

# Lived Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Community in Administrative Leadership of School Heads

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**Abstract.** This study explored the administrative leadership of LGBTQIA+ school heads in private high schools in the province of Quezon. The interview was the primary tool used in the form of semi-structured interview questions that were systematically crafted to give way to the target respondents based on their lived experience. Coding and thematic analysis were done to deeply analyze the responses from the participants. Based on the findings, the identity politics among school heads were described as having genderless and affirmative leadership. Creating inclusive environments, greater professional leadership, and identity reaffirmation and community acceptance were found useful in surpassing the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ leaders. Reliving the unconventional leadership representations of LGBTQIA+ school heads focuses on reflecting transformative leadership and advocating inclusivity. In the private school setting, there is many recommendations formulated based on the responses of the participants. Though there are already existing policies on gender responsiveness, there is still room for modification to set clearer, more inclusive, and comprehensive policies. School leaders can make school safe and inclusive for all. Learning institutions can, therefore, foster effective and responsive school culture for LGBTQIA+ educators in their workplace. Undertaking this study discovered the identity politics, struggles, and representations of the LGBTQ+ Community. It explored their significant lived experiences, which became an eye-opener to the current status, experienced struggles, and representation of the LGBTQIA+ school heads, which could leave an impact on the target readers of the substantial contributions of these leaders in administrative leadership and gender studies. The result of the study can bring change among LGBTQIA+ school heads and teachers and encourage administrative change and integration of evidenced-based solutions that support the LGBTQIA+ community.

**Keywords:** Advocating inclusivity; Genderless leadership; Identity politics; Representation; Struggles.

## 1.0 Introduction

Leadership is a major concern to organizations for its significant role in determining their success. The leader is responsible for directing subordinates' efforts to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Educational institutions are not exempted from this leadership influence. It impacts the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school atmosphere and environment, to improve school outcomes (Pont et al., 2019). Principals perform a vital function in secondary school administration as the head of school administration. The individuals who hold the position of "school leaders" have evolved away from stereotypical straight white males to individuals from all walks of life. Although researchers have begun to explore the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals and their experiences in the workplace and issues related to LGBT, few studies have explored the experiences of LGBT principals within their role as school leaders (Williams, 2018).

To address this, Dumaresq, in 2016, posited that educational leaders must take the initiative to bring about changes that will make the culture of schools more inclusive. However, educators who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (queer) are often stymied in this kind of social justice work for fear of losing their jobs. Further, despite their potential for enacting social justice, a vast majority of LGBT educational leaders remain “cloaked in secrecy” for their protection. They are “invisible” to their counterparts and often pass themselves off as “straight.” Lugg (2003, as cited by Denton, 2015) stated that LGBT school administrators “must be willing to sacrifice a core portion of their identity; they must be constantly on guard that they do not give any clues to their actual identity” in order to retain their position. In no small measure, LGBT educational leaders are forced to walk a tenuous line of assimilation and invisibility depending on where one works and resides; coming out may very well be foolhardy.”.

Moreover, in 2021, Simons et al. claimed that a scarcity of research exists on the lived experiences of educators and school heads who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB). For educators and school heads who identify as LGB, navigating the complex nature of one’s unique identity and additional work identity leads to attempts to balance their personal and professional selves in both congruent and incongruent ways. This was supported by Prior (2017), who noted that progress toward LGBTQ inclusion has been slow and historically fraught with pushback from some institutional leaders and political strife.

Therefore, in order to address this and other gender-related problems, there is a dire need for continued striving towards equity and justice within the realm of sexual diversity of school heads. More so, undertaking this study would identify the identity politics, struggles, and representations of the LGBTQ+ community, explore their significant lived experiences, and turn them into substantial contributions to administrative leadership and gender studies. The researcher hopes it could bring change among LGBTQIA+ school heads and teachers and encourage administrative changes and integration of evidence-based solutions that support the LGBTQIA+ community.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

To characterize the nature of the situation at the time of the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach in line with the stated aims of this academic endeavor. In addition, the phenomenological research design was utilized in the study to investigate research objectives. As Delve (2022) cited, this design seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. The approach investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers’ preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. In-depth interviews were used in the study, and in addition to the semi-structured questions that were prearranged in advance, follow-up and emergent questions were also asked. The responses from the in-depth interview were transcribed and coded through open coding to generate themes and focused on the commonality of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ school heads in Quezon.

### **2.2 Research Locale**

The study was carried out in the four (4) districts of Quezon, which has two (2) participants from the first (1st) district, four (4) from the second (2nd), one (1) from the third (3rd), and one (1) from the fourth (4th) district who belong to the gay and bisexual community.

### **2.3 Research Participants**

Eight (8) school heads from the LGBTQIA+ community were involved in this undertaking. This study employed the criterion sampling technique when choosing the respondents. It is a purposive sampling method used in research to select individuals based on specific predetermined criteria or characteristics. The inclusion criteria for the study are school heads who self-identified as LGBTQIA+, who have administrative tasks, who have specific experiences and skills in leadership, and who are willing to participate in the study.

As stated by Babu, a faculty member at Nanyang Business School (2024), based on a study published in the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), the number of participants in qualitative research is determined by the principle of saturation, where it is the point at which no new information is obtained from additional participants. The study suggests that 8-12 participants are enough to reach saturation in most

qualitative research studies. This was also supported by an article published by Scribblr, which states that the sample size for qualitative research can be as low as 6–10 participants.

## **2.4 Research Instrument**

The study was limited to using the pure qualitative research method for this involved interview as its instrumentation. An interview is a qualitative research method that relies on asking questions to collect data. Specifically, the researcher used a semi-structured interview. George (2022) mentioned that this type of interview is a blend of structured and unstructured interviews. While the interviewer has a general plan for what they want to ask, the questions do not have to follow a particular phrasing or order. This is often open-ended, allowing for flexibility, but follows a predetermined thematic framework, giving a sense of order. The study used interview questions as the main tool for gathering data. The questionnaire constructed by the researcher contained three (3) parts.

First, to help determine the identity politics, struggles, and representation of LGBTQIA+ school heads. The next part described the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community in the administrative leadership of the school heads in Quezon Province. The last part of the instrument explored the representation of the LGBTQIA+ community in the administrative leadership of school heads in Quezon Province. The questionnaire draft was referred to the researcher's adviser for comments and suggestions. The researcher sought experts' help for proper guidance, suggestions, and validation. After this, the researcher applied the suggestions, and then the revised instrument was submitted to the validators to check if the inputs were followed.

## **2.5 Data Gathering Procedure**

This dissertation followed several processes to complete the study. This composed the conduct interview questions for the target participants, as well as the interpretation and analysis of gathered information. For the first aspect, the researcher sought approval to conduct the study through the university where she was enrolled. After the clearance, the researcher asked for approval from the Education Program Supervisor (EPS) in charge of private schools in Quezon, asking to have a one-on-one interview with the target participants of the study. Following this, a letter was also addressed to the president of United Private Education Institutions in Quezon (UPEIQ) to determine which school heads would participate in the study. The researcher scheduled a face-to-face interview based on the availability of the participants. However, those participants who wished to have online interviews were met through Zoom meetings. All the interviews were audio-recorded with consent given. The information sheet and consent forms were provided more than 24 hours before the interview to allow thinking time for the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before conducting the interviews.

## **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

In the interview, the researcher introduced herself first, informed participants of the purpose of the study, and took several ethical considerations into account to ensure their rights. Confidentiality was assured that identifying information would not be made available to anyone not directly involved in the study. Participants were invited at the most convenient time and place. The participants were informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research. Hence, to ensure ethical consideration, the researcher did not mention any names, organizations, or institutions involved in the study but instead used the acronym LGBTQIA+ to assign numbers for each participant.

## **3.0 Results and Discussion**

### **Theme 1: Genderless Leadership**

The most interesting thing highlighted from interviews was that the leaders, regardless of their gender, shared similar opinions on effective leadership and lessons learned from their leadership journey. Results of interviews confirm that there is no difference in leadership qualities, attributes, and characteristics between female and male leaders. In other words, leadership has no gender. This finding runs parallel to the study conducted by Simons (2021), who revealed that leaders of any gender still chose to dedicate their lives to leading and that after serving for many years in education, they were able to continue learning and doing better in school. They emphasized that a committed school head chooses to serve the betterment of their colleagues and their workplace. Therefore, it is concluded that regardless of their gender identity, leaders and subordinates unite together to pursue higher-

order common goals such that both leaders and followers can raise each other to higher levels of motivation, which implies that the leader and subordinate purposes become one fused, united, and collective purpose (Eboka, 2016).

**Normalizing LGBTQIA+ roles and being better represented**, these answers were often revealed in the interviews with the participants. When the researcher asked how their followers respond to them as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, some of them voiced out that:

*They respond to me and treat me as a normal individual without considering my gender because they believe that being part of the LGBTQIA+ will not affect my performance (Par L).*

*They respond similarly to other bosses, regardless of gender. In my experience, they generally adhere to and fulfill most of the tasks I assign them, submitting or complying as required (Par Q).*

**Fostering inclusivity, visibility, and empowerment**, these aspects delve into how the participants see situations where LGBTQIA+ school head identity is important, together with the conditions that support or penalize them. The responses affirm that LGBTQIA+ school heads' identity is important in situations where LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and families need representation, support, and understanding. It plays a crucial role in opening gender sensitivity, enriching decision-making processes, and breaking stigmas and stereotypes about leadership positions.

*School administrators who identify as LGBTQIA+ can contribute to more equitable policies and procedures that meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ people by bringing their distinct perspectives and experiences to the table community. Having helpful coworkers, inclusive school rules, and a climate that promotes diversity and respect are all factors that help LGBTQIA+ leaders. On the other hand, leaders who encounter prejudice, discrimination, or a lack of institutional support could find it difficult to fully express who they are as people and reach their full leadership potential. Discriminatory behaviors or attitudes in the classroom can impair students' productivity and well-being, which may result in consequences for their professional development or career advancement (Par T).*

This quote poignantly illustrates the subtle yet profound ways in which LGBTQIA+ school heads see the importance of revealing their identity to their subordinates. Weller supported this in 2018 and emphasized that visibility matters. The LGBT+ community repeatedly repeats this message: representation of LGBT+ people and relationships promotes acceptance within communities and reaffirms confidence in one's own identity.

**Modeling authenticity** encapsulates authentic leaders acting as role models, leading by example, and displaying appropriate behaviors during their interactions with their subordinates. They earn trust because of their genuineness and because they lead ethically while maintaining integrity. As such, an LGBTQ leader does not possess universally specific characteristics. They access leadership characteristics that exist within a leader-navigator framework. The LGBTQ leader-navigator knows they are living and leading in a time that has been filled with history and culture of contempt for LGBTQ folk. They know they exist outside the majority culture. They know they came to own and express their identity with risk and courage. They also know that they own many other identities as well.

*For me, the importance of LGBTQIA leaders self-identifying lies in the empowerment it brings to both the individual and the community. Openly identifying LGBTQIA leaders can serve as visible role models, fostering a more inclusive and accepting school environment. Additionally, self-identification allows for authentic representation, promoting understanding and empathy among students and staff (Part I).*

Aside from genderless leadership, it was exposed that affirmative leadership also exists in LGBTQIA+ school heads. It was found that an affirmative leader instigates and mobilizes positive emotions and thoughts, processes, and experiences. On the other hand, an affirmative leader eliminates negative mental and emotional currents and directs the focus toward a mutual aim—self-realization. In this way, better conditions for individual and collective life and work are created. Such a leader is like a captain of a sports team who manages the present and paves the road for a better future by balancing interpersonal relations, harmonizing his abilities and skills with those of his colleagues, and applying different types of approaches and diverse styles of work (Gruicic, 2019). As the interview with the participants continued, one participant said:

*I stand with our school's philosophy: "Believing in anything is the first step in making things possible." I am looking at what I can do because, as I said, if I mind what people will say and listen to what others have to say, maybe I will not get to the point that I am here. I always say that even to my students, what you allow is what we continue, so if you allow yourself to be judged or somehow allow fear to lead you, you will not grow, so I believe in risk-taking. As for risk-taking, it is not saying that you have to go this way or that way; what I mean is to explore, try other things, and at the same time consider your boundaries as professionals (Par T).*

**A positive outlook on LGBTQIA+ leaders** highlights that positive LGBTQIA+ identities are affirmed through inspiring firsthand accounts based on the stories shared by the participants. Focusing on how LGBTQ-identified individuals can cultivate a sense of well-being and a personal identity that allows them to flourish in all areas of life, the authors explore various themes. Through the personal stories from people with a variety of backgrounds and gender and sexual identities, readers will learn more about expressing gender and sexuality, creating strong and intimate relationships, exploring unique perspectives on empathy, compassion, and social justice, belonging to communities and acting as role models and mentors; and enjoying the benefits of living an authentic life.

*When it comes to being an administrator, it does not matter even if you are a member of LGBTQIA+ or not. So, the main reason is your ability and capability to run a school (Par B).*

**Highly significant and deserving of respect**, this sub-theme reflects moments of realization that LGBTQIA+ school heads who have administrative tasks are highly significant in the roles they play and deserving of respect. The interview with them revealed that there are people in the LGBTQIA+ community who are recognized, respected, and appreciated for their unique perspectives and gifts. As to wit:

*I consider their status highly significant and deserving of respect, equivalent to that of both women and men. They demonstrate remarkable creativity in their administrative roles. Many actively promote inclusive policies and nurture supportive environments for students, staff, and families. Additionally, some display a firm demeanor in their work, which reflects their authority and command. This underscores the importance of adherence to established standards, rejecting the notion of leniency in professional settings (Par Q).*

*They are highly effective when it comes to leadership because, Ma'am, from my observation, I know a lot of leaders who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community who are really effective in their line of work (Par G).*

**Promoting diversity and a culture of creativity** deals with a sense of belonging and psychological safety, which allows subordinates to feel comfortable sharing their ideas without fear of judgment or criticism. It was revealed through the conversation with the participants that when the members feel valued and supported, they are more likely to take risks and think outside the box. This, in turn, leads to more innovative ideas and solutions. In addition, it was mentioned that an inclusive culture promotes diversity and equity, which is crucial for a creative working environment. A diverse workforce brings a variety of perspectives and experiences, which can spark new ideas and ways of thinking. Thus, an inclusive culture ensures that everyone has equal opportunities to contribute and be heard, regardless of background or identity.

*LGBTQIA+ leadership matters in creating inclusive environments and representing diverse perspectives. Support for leaders who self-identify as sexual minorities can include promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, providing resources for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and fostering a safe and supportive work environment. As far as I know, Sen. Risa Hontiveros is the proponent of the SOGIE Bill in the Philippines, which aims for LGBTQIA+ people to have equal rights (Par L).*

**Addressing discrimination and challenges** is prevalent among the participants, stemming from stories they shared based on their experiences. These prove that challenges still exist when it comes to LGBTQIA+ leadership, which reflects that these should be voiced out and addressed accordingly.

*Conversely, the conditions that may penalize LGBTQIA+ individuals include experiencing discrimination or harassment, lacking legal protections, facing stereotypes regarding their ability to hold leadership positions, and encountering a lack of support from their peers (Par G).*

*On the other hand, based on my opinion, a potential downside of being part of the LGBTQIA+ community is the tendency for some people to take you for granted and underestimate you, especially those conservative individuals who are still fixated on the notion that there are only two types of gender (Par +).*

*Creating an atmosphere of acceptance is projected into the influence of identity in schools. LGBTQIA+ school heads have a significant influence in terms of promoting inclusivity and fairness, fostering respect and a culture of creativity, and welcoming and supporting LGBTQIA+ teachers.*

*I believe my influence has substantially shifted some of their perspectives on approaching work. We welcome and support teachers who identify within this spectrum, even considering them for advancement to higher positions, provided they maintain professionalism and adhere to the institution's standards (Par Q).*

According to Kosciw (2014), schools are the primary social context where marginalized students spend much of their day. The school setting can be a hostile environment where marginalized students are at risk of experiencing adversity, such as verbal and physical harassment, institutional bias, and an exclusive school culture. Therefore, district and school leaders must impact and guide how marginalized students are supported and included in the school setting. Indeed, school leaders can play an integral role in “creating schools that value individual differences.”

## **Theme 2: The Cycle of Fears: Stories of Challenges Faced by LGBTQIA+ School Heads**

Contrary to happy and accepted leadership, as revealed by participants, it cannot be denied that before LGBTQIA+ school heads achieve inclusivity and empowerment, they still face challenges as they embark on their journey to leadership.

An inclusive environment is about creating a workplace where everyone is treated with respect and valued for their contributions. In an inclusive workplace, colleagues and customers are treated with dignity, respect, and equality; these values are reflected in the company's mission and vision (Ho, 2023). In today's globalized and interconnected world, the importance of inclusivity regarding gender in the workplace cannot be overstated. It goes beyond mere compliance with regulations; it is about fostering an environment where everyone, regardless of gender identity, feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best.

*Inclusivity in the workplace can be achieved through granting equal treatment and protection. The researcher remembered that some participants shared their experiences emphasizing the need to create an inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ school heads in the workplace.*

*With the implementation of DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, our educational landscape now has a formal foundation, specifically in providing support and opportunities for LGBTQIA+ members as sexual minorities. The policy states that not only students but also department employees are granted equal treatment and protection against discrimination, regardless of their gender (Par +).*

In an article published by Buccholz (2023), having LGBTQIA+ leaders in positions of power and influence sends a powerful message to individuals throughout industries, encouraging others to aspire to take on similar roles. A diverse representation of employees has been shown to encourage others to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity to achieve their goals while boosting their self-esteem and inspiring others to be authentic and proud of their identity. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ leaders bring diverse perspectives to the table. Their life experiences and unique insights contribute to more comprehensive decision-making, which has been proven to benefit organizations and society. Typically, the following results support this:

*LGBTQIA+ presence in school leadership is essential for creating inclusive environments and meeting the particular needs of LGBTQIA+ staff, students, and families. LGBTQIA+ school administrators can offer a unique perspective and compassion to problems, including bullying, discrimination, and mental health support for LGBTQIA+ students (Par B).*

Leadership is a skill that is not reserved solely for managers, directors, VPs, or anyone else who is the head of a department of a company. It is a crucial quality that any valuable employee should demonstrate in some form or another in the workplace. The term "leadership" can encompass a wide variety of actions and attitudes; it does not

necessarily apply only to a single leader of a group. Leadership can manifest in small actions that can ultimately result in change. As such, it is an essential part of the progress of a company and your individual growth as a professional. Therefore, professional leadership is a process by which a person directs and inspires a team to follow a vision or reach a goal that must be practiced daily while incorporating regular reflection and coaching.

This can be achieved through conformity with policies; based on the participants' responses, they believe this is essential for fostering a harmonious, productive, and legally compliant environment. Policies serve as guiding principles that outline an organization's expectations, standards, and procedures. This would shed light on the challenges they have experienced. As to wit:

*As an LGBTQIA+ leader, I prioritize ensuring everyone feels welcome and respected. This means having inclusive policies, providing support services, leading by example, and collaborating with others to create a supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the school community (Par G).*

In the meantime, as the interview progressed, one of the study's participants exposed the stereotypes, biases, and discriminations that are the common struggles encountered by school heads. According to Pagulayan (2020), the LGBTQIA+ community faces alarming rates of gender-based violence and discrimination. From 2010 to 2020, at least 50 transgender or non-binary Filipinos were murdered. Studies showed that around half of transgender people and bisexual women would experience sexual violence during their lifetime. Another type of violence directed at the LGBTQIA+ community is micro-aggressions, indirect or subtle acts of discrimination against marginalized groups in their daily lives. It often manifests through conscious or unconscious discriminatory or transphobic remarks. Even though there is already existing gender neutrality in language, LGBTQIA+ members are still confronted by different discriminatory experiences in public and private spaces.

Even though this equality of human rights that protects and respects Filipino people is strongly grounded in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, it enshrines in its due process and equal protection clauses that "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws." However, with the traditional perception and norms brought by religious views and opinions on sexual preference and gender roles, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the Philippines, whether professionals or not, have experienced discrimination and non-acceptance (United Nations Development Program, 2014). With the non-existence of effective implementation and monitoring of policies, the teachers experienced many discrimination cases. Marginalization in the education profession is not only permissible, but it is extensively tolerated in several public learning institutions (Bishop et al., 2010, as cited by Añonuevo & Digo, 2023).

### **Theme 3: Identity Reaffirmation and Community Acceptance**

Identity reaffirmation is a profound process through which individuals validate and embrace their sense of self, often in response to internal or external challenges that may challenge their identity. It involves acknowledging and affirming one's core beliefs, values, and personal attributes. It is a process that occurs in various contexts, including cultural, social, professional, and personal spheres. In today's diverse and interconnected world, individuals often encounter situations or experiences that may call into question their identity, whether it relates to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or other aspects of personal identity. Equality means more than passing laws. The struggle is won in the hearts and minds of our communities. While political wins are important for the LGBTQ+ community, true LGBTQ acceptance goes deeper.

*At present, I have not encountered any challenges related to my gender preferences from others within our institution. However, should such situations arise, I will respond calmly and accept their reactions. Ultimately, I will reaffirm my identity and demonstrate that I refuse to be diminished by their perceptions. As a guiding principle, if they cannot accept me for who I am, it does not concern me as long as I lead a peaceful life and do not harm others (Par Q).*

**Being embraced and supported** is prevalent in the participants' responses; this means that by recognizing and valuing subordinates in the workplace, the institution can foster a culture of engagement, productivity, and innovation. This, in turn, leads to higher retention rates, a positive company culture, and improved overall performance. When asked about the support given to LGBTQIA+ school heads, they answered:

*As an LGBTQIA leader, my followers respond with various reactions, often reflecting the diversity within the LGBTQIA community. Many express appreciation for my representation and advocacy, feeling supported and empowered. Some may share similar experiences, forming a sense of solidarity and understanding. However, in all honesty, responses also vary, with some individuals possibly harboring biases or misunderstandings. My followers' responses emphasize the importance of visibility, representation, and ongoing dialogue to promote inclusivity and acceptance (Par I).*

When asked about the response of their followers to them as LGBTQIA+ school heads, most of the participants received positive responses, leading to supporting them with their decisions and projects in school. Their followers respond to them very professionally, showing authority and respect for their positions. The participants considered themselves blessed, for they were treated positively. They said:

*They respond to me and treat me as a normal individual without considering my gender because they believe that being part of the LGBTQIA+ will not affect my performance (Par L).*

*I am blessed and fortunate to work with teachers whom I prefer to address as partners rather than followers. They are remarkably objective, valuing individuals based not on their gender but on their capabilities, skills, and character – attributes they recognize as indicative of a person worthy of respect and admiration (Par A).*

Proving it more, Komiyes, Lucas, and McMahon, as cited by Pryor (2017), claimed that leadership could be located in specific traits of leaders. That is why followers respond to LGBTQIA+ leaders similarly to other members because they see characteristics of these leaders like self-confidence, intelligence, or charisma. An effective leader-follower dynamic is characterized by a strong, mutually supportive peer relationship. However, one party officially has the final authority. When a leader communicates trust and respect for followers' abilities to perform and achieve, the internal motivation of the followers drives them to succeed (Cruickshank, 2017).

As Buchholz (2023b) quoted, "All leaders—and by extension, all people—want to be respected for their contributions and not for their sexual orientation. At the same time, the best leaders do so with authenticity and encourage their teams to do the same, so they often have to be cognizant of balancing the two." This is similar to the study's findings, which show that in terms of administrative leadership, followers of LGBTQIA+ identity school heads respond positively and with professionalism. The following statements prove this:

*My followers respond to me as LGBTQIA+ by supporting my decisions and projects (Par L).*

*I think my followers respond to me professionally (Pag G).*

*I believe that my followers react to me professionally (Par B).*

*They react similarly to male and female leaders ((Par T).*

Meanwhile, if a follower does not respond to the LGBTQIA+ school head, open communication should be prioritized. This will lead to honest and respectful dialogues with them to understand their perspectives and address concerns they may have regarding LGBTQIA+ leadership.

*If there were instances where they did not respond to me as their leader, I would address the matter privately, discussing any concerns regarding my approach to work or my role as their head. I would explain that my actions are not personal but aimed at benefiting the school and the community. Additionally, I would emphasize the importance of separating personal issues from work-related matters (Par Q).*

Fostering open communication aims to promote understanding, trust, and respect among all team members. This approach allows for mutual understanding and creates an environment where everyone feels valued and respected for who they are. Placing a higher priority on transparency is another approach that will help address this. Sincere and polite conversations can bring about viewpoints addressing any worries they might have about LGBTQIA+ leadership.

#### **Theme 4: Courageous Trailblazing: Exposing Representations of LGBTQIA+ School Heads**

Analysis of the research enabled the researcher to expose the representations of LGBTQIA+ school heads. The emergence of LGBTQIA+ leaders has challenged conventional norms of leadership, offering unique perspectives

and experiences that enrich our understanding of effective leadership. The visibility of LGBTQIA+ leaders in media, politics, and other spheres profoundly influenced societal perceptions and policies. Positive representation fosters acceptance and empathy, challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society. Moreover, LGBTQIA+ leaders' advocacy has led to legislative changes, such as marriage equality and anti-discrimination protections, signaling progress toward greater equality and justice.

The participants described themselves as transformational leaders as they inspire employees to strive beyond required expectations to work toward a shared vision. To wit:

*I see myself as a transformative leader who encourages, inspires, and motivates my co-workers to innovate and, if necessary, create change (Par T).*

*I see myself as an empowered and transformational leader, but I'm also very sensitive to my subordinates. I always look to their reactions because, you know, I cannot please everyone (Par I).*

As such, transformational leaders promote leaders and followers to engage in mutual respect and power-sharing interactions. Those leaders who enact transformational leadership influence their followers by behaving in ways that motivate and inspire them. They communicate their expectations, demonstrate a commitment to a shared vision and goals, seek new ideas from others, and promote the individual development of others. Transformational leaders influence their followers. Additionally, these leaders actively solicit new ideas and promote supportive climates. More importantly, they promote the individual development of others (Soria, 2020).

As the interview progresses, their experiences disclose that most LGBTQIA+ school heads demonstrate creativity. They described themselves as creative. They are talented and creative in school, particularly in organizing various affairs and events. Some are artistic in school planning, while others are talented in designing stages, beautifying surroundings, and training the skills of pupils in dance, the arts, and others.

*I believe an LGBTQIA+ leader is very creative, not only when it comes to ideas that we want to share with our faculty but also when it comes to planning activities within the school. Not only leaders but also teachers who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community greatly contribute to its success (Par G).*

According to the information provided by participants, LGBTQIA+ people are innovative in bringing about beneficial changes for the community and school, not only in the four corners of the classroom. It also demonstrates that, besides imparting knowledge to students, they serve as advisors, beauticians, talent scouts, trainers, designers, decorators, inventors, and artists in professional environments. Moreover, they carry out their responsibilities effectively to better serve the needs of their class, their coworkers, and the institution. Teachers shared experiences mirrored those of Simons et al. (2021), who discovered that LGBT teachers must be creative in the classroom.

It was also found that LGBTQIA+ school heads sustain collaboration among their subordinates. A sustained collaborative workplace begins with leadership encouraging everyone to focus outwardly. It ends with sharing resources, expertise, and goals to achieve missions better and improve community outcomes for the long term.

*Effective administrative leadership involves making decisions that benefit the school, colleagues, students, and the community. It also entails identifying the institution's strengths and weaknesses. With this understanding, leaders can cultivate a work ethic that fosters collaboration, fairness, and honesty, promoting a just and equitable environment (Par Q).*

At its core, leadership is about inspiring others. It can be to achieve a common goal, become the best version of oneself, or drive positive change. However, traditional leadership is confined by the social construction society has labeled it with. The notion is that there must be one person above all else who leads and directs others and that there is an authoritarian structure involved in traditional leadership. Queer leadership aims to dismantle these conventional principles, demonstrating that leadership can be a collective effort to inspire and drive positive change (Leithwood et al., 2004, as cited by Williams, 2018).

It was found out that LGBTQIA+ school heads advocate inclusivity in the workplace by embracing diversity, promoting empathy and understanding, advocating for equality, embodying the principle of inclusive and transformative leadership, fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment, and raising voices in order for the people to know that LGBTQIA+ exist in society. This is further elaborated on their statements:

*An LGBTQIA+ school head can better integrate leadership and followership by fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. They can encourage open communication, empower others to take on leadership roles and prioritize building strong relationships with their team. LGBTQIA+ leaders often represent contemporary approaches to leadership effectiveness by embracing diversity, promoting empathy and understanding, and advocating for equality and inclusion in all aspects of their leadership. Their ability to navigate complex social dynamics and champion marginalized voices can lead to more innovative and inclusive solutions within their school community (Par L).*

*Our contributions to the school include fostering an inclusive environment where individuals of different genders can collaborate effectively and promoting a safe and supportive atmosphere (Par Q).*

Leadership may be considered the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement (Stogdill, quoted in Bogenschneider, 2016). It occurs when persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Followership is attaining one's goals by being influenced by a leader to participate in individual or group efforts toward organizational goals in a given situation. Followership becomes seen as a function of the follower, the leader, and situational variables. Most school head participants enacted transformative practices to create conditions to support marginalized students. These transformative actions are essential for sustained change (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Soria et al., 2020).

*As an LGBTQIA+ school head in the Philippines, we can significantly contribute to our school and the educational system. For instance, we can lead the establishment of safe spaces within the school where LGBTQIA+ students and staff can express themselves without fear of discrimination or harassment. As we all know, safe spaces contribute to mental health and well-being, consistent with Dep Ed's commitment to providing a supportive and nurturing learning environment. However, our most important contribution as school leaders is to be open and visible as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, promoting a positive role model for students and staff. Visible leadership creates a culture of acceptance and inclusivity, aligning with the Department of Education's commitment to promoting positive values and ethical behavior (Par +).*

Data analysis revealed that raising the voices of LGBTQIA+ school heads and community members will help people know that LGBTQIA+ school leaders exist. Leaders reported formal and informal structures and systems that provided opportunities to learn stakeholders' concerns, ideas, and solutions, which in turn influenced the leaders' actions.

As a result of their intentional interactions with various district and community stakeholders, district- and school-level leaders shared their explicit and sustained efforts to create responsive actions to support marginalized youth. Aligned to previous research, Bayside Hill leaders described their collective and individual leadership practices to enable their students to thrive socially and emotionally and to feel connected and safe in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). Additionally, district and school leaders reported establishing affinity groups with a culturally responsive lens (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Higher education leadership in the 21st century requires new approaches to understanding and practicing leadership. Scholarship and practice have witnessed a shift toward more socially responsible forms of leadership, yet leaders must learn to navigate oftentimes unwelcoming bureaucratic structures to advance social justice and equity (Pryor, 2017).

The interview with the participants revealed that school leaders may include LGBTQIA+ policies and representation that address gender issues, organize school-based seminars and trainings on gender mainstreaming issues, and strengthen the implementation of gender-responsive basic education to capacitate learners' gender-related concepts. These are evidently depicted with the following verbalizations of the respondents below:

*I recommend implementing clear and inclusive policies covering non-discrimination, anti-bullying, and access to support resources. Provide ongoing education and training for staff to increase awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues and establish dedicated support resources such as student clubs and counseling services. Promote LGBTQIA+ visibility in the curriculum and extracurricular activities and engage with families and communities to build understanding and support networks. Offer them professional development opportunities for LGBTQIA+ staff and regularly review and update policies to remain responsive to evolving needs (Par B).*

*I recommend that the Department of Education, the highest agency in charge of all educational institutions in the country, be more dynamic and visible in implementing DepEd Order No. 32, Series of 2017, not just in public schools but also in private schools. This will achieve the main goal and objective of the policy and realize the concepts of inclusivity, gender responsiveness, and celebrating diversity (Par A).*

In the private school setting, many recommendations are formulated based on the participants' responses. Though there are already existing policies on gender responsiveness, there is still room for modification to set clearer, more inclusive, and more comprehensive policies. School leaders can make school safe and inclusive for all. Learning institutions can, therefore, foster an effective and responsive school culture for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) educators in their workplace. They also need to feel safe and accepted to provide their students with the best education (Wright et al., 2019, as cited by Añonuevo & Digo, 2023).

According to Wright et al. (2019), school leaders continue to struggle with acknowledging and improving the experiences of LGBT educators. Lugg and Tooms (2010) discussed levels of “differentiated citizenship” for LGBT people, emphasizing that educators identifying as LGBT have had some of the most historically difficult experiences of all. These difficulties include living with the daily stress from fear of job loss to the level of acceptance by peers and other stakeholders and their outness in the workplace. In addition, Marshall and Hernandez (2013) found that providing specific training around issues of homosexuality to principal preparation candidates assisted them in disentangling prior views on homosexuality from attitudes that helped school leaders consider these issues analytically.

The impact of LGBTQIA+ representation can be concluded to have had little but significant effects on participants' overall perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community. Although the results showed that they were able to gain understanding, knowledge, and empathy through the media they consumed, it had little effect on participants' perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community because they relied more on what they observed from their peers' experiences as members of the community (Coro, Gaspi, & Navarro, 2020).

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The findings indicate that the identity politics of LGBTQIA+ served useful and empowering purposes for the LGBTQIA+ community in administrative leadership, even while it sometimes contradicted the philosophical complexity of any claim to a shared experience or common group characteristics. It centers on the lived experiences of those LGBTQIA+ school heads facing systemic oppression in identifying themselves as part of this community; thus, it concludes that among the participants, it was found that despite varied views on LGBTQIA+ leaders, they are accepted and respected in their respective institutions. The common struggles that LGBTQIA+ members face in navigating the balance between personal identity and professional responsibilities are stigma, bias, and discrimination. Thus, despite the existence of different policies released, the right of LGBTQIA individuals to express their preferred sexual orientation remained denied. LGBTQIA+ school heads representation fosters an inclusive environment where individuals of different genders can collaborate effectively and promote a safe and supportive atmosphere. They can also address issues related to various genders and establish comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, regular training on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity for staff, and designated safe spaces and support groups. Lastly, they can serve as role models for LGBTQIA+ individuals and others, inspiring them to aim higher and work towards changing societal perceptions of others by serving as a visible role model who values and listens to everyone, especially those who are marginalized and members of the minority. In the private school setting, many recommendations are formulated based on the participants' responses. Though there are already existing policies on gender responsiveness, there is still room for modification to set clearer, more inclusive, and more comprehensive policies. School leaders can make school safe and inclusive

for all. Learning institutions can, therefore, foster an effective and responsive school culture for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) educators in their workplace.

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The author has no conflict of interest to declare relevant to this article's content.

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