

# Implications to Student Well-being: A Qualitative Study on Secondary Teachers' Management of SOGIE Inquiries

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores teacher understanding of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) and its implications on student well-being. This study is not capable of determining correlations between teacher understanding and student well-being; however, interpretations about SOGIE becomes significant when managing inquiries or concerns of students. This study involved eight in-depth interviews of teachers from public and private high schools in Iloilo, Philippines. The Positive Education Practices (PEPs) Framework was utilized as a practical assessment of how teachers approach inquiries about SOGIE, and how it shapes the school environment. Teachers recognize that their students are seeking support in finding themselves, guidance on how to deal with interpersonal relationships, and explanations about the vast information fed by mass media. Results of this study have shown that SOGIE as a whole is a vague concept to the teachers, as well as guidance counselors, and their approaches were found to be both facilitating and impeding student well-being. The ambiguity of SOGIE is attributed to inadequate referents and the impermeable heteronormative Philippine school culture. It is recommended that teachers and guidance counselors should be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes through appropriate training in managing SOGIE concerns considering the needs of students, particularly those of the LGBTQ adolescents. Educational institutions must provide a school environment that enables social and emotional literacy, positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement through strengths, and meaning and purpose. These facilitate student well-being where students can maximize their capacities and reach their full potential.

Keywords: teacher understanding, student SOGIE inquiries, SOGIE inquiry management, LGBT, positive education practices

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most powerful roles of education is to transmit culture from one generation to the next. The school, particularly the teachers, are agents for such transmission. They facilitate the development of social and emotional skills of the students. The role of technology has been emphasized much as to changes and the advancement of new pedagogies. E-learning and the use of the worldwide web are on the rise. However, in today's time, adolescents face a lot of stressors including but not limited to health, environmental degradation, poverty, population explosion, terrorism, increasing natural disasters, and social issues. Thus, learning is more significant when there is learner-faculty interaction (Sobejana, cited in Huyong & Ferrer, 2005). Through valuable communication, students can easily voice their concerns to their teachers. Learners can anchor

on the guidance of their advisers and counselors in making effective and substantial decisions. This could significantly mitigate adolescents' unhealthy coping mechanisms and behaviors.

### ***Adolescence and Sexuality***

Human sexuality development is an intricate process which an individual undergoes. Sexuality is an "expression of interest, orientation, and preference" (Tulloch & Kaufman, 2013). It involves forming intimate relationships; gender identity – a person's self-identification as male or female; and sexual orientation – "one's enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both," among others (American Psychological Association, 2015). It is more than just a biological development or a sexual maturation process. It is concerned not only with physical development but cognitive, emotional,

social, and moral development as well (Oswalt, 2010). It includes how one perceives himself or herself, and how the person feels about oneself, others, and the society that he or she belongs.

During adolescence, specifically from 12 to 19 years of age, sexuality development heightens. There are transitional changes that occur in physical characteristics, emotional aspects, and cognitive features in an individual. According to Benson (2017), puberty is more than just physical changes. The adolescent's way of thinking and emotions also vary.

It is during adolescence when the person begins to contemplate his or her gender identity, whether it fits into his or her whole identity. One way or another, adolescents will question their sexual orientation. This aspect of identity will be confusing because of varying possibilities. For instance, it is quite plausible to be emotionally attracted to one gender but physically attracted to another. There will be conflicting feelings; hence, it is considered normal for adolescents to become uncertain or ambivalent about their sexual orientation (Oswalt, 2010). It is during the middle adolescence stage, from 15 to 17 years old, when adolescents tend to form a more defined sexual orientation and gender identity (Tulloch & Kaufman, 2013).

When they reach late adolescence, about 17 to 19 years old, they begin to form stable relationships grounded on mutuality and reciprocity. These relationships are based on their established gender identity (World Health Organization, 2006). Adolescents may be able to orient themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. However, for adolescents who start to develop gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientations, this life stage may become bothersome and difficult. It may bring distress, most especially if family members, friends, or the community they are in are not accommodating with such sexual orientations (Benson, 2017).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adolescents are considered to be a minority group; hence, like any other minority group, many people do not understand what they go through. They are prone to and may experience mistreatment, being mocked, ridiculed, punished, or ostracized for being who they are. They may also feel estranged from others, alienating themselves from people, and keeping their problems to themselves. These can potentially destroy their self-esteem and increase their risk to develop depression, drug abuse, delinquent behaviors, and

poor school performance (Oswalt, 2010).

### ***Adolescent Sexuality Education in the Philippines***

The Department of Education in the Philippines (DepEd) wants to equip and empower students in making choices and decisions that affect their safety and well-being. Hence, DepEd integrates "an age-appropriate, developmental, and culture-sensitive sexuality education" in its K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum (DepEd, 2016), and mandates more gender-responsive policies (DepEd, 2017).

Sexuality education is not about learning the act of having sexual intercourse. Rather, it is a process of having necessary knowledge and skills, and developing appropriate attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding human sexuality (Ministry of Education, 2016).

In the Philippines, sexuality education has been integrated into several subjects in high school such as Values Education (VE), Religion, Biology, Technology, and Livelihood Education (TLE), Physical Education, Health and Music (PEHM), and Homeroom. These subjects are similar but the "topics covered and emphasis, core messages delivered, and teaching strategies used" vary among schools (Huyong & Ferrer, 2005; Manalastas & Macapagal, 2005).

According to high school students, topics taken up in sexuality education are not clearly discussed. Teachers "taught by parts, not holistic," thus it gives room for more curiosity and misunderstanding on the part of the students. For female students, sexuality is the same as gender or "similar" or "related" to sex. Half of the male students do not have an idea of what sexuality means. To most students, gender is either male or female. They are not agreeable to include lesbians and gays as part of their overall identities. Because of the students' confusion, they want their teachers to correct the wrong information that they have (Huyong & Ferrer, 2005).

In a study by Ohlstrom (2016), Filipino teachers expressed respect, but had contradicting opinions on acceptance of others. She stated that there were heteronormative perceptions and discriminations against LGBT people in the Philippines. She also reported that teachers have minimal opportunities to learn about sexuality topics, thus basing their knowledge on traditional and incorrect information.

Filipino teachers had fears in discussing sexuality because of inadequate knowledge of the subject

matter and insufficient teacher training on how to deliver it to their students. Trainings provided to them were usually generic and focus more on family life education rather than instructions on how to handle sensitive topics like abortion, homosexuality, and contraception; thus, teachers often limit their lessons to “safe” topics such as anatomy and abstinence. They felt anxious because they doubt their abilities to share accurate information, and they feel responsible for molding their students into mature individuals who could make intelligent decisions (La Bella, 2014).

The topic of human sexuality is taught to public schools and private non-Catholic schools for freshmen in subjects such as VE and PEHM. Interestingly, sexual identity and orientation is only taught to non-Catholic schools. In private-Catholic schools, only the juniors (third year high school students) study human sexuality in their TLE class.

### ***Well-being and Positive Education***

There is a need for accurate and comprehensive information that is sensitive to the needs of adolescents, particularly those who belong to minority or marginalized groups. For instance, growing up in extreme poverty is no less than growing up as gay or lesbian (Paunlagi et al., 2005, cited in Hobbes, 2017). The experiences of LGBT adolescents for years and years of small stressors which are caused by their constant anxiety – “Was that because of my sexuality?” –are far worse than those who have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can be addressed in four to six months of therapy. For gay people, they have to hide their minority status and answer their own internal questions – a situation which magnifies the stress that they experience (Hobbes, 2017). This has been referred to as minority stress, which could be simplified as having acute stress by being a member of a marginalized group. These small stresses take its toll over time as the member of a minority group considers possibilities of being ostracized or experience overt stigma. As such, schools play a significant role in supporting the adolescents to develop the necessary skills to improve their well-being (Waters, 2011). High levels of school belonging likely result in low levels of depression and psychological distress (Heck, Lindquist, Machek, & Cochran, 2014).

Well-being affects the student’s socio-emotional skills, academic performance, and holistic development. A study by Nordlander and Stensöta

(2014) among adolescents revealed that there is a positive association between school grades and the general subjective well-being of students for both boys and girls. Adolescence as a period of transition, is a time when the individual’s identity and future well-being are formed. This signifies that the experiences of adolescents at this phase of their lives can influence both their present and future well-being.

A similar study by Hanson, Austin, and Zheng (2010) on adolescents’ academic performance and school well-being confirmed that Academic Performance Index (API) scores are directly proportionate to the levels of school well-being indicators. This means that student achievement can be improved if educational institutions include learning supports that make the schools safer, caring, participatory, and engaging.

As deemed important, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (2015) proposed some guiding principles to promote student well-being. They believed that it is essential for academic achievement and active participation in school; thus, it should be in all areas of the curriculum and other school activities. Student well-being also includes equity, diversity, safe, caring, and accepting schools, character development, contemporary skills, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation. The board believes that it is necessary to hone students for their roles in society and that student well-being must be of the whole school and community effort and responsibility.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education also issued its DepEd Order No. 32, S. 2017 on a Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. It aims to “involve all learners, teachers, and non-teaching personnel and other stakeholders in the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination” (DepEd, 2017). This is the Department’s response to promote diversity in educational institutions to lessen discrimination and encourage inclusivity.

Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009 cited in Waters, 2011) defined an approach that promotes academic skills and well-being. They called the approach as positive education, an applied positive psychology in the field of education (Green, Odes & Robinson cited in Waters, 2011). Further, positive education purports that skills which promote positive emotions, relationships, and character strengths proportionately improve learning and academic achievement (Bernard & Walton, 2011 cited in Waters, 2011). In other words, positive

education is the application of positive psychology in the field of education which aims to develop skills on positive emotions, positive relationships, and character strengths to advance students' learning and academic success.

### ***Positive Education Practices Framework***

Positive Education Practices (PEPs) Framework follows Seligman's core principles and directions in positive psychology interventions. It is an application of the positive psychology movement which aims to promote well-being. It allows educational psychologists to practice innovation and optimism in working with students (Noble & McGrath, 2008). Positive Education and PEPs Framework, however, are novel here in the Philippines. The applicability of this field in the Philippines is currently investigated and assessed (Positive Psychology Center Annual Report, 2016). A grant was given to Alejandro Adler of Quezon City Academy for his study entitled "Positive Education in the Philippines: Educating for Academic Success and Well-being." Nevertheless, in the study of Waters (2011), evidence has shown that positive psychology programs or interventions are significantly related to student well-being, relationships, and academic performance. Thus, twenty-first-century education must incorporate these kinds of programs to appropriately equip students with skills that will not only help them academically but rather holistically. The PEPs Framework has five foundations: (1) social and emotional competency, (2) positive emotions, (3) positive relationships, (4) engagement through strengths, and (5) sense of meaning and purpose.

Social and emotional competency is similar to that of Seligman's (2007 cited in Noble and McGrath, 2008) achievement. This foundation states that in promoting students' well-being, there should be an effective social and emotional learning curriculum that focuses on resilience skills, emotional literacy skills, and personal achievement skills. Further, students must also experience positive emotions by capacitating them in optimistic thinking and problem-solving. According to Noble and McGrath (2008), schools should have policies, programs, and strategies that enhance the students' "feelings of belonging; feelings of safety from putdowns, bullying, and violence; feelings of satisfaction, and pride through opportunities for experiencing and celebrating success; feelings of excitement; and feelings of optimism." Having positive relationships with fellow learners and their teachers, makes them feel connected, and have a

sense of support and acceptance. It also enhances their motivation to achieve and behave in prosocial ways.

PEPs framework also presents that favorable behaviors and achievement are more likely to transpire if students are aware of their cognitive and character strengths. Also, well-being and achievement are enriched if the learners find meaning ("when what they do has an impact on others") and purpose ("when they pursue worthwhile goals") in whatever they experience in school (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

### ***The Current Study***

In view of adolescent well-being and gender concerns, discussion of LGBT mental health must begin in schools as learning institutions. During the 2013 Philippine National LGBT Community Dialogue, it was recommended that education in the Philippines must include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) issues in existing gender studies courses (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

Education has a role in facilitating the development of social and emotional skills of adolescents, inasmuch as its capability of promoting academic achievement. This current study particularly explored how teachers addressed SOGIE concerns considering that students are primarily interested in it (Manalastas & Macapagal, 2005) and that the education department seeks "to undertake gender-mainstreaming in education" (DepEd, 2017).

Adolescence takes place during high school, and it is where adolescents start to contemplate their gender identities – whether it fits into their overall identities; thus, having a significant contribution to their well-being. The Positive Education Practices (PEPs) Framework was utilized as a practical assessment of how teachers manage inquiries on SOGIE, and how it supplements a more gender-responsive school environment.

This study assumes a contextualist perspective which seeks to discover the understanding of the teachers about SOGIE, and how this understanding/knowledge is translated through their management of SOGIE concerns from their students. In particular, this study explored how secondary teachers in Iloilo addressed SOGIE classroom and non-classroom concerns.

Specifically using the PEPs Framework, this study aims:

1. To describe how the teachers respond (i.e. explain, refer, discuss) to students' SOGIE inquiries; and
2. To describe how the teachers' response (i.e. explanation, referral, discussion) to SOGIE concerns facilitate or impede students' well-being.

## METHOD

Limited studies are directed to investigate how teachers have addressed related inquiries and/or concerns on SOGIE both inside and outside the classroom; hence, this research utilized a qualitative study, which is exploratory and descriptive in nature. It assumes a contextualist approach which means it primarily lies in the teachers' subjective realities of SOGIE. This study attempts to understand the teachers' different points of view and interpretations based on their unique understanding and experiences

### *Research Participants*

A qualitative research aims to describe a phenomenon that depends on the subjective realities of its participants; hence, it is necessary to purposively select individuals who can best provide needed information (Creswell, 2014). The inclusion criteria of teachers included that they teach specific subjects where gender and sexuality topics may be incorporated. According to Huyong and Ferrer (2005), and Manalastas and Macapagal (2005), LGBT adolescents in high school may learn about topics related to gender and sexuality in subjects like Religion (including masturbation, abortion, gay sexuality, and reproduction), Values Education; Biology (STDs, reproduction, pregnancy, childbirth, contraception); Technology and Livelihood Education; Physical Education, Health and Music; and in Homeroom. Advisers, other secondary high school teachers and/or guidance counselors handle the aforementioned subjects. Thus, these qualifiers were considered in choosing the research participants.

There were limited opportunities for teachers to discuss SOGIE in the classroom; hence, it was a challenge to find participants who could give rich information. Furthermore, some teachers have anxiety that their participation would lead to termination of employment. This preceded participation concerns

such as refusal for interview and unwillingness to divulge much information.

Private high schools in the City and Province of Iloilo are sectarian or Catholic schools; thus, it was particularly difficult for the researcher to find willing participants. These private high schools still adhere to a heteronormative culture where LGBT orientations and identities are not openly accepted. Public high schools were more accommodating to such realities. Nevertheless, the researcher has gathered substantial information from eight participants where four teachers were interviewed from public and another four from private high schools. Seven of the teachers self-identified as heterosexuals, while one teacher from a private high school claimed to have fluid sexuality. This one participant viewed his sexuality as flexible across different situations where he can experience same-sex or other-sex attractions for either short-term or long-term durations (Diamond, 2016).

Participants from the public high school teach Values Education; Technology and Livelihood Education; Physical Education, Health and Music; and Homeroom. Two of them are class advisers, and another is a guidance counselor. The private high school teachers, on the other hand, are teaching Personal Development, Homeroom, and Sociology. All of them are also guidance associates in their respective schools. All participants are currently handling the aforementioned subjects across all year levels in junior and senior high school.

### *Interview Guide*

The study is qualitative in nature; therefore, it is but reasonable that data shall be in a narrative form. In-depth interviews were conducted to the high school teachers. The interview was pertaining to their knowledge about SOGIE, their experiences in class when they encountered SOGIE concerns, how have they addressed it, and how they think these interactions are relevant to their students' well-being. The interview guide has 17 major questions which were altered, depending on how the interview progressed. The questions were all open-ended and mostly encouraged or prompted the participant to talk more about his or her experiences.

Some of the questions are as follows:

1. If you are to rate your understanding on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression

(SOGIE), how well-versed are you regarding this topic?

2. Are there any SOGIE related terms or concepts that your students ask in the class?

3. Why do you think are they asking these kinds of questions?

4. When they ask you regarding SOGIE, how do you acknowledge their queries?

5. Do you think that your students' queries on SOGIE have an impact on themselves as they ask you? Why?

The interview guide was reviewed by professors from the University of the Philippines Visayas to ensure appropriate course of discussion between the researcher and the interviewees.

### **Procedure**

SOGIE discussions were atypical in regular classroom discussions, thus class observation is an impractical method to use. This study collected data in the Province and City of Iloilo through in-depth interviews with high school teachers. Each interview lasted for thirty minutes to an hour and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with their students to verify what the teachers have shared.

The researcher followed an interview protocol (Creswell, 2014) with the following steps: (1) the researcher formally asked for each of the participants' consent through letters of invitation and accomplishment of a signed consent form; (2) the researcher informed each of the participants about the study before the conduct of the in-depth interviews; (3) the participants were asked to choose their pseudonyms for their anonymity, and they were assured of the confidentiality of the data they have given; (4) they were also told that they are free to terminate their participation should they feel they can no longer continue; (5) permission was asked for the recording of the interviews; and (6) they were thanked and given tokens for their participation.

These protocols were reviewed by professors from the University of the Philippines Visayas to ensure confidentiality and safety of participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The whole qualitative research process focused

on knowing and understanding the meaning attached by the participants to SOGIE, as opposed to what the researcher brings about in the process. Thus, the researcher classified the participants' responses to gain a fuller insight into their subjective realities.

The researcher used thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyzes and reports patterns of themes that emerge from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The transcriptions generated from interviews were organized through a bottom-up process, following Creswell's (2014) method in qualitative studies. It was examined and coded for organization. Coding was established through a classification of raw data; whether they are: (1) knowledge about SOGIE, (2) inquiries from students, (3) perceptions of teachers about the inquiries, and (4) responses of the teachers towards the inquiries. In addition, the responses of teachers were further sorted according to the factors in the PEPs Framework: (1) social and emotional competency, (2) positive emotions, (3) positive relationships, (4) engagement through strengths, and (5) provision of meaning and purpose. When the raw data was organized, themes and categories were identified. Sub-themes were also considered in instances where it is needed. These themes were described according to how they connect the elements. Consequently, the meanings of the themes were interpreted following established concepts and theories.

Validity and reliability were determined through peer debriefing and intercoders, respectively. In peer debriefing, the researcher asked a consultant (a peer debriefer) to review the themes and asked questions on unclear classifications or definitions. An intercoder assisted the researcher in cross-checking the coding whether she overlooked some elements or coded them inappropriately. These validation and reliability measures made the interpretations more objective and accurate.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were put forward where anonymity and confidentiality of data were secured. Interviews with the teachers and the data verification through FGD with students were all done with their consent. No one was forced to participate in the study. All participants were free to terminate the interview/discussion should they want to. In addition, interview and FGD guides and protocols were reviewed by professors from the University of the Philippines

Visayas for the sensitivity of the topic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results and discussion of the study. The first part is about the teachers' understanding of SOGIE – how they defined terminologies, and to what they attribute or associate these concepts. The second part discusses the teachers' approaches to SOGIE inquiries of their students. The analysis was anchored through the PEPs Framework, whether the teachers' approaches contribute or impede their students' well-being.

### *Teachers' Understanding of SOGIE*

This study is not capable of determining correlations between the teachers' understanding of SOGIE and student well-being; however, their understanding of SOGIE becomes significant if they are addressing inquiries or concerns of their students. Since adolescence is the period of heightened sexuality development where puberty is more than just physical changes (Benson, 2017), adolescents yearn to be clarified on issues that bother them, particularly their search for identity.

In classroom discussions, students often ask teachers about certain terminologies used for a specific topic to aid their comprehension. More often than not, teachers begin their lessons by defining key concepts which are regarded as basic and essential to understanding laws and theories in various subjects.

In the interview, teachers were asked to translate the terms sexual orientation, gender identity and expression to assess their knowledge and understanding about it. All of them have difficulty translating the SOGIE terms in the local language, but they do have a certain comprehension of each. As shown in Table 1, rather than stating direct renditions of each terminology, they contextualized it according to how they understand sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. They associated other lexes that closely refer to concepts being asked of them:

*“The same...with sa mga bakla bala. Daw wala gid siya distinction sa akon. Bal-an ko may difference na siya pero kung mahambal ko ya agi, agi; Tomboy, tomboy... Indi siya specific sakon.”* (The same...with gays. For me, there is no distinction. I know there is a difference

among the terms, but when I say gay or lesbian, it simply means gay and lesbian. The terms are indistinctive.)

*- Ms. Ting, TLE teacher*

In psycholinguistics, people have an internal lexicon which is the storage of lexical information in the permanent memory. This includes knowledge of words, concepts, symbols, and objects. The access to this internal storage and retrieving information from it can be influenced by several factors including word frequency, and the person's phonological, syntactic, morphological, and semantic knowledge (Carroll, 2008). SOGIE is a vague concept for the participants. While they have ideas about it, they tend to interchange the terminologies and fit it right according to their context.

Making meanings about terminologies may utilize reference and making sense out of the lexicon. Reference makes use of referents – the people, objects, or events to which a linguistic expression refers; while sense signifies the relationship that a word has with other words in the lexicon (Carroll, 2008). Forrester (1996) presented meaning as a reference. His idea was that “meanings are tied up with our understanding of the constructions we ‘impose’ on the world through our everyday use of language.” Hence, reference and sense contribute to how people find meaning in words.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are abstract words. These words are difficult to define because even if they have meaning, it is difficult to know what they refer to. In other words, they are meaningful terms, but they lack real-life referents. What the teachers did was to make sense out of SOGIE terms by associating it with words that are already in their internal lexicon.

Meanings of concepts can also be determined by cultural context. The acquisition and comprehension of terminologies are “coterminous with the acquisition of a set of cultural practices” (Forrester, 1996). This suggests that lexes are interdependent on culture. Participants are familiar with SOGIE concepts, but their inadequate understanding of SOGIE suggests that the concept is not salient within their culture. According to Jackson (2006, cited in Manalastas, 2013), being a member of the LGBT indicates the status of being a member of a minority group. Therefore, this implies that cultural norms are patterned toward heterosexuality.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Understanding of SOGIE

Terms	Themes and definitions	Sample Text
Sexual Orientation	<p>Lexical non-equivalence -There is no local term</p> <p>Gender awareness -The state of becoming aware of one's gender</p> <p>Sexual responsibility -It relates to accepting ones accountability in performing sexual activities</p>	<p><i>"Wala ko may maisip nga Hiligaynon"</i> (I cannot think of any Hiligaynon term.)</p> <p><i>"Pagkabalo mo sa imo nga pagkatawo"</i> (Your knowledge about yourself.)</p> <p><i>"Since teenagers are into sexual activities, ang gina-imply ko guid sa ila is ang responsibilidad nila dapat mabal-an nila."</i> (Since teenagers are into sexual activities, I always tell them to be aware of their responsibilities.)</p>
Gender Identity	<p>Lexical ambiguity -It is similar to, more or less synonymous to, or quite indistinctive to other SOGIE terms</p> <p>Self-concept -Refers to how an individual defines his or herself.</p> <p>Gender stereotyping -Refers to gender binary labels and social-role behaviors</p>	<p><i>"The same...Daw wala gid siya distinction sa akon."</i> (The same...For me, there is no distinction [among the terms].)</p> <p><i>"Ang pagkakilala mo sa imo self"</i> (How you define yourself.)</p> <p>man-woman, <i>agi-tomboy</i> (gay- lesbian), and masculinity-femininity</p>
Gender Expression	<p>Self-expression -It is a form of self- expression, the way he/ she presents himself/herself to others</p> <p>Gender schema -Refers to whether a person looks and behaves as a man or a woman</p>	<p><i>"Paano mo ginapakita sa imo pamiste, sa imo nga paghambal, sa imo nga mga hulag kung sin-o ikaw"</i> (How you present yourself through your appearance, the way you talk, and how you behave)</p> <p><i>"kababayi/kalalaki nga panghulag/pamayo"</i> (feminine/masculine behavior/look)</p>

In the Philippine school culture, core messages on sexuality are still stereotypical about being a man or a woman despite recent movements on gender mainstreaming. Heterosexuality is one of the predominant frameworks in relationship topics in school. Discussions on gender are stereotypical and pertain to traditional gender roles (Huyong & Ferrer, 2005). Moreover, in a study by Manalastas and del Pilar (2005, cited in Manalastas, 2013), 28%

of Filipino adults still consider being an LGBTQ as "wholly unacceptable."

The culture by which the teachers are in and are practicing is heteronormative. This explains why SOGIE concepts are not quite prominent; thus, they named gender binary labels and social-role behaviors such as man-woman, *agi-tomboy* (gay-lesbian), and masculinity-femininity, among others,



when discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. They associate SOGIE closely to stereotypes, gender binaries, and deviations from heterosexuality.

**Teachers’ Approaches to SOGIE Inquiries and Student Well-being**

According to the teachers, several LGBT adolescents presented their concerns in school. It was through class discussions, formal guidance appointments, or frequent visits to faculty-in-charge. The teachers acknowledge that the students have persistent thoughts that may make them unsettled. Hence, teachers know that whatever the students bring up to class or outside of the class are things that occupy them, may it be out of curiosity, or just to be clarified on some vague constructs they encounter in their daily lives.

Teachers recognize that their students are seeking support in finding themselves, guidance on how to deal with interpersonal relationships, and explanations about information from various mass media. Thus, the teachers were asked to expound on

how they dealt with situations where their students raised SOGIE concerns. The table below shows the result as analyzed according to the different factors in the PEPs framework, whether it allowed attaining well-being and enabling students to use their capabilities to reach their full potential, or it impeded students to be accurately informed.

**Opportunities and Barriers to Social and Emotional Competency.** The first foundation in the PEPs Framework is social and emotional competency. Students are said to experience well-being and behave in a more prosocial way when they believe that they are socially and emotionally competent (Noble & McGrath, 2008). Results have shown that the teachers both provided an opportunity and a barrier to well-being on social and emotional competency.

Confirming diversity is an opportunity for well-being in the sense that teachers let students realize that each person is unique, that people have differences including their SOGIE. By acknowledging this diversity, teachers are encouraging optimistic thinking and amplifying positive feelings.

**Table 2.** Well-being and the PEPs Framework

PEPs Framework Factors	Opportunities to Well-Being	Barriers to Well-Being
Social and Emotional Competency	Confirming diversity	Redirecting responses Inadequacy of responses
Positive Emotions		Indiscriminate responses Conditional positive regard Social referents Bias
Positive Relationships		Institutionally prescribed
Engagement through Strengths		Surface Neutrality - Impartiality - Validating gender stereotypes
Meaning and purpose	Seeking intrapersonal anchors -Preparations for the future -Persistence -Cognitive dissonance Seeking interpersonal anchors -Relationships	Tangentiality Heteronormativity

*“Kay sang gaklase kami, nang nakadiscuss ako sa ila sina sang parte sang kuan, sang ga relasyon-relasyon nga may mga babayi nga naga admire sa mga parehas man nga babayi kag mga lalaki nga parehas man.”* (While we were having our class discussion on relationships, I have mentioned that there are women who admire women, and men who also admire men.)

– Ms. Homma, 43 (Class Adviser)

In a study by Manalastas and Macapagal (2005), students do realize that teachers have biases and prejudices. Students are able to open up and share if expectations are corrected by teachers and when teachers become more accommodating to SOGIE concerns. Educators do admit that adolescent gays have specific needs that are often overlooked in the classroom (Besner & Spungin, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1995, cited in Manalastas & Macapagal, 2005); hence, to be able to acknowledge their needs, such as being able to acquire concrete explanations, is already a step towards equipping them with emotional literacy skill. Students can recognize and understand their feelings and are also sensitive to others.

On the other hand, redirecting questions and inadequacy of responses from the teachers impede well-being. Teachers have been redirecting questions to their students: *“So I ask him back kung ano iya panan-awan sa idea nga ginpamangkot man niya sa akon...”* (So I ask him back about his view on the idea that he just presented...) – Ms. M, 39 (Class Adviser); or they may answer them neutrally:

*“Kay ang pag-explain ko to gani nga indi mo mahambal nga ang being gay is sala or ang being lesbian is sala. Indi mo mahambal nga sala ina siya. So meaning may ara na sila nga concept na they exist and they are not wrong. Pero ang pag-understand gani sina sa rightness or wrongness sang being lesbian or being gay is dependent sa kung paano mo siya i-view.”* (I explained to them that they cannot conclude that being gay is wrong or being a lesbian is wrong. You cannot simply say that those orientations are wrong. So, meaning, they already have a concept that they exist, and they are not wrong. But your [their] understanding of its rightness or

wrongness of being lesbian or being gay is dependent on how they view it.)

– Mr. Ford, 25 (Homeroom Teacher)

Adolescents would want accurate explanations of abstract concepts. Asking them back, redirecting questions, to what they think about their concerns do not provide definite support; thereby leaving them more confused than clarified.

Adolescents prefer that abstract concepts be discussed holistically; otherwise, it gives room for more curiosity and misunderstanding (Huyong & Ferrer, 2005). Teachers are conveying information in several parts if they keep redirecting questions or remain indifferent. Students cannot fully grasp fragmented information.

**Opportunities and Barriers to Positive Emotions.** The second foundation of the PEPs framework is positive emotions. A person must feel good about himself or herself to experience positive emotions. Noble and McGrath (2008) suggested that schools can ensure positive emotions by letting students feel they belong, safe from putdowns and bullying, satisfied and proud, excited and enjoy activities, and optimistic toward academic achievement.

Unfortunately, positive emotions are not highlighted in the teachers' approaches. They have indiscriminate responses, conditional positive regard, social referents, and biases, which are all barriers to well-being.

Indiscriminate responses may suggest support. However, being supportive seems haphazard. Teachers want to level-off with their students, but they give insufficient information. For instance, rather than providing immediate intervention when students are being teased about their SOGIE, a teacher seems to defer students' feelings of relief by opting to provide more dialogue between the students and/or with their parents.

*“Although since adolescents sila there are times nga ang iban gaka-sunluugan gid because of those issues pero still kinahanglan man nga i-strengthen: ‘Eh ano kung agi ako?’ diba kay gina-sunlog na sa ila classmates ang agi daan or some parents would have prejudices on their sons and daughters being gays pero ti, kinahanglan ka dialogue, storya lang.”*

(Since they are in their adolescence, there are times when they are being teased because of those issues, but still, it is just a matter of strengthening: 'So what if I am gay?' It is because gays are really teased by their classmates or some parents would have prejudices on their sons and daughters being gays, but still, it just needs dialogue, just a little pep talk.)

– Ms. Peggy, 38 (*Homeroom Teacher*)

Showing support can mean either acceptance or tolerance. Adolescents in search of identities have so much to deal with, and merely letting them explore on their own as a form of support is hampering their holistic growth. Support must be backed up with appropriate guidance.

Moreover, according to Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist (Feist, 2008), conditions of worth are a barrier to attaining good psychological health. Providing conditions before accepting students requires them to do something, behave in a certain standard, and be someone "acceptable." Ms. Ever, 22, a Guidance Associate, shared that same-sex relationships are tolerated in school as long as it remains discreet: "*You don't put it out there pa gid in the open eh kung 'di mo gusto mahatagan sanction. Gina-tolerate siya in a way nga 'okay, pabay-an ta' as long as indi lang mag-PDA, mga amo na bala haw.*" (You don't put it out there in the open if you do not want to face sanctions. It is tolerated in a way that 'okay, let them be' as long as they will not have PDA – public display of affection – of some kind.)

The teachers use social referents to base these conditions. When they address inquiries of students, they explained what the school, parents, and religion are emphasizing rather than basing it on recent studies or facts:

"*So ang akon lang nga maintiyendihan ninyo dapat, ah, i-consider niyo man ang ginahambal sang mga ginikanan niyo kay para man na sa kaayuhan niyo kay wala sang ginikinan nga indi gusto nga magmaayo ang iya kabataan.*" (I just want you to understand that you should also consider what your parents are telling you because parents only want what is best for their children).

– Ms. Homma, 43 (*Class Adviser*)

Bias was shown when they demonstrated tolerance and selectivity to what is "more acceptable." It depends on what is right according to their beliefs. Otherwise, they do not fully approve of the students' behavior. Tolerance is being shown, but it seems that institutions remain in the heteronormative culture.

According to Benson (2017), when people reach late adolescence, they may already be able to identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. But those who begin to develop gay or lesbian orientations may find it difficult and inconvenient most especially if family members, peer groups, or the community are not accommodating with such sexual orientations. This brings distress to adolescents as they also begin to long for belongingness among these groups. The experience of these anxiety-provoking situations does not foster positive emotions among adolescents. It brings them distress which does not help them in attaining optimum well-being.

In a study by Sobritchea, Conaco, and Jimenez (2003, cited in Huyong & Ferrer, 2005), it was recommended that "sex education programs should be more comprehensive and less heterosexual in design." Thus, teachers must become more inclusive when it comes to managing SOGIE inquiries. Similarly, since students do approach their guidance counselors, counseling programs must also provide an all-encompassing session with LGBTQ adolescents who may have special concerns. Offering programs that are more accepting of gender diversity encourages positive emotions among LGBTQ high school students.

**Opportunities and Barriers to Positive Relationships.** Positive relationships is the third foundation of the PEPs framework. Positive peer relationships and positive teacher-learner relationships facilitate the connectedness of the students with the school. It aids support and acceptance which motivates students to achieve and behave in prosocial ways (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

One way of enhancing these relationships is to engage students in learning activities that promote camaraderie regardless of each student's SOGIE. Unfortunately, teachers provide an unsatisfactory gender-responsive climate in their class activities. They have activities which are all institution prescribed. Although it lessened male-female differences in several tasks, other gender identities were not considered. The fixed modules for homeroom sessions also still include gender stereotypes, and

these modules are rarely revised for several years:

*“May ara na ya nga built-in nga module. For each year level may mga modules na. So, kung sin-o ang next nga maghandle, amo man na siya gihapon ang ginapasa. Gina-polish lang kung may mga kinanglan i-polish.”* (There is a fixed module. There are existing modules for each year level. These modules are passed on to whoever will handle it [homeroom classes] next. It will only be polished if needed.)

– Ms. Heart, 30 (Guidance Associate)

Further, Ms. Heart shared that it would be hard to insert a more gender-inclusive topic because it does not coincide with the school's values: *“...if ever gid man na somebody will talk about this, about LGBT community, I don't know kung pa'no ni nila i-handle. Na indi siya mag get away sa --- na ano, na amo ka di-a mo. Ila ya laki-bayi lang gid.”* (If ever somebody will talk about this, about LGBT community, I don't know how they [institution] will handle it. That it will not get away from --- [institution's values] that, that what should be. For them, [gender] should only be male-female.)

Teachers adhere to existing instructional materials and modules are said to be established and passed on over the years. Little enhancements are made if there is a need to refine it. Topics about SOGIE and LGBT are not included in the learning materials in private schools. Ms. Ever, a homeroom teacher and Guidance Associate in a Catholic high school, uses materials that are readily provided as she explained: *“Like example may mga topics bi nga self-awareness, mga bullying, pwede ko na sila ma-take mo. Pero feeling ko mga topics nga amo na, kailangan ko pa na siya i-consult...”* (I can take topics like self-awareness, bullying. But I feel that topics about it [SOGIE] should be first consulted...). Ms. Ever and Ms. Heart, also a homeroom teacher and Guidance Associate in another private Catholic high school, verified that topics about SOGIE are not included in the learning materials, and they doubt the approval of the school administration on the inclusion of these topics.

Human sexuality is taught to public and private high schools. However, sexual identity and orientation are only taught in non-Catholic schools. To most students, gender is binary, and they only consider male and female as acceptable genders (Huyong

& Ferrer, 2005). While we have already established that students want to be clarified on issues about sexuality, they also expressed that they want to have structured learning activities about this topic. According to the students, class lectures hamper their full understanding of the concepts, whereas class activities let them experience certain situations that holistically facilitate their learning.

*“Activity, Ma'am... Kay kung discuss kung kis-a indi mo maano gid, maintindi.. May mga maintindihan, malipatan mo man, Ma'am, pero kun magin activity ma-experience mo gid, Ma'am.”* (Activity, Ma'am... Because if it was only discussed, we sometimes cannot understand... We may understand, but we forget, Ma'am, unless if it is an activity where we can actually experience it, Ma'am.)

– Inday (Gr. 10 student)

Students have articulated preferred teaching styles from their teachers. For them, they gain more knowledge and comprehend abstract constructs more if they experience it. Hence, structured learning activities should be appropriate when designing classroom activities on SOGIE because it is anchored on experiential learning.

Teachers could have made initiatives to create activities that enable experiential learning. In a study by Monsanto (2015), it was found that schools in Metro Manila show a subconscious level of a school culture which identified teachers' attitude of “this is the way I've always done it.” This means that teachers almost always stick to conventional activities. It may be due to familiarity, convenience, security, or comfort to stay within what is prescribed by the institution. Teachers remain in the shadows of school rules, regulations, and bureaucracy rather than being assertive in initiating change that may stir the current school culture.

More than the effectiveness of experiential learning, it also engages students to be more emphatic to those who may have different sexual orientations and identities from them. It is suggested that subjects that tackle personal development, such as Values Education and Homeroom, initiate learning moments on sexuality and gender diversity to both teachers and students. Being more accepting of others consequently leads to camaraderie among the learners.

**Opportunities and Barriers to Engagement through Strengths.** The fourth foundation of the PEPs Framework is engagement through strengths. Well-being is more likely to be achieved if students are aware of their capabilities. The teacher must be able to provide tasks that highlight the strengths of each student (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Results reveal that teachers show surface neutrality in preparing and conducting classroom activities. They believe that they give gender-neutral tasks. This means that activities are meant to be participated by all students, and the tasks could be achieved by any sex and gender identity. It could emphasize the different abilities and talents that students have. There is impartiality in preparing and conducting activities and assigning tasks: "...*Wala man pili kung male, female or ano ang assigned activities. Maski sin-o pwede maobra. Neutral siya.*" (There has been no bias between male, female with regard to the assigned activities. It can be done by anybody. It is neutral) – Ting; but end results validate gender stereotypes as teachers compare the performance of students, girls versus boys, for instance.

*"Competitive ang students. Kag daw gina distinguish ang boys sa girls. Even sa attendance. ...ang mga boys pala cutting classes man na."* (The students are competitive. And it seems like boys are distinguished from girls. Even in attendance... boys often cut classes.)

– Mr. Ford, 25 (Homeroom Teacher)

Tasks seem impartial, but the outcome of tasks validates gender stereotypes. Teacher remarks involve gender stereotyping when teachers compare girls from boys. These comparisons have implications for well-being. One cause of adolescents' distress is associated with achieving and maintaining an identity combined with academic pressures. As educational systems continue to expand, students have been exposed to new stressors and expectations such as being technologically adept, socially aware and academically competent. These factors together with adopting traditional female and male identities contribute to students' psychological distress (West & Sweeting, 2003, cited in Nordlander & Stensöta, 2014). If these comments are still evident among heterosexual students, there is also a high likelihood that remarks are made for homosexual students. In a study by Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009),

homophobic remarks were high in schools with a high student-to-teacher ratio, and teachers may less likely intervene against these homophobic remarks. These statements, when inappropriately contextualized, could bring twice as much distress among LGBT adolescents.

**Opportunities and Barriers to Finding Meaning and Purpose.** The last foundation of the PEPs framework is giving students a sense of meaning and purpose. Well-being is enhanced when a student finds meaning in what they do and identify their purpose when they pursue worthwhile goals (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Students have been searching for their identities, and they try making sense out of their lives. During adolescence, they begin to determine their life's meaning and purpose. There were two themes that emerged in this foundation: seeking intrapersonal anchors and seeking interpersonal anchors. Both opportunities and barriers to well-being were identified.

Opportunities for well-being were given by the teachers when they accommodate inquiries about intrapersonal and interpersonal anchors. They acknowledge that their students are seeking anchors or bases for their decisions or behaviors. Hence, they allow students to express inquisitiveness relating to their plans, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, Ms. M shared that one of her students told her of his plans on going abroad, finding a good job, and undergo gender-affirming surgery to enhance his sexuality. Ms. Jane, 22, Personality Development Teacher, has also observed that students became comfortable with how they behave with others as they learned to accept themselves. In addition, teachers also try to accept that there is a certain cognitive dissonance among their students as they continue discovering new knowledge:

*"...ngaa gin-ask ko nila kay inconsistent. Kay pagpamangkot ko sa ila about 'Is homosexuality deviant' majority sang response is 'No.' Pero ginpasulod ang topics nga religion so I think nag-impact to sa ila kay Catholic school ang ila nga school. And daw ka, I don't know, sort of inconsistency sa ila eh."* (...they asked me why there were inconsistencies. It was because I asked them if homosexuality is deviant. Majority of their response is 'No.' But

when I introduced topics on religion, that, I think bothered them because they are studying in a Catholic school. And it is like, I don't know, sort of inconsistency on their part.)

– Mr. Ford, 25 (*Homeroom Teacher*)

The teachers have also been accommodating students who frequently visit them, and these students have persistent thoughts about particular issues that motivate them to seek guidance and/or clarifications from their advisers and counselors. Ms. Jane said that she attends to frequent visits of students, and they seem very focused and participative in SOGIE-related discussions. This as an opportunity for well-being because it means that students are reaching out to their teachers. They do not keep things nor answer their personal questions all by themselves.

Students show gestures that seek anchors. Students are sharing their experiences to help their friends, and themselves. They share their thoughts, even their dreams, to their teachers, and they seek advice. This also signifies their need for affirmation on things that they are not sure of. Oswalt (2010) suggests that as adolescents continue to become mature individuals, teachers can assist them in making wise decisions along the way.

On the other hand, while the teachers have been accommodating their students' concerns, their specific responses are tangential and lead to heteronormativity. Ms. Peggy, for example, would want her students to find meaning in their lives by understanding what and how it is to be a male and a female: "*Siguro sa in terms of meaning, mas ma—siguro I'm just hoping nga mas ma-intiyendihan nila ang aspects of being female and aspects of being male.*" (...maybe I'm just hoping that they understand the aspects of being female and aspects of being male). This kind of response to social identities and gender binaries are still leading towards heteronormativity.

Moreover, according to the teachers, the need to belong in certain groups and be accepted is dependent on how students relate themselves to others. They also provide more discernment and tell their students to be more aware of themselves. These responses do not provide concrete answers to the students' specific questions. The answers they gave do not directly address the concerns of their students. They tend to go back to constructs that are safe and more familiar to them.

Teachers do not provide specific anchors that could help students become grounded. Students can achieve better decisions if they were provided with a strong foundation to which they can gauge their discernment.

Anchors are supposedly stable. Hutchins (2004) asserted that thinking processes are complex; thus, concepts must attain stability of representations. Tangential responses do not provide a stable representation of abstract concepts such as SOGIE, and even identity per se. This becomes a barrier to finding one's meaning and purpose.

In addition, when students ask about interpersonal relationships, teachers' responses are geared towards heteronormativity. For instance, a teacher acknowledged that her students were developing orientations that are homosexual in nature, but she still encouraged heteronormative decisions. She conveyed to her students the possibility that no one will take care of them if they take on gender orientations and identities that are not within what is culturally accepted:

*"...amat-amat ginapa-intiyendi ko sa ila nga ti, kung asta sa ulihi mag amo ka sina, ano ka nalang sa ulihi... --- gahatag ko bala sang mga ano, parehas nga may mga ari kami diri bi nga makita nga, oh, ti siya na oh ma-retire nalang siya agi siya, ti wala siya sang pamilya nga iya. Ti sin-o na ma-take care sa iya, mga amo-amo sina no."* (I gradually make them understand that if until the end, they remain the same,... --- I give some [examples], for example as what we have seen here, he will retire soon, he is gay, he does not have a family of his own. So who will take care of him, something like that.)

– Ms. Homma, 43 (*Class Adviser*)

In the Philippines, attitudes towards lesbians and gay men are greatly embedded in a generalized gender belief system. This belief defines how Filipinos come to view women and men, including their supposed qualities of femininity and masculinity, and the ascribed values, roles, and norms about gender in the Philippine society. Unfortunately, Filipinos still hold largely negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Manalastas & Del Pilar, 2005). This implies that Philippine culture observes heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is defined by APA (2015) as “the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behavior and that male-female differences and gender roles are the natural and immutable essentials in normal human relations.”

To this effect, the teachers express heteronormativity when students are asking for interpersonal anchors. This is a barrier to well-being in the sense that students who have or are currently developing gay and lesbian orientations and transgender identities may not be able to find anchors for having a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

SOGIE as a whole is a vague concept to the participants. They have ideas about it, but they struggle in differentiating one term from another. In explaining these concepts, they put it in their context. They appropriate it with their existing knowledge which they learn from experience, the institution that they are in, and the culture that they practice.

Assessing the approaches that the teachers use in managing student inquiries, this study found that they provide both opportunities and barriers to well-being. Teachers have confirmed gender diversity, and they accommodated their students' need for intra- and interpersonal anchors. They listen to their future life plans, persistent thoughts, and relationship problems. They also acknowledge that there is cognitive dissonance among their students. However, the way they answered SOGIE inquiries do not provide enough means for students to attain optimum well-being. Teachers redirect questions and provide inadequate and indiscriminate responses. These show tangentiality where teachers do not straightforwardly answer what is being asked by the students. In such cases, they provide conditions, and base decisions on social referents to determine what is more acceptable. Teachers also keenly follow institutionally prescribed activities. They may conduct classroom activities and delegate tasks neutrally, but outcomes show that they still validate gender stereotypes. Clearly, bias is shown towards gender binaries and heteronormativity.

Both public and private high schools tolerate gender diversity and acknowledge gay and lesbian orientations and transgender identities. However, parameters are still set to limit what is acceptable.

Having these limitations make these schools fall short in providing a more gender-responsive environment for all their students.

## *Recommendations for Educators*

LGBT adolescents belong to a minority or marginalized group, and they need comprehensive information that is sensitive to their needs and boosts their well-being. Positive education is one approach that can promote academic skills and well-being as it emphasizes providing a healthy, safe, supportive, and engaging school environment. In the Philippines, however, both public and private high schools have fairly established school culture which is too impermeable to drastic change. Abruptly adopting the PEPs framework and completely shifting a heteronormative paradigm is quite implausible. Further, the school curriculum has been carefully crafted and it has been passed on for several years. Recent mandates such as DepEd Order No. 32, S. 2017 on Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy, and current issues on SOGIE may have been overlooked due to other pressing issues such as bullying and teenage pregnancy. It is within this context that the researcher suggests that academic institutions gradually try to acknowledge realities that may somehow challenge their conventional beliefs. Acknowledging gender as a spectrum and considering the diversity of gender expression are little ways forward toward a safer space for LGBT adolescents.

Educators are very significant in guiding the young generation, high school students in particular, who are at the peak of searching their identities. It is then essential to equip the teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) that could help them facilitate the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills of the students. In this study, it has been found that teachers are short of KSAs when it comes to handling SOGIE inquiries despite their annual gender sensitivity training. As teachers, they must impart accurate information to their students; hence, it is recommended that they invest on trainings which could provide them with current knowledge, suitable skills and appropriate attitudes in managing SOGIE concerns of their students. For educators who are constantly anxious of moral ascendancy, they should bear in mind their chief duty to a bigger institution – education – which is to rightly transmit knowledge due to all learners.

Acceptance of gender diversity is in its early stages in the Philippines. Initiatives have been made for the last few years, and there has been a gradual increase of individuals, popular personalities, for instance, who have been coming out. This means that there is hope that people are gradually opening their eyes to these realities. In effect, adolescents exposed to these situations will all the more seek clarifications as it also concerns their search for their identities. Teachers and guidance counselors must then be ready to face this upfront. The researcher does not call for immediate integration of SOGIE in the school curriculum or for it to be embedded in any subject. It will be best if teachers and counselors take small steps in uplifting student well-being, particularly those of the LGBTQ adolescents by acknowledging gender as a spectrum and being aware that there is no "one size fits all" intervention for the students. Schools can train their class advisers and guidance counselors to become gender champions to acclimatize the administration and teacher population with SOGIE. Lastly, accommodating and listening well to the real questions of the students are tiny leaps towards change. Small changes are small victories. These are small but significant shifts in the roles of formators and educators toward finding meaning and building positive identities of students.

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