



FIGHTING FOR THEIR PLACE IN BRAVE SPACES: UNCOVERING THE TRAVAILS OF THE CLOSETED POLICE OFFICERS

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Abstract:

In law enforcement and correctional agencies, sexual orientation and gender identity-based harassment and employment discrimination remained persistent until today. Moreover, there is stereotyping involved in the issue of being closeted in the law enforcement agency. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, and struggles faced by closeted officers in law enforcement organizations. The study's participants are closeted police officers, who were chosen through snowball sampling, while data were collected via interview guide questionnaires. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological research approach, focusing on what people experienced concerning certain significant life events and how they perceive those occurring. Thematic analysis was employed as the chosen qualitative data analysis approach. The study revealed that closeted gay police officers needed to adjust and adapt themselves to the workplace dynamics to fit in while balancing their values to stay true to themselves. The participants also experienced discrimination, stereotypes, and bullying. The significance of this study is to understand better the experiences, challenges, and struggles of closeted police officers; specifically, to explore their lived experiences in law enforcement organizations, document the difficulties the respondents have faced and the coping techniques they used to overcome the significant challenges in their professions and document how the closeted police officers project themselves during police operations.

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1. Introduction

Research studies highlight pervasive discrimination against individuals based on their gender identity and sexual orientation, notably in school, public services, and employment (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Baumle *et al.*, (2019) emphasize that studies conducted across a range of social science fields have revealed that LGBTI individuals in the US experience discrimination at work. Moreover, Mallory and Sears (2020) state that there is an absence of legislation preventing discrimination against individuals identifying as LGBT in specific states. As a result, this situation prompted the implementation of executive orders as a protective measure. The lack of specific laws prohibiting bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity also contributes to the challenges faced by the LGBT community (Wikoff & Wood, 2022). They fear the retaliation and existing stigma that prevents closeted police officers from reporting workplace discrimination (Yu, 2023).

Moreover, there is stereotyping involved in the issue of being closeted in the law enforcement agency. An overly generalized, commonly held view, thought, picture, or concept about a person, situation, or object is referred to as a stereotype (Prince & Serena, 2020). Stereotypes are frequently used as an underlying rationale for prejudice, which would be the associated, usually unfavorable, sentiment against members of a particular demographic context (Marc & Ko, 2019). Stereotypes often develop into prejudice, leading to discrimination, or harassment.

A survey revealed that half of LGBTQ adults had experienced worksite discrimination or harassment due to their sexuality, gender expression, or intersex status in the past year, along with being fired, being deprived of a promotion, having their work schedules cut, or facing severe physical, verbal, or sexual assault (Medina & Mahowald, 2023). Couto (2018) found that while some LGBTQ+ police officers reported blatant harassment and discrimination throughout their employment, the majority reported a higher incidence of "microaggressions" in their worksite.

People's perceptions of closeted men continue to be heavily influenced by the "gender inversion" stereotype, which holds that they are similar to the other gender (Reyna, Wetherell, Yantis, & Brandt, 2014). This stereotyping will influence the employment of closeted men entering a profession in which society presumes a standard for masculinity. Mainly, concerning nontraditional police officers, the effect on homosexual men's chances of employment is not entirely understood. It implies that an effeminate man who considers policing a real vocation faces several difficulties (Aguilar, 2019). Officers who concealed their sexual orientation may have experienced limitations in their actions and expressed a pessimistic outlook. In the study conducted by Aguilar & Rungduin (2022), closeted individuals who disclose their identities have a connection

to their past negative or positive experiences, confidentiality struggles, and their motivations for public acknowledgment.

Stereotyping is apparent in universities, especially in college. Closeted students who aim to be part of the law enforcement organization are discriminated against because the cultural standard requires masculinity compared to lesbians. Lesbian police were discovered to see fewer discriminatory acts and experience lower degrees of discrimination than their male counterparts (Roddrick, 2015). This perception can be observed in some universities where they see closeted students taking the criminology course as "not usual" compared to the latter.

This study is associated with the social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), a societal psychological theory that deals with the distinctions and similarities in social conduct between men and women. Its core element is that similarities and differences come mainly from the allocation between men and women among social positions within their respective societies. Men's and women's behaviors typically promote and preserve the division of work due to socialization and the creation of gender roles. The social role theory posits that societal expectations and gender roles shape stereotypes. In the study, societal expectations related to masculinity in law enforcement contribute to stereotypes affecting closeted police officers, aligning with the theory's focus on how social roles influence perceptions and behaviors. Members of specific social categories, such as those based on sex, nationality, and age, hold certain positions considerably more frequently than individuals of many other social identities. As a result, the characteristics that distinguish these roles come to be attributed to the classification, creating stereotypes (Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

While previous studies have acknowledged the pervasive discrimination that closeted police officers face, there is still an important information gap about the variety of coping strategies that closeted police officers use. Literatures has yet to comprehensively explore the diverse strategies closeted officers utilize to navigate interpersonal dynamics within the law enforcement sector and their conduct during police operations. This gap is critical for developing targeted interventions and support systems to enhance the well-being and effectiveness of closeted police officers. Additionally, there is a need for a more in-depth exploration of the intersectionality between gender and sexual orientation, particularly in influencing career choices. Furthermore, there is a lack of data on the long-term career paths of police officers who are closeted, which calls for a longitudinal investigation to fully understand the enduring impacts of discrimination. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of closeted individuals in law enforcement and facilitate the development of inclusive policies and interventions.

The primary objectives of this study revolve around gaining a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, and struggles faced by closeted police officers. The research aims to shed light on the unique circumstances these officers encounter in their professional lives and their lived experiences as closeted police officers within law enforcement organizations. Furthermore, the researchers aimed to document

the difficulties these individuals have encountered and explore the coping mechanisms they employed to overcome significant challenges in their professions. Additionally, the study endeavors to capture how closeted police officers present themselves during police operations.

The study has two limitations about the sample. First, the study's sample size was limited to 3 participants. A more extensive participant pool might have resulted in different or additional themes. Second, the study focused exclusively on participants who are closeted police officers. The study revolves around providing a thorough exploration of the experiences, challenges, and struggles confronted by closeted police officers within law enforcement organizations. In addition, the study is limited to closeted police officers and is to be conducted exclusively within a variety of places in Davao City.

This study is significant, particularly in documenting the struggles, sufferings, exclusions, and afflictions deep-felt by the respondents. The study will help the authorities, administrations, and agencies to develop appropriate measures and policies to address the problems. Also, the study will establish a significant increase in perspective toward the social roles of different genders. This study will serve as a foundation for further studies regarding stereotypes based on gender and societal roles. More so, this study will also contribute to widening inclusivity, awareness, and acceptance of the third genders in widely known masculine-related careers. Lastly, the researchers manifest that through this study, the mass impartiality towards the members of LGBTQ+, regardless of their chosen careers, specifically closeted officers who are part of the law enforcement organization.

2. Methods

2.1 Study Participants

The participants of the researchers are closeted policemen. The researchers utilize snowball sampling as a method of recruiting in which participants are requested to help researchers find other suitable subjects (Oregon State University, 2017). The researchers identified closeted police officers and chose 3 participants to understand better and deeper their lived experiences. According to the study of Subedi (2021), researchers have the independence to decide on the number of participants, which can range from a single individual to up to twenty, depending on the desired depth of information and the nature of the inquiry.

For a phenomenological study, Creswell (2013) says that an appropriate sample size may range from 3 to 25 individuals, depending on the topic you are examining and the diversity you are trying to represent. Thus, it was decided that 3 samples would be adequate for the qualitative analysis of this study. It requires loads of time and effort since the researchers need to establish trust, rapport, and good relationships with the participants. The study was conducted at a variety of places around Davao City.

2.2 Materials and Instruments

The research tools that the researchers use to gather the data are the interview guide questionnaires. The researchers formulated interview guide questions for the participants and were made based on the objectives related to the research study presented. They underwent validation by the panel of experts in which they requested assistance for the needed improvements and additional information.

2.3 Design and Procedure

In this study, researchers employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach, focusing on what people experienced concerning certain significant life events and how they perceive those occurring (Delve & Limpacher, 2022). Phenomenological studies typically entail in-depth interviews involving small samples of participants, allowing researchers to generalize what it means to encounter a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who already have lived such an event by investigating the perspectives of numerous participants (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

This study follows the necessary steps involved in conducting the study. After checking the interview guide questionnaire, the first step was to prepare a letter to the research participant, asking permission to conduct the study and their voluntary participation. By utilizing the snowball sampling technique, the researchers will have one participant who will refer another potential participant until the desired number of participants is achieved. Snowball sampling is applied in situations involving isolated or hidden communities, where locating members is difficult without the support of a familiar person. Through establishing trust with this known individual, they gradually refer additional members within their network (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). During the conduct of the interview, the researchers provided the respondents with the interview guide questionnaires and interviewed them through chat.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in strict adherence to ethical standards, encompassing various considerations to ensure the protection and well-being of participants. The principle of voluntary participation was upheld, providing potential participants with an orientation about the study's nature and allowing them the freedom to decide whether to participate. Rigorous measures were implemented to guarantee privacy and confidentiality, safeguarding participants' personal and professional information. The informed consent process was meticulously carried out, ensuring clarity in the researcher questionnaire and distribution only with permission from authorized channels. The study consciously excluded any high-risk circumstances related to socioeconomic, psychological, or physical health, prioritizing the safety of participants. Throughout the research, a comprehensive approach was taken to address various ethical issues, including those related to authorship, technology, fabrication, falsification, conflict of interest, focus group participant identification, and dishonesty, reflecting a commitment to ethical research practices.

2.5 Role of the Researchers

According to Clark & Vealé (2018), in qualitative research, the researchers function as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As researcher, our main objective was to conduct studies that contribute fresh and meaningful insights to both the academic community and society at large. It is imperative for us to adhere to ethical standards when handling private information obtained from study participants. Acknowledging any dependence on prior research, be it information, data, concepts, or methodology, is a crucial aspect of our research endeavors. Additionally, we are committed to ensuring that each participant is adequately informed and can autonomously decide whether to participate in the study. Lastly, the researchers will take steps to guarantee that information gathered from informants is treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis serves to systematically reduce and organize data, leading to findings that necessitate interpretation by the researcher. This process requires extensive reading, thoughtful consideration, and reflection. Given its time-consuming nature, researchers must remain actively engaged with the textual content to uncover underlying meanings (Ravindran, 2019). Answers from the participant interviews were analyzed through content analysis, focusing on identifying patterns and themes. During the examination of the data and the resulting findings, the researcher assesses whether they align with the study's intent and objectives. The primary goal is to attain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, and struggles faced by closeted police officers.

In this study, thematic analysis was employed as the chosen qualitative data analysis approach. Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns or themes within the data (Villegas, 2022). Researchers refine and assign names to these themes, ensuring they accurately represent the facts. Finally, the researchers scrutinize the themes, drawing inferences and gaining insights from the data.

2.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility of this study lies in its careful participant selection, transparent procedures, ethical considerations, and thorough data analysis, contributing to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. This study's reliability is reinforced by careful participant selection and engagement choices. The use of snowball sampling, a recognized research method, helped identify closeted policemen, and selecting three participants ensured a focused exploration, following recommended practices for phenomenological studies. The decision to conduct the study in diverse locations in Davao City adds contextual variety, making the findings applicable to similar contexts. Transparent reporting of the study's design and procedures, including the use of snowball sampling and the interview process, ensures a clear and dependable research

trail. The detailed data analysis process, involving content and thematic analysis, highlights the study's rigor and commitment to accurately representing findings.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results and discussion were presented. The interview was conducted from October to November 2023. The study has 3 participants from a variety of places in Davao City who were identified as closeted police officers.

Theme 1: Navigating the Law Enforcement Environment

The participants were asked during the interview with regards to their personal experiences as a closeted police officer, including insights into their journey within the law enforcement organization. Specifically, the participants were requested to share the challenges they faced when deciding to pursue a career in law enforcement. The respondent's experiences underscore the significance of resilience in the face of adversity as they confront issues related to gender preferences, uniqueness, and societal stereotypes. It highlights the need to adapt to diverse environments, whether the training center's culture shock or the challenging dynamics within the workplace, emphasizing the importance of adhering to rules values, and maintaining a firm stance while navigating an environment that occasionally questions individual identities. This underscores the ongoing journey of the respondents in law enforcement, marked by personal growth, resilience, and a commitment to making a positive impact despite challenges.

The participant experienced that upon entering the law enforcement organization, Respondent 1's decision to remain closeted during the application process carried advantages and disadvantages. The initial acceptance due to their sexual orientation was countered by susceptibility to bullying. Despite facing cultural shock and challenges at the training center, the respondent shared insights about the unexpected complexity of being a closeted police officer. The attempt to reconcile personal values with those inherent in the profession as the organizational culture and traditions present difficulties and struggles. This involves performing duties and challenging and adapting to the prevalent norms within the law enforcement environment.

Respondent 1 stated:

“When I started with the organization, I disclose my gender preference on the application. There were both advantages and disadvantages along the way. The advantage was that I was well-received during the application process because the people from the organization, including the officer in charge, liked that I was gay. The disadvantage was that I was susceptible to bullying, but it wasn't too harsh. I always just showcased my talent. When I arrived at the training center, I experienced culture shock because the environment was different. I wasn't a criminology student, so I had to adapt to the training. Nonetheless,

people still treated me the same because, after all, I am gay. I faced challenges initially, but I eventually adjusted.” (R001)

“It turns out being a police officer is challenging. I used to think it was just about performing duties, but it involves dealing with a culture and traditions that I dislike. I’ve been trying to go against it, attempting to absorb and adapt, but it’s something I find difficult to handle at the moment.” (R001)

Respondent 2 views their uniqueness as a strength, emphasizing the importance of following the rules and values instilled during training. They remain steadfast while acknowledging the challenges in the working environment, ensuring that criticisms about their identity do not impede their commitment to duty. Their decision to pursue a career in law enforcement is seen as an opportunity for personal growth and resilience.

Respondent 2 stated:

“I think the most challenging part in the profession is not the work itself, it’s the working environment whom I deal with. I can’t deny the fact that these are still co-workers who sometimes questioned my identity, but I make sure that I will not be affected by their criticisms. Instead, be inspired and be mindful of my actions while on duty. I think the decision that I made was one of the challenges that I experienced in choosing this profession is a big fit to fill in, but I accept these changes and I was inspired to make a difference.” (R002)

Respondent 3 has said that the journey has been marked by adversity, including bullying and colleague misunderstandings. Mental and emotional bullying, particularly questioning their motives for entering the criminology course, has notably obscured their initial years of service.

“My journey has been a tough one. I’ve been bullied and misunderstood by a lot of people, even my colleagues, especially in my first year in service. A lot of times, I’ve been bullied. Mental and emotional bullying. They would tell me that I just entered the criminology course because I was flirting with boys.” (R003)

Theme 2: Coping Strategies and Resilience

The participants were asked to describe the strategies they have used to handle challenges faced as a closeted police officer. Additionally, they are expected to explain how these coping mechanisms have been beneficial in managing the difficulties they encountered in their role. The respondents highlighted the proactive use of lifelines, seeking new environments, and distancing from stressors as crucial coping mechanisms. Also, fostering optimism and maintaining a positive mindset are effective strategies to manage behavior and attitude during difficult times. The theme emphasizes the role of personal interests, hobbies, and self-enjoyment in building resilience and fortitude.

Overall, signifies the ability to adapt, endure, and thrive in the face of adversity, contributing to a more fulfilling and successful life.

Respondent 1 faces considerable stress within a specific unit and adopts a proactive approach by utilizing their lifeline. The respondent emphasizes the importance of cultivating connections and exploring avenues for a change in surroundings, seeking ways to distance themselves from stress-inducing environments. Their conviction is that unnecessary difficulties should not be endured, which indicates a strategic approach to self-preservation and well-being.

Respondent 1 experienced that:

"I am extremely stressed while assigned to a particular unit. I used my lifeline, looking for a way and seeking acquaintances to distance myself from a place that causes stress. I can't handle it through self-motivation or peer support alone. I really need a new environment."
(R001)

Respondent 2's coping strategy revolves around maintaining optimism in the face of challenges. The respondent cultivates resilience and adopts a positive mindset for effectively managing behavior and attitude, thereby creating a more conducive working environment.

"I think one strategy that I use is being optimistic in life that these challenges may pass by. Being resilient and having an optimistic mindset help me manage my behavior and attitude in dealing with many people, which makes my working environment easier for me to work with." (R002)

The coping mechanism of respondent 3 centers on self-affirmation and focus on personal goals. By consistently remembering to concentrate on personal objectives, fostering an optimistic outlook, and indulging in personal interests and hobbies, the respondent has found ways to weather the challenges. The assertion that these experiences have contributed to personal strength emphasizes the transformative potential embedded in adopting such coping strategies.

Respondent 3 stated:

"I just always tell myself to focus on what my goal is, be optimistic, and enjoy my own company by doing my interests and hobbies. I think it made me even stronger than my previous self, and without those experiences, I would not be here today, serving my country and countrymen." (R003)

Theme 3: Perceptions of Closeted Professionals in Masculine-Dominated Fields

The participants were asked to share their perspectives on the presence of closeted individuals within professions that are traditionally dominated by masculinity, specifically focusing on law enforcement, and prompted to express what broader societal

understanding should encompass regarding the experiences of individuals who are closeted in such fields. The respondents highlighted the positive impact of gay workers in fields like law enforcement, emphasizing their value in community engagement and the workplace. The advocacy of inclusivity challenges preconceived notions of masculinity and asserts that worthiness in a profession should be based on capabilities rather than conformity to traditional norms. It underscores the readiness of specific organizations to embrace diversity and the need for open-mindedness in recognizing the contributions of the LGBT community.

Respondent 1 expresses the significant impact of gay individuals in traditionally masculine workplaces. Their proficiency in community engagement is highlighted as a valuable asset within the police organization. Despite the inherent stress, the resilience and contributions of LGBTQ individuals are emphasized, challenging stereotypes and showcasing the diverse strengths that can thrive in such environments.

"I've observed that gay workers have a significant impact in traditionally masculine-dominated workplaces, especially in the police force where community engagement is emphasized. LGBTQ members are adept at engaging with people, making them valuable assets in the police organization. Personally, I can't be left alone in our office because I'm too valuable. Despite the stress, we gay individual thrives." (R001)

Respondent 2 challenges traditional notions of masculinity within law enforcement, asserting that softness or a less conventionally masculine demeanor should not impede one's capabilities to meet professional standards. They stress the readiness of the police force to embrace diversity and acknowledge that individuals, regardless of gender identity, bring valuable expertise to the field.

The respondent stated:

"I think there is nothing wrong with being soft or less masculine in the organization as long as you meet the standards and qualifications and are able to compete along the way of your journey. You are capable and worthy to be part of the organization. Everyone has equal chances regardless of their gender identity and I think the PNP is ready for these changes and accept the fact that the LGBT community is in need of some of their expertise in the field of their choice as long as we know our own limitations." (R002)

Respondent 3's perspective is on the fundamental principles of individual rights and inclusivity. The respondent asserted that personal aspirations and dreams are not dictated by sexual orientation. The call for an open-minded approach extends to the broader community and society, urging an understanding of diversity to mitigate instances of petty bullying and minimize triggers that may lead to severe consequences, such as suicide.

Respondent 3 stated:

"I believe in individual rights and inclusivity. I may not be a straight man, but I have my dreams and purpose in life. I still deserve the life that I want for myself. This is also applicable to others. So that they would no longer subject us, closeted professionals, to some petty bullying just because of our gender. They should be open-minded about the diversity of people in their community or society. And, to minimize the triggers that would cause others to end up choosing suicide." (R003)

Theme 4: Frequency of Coping

Respondents consistently employ strategies such as taking breaks, distancing themselves from triggering situations, and adopting a positive mindset to manage overwhelming experiences. This emphasizes the ongoing need for mental resilience, highlighting coping as a continual process rather than a one-time solution. It encompasses a range of strategies, from deliberate breaks and mindset shifts to engaging in personal interests, reflecting the persistent effort the respondents invest in maintaining their mental well-being amidst recurring challenges. More importantly, it recognizes the repetitive nature of coping strategies as an integral part of managing the complexities of personal and professional life. Participants were asked about the frequency with which they needed to implement their coping strategies. The inquiry seeks to understand if there are situations or times when these coping mechanisms become more crucial or necessary in dealing with challenges or stressors. Here is how the participants responded.

The necessity of coping strategies for Respondent 1 is underscored by the traumatic experiences encountered within the organization. The need to apply coping mechanisms is high, particularly when faced with situations that trigger memories of past trauma, and to distance oneself from specific environments, such as those associated with hidden traditions, reflects the ongoing struggle to manage the emotional repercussions of past experiences.

Respondent 1 stated:

"Pushing myself back to that place might overwhelm me. I always find myself being cautious because I wasn't in the right state of mind back then. That's why I left temporarily to take a break. It's frustrating because I get reminded of the trauma whenever there's body contact, and I find it difficult to cope. Even after recognition, there are times when the discomfort persists, which is why I feel like I'm still traumatized by that experience. I know it's normal in the organization, but I oppose it because I can't handle it anymore." (R001)

Respondent 2 adopts a coping strategy involving changing one's mindset when confronted with stress-related problems. The implication is that this coping mechanism is employed selectively as and when problems arise. To the respondent, shifting to a positive mindset and actively seeking solutions are identified as the main components of the coping strategy, thus suggesting adaptability to specific stressors in their professional journey.

"I think sometimes, if I encounter such problems that make me feel stressed, I always change my mindset into a positive and think the brighter side of it and find a solution to the problem." (R002)

Respondent 3 describes a consistent application of coping strategies by enjoying personal interests and hobbies. The emphasis is on always moving forward and fixing their mindset implies a continuous effort. The respondents coping strategy revolves around maintaining focus on personal goals, despite being bullied and the negative perceptions related to their sexual orientation.

"I enjoy my own company by doing the things I love to do, my interests and hobbies. I just keep on moving forward and fixing my mindset to focus on my goals." (R003)

Theme 5: Integration within the Work Environment

In this theme, participants were asked to narrate their experience of assimilating into their work environment while having a sexual orientation that differs from the majority of their colleagues. It encompasses the expectation of versatility, with respondents acknowledging the need to handle diverse tasks within the police force. The theme emphasizes equal treatment and impartiality in task assignments, ensuring that workloads are distributed fairly. Additionally, it acknowledges variations in task complexity while promoting inclusivity within the organizational framework. Respondents also bring a personal dimension, highlighting the challenges faced in the work environment and the resilience required to persevere, often driven by familial responsibilities.

Respondent 1 narrates a journey marked by distinct work assignments that align with his strengths, particularly excelling in roles such as mastering ceremonies for programs. However, the respondent acknowledges the existence of a considerable paperwork load. The integration journey involves predominantly office-based work with fewer field deployments, which depends on superiors' directives. The respondent stated that police officers are expected to be versatile and adept at handling diverse tasks.

"There's a job that's really meant for me, like being the master of ceremonies for programs, but there's also a heavy load of paperwork. I have fewer deployments for fieldwork, and I mostly work in the office. That's the concept in our area, but it still depends on the orders from our superiors. In the police force, we should be jacks of all trades, and we should all be knowledgeable and capable of handling various tasks." (R001)

Respondent 2 provides insights into the organizational landscape, emphasizing inclusivity in work assignments. The respondent notes the absence of biases in tasking or work assignments, indicating a level playing field for all officers, irrespective of sexual orientation. The respondent underscores the perception of fairness within the organization, contributing to a sense of inclusivity.

Participant stated:

"I think there is inclusivity within the organization. Our tasking or work assignments with others are also the same, there are no biases. Sometimes our task is much bigger and harder compared to the majority." (R002)

The integration journey, as described by Respondent 3, is characterized by resilience in the face of challenges. Acknowledging the difficulty and challenges encountered, the respondent reflects on moments of contemplating giving up. However, the familial responsibilities serve as a motivational anchor, compelling them to persevere and continue living their life.

"Sometimes, it was hard and very challenging. There are times, I thought of giving up, but I still have my family that relies on me, so I have to move forward and continue living my life." (R003)

Theme 6: Balancing Identity Closure

The participants were asked about their experiences with revealing or concealing their identity as a closeted police officer. The question seeks to understand if the individual has felt the necessity to keep their identity hidden and, if so, what measures or approaches they have employed to maintain privacy. Respondents showcase diverse approaches, with one taking pride in open disclosure, emphasizing the evolving culture of acceptance. Another adopts a pragmatic stance, suggesting that disclosure may be necessary while underscoring the importance of focusing on work and personal development. The theme encapsulates the delicate equilibrium individuals seek between authenticity and professionalism, as seen in nuanced approaches such as showing one's true self with discretion. It explores the strategies employed to navigate workplace dynamics, considering the evolving landscape of acceptance and the demands of maintaining a harmonious balance between personal identity and professional roles.

Respondent 1 takes pride in being open about their identity, expressing that there has never been a need to conceal it. The respondent highlights the positive shift within their organization, where being gay is now acceptable, and attributes this acceptance to officers recognizing the value that individuals with different sexual orientations bring to the workplace.

Respondent 1 stated:

"Never. I take pride in that because I don't hide, and there's no need to hide since it's acceptable in our organization now. It's good that officers appreciate the value that gay individuals bring to the workplace and see how useful they are in the job." (R001)

Respondent 2 acknowledges the necessity of concealing one's identity at times. The respondent emphasizes the pragmatic approach of recognizing situations where

disclosure may not be well-received and suggests prioritizing personal and professional well-being, focusing on self-improvement, and engaging in activities that contribute to becoming a better police officer.

“If there is a chance, you must, because we can’t deny and please other workmates to accept you, but the most important thing is you should always prioritize your work and yourself and focus to many activities that will help you to be a better police officer.” (R002)

In contrast to full disclosure, Respondent 3 adopts a nuanced approach to openness. The respondent did not intend to keep his gender a secret because he recognized the inevitability of their identity becoming known. The respondent chooses to show his true self but with certain limitations, avoiding overt displays.

Respondent 3 stated:

“I did not intend to make my gender a secret because I know sooner or later it will come out. Just show my true self but with limitations. I show my true gender, but not too overtly. (R003)

Theme 7: Relationships with Colleagues

The theme explores the dynamics of interpersonal connections between individuals and their coworkers within a professional setting. In this part, the participants were asked to characterize their relationships with other male police officers and whether they perceive any differences in these interactions based on their sexual orientation. The question seeks insights into the closeted police officers’ experiences and observations regarding how their sexual orientation may influence or shape their relationships within the context of their work. Here is how the participants responded.

Respondent 1's interaction with other male officers is entirely okay. They express no issues, and the relationships seem casual. The respondent appreciates the broad understanding that fellow officers have about their preferences.

The respondent stated:

“The other male officers don't have any issues, and they just come and go. I've learned a lot from the officers I've worked with. Their understanding of my preferences is quite broad, and I appreciate that.” (R001)

Respondent 2's perspective highlights a straightforward dynamic with male coworkers. The respondent does not perceive any problems in their relationships with other male officers, signaling a sense of ease and harmony within the workplace. This relationship suggests an environment where sexual orientation does not significantly impact professional connections.

"I think I don't have any problems with them, and I have a good relationship with my male co-workers." (R002)

Respondent 3 introduces a more nuanced perspective and shares a close friendship with a colleague who stands out for not treating them differently due to their sexual orientation. This connection is attributed to the colleague's understanding of having brothers within the LGBTQ+ community. However, Respondent 3 also acknowledges a tendency to isolate themselves, indicating a potential impact on their interactions stemming from their sexual orientation.

Respondent 3 shared:

"We became friends because he is the only officer who did not treat me like others or that I did not belong in the profession that I chose. He has brothers as well who are part of the LGBTQ+ community which is why he can relate to me and my experiences. Of course, due to my sexual orientation, I tend to isolate myself, and I often did not talk to my colleagues or interact with them." (R003)

Theme 8: Challenging Stereotypes

The theme revolves around the respondents' perspectives on breaking traditional gender stereotypes within the context of law enforcement. The participants were asked to share their opinions on the stereotype that suggests police officers should primarily be men. Additionally, the question seeks to understand how these stereotypes might affect the participant's experience as a closeted officer, exploring the potential influence of societal expectations related to gender roles within the law enforcement profession. The responses indicate a shift from conventional expectations that police officers should exclusively be male and physically demanding. Instead, the evolving nature of police service is acknowledged, emphasizing diverse skills and qualities. The acceptance of gay individuals for their cheerful and community-engaging attributes challenges the historical gender norms associated with law enforcement.

Respondent 1 acknowledges the lingering stereotype that police officers should exclusively be male and physically robust. However, the respondent's perspective emphasizes the evolving nature of police service. It contends that the contemporary demands of the profession extend beyond physical strength, encompassing aspects such as community engagement. The respondent posits that closeted or gay individuals, known for their cheerful and sociable nature, are valuable in these evolving roles.

Respondent 1 does not perceive this stereotype as a personal problem; he stated that:

"Gay individuals are utilized because they are cheerful and jolly, and they can readily engage with the community. I don't really feel this as a problem because I'm working correctly, and I feel blessed that people understand and accept me for who I am." (R001)

Respondent 2 dismisses the significance of gender in contemporary policing. The respondent asserted that in the current generation, talents, skills, and the ability to perform assigned tasks are the primary markers of a successful police officer. The respondent rejects the notion that gender, explicitly being male, is a prerequisite for success in the profession.

Respondent 2 stated:

"I think these statements are not important now because in our generation this time, as long as you have talents and skills and are fitted to the organization and able to perform the job that is being assigned to you, then you are a successful police officer regardless of your gender." (R002)

Respondent 3 challenges the stereotype by highlighting their own identity as a gay individual within the organization. The respondent rejects the notion that a police officer must conform to the stereotype of a straight man. Instead, it is the willingness to serve is the pivotal factor, transcending gender norms.

"I really don't think it that way. I am now part of organization, and I am gay, so I think it doesn't need to be a straight man. Willingness to serve is what matters regardless of gender." (R003)

Theme 9: Greatest Struggles Faced

Participants were asked to draw from their personal experiences to identify what they perceive as the most challenging aspect of being a closeted police officer and how they have navigated and coped with this specific struggle in their professional lives. The responses highlight diverse struggles, including difficulties in adapting to organizational culture and hidden traditions, challenges related to disclosing one's identity, and the pervasive issue of workplace bullying. The theme sheds light on the multifaceted nature of obstacles faced by the respondents in their professional journeys, emphasizing the unique and sometimes complex nature of these struggles. It conveys the various hardships and personal battles individuals face as they navigate their roles within their respective work contexts.

For Respondent 1, the most challenging aspect revolves around adjusting to the cultural and traditional aspects, particularly those hidden within the organization. The difficulty arises from their more feminine disposition, making adaptation challenging. The respondent acknowledges resorting to an "illegal" method of seeking a new environment to alleviate the burden.

"Since I'm new in the organization, the most challenging aspect is the culture and hidden traditions. It's tough for me because I'm on the more feminine side, and that makes it a bit difficult for me to adjust. I look for an illegal way to lessen my burden, I mean, searching for a new environment. However, this is not an advisable technique." (R001)

Respondent 2 identifies the disclosure of one's identity as a significant challenge, particularly amidst training sessions. However, once integrated into the organization, the focus shifts towards daily tasks rather than concerns about gender and sexuality disclosure.

Respondent 2 stated:

"I think aside from our trainings, the most challenging part is how you disclose yourself to others. But I think I didn't mind it when I was already a part of the organization. I focus more on my daily tasks than dealing with my gender sexuality to others." (R002)

For Respondent 3, the greatest struggle centers on experiencing bullying within the professional environment. To manage this challenge, the respondent adopts a calm demeanor.

Respondent stated that:

"I just remain calm, focus on my goal, and pray." (R003)

Theme 10: Hopes

In this theme, participants were asked about their aspirations and goals for the future and the desired outcomes or achievements they hope to realize in the coming years. In the context of the respondents' answers, it involves personal ambitions such as creating a business for greater autonomy, committing to long-term service and career goals within the police profession, and fostering societal enlightenment and understanding regarding diverse gender and sexual orientations. It reflects an optimistic perspective, showcasing the respondents' desires for positive change, both personally and within the broader societal context, which signifies the belief in and anticipation of a more positive and fulfilling future.

Respondent 1 expresses a candid aspiration for the future, desiring to transition from being a police officer to establishing a business. The hope is to have the flexibility to step away from the demands of law enforcement at any time.

The respondent stated:

"My hope in the future is that I can just sideline being a police officer. I wish to have my own business so I can leave anytime. Hopefully, we can work together in the service soon." (R001)

Respondent 2 envisions a more extended commitment to service, aspiring to dedicate two decades or more to the role of a police officer. The hope is to achieve both personal dreams and career goals within the context of this prolonged service.

Respondent 2 stated:

"Be in the service for 20 years or more and achieve my dreams and career goals." (R002)

Respondent 3's hopes extend beyond personal endeavors, focusing on societal change. The respondent expresses a desire for enlightenment among individuals who are not open about various gender and sexual orientations and articulates a wish to prevent others from becoming victims of cruelty, emphasizing the importance of fair and compassionate treatment for everyone.

Respondent 3 stated:

"I hope that other people who are still not open about various gender and sexual orientations will be enlightened. And I hope no one else becomes a victim and experiences the kind of cruelty I had to endure. We deserve to be treated the way we want to be treated."
(R003)

4. Implications and Recommendations

This section presents the findings derived from the study participants' responses and provides recommendations in consonance with the information acquired through the respondent's experiences in the law enforcement organization.

The researchers concluded that being closeted in a traditionally masculine environment introduces complexities because they need to conform to organizational culture while staying true to their personal values. All of the participants come out as gay during the application period but for some, it becomes a disadvantage which makes them susceptible to bullying and experience culture shock. Other than bullying, it reveals the complex challenges they face in balancing their true selves with the expectations and norms of their workplace. Due to this, there is a need to adjust to the environment. The need for gay officers to adjust in law enforcement organizations stems from the challenges they face due to societal stereotypes, workplace dynamics, and organizational cultures which may not be always inclusive.

Law enforcement has usually been seen as a job where people think and act in a way that's considered traditionally "masculine" or tough. This means there's a belief that police work is more suited to men who fit certain expectations of being strong, tough, and conforming to what people think a man should be like. The researchers concluded that being a closeted police officer in a job where there's a strong belief in traditional masculinity can sometimes make things difficult because not everyone might be accepting or understanding of the differences. This is why adjusting or finding a way to fit into this environment becomes important for them, as the respondent has stated.

In support of the personal experiences of the respondents onsite in the field, a study conducted by Tilcsik (2011) revealed that police officers in the United States who are gay also had challenging experiences when it came to fulfilling their duties as uniformed officers. The study also stated the stereotype wherein gay officers cannot do their duties due to being less masculine than their heterosexual counterparts. These findings of the study strongly support the claims by the respondents of their experiences of discrimination and stereotypes in the field.

The researchers also concluded that a clash between personal identity and organizational culture can be a significant stressor. Thus, coping mechanisms are needed to handle the complexities of navigating an environment with traditions that may not align with an individual's identity. The use of coping strategies is crucial in lessening the effects of stress at work and fostering the overall wellness of employees. Numerous studies have explored the importance of coping mechanisms in dealing with workplace difficulties. As an example, a meta-analysis was conducted, revealing that coping strategies focused on promotion and prevention play essential roles as intervening mechanisms. These mechanisms help explain the connections between workplace stressors and individual outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, a study was conducted that investigated the role of proactive personality in dealing with workplace stressors, specifically focusing on how active coping can help individuals facing bullying at work. This emphasizes the significance of coping strategies in effectively managing stress (Park & DeFrank, 2018). Another study which explored the gendered cycle of stress and coping for those experiencing workplace bullying, highlights the importance of coping within theoretical stress and coping frameworks (Hollis, 2017).

Moreover, there is a significant impact on gay individuals in traditionally masculine workplaces, specifically within the police force where community engagement is crucial. Simply because they are good at talking and connecting with people in the community. Members of the LGBT community are recognized for actively participating in social interactions. Research findings suggest that engagement in community activities and fostering connections have positive effects on the civic involvement of individuals in the LGBT community (Harris *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the cultivation of a positive LGBT identity, encompassing elements such as self-awareness, genuineness, close relationships, affiliation with the LGBT community, and a commitment to social justice, correlates with heightened participation within the LGBT community (Riggle *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, research demonstrates that the sense of connectedness to the LGBT community acts as a mediator in the relationship between sociopolitical engagement and psychological well-being. This implies that active involvement in the LGBT community contributes significantly to overall well-being (Roberts & Christens, 2020).

In the context of law enforcement, there exists a discourse challenging traditional notions of masculinity and its impact on professional standards. The assertion posits that characteristics typically associated with masculinity should not serve as hindrances to an individual's ability to meet the established benchmarks within the field. This perspective advocates for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the qualities deemed essential for success in law enforcement. It emphasizes that the qualities traditionally linked with masculinity, such as physical strength or a tough demeanor, should not be the sole criteria for determining one's competence in the profession. According to a study, the conventional link between masculinity, physical strength, and a tough demeanor is being questioned, with arguments suggesting that these traits should not be the exclusive criteria for determining professional competence (Rumens & Broomfield, 2011). This

challenge extends to the inclusion of closeted police officers in the workplace, where concerns arise about perpetuating traditional masculinity, potentially undermining the acceptance and integration of closeted officers. It calls for a shift in perspective, urging an acknowledgment that success in law enforcement is not exclusively defined by conformity to stereotypical masculine traits. Instead, the focus should be on assessing an individual's skills, competencies, and overall job performance.

The reason why some closeted police officers feel the need to hide or conceal their gender identity and sexual orientation in law enforcement organization is because there are existing problems like biases, stereotypes, and potential discrimination within that workplace. Some people might not be accepting or understanding of others who are different from them so, they choose not to openly share certain aspects of who they are while working in that environment. The examination of closeted police officers' experiences in law enforcement organizations, as discussed in existing literature, uncovers intricacies. In such a work environment, closeted officers might find it necessary to conceal their gender identity and sexual orientation due to prevailing biases and stereotypes affecting perceptions of competence and warmth, thereby influencing discriminatory practices (Krings *et al.*, 2010). The work atmosphere for closeted officers is additionally complicated by implicit biases in policing, leading police departments to address concerns related to biased policing and community complaints (Spencer *et al.*, 2016). A deeper understanding of the experiences of both "out" and "closeted" officers within law enforcement emphasizes the significance of enhancing the performance and engagement of gay male law enforcement officers, shedding light on the impact of disclosure on their workplace experiences (Collins & Rocco, 2018).

However, workplace environments that are more accepting and inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations are conducive to professionals being open about their identities. This positive shift in organizational culture likely contributes to increased comfort and confidence among individuals to express their true selves without fear of discrimination or negative consequences. Thus, the researchers can infer that the need for some closeted police officers to conceal their gender identity and sexual orientation in law enforcement organization stems from existing issues like biases, stereotypes, and potential discrimination within the workplace. The reluctance to openly share these aspects reflects a lack of acceptance or understanding from some individuals in that environment. Conversely, workplaces that foster acceptance and inclusivity of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations create an environment where professionals feel more comfortable being open about their identities.

Studies have indicated that gay police officers commonly encounter difficulties related to disclosing their identity, workplace bias, and mental health issues. Rumens and Broomfield (2011) investigated the experiences of gay police officers concerning identity disclosure and management, revealing the challenges associated with navigating one's identity within the police force. Colvin (2015) explored shared workplace experiences among lesbian and gay police officers in the United Kingdom, underscoring the necessity for future research to discern variations between "out" and "closeted" officers.

Beyond identity management, workplace discrimination remains a significant concern for closeted police officers. Jones and Williams (2013) discovered that a considerable number of LGBT police officers in England and Wales reported instances of discrimination, with those in senior ranks and non-uniformed roles experiencing the highest victimization rates in training, deployment, and promotion. Furthermore, the mental health of police officers, including LGBTQ individuals, has raised concerns. Wittmann *et al.* (2021) stressed the importance of police officers recognizing relevant mental health conditions to adapt their communication strategies and prevent the risk of escalating violence and traumatic experiences. Additionally, Jackson and Theroux (2023) highlighted alarming rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder among police service members, emphasizing the need to instill a culture of wellness and resilience in policing.

To the government, they may prioritize the development and enforcement of inclusive policies within law enforcement organizations. These policies should be explicit in promoting diversity and inclusivity that will emphasize the prohibition of discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. To complement this, they may implement a comprehensive training program. These programs will be designed for police officers and staff, aiming to enhance awareness and understanding of the challenges specifically encountered by closeted individuals within the law enforcement organization. The training may provide practical guidance on fostering a supportive and inclusive environment while actively addressing biases that may exist. Additionally, the government may recognize the mental health challenges faced by closeted individuals in law enforcement because there is a critical need to strengthen their mental health support services. This may involve creating accessible and confidential counseling services to address the emotional and psychological well-being of police officers, ensuring a non-judgmental and supportive space for individuals to seek assistance. These combined efforts will contribute significantly to the establishment of a more inclusive, understanding, and supportive law enforcement environment.

To the Community, they may engage actively with law enforcement agencies in the community to foster mutual understanding and positive relationships, appreciating and highlighting the valuable contributions made by LGBT individuals in fields traditionally dominated by masculinity within the police force. They may participate fervently in advocacy programs that challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity through awareness campaigns, workshops, and community dialogues. Lastly is to widen your perspective and collectively put an end to stereotyping, recognizing that the willingness to serve within law enforcement is not tied to sexual orientation. Embrace an open-minded approach, emphasizing that everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation, possesses the capacity to serve and contribute meaningfully to community well-being.

The closeted police officers, and LGBT members in general, may actively seek and establish support networks. Connect with colleagues who share similar experiences to create a community where advice, shared challenges, and coping strategies can be freely

exchanged. These support networks not only provide emotional and professional support but also serve as a source of strength in challenging times, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity within the workplace. In addition, they may advocate for inclusivity within the workplace actively. Take a proactive role in championing diversity and emphasize the importance of creating a workspace that values individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations and engage with colleagues and superiors to raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals.

To future researchers: to make this study even more insightful, it would be valuable to include the experiences of additional people from different areas within Davao City. Additionally, broadening the research to include the entire Mindanao region would provide a more thorough and detailed exploration of their daily lives. This would help to create a richer and more understandable account of their diverse experiences, making the study more relatable and accessible to a wider audience.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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