Addressing Stigma: Exploring The Experiences of *Mëranao* LGBT

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Abstract

The study investigates the challenges faced by *Mëranao* Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals by exploring their narratives. It interrogates the stigma they encountered and evaluates societal acceptance. Drawing from Erving Goffman's definition, stigma is portrayed as a deeply derogatory characteristic. Through in-depth interviews, the experiences of the participants reveal four main types of stigma: associative stigma linked to their religious and cultural identity, perceived stigma limiting their thoughts and actions, internalized stigma leading to feelings of isolation, and public stigma stemming from societal acceptance. Moreover, this study examines social acceptance among two distinct groups, revealing that while LGB individuals are deemed unacceptable within homogeneous communities, they are accepted within heterogeneous ones. However, within the homogeneous community, negative perceptions persist, particularly towards LGBT individuals in military and government roles. The study also underscores the strong disapproval within the context of behavior and religion.

Keywords: *LGBT, Stigma, Mëranao, Social Acceptability, Social Stigma*

Introduction

Muslims in the Philippines constitute the largest ethnic minority (Magdalena, 2017). The *Mëranao*, a Muslim ethnic group in the Philippines, are often called the people of the lake due to their settlements surrounding Lake Lanao. Ranaw in *Mëranao* denotes "lake, encompassing regions in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur (Alonto, 2022).

The formation of an individual's identity is influenced by both personal and societal factors, but these factors can also lead to conflicts between religious and personal identities (Perales and Todd, 2018). Like, LGBT people in *Mëranao* culture face complex difficulties when navigating the intersection of their sexual orientation and religious beliefs, and they frequently face stigma as a result. Further, although homosexuality is becoming increasingly accepted in Western countries, it is still frowned upon and illegal in mainstream Islam. Theologically motivated homophobia produces negative impressions in Muslim societies, where LGBT Muslims are conscious of discrimination and punishments (Jaspal, 2016).

In addition, stigma is one of the responses the LGB encounters. According to Clair (2018), stigma is a quality that communicates discounted stereotypes. Additionally, it is a trait that isolates an individual from others in a social group and demotes them to a devalued or tarnished position (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) divides stigma into three categories: physical differences, purported moral flaws, and "tribal" stigma based on ethnic, national, or religious background. For instance, stigma could be observed from physical and verbal abuse to more subdued institutional stigmas like discrimination at work, the church, and schools. LGB women spoke of a variety of psychological effects of discrimination and stigma that were consistent with minority stress. The most accurate predictor of LGBT prejudice, above and beyond money, education, religiosity, and age, is adherence to traditional gender roles (PsycINFO Database Record, 2019). Goffman's work on stigma serves as the foundation for this investigation.

Moreover, people who identify as LGBTs are among the most marginalized and excluded members of society. These people may be particularly prone and vulnerable to stigma due to their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Those experiences may contribute to lasting consequences on their social and psychological identity. As seen among other communities the LGBTs are generally in the process of integrating into society's mainstream through taking an active part in development initiatives. This circumstance raises several issues, and they demand further consideration.

This paper is a case study of the social acceptability of *Mëranao* LGBT individuals, elucidates their stigma experiences, and assesses the effects of stigma within two communities.

More specifically, it focuses on the following objectives:

1. examine the level of social acceptability of LGBTs in *Mëranao* culture in homogeneous and heterogeneous communities;

2. describe the *Mëranao* LGBT stigma experiences in the homogeneous and heterogeneous community;

3. determine the impact of *Mëranao* LGBTs' experiences in the homogeneous and heterogeneous community

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Erving Goffman's social stigma theory serves as the foundation for this study. Stigma was described by Goffman (1963) as a severely disparaging characteristic. Furthermore, Clair (2018) opined that people who don't experience stigmatization could mock, overpay, or ignore people who do. In addition, Goffman argues that a stigmatized person is not seen by society as fully human. People engage in numerous forms of discrimination that limit the chances available to the stigmatized person in life, all based on this assumption. Goffman (1997) also added that the stigma theory is an ideology that tries to explain why a person is harmful or inferior by offering a variety of reasons for discrimination.

As such, this study used Goffman's elaboration of the concept of social stigma and has considered how stigma operates at the micro-level, restricting the well-being of stigmatized individuals with the key informants in this study sharing their stigma experiences and has also considered the macro-level dimension of stigma illuminates the social acceptability of the community.
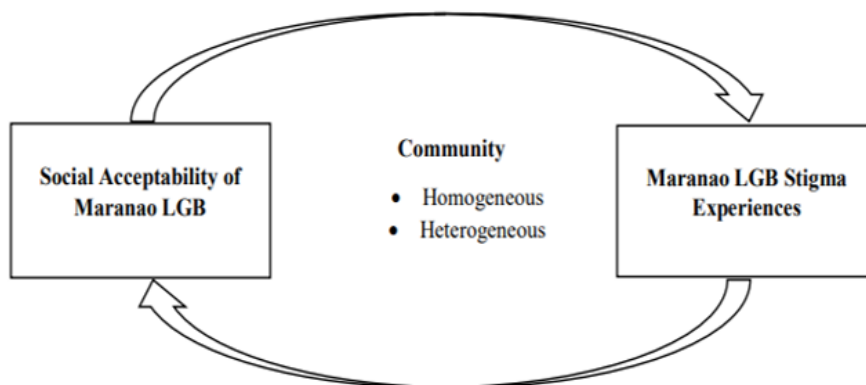

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework on the stigma of Mëranao LGBs in the two communities*

The study looked at two types of *Mëranao* LGBT communities: homogeneous and heterogeneous and looked into the differences in the societal acceptability of LGBTs. Furthermore, it is considered that society's level of acceptance influences their experiences and how they present their identity. Similarly, social acceptance influenced how LGBTs people and how their identification is accepted in the community are shown in this study as factors that impact how well-formed their identity is. Also, *Mëranao* culture and the LGBT

population face many challenges in managing the relationship between their sexual orientation and religious convictions and as a result, they often face stigma. Moreover, it also aimed to determine the substantial variation in social acceptability between the two communities. This demonstrates how the concepts are entwined with the sense of belonging and the impact of the community's acceptability on the well-being and mental health of the *Mëranao* LGBTs.

Review and Related Literature

Working from Goffman's initial conceptualization, defined stigma as stereotypes or negative views attributed to a person or groups of people when their characteristics or behaviors are viewed as different from or inferior to societal norms (Dudley,2000). As reported by the World Population Review cited in the study of Magdalena (2017), Muslims in the Philippines constitute the largest ethnic minority. As mentioned in Rahman and Valliani (2016) many have described the cultural and political conflict between LGBT rights and identities and Muslim cultures. According to Rahman (2014), one crucial method to combat this perceived animosity is to increase information about the experiences and identities of LGBT Muslims, who exist at the crossroads of political opposition and disturb the assumptions that underpin it.

Further, the study of Ali, Apiag, and Novino (2022), indicated that *Mëranao* LGBTs struggled to identify themselves as deviant and not conforming to the standard of the isolated and conservative community they live in. The study shows that the respondents developed internal homophobia since they grew up in a conservative *Mëranao* community. As a result, they suffered from bullying and discrimination and were even rejected by their family which made them develop anxiety.

The study by Ryan et al. (2010) found that family acceptance predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status; it also protects against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors among LGBT adolescents. In addition, Lugo and Tilos (2015) concluded that depression, anxiety, and worry were related to their being homosexuals. They were trapped in a situation where their feelings did not conform to the sex they had acquired biologically and were unable to live as heterosexuals. Others were confused and attempted to commit suicide because of the thought that death was the only means to get out of that stigma.

Studies have suggested that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals whose sexual identity can be easily identified face higher victimization levels and, ultimately, constraints than other groups of travelers (Brunt and Brophy 2006). These are believed to limit and/or prevent them from partaking in travel activities (Weeden, Lester, and Jarvis 2016). Furthermore, as cited in the study by Reyes and Lanic (2015), as self-stigma increases, self-beliefs become inconsistent and unclear. LGBTs who possess high self-stigma scores may internalize societal views and incorporate them into their view of self. Those who experience high levels of self-stigma have negative cognitions about themselves, such as loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and they may view themselves as less competent than the majority (Watson, Corrigan, Larson, and Sells, 2007; Mak and Cheung, 2010). Findings on

self-stigma are further supported by Fingerhut, Peplau, and Gable (2010), who concluded that poorer mental health for gay and lesbian individuals is associated with exposure to minority stressors such as gay-related discrimination and perceived stigma.

Moreover, studies show increasing stigma and discrimination against LGBTs, particularly in their religion. They face harassment, physical abuse, and a lack of acceptance in their communities. LGBT Muslims and allies intentionally challenge marginalizing discourses, while religiosity, gender-role beliefs, and attitudes towards lesbians and gays are significantly related. On the contrary, Statista Research Department (2016), opined that despite their religiosity, the Philippines is one of the countries in Asia where public acceptance of homosexuals is high. The fact is that despite acceptance in Philippine society, many are still faced with discrimination.

The most significant direct impact on the mental health of young LGB people is caused by LGB-specific unsupportive social contacts. Stigma consciousness, internalized homonegativity, and confidant support come next (Berghe, Dewaele, Cox, and Vincke, 2010). Family rejection had the strongest negative effect on the youth's mental distress, whereas friends' and family's support had the strongest positive effect on well-being (Shilo and Savaya, 2011). The higher levels of self-reported minority stresses, such as internalized heterosexism, a lack of acceptance from friends and family, and a failure to disclose one's sexual orientation to others, were linked to lower levels of self-acceptance of sexuality. Poorer mental health outcomes, such as increased overall distress, depressive symptoms, and decreased psychological well-being, were linked to reduced self-acceptance of sexuality (Camp, et al., 2020) As supported in the study of Christie(2021), LGB students reported lower levels of psychological well-being and less social support than their heterosexual peers.

There have been numerous studies on the impact of stigma on LGBs, but few have focused on their social acceptability, particularly in the *Mëranao* culture. As a result, further research is needed to identify new ways to address gender issues and look into the impact of stigma for future policy interventions.

It's crucial to investigate whether there are notable variations in the social acceptance of *Mëranao* LGB individuals within distinct communities and how this acceptance impacts their lives. This study aims to fill three research gaps: Firstly, the limited research on stigma experienced by *Mëranao* LGB individuals—secondly, the societal acceptance of LGB individuals, particularly within Islamic and *Mëranao* cultural contexts. Lastly, understanding the implications of social acceptance on LGB individuals' experiences (well-being as mentioned above) and the various forms of stigma they encounter.

Methodology

Research Design

Mixed methods research combines data collection and analysis methods with both quantitative and qualitative data (Fraenkel, 1993). Creswell (2014) defines case studies as a

qualitative design in which the researcher delves deeply into a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Yin (2009) and Priya (2021), indicated the case story technique is an empirical investigation into a phenomenon in its real-life setting. Thus, study explores the experiences of stigma among LGBs using the case study.

There were 60 survey respondents with 30 each from the homogeneous and heterogeneous community. There were key informants interviewed to describe the stigma experiences of the *Mëranao* LGB. The respondents were chosen using snowball sampling since one of the criteria should be religious leaders and the researcher also considered cultural sensitivity because *Mëranao* is known for being conservative. Respondents were interviewed in formal and informal conversations. Observations were done during the conduct of the study; respondents were observed during the interview and how they behaved in front of others.

Locale of the Study

This research was conducted in two communities of Lanao del Norte Province, which is suitable due to the prevalence of LGB in the chosen municipalities. The researchers believe that these communities can address the specific problem being investigated.

Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis

Ethical considerations were properly observed. Before formal data collection, a panel proposal for the study was conducted and approved. Following approval, the researchers obtained two types of letters. These letters outlined the study parameters and obtained informed consent from the respondents through the Informed Consent Form for Respondents. After, the researcher proceeded to the data-gathering phase. The study utilized two research instruments: (1) structured survey questionnaires and (2) in-depth interviews. The study applied structured survey questionnaires consisting of 60 respondents depending on the community they lived in (heterogeneous community=30; homogeneous community=30) using a Likert scale. The questionnaire is divided into three parts, the first was the socio-demographic profile, the second was the Islamic beliefs of respondents, and the third was the social acceptability. First, an interview using a questionnaire was conducted for surveys for 10 days with 60 respondents. Surveys were conducted with community members across the designated research areas. Once the target sample size was reached, the researcher initiated in-depth interviews with six identified *Mëranao* LGB individuals. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that entails conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce and Neale, 2006). The researcher also used a case study design, which provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The data collection period spanned four months, from June 2023 to September 2023.

 To ensure that the responses were accurate and adequate the interview guide and survey questionnaire were presented and translated into vernacular dialect. The participants were given a demographic sheet after signing the consent form. They were asked to provide basic

demographic details such as their name (optional) or pseudonym, age, sex and gender preference, and address. Contact information was also collected to be able to ask follow-up questions from the participants after the interview, if necessary.

Using SPSS, the data were analyzed using themes, transcripts, and descriptive statistics. The audio-recorded information from the in-depth interview was transcribed in order to analyze the participants' remarks. To get deeper into the discussion and explanation of the responses, coding was used and displayed in each table. Conversely, the researchers employed descriptive statistics for the survey data, which were derived from the variables specified in the several study components.

The Mann-Whitney U test is a non-parametric statistical hypothesis test for the case of two related samples or repeated measurements on a single sample. All tests were 2-tailed with p<0.05 as statistically significant.

Findings

Respondent's socio-demographic profile

One of the objectives of this study is to know the social acceptability of LGBs in two identified communities. Sociodemographic characteristics are essential to understanding social acceptability since they provide the basic background information of the different respondents. The factors that determined the social acceptance of *Mëranao* LGBs in this investigation were the respondents' sex, age, location, education level, religious affiliation, and level of madrasah. Thirty respondents from each community participated in the study's survey. Six *Mëranao* people who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual—one from each of the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups—who volunteered and were accessible throughout the data collecting period were also subjected to in-depth interviews.

Table 1. *Profile of the respondents in terms of sex*

Sex	Homogeneous		Heterogeneous	
	f	%	*f*	%
Male	16	53.33	7	23.33
Female	14	46.67	23	76.67
Total	30	100	30	100

The study's 60 respondents exhibited a notable imbalance, as indicated by the results (see Table 1). Of them, 16 respondents (53.33%) in the homogeneous group and 7 respondents (23.33%) in the heterogeneous group were found to be male. On the other hand, it was found that 23 respondents (76.67%) in the heterogeneous group and 14 respondents (46.67%) in the homogeneous group were female. In comparison to their male counterparts, this sex

characteristic showed a much higher proportion of female respondents in the survey. It implies that different approaches to tackling *Mëranao* LGBs' societal acceptability depend on the respondents' sexual orientation. Their level of acceptance may have been influenced by the way their sexual features have been perceived.

The level of education attained by the respondents differs between the two communities. Nine (9) respondents in the homogenous community are elementary school level holders, five (5) are graduates of elementary and junior high school, one (1) is senior high school level holder and SHS graduate holder, seven (7) are college-level holders, and two (2) hold a bachelor's degree. Conversely, the majority of the heterogeneous respondents were professionals. There are six (6) college-level, twelve (12) bachelor's degree holders, ten (10) master's degree holders, and two (2) hold post-graduate degrees. The respondents' educational backgrounds differ from those of the community. It implies that respondents' perceptions of *Mëranao* LGBs' social acceptability may vary according to their level of schooling. The results showed that respondents who lived in the heterogeneous community were more at ease with the presence of LGBs than those in the homogeneous community.

In the homogenous community, the respondents' occupations consist of eleven (11) government/public personnel, nine (9) farmers, five (5) students, three (3) housewives, and two (2) private employees. However, in the heterogeneous community, twenty-three (23) of the respondents work for the government or are employed by the public sector, four (4) are students, two (2) are employed by private companies, and one is a housewife. The number of public employees in the homogenous and heterogeneous communities differs significantly. Given that the majority of respondents work in the public sector, it is likely that they have encountered LGBs at their place of employment. Based on the respondents' exposure to the following LGB people, it is implied that the respondents' occupation may influence how acceptable the LGBs are to them.

Concerning their religious affiliation, eight (8) of the respondents in the homogeneous community are imams or Muslim chaplains; four (4) hadja/hadji; one (1) sultan, ustad, bae adl; and thirteen (13) have no religious affiliation. However, in the heterogeneous, among the respondents are six (6) hadja/hadji, one (1) sultan, muamma, tabligh, and a shariah lawyer. This demonstrates the differences in religious affiliation between the respondents from both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Thus, it indicates that perspectives among these respondents on the existence of Mëranao LGBs may differ.

Social Acceptability

Being accepted and valued by others in the community, irrespective of one's gender preference, is referred to as social acceptability. Examining social acceptability to comfortability, occupation, behavior, public displays of affection, and religious fundamentalism is the focus of this paper.

In the structured surveys, the Likert scale was applied to the following variables: respondents' comfortability towards LGBs, as well as their acceptance of LGBT behavior, occupation, and religion. In addition, religious fundamentalism was also added by using

open-ended questions where respondents had to provide a passage from the holy Quran outlining the prohibition against homosexuality. These responses were then evaluated using themes.

Respondent's Comfortability towards Mëranao LGB

The analysis of the respondents' *comfortability* of LGB. In the homogeneous community, all the indicators were rated as highly unacceptable by the respondents with a grand weighted mean of 1.31. This implies that the homogeneous community is uncomfortable with the presence of gay (1.37), lesbian (1.17), bisexual men (1.30), bisexual women (1.40).

Nonetheless, the grand weighted mean of 2.125 which was considered *acceptable*, indicated that respondents felt comfortable with LGBs in the heterogeneous community. Among the respondents, the only sign that was deemed acceptable was gay (2.23). The respondents evaluated lesbian (2.07), bisexual men (2.07), and bisexual women (2.13) as unacceptable. It assumed that in the heterogeneous community, LGBs are accepted as members of their group. Examining the weighted mean results for each indicator, data points in greater detail showed that the respondents feel most at ease with gay people. It so clearly demonstrates that LGBs are more likely to be accepted in the heterogeneous community based on the research findings.

Respondents' Acceptability of LGB Occupation

Based on the grand weighted mean results (see Table 2), the indicators: In certain professions, individuals who are homosexual may be deemed suitable, such as being allowed to teach young children in public schools (1.93), and LGB individuals should be included in all occupations, such as being allowed to serve in the military (2.20), were rated as unacceptable. Thus, LGB occupation in the homogeneous community was unacceptable, with a grand weighted mean of 2.07. The study reveals that LGBs in the homogeneous community were not accepted to work in some public occupations.

However, the heterogeneous community respondents revealed that they were rated as acceptable. The respondents agree on the following indicators: in certain professions, individuals who are homosexual may be deemed suitable, such as being allowed to teach young children in public schools (2.80); LGB individuals should be included in all occupations, such as being allowed to serve in the military (2.77). Furthermore, the overall results of the survey on respondents' perceptions of LGB occupation in the heterogeneous community were acceptable, with a grand weighted mean of 2.79. The study reveals that LGBs in the heterogeneous community were allowed to work in some public occupations.

It is supported by the study by Kuyper (2015), which revealed LGB employees would report more bullying, more unequal opportunities, less job satisfaction, and more burnout than heterosexual employees. In addition, LGB workers are stigmatized in the workplace and treated as less than equal human beings (Sidiropoulou et al., 2019). Moreover, the LGBT community, on the other hand, is underrepresented (Aguilar et. al., 2022). Thus, despite some

acceptance from the heterogeneous community, some LGBs were still unacceptable to some.

Table 2. *Respondents' acceptability of LGB occupation in the homogeneous and heterogeneous community*

Community	Homogeneous		Heterogeneous	
Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**
In certain professions, individuals who are homosexual may be deemed suitable, such as being allowed to teach young children in public schools.	1.93	Unacceptable	2.80	Acceptable
LGB individuals should be included in all occupations, such as being allowed to serve in the military.	2.20	Unacceptable	2.77	Acceptable
Grand weighted mean	**2.07**	**Unacceptable**	**2.79**	**Acceptable**

Respondents' Acceptability of LGB's behavior

LGBs actively participate in community events, organizing pageants and dance competitions, while also participating in sports like volleyball and basketball. It demonstrates (See Table 3) that in the homogeneous community with the grand weighted mean of 2.86 which is interpreted as unacceptable. Similarly, the survey results among the heterogeneous demonstrate also unacceptable with the grand weighted mean of 2.90 in heterogeneous, the respondents' acceptability of LGB behavior in both communities. Thus, the findings revealed that respondents agree with the negative assertions and are aware that there is a bad perception of LGB behavior in the community. As a result, the community does not tolerate events that embrace the negative actions exhibited by LGB individuals based on the respondents' results.

As one of the key informants from the homogeneous community shared, Barbie (gay): *Dili sa nako e reveal ako tinuod na identity as long as naa pako dinhi sa amoa. Unya na if mo gawas nako dinhi. Mo abroad ko kay para maka provide ko sa ako family ug para ma experience nako ang freedom and ma kita nako unsa jud ako gusto* (I won't reveal my true identity as long as I'm here in our place. Maybe when I can escape from this place. I'm planning to work abroad to provide for my family's needs to experience true freedom and unleash my real identity and hidden behavior.

The results showed that, despite being comfortable with LGB, they occasionally received negative reactions from others. Considering the gradual growth in acceptance of homosexuality, there is still a lot of stigma around homosexual identification (Koc et al, 2022). Furthermore, LGBQ+ people had lower general self-acceptance than heterosexuals, bisexuals had lower sexuality self-acceptance than lesbian/gay people, and lesbian women had worse sexuality self-acceptance than gay men (Camp et al., 2022).

Table 3. *Respondents' Acceptability of LGB's behavior*

Community	Homogeneous		Heterogeneous	
Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**
LGB people's sexual acts or gender expressions are what the Creator or God/ Allah intended.	3.33	Highly unacceptable	3.77	Highly unacceptable
LGB people's behavior are the same with heterosexual people	2.57	Unacceptable	2.90	Unacceptable
LGB people do not have mental health issues	2.63	Unacceptable	2.53	Unacceptable
Homosexuals encompass a wide range of behavior and personalities which is not determined by their sexual orientation.	2.89	Unacceptable	2.43	Unacceptable
Grand weighted mean	**2.86**	**Unacceptable**	**2.90**	**Unacceptable**

Respondents' Acceptability of LGBs in their Religion

Religious individuals tend to exhibit more disapproving attitudes toward homosexuality compared to non-religious individuals. Additionally, the extent to which religions condemn homosexuality varies significantly (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). Moreover, findings revealed (See Table 4) that homogeneous communities had a grand weighted mean of 1.67, whereas heterogeneous communities had a grand weighted mean of 1.41. The study reveals that both types of communities were highly unacceptable to LGB individuals in terms of religious attitudes.

As Alex (gay) from heterogeneous narrated *"Mag hajj ko kay as a fulfillment of being an Islam and of course, ma transform akong identity now maybe soon when the right time comes after hajj mag start na pud ko ug build ug own family* (I will perform hajj as a fulfillment of being an Islam and of course, my identity will be transformed and soon when the right time comes after hajj I will be going to start building my own family). Jhambee (lesbian) also added her insights as she narrated: *"Mag hajj ko kay as a Muslim apil jud na sa among 5 pillars ang maka pag hajj,siguro pag abot ana nga time ako na e give-up ako pagka lesbian and mag start na jud ko sa ako identity as babaye* (I will perform hajj because as a Muslim it is one of the 5 pillars of Islam, and when that time comes I will give-up my lesbian identity and will start a new identity as a woman.

Similar to other monotheistic religions like Christianity and Judaism, Islam views homosexuality as a sin and something that is strictly prohibited (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). The scripture from the Qur'an implies that homosexuality is forbidden, to justify the answers of the respondents they cited the following *The Collectors of Suman recorded that Ibn Abbas said that the messenger of Allah Said: Whoever you catch committing the act of the people of*

Lut (homosexuality), then kill both parties to the act. Allah said. And when they repent and do righteous good deeds surely, Allah is ever the one who accepts repentance, most merciful.

As a result, religion may have a greater effect on attitudes about homosexuality in developed countries like the United States, which are characterized by a high level of self-expression and a diversity of perspectives (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). Therefore, the study shows that perceptions regarding homosexuality may be more influenced by religion. They transgress Islamic beliefs, as acknowledged by the key informants themselves. Hence, they intend to undergo the hajj to transform their personalities and adhere to what their religion permits.

Table 4. *Respondents' Acceptability of LGBs in their religion*

Community	Homogeneous		Heterogeneous	
Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**
LGB acceptance is reflected in religious texts and is permitted.	1.63	Highly unacceptable	1.40	Highly unacceptable
Our religion embraces and provides support for LGB individuals.	1.37	Highly unacceptable	1.10	Highly unacceptable
Our church/mosque/spiritual leaders occasionally or seldom address topics related to LGB individuals.	2.13	Unacceptable	1.97	Unacceptable
Our church/mosque/spiritual leaders are accepting and supportive of LGB individuals.	1.57	Highly unacceptable	1.17	Highly unacceptable
Grand weighted mean	**1.67**	**Highly unacceptable**	**1.41**	**Highly unacceptable**

Table 5. *Summary table of weighted mean of Social Acceptability*

Community	Homogeneous		Heterogeneous	
Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Interpretation**
Comfortability with LGBs	2.125	Acceptable	2.125	Acceptable
LGBs Occupation	2.07	Unacceptable	2.79	Acceptable
LGBs Behavior	2.86	Acceptable	2.90	Acceptable
LGBs' Acceptability in Religion	1.67	Highly Unacceptable	1.41	Highly Unacceptable

Significant difference between the social acceptability of LGB in heterogeneous and homogeneous communities

Even though acceptance of LGB people has come a long way in recent decades, negative stereotypes still exist in families and cultures, making full acceptance of LGB people elusive. Thus, further work is required to refute antiquated perceptions of LGB people (Lee et al., 2022). Significant differences between the two communities are shown in Table 6, which are corroborated by significance values for both tests that are less than 0.5.

Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. From the available data, it can be inferred that there are significant differences in the actual means of social acceptability between the two communities. Drawing on Goffman's (1963) theory of social stigma, an individual's behavior is influenced when other members of society undermine their position. Data indicates that *Mëranao* LGBs' experiences of stigma and social acceptability may vary based on the communities and the type of people they interact with.

Table 6. *Mann-Whitney U test between social acceptability of Mëranao LGB in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Communities.*

Category		Social Acceptability
Homogeneous community and Heterogeneous community	Mann-Whitney U	261.500
	Willcoxon W	726.500
	Z	-2.794
	Sig (2-tailed)	.005

Mëranao LGB Stigma Experiences

The insights into the stigma experiences of the *Mëranao* LGBs are drawn from case narratives provided by six informants.

LGB Mëranao Stigma Experiences in a Homogeneous Community

In homogeneous communities, key informants shared experiences spanning different life stages. In early childhood (3-7 years old), they recounted incidents of enduring physical, verbal, and emotional violence, coupled with rejection from family. As they transitioned into adolescence, they faced intensified challenges, including social rejection, self-rejection, familial and societal ostracism, self-blame, self-doubt, and episodes of depression. Throughout this phase, verbal and emotional abuse persisted, exacerbating their struggles. Finally, in adulthood, the informants continued to grapple with self-rejection and feelings of abandonment, reflecting the enduring impact of their formative experiences within the homogeneous community.

All informants shared common experiences of emotional, verbal, and physical violence during their youth. However, Barbie (gay) stood out as the sole informant who personally encountered rejection from her family as he said, "*feel naku nga gikaulaw ko ni ina kay siya*

man gud kay ustadza" (I feel that my mother feels ashamed of my identity because she is ustadza (a religious woman). As they entered adolescence, their experiences diverged. Kim (lesbian) grappled with depression, and self-blame, and faced rejection from both her family and society. Kim shared, *"tungod sa akong gebati hapit nako mag suicide (*I am on the verge of committing suicide because I don't understand myself). Meanwhile, Barbie experienced self-doubt, while Mickey felt rejected by herself. Throughout this phase, all informants endured emotional and verbal abuse from their friends, family, and relatives. In adulthood, Barbie and Mickey underwent a period of self-rejection, while all informants experienced self-desertion by suppressing their identity just to be accepted.

Despite their paths, they all traversed a landscape marked by emotional turmoil and inner conflict. Stigma represents a multifaceted social construct with far-reaching consequences for both society at large and individuals grappling with mental health conditions (Palermo, Corrigan, and Sheesan, 2022). Expanding upon Goffman's work, Dudley (2000) defined stigma as the application of unfavorable perceptions or stereotypes to an individual or group whose traits or behaviors are perceived as deviating from or inferior to societal norms. Shilo and Savaya (2011) further assert that among youth, mental distress is most significantly exacerbated by familial rejection, while their well-being is greatly enhanced by the support of friends and family.

LGB Mëranao Stigma Experiences in a Heterogeneous Community

During their formative years, key informants endured profound challenges. Early life experiences were marked by familial abandonment and exposure to various forms of violence, including sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. As they navigated adolescence, the informants faced heightened levels of violence, including sexual assault, verbal abuse, emotional trauma, and public humiliation. Additionally, they grappled with rejection in various forms, including anxiety, self-doubt, and alienation from both themselves and family members. In adulthood, the challenges persisted, with informants encountering discrimination, continued verbal and emotional abuse, self-rejection, and resignation in the form of coerced marriages. Throughout their life stages, the informants' experiences underscore the pervasive and enduring nature of the hardships they faced.

As the informants shared their sentiments like Shavey's early childhood was marked by sexual harassment with his neighbor because of his sexual identity. As he narrated "*Iya ko gipalugod sa iyang likod while naligo siya. Ug iyang gikuha akong kamot ug ipahawid sa iyang private part* (He commanded me to rub his back while taking a bath then he held my hand and forced me to hold his private part)*."*

He was also neglected by his parents because he lived with his grandparents. Shavey, Jhambee, and Alex, additionally disclosed verbal and emotional abuse from their relatives and the community. The informants still endured verbal and emotional abuse during the adolescent years, in addition to public humiliation for Shavey and Jhambee and, even worse, sexual abuse for Shavey. Like Alex and Jhambee, they too had to deal with rejection from family members as well as rejection from themselves. Shavey, on the other hand, was anxious and doubtful about himself. Finally, the informants still experienced self-rejection as adults.

Jhambee continued to endure verbal and emotional abuse, was coerced into marriage, and, worse of all, faced discrimination at work.

The result of the study revealed a similarity to a study conducted by Gates and Mitchell (2013), where experiences of stigma are influenced by key demographic characteristics. Additionally, LGBTs commonly face physical and verbal abuse, encounter a lack of acceptance, and are often unable to engage in social activities, both in their hometowns and in the places they migrate to, as highlighted by research from Biçmen and Bekiroğulları (2014).

Impact of Stigma on the Mëranao LGB

Pescosolido and Martin (2015) explored Goffman's stigma as characterized by a discrediting attribute. This attribute has far-reaching implications, affecting personal well-being, economic productivity, and public health, thus perpetuating a detrimental cycle of diminished expectations, profound shame, and despair, as noted by Stier and Hinshaw (2007). It imposes a humiliating label upon its bearer, often leading to altered behavior.

Individuals with stigmatized identities often grapple with the challenge of conforming to societal norms and expectations highlighted by Goffman (1963). The findings revealed that the informants encountered four distinct types of stigma. Firstly, association stigma emerged from their identity being intertwined with their *Mëranao* culture and religion, resulting in rejection from family and relatives to avoid association with the stigma. Secondly, perceived stigma constrained their behavior and ideas, limiting their actions due to anticipated judgment from society. Thirdly, self-stigma manifested as feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by the informants themselves. Lastly, public stigma fostered self-doubt and diminished self-esteem, ultimately culminating in self-rejection among the individuals.

The informants were profoundly affected by the stigma they experienced, leading to a multitude of emotional and psychological challenges also, making them vulnerable to rape and physical abuse. These included feelings of hopelessness, fear of relationships, and apprehension about rejection as one of the informants shared, "I had intended to marry my high school sweetheart when I graduated and we would move away from this area to prevent our future children from learning about my background". They also experience self-doubt as the informants answered "Throughout all of my experiences, I've wondered about who I am, what I like, and what my true identity is, "I am not sure if I'm a lesbian I want to play with the boys. But through peer pressure, I courted girls", self-blame, and ultimately, self-rejection. Some individuals might internalize these negative experiences, developing an inferiority complex, withdrawing from social interactions, harboring resentment, or becoming distrustful and unfriendly. Shavey, who identifies as bisexual, expressed a desire to start afresh in a new environment where his past experiences, including rejection, paternal abandonment, and sexual harassment, would not have an impact on his future children. He hopes to create a happy and nurturing family that reflects the positive experience he did not have growing up. Building and maintaining relationships can become increasingly difficult as a result. Furthermore, some individuals may feel compelled to leave their hometowns in search of greater freedom and acceptance elsewhere. Barbie, who identifies as gay, has shared

that he intends to keep his true identity private until he can leave his current location. Once he can relocate, he plans to travel abroad to both provide for his family and to experience the freedom to openly express his true self. Lastly, to reconcile their identity with societal and religious norms, some individuals may choose to renounce aspects of their identity to conform to perceived moral standards within their culture and religion. Jhambee, who identifies as a lesbian, expressed her intention of undertaking the hajj pilgrimage following her retirement. Acknowledging that her same-sex relationship is not accepted in her religion, she plans to adhere to the teachings by taking on the identity of a devout Muslima, including wearing the traditional abaya and niqab. Additionally, she mentioned her decision to conclude her relationship with her partner after completing the pilgrimage.

The study by Liu et al. (2021) supports the idea that public stigma plays a significant role in the development of internalized homophobia among LGBs. Additionally, as noted by Lee et al. (2022), internalized stigma encompasses a process in which individuals internalize and endorse stereotypes about various aspects of their identity, including race, ethnicity, health status, body image, and gender or sexual orientation.

Additionally, in a study exploring sexual orientation group differences in parental support among young adults, Needham and Austin (2010) found that lesbian and bisexual women reported lower levels of parental support compared to heterosexual women, while gay men reported lower levels of parental support compared to bisexual or heterosexual men.

The *Mëranao* people are instilled with a strong sense of the importance of upholding their cultural and religious rituals and practices from a young age. They are widely acknowledged for their profound commitment to these traditions. Consequently, all the individuals in the study had developed internalized homophobia or negative attitudes towards themselves and other LGBTQs, as identified by Ali, Apiag, and Novino (2022). The impact of stigma on *Mëranao* LGBs is a byproduct of societal acceptance within the community. Furthermore, this acceptance influences the behavior and self-perception of LGBs, as well as their interactions with others. Not only their behavior and self-perception but the decision to reform themselves and to conform to society's moral values.

Conclusions

The study investigated the effects of stigma on the *Mëranao* LGB community in two selected communities in Lanao del Norte. Specifically, the study looked at two types of communities - homogeneous and heterogeneous. Key individuals for the case story approach included lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, while thirty individuals from each community took part in the social acceptability survey.

Anchored in the framework provided by Erving Goffman's seminal work (1963), clearly demonstrates the pervasive impact of stigma on *Mëranao* LGB individuals. The data reveals that certain aspects of LGB individuals' comfort conform to social norms, while other indicators unmistakably point to significant stigma. In particular, LGB individuals' occupations and behavior were resoundingly deemed unacceptable, and their acceptance within religious contexts was considered highly unacceptable. The experiences of the

informants included being rejected by friends and family, being abandoned by parents, experiencing sexual violence, depression, anxiety, self-doubt, self-rejection, and self-desertion, as well as physical, verbal, and emotional violence, discrimination, and humiliation. These unambiguously underscore the existence of stigma.

The interviews with LGB individuals revealed the significant impact of their adult and early life experiences in shaping their personalities. Each participant shared a distinct narrative encompassing both ordinary and extraordinary events that contributed to the formation and reinforcement of stigma. The study found that societal acceptance of LGB individuals has a profound effect on their self-perception and influences their vulnerability to encountering stigma in the future.

The research emphasized the experiences of the participants facing four distinct types of stigma, aligning with Erving Goffman's stigma theory. Firstly, perceived stigma constrained their thoughts and behaviors, compelling them to adhere to societal norms for acceptance. Internalized stigma led to feelings of depression and isolation as they internalized negative societal attitudes about their identity. Public stigma exposed them to prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes from the broader society. Associative stigma was evident in their families' inclination to reject and deny them to avoid stigma themselves, consistent with Goffman's conceptualization of stigma as a social discrediting process. Furthermore, it was considered that the level of societal acceptance influenced their experiences and how they expressed their identity. Similarly, social acceptance influenced how well LGB individuals formed their identities. According to Goffman's stigma theory (1963), an attribute and its audience have a relationship that gives rise to stigma. The study illustrated the impact of community acceptance on the well-formed identity of *Mëranao* LGB individuals.

The study revealed that in their adolescence, *Mëranao* LGB individuals often feel the need to leave their communities in pursuit of the freedom to express their identity. The study also highlights the significant challenges faced by the *Mëranao* culture and the LGB community in reconciling their sexual orientation with religious beliefs, which can lead to stigma. Consequently, some informants realize they will likely have to transform their identity to adhere to societal and religious norms as they reach adulthood and after performing hajj or Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

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