

# His Other Man: Straight Men's Romantic Relationships with Homosexual Partners

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**Abstract** –*The literature on same-sex relationship is filled with studies pertaining to homosexual men. Few works have been done accounting the perspective of straight men who are involved in same-sex relationships. Drawing from 23 self-identified straight men who are and have been in romantic relationships with gay male partners, we conducted in-depth interviews to account the various domains of the different stages of same-sex relationships: courting, beginning, maintenance, and dissolution. Our results showed similar patterns of relationship behaviors, cognitions, and emotions that are identified in the same-sex relationship literature. More interestingly, our results suggest the largely heterosexist view of our respondents in the different domains of the relationship stages amidst their generally low level of self-reported heterosexism. This outcome may be attributable to the internalization of relationship stigma they are aware of and have experienced. Furthermore, our respondents self-identified gender identity as straight supports the gender heteroflexibility for men. When compared to female romantic partners, gay men were described to be above par in terms of emotional investment and reciprocity and below par in intimacy and commitment. These results support empirical works on minority groups and provide a framework for policymaking, protecting same-sex couples from discrimination and hate crimes and the enjoyment of their rights.*

**Keywords** –*straight men, gay men, same-sex relationship, heterosexism, heteroflexibility*

## INTRODUCTION

*“Let’s not fool ourselves here, Vincent–bakla ka, bakla ang anak ko. Ang pagkakaiba, hindi niloloko ng anak ko ang sarili niya! The moment you decided to have a wife, nagpatali ka sa kasinungalingan. Either panindigan mo ang asawa mo, o kumawala ka sa kanya para maging totoo ka kay Eric at sasarili mo. Iyan lang ang choices mo, Vincent, dahil bilang ina, hindi ako papayag na pumasok sa komplikadong relasyon ang anak ko!”* (Let’s not fool ourselves here. Vincent you’re gay. My son is gay. The only difference is that my son does not lie to himself! The moment you decided to have a wife, you have tied up yourself to lies. It is a choice between standing for your wife or leave her for you to be truthful to Eric and yourself. These are your only choices, Vincent, because as a mom I will not allow my son to get into a complicated relationship.)

These are the words of Sol (Chandra Romero), mother of Eric (Deniss Trillo), a gay man who is romantically involved with Vincent (Tom Rodriguez), married and father of two. This is an excerpt from the controversial Philippine television series of 2013 entitled *“My Husband’s Lover”*. To

the eyes of the viewing public, Vincent and Eric’s and other similar romantic bonds are not only condemned for their infidelity but also for their culturally deviant sexuality and nature of relationship.

The literature on same-sex relationships has been dominated with studies on gay men and homosexual couples [1], [2]. To our earnest efforts, there have been only few studies that explored the romantic involvement of straight men with gay relationship partners and none amongst the Filipino sample [3]. These studies in particular have looked into relationship stigma alongside age-gap and interracial romantic partnerships. Meanwhile, straight male’s association with gay men in the literature is often related to economic purposes such as the case of male prostitution[4]. More recently, studies of men who have sex with men (MSM) have also been a phenomenon of interest of scholars [5] – [7]. Most of these empirical works are part of the sexual health literature with implications on the transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV [8] – [10].

Narratives about straight and gay men romantic bonds have been more evident in recent years even entering mainstream mass media as in the case of the TV series, *“My Husband’s Lover”*. This type of

romantic partnership also remains discreet in some subcultures in the Philippines like the movie and Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) industries. The storytelling of the relationship development of these culturally and evolutionarily deviant bonds somewhat mimics that of the traditional heterosexual romantic partnership or at least in the construals of the public. As an unexplored research phenomenon, this drove the current researchers to study more deeply the developmental process of this type of bond from the perspectives of the straight men romantic partners.

Moreover, one of the controversies of the television series "*My Husband's Lover*" is whether Vincent, who plays the straight man, is also gay considering that he is romantically involved with his homosexual partner, Eric. The assumption that "Yes, it follows." continued to spark discussions. Diamond [11] has pointed out that there has been no clear framework of sexual flexibility for straight men as compared to women's sexual fluidity. What has been closely associated with straight men's sexual flexibility is lessening homophobia across the life span [12]. Consequently, normative masculinity remains to be related with homophobia as evident in some of the measures of the construct [13]. As such, the late 19th century proliferation of gender identity based on sexual behavior remained the dominant framework of understanding straight men's sexuality [14], [15]. This explains the stigma that having sexual acts with homosexual men makes any other man also gay regardless if he identifies himself straight. However, cultural differences are neglected in this framework. For example, Americans differentiate between sexual attraction and sexual behaviors in relation to sexual identities [16]. Meanwhile, Mexicans delineate levels of normative masculinity according to sexual roles [17]. Bottoms or men who are being penetrated are considered to be homosexuals while tops or men who penetrate their same-sex sexual partners are tagged as straight. Among Filipinos, this differentiation connotes more masculinity for the tops than bottoms. But still, sexual behavior and gender identity equivalence remains a dominant framework in looking at men's sexual flexibility. Consequently, straight men's association with gay men be it romantic or not is still stigmatized in Philippine culture [2], [18], [19].

### **Same-Sex Romantic Relationships**

Studies on gay couple relationship have suggested that same-sex romantic bonds are similar to that of

heterosexual couples [2],[20]. For example, correlates of relationship stability of same- and different-sex couples are found to be the same [21]. Similarly, the literature has widely used same framework both to same- and different-sex relationship studies. For example, studies have associated healthy relationship to four indicators namely, (1) quality; (2) stability; (3) commitment; and (4) closeness [22]–[25]. Though these indicators are associated with each other, they are conceptually distinguishable. The general subjective evaluation of the partner to the relationship and one's partner is the first indicator on quality of relationship. Meanwhile, Booth, Johnson, & Edwards [26] defined stability as the emotional and thought processes that partners have in relation to the likelihood of remaining in the relationship. Contrastingly, commitment reflects couples' tendency to continue the existing partnership vis-a-vis certain factors [27]. Lastly, the affective, cognitive, and physical proximity between romantic partners is referred to as closeness [28]. As far as these indicators are concerned, male couples have exhibited some distinguishable behaviors such as how gay men partners go to extra effort to respect each other's boundaries and emotional space as an expression of emotional intimacy and autonomy [29]. In terms of dissolution, same-sex romantic partners are suggested to have similar rates of breaking-up when compared to heterosexual couples [30], [31]. However, the literature has been inconsistent of whether both male [32], [33] or both female [34], [35] couples dissolved faster.

Lau [35] explained that variations between same- and different-sex couples are brought about by incentives, alternatives, and challenges in the relationship. Right to marriage, for example, engenders trust and investment into the romantic partnership [20], [36]. Additionally, same-sex couples, in general, has to negotiate and manage the disclosure of their relationships to family members, friends, and colleagues as they are more likely to anticipate and face disapproval [37], [38]. To maintain the relationship, same-sex couples opt to live together [35]. This cohabitation decision is centered on stability factors (e.g., commitment) amongst two male partners.

When striving to achieve successful relationships, homosexual couples face the same general life stressors experienced by all couples. Consistent to Lau's [35] argument, the challenges that same-sex

couples faced, particularly in the form of relationship stigmatization [39], account for the difference. This relationship stigma has been suggested to have adverse effects to relationship intimacy, satisfaction, and conflict [40]. For example, Gamarel and colleagues [3] has reported the association of the stigma to lower relationship quality and greater depressive symptoms between transwoman and cis men couples. Rosenthal and Starks [41] have also found that relationship stigma was associated with lower relationship commitment, trust, love, and sexual communications among same-sex and interracial couples. Moreover, experiencing such stigma is also associated with greater odds for intimate relationship violence victimization. In a more recent work, relationship stigma from friends was directly associated with greater depressive symptoms and indirectly related to overall self-rated health via greater depressive symptoms [42]. Consequently, it becomes evident how dissolution of same-sex romantic partnership can be attributable to relationship stigma [37]. In fact, such stigma is common to this disadvantaged group and is a real threat to same-sex couple relationships [43]– 45].

### **Heterosexism**

Provided the impact of relationship stigma to same sex relationship, we also found it necessary to look at the psychological construct of heterosexism. Herek [46] laid out three areas that heterosexism covers. These are (1) sexual stigma or the shared knowledge with what society deems as negative for anything that is non-heterosexual in behavior, identity, relationship, or community; (2) ‘the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma’; and (3) sexual prejudice to refer to negative attitudes of people basing on sexual orientation.

The prejudicial nature of heterosexism as a construct makes us think whether our target respondents who have been to romantic relationships with gay men partners are likely to endorse heterosexist or heterofluid accounts of their romantic relationship experience. Otis, Rotosky, Riggle, and Hamrin, [47] explained that internalizing prevailing negative societal views of same-sex relationships (e.g., economic in nature, opportunities for sexual infidelities) may lead to behaviors that prevents these straight partners from establishing long-term, committed relationship in order to protect themselves from possible losses and threats. Additionally,

heterosexist views may also lead to the development of secondary stressors such as in the case of managing public visibility of one’s same-sex relationship and sexual orientation [48], [39]. In turn, these additional stressors compete with the energy supposedly for maintaining the relationship and may thereby impair the relationship. As heterosexism includes long-standing sexual stigma, cultural ideology, and accompany sexual prejudices, we hypothesized its evidence in the narratives of our respondents in the different stages of their relationship with their gay men partners.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Our work is aimed at knowing what the respondents’ general levels are of (1) heterosexism; (2) quality of relationship with partner; (3) emotions towards the partner; (4) quality of break-up; and (5) gender identity.

In terms of the romantic relationships process, the current work also aimed at exploring the nature of the following phases namely, (1) courting process (i.e., courting initiator; length of courting period; courting strategies and sexual courting behavior); (2) beginnings of the romantic relationship (i.e., signs, emotions, cognitions - reasons and hesitations; disclosure to family and friends; and fidelity); (3) relationship maintenance (i.e., activities, similarities, roles, rules, challenges and coping, and fidelity); and (4) dissolution (i.e., break-up and reconciliation patterns; final break-up cognitions; final break-up emotions; post-break-up communication patterns; and future intentions to be in another same-sex relationship).

Lastly, we also investigated the comparative descriptions of the respondents of their homosexual relationship partners with women romantic duos (i.e., emotional investment; emotional reciprocity; intimacy; and commitment).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current research employed Mixed-Descriptive Research Design. Common themes in the various domains of the different stages of a romantic relationship of straight and gay men partners were analyzed. Some social and psychological variables (e.g., heterosexism, infidelity, women and gay men partner comparison, etc.) were also measured and assessed.

### Sampling and Participants

Non-probabilistic sampling was employed in the study. We started with asking their network of colleagues and friends for potential respondents. Similarly, respondents' referrals were also maximized.

A total of 23 self-identified straight men who have been and are currently in a romantic relationship with a gay partner took part in the study. For respondents who have been in a relationship with more than one homosexual romantic partner, they were asked to refer to the partner and relationship which they considered serious - defined through its longevity and the reported level of emotional attachment formed towards the gay lover and the relationship.

The mean age of the respondents was 24 ( $SD = 5.7$ ). The youngest respondent was 16 years old while the oldest respondent was 39 years old. Nineteen (19) of them are single, three (3) are married, with one respondent did not identify his civil status. The respondents come from a variety of occupations; seven of which had blue-collar jobs (e.g. maintenance personnel, construction, factory worker), three had white collar jobs (e.g. academic manager, real-estate agent, customer service representative), two pink-collar (i.e., barber and service attendant) and one is self-employed. Four of which are still students while another four are unemployed. Their average perceived socio-economic status was middle class ( $M = 4$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and mean estimated monthly income of Php 8, 958.33 ( $SD =$  Php 5, 353.24). All participants reported to be Christians and are largely Roman Catholic (91%).

### Measures

We utilized an in-depth interview guide in the data gathering. The guide was comprised of five major sections. The first three sections pertained to the three major stages of romantic relationship development namely (1) beginnings, (2) maintenance, and (3) break-up. These sections included mostly open-ended questions allowing respondents to narrate the events of their romantic relationships within the three major phases. Sample questions of these parts of the interview guide included how did you meet your current partner (beginning)? What were your reasons for getting into the said relationship (beginning)? What were the things that you enjoy doing as a couple (maintenance)? What were the roles that you both take in the following aspects of your relationship (maintenance)? While in the relationship with your

partner, were you into other relationship (maintenance)? What was the reason for the final break-up (break-up)? Who initiated the reconciliation (break-up)? Would you try being in a romantic relationship with a homosexual partner again? Why? (break-up).

Aside from open-ended questions the major interview guide sections on beginnings and break-up included 10-item researcher-developed 5-point Likert scales. These are (1) the Quality of Relationships with the Gay Partner scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and (2) the Emotions towards the Gay Partner scale ( $\alpha = .894$ ) for the romantic relationship beginning section and (1) the Quality of Break-up Scale ( $\alpha = .61$ ).

The fourth section of the interview guide was on measures particularly the 10-item researcher-developed 5-point Likert Heterosexism scale ( $\alpha = .847$ ). This section also included open-ended questions pertaining to the gender identity of the respondents. Sample of these questions included: having experience a relationship with a homosexual, do you consider yourself as homosexual? If yes, why? If no, why? Do you have friends who are gay? Do you have relatives who are gay? How would you describe the homosexuality of your partner? What were things you like about his homosexuality?

The last section of the interview guide was divided into two sub-parts. The first part is on the socio-demographic information of the respondents to include variables like age, occupation, educational attainment, family position, perceived socio-economic status, estimated monthly income. The second part is on the family background of the participants that asked participants questions like the civil status of their parents, their professions, quality of relationships to both parents (taken separately), and closest family member of the respondent.

These questions were prepared both in English and Cebuano and were asked based on the preferred language of the respondents. The interview guide was also consulted to social psychology expert and were pre-tested. Minor corrections from these processes were integrated into the final interview guide.

### Procedures

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, verbal consent of the respondents was obtained. The consent included the explanation of the purpose of the study and the protection of their rights and confidentiality.

They were also interviewed in their preferred time and place.

The one-on-one in-depth interviews lasted for an average of an hour. With respondents' permission, the interviews were recorded. The interviewers solely did the notetaking.

The interview ended with an expression of gratitude and a small token of appreciation for the respondents' time and sharing. They were also asked for referrals of potential respondents who meet the selection criteria of the study.

### Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method of analysis. Researchers looked through each of the individual interview transcriptions and identified superordinate themes regarding the different phases of the romantic relationship of straight men with gay men, namely: 1) Courting, (2) Beginnings, (3) Maintenance, (4) Dissolution and (5) Comparison of Gay men and Women Romantic Partners. Cohen's Kappa was used to measure inter-rater reliability and level of agreement of the themes of the following: signs of relationship officiality ( $k = .95, p < .01$ ); emotions felt at the beginning of relationship ( $k = .93, p < .01$ ); disclosure of relationship ( $k = 1, p < .01$ ); reasons for getting into the relationship ( $k = .92, p < .01$ ); hesitations about the relationship ( $k = 1, p < .01$ ); conversation topics ( $k = .742, p < .01$ ); activities enjoyed as a couple ( $k = .816, p < .01$ ); similarities ( $k = 1, p < .01$ ); challenges ( $k = .889, p < .01$ ); coping strategies ( $k = .93, p < .01$ ); break-up patterns ( $k = .848, p < .01$ ); reconciliation patterns ( $k = 1, p < .01$ ); final break-up cognitions ( $k = .942, p < .01$ ); final break-up emotions ( $k = .93, p < .01$ ); post break-up communication patterns ( $k = 1, p < .01$ ); comparisons of gay men and women romantic partners ( $k = .93, p < .01$ ).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Provided the Mixed Research Design of the study, we analyzed the quantitative data through descriptive statistics and used thematic analysis for the qualitative data.

The average number of romantic relationships that the respondents have with women is four. Meanwhile, they have reported an average of one romantic relationship with gay partners.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of some Psychological Constructs of the Respondents

Psychological Constructs	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Heterosexism	23	2.22	0.62
Quality of Relationship with Partner	23	3.55	0.81
Emotions towards the Partner	23	3.72	0.84
Quality of Relationship Break-up	18	3.18	0.61

*Note:* All scales were in a 10-item 5-point Likert scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*) scale;

As shown in Table 1, respondents reported generally average levels in the different psychological constructs. Note worthily however, respondents displayed below average levels of heterosexism. To shed further light into this, we examined the lived experiences and accounts of the respondents' romantic relationships and subjected it through an in-depth analysis, taking note if truly the accounts are more heterofluid than heterosexist.

All 23 respondents identified themselves as heterosexual males or in colloquial language, straight. Respondents emphasized that a key aspect of their heterosexuality was attractions to women.

*"Kasi nagkakagusto din naman ako sa mga babae paminsan. Nagkaka crush din ako [on women] pero siguro nauna lang yung feelings na umusbong doon sa pakikipag relasyon ko sa bakla* (Because I still get attracted to women from time to time. In fact, I still have crushes [on women] it just so happens that I developed feelings first for the gay partner I had relationship with)" (R13, 17 years old, single)

A common misconception regarding straight-identified males who engage in same-sex practices and desires is that they are men that are actually "gay or bisexual but refuse to accept those identities" [4]. Carillo and Hoffman [4] dispelled this misconception by uncovering how these men recognize their same-sex practices and desires as another form of expressing their heterosexuality. The same study termed this as "heteroflexibility" suggesting that heterosexuality could be viewed as an "elastic category" in which men integrate same-sex behaviors into their identity as straight or heterosexual all the while continue having primary or exclusive attractions to women [4]. Respondents illustrate this by indicating that, *"Dili, laki gyud ko; kay maibog gihapon ko'g babae* (No, I'm still straight because I still get attracted to women)" (R2, 30 years old, single). Additionally, one respondent said that, "I have a wife" (R12, 29 years old, married) to reaffirm his heteroflexibility.

However, what's more notable is how respondents conceptualized their own heterosexuality through re-framing their gay partners as women.

*"No dili ko bayot kay ako man siyang gihimong babae wala siya nako giconsider nga bayot. Babae siya para nako* (No, I'm not gay because I see my partner as a woman not gay. For me my partner's really a woman)" (R3, 20 years old, single)

*"No because I treated him as a girl; and he was the only exception at that time."* (R18, 20 years old, single)

The responses point up to how gender and sexuality can be "constantly created and re-created out of human interaction and social life" [49] (p. 13). With that being said, gender and sexuality as a social construct does not solely subscribe to the heteronormative assumptions and presuppositions of hegemonic societal environments [50]. Conversely it should be viewed as a distinct process that allows variance and subtle differences in its conceptualization across the individual and institutional levels [12], [51], [52]. Of relevance to this research, understanding gender and sexuality from such perspective helps do away with too much restriction that may result in the misrepresentation of unique individual experiences. Truly these results highlight the flexibility of heterosexuality [5]; all the more making the pursuit of understanding straight men and gay relationships in the Philippine setting more important than ever.

In this light, the different phases of romantic relationships were the primary area of interest of our research with the aim to capture the distinct accounts of the respondents. This was divided into four parts, namely, (1) courting; (2) romantic relationship beginnings; (3) maintenance; and (4) separation.

In the courting stage, two of the respondents reported that they initiated the courting process. Meanwhile, eight respondents mentioned that it was their homosexual partner who courted them. Thirteen of the respondents indicated that they and their partner consensually initiated the courting. The average length of time of courting was 16 days ( $SD = 22.7$ ). The ways of courting included outright declaration of courtship, gift-giving and constant interaction. Respondents also reported sexual courting behavior that included intercourse and kissing.

When asked about the beginnings of their romantic relationships, the respondents reported the following themes:

Table 2. Top five area themes in the romantic relationship beginnings of the respondents

<b>Signs of Official Relationship</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Persons they Disclose to</b>
Mutual Understanding	Happy	Friends
Explicit Agreement	Fearful	Family
Gift Giving	Mad	Nobody
Public Announcement	Bad	Colleagues
Use of Endearment		Neighbors
<b>Reasons for Getting into the Relationship</b>	<b>Hesitations about the Relationship</b>	
Material Benefits	Negative Evaluation of Others	
Attraction	No Hesitations	
Past Experiences	Existing Commitments	
Curiosity		
No Reason		

Recent studies conducted suggested how homosexual and heterosexual relationships are more similar than dissimilar [20], [53]-[55]. The responses in the current study point up to a comparable pattern. For example, when it comes to signs of the officiality of relationship, one can note how the responses are characteristically indistinguishable from different-sex couples. The signs for the officiality of relationships were mainly mutual understanding. For example, R15 (28 years old, single) knew the relationship became official when: *"Magsige na mi ug kuyog-kuyog, tawganay, text. Unya napaila-ila sad siya nako sa akong mama ug papa.* (We would always hang-out, call and text each other. I also introduced him to my mother and father)". Remarkably, even if some preferred not to disclose their relationship to anybody a number of respondents divulged their relationship to either friends or family just like R15 above.

Furthermore, the same reported pattern could be said for the emotions felt during the onset of relationship. Respondents expressed a prevalence of happy emotions over others, highly characteristic of new couples. However, it is also important to note how respondents felt fearful emotions such as anxiety and embarrassment. To the words of one respondent, *"I felt confused, shocked and pressured kay nabalaka sa tan -aw sa uban. I love him but worried sa among dangatan* (I felt confused, shocked and pressured of what other people might think. I love him but I felt

really worried about the consequences)” (R1, 25 years old, single).

“*Okay ra pero usahay kay awkward kung mag kuyog sa public. Nalipay nga murag naguol mahadlok ko makit-an sa neighbors* (It was okay but sometimes it felt awkward especially when we go out in public. I was happy but worried that my neighbors will see me).” (R3, 20 years old, single)

This is no surprise considering the Philippines, a predominantly Christian country, where heterosexism and stigma against gays and lesbians are still prevalent across different settings - from media, workplace, school and down to the basic levels of community, home [2], [18], [19]. This also explains why majority of respondents report negative evaluation of others as the primary hesitations about the relationship, an overriding theme experienced usually in heteronormative societies.

On the reasons for getting into relationship, respondents primarily reported material benefits, closely followed by attraction and past experiences. A qualitative study conducted by Motilla [56] suggested that stigma is ascribed to older gay men relationships with heterosexual men especially if it is “financially and emotionally involved”. For so long, media has portrayed that heterosexual males only engage in relationship with gay men solely for financial reasons completely bereft of emotions and attraction. In relation to the study, respondents started off for materialistic reasons, yet a number also reported attractions. Take R13, for example, “*Matagal ko na siyang medyo type at na fall ako.* (My partner has been my type for so long, I just fell for my partner)”. In fact, some even reported feelings of love for their partners “*Murag nibati ko’g gugma sa iyaha bisag siya bayot. Nakasuod g’yud mi* (I felt love for my partner even if my partner was gay. We got really close.)” (R2, 30 years old, single).

Respondents also described past experiences as reason for getting into the relationship. By pointing out their past experiences, respondents were able to subtly compare their previous different-sex relationships with gay partners, underlining their deep-seated desires for love and affection.

“*Past 3 GFs ako ang gibulagan; I was looking for a real and long-lasting relationship* (I was looking for a real and long lasting relationship since my past three girlfriends dumped me.)” (R1, 25 years old, single)

“*Gibinuangan sa previous relationship with other girls before; Out of 5 kay 3 nga nasakpan gyud nako nga nay 3rd party unya nasakitan gyud ko.* (I was cheated on in my previous relationships with other girls. Out of 5 [relationships], I caught 3 of them having a third party and I was really hurt.)” (R17, 27 years old, single)

“*Nangita kog love sa laing taw kay wala ko ka feel ug love pagkabata nako kay akong mama naay laing family then akong papa namatay sa akong edad nga 19 pero wala sad mi nagkauban sa akong papa, ako lola ra nagpadako nako* (I was looking for love that I never felt in my childhood. My mother had another family and then my father died when I was 19. I was raised by my grandmother and not by my father.)” (R22, 21 years old)

Interestingly, these respondents viewed gay relationship as a resource, not of money but of love. Although respondents mentioned materialistic reasons for getting into the relationship it is important to note that this is not only exclusive to same-sex couples. This also happens in different-sex couples given how provisioning has been an integral part of every human relationship.

Moreover, eighteen of the respondents mentioned that they were not committed into another relationship upon agreeing to be in relationship with their gay men partner. On the other hand, five of the respondents were in another relationship when their same-sex relationship commenced. One reason for the said infidelity included material benefits. According to one respondent, “*Maayo siya sa akong needs; Mo provide and mohatag siya kay student ko hasta ako uyab* (My partner was really good for my needs. My partner would provide for me since I was a student as well as my girlfriend)” (R15, 28 years old, single). Notably, the respondents also expressed attraction being the primary reason for their infidelity such as in the case of one respondent reporting how, “I feel happier in his presence. She is an ideal girl” (R18, 20 years old, single). Another respondent also reported attraction saying “*Siya na may nisulod sa akong huna-huna ug kasing-kasing. Importante na siya sa akoa* (He already came flooding into my heart and my mind. He became important to me.)” (R2, 30 years old, single).

With regards to their relationship maintenance, gay couples have been found to be as effective as heterosexual couples in maintaining successful and

enduring relationships [2], [54], [55]. This is in contrast with mainstream belief and the results of our work corroborates this. Table 3 summarizes these themes for this stage of the relationship.

Table 3. Top five area themes in the relationship maintenance phase of the respondents

Conversation Topics	Activities	Similarities
Day-to-day Life	Travel	Hobbies
Future Experiences	Public Dates	Personality
Personal Values	Hobbies	Values
	Sexual Activities	Occupation
	Private Dates	No Similarities
Challenges		Coping Strategies
Real or Imagined Third Party		Dialogue
Partner's Shortcomings		Passive Approach
Covert Nature of Relationship		
Negative Evaluation of Others		
Financial Difficulties		

Respondents' maintenance activities appear to be characteristic of the observed activities typical of different-sex couples may they be in the aspect of conversation topics, similarities, activities and coping strategies. Specifically, respondents preferred using dialogue or positive communication as their main coping strategy which is in step with a study done by Kintanar [2]. He suggested that in most cases heterosexual men, gay men and lesbian women primarily employ a positive problem-solving coping style more frequently than others [2]. However, one apparent difference is showcased in the challenges encountered in the relationship. Third party was the primary issue encountered followed by partner's shortcomings. Since these two are commonplace issues in every relationship, they are not as interesting as the third and fourth cited relationship concerns namely, coyness of relationship and negative evaluation of others. As one respondent expressed, "Yung mga sinasabi ng mga tao tungkol sa relasyon namin at yung pagtago namin sa mga parents namin (What others will say about our relationship and how to keep the relationship secret from both our parents)" (R16, 21 years old, single). Managing public visibility of one's same-sex relationship truly provide secondary stressors in the relationship that may prove to impair maintenance of relationship[48], [39].

Again, this reveals a key characteristic of a heteronormative society that up to this day and age still accord stigma to same sex relationships [2], [18], [19]. It could be posited that respondents resort to

secrecy in relationship due to fear of negative evaluation. To avoid the consequences of being in same-sex relationships, being straight in the eyes of society is viewed as the best course of action [57].

Aside from maintenance activities, respondents were asked on the roles they played and the rules they observed in the following aspects: (1) Finances, (2) Decisions about the future of relationship, (3) Intimacy (4) Socializing with family and friends (5) Having Relationship with others or open-relationship. Financially, ten respondents reported that their partners played the provider role while only one reported assuming the role. Additionally, five reported having egalitarian roles while seven indicated that their relationships did not have particular roles regarding finances. R19 explained, "Mag-agad ra ko niya, unya iyaha tanan." (I would rely on my partner while he takes care of all the finances). Contrastingly R5 mentioned that, "I handle the finances especially more on the decision while my partner usually agrees to it". Additionally, R6 also explained "Kami duha mo decide [on finances] (We both decide [on finances])".

The rules on finances mainly were regards to giving equal contribution like in the case of one respondent "Hatian kami sa lahat ng gastos lalo na sa mga kain namin sa labas o kapag nagdedate (We split the expenses especially when we eat out or go on dates)" (R13, 17 years old, single). Contrastingly, another rule provided a one-way street wherein the respondents were solely provided for by their partners such as in the case of R9, "He supports me financially for my studies". Another rule in finances included frugality of spending. R3 explained, "Mogasto ra kung kinahanglan but sa kaon permanente gyud (To spend only when really needed except for food of course)".

On decisions about the future of the relationship, the majority of the respondents had no particular roles in such aspect. Only two of the respondents indicated having played the role of the decision maker compared to the six that had their gay partners as the sole decision maker. One respondent explained, "Mosunod ra ko unya siya ang tigdesisyon (I just follow my partner as he makes the decisions)" (R14, 31 years old, single) The rest of the four indicated having egalitarian roles as both partners play a role in decision making. The rules of this domain mainly centered on commitment and power of the decision. For powers of decision R18 explained, "Anyone can make decisions, dili na kinahanglan mag consult if dili



*ra bad ang buhaton* (Anyone can make decisions, no need for consulting each other as long we won't do anything bad). Another respondent expressed a shifting of power either leaning to the gay partner, "*Dapat agree ko niya* (I have to agree with my partner) (R19, 34 years old, single)" or to the straight partner, "*Muconsulta siya nako* (My partner consults me)" (R5, 39 years old, single).

In terms of intimacy, five respondents reported being top or the one who penetrates which correspondingly equals the number of respondents that assumed the bottom role or the one being penetrated. Six respondents reported being versatile while the remaining reported having no roles. These results are contrary to the stereotypical masculine intimacy role (i.e., top) of straight men in same-sex relationship. Noteworthy though is how respondents were clear of intimacy rules pertaining to dominance - who is on top or bottom - and reservations in sexual activities that limited sexual activities to petting, kissing, and hugging only for some respondents. In one example, R2 cited, "*Hikap-hikap lang ug masturbation ra. Also kiss and hug.* (Petting and masturbation only. Also kiss and hug)". Additional rules also include discretion in public such as avoiding displays of affection. One respondent recalled their discussion about this, "*Dili pwede mag holding hands in public kay dili ko ganahan.* (We must not hold hands in public because I don't want to)" (R14, 31 years old, single).

In terms of socialization with family and friends, majority of the respondents ( $n = 15$ ) indicated having no particular roles. Five of them reported having partners playing the active role while they assume a passive role in the socialization. Only two of the respondents indicated having played an active role in the said aspect while five indicated playing egalitarian roles in the said aspect. As an active role taker of this domain, one respondent emphasized, "*Ako ra bahala sunod sunod ra siya.* (I usually take the wheel, my partner just follows me)" (R22, 21 years old). The rules on socialization was reported to be discretion ( $n = 13$ ). Examples to this included, "*Magpaalam muna para hindi mahalata yung sa aming dalawa at para di din magtaka ang parents* (We must consult each other prior so that we don't become too obvious and also so that our parents wouldn't suspect us)" (R13). Meanwhile, only one explicitly allowed publicity in the relationship as R15 puts it, "*Ganahan ko dili siya*

*maulaw sa akong pamilya ug mga amigo* (I preferred that he wouldn't be shy to my family and friends)".

Lastly, eight of the respondents indicated having played restrained roles in engaging in other relationships concurrently. Five reported having played an unrestrained role only for the heterosexual partner - that is the heterosexual partner had other relationships simultaneously while the homosexual partner did not. Contrastingly, only one reported having unrestrained roles for both partners.

Seven of the respondents mentioned to have committed infidelity while maintaining the relationship with their gay partners. The reasons for such infidelity included attraction to others like having flings or in some case sexual attraction "*Layo man siya ato, Ako, taw ra baya ko naa sad gyud panginahanglan [sex].* (My partner was out of town that time, I'm only human I have needs [sex].)" (R15). In a heteronormative society, the stigma and pressures that come with it prompt these men to overtly emphasize attraction to women. In the case of our study, the respondents' infidelity are attempts of drowning out or making their same-sex attractions less significant and in so doing reaffirming their masculinity and heterosexuality [6]. In the words of one respondent, "*Ganahan gyud kog babae, ana* (I just really like women, simple) (R19)". Other reasons of infidelity include having existing commitment like being married and also the costliness of relationship reporting how it "was not healthy anymore" (R8, 26 years old, married).

Contrastingly, the majority remained loyal to their relationship and indicated contentment with the partner, trust and rapport, and love as primary reasons for doing so which further dispels the notion that this type of relationship is empty of emotions. As R22 (21 years old) puts it, "*Contented man ko niya so dili nako mangita ug lain* (I was content with my partner, so I didn't look for anyone else)".

The last romantic relationship phase that we explored is separation. Table 4 summarizes the area themes in this stage.

Additionally, the indicators and patterns that appear during the dissolution phase of relationships do not seem entirely different from the ones exhibited by different-sex couples in the aspect of break-up, reconciliation, post-break up communication patterns as well as final break-up emotions. What's interesting to note however are the data gathered on final-break

up cognitions where rationalizations are primarily abundant.

Table 4. Top five area themes in the relationship dissolution phase of the respondents

Break-up Patterns	Final Break-up Emotions	Final Break-up Cognitions
Diminishing Interactions	Sad	Rationalization
Explicit Declaration	Happy	Negative Thoughts
Third-Party Involvement	Surprise	Positive Thoughts
No Apparent Signs	Angry	
Post-Break-up Communication Patterns	Reconciliation Patterns	
Attempts of Reconciliation	Feelings of Love	
Causal Interaction	Familiarity and Dependence	
	Change and Forgiveness	

“*Sayang pero unsaon ta man wala ra man gihapon ugma kay bayot man siya; Dili siya pure nga babae* (It’s regretful [we ended] but what can we do anyway; there’s no future for us because my partner was gay and not a bona fide woman)” (R2, 30 years old, single).

“*Partly sad kay love ang partner; partly sakto kay dili ganahan ma-reveal ang relationship* (Partly, I felt sad because I loved my partner but at the same time I think it was right because I don’t want to have the relationship revealed [at some point])” (R4, 19 single)

Aside from the seemingly embittered undertone the responses reflect hints of heterosexism. Even if respondents displayed below average levels of heterosexism, it could not be helped to see how some rationalizations harbored stigma like that of R2. Despite accomplishments of gay movements, negative social attitudes toward the homosexuality remain evident and that being straight is still pervasively preferred as the more acceptable choice in relationships than any others [57]. This also highlights an internalization of negative societal views of same-sex relationships that inhibit some respondents to establish long-term, committed relationship with their gay partners in order protect themselves from perceived losses and threats that come with it [47].

The abovementioned theme is further substantiated by respondents’ intentions to get into another same-sex relationship in the future. Only three respondents signified willingness to do so. Their reasons for this intention included material benefits and perceived positive qualities of homosexual partner. As R2 explained, “*Yes, kung naay makaparehas niya. Tagas ra ing-ato nga mas komportable, mas lingaw. If you need anything naa kay makaduolan labi na if naay*

*trabaho* (Yes if there’s someone who could be at par with him. He’s one of a kind as our relationship was more comfortable and fun. If I need anything, I can always rely on my partner especially if that he has work)”. Meanwhile, twelve declared no intentions mainly due to two main reasons. First, is due to existing commitments such as having families or girlfriends. Second, is having considered the relationship as one-time thing. R20’s answer clarifies this, “*Sakto nato nga kausa. Experience na lang to ba... One-night-stand na lang* (One time was enough. I’d rather charge it to experience. I could do one-night-stands but only that). Three (3) respondents were uncertain of what the future holds.

The last area of interest of our research are the comparative descriptions of the respondents of their homosexual relationship partners vis-a-vis their women romantic duos. Table 5 summarizes these differences.

Table 5. Respondents’ perceived comparison between gay men and women romantic relationship partners

Area of Comparison	Gay Men Partners (in comparison to women partners)
Emotional Investment	Above par
Emotional Reciprocity	Above par
Intimacy	Below par
Commitment	Below par

When compared to their experiences with women partners, respondents reported that their gay partners were better in the aspects of emotional investment and reciprocity.

“*Mas ganahan ko sa among relationship; mas close me; mas nakaila ko niya; we had play; the best siya nako nga uyab* (I prefer our relationship [with gay partner] among all relationships I have been. I feel we were much closer. We knew each other better and we had time for play. Overall, it was the best relationship I ever had).” (R1, 25 years old, single)

In terms of commitment and intimacy, respondents’ women partners appeared to come into the upperhand. Again, data showed an emphasis on

attraction to women specifically in sex to reaffirm their masculinity and heterosexuality [6].

*Dako ang kalainan. Nay mahatag ang babae nga dili mahatag sa bayot and vice versa; Sex ang sa babae, provisions/kwarta ang mahatag sa bayot* (There's a big difference actually. There's something a woman can give that a gay partner cannot and vice versa. For example, women partners satisfy sexual needs while gay partners provide for financial and material needs). (R20, 29 years old, single)

Responses also displayed the perceived challenges brought about by the nature of the relationship specifically negative evaluation of others. To foster stronger intimacy and commitment require a great deal of safety, a condition in which partners can be true to themselves, not just in the private realm but also publicly without fear of reprisal or scrutiny. This could explain why in these types of relationships, men do not commit for the long-term thus cutting short potential relationships [47].

*“Okay ra ang gay but mas okay ang girl kay naay freedom i-show ang feelings in public. (Gay partners are okay but having women partners are better since you have the freedom to show your feelings in public.)”* (R5, 39 years old, single)

*“Mas open in public ang girl unya tago kaayo ang gay. (My relationships with women partners are much open in public while my relationship with gay partners are hidden.)”* (R6, 22 years old, single)

Although the data displayed wide array of emotions like closeness felt in the relationship, it is still apparent how the covertness of the relationship continues to play an invariable role in making or breaking relationships.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study challenges Philippine stigma and stereotypes that surround Filipino straight men relationships with gay men. Firstly, it dispelled notions and misconceptions that these men are in denial of their gay or bisexual identity [6]. Plainly put, the men in the study are straight and have developed a definite sense of identity by challenging hegemonic social prescriptions of what straight masculine men ought to be. This is consistent with the more recent framework of gender on ‘heteroflexibility’ [6], [59].

Secondly, it debases the notion that the relationships at hand are only functional or materialistic in nature, and that it is completely devoid of emotions characteristic of a fulfilling relationships. In fact, across all phases of romantic relationship from beginnings to the dissolution, themes of attraction and feelings of love have been thoroughly prevalent.

Additionally, we concur with other scholars who have argued that in many aspects, same-sex and different-sex relationships are more similar than dissimilar [20], [53]-[55]. Themes across the different phases of the romantic relationship of straight men with gay men displayed how contrary to popular belief the patterns, activities and practices are not as deviant as depicted by mainstream media.

However, the only stark difference is how respondents displayed a marked fear of negative evaluation. This result is consistent with the theories of minority stress [38], [47-48] and relationship stigma [40-46]. Still the Philippines remain to be predominantly Catholic and the cost and social consequences of publicity appear to exceed the benefits of staying in a same-sex relationship. Therefore, future proponents should strive for studies that push further the elucidation of a rather obscured topic in the Philippine setting to promote inclusiveness, debasing heteronormative norms and thereby contribute to the normalization of these types of relationships.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In our attempts to explore the complexity of the somewhat societally unique relationships of gay and straight men, we have placed less emphasis on the stigma and the struggles of this minority group. As the largely evident heterosexism exist in Philippine society, it would be imperative for future researchers to explore social issues pertaining to this type of same-sex relationship including topics like hate acts and discriminations and legal concerns like union, conjugal property acquisition, and other civil rights. Also, research design that accounts for the causal link of heterosexism and same-sex relationship stigma with same-sex relationship thoughts, behaviors, and behaviors may also be explored.

Our study has also shed light on the confusion about the sexual fluidity of straight men having romantic relationship with gay partners. It supports the framework that gender identification should not be solely based on sexual acts. Empirical supports like

this are needed to unravel the complexities of straight men's heteroflexibility. Domains of culture like religion, socialization, media, and the like are also worth noting to be explored. Consequently, more culturally appropriate measures of this construct may also be developed.

Furthermore, romantic relationships are processes. It is our attempt to capture the developmental nature of gay and straight men romantic partnership, we were somewhat challenged by memory limitations. As such, longitudinal research design of a larger sample and indigenous research methods (e.g., pakikipagkwentuhan, pakikisama) is ideal to address the limitations of our work. However, the challenge of getting willing participants who are attuned with the scholastic merit and its corresponding social impact and who are not keen to stigmatization should not be ignored. This is where more culturally appropriate research techniques in Sikolohiyang Pilipino (SP) are viable.

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