will be stored in a password protected laptop and USB flash drive. This will be kept together with the hard copies of documents in a locked cabinet. Only the researcher and the members of the thesis advisory panel will have access to the data.
<b>Benefit/Compensation/ Payment for Participation</b>	There will be no direct benefit for your participation in the study but the research will hopefully elucidate safe spaces for coming out and encourage positive conversations that facilitate the creation of safe spaces for coming out. There will be no payment or any other form of compensation for your participation in this study.
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	I read and understood the information in this form. I consent and voluntarily participate in this study. I will be provided a copy of this form.

	<p>I will be recorded during the interview and I am indicating yes to declare that I agree to be recorded and no if I do not agree to be recorded.</p> <p>_____ YES          _____ NO</p>
<p><b>Signature and Date</b></p>	<p>NAME:          EMAIL ADDRESS:</p>
	<p>SIGNATURE:</p>
	<p>DATE:</p>

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide

The researcher will first introduce herself and express gratitude to the research participant for agreeing to participate in the study and then will let the participant pick a pseudonym to use for the study.

#### ***Script***

This is Bea Roseanne V. Gaza, a student of Master of Development Communication in the University of the Philippines Open University.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to find out how Filipino LGBT youth give meaning to safe spaces for coming out. The research focuses on your coming out experiences and how you describe spaces you consider to be safe or unsafe for coming out. I am hoping that through your insights shared in this study, I will be able to gain a deeper understanding of safe spaces for coming out from the perspective of the Filipino LGBT youth.

Rest assured that your personal information will be kept confidential. I will be referring to you by using the pseudonym that you picked during the interview. I will be obtaining your consent and should you feel the need to withdraw from participating, I will respect your decision. I will be recording this interview and provide you with a copy of the transcription afterwards. Shall we proceed?

After obtaining the research participant's consent, the researcher will now use the pseudonym to address the research participant to signal the start of the formal interview. The researcher will begin by asking background information and gradually proceed to the actual interview.

#### ***General Information***

I will start by asking basic information to establish your profile, to build rapport, and to provide context that will help me understand your experiences.

1. What is your real name and what pseudonym would you pick to be used in this study?
2. Where is your hometown?
3. How old are you?
4. What year are you in college? What is your college course/major?
5. What are your career aspirations?

6. What other identities do you classify yourself as (in terms of religion, relationship status, ethnic group, social economic status, etc.)?
7. Are you a member of an LGBT student organization? What is the name of this organization?
8. Do you join Pride parades? How do you find Pride activities?

After asking these background questions, the researcher will now ask the questions from the formal interview.

### **Formal Interview**

The interview questions aim to address the main inquiry of this research: *How do Filipino LGBT youth construe communication for safe spaces in coming out?*

<b>Part 1: Filipino LGBT youth’s conceptualization of a safe space for coming out</b>
a) How would you describe the LGBT climate for coming out?
b) How do you personally define the term “safe space” for coming out?
<b>Part 2: Communication factors that facilitate safe spaces for coming out</b>
a) How do you communicate about these safe spaces?
b) How did safe spaces help in your coming out process/experience?
c) Any advice you can offer to other LGBTs in their coming out process?

## APPENDIX F

### Thank you Letter

Dear Student:

Greetings!

Thank you very much for participating in the study and for selflessly sharing your insights. I sincerely recognize and appreciate all efforts in the interview. If you have any additional thoughts, you can always reach me at these contact details:

Contact no.: 0921 921 2493

Email address: [bvgaza@up.edu.ph](mailto:bvgaza@up.edu.ph)

Sincerely yours,

Bea Roseanne V. Gaza  
Master of Development Communication, Student  
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies  
University of the Philippines Open University  
Los Baños, Laguna