



## **Filipino LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults' Conceptualization of Romantic Relationships**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the narratives of contemporary romance among Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults, emphasizing their lived experiences, modern influences, and cultural determinants that form their relationships. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed to conduct semi-structured interviews with eight participants from a state institution in Laguna, Philippines. The findings indicated that romantic connections are crucial in identity exploration and self-affirmation. Participants characterized love as a collaboration founded on reciprocal respect, emotional intimacy, and equality, contesting established conventions and heteronormative standards. Digital platforms facilitated connections and provided safe spaces for users; nevertheless, they also engendered obstacles, including false expectations and superficial interactions. Cultural influences, including familial expectations and Catholic ideals, were substantial, offering both obstacles and avenues for growth and authenticity. This study offers insights into the interplay between identity, culture, and love; but, its limited sample size and concentration on a particular university restrict its generalizability. Future research ought to investigate many contexts, encompassing rural regions and a wider array of socioeconomic demographics, while analyzing the changing influence of technology on LGBTQ+ relationships. This study emphasizes the resilience of Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults and advocates for inclusive legislation and community assistance to foster acceptance and equality.

**Keywords: Emerging Adulthood; LGBTQ+; Modern Love; Romantic Relationships**

### **Introduction**

Humans constantly seek the opportunity to engage socially to achieve social goals, such as the formation of strong bonds (Tamir and Hughes, 2018). This innate capacity for sociality and cooperation has led humanity to develop sociocultural, organizing norms and institutions that work towards both individual social roles and joint goals (Tomasello and Vaish, 2013). This remarkable psychosocial drive for cooperation only highlights the wondrous phenomenon of seeking love in another person. Love is a contentious and enduringly relevant topic of fascination. Across time and culture, humanity has been fervent in claiming what romantic love may mean. Vast industries in the arts, media, and society portray and accentuate distinctive ideas and characteristics that pertain to love.

It is suggested that contemporary romantic practice has become entangled, and almost unthinkable without media (Storey and McDonald, 2014). The active exploration of potential romantic and sexual partners is most prominent with the internet being a social intermediary, displacing traditional social intermediaries as definers and matchmakers (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber, 2016). As of January 2023, Filipinos take the spot as the eleventh country with the most digital presence in the world, with a digital population numbering over 85 million (Petrosyan, 2023). Given this supply of romance and relationship ideas, especially in today's time, it is difficult not to feature one's conceptualization of what romantic love is supposed to be for the Filipino individual.

A pivotal approach to exploring one's conceptualization of love is focusing on groups that are disproportionately affected by the traditional and normative structures of society.

Gender differences manifest between heterosexual couples, decreasing reflexivity between men and women in relationships, while it is suggested that queer romantic and sexual relationships work in the absence of such inequalities and boundary reflexivity and sexual expression is more readily manageable (Gabb, 2019). Given this, although the LGBTQ+ community has been receiving growing academic attention over the years as society becomes more inclusive, the general bias of the relevant literature still largely focuses on heterosexual love. As such, this study explored the dominant narratives of modern romance as described by Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults and its influences on their conceptualizations of romantic relationships.

Specifically, this study sought to determine the lived experiences in contemporary romantic love as described by LGBTQ+ emerging adult college students and assess how such contemporary characteristics of love affect one's conduct and entire conceptualization of romantic relationships. It finds its significance in the realm of Human Ecology as supplementary data to exemplify lessons in social relationships, human development, and psychology. Consequently, Among the prominent types of relationships, romantic relationships have a particularly intense impact on well-being (Kansky, 2018). In the context of emerging adults as participants, intimate relationships only become increasingly important over time.

Emerging adulthood is marked by a progression of romantic relationships, each exhibiting differences in levels of commitment, intensity, and intimacy Arnett et al., (2014), and a primary developmental task for such a life stage is successfully navigating intimate relationships. Hence, it is ever more significant to understand how the modern individual conducts themselves in a romantic setting in hopes of cultivating better relationships. However, it is important to note that the different types of data and assumptions suggested in this study are merely descriptive and do not aim to promote certain ideologies of romantic love, nor do they encourage or discourage certain behaviors, attitudes, and motivations toward seeking romantic relationships.

## **Method**

The research utilized qualitative methods, employing a phenomenological research design. This approach facilitated a deep investigation into the lived experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ emerging adults regarding romantic relationships and provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities of romantic relationships among LGBTQ+ emerging adults. The study took place at a state university in Laguna, Philippines. The choice of the said state university as the study site was deliberate, benefiting from its diverse student body and renowned status as a center for academic exploration and community involvement. This dynamic campus setting provides an optimal backdrop for investigating LGBTQ+ emerging adults' conceptualizations of romantic relationships, leveraging the distinctive experiences and viewpoints found within this environment.

Participants were selected for their year-long experiences in gay romantic relationships. The study involved 8 LGBTQ+ individuals aged 18 to 24, as prescribed by relevant research on the recently acknowledged life stage of emerging adulthood. The participants consisted of 3 males and 5 females with varying sexual orientations and gender identities, all enrolled as undergraduate students at the said state university. Efforts were made to ensure diversity among the participants, including variations in socioeconomic status (ranging from lower-income to middle-class backgrounds) and geographic origin (participants represented urban, rural, and suburban areas of the

Philippines). This diversity enriched the data, allowing for a broader exploration of how different contextual factors shape romantic experiences and perspectives.

The research utilized a semi-structured questionnaire as an instrument designed to comprehensively explore various aspects of participants' lived romantic experiences, with categorized sections tailored to delve into different dimensions of romantic relationships within the LGBTQ+ emerging adult population, more particularly to the influence of identity, the development stage of emerging adulthood, and modern societal factors concerning relationships. The study utilized a purposive sampling method, which allowed for the intentional selection of participants who possess the relevant characteristics necessary for addressing the research questions effectively.

Interviews were conducted using an online video conferencing platform, ensuring accessibility and convenience for participants while adhering to ethical considerations and privacy protocols. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and prepared for data analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants

Name	Age	Sex	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Years in a Relationship
Sam	22	Female	Chose not to disclose	Chose not to disclose	3
V	23	Female	Bisexual	Genderfluid	1
Caleb	24	Male	Chose not to disclose	Cisgender Male	1
Camille	23	Female	Bisexual	Cisgender Female	2
Alex	21	Female	Bisexual	Chose not to disclose	1
TP Gonzales	24	Male	Chose not to disclose	Gender Expression Fluid	3
M	24	Male	Gay	Cisgender Male	2
AC	21	Female	Chose not to disclose	Cisgender Female	1

Thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis approach, was employed to identify patterns, themes, and recurring motifs within the data. By systematically coding and categorizing participants' responses, the researchers discerned common themes and variations in how participants conceptualize their romantic relationships. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of the participants' shared and unique experiences, offering valuable insights into the interplay of personal identity, societal expectations, and developmental factors in romantic relationships.

## Results and Discussion

The subsequent paragraphs delineate the recognized themes and subthemes, emphasizing the impact of contemporary attitudes and cultural circumstances on the views and conceptualizations of romantic relationships among Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults. This section incorporates a critical examination of literature deficiencies, cultural ramifications, and policy suggestions to enhance the discourse and emphasize the study's significance.

## **1. Identity Exploration and Romantic Discovery within the LGBTQ+ Experience**

### **a. Romantic Feelings as the Catalyst for LGBTQ+ Identity Awakening**

The study's findings underscore the critical influence of romantic emotions on the identity formation of Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults, especially during their initial inquiries into sexual orientation. This corresponds with Cardinal's (2014) notion of the questioning stage, during which individuals start to confront and investigate their developing identities, frequently triggered by feelings of desire. The three persistent patterns initiation of romantic attraction, disclosure of sexual orientation, and exploration of identity indicate a developmental pathway shaped by both individual experiences and the encompassing social and cultural context.

Romantic attraction frequently serves as the catalyst for identity development, prompting individuals to examine their emotions and contemplate their orientations. This reflects results in identity formation literature, indicating that emotional connections or attractions frequently stimulate profound self-reflection. In the Filipino setting, societal norms around traditional gender roles and expectations may complicate this initial stage, presenting distinct problems and opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals managing these feelings. The act of coming out became a significant motif, illustrating the emotional fragility and strength necessary to disclose one's identity to others.

For Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals, coming out often necessitates navigating family dynamics firmly entrenched in collectivist traditions that prioritize household unity and reverence for elders. The acceptance or rejection by family profoundly influences the emotional health of LGBTQ+ individuals, as evidenced by the findings of (McConnell et al., 2018). Individuals who obtained support from family and peers frequently experienced enhanced confidence and empowerment in their identities, highlighting the significance of validating relationships in alleviating the adverse impacts of societal stigma.

The ultimate pattern, a more emancipated method of identity research, suggests that acceptance both internal and external significantly contributes to self-discovery and authenticity. This phase frequently signifies a transition from inquiry to acceptance of one's LGBTQ+ status. Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory offers a significant paradigm for comprehending how supportive situations, especially familial ones, might alleviate the psychological suffering associated with minority stress. In the Philippine context, this phase may also overlap with the impact of religion, local LGBTQ+ networks, and media portrayals, which can either obstruct or facilitate identity development.

The study's findings highlight a significant deficiency in current literature: although several investigations of LGBTQ+ identity emergence concentrate on Western contexts, they frequently neglect the distinct cultural aspects of Southeast Asian societies, such as the Philippines. Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals navigate the complexities of personal identity development alongside cultural pressures, including familial responsibilities, religious beliefs, and societal norms. These intersections distinctly influence their experiences of romantic relationships and identity exploration in contrast to their Western counterparts.

Additional study is required to investigate how these cultural subtleties affect the overarching narrative of LGBTQ+ identity formation in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. The influence of extended family, local LGBTQ+ communities, and geographical variations in acceptance may yield profound insights into the intricate relationship between identity and culture in this area. Furthermore, investigating the influence of developing digital environments and social media on the creation of Filipino LGBTQ+ identities may provide significant insights, especially since these platforms increasingly function as safe havens for connection and self-expression.

## **b. LGBTQ+ Identity Awakening Preceding Romantic Experiences**

The participants' narratives offer a detailed view on the evolution of LGBTQ+ identities, highlighting the variability in the timing and catalysts of self-awareness. Romantic experiences act as catalysts for some individuals, while others characterize their realizations as organic and contemplative, underscoring the diverse pathways to identity creation. Participants with pre-existing self-awareness prior to romantic engagement credit the recognition of their LGBTQ+ identification to an intrinsic sense of respect and desire that surpasses cultural conventions or stimuli. This discovery highlights the inherent characteristics of sexual orientation and gender identity, contesting the belief that external events solely influence these understandings.

The restricted exposure of varied sexualities, especially among women, further elucidates the subtle yet enduring process of introspection these individuals experienced. Their comments indicate that, despite a lack of representation, internal validation was crucial in the formation of identity. The account of a participant who struggled with society expectations prior to accepting his identity underscores the conflict between conformity and authenticity. This conflict, prevalent in countries with rigid conventional or heteronormative ideals, exemplifies the emotional effort required to align personal identity with societal norms. The decision to accept and reveal one's authentic self signifies both personal emancipation and a crucial advancement in cultivating genuine relationships with family and community.

For numerous individuals, coming out is portrayed as a pivotal moment that transcends individual affirmation. It serves as a method for strengthening familial connections and fostering genuine partnerships. This facet of coming out corresponds with the Filipino culture focus on family as a fundamental unit of support and belonging. Participants' experiences indicate that, although coming out entails vulnerability, it can also enhance familial warmth and promote mutual understanding. The significance of love experiences in promoting self-reflection and identity exploration is a prominent theme.

For many, the experience of falling in love or encountering romantic attraction served as a framework to scrutinize their emotions and preferences, so reinforcing their comprehension of their identity. These moments act as pivotal junctures, signifying a transition from ambiguity to self-acceptance. This dynamic demonstrates the profound interconnection between romantic and personal identity, as individuals utilize these experiences to delineate and validate their self-concept. The participants' accounts together emphasize that LGBTQ+ identity development is neither linear nor homogeneous.

For some, the journey commences with an inherent self-awareness, whereas for others, it is influenced by interpersonal connections and external events. Irrespective of the journey, themes of resilience, introspection, and the quest for authenticity throughout their narratives. The collective challenges highlight the significance of supportive surroundings and representation, especially in contexts where LGBTQ+ identities are frequently marginalized or misinterpreted. The narratives highlight the cultural backdrop of identity creation in the Philippines. The Filipino experience of coming out and self-discovery is profoundly linked to familial dynamics and societal expectations, characterized by collectivist beliefs and robust familial relationships.

Although these cultural aspects may present obstacles, they also offer opportunity for distinctive expressions of support and connection, as seen by individuals who had strengthened familial bonds following their coming out. These reports indicate that further focus is required to examine the intricate methods by which Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals navigate their identities within their cultural context. Future research may



explore the impact of media representation, religious influences, and peer connections on identity development. Moreover, initiatives designed to cultivate inclusive environments and enhance understanding among families and communities may significantly aid LGBTQ+ individuals in their pursuit of self-acceptance. In sum, the participants' varied experiences underscore the complex nature of LGBTQ+ identity development, illustrating that personal and cultural settings significantly influence this process. The journey of self-discovery, whether by introspection, societal rebellion, or love encounters, exemplifies the strength and authenticity of LGBTQ+ individuals among intricate social environments.

### **c. Intersection with Socioeconomic and Geographic Factors**

The influence of socioeconomic background and geographic origin on LGBTQ+ identity exploration and romantic discovery offers essential understanding of the contextual elements affecting participants' experiences. These aspects, sometimes disregarded, profoundly influence the timing, character, and transparency of identity development, underscoring the necessity of analyzing the intersectionality of identities. Individuals from urban surroundings gained advantages from exposure to more progressive and inclusive social contexts, where LGBTQ+ identities were more prominent and acceptable.

Access to LGBTQ+-inclusive environments, varied communities, and supporting networks in urban settings enabled earlier and more candid exploration of identity. Participants frequently reported a more seamless shift to self-acceptance, facilitated by accessible tools and social support. Conversely, participants from rural regions encountered more stigma and conventional expectations, frequently postponing their self-discovery and expression. Rural environments, characterized by conservative values and insufficient representation of LGBTQ+ individuals, provide considerable obstacles to identity exploration.

The lack of open discourse and supportive environments compelled numerous rural people to depend on internet channels for connection, affirmation, and assistance. These online groups served as vital resources, providing anonymity and access to an extensive network of persons experiencing comparable journeys. Socioeconomic factors exacerbated these geographic discrepancies. Individuals from elevated socioeconomic strata frequently possessed enhanced access to educational resources, inclusive social networks, and mental health assistance. These resources were essential in cultivating self-awareness and assisting participants in managing societal stigma more adeptly.

Conversely, persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced heightened problems, including financial limitations and insufficient access to supportive networks, which intensified the obstacles of identity development. Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality Theory offers a significant paradigm for comprehending how the intersection of geographic origin, social level, and LGBTQ+ identity engenders distinct experiences of marginalization. For rural and low-income LGBTQ+ individuals, these overlapping identities exacerbate the difficulties of societal acceptability, self-expression, and mental health. Their accounts illustrate the cumulative obstacles people encounter, such as restricted mobility, diminished access to resources, and increased susceptibility to discrimination.

The results highlight the necessity for tailored and contextually relevant strategies to comprehend and assist LGBTQ+ folks. Urban and rural LGBTQ+ populations possess unique needs that necessitate customized responses. Initiatives for rural communities should include awareness enhancement, the cultivation of inclusive environments, and the utilization of digital platforms to deliver accessible support and education. Urban interventions may focus on enhancing allyship and addressing residual bias in

predominantly progressive environments. Policy and advocacy initiatives must also confront the systemic disadvantages that sustain these gaps. Investments in rural development, education, and mental health services can mitigate disparities between urban and rural LGBTQ+ experiences.

Furthermore, community-oriented initiatives that involve families and local leaders can establish safer environments for LGBTQ+ individuals, promoting acceptance and diminishing stigma at the grassroots level. Future research ought to investigate the intricate experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals across many geographic and socioeconomic situations, especially in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations. Comparative research of urban and rural LGBTQ+ populations may yield profound insights into the determinants of identity formation and well-being. Furthermore, investigations on the function of digital environments in connecting marginalized LGBTQ+ individuals may guide the development of initiatives for fostering inclusive online communities.

## 2. Perceived Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values on Romantic Love

### a. Emerging Adulthood in Relation to Romantic Relationships

Emerging adulthood, as articulated by Arnett (2000), is a developmental phase marked by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a sense of liminality, and optimism. This stage in the Filipino environment is influenced by conservative societal norms, familial expectations, and the prevailing impact of Catholicism. Participants offered insights into how these traits influenced their love experiences, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Emerging Adulthood in Relation to Romantic Relationships

Emerging Adulthood Characteristics	Positive Effects	Negative Effects
Identity Exploration	Clarity and authenticity in relationships; enhanced ability to form healthy connections.	Confusion and instability during self-discovery can disrupt relationships.
	Openness to trying new experiences fosters personal and relational growth.	Uncertainty about one's identity can lead to misaligned expectations in relationships.
	Determining individual needs and preferences strengthens relational compatibility.	Societal and cultural pressures can exacerbate identity struggles, negatively affecting relational stability.
Instability	Promotes resilience by encouraging individuals to navigate challenges and adapt.	Creates difficulties in forming long-term commitments due to fear of future uncertainties.
	Facilitates self-awareness by learning from relational failures.	Heightens emotional stress from frequent transitions and instability in life and relationships.
Self-Focus	Encourages self-improvement, which indirectly enhances relational dynamics.	May create tensions when one partner's growth overshadows or conflicts with the other's priorities.

		Helps individuals establish boundaries, promoting healthier communication.	Excessive focus on personal goals may be perceived as neglect or indifference by a partner.
Feeling In-between		Provides opportunities for balancing independence and commitment in relationships.	Ambiguity about relationship goals can cause friction, especially when partners have differing timelines or aspirations.
		Encourages flexible relational roles, fostering equality.	Heightens the risk of interpersonal misunderstandings and unmet expectations.
Optimism		Fosters trust, hope, and long-term vision in relationships, despite challenges.	Overly idealistic expectations can lead to disappointment and disillusionment when reality fails to meet anticipated outcomes.
		Supports growth by viewing challenges as opportunities for deeper connection.	Excessive reliance on optimism may prevent individuals from addressing critical relational issues, leading to unresolved tensions.

This concept illustrates the dual function of emerging adulthood as a period of possibility and a phase characterized by relational complexity. The results correspond with Cohler and Hammack's (2007) research on narrative identity formation, emphasizing how LGBTQ+ teenagers approach relational issues variably due to cultural and social influences.

## **b. Perceived Characteristics of Modern Love**

The exploration of modern love reveals a complex interplay of cultural, technological, and personal factors shaping romantic relationships. Participants' impressions of these interactions, especially within the Filipino LGBTQ+ community, illuminate the developing nature of love, intimacy, and commitment in modern society.

### **1) Romantic Tempo**

A significant theme is the feeling of romantic tempo. Numerous participants observed that the rapid development of romantic relationships in contemporary society is predominantly influenced by technology. Social media, dating applications, and instant messaging platforms facilitate rapid connections among individuals, frequently circumventing conventional courtship practices (Shulman and Connolly, 2013). This transition signifies a wider societal trend towards immediacy, when waiting is regarded as superfluous, and swift interactions are appreciated. This rapid transition from early engagement to commitment poses issues, as partnerships sometimes lack depth and individuals may favor quantity over quality.

Ironically, although early connections may form rapidly, attaining long-term commitment now requires a greater investment of time. This is partially due to young individuals' growing focus on self-improvement and job progression, with long-term partnerships frequently regarded as subordinate to personal objectives (Reese, 2023). The excessive availability of internet information regarding potential partners leads to decision paralysis, hindering individuals from forming meaningful connections. This paradox underscores the duality of contemporary romance, wherein swift initial connections coexist with a more intentional strategy for extending relationships.

### **2) Notion of Commitment**

The notion of commitment has also arisen as a multifaceted and dynamic element of contemporary love. Participants emphasized the ubiquity of situationships, which



obscure the distinctions between casual dating and committed partnerships. These ambiguous arrangements are frequently motivated by a fear of missing alternative chances and a wish to preserve personal autonomy (Shulman and Connolly, 2013). Although commitment is an aspirational ideal, its attainment has grown progressively difficult in an age defined by liberty and choice.

In the Philippines, traditional traditions prioritizing familial connections and enduring relationships combine with Western influences that advocate for autonomy and exploration. This cultural dualism hampers commitment, especially for developing adults balancing personal objectives with relationship obligations. Moreover, the digital era has presented obstacles including the allure of infidelity and the demands of crafted online identities, which further jeopardize the stability of committed partnerships (Galloway et al., 2015).

### 3) Sexual Closeness

Sexual closeness in contemporary partnerships signifies substantial changes in standards and expectations. Conversations on sexual behavior have become increasingly candid and accepted, especially among younger demographics. The emergence of hookup culture, enabled by dating applications and social media, has rendered casual sex more attainable; yet, participants voiced apprehensions regarding the erosion of authentic closeness (Reese, 2023). Studies indicate that, despite the growing acceptance of casual sex, there is a decrease in sexual activity among young adults (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber, 2016).

This contradiction indicates a wider cultural transformation, when individuals emphasize emotional bonds and personal aspirations over physical partnerships. In the LGBTQ+ community, sexual intimacy encompasses additional dimensions of significance. Participants underscored the significance of reciprocal pleasure and comprehension, frequently perceiving them as avenues to profound connections. This focus contests conventional narratives of intimacy, presenting a dynamic interpretation of satisfaction in romantic and sexual relationships (DeHaan et al., 2013).

### 4) Technology and Digitalization of Love

Technology significantly influences contemporary love relationships, serving as both an enabler and an impediment. Digital platforms offer underrepresented populations, such as the LGBTQ+ community, access to expansive dating pools and secure environments for connection (DeHaan et al., 2013). Participants observed that internet platforms enable people to investigate relationships without the apprehension of prejudice, fostering opportunities for genuine interactions in an inclusive setting. Nevertheless, the same technology also presents obstacles. The compulsion to construct an ideal online identity frequently results in shallow affirmation, eroding authentic relationships.

Moreover, the incessant comparisons to idealized relationships on social media cultivate uncertainty and discontent. Upward social comparisons, influenced by curated information, might adversely affect individuals' well-being and damage their relationships (Vogel et al., 2014). Participants highlighted the significance of offline interactions, underscoring the depth of nonverbal signals, emotional impact, and physical presence. Although digital platforms enable initial contacts, offline interactions are the cornerstone of enduring and significant partnerships (Vogel et al., 2014). Media and social platforms exacerbate relationship expectations by propagating unrealistic ideals of romantic love. Idealized representations in films, television programs, and social media generate skewed expectations, complicating individuals' ability to manage real-life relationships. For LGBTQ+ individuals, these forces can be both empowering and constraining, as they pursue representation while contending with societal constraints.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, technology possesses the revolutionary capacity to redefine love and promote diversity. Digital platforms empower underrepresented communities to enhance their voices, establish connections, and contest conventional norms, offering a venue to cultivate significant interactions that embody distinct experiences and objectives (Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber, 2016). The complex character of contemporary love highlights the interaction between technology, cultural factors, and individual priorities. For Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults, these dynamics present both opportunities and problems, significantly influencing their love experiences. Comprehending these intricacies is vital for navigating contemporary love with lucidity and fortitude, cultivating connections that are both significant and genuine.

### **3. Challenges of Modern Love**

#### **a. Navigating Prejudice and Discrimination**

Confronting prejudice and discrimination continues to be a considerable difficulty for LGBTQ+ individuals in comprehending and participating in love relationships. These issues are intricately linked to society standards, psychological conflicts, and external obstacles influenced by cultural and traditional beliefs. Study participants highlighted that Filipino culture and customs, profoundly anchored in Catholic values, markedly shape their love experiences and behaviors. In the Philippines, where Catholicism significantly influences societal conventions, conventional perspectives on gender and sexuality frequently endorse a binary framework that favors heterosexual relationships.

Cultural and religious influences sustain preconceptions and stigmas around non-heteronormative identities, complicating the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals to engage in love relationships openly. Public shows of affection among same-sex couples frequently encounter scrutiny, illustrating cultural opposition to LGBTQ+ demonstrations of love. Participants observed that these restricted norms frequently result in feelings of isolation and marginalization, as their romantic expressions diverge from popular expectations. Moreover, the cultural norms and behaviors pertaining to courtship in Filipino society frequently do not represent the experiences and realities of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Conventional courtship, characterized by explicit expressions of gallantry, familial participation, and gender-defined duties, is incongruent with the varied dynamics inherent in LGBTQ+ relationships. This imbalance can engender a sense of discomfort, rendering LGBTQ+ individuals feel marginalized from these cultural practices. Moreover, familial expectations grounded in heteronormativity intensify this conflict. Participants expressed anxiety in sharing their sexual life with relatives, frequently opting to conceal their relationships to evade conflict or disapproval. The absence of acceptance in familial settings highlights the wider cultural hesitance to wholly acknowledge LGBTQ+ relationships. The cumulative impact of societal prejudice, cultural norms, and psychological struggles profoundly influences the experiences and interpretations of love relationships among LGBTQ+ individuals in the Philippines. To address these problems, many individuals utilize internet platforms and LGBTQ+ support networks to express their genuine self and seek acceptance. Notwithstanding the obstacles, the perseverance and adaptability exhibited by LGBTQ+ individuals in establishing love and connections underscore their fortitude in confronting adversity. Confronting these difficulties necessitates comprehensive societal initiatives to eradicate biases and enhance inclusion, cultivating an atmosphere in which all persons can pursue romantic relationships devoid of discrimination and judgment.

#### **b. Societal Norms and Internalized Struggles**

A principal problem encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals is the societal pressure to adhere to heteronormative relationship standards. In a mainly heteronormative society such as the Philippines, where traditional gender roles and relationship dynamics are

firmly established, LGBTQ+ individuals frequently feel pressured to conform their relationships to these norms in order to attain societal acceptance. This pressure may emerge in multiple forms, such as the compulsion to emulate heterosexual relationship conventions or to minimize facets of their identity that diverge from society standards. The incessant need to validate the legitimacy of their relationships frequently induces considerable stress and anxiety, as individuals grapple with the conflict between authenticity and conformity.

This cultural condemnation transcends external contacts, often resulting in psychological conflicts such as internalized homophobia or transphobia. Internalized biases, driven by adverse cultural signals, can undermine self-esteem and reduce confidence in initiating or maintaining romantic relationships. LGBTQ+ individuals may doubt the validity of their emotions or relationships, inadvertently internalizing the biases imposed upon them. These internal conflicts impede the formation of healthy, rewarding relationships and exacerbate broader mental health issues, such as sadness and anxiety. The widespread societal disapproval renders LGBTQ+ individuals acutely aware of their environments, as they anticipate and prepare for possible adverse interactions. Study participants often noted the continual necessity to evaluate the safety of spaces prior to expressing affection or discussing their romantic lives.

This heightened vigilance introduces an extra dimension of emotional labor, as they maneuver through contexts where their identities and relationships may face rejection. The apprehension of public scrutiny or discrimination highlights how societal pressure and disapproval permeate daily existence, exacerbating feelings of exclusion and alienation. The challenges underscore the extensive influence of heteronormative societal frameworks on LGBTQ+ individuals, demonstrating how entrenched biases can impact both public perception and private experiences. Tackling these issues necessitates a cultural transformation towards enhanced acceptance and inclusivity, enabling LGBTQ+ individuals to engage in relationships devoid of judgment, fear, and conformity pressures. Acknowledging and affirming diverse expressions of love is essential for cultivating a more equitable and supportive society.

### **c. Discrimination and Stigmatization**

Discrimination continues to be a substantial obstacle for LGBTQ+ individuals in their quest for meaningful love relationships, frequently appearing in forms that range from subtle prejudices to explicit animosity. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are ingrained in society structures, sustaining a culture that marginalizes non-heteronormative relationships. A notably derogatory kind of prejudice experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals is the sexualization of their relationships. This transpires when their intimate relationships are diminished to sexual stereotypes or fetishized, neglecting the emotional profundity, reciprocal respect, and commitment that characterize their connections.

Participants often observed that this sexualization is both degrading and undermines the credibility of their relationships in societal perception. For example, same-sex couples may encounter baseless notions that their relationships are solely physical or devoid of the emotional and familial ambitions commonly linked to heterosexual unions. Such attitudes compromise the intricacy and legitimacy of their partnerships, frequently resulting in LGBTQ+ individuals feeling disregarded and dehumanized. This type of discrimination signifies a wider social inability to acknowledge and honor the varied manifestations of love and intimacy in LGBTQ+ partnerships.

Moreover, discrimination may manifest in more explicit forms, including verbal abuse, exclusion, or even violence. Public shows of affection among LGBTQ+ couples

frequently encounter scrutiny or hostility, fostering a climate where open expressions of love pose a danger. This animosity may be especially evident in communities or cultural situations where traditional and religious values prevail, as observed in the Philippines. Participants observed that these experiences of discrimination exacerbate feelings of invisibility and isolation, prompting individuals to obscure their relationships and identities to evade confrontation or injury.

The intersection of subtle biases and overt hostility also affects how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate their relationships within familial and social circles. Families often perpetuate discriminatory attitudes by rejecting LGBTQ+ relationships or imposing heteronormative expectations, making it difficult for individuals to receive emotional support or acceptance. This lack of support exacerbates the challenges faced in building and sustaining romantic relationships, as individuals must contend with external disapproval alongside the usual complexities of love and intimacy.

The aggregate impact of discrimination manifested through sexualization, animosity, or exclusion imposes considerable emotional and psychological burdens on LGBTQ+ individuals. It diminishes self-esteem, cultivates anxiety toward both public and private displays of affection, and restricts the potential to cultivate good, supportive connections. To overcome these obstacles, social education and campaigning are essential to confront prejudices, deconstruct discriminatory conventions, and cultivate an atmosphere of inclusion and respect. Acknowledging the humanity and diversity of LGBTQ+ relationships is crucial for fostering a community that celebrates and values love in all its manifestations.

#### **d. Lack of Representation and Education**

The insufficient media representation and inclusive education concerning LGBTQ+ relationships constitute a substantial obstacle for LGBTQ+ individuals in effectively navigating romantic relationships. Media representation is pivotal in normalizing LGBTQ+ relationships, confronting societal stigma, and promoting acceptance. Positive and varied depictions offer role models and mirror the realities of LGBTQ+ individuals, enhancing visibility and comprehension. Nonetheless, participants noted that despite the significant increase in Boys' Love (BL) series and Girls' Love (GL) narratives in media, particularly in the Philippines, many of these representations remain problematic.

Despite their growing popularity, numerous BL and GL narratives continue to perpetuate stereotypes, encourage stigma, or depict idealized portrayals of homosexual relationships that do not reflect their nuances. These media frequently portray relationships through excessively romanticized or superficial perspectives, potentially distorting perceptions and establishing unreasonable expectations for LGBTQ+ individuals. Participants underscored that such representations often prioritize the novelty or sensationalism of LGBTQ+ relationships instead of examining their depth, challenges, and complexities. This distortion is seen in research indicating that LGBTQ+ individuals frequently regard media portrayals as the least genuine representation of their lived experiences (Boosting LGBTQ Representation With More Diverse Life Stories, 2022). The absence of precise and relatable representations can render LGBTQ+ individuals feeling unrepresented and misapprehended, thereby exacerbating the marginalization of their love experiences. In addition to media representation, participants underscored the importance of inclusive education in empowering LGBTQ+ individuals to form healthy relationships. A more comprehensive and inclusive approach to sex education, starting from high school, was identified as a key factor in addressing the knowledge gaps faced by young LGBTQ+ individuals. Current sex education curricula often exclude LGBTQ+ perspectives, focusing primarily on heterosexual relationships and failing to address the

unique challenges and dynamics of LGBTQ+ partnerships. Participants suggested that integrating discussions about diverse family dynamics, gender identity, and sexual orientation into educational programs could help destigmatize LGBTQ+ relationships and equip young individuals with the tools to navigate their romantic and personal lives confidently.

Inclusive family dynamics also play a crucial role in fostering understanding and support for LGBTQ+ individuals. Participants emphasized the need for media and education to depict families that accept and support their LGBTQ+ children, challenging traditional notions of family structure. These portrayals can help normalize LGBTQ+ relationships within familial and societal contexts, reducing the pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations. Moreover, by promoting understanding and acceptance from an early age, such initiatives can create a more supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals to explore and establish healthy romantic relationships.

#### **e. Building Safe and Supportive Environments**

Establishing secure and nurturing environments is crucial for the welfare of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially for romantic relationships. Supportive surroundings establish the basis for emotional stability, acceptance, and the freedom to express one's identity. Transitioning to such situations promotes healthy development and alleviates the detrimental impacts of marginalization and minority stress often encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in hostile social contexts (Puckett et al., 2016). The establishment of these environments is essential for fostering healthy relationship dynamics and allowing LGBTQ+ individuals to pursue their romantic lives free from fear or shame.

A multitude of LGBTQ+ individuals discover comfort and affirmation within groups that acknowledge and honor their identities. These LGBTQ+ affirming spaces function as sanctuaries where individuals can articulate their sexual orientation and relationship choices free from judgment or persecution. Participants in this study regularly highlighted the transforming influence of belonging to inclusive communities. They indicated that these settings facilitate open dialogues regarding their relationships, create possibilities for experience sharing, and furnish validation and support from peers encountering analogous issues.

For many, these spaces are regarded as game-changers, as they mitigate feelings of loneliness and foster a sense of belonging. Queer-friendly communities significantly alleviate the stress of adhering to heteronormative expectations and the anxiety of public scrutiny. Participants observed that in these circumstances, they felt liberated to establish connections according to their own preferences, unencumbered by public judgment. These spaces provide services and networks that enhance mental health and well-being, assisting individuals in managing the complexities of love relationships more effectively.

LGBTQ+ support groups and advocacy organizations frequently offer counseling, training, and social activities that enhance relational skills and foster resilience against external discrimination. In addition to personal advantages, friendly surroundings facilitate the wider normalization of LGBTQ+ partnerships within society. By promoting visibility and acceptance in these environments, communities confront systemic biases and advocate for a cultural transition towards inclusivity. Participants noted that their favorable experiences in queer-friendly environments frequently motivated them to promote such spaces in many contexts, including workplaces, educational institutions, and public forums, thus amplifying the influence of these supportive networks.

#### **f. Overcoming Challenges**

Overcoming challenges in romantic relationships is a critical aspect of the lived experiences of Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults. Participants in the study shared strategies and experiences that enabled them to navigate the complexities of being in a



relationship while managing societal pressures, discrimination, and internal struggles. One of the most significant and courageous steps taken by participants was the decision to come out to their families. Despite the fear of potential backlash or rejection, coming out was often motivated by the desire for authenticity and the aspiration to include their partners in family activities. This decision reflects a broader effort to foster openness and acceptance within their immediate social circles.

Research supports this approach, indicating that increased social support and openness are linked to reduced psychological distress among LGBTQ+ individuals (Puckett et al., 2016). Participants expressed hope that by coming out, they could create a more inclusive environment where their relationships would be acknowledged and celebrated. Another key strategy highlighted by participants was the active search for supportive communities and like-minded individuals. Queer-friendly networks and safe spaces provided participants with the opportunity to share their experiences, receive guidance, and feel validated in their identities. These communities offered a refuge from societal stigma, promoting a sense of belonging and emotional security.

By transitioning to more supportive environments, participants experienced positive personal growth and alleviation of minority stress, as such environments are known to mitigate the adverse effects of marginalization (Puckett et al., 2016). These support systems often served as a foundation for building resilience and fostering healthier romantic relationships. Self-acceptance and identity exploration also emerged as pivotal factors in overcoming challenges. Many participants described their romantic relationships as integral to their journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Embracing their sexual and gender identities allowed them to view their relationships as affirmations of who they are, rather than sources of shame or secrecy. This process of self-acceptance often strengthened their ability to confront societal stigma and advocate for themselves and their relationships.

The ability to frame their romantic experiences as part of a broader narrative of personal development empowered participants to navigate challenges with greater confidence and resilience. Notwithstanding the stigma and minority stress that may adversely affect intimacy, research indicates that same-sex couples frequently maintain successful and gratifying intimate relationships (Frost, 2013). Participants corroborated this finding, highlighting that their proactive measures such as disclosing their sexual orientation, pursuing supportive communities, embracing their identities, and promoting personal development not only enriched their romantic relationships but also bolstered their overall well-being. These strategies functioned as vital instruments for navigating societal challenges and fostering a sense of empowerment in their lives.

#### **4. Conceptualizations of Romantic Love**

The participants' conceptions of romantic love demonstrate a sophisticated comprehension influenced by their identities as Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults. Various experiences and reflections revealed numerous key themes, including the significance of emotional connection, reciprocal growth, and perseverance amid societal obstacles. The element of support and companionship emerges as a fundamental conception of romantic love.

##### **a. Reciprocal Support and Companionship**

Participants often considered romantic love as a partnership defined by reciprocal support and companionship. This viewpoint emphasizes the emotional and practical aspects of a partnership, wherein love surpasses simple passionate fervor to encompass a profound dedication to each other's development and welfare. For these individuals, romantic love involves supporting one another not only in joyous times but also throughout challenges, demonstrating a dedication to collective resilience. This

perspective on love underscores the need of cultivating a connection that promotes both individual and collective development, asserting that a rewarding relationship necessitates the active participation of both parties in each other's personal improvement.

The obstacles encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in a mostly heteronormative culture underscore the significance of support and companionship in love relationships. Participants observed that their distinct identities frequently result in circumstances where external validation and societal acceptance are constrained. In these settings, the romantic relationship serves as a crucial source of validation, comprehension, and unity. Nonbinary and other LGBTQ+ individuals engaged in atypical partnerships frequently depend on their partners for emotional fortitude and support while facing prejudice, stigma, and misunderstanding. Romantic love, in this context, transforms into not merely a personal bond but a sanctuary a realm where their identities are accepted and their challenges are collectively experienced. Participants also stressed that love is not simply about passion or romance but also about the reliability and presence of a mate who remains steadfast through life's complications. This conception of love emphasizes the need for stability and trust in a world that often marginalizes non-heteronormative partnerships. For many, the idea of romantic love involves building a partnership that gives emotional security and develops an atmosphere where both individuals may thrive, especially in the face of external adversities.

#### **b. Respect and Non-traditional Dynamics**

Respect emerged as a cornerstone of romantic relationships for many participants, who emphasized its significance in fostering equality, understanding, and harmony. Participants highlighted that in their experiences, mutual respect is a fundamental element that transcends circumstances, helping to maintain a healthy and balanced connection between partners. This stands in contrast to their observations of heterosexual relationships, where traditional gender roles often overshadow mutual respect. In LGBTQ+ relationships, respect is viewed as a core value that ensures both partners are treated as equals, reinforcing a partnership built on mutual acknowledgment and appreciation.

The participants' emphasis on respect reflects a broader commitment to equality in love, regardless of conventional or non-conventional family structures. They pointed out that LGBTQ+ relationships often reject traditional norms and roles, instead prioritizing mutual affection, shared responsibilities, and equal footing between partners. This rejection of rigid roles allows for greater flexibility and creativity in defining relationship dynamics, enabling individuals to tailor their partnerships to their unique needs and values. In this context, respect is not only a principle but a practice that sustains the relational health and emotional well-being of both individuals. Furthermore, participants noted that LGBTQ+ relationships often operate outside the constraints of traditional family structures, celebrating diversity and challenging societal expectations.

Unlike heterosexual relationships, where traditional gender roles often dictate expectations for instrumental support and relational duties, gay and lesbian partnerships tend to exhibit less adherence to these conventions (Hank & Wetzel, 2018). This deviation from traditional dynamics reduces the pressure to conform to predefined roles and allows LGBTQ+ individuals to create partnerships that reflect their authentic selves. As participants highlighted, these relationships thrive on the values of equality and mutual respect, which promote an inclusive and empowering understanding of love.

#### **c. Transcending Biological Definitions**

Study participants characterized passionate love as an abstract and profound phenomenon that transcends biological constraints and societal conventions. This view holds special significance in the context of LGBTQ+ relationships, since conventional

expectations around gender roles, procreation, and physical attractiveness are frequently contested. Participant TP Gonzalez articulated a persuasive viewpoint on this concept, characterizing passionate love as a unique connection that transcends primitive instincts, physical allure, and traditional cultural boundaries. Gonzalez asserted that love involves a deep emotional bond with another person one that surpasses the mundane and favors emotional and spiritual connections over physical aspects. This conceptualization of love as a connection beyond biological imperatives resonates strongly with the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, as it challenges heteronormative assumptions that often link love and relationships to reproduction and gender binaries. For LGBTQ+ couples, love is not about fulfilling societal expectations of childbearing or partnering with the opposite gender; instead, it centers on the intense, deeply personal connection between two individuals. This idea aligns with research suggesting that individuals who are sexually fluid are more likely to embrace beliefs that romantic love is based on the person rather than their gender, compared to those who adhere to more traditional definitions of sexuality (Katz-Wise and Hyde, 2014). This shift in perspective underscores the unique ways LGBTQ+ individuals conceptualize love, moving beyond biological and societal constraints to prioritize authenticity and emotional depth.

Gonzalez's perspective emphasizes the spiritual and emotional aspects of love, depicting it as an exceptional connection that links two individuals deeply. By dismissing conventional beliefs that associate love with pragmatism, physicality, or biological drives, he reconceptualizes romantic love as a profoundly significant and transformational experience. This view honors the diversity of love and contests the idea that romantic partnerships must adhere to cultural norms or biological dictates. This comprehension of love empowers numerous players, affirming their relationships and providing a framework for maneuvering through an environment that frequently marginalizes non-heteronormative connections.

#### **d. Normalizing Romance Across the Spectrum**

Participants recounted intimate experiences on the difficulties encountered as LGBTQ+ individuals, especially the imperative to hide their romantic relationships from family and society. These experiences profoundly influenced their views on love and relationships, cultivating a yearning for honesty, acceptance, and acknowledgment. Requesting familial support for a romantic connection is identified as a crucial milestone, frequently indicating a heightened commitment to the partnership (Macapagal et al., 2015). This want for familial acceptance highlights the emotional challenges faced by numerous LGBTQ+ individuals when their relationships are met with rejection or misunderstanding. Participants observed that parental rejection, especially regarding sexual orientation, can exacerbate challenges related to identity and self-acceptance, since research indicates that such rejection heightens the risk of emotional and psychological suffering (Bregman et al., 2013).

Alongside familial issues, participants articulated a persistent theme of pursuing public approval for their partnerships. Societal biases, preconceptions, and insufficient visibility of LGBTQ+ relationships frequently impose external constraints that impact the emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. Some interviewees noted that same-sex relationships are frequently misconstrued, misrepresented, or simplified into stereotypes, in contrast to the wider acceptance of heterosexual unions. This deficiency in comprehension perpetuates adverse societal narratives and exacerbates the marginalization of LGBTQ+ partnerships.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, participants underscored that love is universal and transcends sexual orientation. They contended that the emotional connections and experiences inherent in LGBTQ+ partnerships are substantially analogous to those in

straight relationships. They argued that love is a universal human experience characterized by compassion, support, and emotional intimacy, irrespective of the gender or sexual orientation of the individuals involved. By promoting this universal perspective, participants seek to normalize LGBTQ+ relationships and confront the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with them. This approach fosters a more comprehensive comprehension of romantic relationships, highlighting the common experiences of love and care that connect all humans. These fundamental themes underscore the complex and varied methods by which people perceive love and manage their romantic relationships. Their viewpoints not only contest cultural prejudices but also promote enhanced inclusivity and acceptance. By emphasizing the parallels between LGBTQ+ and straight relationships, participants offer significant insights that promote a more sophisticated and empathetic understanding of love. These contributions highlight the necessity of acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of human relationships while fostering a more equal and supportive atmosphere for all romantic unions.

Table 3. Conceptualization, Culminating the Lessons of Romantic Experiences

Themes	Subthemes
Challenges of Modern Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigating Prejudice and Discrimination</li> <li>• Societal Norms and Internalized Struggles</li> <li>• Discrimination and Stigmatization</li> <li>• Lack of Representation and Education</li> <li>• Building Safe and Supportive Environments</li> <li>• Overcoming Challenges</li> </ul>
Romantic Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocal Support and Companionship</li> <li>• Respect and Non-traditional Dynamics</li> <li>• Transcending Biological Definitions</li> <li>• Normalizing Romance Across the Spectrum</li> </ul>

Participants defined romantic love as a partnership rooted in mutual support and companionship, transcending traditional gender roles. Respect emerged as a key value, challenging conventional dynamics often seen in heterosexual relationships. Additionally, the concept of love as a profound emotional connection, rather than a biological or societal construct, underscores the unique perspectives of LGBTQ+ emerging adults. Modern love, especially within the LGBTQ+ community, encompasses a unique set of challenges and transformative experiences. Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals, in particular, navigate a complex landscape shaped by deeply rooted societal norms, discrimination, and internal conflicts. These challenges are often magnified by the influence of entrenched Catholic beliefs and traditional Filipino values, which tend to promote heteronormativity and binary gender roles.

In this cultural context, LGBTQ+ individuals often face significant barriers in expressing and validating their romantic relationships. Despite these societal hurdles, Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals demonstrate resilience and creativity in redefining and personalizing their understanding of romantic love. Participants in the study offered diverse perspectives that highlight their capacity to navigate these complexities while maintaining meaningful relationships. Many participants emphasized the importance of support and companionship, respect and equality, and transcending traditional definitions of love. These themes reflect their desire to move beyond societal constraints and stereotypes, creating partnerships that are rooted in authenticity, mutual growth, and emotional depth.

One of the central insights from the participants' narratives is how their experiences challenge prevailing stereotypes about LGBTQ+ relationships. They reject the idea that love should be confined to traditional roles or biological imperatives, instead advocating for a more inclusive understanding of romantic relationships. For instance, participants underscored that love within the LGBTQ+ community is often characterized by a profound connection that prioritizes emotional and spiritual intimacy over societal expectations such as childbearing or adherence to gendered norms. This redefinition of love highlights the diversity and depth of LGBTQ+ relationships while challenging traditional conceptions of what constitutes a valid partnership.

Another recurring theme is the desire for acceptance and normalization of LGBTQ+ relationships within familial and societal contexts. Participants expressed a longing for transparency and support from their families, acknowledging that coming out and seeking family approval are often significant milestones that reflect a deep commitment to their partners. Moreover, participants noted the importance of creating supportive environments and finding communities that embrace their identities, which are crucial for fostering emotional well-being and resilience. Such environments provide LGBTQ+ individuals with spaces to share experiences, receive validation, and develop a sense of belonging, thereby mitigating the effects of societal discrimination and minority stress.

These narratives offer valuable insights into how contemporary attitudes influence perceptions and conceptualizations of romantic relationships among Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals. By confronting stereotypes, navigating societal pressures, and embracing a more inclusive and authentic expression of love, they redefine the boundaries of modern romance. Their experiences not only illuminate the distinctive dynamics of LGBTQ+ relationships but also underscore the universal nature of love as a shared human experience that transcends cultural and societal barriers.

## **5. Cultural Implications and Broader Significance**

### **a. Filipino Cultural Values and LGBTQ+ Relationships**

Filipino cultural values, including robust familial connections and Catholicism, both constrain and bolster LGBTQ+ partnerships. Familial acceptance can affirm identities; nonetheless, conventional perspectives frequently require concealment, affecting emotional connection. The experiences of participants underscore their techniques for navigating these limits, including the pursuit of supportive communities and the redefinition of conventional standards. The duality of cultural influence aligns with the findings of Cruz and Peralta (2020) about Filipino familial expectations and LGBTQ+ identity.

Familial Filipino values frequently urge LGBTQ+ individuals to prioritize familial unity over the revelation of personal identity, resulting in conflicts between individual authenticity and communal expectations. David et al., (2017) demonstrate that filial piety, ingrained in Filipino culture, affects LGBTQ+ individuals' choices regarding the concealment or revelation of their identities, especially in multigenerational households. Furthermore, the extensive presence of Catholicism exacerbates these conflicts, as LGBTQ+ individuals frequently contend with discordant religious principles and their own aspirations for acceptance and love.

### **b. Intersectionality in LGBTQ+ Experiences**

Socioeconomic background, rural vs urban upbringing, and religion affiliation overlap with LGBTQ+ identities, influencing love experiences. Urban individuals indicated enhanced access to supportive communities, whereas rural participants saw more stigma. Urban LGBTQ+ individuals frequently get advantages from exposure to



progressive beliefs and access to queer-friendly environments, as indicated by research such as that of (Manalastas and Torre, 2016). In contrast, rural LGBTQ+ folks face restricted resources, intensifying their isolation and marginalization. Moreover, rural LGBTQ+ individuals frequently depend on online channels for connection and assistance, reflecting observations made by Gray (2009) who noted analogous developments in other conservative rural contexts globally.

### **c. Implications for Policy and Practice**

Education and representation are essential in cultivating an inclusive community that advocates for Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals. Integrating LGBTQ+ perspectives into sex education curricula would furnish young individuals with a thorough comprehension of varied partnerships, aiding in the normalization of LGBTQ+ identities and diminishing societal stigma. Moreover, genuine representation in Filipino media can contest prejudices and foster acceptance, facilitating healthier love connections among LGBTQ+ youngsters. Mental health treatments are essential in tackling the specific issues encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals.

Culturally attuned counseling programs that tackle minority stress and the intricacies of identity exploration are crucial. These services must provide support for relationship development, allowing LGBTQ+ individuals to manage societal pressures while preserving mental well-being. Community support is an essential element in promoting acceptance and inclusion. Creating secure environments and advocacy initiatives, especially in remote regions, can enable LGBTQ+ individuals to interact, exchange stories, and seek comfort. These communities serve as a safeguard against discrimination and provide a basis for personal development and relationship cultivation.

Advocacy for policy is essential in safeguarding LGBTQ+ rights and guaranteeing equality. Prioritization of anti-discrimination legislation and inclusive policies is essential to protect the welfare of LGBTQ+ individuals. These approaches can mitigate structural obstacles, cultivating an environment in which LGBTQ+ relationships are esteemed and acknowledged. Considering the substantial impact of Catholicism in the Philippines, integrating pastoral initiatives like the Courage Apostolate can facilitate a connection between faith and the LGBTQ+ population. The Courage Apostolate provides spiritual assistance to LGBTQ+ individuals, focusing on chastity, personal development, and reconciliation with faith. Although its beliefs may correspond with Catholic dogma, it also offers a compassionate framework for those traversing the crossroads of faith and sexuality. This strategy could be enhanced by inclusive parish-based programs that promote conversation and understanding, with the objective of diminishing stigma while honoring Catholic principles. Programs based in Catholic pastoral care must emphasize the establishment of secure, nonjudgmental environments for LGBTQ+ individuals to share their experiences, promoting spiritual and emotional well-being. Policymakers and community leaders can tackle the complex difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Philippines by combining faith-based and secular strategies, given that religion is a fundamental aspect of society.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the prevailing narratives of contemporary romance among Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults, highlighting their lived experiences, the impact of modern influences, and the cultural and societal ramifications of these narratives. The findings demonstrate that communication techniques in LGBTQ+ partnerships promote closeness, mutual respect, and resilience against societal and cultural difficulties. Romantic encounters were identified as essential for facilitating identity development and affirmation, emphasizing the relationship between love and self-discovery. Participants

redefined love as a partnership based on mutual support, equality, and emotional depth, thereby challenging heteronormative standards and promoting more inclusive interpretations of partnerships.

The study provides significant insights into LGBTQ+ love relationships, however it has limits. The limited sample size of eight participants constrains the generalizability of the findings, and the study's concentration on a single university in the Philippines further restricts the scope, yielding insights predominantly representative of urban, educated LGBTQ+ emerging adults. The research utilized qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, which, although providing comprehensive insights, may not entirely represent the diverse experiences within the wider LGBTQ+ population, especially in rural regions or among individuals from different socioeconomic strata.

Subsequent study ought to rectify these limitations by increasing the sample size and including participants from varied geographic regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural situations. Comparative analyses of urban and rural LGBTQ+ populations may provide profound insights into the disparate societal pressures and support systems accessible to individuals in diverse environments. Furthermore, analyzing the intersectionality of characteristics including gender identity, socioeconomic class, religion, and geographic location may yield a more nuanced comprehension of how these elements influence LGBTQ+ love encounters.

A promising area for future research is the influence of technology on contemporary romantic relationships. Participants emphasized the advantages and drawbacks of digital platforms, noting its capacity to facilitate connections and provide safe spaces for self-expression, but also acknowledging their tendency to reinforce unrealistic relationship expectations and superficial interactions. In-depth investigation of these processes, especially the enduring impacts of digital technology on LGBTQ+ relationships and identity development, may provide valuable insights into contemporary love. Longitudinal study would be crucial in documenting the dynamic progression of romantic relationships among LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly as they navigate the transition from emerging adulthood to subsequent life phases.

These studies could examine the evolution of identity and relationships over time, as well as how individuals manage the complexity of balancing romantic partnerships with other life commitments, including professional advancement and familial responsibilities. There is a necessity for enhanced examination of LGBTQ+ experiences within culturally particular contexts, such as the Philippines. Future research may examine the impact of religious influences, namely Catholicism, on LGBTQ+ love relationships and identity development. Furthermore, the influence of media representation both beneficial and detrimental on LGBTQ+ individuals' perspectives of love and relationships necessitates additional investigation. This is especially crucial for comprehending how media can be utilized to foster acceptance and inclusivity.

This study highlights the resilience and agency of Filipino LGBTQ+ emerging adults as they navigate the complexity of love, identity, and societal expectations within a primarily heteronormative culture. Their anecdotes underscore the significance of mutual respect, emotional profundity, and authenticity in relationships, while promoting greater acceptance and comprehension of LGBTQ+ couples. The findings underscore the universal essence of love as a collective human experience and the imperative to cultivate inclusive and supportive environments that enable LGBTQ+ individuals to establish significant bonds. Confronting the issues encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals necessitates ongoing endeavors in research, education, policy formulation, and community development to establish a more inclusive and equitable society that honors diversity in all its manifestations.

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