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INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: GAY STUDENT GOVERNANCE IN DMMMSU

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Abstract

This study, Inclusive Leadership: Gay Student Governance in DMMMSU, is geared towards discovering the various experiences of Gay Student Leaders. Despite increasing inclusivity in many educational institutions, the role of gay individuals in student governance remains underexplored. Using a quantitative research design with total enumeration sampling, the researchers administered a validated survey questionnaire to 52 gay student leaders across the three DMMMSU campuses. The study aimed to assess their demographic profile, level of agreeability to various leadership styles, extent of involvement and influence, and the challenges and opportunities they face. Findings reveal that most GSLs favored democratic and transformational leadership styles, aligning with values of collaboration, inclusivity, and advocacy. The study also identified that while GSLs demonstrated strong involvement and influence within their student organizations, they encountered barriers such as stereotypes and prejudices. Nevertheless, they exhibited resilience, innovation, and a deep commitment to inclusive leadership. As a result, the study proposed a policy recommendation to enhance leadership opportunities and institutional support for GSLs. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender, leadership, and representation in student governance and advocate for creating safer and more inclusive academic environments.

Keywords: *gender politics, resiliency, student governance*

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Introduction

Leadership has the power to change the way we act and think, but it is not contingent on the sex or ethnicity of the person leading, rather their courage, vision, ability to have impact, and capacity to mobilize people and communities towards a continuum of actionable change (Northouse, 2019). Over time, LGBTQIA+ movements have shifted global understandings of gender and sexuality while centering the importance of visibility, equity, and representation.

As this framework staggers in the public landscape but remains narrow, the role of gay men in student governance has received little attention. This study examines the governance of Gay Student Leaders (GSLs) at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) and their leadership styles, governance roles, impact, challenges, and/or opportunities.

Despite increasing visibility and access to LGBTQIA+ engagement, there is still little understanding of GSLs experiences as university student leaders. This study aims to examine the demographic profile, nature of leadership styles, level of involvement, challenges, and recommendations for policy growth concerning GSLs. Ultimately, the next objective is to observe how these leaders navigate gendered and heteronormative spaces to create change and equity within their campus communities (Komives, 2005; Dessel & Robinson, 2018).

Research Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative method of research through a descriptive design. The researcher used total enumeration sampling, meaning that all 52 Gay Student Leaders (GSLs) who are affiliated with three different campuses were included for study. The data collection process involved the use of a validated survey instrument. The survey measured demographic data, leadership styles, school involvement, and challenges and opportunities faced by GSLs. The survey used a series of Likert-scale items to measure the level of agreement of different leadership styles, the level of involvement in leadership functions, and challenges and agency in their positionality.

The data collected was reviewed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and medians, which provided an understanding of the GSL profile and

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leadership experience. The study achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the survey as evidence of its reliability.

Results and Findings

Demographic Profile of Gay Student Leaders (GSLs) in DMMMSU

It was revealed in the study that a large proportion of GSLs at DMMMSU belonged to a young adult demographic, including those aged 18-20 (67.31%) and aged 21-23 (28.85%). This finding is in keeping with the research conducted by Poushter and Kent (2020) who argue that younger students are more open to diversity and inclusion. In addition, it was noted that most GSLs were students in their second year (38.46% of the GSL sample), which suggests that younger students - particularly first and second year students - tend to be more involved in leadership opportunities (Astin, 1999). Conversely, the study noted that those in the 24-26 age range were meaningfully less engaged in GSL work, with only 3.85% of GSLs falling into this range. Students in this demographic may have a greater academic workload and/or began to plan for their career which could preclude their engagement in leadership roles (Irehill et al., 2023).

The ages of GSLs sampled would suggest that where generational difference exists, younger and newer students are more likely to participate in campus leadership opportunities due to the lack of social and academic responsibilities that older students have. Damon (2004) highlights that younger people strive for personal development through leadership and community involvement, thereby experiencing these more than older cohorts.

Leadership Styles

Upon reviewing leadership styles, the research indicated that GSLs strongly favored democratic, and transformational leadership styles with 65.38% of GSLs stating they strongly agreed that the democratic style is an effective means of leading, and 61.54% strongly agreed that transformational leadership is effective. Democratic leadership style is characterized by working in collaboration, shared decision making, fostering inclusivity and respect. All of these elements are reflective of the values of the LGBTQIA+ hidden community (Northouse, 2019). This is also true for transformational leadership style, whose focus is to inspire and motivate followers. Bass (1997) stated that transformational leaders are effective at influencing positive change by empowering individuals and encouraging creative thinking.

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Following some of the factors surrounding these two leadership styles is particularly valid for GSLs who want to leverage their leadership role to advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights. Autocratic leadership style had a somewhat mixed response as 36.54% of GSLs stated they agreed that it is an effective leadership style and equally 36.54% stated they disagreed it was an effective leadership style. Therefore, it may be inferred that although autocratic economic leadership styles can be effective in crisis situations, GSLs would prefer less autocratic student leadership as collaborative and empowering practices are vital to meeting student leadership goals (Avolio et al, 1999). Clearly, the motives of GSLs working in student governance leadership preferred a leadership style and vehicle that can create viable participatory, inclusive and collaborative student leadership practice.

Levels of Involvement

GSLs indicated their involvement was high across leadership functions. They were actively involved in all aspects of leading team meetings, delegating responsibilities, creating the team task goals, and providing feedback, which all received a high involvement level with the median being a 4 (Strongly Agree). Findings are aligned with the student leadership literature that characterizes effective leaders being engaged and clarifying processes with their teams (Smith et al., 2020). Martinez (2022) contended that leaders delegating tasks and responsibilities provides stages various levels of autonomy and accountability to teams, as illustrated by the GSLs' level of involvement in these leadership roles.

Also, GSLs using their abilities to resolve conflicts with a team showcases their emotional intelligence and desire to foster an engaging and productive environment. This finding supports Goleman et al. (2013) which stated that emotional intelligence is a key attribute of effective leadership particularly in diverse circumstances and other often troublesome contexts like student governance situations overall.

Challenges and Opportunities

Although GSLs indicated positive institutional support (46.15%) and resilience from their sexual orientation as a source of strength in their leadership (40.38%), they still faced various barriers, namely respect (32.69%) and stereotypes/discrimination (38.46%). These findings are in line with Gonzales (2016), who noted that LGBTQIA+ leaders can be subjected to prejudice and biases that can undermine the effectiveness of their leadership. Even with these barriers, GSLs in this study engaged in impressive resilience, using their identities as strength, empowerment, and subsequently as a vehicle for advocacy and change.

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There were also opportunities identified for change through mentorship programs and recognition. As Rankin et al. (2010) found, recognition and institutional support are essential for creating a supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ leaders to exist. GSLs in the study suggested that mentorship programs (61.54%) and visibility (59.62%) would greatly enhance their governance skills and bolstering effectiveness against the challenges faced.

Influence in Student Governance

GSLs indicated a moderate to strong degree of influence on their organizations, especially symbolic and cultural aspects. However, their influence on peers, team performance, and institutional policy limitations was less. This gap shows the need for institutional policies and practices to further broaden GSLs' influence beyond symbolic representation. Kezar (2014) suggested the inclusive leadership practice could create lasting change within both organizational culture, and supportive institutional policies surrounding it, but there is a need for GSLs to have a stronger platform to create meaningful change.

Discussion

The results unravel the impactful leadership capacity of Gay Student Leaders (GSLs) at DMMMSU, where their preference towards democratic and transformational leadership models coincides with the values of inclusivity, advocacy, and empowerment. However, hesitation towards autocratic models imply a reluctance for GSLs to lead from a traditional top-down directive leadership style and instead adopted a form of collaborative and inspiring rather than directing leadership.

The study's findings also indicate resilience among GSLs and they feel emboldened to lead despite dealing with stereotyping, barriers, prejudice, and discrimination. As GSLs are able to couple their sexual orientation with resilience to serve as a source of strength, this reflects the transformative potential of one's identity in being a leader, which is congruent with Cohen's (2010) findings in reference to "identity capital." This resilience is essential to actively navigate the heteronormative spaces in which GSLs, especially when often reluctant in associating their sexual identity with societal expectations and equitable expectations.

Furthermore, the present study illuminates the significance of mentorship and visibility to gain the beneficial effects of leadership in GSLs. The findings align with the previous recommendations of Dessel & Robinson (2018) on how structured mentorship could program be useful in managing mentoring processes and create spaces to build leadership capacity together. As the visibility of GSLs increases and participates in the

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student body, institutions would be more capable of creating more equitable pathways of leadership for marginalized groups to have more power in leadership positions.

Conclusion

In light of the presented findings, the study concludes that Gay Student Leaders (GSLs) at DMMMSU possess the inherent qualities to lead but encounter barriers based on the GSLs' identity. Barriers such as prejudice, disrespect, and ostracism inhibit GSLs from exercising and utilizing their leadership potential and influence. However, GSLs' preference for democratic and transformational leadership styles signals their value, specifically, creating unifying spaces to enhance, develop, and promote their peers' well-being. To improve the governance of GSLs and build confidence to take up more meaningful roles in leadership, the study's recommendations for policy development are important. They have identified the following policies:

1. Inclusive Leadership Programs: Create leadership training beyond the general leadership processes that support skills like financial decisions and management, conflict resolution, advocacy, etc.
2. Policies that protect against Discrimination: Develop more robust discrimination policies that support, protect and defend against bias and prejudice to GSLs.
3. Mentorship and Recognition Programs: Establish mentorship programs that pair up established leaders in formal and informal settings along with GSLs. Further develop recognition programs that celebrate GSL's contribution to university initiatives.
4. Promotion of Visibility: Promote GSLs to the campus community through promoting campaigns that emphasizes visibility, leadership, and accomplishments.
5. Advocating Policies: Advocate for policies specific to LGBTQIA+ issues to be included in campus policy. This would require GSLs to have and present critical voices to the institution to address needs, both social and academic, for members of the campus LGBTQIA+ community.

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