
Research

Rainbow Faith: Exploring the Characteristics of LGBTQ+ Camareros Towards Pagsasanto

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Abstract: The integration of homosexuality in religious activities, particularly in the sacred practice of pagsasanto done by camareros who belong to the LGBTQ+ community, has become more prevalent nowadays. However, few studies ascertained the inner qualities and outward behaviors of these individuals. Grounded on the theory of Person Perception Theory, this descriptive-qualitative study explores the inner qualities and outward behaviors of these individuals to shed light on the integration of homosexuality in the faith community. Using a grand tour inquiry approach and snowball sampling, the researchers gathered data through face-to-face interviews with four (4) camareros from Iloilo City, all of whom had over three (3) years of experience. Following the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke, researchers produced two (2) major themes: (1) inner qualities and (2) outward behavior. These were further narrowed down into four (4) sub-themes, yielding eight (8) categories and a total of nineteen (19) sub-categories. This study concludes that the inner qualities and outer qualities of the LGBTQ+ camareros cultivated through the practice of pagsasanto became an avenue for them to integrate their faith and identity, highlighting how religious devotion can evolve to become more inclusive, authentic, and supportive of personal and communal growth.

Keywords: Pagsasanto, Catholicism, Philippines, Qualitative Research, Religious Practices

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the contributors to and predictors of societal attitudes toward homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). The Philippines, being the sole Christian country in Asia, boasts that more than 86 percent of its people are Roman Catholic (Miller, 2016, as

cited in Antonio & Romerosa, 2021, pp. 57–70). Together with Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church is one of the three main branches of Christianity and has played a significant role in the development of Western civilization (Cunningham et al., 2023). With the emergence of Catholicism in the country, numerous religious practices, including the practice of pagsasanto, have arisen following the Spanish colonial period (Antonio & Romerosa, 2021). Historically, old, wealthy ladies (camareras) and significant political families were the primary practitioners of pagsasanto (Antonio & Romerosa, 2021, pp. 57–70). However, the country has reinvented the practice due to the increased involvement of camareros who are part of the LGBTQ+ community (Antonio & Romerosa, 2021, pp. 57–70; Piamonte et al., 2020). To situate this study within its cultural context, several key terms require explicit definition for international readers. Pagsasanto (from the Filipino root *santo*, meaning "saint") refers to the devotional practice of caring for, dressing, and publicly displaying Catholic religious images, known as santos, particularly during the Holy Week Lenten observances (Icawalo & Gepty, 2026; Tamayo, 2024; Antonio & Romerosa, 2021). A camarero (masculine form; plural: camareros) is the individual custodian or caretaker of a santo, while the feminine counterpart, camarera, historically denotes the wealthy female devotees who traditionally fulfilled this role. The santos themselves are sacred religious images, statues or icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints, which are processed through the streets during Holy Week processions atop ornately decorated floats called carros or carrozas (Tamayo, 2024). This practice is deeply rooted in Spanish colonial Catholicism (16th–19th centuries) and remains a central feature of Filipino folk Catholic devotion, particularly in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines, where Iloilo City is renowned for its grand and historically significant processions (Antonio & Romerosa, 2021).

Over the past two decades, a sizable number of academic studies have examined the intersection of religious and sexual minority identities (Hart, 2015; Kocet et al., 2011; Love et al., 2005; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Rodriguez & Ouellete, 2000). Today, society has become more accepting of homosexuality as a result of the shift in emphasis from survival to self-expression, and personal religiosity has little bearing on attitudes about homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Most religions tend to categorize behaviors associated with homosexuality as ‘unnatural,’ ‘ungodly,’ and ‘impure’ (Yip, 2005; Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). The presence of religious activities, such as reading religious texts and being surrounded by religious people, may promote anti-homosexual views

(Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009; Olson et al., 2006; Sherkat & Ellison, 1997) In the Philippine context, homosexuality is becoming more acceptable, particularly as the prevalence of homosexual integration in pagsasanto has become apparent, which at times contradicts official religious doctrine (Piamonte et al., 2020). Previous research has failed to adequately highlight the qualities of these camareros, particularly those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. This gap prompted the researchers to explore both the inner qualities and outward behaviors of LGBTQ+ camareros, aspects of character that remain underexplored yet are highly consequential for understanding how faith and identity intersect. There is thus a clear need for more research to expound on the relationship between religiosity and homosexuality in the Philippines, particularly in the context of the Catholic Church, as it can help provide a richer understanding of how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate and negotiate their participation in sacred communal life.

This study is anchored on Person Perception Theory in social psychology, which concerns the cognitive processes involved in categorizing individuals and their behavior, developing inferences about their qualities and the causes of their actions, and arriving at attributions that explain behavior (Moskowitz & Gill, 2013). Crucially, Person Perception Theory is applied in this study not only to illuminate how the camareros perceive themselves and construct their own identities within the religious space, but also to analyze how their surrounding community (clergy, fellow devotees, and the broader Philippine Catholic public) perceives, categorizes, and forms impressions of these LGBTQ+ camareros. The theory illuminates a bidirectional dynamic: LGBTQ+ camareros navigate their participation in pagsasanto while simultaneously being observed and evaluated by others who may hold varying degrees of acceptance or skepticism. This dual lens of perception: self-perception and community perception, shapes the social realities, behavioral norms, and identity negotiations described throughout this study. Guided by this theoretical framework, the study sought answers to the following research questions: (1) What are the inner qualities that camareros develop through the practice of pagsasanto? and (2) What are the observable behaviors that camareros acquire through the practice of pagsasanto?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which, as described by Manjunatha (2019), is appropriate for ascertaining the inner qualities and outward

behaviors of individuals within a naturalistic context. The study was epistemologically anchored in constructionism, recognizing that knowledge is constructed subjectively by individuals rather than in an objective, value-free manner (Lowenthal & Muth, 2008). Narrative inquiry served as the methodological orientation, centering on the personal experiences of individuals and the way they narrate their stories as a tool for investigating the significance of those experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20; Constantino, 2001). Person Perception Theory (Gill & Moskowitz, 2013) was also adopted as the theoretical lens, attending to how humans categorize others, draw conclusions about their characteristics and actions, and assign causes to behavior.

2.2 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the study underwent institutional ethics review. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and they were fully briefed on the voluntary nature of their participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality measures in place. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant anonymity. All data were stored securely and used solely for the purposes of this research. Facebook Messenger was used as a supplementary communication tool for scheduling and confirming consent, with all sensitive communication handled with discretion. The researchers also acknowledged their positionality as students and researchers affiliated with a Philippine Catholic university, which may have influenced interpretive processes. Reflexive awareness of this potential bias was maintained throughout data analysis.

2.3 Participants and Sampling

Four (4) LGBTQ+ camareros from Iloilo City were chosen as the informants of the research, and they were chosen for their ability to share their views on the practice of pagsasanto. Snowball sampling was utilized to find informants with specific criteria needed for the purpose of this research (Pedroso et al., 2022) namely camareros who: (a) acquired a religious image through inheritance; (b) managed to obtain their own religious image; (c) had been involved in the practice of pagsasanto as an assistant; (d) had been practicing for more than three (3) years; (e) were willing to share their views about pagsasanto; and (f) identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Although the snowball procedure yielded a sample of only four participants, this number is consistent with established qualitative data saturation standards for phenomenological and descriptive-qualitative research, allowing to have a depth of

understanding rather than breadth. Thematic saturation is achieved when no new themes emerge from additional data, which often reached with as few as six interviewees (Chepp et al., 2026), and in highly homogeneous, specific populations such as this one, saturation can occur even earlier. As no new themes emerged after the fourth interview, data saturation was considered achieved, justifying the sample size. It is also noteworthy that the sensitivity of the topic and inclusion specified have contributed in limiting the pool of eligible participants, further supporting the use of a small but information-rich sample.

2.4 Research Instrument

Semi-structured, grand tour interview questions were developed to elicit the informants' views on their experiences as LGBTQ+ camareros. This interview technique reflects a comprehensive exploration of the informants' experiences, views, and knowledge. Grand tour questions are typically broad and open-ended, providing participants with the freedom to express themselves fully. The instrument was grounded in Person Perception Theory (Gill & Moskowitz, 2013) and organized around two guiding questions corresponding to the study's research objectives.

2.5 Data Collection

Interviews were scheduled based on the availability of the LGBTQ+ camareros in Iloilo City. Eligible informants were identified through peer recommendations and referrals. Personal requests regarding comfort and confidentiality were honored throughout the process. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with participant consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The narratives from these one-on-one interviews served as the primary source of data. Informants were permitted to use English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon during the interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to uphold anonymity and privacy. Data credibility was supported through ongoing monitoring, written accounts, direct citations, and source validation.

2.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was applied after the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. During the coding process, the researchers systematically highlighted and assigned significant meanings to key statements from the informants. Depending on similarities and differences in the informants' responses, statements were organized into meaning units, which were then grouped into sub-categories, categories, sub-themes, and overarching themes. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing and maintained an audit trail

throughout the analytical process. Member-checking was also employed, with preliminary findings shared with participants to validate interpretive accuracy. These measures addressed the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative data.

3. RESULTS

This descriptive-qualitative research sought to ascertain the characteristics of LGBTQ+ camareros. The analysis yielded two significant themes: (1) inner qualities and (2) outward behaviors, organized into four sub-themes: (1) intrapersonal attributes and (2) intellectual capabilities under inner qualities; and (3) positive conduct and (4) problematic actions under outward behaviors.

Under intrapersonal attributes, two categories emerged: (1) encompassing order-control traits, comprising awareness, disciplinarian, and introspective; and (2) exemplifying emotional competence, comprising resilience, optimism, and empathetic-altruism. Under intellectual capabilities: (1) upholding creative thinking, with sub-categories imaginative and problem-solver; and (2) showcasing technical thinking, with sub-categories detail-oriented and lifelong learners.

Under positive conduct: (1) displaying unique traits, comprising conventional, responsible, and religious; and (2) placing value on respect, comprising inclusive, traditionalist, and reverent. Under problematic actions: (1) fostering competitions, comprising superiority complex and deviant; and (2) exhibiting hostility, comprising affront and toxic honesty. Figure 1 presents the complete thematic map.

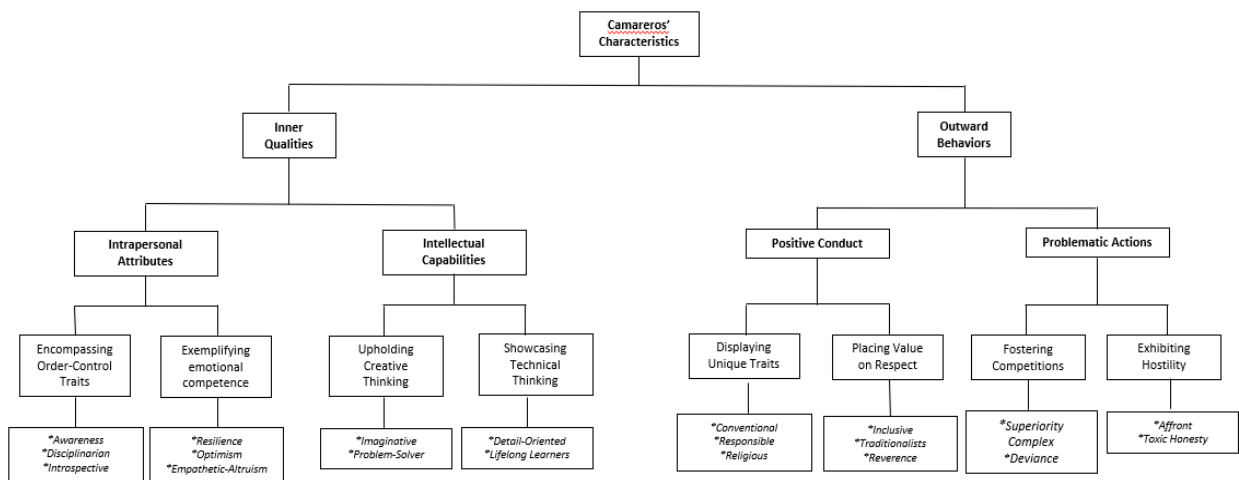


Figure 1. Thematic map demonstrating the meaningful categories of the study

3.1 Inner Qualities

Inner qualities refer to personal characteristics existing within an individual that are not immediately visible to others, encompassing character, values, attitudes, and emotional intelligence. This theme covers the informants' dispositions regarding pagsasanto and is organized into two sub-themes: intrapersonal attributes and intellectual capabilities.

Intrapersonal Attributes

Intrapersonal attributes relate to self-awareness, self-reflection, and understanding of oneself within religious settings. Two categories are included: (1) encompassing order-control traits and (2) exemplifying emotional competence.

Encompassing Order-Control Traits

Religious settings require adherence to established norms. This category covers three sub-categories: awareness, disciplinarian, and introspective.

Awareness. Awareness describes being cognizant of oneself, one's surroundings, and the demands of being a camarero.

Michael: *"You should reflect deeply. As camareros, you should be humble, your faith should be strong, you should help the church, and become more compassionate. You should live simply. Those are the traits that should be developed in one's character."*

Earl: *"We developed the attitude that whenever the saints are present, we should avoid gossiping nearby. We make sure we are in the proper place. We say, 'The saints are here; let's not gossip inside the church. Let's go outside instead.'"*

Disciplinarian. Disciplinarian refers to one who enforces discipline within a religious setting, emphasizing adherence to rules and maintaining order.

Earl: *"Our grandparents were very devoted and strict. They wanted to make sure that we respected the Viernes Santo procession. Their discipline greatly influenced me and taught me to be solemn and disciplined whenever attending the procession."*

Earl: *"When joining a procession, you should not wear shorts or slippers. You must dress formally. You were expected to focus on the solemnity of the activity, just like attending Mass. Talking and unnecessary movement were discouraged because the occasion is sacred."*

Mhykee: *"I grew up waking up every Sunday as early as 5:00 AM to attend Mass. Until now, I still go to the first Mass no matter how sleepy I am."*

Introspective. Introspection involves deliberate inward focus to understand one's feelings, motives, and beliefs in light of religious responsibility.

Diutay: *"Sometimes you feel guilty because what you are able to do only happens once a year, and it may not happen again next year."*

Michael: *"One way of earning merit in heaven is by helping others, helping the church and helping the poor."*

Exemplifying Emotional Competence

Emotional competence refers to the ability to comprehend, manage, and express emotions across various contexts. This category covers resilience, optimism, and empathetic-altruism.

Resilience. Religiosity is linked to resilience, reflecting the capacity to persist in the face of adversity.

Michael: *"We have been shaken many times, but we still stand strong, stronger than before."*

Earl: *"It is not like you bring out your carro once and then rest the following year. The challenge is how you continue the tradition every year."*

Optimism. Religious involvement fosters an optimistic outlook, enabling camareros to maintain a positive perspective amid difficulty.

Diutay: *"It feels good to be in that situation because even when you are struggling financially, somehow there are always ways or resources that come unexpectedly."*

Michael: *"Problems are temporary. They are just part of life. Challenges do not stay with you forever, maybe for a week, a day, or a month, but eventually they disappear."*

Empathetic-Altruism. Empathetic-altruism is a motivational state combining empathy with a genuine desire to help others, even at personal cost.

Mhykee: *"I sponsor things in our community and help provide what is needed."*

Michael: *"If I am going to spend thousands, instead of spending it all on decorations, I would rather use it to feed people. Even if my flowers are simple, every Holy Week after the procession, there are people who are fed."*

Intellectual Capabilities

Intellectual capabilities refer to the cognitive skills individuals use to engage with religious concepts, practices, and traditions. This sub-theme comprises upholding creative thinking and showcasing technical thinking.

Upholding Creative Thinking

Imaginative. Creative imagination among camareros is often rooted in childhood experiences that mature into artful religious expression.

Diutay: *"We had dolls before, and we turned them into little saints. We would decorate them with flowers and pretend to hold a procession."*

Diutay: *"Before, I only used flowers that I planted, but now I mix flowers with fruits."*

Problem-Solver. Camareros regularly face logistical challenges requiring creative solutions in the execution of pagsasanto.

Michael: *"The challenges there are simple, but they can still make you anxious, like figuring out how to bring the carro out, or how difficult it is to carry it when you do not have enough people. You really need manpower. You also have to think about transportation, installing the electrical lines, and arranging the flowers."*

Showcasing Technical Thinking

Detail-Oriented. The sacred nature of religious images demands exceptional attention to detail in their care and presentation.

Earl: *"These images are considered sacred. They have been blessed and prayed over by people. If you undress them carelessly and let people see them, it is like undressing your own mother in front of everyone."*

Mhykee: *"There are traditional practices that must be followed when dressing the saints. It should not be done in front of people. By Monday, the saint should already be dressed, and by Wednesday, it should already be placed on the carro. Everything should already be planned."*

Lifelong Learners. Lifelong learners pursue knowledge and skills with curiosity and continual growth.

Mhykee: *"I prefer things to progress gradually. For me, it should be step by step."*

3.2 Outward Behaviors

Outward behaviors are the actions and conduct visible to others, including how camareros act, communicate, and present themselves within and beyond the religious community. Two sub-themes were examined: positive conduct and problematic actions.

Positive Conduct

Displaying Unique Traits

Conventional. Participation in religious activities requires camareros to conform to morally accepted behaviors within the community.

Michael: *"I became more patient and understanding, and I became more careful with the words that come out of my mouth."*

Responsible. Camareros are required to fulfill their duties in pagsasanto with initiative and diligence, often without close guidance from a higher authority.

Earl: *"You have the responsibility to make sure that every time you bring out your saint, everything is properly executed."*

Religious. Being raised in religious families cultivated deep devotion among camareros, becoming the root cause of why they took on the role of caretaker of religious images.

Earl: *"I grew up surrounded by religious people, and I even have an uncle who is a priest. Because of that, the thought of changing religion never entered my mind. I consider myself religious."*

Diutay: *"My faith is still there. It remains unchanged."*

Earl: *"No matter how tired you are, you still say yes because you believe it becomes your spiritual merit in heaven."*

Placing Value on Respect

Inclusive. Religion inculcates unity among followers, enabling camareros to seek consensus in setting up religious images for processions.

Mhykee: *"There should always be consultation among everyone. If one person does not agree, then the decision should not proceed."*

Mhykee: *"Even if I am the one who pays for everything, I still ask for their opinions. There should always be consensus."*

Traditionalist. Camareros adhere to traditional practices of pagsasanto to preserve their historical and spiritual significance.

Earl: *"There are specific do's and don'ts. For example, the Dolorosa should wear dark colors and a veil, while Christ images should only use appropriate colors. There are rules you need to follow to ensure proper execution."*

Michael: *"The more traditional, the more beautiful. Whatever the traditional way of decorating the carroza (float), the simpler the better."*

Reverent. Camareros exhibit deep respect for religious tradition, working to preserve its sanctity and solemnity.

Earl: *"You develop the attitude of considering these things holy. You respect them even if they cannot speak or move. You still give them respect because they represent a deeper meaning of your faith and devotion."*

Problematic Actions

Long-standing LGBTQ+ camareros acknowledged that some practitioners exhibit negative behaviors inconsistent with Christian conduct and pagsasanto practice.

Fostering Competitions

Financial resources are a practical prerequisite for pagsasanto, as it requires substantial supplies and equipment. Some camareros have begun to regard the practice as a status symbol, generating indirect competition. This produces two related behaviors: superiority complex and deviant conduct. The financial dimension of pagsasanto cannot be overlooked, as it forms the material foundation upon which much of the competitive behavior described in this section rests. Maintaining a santo requires ongoing personal investment on sacred images, floats, flowers, materials, and manpower, sometimes reaching tens of thousands of pesos per procession. Without parish support, many rely on personal savings, donations, and sponsorships. This financial burden creates social competition: those who can afford grander displays are seen as more devout, blurring the line between genuine piety and a performance of wealth and status.

Superiority Complex. This competitive dimension has given rise to attitudes of superiority among some practitioners.

Mhykee: *"Some fellow practitioners notice things like, 'Oh, they did not order from Talyeres because they probably cannot afford it.' That is one of the problems among LGBTQ+ camareros, they tend to compete. They think, 'I should not be outdone. If they have 32 lights, I should have 65.'"*

Deviant. Some camareros depart from accepted norms, prioritizing public spectacle over devotional authenticity.

Michael: *"The newer camareros turn it into pageantry. Many of them do not even pray anymore. They focus more on the clothing and on comparing whose carro is the most beautiful. It becomes a competition."*

Exhibiting Hostility

Affront. Some camareros engage in direct verbal attacks that demean fellow practitioners.

Earl: *"They would say things like, 'Oh, her saint's hair is only synthetic because she cannot afford abaca.' That kind of comment really happens."*

Toxic Honesty. Unlike constructive criticism, toxic honesty involves unsolicited, harsh commentary that undermines the practice.

Mhykee: *"Most of the negative comments come from the newer ones. They would say, 'What kind of carro is that? It does not even have stargazer flowers. The flowers are so plain.'"*

4. DISCUSSION

Religion functions as both a formative and transformative force in shaping the moral and emotional landscape of LGBTQ+ camareros. Within the context of pagsasanto, faith serves not merely as a ritual practice but as an ethical framework that instills discipline, self-regulation, and resilience amid the tensions of identity and belief. The findings reveal that religiosity cultivates key intrapersonal attributes, awareness, discipline, and introspection, through sustained participation in prayer, meditation, and the maintenance of sacred images. These practices reflect the notion that religion, as a moral framework, fosters ethical consistency between inner conviction and outward behavior (Kouatli, 2017).

This moral formation process is anchored in emotional competence. LGBTQ+ camareros demonstrate resilience, optimism, and empathetic altruism as outcomes of spiritual engagement, aligning with studies that link religiosity with enhanced emotional regulation and life satisfaction (Krause, 2015; Manning & Miles, 2018). Religious activities foster a disciplined sense of responsibility and reverence, traits reinforced by communal rituals that structure social expectations and moral codes (Ochola, 2018; Fraser, 2008). Yet this discipline is not without complexity. For some, faith becomes both a site of empowerment and restraint, strengthening self-control while occasionally inducing moral conflict, particularly when religious norms contradict personal identity (Tay et al., 2018; Cornelio & Dagle, 2024).

From a sociological lens, the camareros' experiences reflect what Durkheim and later scholars describe as collective effervescence, a phenomenon wherein shared religious rituals produce emotional cohesion and moral energy (Borowik, 2024; Xygalatas, 2015). Such collective participation reinforces the camareros' ethical identity, grounding their self-discipline in a sense of spiritual community. However, this moral grounding is not without contradictions. While faith offers a compass for emotional and ethical formation, it may also reproduce hierarchies of respectability, where piety is equated with moral worth and deviation is stigmatized.

This dynamic resonates with studies noting that religious spaces can simultaneously nurture and marginalize queer believers (Timbers et al., 2023; Schneider & Young, 2021). These dynamics are further illuminated by the broader literature on queer religiosity in post-colonial Southeast Asia. Scholars have documented how LGBTQ+ individuals in Catholic-majority and predominantly Christian societies in the region, particularly in the Philippines, occupy a liminal spiritual position: simultaneously interpellated by the Church as members of the Body of Christ and marginalized by its doctrinal condemnation of non-heterosexual identities (Walker, 2022). This liminality produces what Cornelio and Dagle (2024) describe as a spirituality of struggle, a continuous, lived process of seeking God's will within a context of social conservatism and institutional exclusion. Rather than abandoning their faith, LGBTQ+ devotees in this post-colonial Catholic context often engage in what may be called devotional reappropriation, selectively drawing upon and reinterpreting inherited religious symbols, practices, and narratives in ways that affirm rather than negate their queer identities. This pattern is observed not only in the Philippines but across post-colonial Catholic societies in Southeast Asia, where colonial imposition of Catholicism intersected with pre-existing spiritual traditions and gender fluidity, producing uniquely syncretic religious subjectivities (Omodeo, 2025).

Despite these tensions, the camareros' narratives highlight the possibility of reconciling faith and sexuality through creative reappropriation of religious symbols and practices. Their participation in pagsanto becomes a form of devotional artistry, an embodied theology of resilience, discipline, and love that challenges the binary between sacred and profane (Myers, 2024). In this context, religion operates as both a structure and a strategy for LGBTQ+ camareros. It disciplines conduct through moral codes, yet

simultaneously cultivates the inner resources needed to endure exclusion and reinterpret faith as a form of self-affirmation.

A critical dimension that emerges from the data, and that warrants explicit analytical attention, is how LGBTQ+ camareros navigate internal theological conflict, the psycho-spiritual tension arising from the perceived incompatibility between their queer identity and the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church, which classifies homosexual acts as intrinsically disordered (Clemens, 2026). The findings suggest that the camareros in this study do not resolve this tension through a simple rejection of Catholic doctrine or a full embrace of institutional Catholicism; rather, they engage in what may be termed spiritual compartmentalization and devotional re-centering (Kim, 2025). Spiritual compartmentalization involves setting aside doctrinal condemnation and focusing instead on the experiential, affective, and communal dimensions of faith, the personal relationship with a saint, the beauty and discipline of preparation, the sense of communal belonging during processions (Ifeyinwa & Richards, 2026). Devotional re-centering involves redefining the locus of religious validity: rather than institutional approval or doctrinal compliance, what matters to these camareros is their perceived sincerity of devotion, their service to the community, and their stewardship of sacred heritage (Muluneh, 2025). As Michael articulated, spiritual merit is found in service to others and the Church, not in doctrinal conformity. This is consistent with research on LGBTQ+ Christians more broadly, which documents the development of personalized, interior-focused spiritualities that prioritize direct experience of the divine over institutional mediation (Block, 2023; Hollier, 2023; Ashok & Saranya, 2025; Justyna et. al, 2025)

This religious service transcends mere acts of devotion for LGBTQ+ camareros. Their involvement in pagsasanto has fostered a sense of belongingness and social participation within the faith community (Yih, 2025), transforming consistent participation into a lived expression of faith that connects personal spirituality with communal purpose. Their strong sense of accountability, discipline, meticulousness, proactiveness, and creativity is evident in how they carry out their roles, from successfully organizing religious events despite challenges, to diligently caring for sacred images, and creatively dressing them for processions. These actions reaffirm their moral integrity and identity as believers within a sacred environment (Baidya & Devi, 2024; Kouatli, 2017).

Through these acts of devotion, LGBTQ+ camareros embody ideal Christian values such as humility, respect, and selfless service, positioning their queerness not as a

contradiction to faith but as an expression of its depth (Cornelio & Dagle, 2024; Schneider & Young, 2021). Queer believers, such as the camareros, reinterpret their faith, religious scriptures, and practices in ways that are true to their self-understandings, creating inclusive and transformative spiritual expressions that align with queer identities (Ashok & Saranya, 2025; Hollier, 2023; Talvacchia et al., 2015). In congruence with Durkheim's concept of Collective Conscience, participation in pagsasanto by queer believers cultivates a sense of shared community, making faith a bridge for social connection and collective harmony within the congregation (Borowik, 2024; Xygalatas, 2015). Similarly, the Filipino concept of pakikipagkapwa or relational solidarity serves as a mediating principle that allows queer believers to reconcile devotion and difference, reframing religious participation as inclusive and community-oriented (Labor & Agonos, 2025). Religion thus functions as both a sanctuary and a site of struggle, simultaneously affirming belonging and demanding conformity (Yih, 2025; Ashok & Saranya, 2025).

The camareros' navigation of the balance between spiritual devotion and public expression also reflects a deep sense of authenticity. Authenticity in modern spirituality is founded on the congruence between outward behaviors and inner moral principles; perceiving oneself as morally upright fosters authenticity, and the pursuit of such authenticity diminishes the inclination toward immoral behavior (Zhang et al., 2019). This means that camareros display genuine religiosity by integrating their identity with their faith, demonstrating that spirituality can coexist with self-acceptance and moral responsibility (Christy et al., 2020; Block, 2023). Filipino religiosity thus serves as a resilient personal moral framework that aids individuals in maintaining their spiritual life and navigating diverse challenges in society (Castillo, 2024).

However, this study also reveals the conflict between faith and social prestige. Certain camareros exhibit competitive tendencies, seeking grander processional displays, thereby turning devotion into spectacle. The secularization of society has altered social and religious rituals, leading to new forms of subjective religiosity that integrate spiritual and secular components; contemporary culture frequently converts meaning into spectacle, where symbolic actions are experienced visually rather than spiritually (Bognár, 2024; Izluchenko, 2018). In a similar vein, Philippine religious festivals sometimes blur the distinction between the sacred and the spectacular, creating settings of communal celebration and social competition (Tiatco, 2024). The negotiation between devotion and display among LGBTQ+ camareros illustrates how Filipino religious beliefs are evolving.

As Cornelio and Dagle (2024) note, Filipino queer Christians navigate tensions between faith and sexuality through a spirituality of struggle, a continuous process of discovering and fulfilling God's will amidst societal conservatism.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the study included only four (4) LGBTQ+ camareros from Iloilo City, limiting the generalizability of findings to other contexts or localities in the Philippines. Second, the study employed a descriptive qualitative design focused solely on narrative accounts; future researchers may consider quantitative or mixed-method approaches for statistical grounding. Third, the inclusion criteria limited participants to those with at least three years of experience; expanding the criteria to include newer or inactive practitioners could offer a broader range of perspectives. Fourth, the study focused exclusively on the perspectives of camareros, excluding the views of clergy, parish officials, other devotees, and non-LGBTQ+ practitioners, whose inclusion could significantly deepen the conversation about inclusivity, acceptance, and the evolving place of LGBTQ+ individuals within faith communities. Future research should deliberately incorporate these diverse voices to provide a more complete and dialogic picture of how LGBTQ+ participation in pagsasanto is perceived and negotiated across the broader Catholic community. Finally, the findings are situated within the specific cultural and religious context of the Philippines and may not apply in other cultural or denominational settings.

5. CONCLUSION

Religious devotion, particularly through pagsasanto, offers valuable insights into how faith shapes identity, morality, and emotional strength among LGBTQ+ camareros. The relationship between spirituality and sexuality is a continual process shaped by personal experiences, collective engagement, and evolving interpretations of devotion within a conservative religious setting. The narratives of the camareros demonstrate that religiosity is not a fixed or uniform experience; rather, it varies based on individual interpretations of faith, the pursuit of social acceptance, and the redefinition of sacred roles. While pagsasanto remains a deeply traditional practice, it also acts as a space where inclusivity, authenticity, and devotion coexist. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and religious practice in the Philippines, offering a culturally grounded understanding of how queer devotees negotiate belonging, moral integrity, and spiritual authenticity. Future research is encouraged to expand the scope geographically, include diverse stakeholder perspectives, and employ

mixed-method designs to build on these findings. Acknowledging and accepting various expressions of faith is crucial for establishing faith communities that value both spiritual devotion and personal identity, ensuring that devotion continues to serve as a foundation of solidarity, compassion, and shared moral purpose across generations.

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