

VENTURING OUT OF THE ORDINARY: HANDLING BLENDED HOMES THROUGH THE LENS OF PARENTS

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Abstract

The study delved into the lived experience of parents who handled blended homes. The research design used was qualitative with phenomenology as an approach. The study explored the experiences of parents who handled blended homes in several barangays in Lipa City. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the study generated ten (10) superordinate themes which were Achieving Self Differentiation and Establishing Boundaries, Dyadic Relationship and Triangulation through Physical Attachment and Detachment, Emotional Cut Off, No observable Influence of Sibling Position, Different Ways of Processing Family Emotions, Projecting Unresolved Emotional Issues, Expecting Multigenerational Continuity and Understanding Emotions in Social Context.

Parents who handled blended homes represented resilience and adaptability of families, highlighting the importance of understanding and communication in building a harmonious and nurturing family. Though misunderstandings, challenges, and family tensions usually arose due to the absence of emotional connection. Parents had a hard time doing their role for children always saw them as the antagonist in the story. Despite those, they showed that families could evolve and thrive from previous experiences of separation or loss, exemplifying the human capacity to heal and love again, highlighting their ability to create new bonds and meaningful connections. Effective communication was also vital. It was through communication that misunderstandings could be addressed, emotions could be expressed, and relationships could be strengthened. One more fascinating thing about couples from blended homes was that they protected their family at any cost, they resolved the conflict before the day ended since they had been in a broken relationship before. As an output, a parent-child program that aimed to bring blended families together to strengthen their bonds and create lasting memories was proposed.

Keywords: blended homes; emotional connection; communication; parents; children; interpretative phenomenological analysis

1. Introduction

Life changes often happen without warning. It could be the loss of a loved one or even changes in one's family structure that causes significant effects to family dynamics. Despite these changes that alter some things in once life, family is family. This family may be the one that holds a person down but still, this is also the same family that will lift them up.

According to Segal and Robinson (2022), when two individuals decided to build a life together with the children from their past relationships, they form a stepfamily. While the idea of starting a new blended family can be a positive and exciting experience, it can also be challenging. Parents may be eager to move forward, forming their new family, but the children may not be as excited. They may worry about how their relationships with their parents will be affected and how they will get along with their new stepsiblings. Additionally, some children might not be willing to adapt to the changes, and it's frustrating for parents when their new family doesn't go the way they want them to be.

Significantly, when a blended family is formed, the members may not be familiar with each other's family customs or even have the same ideologies, which can include differences in ethnicity, education, or faith. Children in this situation may feel divided between the parent they primarily reside with and their other parent, while the new couples may not have had sufficient time to adapt to their new relationship.

Indeed, it is challenging to bring two parents and their children together. Parents may feel stress in balancing both the needs of their children as well as their new partner, particularly where values may conflict. In addition, disagreements over how to raise the children jointly can also arise. It might take some time for both families to get used to living together. This could be caused by various parenting and disciplinary techniques, the development of new relationships, or even strong or differing emotions. The couple may also find it difficult to settle into their new roles as parents. Because problems with stepchildren may also affect a couple's relationship, one or both adults will need to learn how to parent.

In the same way, a good relationship does not develop overnight. It takes effort to establish strong bonds with stepfamily members. It requires a lot of patience, time, effort, and commitment. An attempt to quickly combine two families may result in disappointment as some family members may be resistant at first because each member of the newly blended family may experience loss and must make adjustments to the new family dynamic, emotions and situations in stepfamilies tend to be more intense and complicated.

Although they may decide to split their duty with their spouse, it is the primary duty of the parent to discipline his/her child. Children who feel that rules are being imposed on them by someone other than their parent may become annoyed and resentful. They might experience anxiety, fear, or unease around a new stepparent. With that, the parents in the new home are actually very important in helping their child form a good relationship with their new spouse or partner.

Moreover, it is believed that if the parent continues to be the main foundation of love, care, and behavior guidance, which includes setting rules, they will typically adjust better and feel more secure in the early years of a new blended family. To ensure that one's family can surpass the challenges, it is vital to understand the principles of a blended family.

Aside from that, although these families are common, the family members in them deal with the broken family stigma. Coleman and Kumar (2018 and 2017 as cited by Travers, 2021) said that the stigma of their past broken family, which was caused by separation or divorce, puts these families susceptible to the possibility of another failed relationships. And with the aid of this study, hearing the lived experiences in blended families may help other members of blended families to lessen their feelings of being in such complicated family structure alone. And because

most research has focused on stepparents as well as children then moving away from seeing perspective of those parents handling blended homes, this study took a deeper look on the perspective of parents handling blended homes.

Certainly, blended families venture into a not so ordinary kind of family, often facing potential risks due to unique challenges brought by their complex family dynamics. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of parents who are currently handling blended homes. It is believed that families play such an important role when it comes to the development of every facet of their children's life. Exploring the perspectives of the parents when handling such situations would not only serve as an eye opener to the struggle of those parents but also it is the first step in helping the maladjustment that is experienced by the children who are currently living in the blended home.

2. Research Questions

Central Question

The main objective of this interpretative phenomenological inquiry was to explore the essence of the lived experience of parents in handling blended homes. Moreover, this sought to answer one central question:

What is the essence of the lived experience of parents in handling blended homes?

Corollary Questions

1. How do the parents describe their experiences in handling blended home?
2. What themes emerge from the testimonies of parents handling blended home?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what parent-child program may be proposed?

3. Methods

This study used qualitative research with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an approach. This research design was suitable for the study since the researcher sought to explore the lived experience of parents handling blended homes. It significantly assisted the researcher in exploring and understanding all of the participants' shared personal lived experiences. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to look into the personal lived experience of the participants in detail.

This study was conducted in the City of Lipa. The total number of households in Lipa City reached 89,993 in 2020. The researcher opted for this city for the convenient accessibility of the participants.

The parents handling blended homes were the focus of this study because it is believed that the parents greatly affect every facet of the development of their child. They also play a crucial role inside a blended home.

With the use of purposeful sampling, the researcher selected ten (10) parents handling blended homes in Lipa City with the age range of 32-43 years old. Among 10 participants, most of them are female while two (2) are male. Also, when it comes to marital status, only two (2) were married and the rest eight (8) were lived-in-partners. Furthermore, in terms of family structure, most of them or eight (8) have nuclear family structure and only two (2) are in extended family structure.

The researcher made guide questions in gathering pertinent information. The interview questions were validated by a subject specialist. The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting, allowing for a personal and interactive exchange. To establish rapport and create a relaxed atmosphere, the researcher engaged in conversation with the participants. The research topic was explained, clarifying the objectives, the participants' qualifications, the data-gathering procedure, the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, and the need for consent. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the responses verbatim, including any fillers and expressions used

during the interview. The transcribed data was then tabulated for easier qualitative analysis, aiming to identify emerging themes. The transcriptions were shared with the participants for verification, ensuring the accuracy and interpretation of their provided information.

Once the relevant information and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews word-for-word. Similar responses from the participants were then identified and organized into themes, codes, and clusters. To analyze these responses, the researcher employed a well-established method called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

4. Results and Discussion

Corollary Question Number 1. How do the parents describe their experiences in handling blended homes?

Interview Question 1: How do you maintain your sense of self and independence as a parent of a blended family?

When asked about sense of self and independence of parents, Parent 7 mentioned that since she had prior experience of abuse from previous partner, she is stronger and more independent now when it comes to handling her family and children. Meanwhile, Parent 8 exhibited flexibility wherein he was still able to express his sense of self and independence in their blended family.

Parent 7 showed determination while she shared her experience in her previous husband and how it opens her eyes to become stronger and more independent woman she is now. On the other hand, Parent 8 looked calm as he answered the question and how he explains to how they came to agreement when it comes to decisions inside the family. The participants of the study had different responses though both these responses are still indication of self-differentiation in different ways. One of the things they mentioned that they both share the same sentiments is that they are both particular to decisions concerning the welfare of their family and children.

Comparable to the results of study "Relationship between family functioning, differentiation of self and anxiety in Spanish young adults" by Dolz-Del-Castellar & Oliver (2021), it showed that a positive correlation exists between family functioning and differentiation of self, indicating that as family functioning improves and demonstrates higher levels of adaptability and cohesion, individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of differentiation of self. Furthermore, individuals who perceive their families as having the ability to adapt and establish emotional connections are better equipped to develop emotional regulation skills, maintain intimate relationships, connect with their own emotions, assert their own opinions, and exhibit tolerance towards differences with others.

Interview Question 2: How do you involve any other family members whenever you have misunderstanding with any of them?

When asked about the involvement of family members whenever having misunderstanding, Parent 4 stated that she it is better to keep the situation in herself and concern her husband when needed. On the other hand, Parent 9 shared that either she is managing the situation by herself or communicate it to her husband.

Parent 4 showed sincerity while explaining as to how she involved other family members during the misunderstanding. As mentioned in her response, she and her husband were working together to resolve the issue within the family by taking their children out to talk to them sincerely. Meanwhile, Parent 9 showed earnestness while answering the question, according to her, his husband was asking her to talk to her child whenever problem arise, which she in turn did. The participants were both involving their husband and the children whenever tension arises within the family.

The responses of the participants were supported by the article of Cromwell (2023), titled *Building Stepfamily Relationships*, stepfamilies are characterized by their complexity and diversity, and achieving a successful and harmonious stepfamily dynamic is a gradual process that demands patience and time. The presence of a solid foundation built on trust and open communication serves as a protective buffer against the challenges commonly faced in stepfamily life. Couples who are dedicated to investing the necessary time and effort can create a loving and well-adjusted stepfamily environment. Effective communication plays a vital role in facilitating the functioning of stepfamilies and fostering healthy relationships. Employing a range of communication techniques enables stepfamilies to establish strong and close bonds. Techniques such as organizing family meetings, which provide all members with an opportunity to express their concerns about family matters, as well as engaging in discussions about rules and discipline, contribute to the connectivity of stepfamilies.

Interview Question 3: If ever you felt like you were the odd person out? What do you do to address those feelings and maintain your emotional attachment to your partner and children?

When asked about the feeling of being the odd person out and ways to address those feelings to maintain emotional attachment to partners and children, Parent 5 stated that they often eat together where they can talk and have fun with each other to ease the feeling of being the odd person. On the other hand, Parent 10 mentioned that in order for her to maintain the emotional attachment she considers her stepchildren as her own children as well.

Satisfaction was apparent in Parent 5 while narrating her response because according to her she won't feel being left out in the family because it is her family. Meanwhile, Parent 10 communicated earnestness as she shared her response that treating her stepchildren makes her feel that she is always part of the family, because the way she is raising her biological children is no different by the way she is raising her stepchildren. Both participants explained that active involvement in their partners and children's lives helps them maintain their emotional attachment with them.

Comparable to the study of Sloan (2021), entitled "Long-Term Impact of Growing Up In A Blended Family: Emotional and Attachment Issues", examined the experiences of individuals raised in blended or stepfamilies and the impact on their development and adult attachments. It focused on communication styles, abandonment issues, self-esteem, and individual behavior problems commonly reported by adults from such families. Using a phenomenological approach, the study provided detailed descriptions of emotional struggles, adult attachment issues, feelings of abandonment, and the development of successful or failed relationships. The participants' stories revealed common themes of emotional impact, attachment styles, abandonment issues, and traumatic experiences leading to emotions like shock, neglect, fear, trust, anxiety, and anger. The findings emphasized the importance of reciprocal love and attachment in preventing insecurity and extreme behaviors that could drive others away. The study also highlighted the complexity of the blended family process and the various factors necessary for a successful transition into adulthood. Children in blended or stepfamilies form close emotional bonds with their caregivers, and the study underscored the psychological factors influencing participants' relationship patterns and the lack of family cohesiveness that often goes unaddressed. It emphasized the ongoing need for attention to emotional and relational issues beyond divorce and into adulthood.

Interview Question 4: Can you describe your relationship with your family? Do you feel emotionally connected to them or have you experienced any emotional cutoff?

When asked about the relationship within the family and emotional connection, Parent 1 mentioned that she was always misunderstood when scolding her stepchildren. Meanwhile,

sadness was evident in Parent 4 as she mentioned that her children see her as overreacting when she tries to discipline her children.

As observed, Parent 1 was quite sad while sharing her experience. According to her, she just wants her children to treat her as their real mother because she just wants what is best for them. Likewise, Parent 4 showed sadness with regard to the absence of emotional connection in her family. Parents too wanted to feel appreciated and acknowledged. The participants shared their sentiments of being misunderstood when they just want what is best for their children. From their responses, they really accept their stepchildren as their own, the reason why they try their best to raise them well in their own way. Sadness was evident in both participants as they shared their experience.

Likewise, according to the study "Effects of the Blended Family on Parenting Styles and Emotional Regulation among Tertiary Students" by Njoreh and Kirori (2018, as cited by Lipat, 2021), stepparents often face a challenging balance between authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, but they tend to lean towards authoritarian parenting due to resistance from their stepchildren. This inclination towards authoritarianism arises from several factors, such as the stepparent's limited emotional attachment to their stepchildren compared to their partner. This dynamic significantly influences the stepparent's interactions and parenting approach. For instance, what a stepparent perceives as unruly behavior, a parent may view as their child simply being enthusiastic. Similarly, while a stepparent may interpret a child's assertiveness as "back-chat," the parent may see it as the child expressing themselves.

Interview Question 5: How did a situation like when family members emotionally cut off himself/herself from you or another family influence your family dynamics?

When asked about situation when family members emotionally cut off himself/herself from other people and its influence their family dynamics, Parent 1 stated that this causes a lot to her husband especially now that most of his siblings doesn't communicate with them. For Parent 5, whenever she feels betrayed by someone and this causing problem inside the family, the best option is cutting them off their circle.

While sharing her experience, Parent 1 was teary eyed. She found it sad that his husband was greatly affected by misunderstanding between her and in-laws. On the other hand, Parent 5 showed seriousness and a bit upset while narrating her experience because she still remembered the accusation being thrown to her. During the interview, an expression of distress was observed in the participants. Both might have different responses but had the same effect on their husband.

Similar to the article of Kennedy (2021) titled Emotional Cutoff: Avoiding Emotional Pain, a variation of emotional cutoff involves maintaining emotional proximity to one's family of origin while internalizing anxiety and experiencing physical illness and depression symptoms. This person may unintentionally distance themselves from desired relationships, unable to process or heal from long-standing emotional pain. The recent pandemic may have provided a convenient excuse to avoid distressing family gatherings. While cutting off contact with family through physical distance may temporarily shield against further pain, it can result in chronic sadness and anger, ultimately hindering efforts to reconnect with family or establish new relationships.

Interview Question 6: How does the sibling position of you and family members influence the family?

When asked about influence of sibling position to blended family, Parent 4 stated that sibling position does not influence the family. Meanwhile, Parent 6 mentioned that sibling position may somehow influence since they share same traits with her eldest child.

Parent 4 and 6 was both confident and convince in their responses. According to Parent 4, her children may have the same wants, hobbies, and enjoy doing things together but when it comes to behavior, she doesn't find any similarity.

This was supported in the article entitled, "Does Birth Order Affect Personality?" by Corinna Hartmann and Sara Goudarzi (2019). According to this, the position in the sibling sequence may potentially impact personality, but its influence varied among families. It was not a universally systematic effect. However, other factors carry more weight in explaining the differences in siblings' characters. Besides genetics, the shared environment, often referred to as the "undivided environment," also played a role. This included factors such as the respective circle of friends for siblings growing up in the same family. Additionally, parents did not treat all their children the same, regardless of birth order. Research indicated that parents respond sensitively to their children's innate temperament and adjust their parenting accordingly.

Interview Question 7: How are you going to describe the way you and your family handle family tensions?

When asked about how they are handling family tensions, Parent 5 revealed that she communicates with her family by explaining her side for them to understand. On the other hand, Parent 7 stated that they talked about the issue or problem during mealtime.

Parent 5 was serious while sharing her response. She also shared that she often shows affection and sweetness to her husband to ease his anger. While on the other hand, Parent 7 showed seriousness and is proud of her way of handling family tensions. From the participants' responses, it was evident that open communication is an important approach when dealing with family tensions. As they explained the benefit of communication, this may help family members be encouraged to express their feelings, concerns, and perspectives in a respectful and non-confrontational manner.

Seemingly, the article of Eldemire and Eldemire (2021) entitled, "Seven Tips for Stepfamily Success Remarried", to navigate the challenges of stepfamily life, couples must prioritize trust and communication as the foundation of their relationship. Effective and open communication was essential, even when discussing sensitive topics. The conflict was unavoidable, but without active listening and understanding, couples could become stuck in major marital issues. Over time, poor communication eroded the foundation of the relationship, which holds the stepfamily together. Additionally, the loyalty a parent felt towards their own child was significant and valid, making stepparent discipline a delicate matter. Developing love and trust between stepparents and stepchildren takes time, so establishing parenting roles and discipline early on, while adapting to each child's developmental stage, is crucial. Every relationship had its challenges, but couples who were committed to overcoming obstacles together build a solid foundation for tackling future issues. Remarried couples who understood the importance of a strong marital relationship as the bedrock of blended family happiness were more likely to succeed in their journey.

Interview Question 8: If there is a time when you or your partner projected anxiety onto your children? How did it influence your relationship with your children?

When asked about their projected anxiety to their children, Parent 1 said that her stepchildren failed to finish his schooling. On the other hand, Parent 4 overheard the conversation of her stepchildren that she is too strict. The projection of parents' anxiety to their children really had effects on the parent-child relationship. Meanwhile, Parent 1 was regretful as she shares her response, since no matter how hard she tries to convince and help her stepchildren to study, he did not want to. On the other hand, Parent 4 felt relieved as she told her experience since, her stepchildren were able to realize that what she always told them was for their own good.

Likewise, this is comparable to the article by Heather Hayes (2022) entitled “Parental Projection: The Perils of Living Through our Children” wherein projection can manifest as undue pressure for a child to excel in areas where the parent themselves did not succeed. The parent may relentlessly push the child to achieve more, setting ambitious goals that they themselves never reached. In these cases, parents will go to great lengths to assist their child in achieving these aspirations. However, this approach can have negative consequences. The child may develop an expectation that their parents will always intervene to help them achieve their goals, or they may experience significant stress in striving to meet unrealistic expectations. Additionally, when parents project their own dreams and emotions onto their children, they fail to recognize and appreciate their children as unique individuals. This projection can also lead to missed understanding, as parents prioritize meeting perceived needs rather than addressing their children's actual needs.

Interview Question 9: How has your own generation influenced the way you function and interact with your family now?

When asked about the influence of generation to the way family function and interact, Parent 2 stated that there is a big difference their generation before compare the present generation, according to him, children before prefer playing outside while today, most children are fond of gadgets and internet. On the other hand, Parent 7 said that children nowadays are way hardheaded than before.

As observed, Parent 2 showed seriousness as he compares his generation to the current generation while. According to him, despite the differences the two generation had, he still managed to be patient in communicating with his children. On the other hand, firmness in her decision was observed to Parent 7 while expressing her observation, she stated that as long as her children was with her, she will be in charge of the rules inside their home.

Comparably, on the article “A Generation Gap?” by Chaudhary (2021), both parents and their children often struggle to understand each other's perspectives, leading to the formation of a generation gap. Various issues contribute to tension between teenagers and parents, such as homework, sibling conflicts, boundaries, and trust. Some teenagers believe their parents should demonstrate more trust and grant them greater independence, yet they also recognize that parents primarily have concerns about their safety. Technological proficiency is another significant factor. The impact of technology on the generation gap depends on how effectively older individuals can learn and adapt to new technology. Since much of the discourse surrounding technology is driven by Millennials for the younger generation, many older individuals may feel left behind when advancements occur too rapidly.

Interview Question 10: How do you think the culture in today's society influences how you understand the behavior of your partner and children?

When asked about on how the culture today influences their understanding the behavior of their children and partner, Parent 3 stated that culture before was way different in culture of today's society particularly with how teenagers behave. Meanwhile, Parent 4 said that children nowadays are likes gadgets, and since gadget and technology is quite a trend now, she can't help but support her children when it comes to these things.

Parent 3 and 4 both expressed seriousness and genuineness while stating their responses. Parent 3 said that such attitude was influenced by what they have seen in social medias particularly with the vlogs. On the other hand, Parent 4 do understand that using of gadget was the trend nowadays and the reason why she tried to support her children is that she doesn't want them to get envy with their friends since most of them already have their own gadgets.

Comparable to the study “Family cultural norms and its role in negative internet choices of children” by Rehim and Attiyeh. (2020), undoubtedly, the Internet became a significant and valuable tool for communication through numerous websites, greatly influencing various aspects of our lifestyle. Additionally, many individuals depended on their laptops or tablets to work remotely from home, replacing the need to physically commute to institutions or companies. However, this technological advancement has also introduced several negative aspects within households, particularly concerning the socialization of children. Controlling children became increasingly challenging with the widespread availability and accessibility of the Internet, even in traditionally conservative family environments.

Corollary Question Number 2: What themes emerge from the testimonies of parents handling blended home?

The themes were as follows: Achieving Self Differentiation and Establishing Boundaries, Dyadic Relationship and Triangulation through Physical Attachment and Detachment, Emotional Cut Off, No observable Influence of Sibling Position, Different Ways of Processing Family Emotions, Projecting Unresolved Emotional Issues, Expecting Multigenerational Continuity, and Understanding Emotions in Social Context.

Interview Question 1: How do you maintain your sense of self and independence as a parent of a blended family?

Theme A

Achieving Self Differentiation and Establishing Boundaries

With the theme, Achieving Self Differentiation and Establishing Boundaries, the participants had different responses to how they maintain their sense of self and independence while handling blended homes.

In Fair in Decision-making and Open communication subtheme where Participant 1 specifically mentioned, “Meron slight na hindi ko gusto sa asawa ko tulad ng bisyo at pagiging seloso. Parang iyon lang naman ang aking ano, sa aming dalawa, parang pantay naman kaming mag-asawa sa desisyon, o kaya pag may mga problema kami, sinasabi ko, yon, parang nagkakasundo kami sa mga ganon,” one of how the participants maintain their sense of self and independence by trying to reach out and communicate with her partner with whatever problem that arises in their family. Seemingly, Same Work and Choose to Work is Participant 2 and 6 ways of maintaining their sense of self and independence. As stated by Participant 2, “Ano siguro, di don sa ahh, yun magkaparehas kami ng trabaho tapos parehas kaming ahh.. kasi kailangan talaga naming magtrabaho, parang pursigido kaming magtrabaho...” while Participant 6 detailed “Minsan po about tungkol sa pinansyal eh, katulad nga po nyan, para hindi kami masyadong nag-aaway, pinili ko pong magtrabaho imbis na sa bahay lang”. Since both participants decide to pursue their personal goals, they believe that achieving balance promotes a harmonious and healthy family life while allowing for personal growth and self-care. Apparently, Participant 3 shared that “May time na hindi magkapareho sa, paniniwala, may time na nagkaparehas naman. Parang ano, di ko maexplain, siguro yung pananaw sa buhay” with the subtheme Outlook in Life. Reflecting on one’s values, engaging in self-reflection practices can help them stay connected to their authentic self and make conscious choices aligned with their values as a parent and an individual. Moreover, Participant 7 indicated that “...naninindigan ako para sa akin at sa anak naming po, talaga po, kasi don po sa una kong asawa, hindi lang po 100% ang ibinigay ko alam ng panganay ko yon, kaya sabi ko hindi na ako padadaig, yun po. Matapang na, natututo na talaga ako mam” under the theme Stands Firm for Self and Children. From own experience of the participant, they were able to realize the importance of maintaining a sense of self and independence for one parent, not only for his or herself but also for the welfare of the children.

Furthermore, Patience and God's Mercy were the subtheme based to the response of Participant 5 "Tyaga lang din talaga ang puhunan. Tyaga, lakas ng loob. Yun awa naman ng Diyos." With the guidance of almighty above, this participant was able to achieve balance between personal and family matter as her way of maintaining her sense of self and independence. On the other hand, Participant 8 denoted "Wala naman nasusunod, parehas lang, kapag sinabi niya, ay di siya, pag ako ay di ako, ganon lang, sunudan, kung sino ang mas may point", which falls under the subtheme Mutual Decision. While Asking Permission were the subtheme based on the response of Participant 9 "Ang asawa ko kasi dapat pag may ginawa cya, susundin mo, hindi mo kokontrahin cya, siya ang nagdedesisyon sa bahay, pero minsan, kapag may gusto akong gawin, nagpapaalam ako sa kanya". Additionally, Parent 10 expressed "Pero ako, wala akong gusto na nasusunod, palaging siya ang nasusunod. Kung ano sa tingin ko ang maakabuti sa pamilya naming, ayun na lang din ang sinusunod ko, hindi na ako, nakontra" in the theme Doing what was Best for the Family. Based on the last three mentioned subthemes, adjusting one's approach as children grow and circumstances change as well as being open to change allows her to navigate the various stages of parenting while maintaining her sense of self.

Self-differentiation approaches in many ways. It does not only mean having sense of self and independence but rather it is establishing boundaries, protecting oneself from any anxiety and worry that may come from the challenges the blended family takes. Responses from the participants just proved that maintaining a sense of self and maintaining boundaries as a parent is essential for personal well-being and can contribute to being a more effective parent thus influencing the quality of one's relationships, personal fulfillment, role modeling, and reducing stress and conflicts within the family. This self differentiation is about establishing a strong and secure identity that allows individuals to make decisions, pursue their own goals and values, and maintain healthy boundaries in relationships.

This is supported in the study of Swanberg-Hjelm (2020) in "The Moderating Effect of Negative Childhood Experiences on the Development of Differentiation of Self" which indicated that Differentiation of Self increases when people have a more exceptional ability to adapt to situations and not over-react when encountering worrying circumstances. Not overreacting allows people to remain connected to others and reduces the need to control the situation. Without the need to control the situation, people have the capability of not absorbing the anxiety occurring in a problematic situation, so they do not develop physiological, emotional, or interpersonal issues.

Likewise, this was supported by the Differentiation of self as one of the central concepts in Bowen's Family Systems Theory. This is also the only concept which is about individuals rather than relationships. According to this, a differentiated self is a person who is connected to others, yet the anxiety of others does not influence this person's function. All members are connected to others and affected by their emotions and responses. It involves the establishment of clear boundaries, both emotional and physical, between oneself and others, maintaining a healthy separateness while still being able to engage in meaningful relationships.

Interview Question 2: How do you involve any other family members whenever you have misunderstanding with any of them?

Theme B

Dyadic Relationship

With the theme, Dyadic Relationship, the participants had almost the same responses regarding the involvement of other family members during the misunderstanding in the family. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 shared the same response with regards to involvement of other family members, which means that whenever they are facing misunderstanding in the family, they are just forming dyadic relationship. Particularly, Parent 2 and 10 disclosed "Wala naman na, Wala ako lang, kapag kaming mag-asawa ang may hindi pagkakaunawaan, sinasarili

ko, ganyan, pag nag-aaway naman sila, ako ayhi ndi nakikielam, pag ako ay nagsaway ng isa na di nakikinig, pinapabayaan ko na sila”

Family members from blended homes believed that problems must be resolved between and inside the family without any involvement from other people. In that way, they were able to settle the issue easily. They expounded that whenever they have misunderstanding in the family, they always chose to maintain the confidentiality between the partners. Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of all family members involved and avoiding discussing the details of the conflict with other family members who are not directly involved, this creates a safe space for open and honest communication.

Comparably to the article “How to Manage and Resolve Family Conflicts” by Skurat (2022), communication served as the dynamic component in family dynamics, influencing the movement along other dimensions. Positive communication skills, such as empathy, clarity, and effective problem-solving, foster healthy levels of family cohesion and flexibility. Conversely, a lack of communication skills hindered the family system's ability to adapt when necessary. Insufficient communication was a common trigger for conflict within families. When communication is ineffective, family members struggle to ensure their needs were met and boundaries were respected. This lack of communication can leave individuals feeling as though their needs and desires were insignificant, perpetuating a cycle of communication problems.

Contradictory in Bowen’s Family Systems Theory, triangles were the building blocks. They stabilized systems’ relationships. In here, when two people were in relationship and need to get rid of some anxiety, they triangulated in a third. Sometimes this happened by bringing in another person either as a part of the conversation or even just talking about someone else. At other times, dyads can pull in a third object like going to a movie on dates — instead of hours of conversation between the partners, their focus can go onto the movie for a time.

Interview Question 3: If ever you felt like you were the odd person out, what do you do to address those feelings and maintain your emotional attachment to your partner and children?

Theme C

Triangulation through Physical Attachment and Detachment

With the theme, Triangulation through Physical Attachment and Detachment, the participants stated different responses about their ways of maintaining emotional attachment to their partner and children. The participants explained in detail the gestures they usually did to maintain their emotional connection. The subordinate themes were as follows: Communication between Couples wherein the Participant 1 stated “Eh di nag-uusap kaming mag-asawa ...” while Participant 9 stated “Wala, hindi, napapag-usapan naman kung mayroon hindi pagkakaintindihan”. Fostering open and honest communication with partner and children creates an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their feelings, thoughts, and concerns that results to active listening, empathy, and understanding within the family. On the other hand, Participants 5 detailed “Nagsasabay sabay kami sa pag kain. Di syempre magkakasabay sabay kayo, mag uusap usap kayo” with subtheme of Eating Together. Dedicating quality time to spend with partner and children, creating rituals and traditions that strengthen emotional connection, such as regular family meals allow for bonding, nurturing relationships, and building emotional attachment. Furthermore, Participants 2 stated “Oo, may time na ganon, minsan ay pag yung pagpunta don sa biyenan, sa san juan, minsan hindi ako pumupunta” with subtheme of Avoidance whereas Participants 8 stated “Minsan, ang gingawa ko, pumunta ako sa mga tiya, don muna ako, saka ako umuuwi sa bahay kapag nag-iba na yung pakiramdam, tapos yon ayos naman kami” with subtheme of Go to Aunt’s House. Reaching out for support when needed, confiding in trusted friends or family members who can provide guidance and perspective can help process emotions and navigate any challenges that arise. Moreover, subtheme of Keep to

Oneself based on the response of Participants 3 “May time cyempre, hindi naman kasi mawawala yon, ano, wala syempre, kailangan tumahimik, sarilinin na lang, tapos nagiging okay din naman.” Likewise, Participants 4 shared “... na umiiyak na lamang ako sa isang tabi, ahhh pupunta ako sa kwarto umiiyak na lang ako” with subtheme of Crying Alone. Keeping to oneself and crying alone can both help in developing emotional awareness by recognizing and understanding his/her own feelings. This self-awareness allows people to communicate their needs and emotions effectively to their partner and children. Lastly, the subtheme Did not Feel Out-of-Place was derived from the responses of Participants 6, 7 and 10 that stated “Ay hindi naman po. Okay naman po, parang tanggap naman po”, “Hindi naman kasi, pamilya ko yun, lagi din naman akong ka ano nila, kadamay, hindi naman ako naaout of place” and “Hindi naman, parang ang turing ko ay pamilya na din kami...”.

Maintaining emotional attachment varies from one family to another. Every family has their own way of maintaining it. Some may encounter being out-of-place in the family, given the fact that they are from a blended family wherein everything is new and different. But some were able to come up with ways and strategies to overcome that feeling of emotional detachment such as doing the emotional triangle process. When anxiety or tension arises between two individuals, they often involve a third person or issue to alleviate the tension temporarily. This third person can be a family member, a friend, or even a specific issue or topic that becomes the focus of attention.

Seemingly, the study “Effective parenting in stepfamilies: Empirical evidence of what works” by Sanner et. al. (2022) stated that effective parenting in stepfamilies revolves around the role parents play in fostering the development of relationships between stepparents and stepchildren. Researchers emphasize that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is crucial for stepfamily functioning and the long-term success of the remarriage. Establishing positive stepparent-stepchild bonds is considered a significant task in stepfamily dynamics. Studies and professionals have examined how parents can support the development of these relationships, recognizing that close relationships with stepparents contribute to positive outcomes for stepchildren. Parents can support these ties by cultivating closer relationships and greater involvement with their own children. When parents are more engaged and supportive towards their children in practical matters, household chores, and offering guidance, their spouses tend to become more involved with the stepchildren as well. Therefore, these behaviors have benefits that extend beyond the parent-child relationship, positively impacting the stepparent-stepchild relationships within the stepfamily.

Moreover, the triangles as one of the concepts of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory, supported some answers of the participants wherein when two people were in a relationship and need to get rid of some anxiety, they triangulated in a third. Sometimes this happened by bringing in another person either as a part of the conversation or even just talking about someone else. Even in small groups, there were many triangles at play.

Interview Question 4: Can you describe your relationship with your family? Do you feel emotionally connected to them or have you experienced any emotional cut-off?

Theme D

Emotional Cut Off

With the theme, Emotional Cut Off, the participants’ responses varied. Subthemes revealed from the responses were as follows: Misunderstanding, wherein Participants 1, 4 5, 6 and 8 mentioned that they were not being understood at home, particularly, Parent 4 and 5 revealed “Oo hindi nila ako naiitindihan...” and “Oo naman maraming beses kasi may mga pananaw nga sa aking sarili, sa buhay na di nila naiitindihan...”

Prominent response of these parents how their family members do not understand with how they disciplined their children, some also mentioned that since they are not the real parents, their way of raising them confuse the children which often lead to misunderstanding; Understanding the children, is the subtheme from Parent 9 as she revealed “naiintindhan ko naman sila minsan kapag nagtatampo sila, pati ugali nila”. This is when their child is being sensitive and emotional; Moreover, Parent 10 responded “Oo, naiitindihan ako ni Michael, kapag ako ay nakasimangot alam noon, hindi ko lang alam kung naiitindihan ako ng mga anak ko” which fall on the subtheme Unsure of the Children’s Understanding. The parent expressed that though she was being understood by her husband, she was not sure if her children understood her since they are being disobedient sometimes despite her continued guidance with them.

It is easy for other children to misunderstand their parents, especially those critical parents, though their intention is only pure and for the welfare of their children and family. They wish that sometimes their other family members were able to see how much they are trying and how much they love their children. This is the situation being experienced by parents handling blended homes. As much as they wanted to raise their children and the children of their new husband, misunderstandings arise, which is an indication of poor emotional connection between the family members. This poor emotional connection if not address properly may lead to emotional cut off which is detrimental to the relationship of the family.

Likewise in the article, “Stepparenting: It Takes Two” written by Ron Deal (2023), stepparenting changes as relationships grow. In the early stages of remarriage, the most successful relationships between stepparents and stepchildren were those where the stepparent prioritized the development of a warm and friendly interaction style with the stepchild. By establishing a foundation of mutual respect and affection, stepparents who later took on a disciplinarian role were less likely to encounter resentment from the stepchild. Building closeness and earning the authority to discipline takes time and should not be rushed. For instance, stepparents may be eager to bond with stepchildren through one-on-one activities, but it was important to acknowledge that stepchildren often feel uncomfortable being alone with a stepparent initially.

Similarly, this was supported by Bowen’s Family Systems Theory of cutoff. The concept of emotional cutoff describes how people manage their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them. Emotional contact can be reduced by moving away from family and rarely going home, or it can be reduced by staying in physical contact with family but avoiding sensitive issues. Relationships may look “better” if people cutoff to manage them, but the problems are dormant, not resolved.

Interview Question 5: How did a situation like when family members emotionally cut off himself/herself from you or another family impact your family dynamics?

Theme E

Emotional Cut Off

Most of the participants revealed that the theme Emotional Cut Off impact the family dynamics. Participant 1 revealed “Napakalaking epekto sa akin dahil si ____, alam mo naman na di yan ganyan noon, ngayon lang, siya na lahat o ilan na laang ang kapatid niya na magkasundo sila” falls under the subtheme Create Conflict among Siblings. Emotional cutoff often leads to a breakdown in communication within the family. When individuals distance themselves emotionally, it becomes difficult to address conflicts, express needs, or share important information. This lack of communication can hinder the resolution of issues and create a sense of disconnection within the family. On the other hand, Participant 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 revealed that there are No Conflicting Situations being experienced in their family thus there is no emotional cut off. Parent 2 shared “Wala naman, wala, kasi mahalaga yung ano eh yung samahan. Nandito

na kasi kami sa time na parehas kaming may past, so ngayon, parang pinag-iingatan na naming”, and Parent 3 revealed “Wala, maayos naman ang relasyon naming mag-asawa pati ang ibang kamag-anak”. Since Participant 8 stated “Wala na kaming komunikasyon ng aking anak sa una, pero dati, ayos naman ang relasyon sa anak ng aking asawa. Wala naman akong nakikitang ano”, the Communication Barrier between him and his child resulted to emotional cut-off.

Not all blended homes experience emotional cut-off. Lucky are those family who haven't experience any, which means that they have a smooth transition into blended homes. However, emotional cutoff is a complex issue, and its impact can vary depending on the specific family dynamics and individual circumstances. Some of them think, that emotional cut-off prevents them for further and more painful experiences. On the other hand, addressing emotional cutoff often requires a willingness to engage in open and honest communication as well as working towards rebuilding emotional connections within the family. So, when either party failed to reach out to have an open communication, it will result to emotional cut-off or more bigger problems that may affect the family dynamics.

Also, Hodis (2022) in his article “Beyond the Virus | Ending Emotional Cutoff” stated that Emotional cutoff may provide temporary relief from anxiety and pain, but in the long term, the unresolved conflicts and accumulated emotional baggage intensify the suffering. Over time, emotional cutoff can become a familiar pattern, leading to numerous unresolved conflicts that progressively deteriorate one's mental health. This pattern of cutoff not only damages the relationship in question but also has repercussions for new relationships. As the individual increasingly cuts off their family, they become overly reliant on new relationships to fulfill their social and emotional needs. Consequently, relationships with new spouses, children, and friends tend to become unstable and unhealthy.

Plus, this was supported by cutoff of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, specifically about generational cut-off. In a cutoff situation the parent and adult offspring may have no interaction, the adult child's life is still greatly impacted by the relationship. The concept of emotional cutoff describes how people manage their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them. Emotional contact can be reduced by moving away from family and rarely going home, or it can be reduced by staying in physical contact with family but avoiding sensitive issues. Relationships may look “better” if people cutoff to manage them, but the problems are dormant, not resolved.

Interview Question 6: How do your sibling's position and family members influence the family?

Theme F

No Observable Influence of Sibling Position

With the theme, No Observable Influence of Sibling Position, the participants told there is no observable influence the sibling position to the family. Parent 2 pointed out “Hmm o, hindi ko pa masyadong ano sa kanya eh, kasi hindi pa naman siya nag, syempre mga bata pa lang sila, kung ano pa rin yung ano ko, sya pa rin yung ah, don pa rin sila nagrerely sa mga sinasabi ko” while Parent 3 shared “Parang wala naman, magkakaiba halos lahat, kahit kaming mag-asawa ay magkaiba din, wala naman taong nagkakaprehas ng ugali, halos lahat ay magkaiba.”

They elaborated that despite the similarity of sibling positions among the family members, they still are different from each other. Participant 2 also stated that since his children were still young, he cannot compare them and was not able to determine if there is any influence the sibling position has. While Participant 9 claimed that when it comes to hobbies, the eldest child of his husband as well as his eldest child were in good terms since they both have the same hobby.

The idea of sibling position was not that common with others. And that may be the reason why parents don't usually associate sibling position with regards to the attitude or

characteristics of any family members. Each family is unique, and the influence of sibling position may vary depending on various contextual factors such as parenting styles, family dynamics, genetics, and individual experiences outside the family. This may have a more significant impact on shaping an individual's development and behavior.

Furthermore, Guertin (2021) in his write ups "Understanding Stepsiblings vs. Half-Siblings: A Closer Look" indicated that the addition of new children to a family can disrupt the established birth order, posing a challenge for all siblings. The oldest child, for example, may suddenly realize they are no longer the eldest, while the youngest may find themselves transitioning into a middle child role. This loss of their established "place" in the family hierarchy can lead to confusion and trigger feelings of resentment towards the newly arrived sibling. With that, sibling position may be affected and its influence both on the individual and family may no longer be observable because of the impact of joining children with the same birth order.

Contrary to the fourth one concept of Bowen's Family Systems Theory which is the Sibling Position, that posits in broad strokes that oldest children have similar ways of functioning, also, according to this concept can be especially helpful when looking at partnered relationships. The current study findings reveal that there is no observable influence of sibling position in the family.

Interview Question 7: How are you going to describe the way you and your family handle family tensions?

Theme G

Different Ways of Processing Family Emotions

With the theme, Different Ways of Processing Family Emotions, the participants divulged the way their family handle family tensions. From the Participant 1 response, "Hindi ko na lang sila iniintindi, hindi ko na lang sila pinakikielam", it was revealed that Letting them Be or letting family member's individual needs and personal space be respected. Boundaries can define limits on behaviors, expectations, and intrusions into personal matters, respecting them fosters a sense of autonomy and reduces potential conflicts; whereas Participant 2 who express that "Ano lang, kasi yung asawa ko, gusto niya matapos yung, halimbawa, hindi kami magkasundo, yung gabing yon, dapat maging okay" na kami", and Participant 3 who told "Sinolve, para hindi na lumala, ano yung, cguro kailangan ay ano, yung isa ay magiging humble bigayan, unawaan" both use the strategy Resolving the Conflict at Once by trying to solve the family issue within the same day they encountered it. On the other hand, Parent 4 responded "Parang ang nagyayari ay parang kailangan muna maghihiwalay para makapagisip isip para palipasin ang nararamdaman ..." which fall under the subtheme Physical Separation is the way this parent deal with family tensions, according to her "Parang ang nagyayari ay parang kailangan muna maghihiwalay para makapagisip isip para palipasin ang nararamdaman ..." which means that they need some time alone to think of the problem and ease the negative emotions toward each other. Aside from that, Parent 5 use Giving the Children the Chance to Explain in her response "Parang pinapaliwanag ko naman sa mga bata" whenever they are dealing with family tensions.

Furthermore, Admonish the Children, or Enduring the Situation, or Leaving is the strategy of Parent 6 to avoid further argument with the other family members whenever possible, her reply was "Kapag ganun po, pinagsasabihan ko po lahat sila. Minsan po ay tinitii ko na lang. Minsan po ay naalis na ako para hindi na humaba." Parent 7 and 8 try to do the Talking about the Conflict during family tension, they usually do it during their mealtime in the family. They pointed out "Pinag-uusapan po mam, pag po magkakaharap kami kumain, pinag-uusapan namin" and "Nag-uusap ng mahinahon at masinsinan, ilang minute pa lang ay maayos na kami, hindi kami naghihiyawan, kung sino ang may kasalanan ang nahingi ng pasensya". On the other hand, Addressing and Explaining the Situation at Once is the approach Parent 9 did, according to her

“Kinakausap ko agad cya pag mayroong kami hindi pagkakaintindihan tapos ay pinapaliwanag sa kanya na ito ang mali” in here she tries to talk with the family members explain the situation before it gets worse. Lastly, Parent 10 try to Admonish the Children and explain them what they do, where did they go wrong so that they will not repeat it again based on her answer “Pinagsasabihan ko na garne ang gawain nila...”

Processing family emotions can vary greatly depending on the specific family and the dynamics at play. It's important to note that each family is unique, and the methods employed to handle family emotional process. What works for one family may not work for another, so it's crucial to find approaches that are tailored to the specific needs and dynamics of one's own family. Resolving family tensions is a process that requires patience, understanding, and ongoing effort from all family members.

Moreover, the article “9 Ways To Resolve Conflicts In Blended Families” written by Menon (2021) implied that Family conflicts are inevitable as long as there are individuals with diverse personalities, aspirations, and values. However, in blended families, these conflicts can take on unique dynamics. Jealousy and territorial behaviors are common, and even when tensions are not overt, underlying stresses can emerge in certain situations. Resolving tensions or conflicts in a blended family begins with showing respect towards stepchildren and seeking support from one's spouse. It is also important to establish clear parenting styles before marriage, implement a family meeting schedule, address sibling rivalry with sensitivity, give one's spouse space with their own family, maintain a strong connection with one's spouse, plan for the needs of biological children carefully, and acknowledge and work on differences within the family.

Furthermore, one concept Bowen's Family Systems Theory which is the Nuclear Family Emotional System supported this finding as this sees marriage as the main fusion between two people. That primary relationship, and the family living with that marriage, is the primary emotional unit. It is the place family members most often are able to offload anxiety. Bowen described four ways families process and share anxiety: emotional distance, marital conflict, sickness/dysfunction in one partner, or projecting problems onto the children. It involves recognizing and addressing emotional reactivity, working towards emotional connectedness without fusion, and exploring and resolving unresolved conflicts from one's family of origin.

Interview Question 8: If there was a time when you or your partner projected anxiety onto your children, how did it influence your relationship with your children?

Theme H

Projecting Unresolved Emotional Issues

As a theme, Projecting Unresolved Emotional Issues, the participants revealed how family projection process influences the relationship inside the blended family. The subtheme Children Lost Interest in Oneself was provided by Participant 1 of the study with her response “Malaking epekto dahil, napabayaang na ang kanyang sarili, as in , wala na siyaya, hindi na siya nakapag-aral”. According to her, she tries to encourage her stepson to continue with his studies, but in contrast, the child opted to stop and doesn't have any interest in studying. Meanwhile, Parent 4 stated that despite she projected her anxiety to her stepchildren, still in return, they are still able to Show Concern to them, she responded “Kapag ganoon na nakikita nila ako na malungkot, na lalapit na lang sa akin yung bata, tita bakit ka po naiyak?” Moreover, Parents Preventing a Repeat of their Previous Lives was the theme expressed by Parent 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. Parent 6 shared “... balang araw yung dinadanas ko ngayon, ayaw ko pong madanas nila...” while Parent 7 expressed “Yang panganay ko ay pinapaunawa ko sa kanya na alam mo anak nung bago ako nagbuntis sa iyo, 18 pa ang ako non, yun sana ayaw kong mangyari sa iyo”.

According to them, they often fear that their misfortune in life will also be experienced by their children. Seemingly, Parent 9 Give Advice as she project anxiety to her children based on her answer “Tinuturo kung ano ang dapat agwin, ang tama at mali, pinapangaralan”. Parents always want what is best for their children. The misfortune, mistakes and struggles they encounter before is one of the reasons for their anxiety. As much as possible they are going to protect their child from those, and this type of parenting resulted in anxiety projection that affects their relationship with their children. In times where parents cannot control their unresolved anxiety and often project it to their children, parents must be aware of their own anxiety levels and take steps to manage and address them in a healthy manner instead of projecting it to their children alone. Creating a nurturing and supportive environment, where emotions are acknowledged and addressed, can help mitigate the negative impacts of parental anxiety projection on the parent-child relationship.

Similar on the research article written by Dumount (2021) entitled Facing Adulthood: Helicopter Parenting as a Function of the Family Projection Process, helicopter parenting is a distinctive style characterized by high levels of intensity and involvement in raising children. This parenting approach influences various aspects of adolescents' development and lifestyles. Helicopter parents tend to excessively protect their children by imposing strict instructions, often disregarding their individuality. This overprotection stems from the parent projecting their worries onto the child and attempting to provide solutions preemptively. Additionally, parents may project their own goals onto their growing child, contributing to helicopter parenting. This projection indirectly increases parental anxiety, leading to excessive control. While there may be some positive effects associated with helicopter parenting, negative outcomes have also been extensively studied. Literature suggests that children raised by helicopter parents may experience challenges in emotional regulation, academic productivity, and social skills. They may exhibit low self-efficacy, lack trust in peers, and feel alienated from them as well.

Comparable to the Family Projection Process under Bowen's Family Systems Theory, this concept is in play when parents project the anxiety they have from marital issues onto their children. If one or both parents need to offload some anxiety, they can easily focus their anxiety onto a child. This projection is unconscious and not intentional. The more it happens in the parent's own family of origin, the more likely it will play a larger part in their relationship with their own children.

Interview Question 9: How has your own generation influenced the way you function and interact with your family now?

Theme 1

Expecting Multigenerational Continuity

The main theme that emerged was Expecting Multigenerational Continuity. The generation where parents were born is way different to the current generation. With that according to Participant 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, they can't help but to compare their experiences. Just like what Parent 5 pointed out “Ibang iba talaga ang kabataan noon at kabataan ngayon. Talagang sobra. Yung sabi ko nga ang hirap nilang akayin. Ang hirap nilang unawain. Ang hirap ipaliwanag ba yung mga dapat nilang gawin...” and Parent 10 shared “Hindi talga maiwasan na palaging ikumpara yung amin dati sa ngayon.” Those responses from the participants resulted to the subtheme Comparing Experiences.

With such Comparing Experiences, problems and misunderstandings arise most especially between the parents and children. Parents tend to expect their children to act and behave the way they were told to do so when they are still young. Moreover, Parent 2 stay as Being Calm despite how generation influenced the way their family function and interact now. According to him “Bale, laging ako pa rin yung ano eh, mababa, yung ano, kahit ako yung ama,

ako yung, may mga times na ilang beses mo na inutusan, sinabihan, hindi pa rin minsan sumusunod, nagiging kalmado pa rin ako...”. Despite the generation gap between him and his children has, he is still able to calm down and be patient with his children.

Generational differences can sometimes lead to multigenerational conflict or tension within families. Opposing perspectives on norms, attitude and work ethic can create disagreements. And comparing these different generations while expecting others family members from other generation to act and behave which was way different from current generation create conflicts and misunderstandings. The influence of generation on family functioning and interaction is significant as each generation brings its own values, beliefs, experiences, and social context to the family dynamics. Recognizing these differences of generation may help the blended homes to maintain the harmonious relationship within the family.

To support these statements, according to the article “What Research Says About the Generation Gap: Generational Differences and Their Causes” of Adcox (2021), the term "generation gap" commonly refers to the differences between generations that can lead to conflicts and communication challenges, creating a perceived divide. However, the generation gap can also be seen as a valuable period of time that allows cultures within a society to develop their own unique character. Grandparents, positioned within the family and possessing more life experience, can recognize that generational differences can have positive impacts for everyone involved. With the rise of television and movies, younger individuals have been exposed to cultural influences that may differ from their own family and cultural backgrounds. Differences in attitudes toward race, moral values, religious beliefs, respect for others, political views, and work ethics are some key areas where generational gaps exist. The areas of technology and music, although less emotionally charged, often showcase noticeable differences between generations. The older generation typically takes pride in the younger generation's technological prowess rather than viewing it as a problem. When it comes to musical preferences, each generation desires its own style, and the older generation can usually understand and appreciate this desire. In other areas of difference, the younger generation tends to perceive the older generation as superior, which marks a contrast from the 1960s.

Likewise, the concept Multigenerational Transmission Process under Bowen's Family Systems Theory states that general differentiation levels are passed from generation to generation. Parents that are better self-differentiated have children that are also better self-differentiated. Parents that are less self-differentiated have children that are also less self-differentiated. The Multigenerational Transmission Process focuses on how functions and patterns are connected through many generations of a family. This was evident in how the parents wanted their child to be like them on how they behave, and act based on the generation they were shaped.

Interview Question 10: How do you think the culture in today's society influences how you understand the behavior of your partner and children?

Theme J

Understanding Emotions in Social Context

As the theme, Understanding Emotions in Social Context, the parents had different responses as to how the culture in today's society influences how they understand the behavior of their partner and children. As revealed by Parent 1, “Tinanggap ko, tinatanggap ko kahit mahirap” on the subtheme Accepted but Difficult, she admitted that though it is hard to understand the behavior of her stepchildren, she still manages to accept the fact that they are living in different cultures. Whereas Parent 2 expressed “minsan kasi yung gusto yung, yung naranasan ko non, maranasan nila, yung simpleng ano ng mga laro laro”, that he is wishing for the same experience he had before when he was still young for his children to be able to experience. This falls under the subtheme, Wishing for the Same Experience. The subtheme Understanding their Ways as

disclosed by Parent 4, 7, 5, 8, and 10. As what Parent 4 shared “Inuunawa ko sila sa bagay na, nakikita nila sa iba” and Parent 5 expressed “Kaya mas magaling pa yung parang sinasakyan sakyan mo pero tinuturuan mo. Sinasakyan mo sila pero tinuturuan.”

According to these parents they try to understand and go with the flow with regards to how culture is influencing the behavior of their children. Parent 6 expressed that “Kailangan na ikaw po magulang magsasakripisyo ka para maibigay ang gusto. Pero hindi ko po yun dinanas nung sa mga magulang ko” which means that Making Sacrifices is the way this parent deals with how culture affects the behavior of her children. Furthermore, Parent 9 revealed that she sometimes prays, gives punishment, as well as explaining to their children how they must behave. According to her “Minsan ay nagdadasal na lang ako, o minsan nagagarute ko, pero ako ay tahimik, pero minsan napapalo ko sila, tapos ipapaliwanag ko sa kanila na buti pa dati, ang bata isang sutsot mo laang nadiyan ana agad, ay ngayon ay wala, balewala”. This parent’s response falls under the subtheme Prayers, Punishment and Explanations.

Understanding is the best way to adapt to the changing culture in today’s society. Without this flexibility and understanding, parent-child relationships may be at risk since every child nowadays is greatly influenced and affected by this culture in society. Culture plays a significant role in understanding the behavior of family members. It provides a framework of shared beliefs, values, customs, and social norms that influence how individuals perceive and interpret behaviors within the family context. Culture is complex, and individuals within a cultural group may still exhibit diverse behaviors and attitudes. While culture provides a valuable framework, it should not be used to make sweeping generalizations or assumptions about individuals. Effective communication, open-mindedness, and a willingness to learn and adapt to different cultural perspectives are essential for understanding the behavior in a culturally sensitive way.

Comparable to the study “Cultural Orientation Gaps within a Family Systems Perspective” of Bámaca-Colbert et. al (2019), they underscore the view on cultural gaps in families highlights their self-stabilizing and adaptive nature, as well as their impact on family dynamics and individual adaptation. Families, being adaptive and self-stabilizing systems, have the ability to respond and adjust when faced with changing conditions such as living in a new culture or transitioning through different stages of development. The family adaptive system is activated to facilitate adaptation, allowing families to establish a new normal or stable state within the context of the new culture. Through this process, the family adaptive system can gradually diminish the negative effects of cultural gaps or leverage existing gaps to cultivate positive family dynamics over time. By studying family cultural gaps within a family systems framework, we can gain insights into why cultural gaps may have varying significance in different circumstances, offering a promising approach to understanding their impact.

Lastly, this was also supported by the Societal Emotional Process of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. Symptoms of societal regression include an increased focus on “rights” instead of “responsibilities”; increased polarization in politics and other spheres; an increase in leaders making decisions not from a principled stance but to appease their base, and greater and greater division and pettiness. Bowen believed this increased societal regression would likely continue for a few more decades. It will continue increasing until the pain of continuing becomes worse than the pain of confronting what had become and doing the difficult work that needs to do to move beyond polarization as a coping mechanism.

With regards to the essence of lived experiences of parents handling blended homes, achieving self differentiation through establishing boundaries greatly help the parents in maintaining their wellbeing despite the challenges encountered in handling blended homes. Every parent has their own way of being self differentiated. Regardless of which is better way of relieving tension experienced in blended homes, some of them prefer dyadic relationship wherein

they resolve any familial issues between the couple in the blended homes while others use the triangulation through physical attachment and detachment. These families from blended homes really go through different struggles before they achieve the status of their current relationship, some resort to emotional cut off believing that it is way better than having deeper tensions between the other party. No observable influence of sibling position was recorded based on the responses of the participants since they believe that everyone is unique despite the similarity of sibling position in the family.

Moreover, processing family emotions seems to be one of the most challenging parts in handling blended homes. Misunderstandings between the parents usually arise because of the differences between two different families. Another cause of that misunderstanding is the projection of unresolved emotional issues of parents to their children and expecting multigenerational continuity or comparisons of generations which lead to unacceptable expectations. Understanding emotions in social context doesn't give tensions unlike other generated themes, for the parents were open minded to the cultures in today society.

Corollary Question Number 3: Based on the findings of the study, what parent-child program may be proposed?

As an output of this study, the researcher developed a parent-child program entitled "Unite and Thrive: A Journey of Uniting Hearts, Creating Memories" that may serve as a guide for schools in aid to the maladjustment being experienced by the children from blended homes. This program aims to bring blended families together to strengthen their bonds and create lasting memories. Through a variety of engaging activities that will help foster a sense of unity, promote personal growth, and celebrate the unique qualities that make each family special. With the help of these activities, the researcher believed that creating a harmonious relationship between the parents and the children is a great start in helping them with the struggles and challenges that they encounter in their family. As what of the findings of this study revealed, blended families lack the presence of emotional connection. With that, these activities aim to develop the emotional connection of the family members inside the blended homes.

5. Consolidated Findings

In the phenomenological study on the lived experiences of the parents handling blended homes, ten (10) themes emerged.

These were: Achieving Self Differentiation and Establishing Boundaries, Dyadic Relationship and Triangulation through Physical Attachment and Detachment, Emotional Cut Off, No Observable Influence of Sibling Position, Different Ways of Processing Family Emotions, Projecting Unresolved Emotional Issues, Expecting Multigenerational Continuity, and Understanding Emotions in Social Context.

Under the first theme, the participants shared their responses on maintaining their sense of self and independence as a parent of a blended family. Every single answer of the participants showed how they manage to achieve their self-differentiation. Some recognize the balance between parenthood and personal life in which they embrace flexibility and adaptability, while others continue pursuing their personal goals and aspirations, mostly related to careers. Other participants tend to seek support from friends and family. Thus, accepting help allows them to create space for themselves and maintain a sense of balance. Most importantly, they also establish boundaries between their role as a parent and in their personal life. They sometimes prioritize their needs and find time for their own interests and pursuits. Truly, self-differentiation involves developing a clear sense of self, independent of external influences, while establishing boundaries entails setting limits to protect one's emotional, physical, and mental well-being.

For the second theme, the participants discussed the involvement of other family members whenever having a misunderstanding with any of them. Responses from the participants

vary depending on the situation of their family. If other participants look for a confidant in times like this, others try to respect the privacy and confidentiality of all family members involved. They avoid discussing the details of the conflict with other family members who are not directly involved. Thus, according to them, this dyadic relationship helped create a safe space for open and honest communication, not neglecting to foster an atmosphere of empathy and understanding. All these ways of handling tensions in the family can help break down barriers and create a sense of shared understanding to resolve the problem or conflict.

Under the third theme, the participants explained how they maintain their emotional attachment to their partners and children. Most participants go with triangulation through physical attachment and detachment. They believed that understanding and addressing triangulation is vital for promoting harmony, trust, and healthy relationships within blended families. By recognizing the potential challenges and working towards clear communication, establishing boundaries, and prioritizing the well-being of all family members, stepfamilies can foster a positive and nurturing environment for everyone involved. And when they feel like they need such support, they confide in trusted friends and family members who can provide guidance and another perspective.

For the fourth theme, the participants shared their relationship inside blended homes including the presence of emotional connection and emotional cut off. Emotional connections are strengthened when family members show empathy and seek to understand each other's experiences and emotions. Demonstrating care and compassion helps them create an environment where emotions can be acknowledged and validated. Emotional bonds are nurtured through shared experiences and quality time spent together. Engaging in activities and making memories as a family can deepen emotional connections and build a sense of belonging. Most of the participants responded that they feel like being misunderstood whenever they discipline their children. Not only their children but sometimes as well as their spouse seems to misunderstand them. Presence of this emotional connection is vital for a blended homes to have a harmonious relationship away from emotional cut-off. This emotional cut off sometimes the reason why misunderstanding between family members happen.

Under the fifth theme, the participants revealed when family members emotionally cut off himself/herself from other and its influence on their family dynamics. The presence of emotional cut-off in blended homes are rare. According to them, presence of emotional cut off may influence their family dynamics and relationship. Emotional cutoff often leads to a breakdown in communication within the family. When individuals distance themselves emotionally, it becomes difficult to address conflicts, express needs, or share important information. This lack of communication can hinder the resolution of issues and create a sense of disconnection within the family.

For the sixth theme, the participants emphasized how does sibling position influence the family. It revealed that there is no observable influence of sibling position in the family. While birth order and sibling position have historically been regarded as influential factors in family dynamics, it is clear that their impact is limited. Family dynamics are shaped by a multitude of complex and interrelated factors, including individual differences, parenting styles, external influence, and sibling relationships. Understanding and appreciating the multifaceted nature of family dynamics allows to move beyond simplistic assumptions about sibling position and recognize the numerous factors that truly shape familial relationships.

Under the seventh theme, the participants shared the way how they are processing family emotions. Family emotions holds immense significance in fostering understanding, empathy, and connection. Blended families often navigate complex emotional landscapes as individuals from different family units come together. Addressing and effectively processing these emotions can lead to healthier relationships, enhanced communication, and a stronger sense of unity.

For the eight themes, the participant shared how parents' projection of unresolved emotional issues influence their relationship with the children. Some parents tend to be anxious to what the future hold for their child. They feel scared thinking what might happen to them especially when they as parents experience unfortunate events in their life such as not finishing studies, early pregnancy or even when it comes to the work that awaits them. With that, some parents tend to project these anxieties to their children. Truly, parental anxiety projection can contribute to communication difficulties and increased conflict within the parent-child relationship. When that happens, children may feel hesitant to express their own emotions or concerns, fearing their parents won't understand them, children may experience heightened levels of stress and emotional distress when they absorb their parents' anxiety. This can lead to feelings of unease, uncertainty, and confusion. Children may perceive their parents as too controlling, strict and critical. This can influence their future relationships and worst disobedience that leads to unfortunate situations the parents been afraid of.

For ninth theme, the participants shared how expecting multigenerational continuity influence the way their family function and interact now. Each generation is shaped by the cultural and social norms of their time. These norms influence the family's values, expectations, and ways of interacting. Generational differences can sometimes lead to intergenerational conflict or tension within families. Divergent perspectives on norms, attitude and work ethic can create disagreements. This can affect how family members stay connected and engage with each other. Also, parenting approaches can vary across generations. Each generation may adopt different parenting styles, influenced by their own upbringing and societal changes. Aside from that, different generations have experienced distinct historical events and societal changes. These experiences can shape their worldview, resilience, and coping mechanisms. All these experiences can influence family dynamics and interactions.

Under the last theme, the participant divulged how understanding emotions in social context influences their understanding to the behavior of their partner and children. Understanding emotions in a social context within blended families requires embracing multiple perspectives, fostering open communication, navigating complex emotions, building trust and emotional safety, practicing effective co-parenting, and blending family rituals and traditions. By nurturing empathy, validating individual experiences, and promoting open dialogue, blended families can create an environment that supports emotional well-being and fosters a strong and unified family unit. Through understanding and addressing emotions within the social context of the blended family, members can forge deeper connections, navigate challenges with compassion, and build a resilient and harmonious family.

6. Conclusion

As the researcher reflected on the lived experiences of parents handling blended homes, it represents the resilience and adaptability of families, highlighting the importance of understanding, communication, and unity in building a harmonious and nurturing environment. Blended homes demonstrate the resilience and adaptability of families. But despite the traits of adaptability and resilience, misunderstanding, challenges and even family tensions usually arise. This was due to the absence of emotional connection between the parents and the children. Often, when lacking emotional connection, parents have the hard time doing his/ her role as the parent in the family, children always see them as the antagonist in the story. But, despite those struggles, they show that families can evolve and thrive despite previous experiences of separation or loss. These blended families exemplify the human capacity to heal, grow, and love again, highlighting their ability to create new bonds and forge meaningful connections. Effective communication is also vital. Open and honest communication is essential for building trust, resolving conflicts, and creating a sense of belonging. It is through communication that misunderstandings can be addressed, emotions can be expressed, and relationships can be strengthened. One more

fascinating thing about couples from blended homes is that they make sure that they are protecting their family at any cost, as the most participants share, they resolve the conflict before the day ends since they've been in broken relationship before the reason why, as much as they can, they will always choose to reconcile again. With that, blended homes exemplify the resilience and adaptability of families, demonstrating that with dedication and an open heart, new beginnings can be the start of beautiful journeys together.

7. Recommendations

This study also provided these recommendations:

- Parents handling blended homes may assess how they are affecting the lives of their children as well as new partners. With that, they may identify what things must be done to improve their relationship with his/ her family. Also, they may look for ways to be able to maintain their sense of self and independence as well as achieve a balance between their personal and family matter.
- Parents may develop a warm, friendly interaction style with their children, especially their stepchildren. A foundation of mutual respect and affection must be established to create an emotional connection with them.
- Parents may be aware of their own anxiety levels and take steps to manage and address them in a healthy manner instead of projecting it to their children alone. Creating a nurturing and supportive environment, where emotions are acknowledged and addressed, can help mitigate the negative impacts of parental anxiety projection on the parent-child relationship.
- Parents may learn that effective communication, open-mindedness, and a willingness to learn and adapt to different cultural perspectives are essential for understanding behavior in a culturally sensitive way
- A new spouse may try to look at a different perspective as to what their partner are feeling and experiencing. This would help them to be more supportive and understanding with their new partner.
- Children from Blended Homes may open their mind to understand and gain a different perspective as to what their parents are feeling and experiencing. This would help them to be more considerate, appreciative, and understanding to them.
- Family members may know when to use triangles during misunderstandings and respect the privacy and confidentiality of family members involved whenever they have a misunderstanding. They may be sensitive if ever any members feel being out-of-place. Strategies to overcome the said feeling may also be done to avoid emotional detachment.
- Family members may be willing to engage in open and honest communication as well as working towards rebuilding emotional connections within the family.
- Family members may be aware that family tensions is a process that requires patience, understanding, and ongoing effort from all family members. So, they should find approaches that are tailored to the specific needs and dynamics of their family.
- Recognizing the differences of generations may help the blended homes to maintain the harmonious relationship within the family.
- Schools may conduct programs to reach out to those children inside blended homes in providing social support for them. This program may be the avenue for the children to gain a better understanding of the perspective of their parents to develop a deeper emotional attachment with them.
- The community may foster better sensitivity and consciousness about stepfamilies and the experiences of parents handling blended homes.

- Another qualitative study concentrating on the lived experience of parents handling blended homes as well as the perspective of the spouse and children may be gathered for research which may be conducted by interested researchers.

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