

Butterflies Behind Bars: Untold Stories of Incarcerated Homosexual Men

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Keywords:**ABSTRACT**

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This study aimed to uncover the lived experiences of homosexual men behind bars; their coping mechanisms, as well as insights that can be learned from their incarceration. Qualitative research design by means of phenomenology was used with validated semi-structured interview guide as a tool in gathering the responses of the participants of this inquiry. The study employed an in-depth interview with nine participants incarcerated at the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Maa, Davao City, Philippines. The participants shared their primary experiences such as involvement with prohibited drugs, paying the price of one's transgressions, dealing with painful realities behind bars, living with HIV/AIDS, longing for family, finding a little niche under the sun as a woman and relishing romantic relationships. The coping mechanisms of the participants included being actively involved and occupied, entertaining oneself with jovial activities, getting spiritual, being positive and accepting and getting a grip of oneself. The participants have also shared their insights as a result of their incarceration; live clean, stay away from drugs, alcohol and bad company, education is undoubtedly important, every action has a corresponding repercussion, there is something positive in every situation, and hope springs eternal.

INTRODUCTION

Studies about incarcerated men and women are conducted yearly around the world. These studies usually aim to know the status (psychological and physical) and experiences of either or both men and women in prison as in the studies of Faiia (2009) and Dolovich (2009). In addition, here in the Philippines, most of these studies are conducted to know the effect/s of incarceration, if any to the children of these individuals – to know if it has an impact to the various aspects of the life of a child such as academic/school performance, social interaction and adaptation, coping mechanisms, personality and the like.

In the advent of the technology age however, where people become more expressive, explorative and to some extent, supportive of the endeavors of their peers, family members and acquaintances, studies with Homosexual Males as participants dwell most of the time on the issues like discrimination in various aspects of the lives of these individuals such as in the workplace, school, community and family and only a handful are researches conducted to investigate the status and experiences of individuals who identify themselves as homosexual males who are incarcerated and most often than not, these studies are concentrated on negative experiences by gay men behind bars such as sexual assault bullying and cruelty to name a few (Dolovich, 2009; 2011; Howarth, 1980; Just Detention International, 2013; California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2010).

In the Philippines, studies about homosexual males are focused on Human Rights Violations as in the coalition report submitted to the 106th Session of the Human Rights Committee by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) (2012). In addition, studies about culture acceptance to male homosexuality are conducted as in the study by Foe (2014) that was presented in International Academic Forum entitled "Tolerated if Discreet: 1960s Filipino Gays" but very scarce inquiry was done to suffice questions pertinent to answering probes related to the current situation and experiences of Gays or Homosexual males in prisons. However, there was an attempt to qualify how the life of a homosexual male in prison was but this was after the participant was released in prison in Cebu City Philippines and narrated his story in an article written by Michael David dela Cruz Tan in 2015 for *Outrage* entitled *Pink Behind Bars* still focusing on the negative experiences of a gay man in prison (poverty, sexual assault to name a few). In addition, there is too much highlight on the negativity that is happening behind bars and very scarce are researches that focus on stories of resilience, change and new beginnings and not to mention coping mechanisms and insights from these institutionalized individuals.

Researches relevant to the lives of homosexual men are very limited as well here in Davao City and most often than not, these are scientific inquiries related to other things but not connected with the experiences of incarcerated homosexual men. It is through these premises that the researcher wants to focus on – to know the status and experiences of incarcerated homosexual men in Davao City; their lived experiences, struggles, triumphs as well as their coping mechanisms behind bars, including the insights that can be learned from their experiences as incarcerated homosexual men. This research has a personal appeal to the researcher because he identifies himself as one – a homosexual male and as a graduate student taking up Psychology, it is a duty for him to narrate the experiences of people from different walks of life to serve as an eye opener to the masses as to the current situation of not just straight heterosexual individuals but also those people who consider themselves as a member of the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Queers, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) community, particularly gay men who are incarcerated.

Homosexual males (and the LGBTQIA as a whole) live a very colorful life; hence the rainbow as our representation. But just how colorful is a life of a gay man could be even after he is incarcerated? Moreover, the tenacity of this inquiry is directed towards answering inquiries about the experiences of gay men behind bars (being imprisoned) and are they still able to spread their wings and fly even after being caged; considering other aspects of the lives of these individuals not just the negatives but possibly the positives as well. In addition, the study aims to know how incarceration has impacted the lives of these homosexual males as a whole.

Localizing various studies around the globe and from a specific part of the country (Tan, 2015) are also seen as a purpose of this research since those studies mentioned above are of qualitative nature, hence results of such may or may not be applicable locally. Trying to understand other aspects of the lives of homosexual males behind bars is also seen as an aim of this endeavor apart from the commonly reported experience of sexual assault. Shedding light to these are the purposes of this study since it has been established in the opening vignette that very little researches have been conducted to investigate the said topic.

Imprisonment has many negative consequences for individuals, including losing their homes, jobs, and social ties, as well as facing a crisis of self-narrative. LGBT prisoners face additional challenges, such as discrimination, victimization, and abuse, in addition to the general harsh and hostile environment of prisons. These challenges are often ignored by prison staff or correctional officers due to their negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals. The literature offers limited discussion about these challenges, which include access to justice, health care, family links, and protection from sexual abuse and rape, as well as the attitudes of prison staff and other prisoners towards homosexuality and gender nonconformity in prison. Police brutality is also identified as a form of victimization suffered by LGBT people when arrested (Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Erwin, 2012; UNODC, 2009)

Neglect of the security and support needs of LGBT prisoners can lead to further victimization, which may include sexual requests and participation in prostitution that exacerbates prison staff's sexual prejudice against them. Moreover, their lack of contact with

families and limited support from prison staff may force them to rely on other LGBT prisoners for social support. However, formation of gay communities is discouraged due to the belief that same-sex sexual encounters cause health problems in prisons. The experiences of LGBT prisoners are often invisible in the literature and are viewed as victims of their circumstances. Empowerment of LGBT prisoners can be achieved by highlighting their stories of resilience and reframing how we position them from victims to agents. However, there is a dearth of studies on the lived experiences of LGBT prisoners. National mechanisms are needed to ensure the safety and equality of LGBT prisoners in prisons (UNODC, 2009; Dumond, 2000; Eigenberg, 2000; Pintobtang & Bualar, 2012; Candaliza-Gutierrez, 2012; Ofreneo, 2013; JDI, 2009; Erwin, 2012).

Erwin (2015) reported that there may be up to 10,000 gay men in prison in England and Wales, where homophobia is prevalent despite the official "condom policy" and "don't ask, don't tell" strategy. The Howard League for Penal Reform's independent commission found that the prison culture, which is based on hypermasculinity and a hierarchy of dominance, lends itself to rape, especially when sexual minorities are housed with violent offenders. Kupers (2001) identified four crucial aspects of the prison culture that contribute to rape: the hierarchy of domination, the delineation between top and bottom rankings, the overt power differential, and the inescapable nature of the system. The study by Ibrahim (1974) supported this hypothesis and found that prison officials' attitudes and tolerance reinforce inmates' behavior, while overcrowding and housing and classification obstacles are major contributors to the problem.

In the article, "Prison Rape: A Critical Review of the Literature," the author discusses the four aspects of prison culture that contribute to the problem of prison rape. The second aspect, according to Kupers (2001), is the strong delineation between the top and bottom of the prison hierarchy. Fear motivates inmates to rape others, as more dominant inmates fear becoming victims. Power and domination are the means of achieving status within the hierarchy, and many inmates act out sexually to keep from being victimized. The third aspect is that higher ranks are associated with masculinity, while those at the bottom are seen as weak or "punks." The last aspect is that the prison culture is inescapable, and staff members have acted as both perpetrators and perpetuators of sexual violence. Studies have shown that staff members have contributed to the problem of prison rape through sexual misconduct and passivity, with anecdotal reports revealing that staff members overhear screams and cries for help during rape but remain passive. The prison culture is further complicated by the conventional beliefs held by staff within the prison system. Sexual acts between males within prisons are often viewed as consensual homosexual relations between inmates, influencing how staff responds to such incidents. This stigma remains even more so for those who are victimized and sexual minorities. When prison staff fail to understand the greater picture, these unhelpful attributions perpetuate the cycle of victimization. An inmate typically becomes turned out through varying types of coercion including bodily force rape, rape by threat, and rape by subjugation. These types of rapes typically involve strangers and take place in locations such as restrooms, showers, and dormitories. Once raped, the victim is then marred for the rest of his sentence—and even the rest of his life. Inmates in prisons are at high risk of victimization, including rape and sexual assault, which can result in the "turning out" of weaker inmates by subjecting them to rape and branding them. This process can also involve three types of inmate coercion, including bodily force rape, rape by threat, and rape by subjugation. In order to avoid victimization, some inmates may choose to disobey prison rules or opt for seclusion or protective pairing with dominant inmates. However, these alternatives come with high costs, including being sold to other inmates for sex or being forced to take on more traditional feminine roles. Protective pairing relationships often go undetected by staff and other inmates as they are perceived as consensual. Understanding the process of victimization and vulnerable populations in prisons is essential to take preventative and prosecutorial measures to eliminate sexual victimization (Thomas, 2015).

Research suggests that substance use disorders and related problems are more prevalent in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations. Sociocultural factors (e.g., affiliation with gay culture, HIV status) and bisexual identity and/or behavior are among the correlates of

substance use patterns in LGB populations, and limitations of extant research prevent conclusions about the relative impact of LGB-specific interventions. Grella, Greenwell, Mays, and Cochran (2009) found that minority sexual orientation populations report higher rates of drug use and related problems than do others. Furthermore, homosexual prisoners face health concerns such as outbreak of sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) in prison due to consensual and/or coerced unprotected sexual activities. The lack of condom provisions is identified as one of the reasons for the prevalence of STDs in prisons, and LGBT prisoners' knowledge about STDs and their perception of their partners' HIV status often affect their (non)use of condoms during sexual encounters. LGBT prisoners' needs for psychological support and mental health care are also a crucial health issue that has to be addressed. There are both public health and ethical reasons for monitoring the occurrence of HIV in prisons and detention centers. Penal institutions are ideal sites for providing public health and social welfare programs for marginalized populations, and interventions should include treatment for acute and chronic health conditions, screening for treatable diseases, and health education (Green & Feinstein, 2012; Harawa et al., 2010; Matic, Lazarus, & Donoghoe, 2006; Pintobtang & Bualar, 2012; UNODC, 2009; WHO, UNODC, & UNAIDS, 2007).

Castro et al. (2009) conducted a study titled "Mariposa sa Likod ng Rehas: Coping Mechanisms of Homosexual Inmates" which aimed to identify coping strategies used by gay inmates in the Philippines. The study found that gay inmates often keep quiet or ignore humiliation to avoid abuse and obey commands from male inmates to survive. They also relied on their faith in God and the Bible for emotional support. Engaging in activities such as beautification services, livelihood, and joining organizations or gangs also helped them cope. The study suggests that more research is needed to explore the perspectives of incarcerated homosexual men and calls for help from concerned government agencies and non-government organizations to support this vulnerable population.

On the contrary, as a believer of humanistic and positive psychology, the researcher still believes that there are good and positive experiences that incarcerated men could share despite their current situation hence could be a source of motivation and inspiration for the possible readers of this study.

The research aims to explore the experiences of homosexual men in prison, focusing on their coping mechanisms and extracting insights from their incarceration. Grounded in the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, the study delves into the notion that males and females are born undifferentiated, and anatomy shapes mental processes and social behaviors. Freud's proposition of pansexual, bisexual, and homosexual nature, and the progression toward heterosexuality after overcoming developmental complexes, serves as a theoretical lens. The psychodynamic theory further posits that antisocial behaviors are rooted in unconscious processes from early childhood, governed by the id, ego, and superego. Weak ego links to social issues, immaturity, and dependence. Additionally, Carl Jung's concept of anima and animus, representing feminine and masculine tendencies, is explored. The research synthesizes insights from Freud, Bartholomew, Docena, Alegre, Fiest & Fiest, and Wehr (1933; 2003; 2013; 2006; 2013; 1964) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dimensions of homosexual men's experiences behind bars.

METHOD

The research design employed in this study is qualitative and phenomenological, focusing on the experiences of incarcerated homosexual men and their coping mechanisms. Phenomenology, emphasizing individual experiences and subjective knowledge, guides the exploration through a semi-structured interview approach. The study involved nine participants from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology in Davao City, selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria outlined in the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines. The voluntary nature of participation and respect for withdrawal were emphasized. Data collection involved a validated semi-structured interview guide, conducted by a trained psychometrician assisted by BJMP personnel. The collected data underwent encoding, transcription, and analysis by the researcher, addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability for trustworthiness. Ethical considerations adhered to

guidelines from the UM Ethics Review Committee, the American Psychological Association, and the Psychological Association of the Philippines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality through pseudonyms, and ethical protocols. The study's ethical conduct and methodological rigor contribute to its overall reliability and validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the life and experiences of incarcerated homosexual men. Their responses were taken from the individual in-depth interview conducted by the researcher from nine self-identified incarcerated homosexual men; with the aim of knowing their experiences behind bars, their coping mechanisms and the insights that can be learned from their experiences.

This chapter is further divided into three parts: Part One is the participants' data from which the qualitative data were collated; Part Two is the analysis procedure and the steps in categorization of the emergent themes from the results of the individual in-depth interview questions under each research problems; and Part Three is the summary of the responses.

Profile of the Informants in the In-Depth Interview

The study was conducted with nine homosexual male inmates who were currently incarcerated at the Annex Building of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology in Davao City, six of whom had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Table 1
Profile of the Informants in the In-Depth Interview

Pseudonym	Criminal Offense	Number of Mos./Yrs. Incarcerated	Medical Condition	Age
Butterfly Gary	Violation of RA 9165	11 Yrs.	Tuberculosis	42
Butterfly Tamtam	Violation of RA 9165	3 Yrs.	HIV/AIDS	36
Butterfly Zalde	Violation of RA 9165	3 Yrs. & 4 Mos.	None	39
Butterfly Jessa	Violation of RA 9165	3 Yrs & 6 Mos.	HIV/AIDS	35
Butterfly Kate	Violation of RA 9165	3 Mos.	HIV/AIDS	26
Butterfly Tutchi	Violation of RA 9165	1 Yr.	HIV/AIDS	38
Butterfly Beyonce	Violation of RA 9165	4 Yrs.	HIV/AIDS	41
Butterfly Herfz	Violation of RA 9165	3 Yrs & 5 Mos.	HIV/AIDS	33
Butterfly Tomtom	Violation of RA 9165	5 Yrs. & 6 Mos.	None	35

Two participants were transferred from the Main Facility upon request and for safety reasons. The participants violated Republic Act 9165, which is the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. The data were categorized and regrouped to generate 18 essential themes, and the important phrases that emerged from the transcripts were identified as Core Ideas (Peralta, 1977).

Experiences of Homosexual Men Behind Bars

Involvement with prohibited drugs and drug-related activities. As per the account of the participants, the primary reason for their incarceration was due to their involvement with the prohibited drugs; they have violated various sections of the RA 9165 otherwise known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

This furthers what is stated in the research conducted by Green and Feinster in 2012 averring that historically, substance use problems were thought to be prevalent among sexual minorities (LGBT). Additionally, in a study conducted by Grella et al. in 2009, they mentioned that prior epidemiological surveys, both population-based and respondent-driven, have shown that minority sexual orientation populations report higher rates of drug use and related problems than do others.

Table 2

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of Homosexual Men Behind Bars

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Involvement with prohibited drugs and drug-related activities	Incarcerated for drug pushing
	Rehabilitated for drug use, but relapsed and got caught
	Violation of RA 9165
	Arrested because of drugs; betrayed by a trusted friend.
	Caught using/pushing drugs in entrapment operation.
	Drug related case; Rebelled against parents
Paying the price for one's transgressions	Caught having pot session
	Suffering for own wrong doings; feeling worthless
	Not getting what one wants; losing freedom
	Having to fight off boredom
	Losing a lot of things, job, time, opportunity to help family, etc.
	Being restricted; communication is hindered
	Life imprisonment looming in the horizon
	Had to change lifestyle; wake up very early
Used to be grandiose, but now content with simple things	
Dealing with sad and painful realities behind bars	Unappealing, unpalatable, insufficient food ration
	Being uncomfortable in prison, too overcrowded
	Anxiety because of uncertainties and insecurities
	Problem with debts here and there
	Having to do things and not depend on others
	Drug use still rampant in jail; easy to secure drugs behind bars
	Rivalry for boys; jealousy when other inmates get near boyfriend
	Having fights and conflict with other inmates; gossips, word war
	Performing lewd acts in exchange for goods, vending to earn
Became butt of rumors because of AIDS infection	
Living with HIV/AIDS	Learned about being HIV positive
	Discriminated because of the HIV infection
	Referred to as the gay inmate with AIDS
	Not allowed to go out by cell leader so as not to infect others
	Got sick, no visits; family is afar
Longing for family and connection with world outside	Difficulty adjusting, feeling sad, crying
	Miss family; siblings, nephews, nieces
	Had no visits in jail; feel like being forgotten
	Nobody to help follow up the case
	Envious with others who have visitors.
	Mom lost job, support stopped coming.
	Realized love for mother when in prison; took for granted before.
	Had to take drugs to dull the pain of missing family
Finding a little niche under the sun as a "woman"	Being courted by male inmates; being considered "goddesses"
	Boys are competing for attention of gay inmates
	Courted by the boys; given love letter, coffee, bread, cigarette
	Being treated as prettiest in jail even if not comely and beautiful
	Treated like a real woman in jail, as opposed to reality outside
	There are no gays being mistreated or raped there.
Relishing special romantic relationships	Homosexuals very welcome in prison; regarded well
	Very easy to find a boyfriend in jail; had a handsome boyfriend.
	Happiness is having a boyfriend to take care of; to support needs.
	Had relationship with someone who gave care and attention.
	Relationships with male inmate is like real husband and wife.

Gays get good help/support from partners; treated like wife.
First time to experience serious relationship with a man.

Just the thought of being incarcerated is very difficult to bear; more so when you experience it firsthand. This is what the participants came to experience the moment they were taken in the facility of BJMP. To name a few, they have experienced how it is like to be in a very uncomfortable and overcrowded prison, having to deal with unpalatable, and unappealing and insufficient food ration; experience anxiety and deal with debts and performing lewd acts in exchange of goods. In addition, being in prison also limits one's capacity and potentials for growth and development.

Imprisonment contains countless, well-known "pains" and individuals who are kept in these institutions face many crises (Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006). These findings further support that despite the developments in the programs of many prison systems in the world, the physical and social environments that the PDLs face remain harsh and hostile. In the Philippines, for example, one of the human rights violations identified by the United States' Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2013) is the torture and inhumane treatment of PDLs. Overcrowded prisons, lack of basic provisions such as food, potable water and medical attention, limited opportunities for self-development

Living with HIV/AIDS

To be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is agonizing and what makes it more distressing is to find out about this condition while in prison. Some of the participants have known about their condition via testing inside the jail and one can only imagine the pain associated with it. Some of the key informants have experienced discrimination and has been called names because of their diagnosis; some have been restricted to go out of their prison cell so as not to "infect" other inmates.

This goes against what is mentioned in the research of Matic et al. in 2006 that confidentiality and sound ethical principles should be performed in evaluating HIV/AIDS infection especially in prisons. Not all experiences associated with being diagnosed with the abovementioned illness are negative; some of the informants have felt acceptance from the people inside the jail hence accepting the fate as a person with HIV/AIDS smoothly.

Longing for Family and Connection with the Outside

Being incarcerated entails one to be away from an individual's primary source of support. Some of the informants said that as part of their experience inside the jail, there are those times that they would get sick yet receive no visit at all because of the fact that their family is away. They have also shared that they miss their family – parents, siblings and nephew so bad. Due to the infrequent visits that they get, the participants would think sometimes that their family have forgotten them already and because of this, a participant had to take drugs inside the jail (when drugs was still rampant) to ease the pain of missing one's family. This supports the findings of the report of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes in 2009 that lack of contact and with parents and other family members is a challenge homosexual men face behind bars.

Finding a Little Niche under the Sun as a Woman and Relishing Special Romantic Relationships

As per the accounts of the participants: "*ang mga bayot ang babae diri sa jail*" (gays are the women here in jail) – hence being gay served the participants well behind bars. Some made mention that they have felt like goddesses and that boys are competing for their attention and are courting them; they are also treated like real women and treated the prettiest even if they are not that comely. As a result, they have found romantic relationships inside the jail that have helped them survive their day-to-day living. According to the participants as well, there were no instances wherein gays are maltreated nor raped and that gays are very much welcome in prison.

This being said, this goes against the result of former inquiries stating that gays have suffered from sexual abuse or rape while inside the jail (Alarid, 2000; Association for the Prevention of Torture [APT], 2015, Dumond, 2000; Harawa et al., 2010; Just Detention International, 2009; Neal & Clements, 2010; Pintobtang & Bualar, 2012; UNODC, 2009; Thomas, 2015; WHO, UNODC, & UNAIDS, 2007; Kupers, 2001).

Coping Mechanisms of Incarcerated Homosexual Men

Being Actively Involved and Occupied and Entertaining Self with Jovial Activities and Tasks. A study conducted by Castro et al. (2009) outlined several coping mechanisms that homosexual men turn to while incarcerated. One of these is engaging into activities such as beautification services (pedicure, manicure and haircut), livelihood and joining organizations inside the prison.

This has been proven true by the results of this inquiry. Some of the participants of this research mentioned that to cope, they have engaged into livelihood such as making purses and bags, offering massage to other inmates’ visitors; joining events such as Ms. Gay and playing games and organizing sports activities; teaching and or studying under ALS and engaging into trivial activities such as gossiping, watching TV and even looking at their handsome crush.

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on Coping Mechanisms of Incarcerated Homosexual Men

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Being actively involved and occupied	Playing games; organizing sports activities and leagues
	Taking part in shows and Ms Gay events inside jail
	Helping out fellow inmates as a way of coping.
	Joining events inside prison just for fun.
	Accepting laundry jobs to earn money; doing tutorial work.
	Teaching ALS to inmates who are uneducated
	Studying under ALS; doing community service
Entertaining self with jovial activities and tasks	Learning ways to earn like crocheting, making bags, massaging
	Gossip with fellow inmates morning till night time
	Just watch TV; do things that can make one happy.
	Watch other inmates and friends play volleyball.
	Just laugh all troubles away; sleep all woes away.
	Looking at handsome crush.
	Keeping self-entertained with gossip and other things.
Getting spiritual and cultivating a relationship with the Divine.	Just searching for some kind of happiness and excitement.
	Pray every night; ask for God’s guidance.
	Talk to God; prayers give strength to face problems.
	Let things be; let God rule life.
	Calling on God; praying for quick resolution of case.
Being positive and accepting	Read the Bible almost every day.
	Go to church; pray regularly, attend mass.
	Not thinking about worries; paying no mind to them
	Not dwell on the past; what’s done is done.
	Accepted the situation; being HIV positive and in prison
	Just moving on with life; not minding if freedom comes or not.
	Just go on with life; continue flourishing.
	Learning to be content with present situation.
Always trying to get along well with others.	
Focus on what can be done best to earn rather than sulk.	
Paying no mind to what people say.	

Turning to family and friends for support	Communicating with family.
	Thinking about love of family.
	Opening up to closest friends.
	Gay friends continue to be supportive and good.
Getting a better grip of oneself	Being calm; minding own business
	Having enough dose of patience inside prison bars
	Not letting stress affect and compound situation
	Not giving in to emotions
	Being sensitive to the needs and feelings of others

Cultivating a Relationship with the Divine and Being Positive and Accepting

Accepting one’s fate and being positive about it is quite difficult especially if your reality entails being incarcerated for an uncertain period of time. For some of the gay PDLs however, they managed to embrace their current situation and become optimistic about it through the Divine and entrusting everything in God’s hands.

This is in alignment to previous researches saying that faith in God sustains the homosexual inmates’ belief to surpass their travails, such as loss of hope and courage. Lack of choice and emotional support system has impelled these homosexual inmates to renew their faith in God. Every day, the Bible is a handy companion (Castro et al., 2009).

Turning to Family and Friends for Support and Getting a Better Grip of Oneself

Handling one’s emotions especially in a prison setting might be hard to do. However, due to the support that the PDLs are receiving from their families and friends, they are able to keep or recover their self-control and continue striving inside the prison. Some of them turned to friends for support, some maintained a communication with their families. As a result, they controlled their emotions better, had more patience inside the jail and became calm behind bars which are important to possess while incarcerated so as not to be involved with fights and misunderstandings.

This somehow refutes the result of the inquiry conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes in 2009 which states that one of the challenges faced by incarcerated gay men is a lack of contact and connection with their families; wherein it is a fact that they have turned to the latter for support and undergird.

Insights of Homosexual Men from their Experiences Behind Bars

Live Clean, Stay Away from Drugs, Alcohol and Bad Company. It is somehow a common knowledge that one should stay distant from destructive things such as drugs, alcohol and bad company. This has been reiterated multiple times by the participants of this research; one must heed their “warning” – this has become more meaningful since this is coming from those people who paid a great deal of price for acquainting themselves with such activities.

As a result, the participants have suffered from countless, well-known “pains” and individuals who are kept in these institutions face many crises. They are statistically very likely to lose their homes and jobs, become estranged from their families and friends, and struggle to reconnect with these social ties after their release (Maruna et al., 2006).

Table 4
Major Themes and Core Ideas on Insights of Homosexual Men From Their Experience Behind Bars

Major Themes	Thematic Statements
Live clean, stay away from drugs, alcohol and bad	Vices do not serve one in good stead; avoid alcohol and drugs.
	Do not venture into things that are not good; vices, drugs.
	Don’t even think about tasting drugs – that will lead to perdition.
	Choose your friends well; avoid bad company and influences.
	Avoid self-destructing choices; say no to drugs.

company.	Drugs is no good for a person's being and existence. Drugs is a menace to life and society; does one no good. Wouldn't be behind bars if I were educated. The lack of education led to present predicament.
Education undoubtedly important.	is It is good to have education; gives life a sense of direction. Wouldn't have gone into drugs if I had education. Prioritize studies as vices will do you no good. Do well in studies; avoid engaging in gangsterism. There would be many opportunities if only I was educated. Deciding against studying was a major failure. Before doing anything, think of the consequences multiple times. Everything one does has rebound effect.
Every action has a corresponding repercussion.	Really weigh the consequences of your actions. Contemplate before doing something you might regret later on. I am in this predicament because I did not listen to parents. If I haven't done those things, I might have a decent job today. Have new experiences in jail which enriched me as a person. Being incarcerated taught certain life lessons.
There something positive in every situation	is Grown better as a son and as a person inside prison. Experiences behind bars changed me as a person. Being in jail made stopped all vices; became responsible. Discovered that family will never forsake no matter what I do. Discovered talent; that there are many other things I can do. Found fulfillment as a woman/gay person inside prison. Became mature; experienced serious relationship with a man. Learned ways to make money here like crocheting, bag making. One can be happy even without fame and fortune. My only dream – to serve my parents. Hope to still be accepted by community when I get out.
Hope eternal.	springs Wished to go back to my life before prison. I dream of going back to our place, be with my family. To be able to go out, start a new life, new job, help family. Hope that siblings, nephews/nieces will get to finish studies. Hope to have a stable relationship and find happiness here.

Education is Undoubtedly Important

One of the lessons the informants stated is the importance of obedience to parents, especially in putting value to education. The participants looked at education as a valid tool that one can use to improve one's life and that it has an equalizing effect to people living in poverty (Relis, Agustin, & Mercines, 2016).

The participants furthered that deciding against studying was a major failure and that should they have been educated, there would be a lot of opportunities for them; they added as well that the lack of education led them to their present predicament. This being said, education is indisputably vital.

Every Action has a Corresponding Repercussion

The incarcerated homosexual men were cognizant that the engagements they had taken to assuage their poverty were not right. Moreover, they also viewed their incarceration as the price they have to pay for mistaken decisions they had made (Relis et al., 2016). This being said, they advocated that before doing anything, one must think of the consequences multiple times since everything that we do has a rebound effect.

There is Something Positive in every Situation and Hope Springs Eternal

Remarkably, the participants initially thought their lives would be over once they became imprisoned. However, upon realizing that it is not yet the end, they started believing that despite being imprisoned, they must continue living their lives. Doing so gave them the hope that better things would still happen to them.

Realizing that their lives must go on despite their imprisonment is an important factor that contributed to their optimism in life. It helped them set aside the negativities and instead become more proactive in redeeming themselves. They admit that their lives in prison are not easy but believing that this could have a silver lining keeps them going and motivates them to regain their direction in life (Relis et al., 2016).

Summary, Implications, and Concluding Remarks

This phenomenological study has enlightened the researcher of the clear stories of incarcerated homosexual men; their experiences, coping mechanisms and insights are about life's journey, all worthy to be emulated by those who are in the same situation – homosexuals and heterosexuals alike.

The key informants of this research shared that their experiences were primarily about involvement with prohibited drugs and drug-related activities and that they have to pay the price for their former transgressions; they also had to deal with sad and painful realities behind bars such as dealing with the negative emotions associated with being diagnosed and living with HIV/AIDS, and longing for family and connection with the outside world. However, not all experiences by incarcerated homosexual men are negative; they have had some sort of positive experiences such as finding a little niche under the sun as a "woman" inside the jail and being able to relish special romantic relationships behind bars.

As a way of coping, the participants shared that being actively involved and occupied helped them deal with painful realities inside the jail as well as entertaining themselves with jovial activities and tasks. Getting spiritual and cultivating a relationship with the Divine and being positive and accepting ushered the somewhat smooth living of the informants inside the jail; and there is no better source of support than turning to family and friends as well as getting a grip of oneself hence, the participants have done as such to lessen the burden of their current reality.

On an end note, the informants have been very insightful with the things that had happened with their lives. Such acumens include living clean, staying away from alcohol and drugs and bad company. They have also paid great importance to education; they have also realized that every action has a corresponding repercussion. Identical to their experiences, not all of their insights have a touch of being stygian. As a matter of fact, they have come to realize that there is something positive in every situation and that hope springs eternal.

Implication for Practice

The study conducted focused on homosexual men; their life experiences, coping mechanisms and insight that may serve as an eye-opener for readers regarding the former's current situation. The results of this inquiry could not be generalized to all people deprived of liberty. Hence, future researches may be conducted focusing on other sexual minorities such as Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgenders.

Regardless of the way that the informants trusted they had settled on some wrong choices throughout everyday life, despite everything, they saw their battles as a wellspring of exercises from which others, particularly the youth, can learn. Besides being a type of recovery from their past, the participants see their lives as accounts of learning for themselves as well as for the general masses. Their encounters influenced them to acknowledge to do things "the correct way". In the like manner, these are the lessons they need more youthful ages to gain from them. They even underlined the significance of training, positive companion impact and the part of diligent work to better one's life.

The current study offers rich insights into the life stories of Filipino homosexual PDLs; however, some admonitions should be noted. The study is culturally positioned, given that the

lived experiences presented are specific to the Filipino homosexual men who are incarcerated in the Philippines. Since the prison where the participants are held is run by a government agency, their lived experiences may be different from those who are imprisoned in Western countries where prisons are privatized. The purposive nature of the sample also limits the generalizability of the study's results. Given the variability of environments that different prisons in the Philippines impose on inmates, the experiences of the participants may not fully reflect the lives of Filipino gay PDLs who are held in other prisons. Therefore, future studies can look at how the prison environment and other demographic information (age, religious affiliation, etc.) create unique experiences for Filipino gay PDLs.

Previous discussions on LGBT PDLs seem to focus exclusively on their stories of struggle. This may be one of the reasons why their experiences of discrimination and victimization are better documented in the literature. However, examination of their stories of hope, resilience, and positive experiences is virtually non-existent. The view that LGBT prisoners are victims in the prison system is probably perpetuated by this imbalanced presentation of their narratives. Since the study specifically looked for these stories of Filipino gay prisoners, it is an important consideration if we want to frame them as agents, and not merely victims, in the prison context. It is interesting to look at the romantic relationships that are established among Filipino gay PDLs in prison. Instead of having a one-sided relationship, in which the openly gay prisoner gives more support by serving his romantic partner, they mutually support each other in various ways.

This is in contrast to UNODC's (2009) report that LGBT prisoners cannot gain support from their inmates as they are potential abusers. In fact, a gay prisoner's romantic partner could also be his source, and recipient, of support in the prison. Filipino gay prisoners' meaning-making also signifies that they can view their lives in a more positive light. Vaughan and colleagues (2014) call this the virtue of transcendence, which helps LGBT individuals create and provide connections among their lived experiences. Because they are given opportunities to help in some tasks like becoming prison community organizers, office workers and other trustees, they feel that they are valued in prison. Moreover, they also witnessed some of their co-inmates who were released from prison after serving their sentence. They all look forward to that day and believe that it will happen soon. These experiences help them form an optimistic point of view of their lives. The lives of Filipino gay PDLs appear to be less miserable than how it is documented in the literature. The traits they possess and the relational opportunities for development they create are their sources of positive outlook in life.

In addition, future inquiries may be conducted focusing on the back stories of incarcerated LGBTQIA++ to better understand the dynamics of their motivation as individuals. Taking in informants with different or varied offenses may add novelty to the results of future academic inquiry concentrating on incarceration as well since the participants of this investigation are homogenized to incarcerated gay men who have violated Republic Act 9165 otherwise known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs act of 2002.

This study shows that despite the adversities of life in prison, Filipino gay PDLs have the capacity for development of a more positive outlook in life and self-efficacy, on their own or with the help of others in the prison (i.e., romantic partners). This capacity can be properly fostered if the prison as an institution will enable these PDLs. Prisons as a rehabilitative institution must be able to help prisoners develop a sense of responsibility and agency that will enable them once they are reintegrated in the society. In fact, social institutions, like prisons, are believed to have the potential to promote the development of positive traits and positive subjective experiences, especially for LGBT people (Vaughan et. al., 2014; Vaughan & Rodriguez, 2014).

It would also be beneficial to the Filipino gay PDLs if their stories of struggle and narratives of hope will be equally present in the literature. In this way, researchers would be able to use a more holistic perspective in understanding the lives of PDLs in general and Filipino gay PDLs, in particular. This shift in perspective could catalyze change of attitudes towards them as helpless and mere victims. This would be particularly useful in action research that aims to identify and eventually implement LGBT-inclusive prison policies that will allow Filipino gay PDLs to live a more meaningful life while in prison.

Concluding Remarks

In the opening vignette of this inquiry, the researcher indicated that this study has a personal appeal to him especially that he identifies himself as a homosexual man. On an honest note, one of the main reasons for the researcher to undertake this study is because there is so much thrill in trying to decipher the experiences, coping mechanisms and insights of incarcerated homosexual men; just try to imagine doing an in-depth interview with people deprived of liberty in a prison setting; for someone who is a neophyte in the study of human behavior, the anticipation of doing as such brings so much exhilaration; little did the researcher know that he is up for something bigger, more relevant and an experience that would validate and refute some of the information that he was able to read in literatures, hence ushering a paradigm shift within him.

During the conduct of the in-depth interview, there were a lot of emotional states that were happening internally with the researcher; there were anxiety, fear, uncertainty and most of all, excitement. As the stories of the informants unfolded throughout the conduct of the interview, the researcher was filled with not just new insights but feelings of sympathy and empathy as well. Sympathy because there is a sense of feeling for and compassion and at some point, feeling bad because these participants are going through a tough time and that the only thing that he can offer momentarily is his empathy – making the informants sure that he somehow understands what they are experiencing.

In this inquiry, the researcher was a bit (for a lack of a better term) surprised to see that the life of the PDLs are far better than what he had anticipated – that prison life is not as gory as what is readily available in most references; there are stories of positivity, resilience, camaraderie, hopes, dreams and aspirations that springs within the informants.

Truly, this experience was an eye opener: It provided the researcher with a lot of insightful understandings that he can use in his pursuit of greater knowledge in the field of psychology and behavioral sciences.

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