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## Comparing HIV–AIDS Awareness among College Students in St. Paul University Manila

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**Abstract:** The study aimed to investigate the similarities and differences between the reflections of different student groups (classes from the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and Management, and the College of Music and the Performing Arts) who, during the academic year, were exposed to three different educational events on HIV-AIDS (considered in this study as types of conditioning). After acquiring the journals of students who reflected on their experiences post-viewing of an independent film by Crisaldo Pablo titled *Ang Timeline ng Buhayni B* in the National Commission on Culture and the Arts, the narratives were thematically analyzed for comparison. The results revealed that exposure to educational materials on HIV-AIDS from both the university and third-party advocates help to increase students' willingness to share the knowledge they gained about the disease and increased the university's perceived intent to empower students in the same.

**Keywords:** HIV-AIDS, students' awareness, advocates, St. Paul University Manila

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### I. Introduction

HIV infections in the Philippines have more than doubled from 2010 to 2016. The country is now known to be the place in Asia and the Pacific with the fastest-growing incidences of HIV infection, accounting for 85 percent of new infections in the region" (Department of Health, 2016, para. 1). In January 2019, the Department of Health reported that it has recorded more than 1,200 newly diagnosed cases of HIV (De Vera, 2019), which is higher than the number reported the year before. The most dominant mode of infection is sexual contact, accounting for 98 percent of the total infections, largely from the National Capital Region with 402 cases reported (De Vera, 2019), and among males (Evangelista, 2018), with a median age of 27, who have sex with males (Junio, 2018). Even further raising the alarm is the report about a 13-year-old youth who contracted the disease sexually (Casamayor, 2018). New cases "are getting younger and younger," said Obenza, an HIV-AIDS advocate. With adolescents being naturally sexually curious and experimental (Perez, n.d.), teenage pregnancy on the upswing in the Philippines (Crisostomo, 2019), and social media providing easy access to sexual partners (Montemayor, 2018), HIV infection among the youth of all sexes and sexual orientations must be considered a serious social concern. Raising awareness on HIV-AIDS in the educational setting or campuses among the youth must be done to help lower the rate of infection.

Catholic schools are not known to be the most proactive in informing the youth about sexually transmitted illnesses. Pope Benedict, in 2009, declared that "widespread use of condoms could worsen the situation" (Benagiano, Carrara, Filippi, & Brosens, 2011, para. 1); however, Catholic schools in the Philippines provide no space for sexuality education (Masilungan, 2014) because many Catholic teachers and educators do not agree with such a position, added Masilungan. Some of them have helped develop a learning tool for sexuality education that can be applied across all educational levels. The Population and Development Education Teaching Modules for Catholic Schools, conceptualized in forums organized by the Office of Population Studies of University of San Carlos and the John J. Carroll Institute of Church and Social Issues of

the Ateneo de Manila University and attended by administrators and educators of CEAP schools, was released in 2009, but ten years later, many have yet to learn about its existence. In the absence of such an educational material, and pending a more liberal stance on sexuality, in general, and homosexuality, masturbation, and sex work, in particular, concerned educators must find other ways to help inform their students in alternative and less threatening ways.

In an attempt to change the landscape of learning about HIV-AIDS in St. Paul University Manila, the authors decided to uncover the awareness of first-year students who participated in a (1) HIV-AIDS film showing event featuring Crisaldo Pablo's *Ang Timeline ng Buhay ni B* in the National Commission on Culture and the Arts and a research forum of the National Research Council of the Philippines on increasing the public's awareness on HIV-AIDS through digitized arts; (2) HIV-AIDS film showing event featuring Pablo's *Ang Timeline ng Buhay ni Bonly*; and (3) in neither of the two events (only the regular university activities involving the orientation of the Red Ribbon Care Management Foundation). By doing so, this study aimed to present the difference between the awareness of students regarding HIV-AIDS given varying learning conditions.

## II. Review of Related Literature

**Sex Education.** Science Daily (2019) defines 'sex education' as a "broad term used to describe education about human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, and other aspects of human sexual behavior" (para. 1). There is an ongoing debate all over the world about the proper age when sex education is to be best delivered, the details that are to be included, and the subject matter that must be included, Science Daily added. Masturbation, birth control contraceptives, pregnancy before the age of consent or marriage, and sexually transmitted diseases are but some of the most highly controversial topics even in the US.

In the US, only 22 states require sex in public schools (ATTN, 2019). In contrast, most European countries mandate sex education. The Netherlands and Denmark lead Europe in this regard, with the former educating children on sex as early as four years old by helping them learn to learn about building relationships and discussing 'sexuality'. The latter, meanwhile, does so to "encourage respect for all sexual preferences and to help students develop skills to protect against sexual coercion, intimidation, and abuse" (para. 3). This is especially valuable in Europe where between 10 and 20 percent of minors are assaulted sexually and many forms of sex abuse-related practices like incest, sex work, sexually explicit materials, date rape, peer and institutional sexual violence are realities that threaten the safety and health of children (May-Chahal & Herczog, 2003).

Nepal aims to guarantee the rights to equality and justice for children in a situation where "sexual harassment issues are not openly discussed within families" (Global Giving, 2019, para. 2) by improving the awareness of school children on sexual abuse through the use of "print and electronic media via 48 different educational contents on sexual abuse as well as street dramas and training of local youth clubs" (para. 3). Unfortunately, in sexually conservative countries "body safety is not taught until much older – until sometimes, it is too late" (Child Mind Institute, 2019, para. 1). The US Department of Justice reported that only 10 percent of sexual perpetrators targeting children as young as children under five years old were strangers to them and 23 percent were children, the Child Mind Institute added. As such, educating children about body safety "is never too soon" (para. 7) and must include talking about body parts, especially the private ones, body boundaries, not keeping body secrets, not taking photos of private parts, getting out of scary and uncomfortable situations, use of code words for body safety, and avoiding secret touching. In this context, sex education must be taken seriously.

Planned Parenthood (2019) wrote that sex education must help the youth acquire information, skills, and desire to "make healthy decisions about sex and sexuality throughout their lives" (para. 1). Concerning preventing early and unwanted pregnancies and avoiding sexually transmitted illnesses, Planned Parenthood

suggests including the following in sex education because they were seen to have a positive impact on the youth's sexual behaviors: (1) delaying sex until they are older; (2) using condoms and contraception when they do have sex; reducing the frequency of sex; and (4) reducing the number of sexual partners. Sex education, when considered synonymous to 'sexual health' education, must, therefore, be understood as follows:

Sex education is the provision of information about bodily development, sex, sexuality, and relationships, along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and their sexual health. Sex education should occur throughout a student's grade levels, with information appropriate to students' development and cultural background. It should include information about puberty and reproduction, abstinence, contraception and condoms, relationships, sexual violence prevention, body image, gender identity, and sexual orientation. It should be taught by trained teachers. Sex education should be informed by evidence of what works best to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but it should also respect young people's right to complete and honest information. Sex education should treat sexual development as a normal, natural part of human development. (Bridges & Hauser, 2014, para. 2)

In the context of the above quote, sex education ceases to be merely a study of sexual body parts, functions, and corresponding behaviors attached to them; it becomes a way of empowering the youth to become more responsible about their relation to their being sexual human beings. Thus, beyond the goal of preventing unwanted pregnancies (the 1960s-1970s), HIV (1980s), and sexual abuse (1990s), sex, or more appropriately, sexuality education must also deal with preventing "sexism, homophobia, and online bullying" (European Expert Group on Sexuality Education, 2016, para. 4).

In this sense, allowing students to participate in film viewing activities aimed at increasing the youth's awareness about HIV-AIDS, or in research forums that intend to do the same using digitized arts, essentially coincides with the goals of sexuality education, as stated above. Focus on the use of media to communicate messages that relate to sexuality education, however, aligns it also with media education, which is the reason why communication students in this study were given greater access to the two events. Bringing media education and health education, however, essentially brings the two events to the core of Paulinian education, as the SPC congregation is known for its health and media education in the Philippines.

**Gender and Development (GAD).** The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines issued in 2017 the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy to implement within the basic education system of the country the Gender and Development mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Republic Act (RA) No. 9710 or the *Magna Carta of Women* (MCW), RA 10533 or the *Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013*, and the Philippines' International Human Rights Commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) among others" (DepEd, 2017, para. 1). As such, the department commits basic education in the Philippines to "integrate the principles of gender equality, gender equity, gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and human rights in the provision and governance of basic education" (Outrage, 2017, para. 1). Specifically, the order mandates the department to:

... undertake gender mainstreaming in education to address both enduring and emerging gender and sexuality-related issues in basic education, to promote the protection of children from all forms of gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying, and to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in the workplace and within DepEd.

The said order essentially institutionalized sexuality education, discussed previously, in the basic education system of the country, including not only women's issues but also those of gender minorities. The order also distinguishes between "gender identity" and "gender expression", over and above 'sexual

orientation', which are core concepts in 'gender' education. The order also provides for the following (Outrage, 2017, para. 5):

- Enforcement and compliance with RA 9710 on non-expulsion of women faculty and female learners who become pregnant outside of marriage;
- Implementation of sexual and reproductive health services in every school;
- Formulation of policies to boost women's participation in sports;
- Provision of facilities for differently-abled people;
- Establishment of media network and mechanism to disseminate GAD-related information/advocacy campaigns;
- Establishment of VAWC desk in schools; and
- Provision of breastfeeding stations and child-minding stations.

In 2015, the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines issued a memorandum order titled "Establishing the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions". This essentially pioneered gender mainstreaming in the Philippine educational system, requiring the use of five percent of school budgets for the empowerment of gender minorities, the establishment of GAD Focal Points System responsible for the "development and coordination of the institutional GAD programs... and maintain records of GAD programs, activities, and projects" (Mananzan, 2015, para. 5). Higher education institutions (HEIs) that are expected to be gender-responsive are "administration, curriculum, research, and extension programs" (para/ 7). The GAD Focal Points of HEIs must also ensure that all institutional policies are aligned with the order.

The exposure of students of St. Paul University Manila to the two events is aligned with the gender and development directions of the educational system. The primary concern of this study deals with finding out whether said activities are delivering the desired gender-responsive outcomes, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to its main stakeholder, the students, especially those who have just graduated from the new K-12 curriculum. Should the data point to the achievement of said outcomes, the university should find itself in a good place relative to the legal, educational, and development frameworks guiding its operations.

**HIV-AIDS Education.** Education now plays a key role in raising awareness about HIV-AIDS like sexuality, and gender. While the Partnership for Childhood Development and Schools & Health (2019) reported that HIV infection is the lowest among children, the sexual transmission of HIV to youths below 15 years old in the Philippines (Casamayor, 2018) raises an alarm. A World Bank study that evaluated the HIV-AIDS undergraduate education of health professionals in the Philippines (Juban, Salvador, Tawasil, & Chan, n.d.) found that said education is adequate to produce the expected competencies of the graduates of different health programs; however, the actual exposure of health professionals to HIV-AIDS patients was limited. Hence, behaviors related to dealing with said patients have yet to be improved. Likewise, the importance of standard precautions has to be highlighted. Issues in teaching HIV-AIDS to said professionals were related to disclosure of patient records, particularly those who have yet to know their diagnosis, and misconceptions about breastfeeding involving persons with HIV-AIDS. That said, one can expect education on HIV-AIDS among non-health professionals to be more problematic, especially because the memorandum of the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines on the medical curriculum "does not specifically state the discussion of AIDS" (p. 8). Instead, it can be found embedded in subspecialty topics like Obstetrics-Gynecology, Pediatrics and Internal Medicine, Pathology, Microbiology, Public Health, and Pharmacology. Despite this, the study recommended teaching HIV-AIDS to the general public. The problem is the general public is rarely informed by said health professionals in spaces they inhabit.

Efforts to educate the public come mostly outside of school settings. The film of Pablo titled *Ang Timeline sa Buhay ni B*, funded by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA), told the story of a young male person around said age; thus, it was shown to high school and college students to educate them about HIV-AIDS. The exponential rise in new HIV infections from two new cases daily in 2008 to 32 in 2018 (Tomacruz, 2018) became a serious concern for artists whose significant others have become infected or died from AIDS-related complications. As a consequence, producing art that seeks to prevent the spread of the disease has become more frequent and had become visible online. This phenomenon became the subject of a research grant that was funded by the National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP) between December 2016 and January 2018 and led to the research forum in February 2019. Pablo and his said film became one of the subjects of the said grant. Consequently, Pablo became one of the speakers in the said forum. In the following month, Pablo's film had a series of screenings in the NCCA. Both events, having been connected to one of the authors (Bantugan) of this paper, were used to help improve the awareness of selected students of St. Paul University Manila on HIV-AIDS. If any, the Philippine Red Cross Youth in St. Paul University Manila help in this regard but only in limited occasions and capacities. A study by Bantugan, Alderete, and Valeriano (2017) on the use of YouTube videos on HIV-AIDS in senior high school research courses revealed that even such materials can help enhance the empathy of students towards persons living with HIV-AIDS.

**Public Opinion and Policy.** To date, HIV-AIDS education in St. Paul University depends largely on faculty initiative and has yet to be institutionalized through university policies, annual activities, curricular offerings, and syllabi. Hobley (2012) pointed out that public opinion may play a role in forming policy. For Abraham Lincoln's (in Hobley, 2012, however, "public opinion in this country is everything" (para. 1). Winston Churchill clarified that there is "no such thing as public opinion... only published opinion" (para. 1) and, as such, the opinion of the main public or stakeholders of the university must be published to create an impact in policy-making. Research and publication dealing with public opinion like the Ipsos Mori's understanding society series and Britain 2012 report that both capture the people's mindset. Published public opinion can also set the pace of reform within an institution as the latter can be aligned according to the suggestions of the former.

In the 1980s, much was done to address the concerns of key affected populations regarding HIV and AIDS in the US. Much of the momentum could be attributed to the reality that "two-thirds of Americans (in 1987) named HIV-AIDS as the most urgent health problem facing the country" (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2011, para. 2). Never has HIV-AIDS become such a concern for the Philippines until recently when rates of infection in the country have become the highest in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, there is a need to sway public opinion in HEIs where the most vulnerable populations, highly sexually curious and digitally connected youths, are found. Universities must draw from the opinions of students to formulate policies that mobilize the most effective tools for enhancing their community's awareness of HIV-AIDS. It is for the said purpose that this study was conducted and it is hoped that the publication of public opinion related to HIV-AIDS in universities could create the change needed, policy-wise, to ensure that students are kept healthy and safe as much as possible.

### **III. Study Framework**

The study used a research design where selected students representing student groups with different degrees of exposure to HIV-AIDS-related educational events are compared. This is based on the idea that human behavior is learned. In particular, Stimulus-Response Theory by Thorndike (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019), asserts that rewarded responses to a stimulus become habitual. The lack of any stimulus that can lead to a rewarded response, in contrast, will lack the process of conditioning where preferred behavior can be learned. In this study, students who were exposed to HIV-AIDS related educational events were also exposed to educational opportunities that were institutionally rewarded (as they were produced through grants by the government), and students who were not exposed to said opportunities did not witness any behaviors related to

HIV-AIDS that were rewarded by the government (if any, they were probably previously informed of random HIV-AIDS-related behaviors institutionally rewarded only by the university). Below is a figure that demonstrates how varying stimuli or lack thereof could potentially lead to different behavioral learning.

In Figure 1, Conditioning A (of students) was influenced only by learning opportunities that are rewarded only by the university (Stimulus-Response 1). Conditioning B was a result not only by Stimulus-Response 1 but also by a film that was produced with the help of an award of the NCCA (Stimulus-Response 2). Conditioning C was shaped Stimulus-Response 1, Stimulus-Response 2, and a research forum on HIV-AIDS funded by the NRCP (Stimulus-Response 3). All three types of conditioning lead to their respective kinds of awareness on HIV-AIDS. This study aims to describe and compare the kinds of awareness on HIV-AIDS that emerge from each of the three kinds of conditioning.

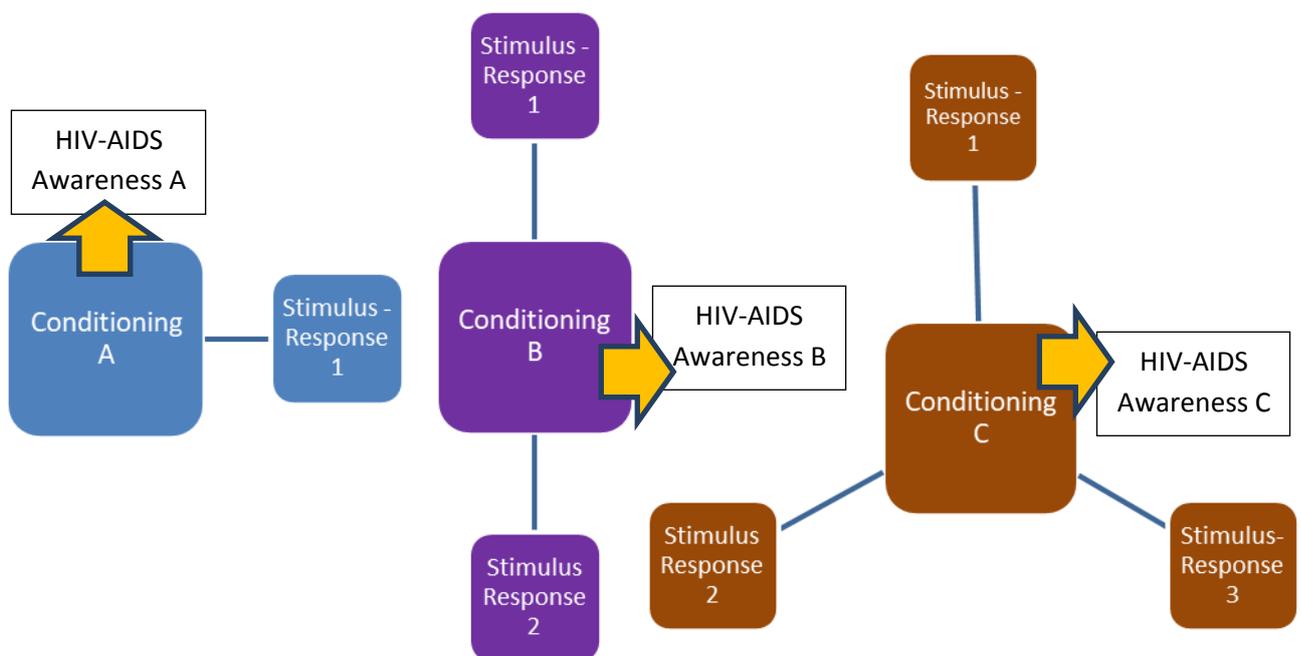


Figure 1. Study Framework depicting three kinds of conditioning that produce three kinds of awareness

#### IV. Statement of the Problem

In this context, this study sought to compare the awareness of students on HIV-AIDS in three different learning conditions. To do so, the answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How aware are the selected students on HIV-AIDS in the following contexts?
  - a. Non-exposure to the selected film and a research forum
  - b. Exposure to the selected film only
  - c. Exposure to the selected film and a research forum
2. What do selected students in the following contexts think about the university concerning educating students about HIV-AIDS?
  - a. Non-exposure to the selected film and a research forum
  - b. Exposure to the selected film only
  - c. Exposure to the selected film and a research forum

3. What are the areas of convergence and divergence between the three groups of students concerning their responses to HIV-AIDS?

## V. Methodology

This study used the qualitative research design. Three groups of first-year college students of St. Paul University Manila: one group belonging to the College of Business and Administration Tourism Program (that underwent Conditioning A), another to the College of Music and the Performing Arts (that underwent Conditioning B), and the last group to the College of Arts and Sciences Mass Communication Program (that underwent Conditioning C). Group A has 25 students. Group B had 5 students. Group C had 10 students.

The students in Conditioning A group were primarily exposed to HIV-AIDS content in Biology in Senior High School and Science, Technology, and Society in the college General Education Program. They were also required to attend a seminar on HIV-AIDS organized by the university with the help of the Red Ribbon Foundation. The students in the Conditioning B group were exposed to the same activities experienced by the previous group and Pablo's HIV-AIDS advocacy film titled *Ang Timeline ng Buhay ni B* which told the story of a young man who suffered from the social stigma attached to HIV-AIDS in a family and educational setting. The film screening also included a short introduction of the Love Life Project of Pablo and its HIV-AIDS activities, including a short briefier on HIV-AIDS after the screening, and a longer talk by a representative of The Love Yourself Foundation which took care of the HIV testing after the film. The students in the Conditioning C group underwent the same learning activities as Conditioning B group and attended a research forum organized by the NRCP based on the research completed by one of the authors of this paper (Bantugan) on HIV-AIDS where core advocates (People Living with HIV of PLHIV), mediating advocates (non-PLHIV), and peripheral advocates (collaborators of core and mediating advocates) were given the chance to share their experiences as advocates. The final talk was delivered by Bantugan and was focused on the formation of advocates who have the skills to optimally use digital tools to their advantage.

They were all given a set of 10 questions for journaling that they were requested to answer a week after the two groups' exposure to Pablo's film. Qualitative responses from each student were transcribed until the researchers reached the "response saturation point". The responses were broken down into smaller units corresponding to the areas of inquiry identified and for later comparison. Areas of convergences and divergences concerning HIV-AIDS were surfaced to understand how various types of stimulus-response exposures influence students' awareness of HIV-AIDS.

## VI. Results

### Awareness on HIV-AIDS of selected students

**Conditioning A.** The selected students who were only exposed to the HIV-AIDS activities in the university showed the following concerning their knowledge of HIV-AIDS

**Brief and Partial Knowledge.** The participants shared their knowledge on HIV-AIDS using one to four very short sentences, mostly revolving around the nature ("disease"/"illness") of the problem, severity ("chronic"/"serious"/"lifetime"/"hard to be treated"/"incurable"), mode of transmission (mostly sexually and via bodily fluids), and its relationship to immunity. Only two of 25 responses elaborated on HIV-AIDS, and a few expressed disclaimers saying their knowledge is limited.

**Reservations on the Use of 'Sex'.** While the majority of the participants had no problems using the word 'sex' in sharing their knowledge about HIV-AIDS, a few veered away from the words and used substitutes like "using" (females and gays infected with HIV), "mating", "being intimate", and "(sexual) interaction" (instead of intercourse). These words suggest that while some of them know HIV-AIDS, they are particularly

bothered by the word 'sex'. Their word preference points to derogatory ("using"), prejudicial (against females and gays), scientific ("mating"), asexual ("intimacy"), and objectifying ("interaction") terms that express negative attitudes on sex or a lack of 'sex-positive' dispositions.

**Need to Know More.** Many from this group admitted to being comfortable with talking about HIV-AIDS in public not so much to share what they know but to know about it. They recognize that "many don't know what it is so when they see people who have the disease, they easily judge them". There is a curiosity to know more, an acknowledgment that the public should be "aware and have knowledge" about it, and a realization that "it should not be ignored, something that should be ashamed of or be shy about". One participant revealed being "open-minded", hence, being "very open to this kind of issue". That said, developing a natural curiosity for new things and a disposition of open-mindedness are key to making more people open to learning more about HIV-AIDS in public spaces – which can counter stigma.

**Discomfort in Sharing Knowledge.** While many revealed that they know HIV-AIDS to some degree, some of them do not feel comfortable sharing their knowledge in public conversations. A couple admitted to feeling "awkward", with one saying that the public spaces are "not the correct place(s) to talk about it". Another pair of respondents said they were uncomfortable talking about it in public such that they "make sure that nobody will hear us because we know that some people are really sensitive and judgmental". This sense of shame is attached to a perception that "most people find it a sensitive topic". One respondent admitted to feeling "scared" and "sad" about what she knows about HIV-AIDS. Altogether, these responses stem from the existing stigma that is attached to HIV-AIDS. It is worth noting that having a few people talk about it positively (without negative judgment) contributes to a perception that most people are not open to talking about it in public.

**The gap between Knowing and Knowledge Sharing.** The responses of the participants show that knowledge of HIV-AIDS does not translate automatically to a desire to be public about it. Some students in this group know enough not to be scared of HIV-AIDS and yet they remain fearful of 'perceived' social disapproval when one engages in talks about HIV-AIDS in public spaces. Knowledge alone does not remove existing biases against marginalized groups (females and gays). Knowledge alone does not remove negative emotions previously experienced as part of the stigma. However, an understanding that "focusing more on this kind of illness" can ensure better health for people can help encourage the development of more positive attitudes towards the public discourse of HIV-AIDS.

**The ubiquity of their Knowledge Sources about HIV-AIDS.** Their responses also indicated that there is no lack of knowledge about HIV-AIDS in that both online and offline information sources carried content on said illness. Traditional media like TV (news) and movies were revealed as vital sources of information. Persons with HIV, friends, family, and members of the LGBTQ+ community were also cited as a source of information. Many of the participants shared that they get a lot of information from the Internet, mostly social media (Twitter). Most of them also shared that they were able to learn about HIV-AIDS through school activities like classes in high school ("Biology") and college ("Science and Modern Technology") handled by a General Education teacher, and seminars organized together with an HIV-AIDS advocacy organization who exposed them to people living with HIV (PLHIV) in a major school venue ("Fleur de Lis Auditorium"). Altogether, these present legitimate sources of information. That said, there is no reason why a student can go about his or her daily life without encountering any particular source of information on HIV-AIDS. Barely out of their first year in St. Paul University Manila, the university, through the initiative of concerned faculty members and organizations already provided them access to vital information about HIV-AIDS, including an actual encounter with a PLHIV which no one ever had before the seminar in school.

**Conditioning B.** The selected students who were exposed to school activities and Pablo's film that chronicled the life of a young man who experienced stigma upon learning that he contracted HIV, meanwhile, revealed the following concerning their knowledge on HIV-AIDS.

**Brief and Partial Knowledge.** The five participants shared their knowledge on HIV-AIDS using one to three very short sentences, mostly revolving around the nature (“disease”/“ailment”) of the problem, severity (“dangerous”/“can cause death”/“no medicine or treatment”/“cannot be cured”), mode of transmission (without bias towards sexual intercourse), and its relationship to immunity. No disclaimers were expressed regarding their limited knowledge.

**No Reservations on the Use of ‘Sex’.** While three of five of the participants openly used the word ‘sex’ when they shared their knowledge about HIV-AIDS, the remaining two did not allude to sex using other terms. This means that there was no intent to avoid using the term and that, seemingly, the participants in this group have no issues with it.

**Excited to Know More.** Two of the five students in this group expressed being “excited” about talking about HIV-AIDS in public. One was excited to know more. The other was excited despite feeling awkward on public discussions of HIV-AIDS. The urgency of HIV-AIDS seems very strong among the three other participants in this group that there is no reason to believe they would prefer to not know more.

**Mixed Responses about HIV-AIDS.** The participants of this group noted that they struggle with HIV-AIDS as a topic in public discourse. The urgency and their lack of knowledge on the issue seem to stress out one of the participants who confessed, "I feel nervous when I talk about it in public because I know that it's a very pressing and sensitive issue. I also know that I am not that knowledgeable about the topic". Another felt "sad" knowing that PLHIV are being avoided by others because of their illness. One was "afraid" knowing there was "no cure and can lead to death". Finally, two expressed "excite(ment)" being able to talk about it in public, even if there is some sense of awkwardness that they feel. Gaining "knowledge and awareness" was considered important by another participant.

**No Call for Sharing Knowledge.** Despite being disturbed by HIV-AIDS, and their acknowledgment of the seriousness of the problem and the suffering of PLHIV, none of the participants expressed a desire to share what they know with those who know less.

**Personal over Mediated Knowledge Sources.** Most of the participants reported that they get most of their information about HIV-AIDS from the university, particularly in a seminar they attended and in a science subject, both of which were required in the university. These were the same activity and subject previously mentioned in the Conditioning A group. One participant went online for information (WebMD), and read the World Health Organization pamphlets brought by his mother who works for said organization. In this group, it is clear that the ‘personal’ is more influential than the ‘mediated’; and yet, they appear less hesitant to talk about HIV-AIDS in public. Unlike the first group, though, this group was made aware of more HIV-AIDS advocacy groups, the first being Red Ribbon Foundation (also encountered by the first group), and the second being Love Yourself (who provided HIV testing during the screening of Pablo’s film in the NCCA), and Love Life, Pablo’s advocacy organization.

**Conditioning C.** The students who attended a research forum on HIV-AIDS organized by the Department of Science and Technology-National Research Council of the Philippines over and above the learning experiences of Conditioning B group revealed the following concerning their knowledge on HIV-AIDS.

**Elaborated and Extensive Knowledge.** The participants shared their knowledge on HIV-AIDS using one to four very complex sentences, mostly revolving around the nature (“infection”/“disease”/“illness”) of the problem, severity (“life-threatening”/“serious”/“fast-spreading”/“stigmatized”), mode of transmission (all modes cited without underscoring one over the others), and its relationship to immunity. Unlike the other groups, some participants mentioned available therapies, the process of destroying the immune system, and prejudices against

PLHIV. Despite the same number of sentences, this group seemed to have more things to say, including special terms (“anti-retroviral therapy”/”viral load”/”opportunistic infections”).

**No Reservations on the Use of ‘Sex’.** The use of sex was more in the context of explaining the mode of transmission (“sexual transmission”/”sexual fluids”/”vaginal sex”/”anal sex”/”sexual intercourse”). However, not all 10 participants needed to refer to sex to share their knowledge on HIV-AIDS. Most of the elaboration revolved around elaborating how infection happens, revealing the most scientific knowledge of all the groups in this study.

**Need to Spread the Knowledge.** Unlike the previous groups, the participants of this group expressed the need to inform others about HIV-AIDS “to raise awareness and also to address the concerns and needs of those who tested positive”. Some emphasized public discourse as necessary for “prevention” and largely towards “education”. One participant mentioned that “becoming more aware of HIV-AIDS (can help us become) an instrument in helping those people living with this serious disease”. Another participant mentioned using social media to help stop the stigma. Another asserted that public discourse is necessary to “set an example to those who want to see and set a positive environment for people living with HIV-AIDS”. A couple mentioned that “open-mindedness” was needed to accomplish said goals. Spreading the knowledge requires the use of the proper words as “certain words and language may have a negative meaning for people at high risk for HIV or those living with HIV”.

**Sharing Knowledge towards Empathy and Action.** Unlike the two previous groups, this group highlighted the need to be empathic and action-oriented when it comes to dealing with HIV-AIDS. Many mentioned “reducing the stigma”. Another sought the end of “stereotyping”. This group appears more pro-active and considers themselves sources of knowledge about HIV-AIDS than receivers.

**No Gap between Knowing and Knowledge Sharing.** In this case, their knowledge is enough to render them confident to help spread the word in public spaces. Their knowledge has enabled them to look beyond their limitations and focus more on the urgency of making people more aware of HIV-AIDS and responsive to PLHIV needs and concerns. Their knowledge has helped develop in them a concern for the marginalized, a sense of “obligation” and “citizen responsibility”, and a desire to “enlighten” and “open the minds” of the public. They expressed no reservations about becoming information sources themselves, except for two who preferred talking to persons who were more open-minded and willing to learn than those who were not.

**The ubiquity of their Knowledge Sources about HIV-AIDS.** Like the first group, the participants in this group have an extensive network of sources of information on HIV-AIDS. The forum organized by the NRCP was the most cited source, followed by online sources, lessons in classes, advocates (including teachers), and lastly, traditional media. Organizations like the Red Ribbon Care Management Foundation and the Love Life Project were also sources outside of the school that helped empower them for HIV-AIDS. However, unlike the first group (Conditioning A), this group was more proactive in their response to PLHIV and not just to the topic of HIV-AIDS. The difference between the two lies in the film they watched and the forum they attended. Between the second group (Conditioning B) and this group, the difference lies in the high profile NRCP research forum that featured many high-profile advocates of HIV-AIDS, who, unlike the non-famous actors and non-actor advocates of Pablo’s film and screening event, drew a lot of attention for the impressionable minds of the students of this group. Thus, it seems that not all sources of information on HIV-AIDS have equal value or are assigned equal importance by their viewers. Likewise, the accumulation of sources that are highly valued by institutions like government units, celebrities, and even the university takes precedence over the personal choices of information sources of the participants.

### **Perceptions on the University as HIV-AIDS Educator**

Knowing that all three groups were exposed to the different educational activities with the school's permission, it was crucial to see how the different groups perceived the university as an educator in the context of HIV-AIDS.

**Conditioning A.** Perceptions of the students in this group range from "not open", "fairly open", "open", to "very open". The dominant perception is "open" and it stems from the following beliefs:

They (the school) want the students to be more extra careful because of the serious disease.

... (It was) for us (students) to know more and understand it fully. They also let us ask them questions.

... (The school) wants us to know what it's really about...

... it may help us to care for ourselves...

... it is for our own good...

Our school has a big concern about their students and they did not fail to remind us to be careful.

... (It was) to not make students believe inaccurate information regarding HIV-AIDS.

The quotes above indicate that most of the students see the good in the intention of the university to inform them about HIV-AIDS. A few, however, dissent by saying that the school is not "really open" because "it is too sensitive and... that the sisters are not also open about it". One declared that s/he has not "heard someone talk about HIV in school" despite the "posters (on HIV-AIDS) around the school" and the fact that "they allow seminars like this in the university considering that it is a Catholic school... (many of which) feel that it shouldn't be discussed in this age". One student qualified that HIV-AIDS may have been permitted as a topic of discussion because it is a "medical issue". Nevertheless, these contentions seem to be unfounded and reflect, more than anything, their personal biases against the general conservative stance of any Catholic university.

**Conditioning B.** There was agreement among the participants of this group that the university is open about HIV-AIDS as an area of learning. They qualified that allowing other "organizations" to talk about it in school, and "requiring" students to attend a seminar about it are indicators of openness. The school was also perceived by one participant as seeking to "inspire" people concerning HIV-AIDS. If any misgivings, one participant declared that s/he is "just not sure about what the professors and staff have to say", indicating a desire to have a collective voice heard and not just a select few advocates coming from some advocate units in the university.

**Conditioning C.** This group had the most positive perception of the university as a source of information and empowerment to HIV-AIDS. Their responses ranged from "not open enough", to "open", to "quite open", to "very open". Because the university "gives permission to its students to attend and engage in different activities all about HIV-AIDS" and "exposes "the students to realities that many people face" it is perceived as open not just to "fully" talk about HIV-AIDS but also collaborate with HIV-AIDS advocacy organizations (Red Ribbon). As such it is considered as addressing not only achieving "academic excellence but also (engagement in) social issues... that caters to what the students need". Thus, it is not difficult to say for one participant to say that the university has become open to "talk about these issues and confront them with decency and compassion". However, one student shared that because the school has "yet to accept that people have sex... (and that) we can't do anything to stop it..." there remain topics that have yet to be discussed freely and the limitations or restrictions "hinders us to further discuss the topic(s) and take further actions about it". Despite openness to HIV-AIDS, thus, there is still room to grow in the area of openness, according to the said

participant. Discussing HIV-AIDS in the course “Science, Technology, and Society” is a good step towards desensitizing students to usually taboo topics in Catholic universities.

### **Areas of convergence and divergence between the three groups**

**Convergences.** It was made clear that students have access to information about HIV-AIDS and that the university is not amiss in integrating the topic both inside and outside of the classroom. The participants across all groups judge access to information about HIV-AIDS as positive and indicative of openness of the university and genuine concern for their health, safety, social involvement, and realistic education/formation. All participants were appreciative of the university’s efforts to inform them about HIV-AIDS inside and outside of the campus.

**Divergences.** There are some areas where the three groups differed and they are as follows:

***The Extent of Expression of Knowledge.*** Of the three groups the Conditioning C group, the most exposed to off-campus activities on HIV-AIDS were the most confident in sharing their knowledge about the problem. One could say that after having received information from more than one source, particularly, sources outside of the university, participants of Conditioning C were more assured of the certainty of their knowledge. The university, being a Catholic higher education institution, remains perceived, even by its students, as being restrictive of certain information; hence, an opportunity to validate knowledge coming from university sources via external parties empowers one to be more confident about his or her knowledge about a highly confidential topic. A third source (NRCP research forum) seems to be key in truly empowering the students in that information given during this event was research-based and more than one organization was present to build a consensus regarding knowledge on HIV-AIDS.

***Use of ‘Sex’ in Reporting One’s Knowledge.*** Of the three groups, it was Conditioning Group A which revealed the most attempts to substitute the word ‘sex’ with other ‘sex-neutral’ terms. Because this group had the most limited access to information about HIV-AIDS outside of the university, relying more on the classes that included the topic and a required seminar, the collaborating organization of which was selected by the university, there was very little exposure to the use of the word ‘sex’ in third party spaces or spaces not defined by the authority of the religious sisters that run the university. In the NCCA and NRCP events, resource speakers used the word ‘sex’ more frequently and in a less reserved manner, sounding more natural and ‘sex-positive’ without sounding vulgar or excessive. This allowed for greater desensitization of students in Conditioning B and Conditioning C groups to the use of ‘sex’ in regular conversation, which, consequently, resulted in the more casual and less restrained use of ‘sex’ in sharing their knowledge about HIV-AIDS in this study.

***Public Discourse about HIV-AIDS.*** Among the three groups, it was the Conditioning C group that manifested a desire to use the knowledge they gained from all HIV-AIDS learning opportunities to help increase public awareness and reduce stigma for PLHIV and those who seek to publicly discuss HIV-AIDS. Unlike the two other groups, they have seen the greatest number of people talk about HIV-AIDS in the NRCP research forum, on top of the other advocates who were in the screening of Pablo’s film. Knowing too that this group had seen the greatest number of government rewards for advocates of HIV-AIDS and their activities, they witnessed more instances of positive institutional support for people who spoke to advance HIV-AIDS advocacies - the highest levels of support. It is not surprising, thus, to find this group to have the greatest desire to share their knowledge about HIV-AIDS even if their knowledge, perhaps, is just at par with the other two groups.

***From Knowledge to Action.*** Among the three groups, it was the Conditioning C group that was more advanced in terms of their intent to help the HIV-AIDS advocacy. Unlike the two groups who were variably

grappling with their discomforts about what they know and how they feel about the issue, the Conditioning Group C participants were driven to help not just towards greater awareness but also a greater show of compassion for people who live with HIV-AIDS. While most, if not all, participants in the three groups had no personal relationship with any PLHIV, it was the third group that had the most exposure to advocates who were also PLHIV. They saw champions of the cause and not merely victims of the disease. While Conditioning A group and Conditioning B group were similarly having mixed emotions and expressed different levels of anxieties and uncertainties about sharing their knowledge for the greater good, the latter, exposed to an activity organized by a third party in a government facility, had lesser misgivings about helping the cause either by increasing awareness, using social media to widen the reach of information, or treating a PLHIV personally more compassionately. Thus, the experience of action done by organizations other than the university seems to help drive a desire to spur social action in response to a problem that concerns all of the participants.

**From Knowledge to Knowledge-Sharing.** Among the three groups, it was the Conditioning C group that showed no gap between desiring to know and letting others know. Where the two other groups showed either reservation to share what they know (Conditioning A group) or had very little indication of a desire to share what they know (Conditioning B group), the third group drew immediately from their sense of being empowered by knowledge and were the least hesitant about sharing their knowledge to help the cause. It seems clear that exposing students to more knowledge sharers helps foster courage to do the same, even if, technically, they are no experts or have little experience with PLHIV, HIV-AIDS, or any existing HIV-AIDS campaign. The desire to share knowledge seems to come from realizing the urgency of the problem expressed by many sectors (which they experienced in the NRCP research forum).

**Personal over Mediated Sources of Knowledge.** The second group, the Conditioning B group, had the most limited sources compared to the two other groups, the Conditioning A group, and Conditioning C group. This is particularly interesting in that they have very little difference with the other two groups psychographically, except for the academic program they come from – music. A closer analysis of the group, being less numerous as a sample, and most emotionally driven as learners, relationships among them would tend to be deeper and the influence of peers stronger in issues that concern them. This assertion needs to be further examined in later studies but there is very little reason to believe that they are less connected to online sources than the participants from the two other groups.

Table 1. Comparative table showing areas of divergence in the knowledge of participants on HIV-AIDS

Conditioning A	Conditioning B	Conditioning C
Brief and Partial Knowledge	Brief and Partial Knowledge	<b>Elaborated and Extensive Knowledge</b>
<b>Reservations on the Use of ‘Sex’</b>	No Reservations on the Use of ‘Sex’	No Reservations on the Use of ‘Sex’
Need to Know More	Excited to Know More	<b>Need to Spread the Knowledge</b>
Discomfort in Sharing Knowledge	Mixed Responses about HIV-AIDS	<b>Sharing Knowledge towards Empathy and Action</b>
The gap between Knowing and Knowledge Sharing	No Call for Sharing Knowledge	<b>No Gap between Knowing and Knowledge Sharing</b>
The ubiquity of their Knowledge Sources about HIV-AIDS	<b>Personal over Mediated Knowledge Sources</b>	The ubiquity of their Knowledge Sources about HIV-AIDS

**Note:** The words in bold letters are intended to highlight the areas of divergence across the three groups

## **VII. Discussion**

The data above present several realities that help in engaging university students in HIV-AIDS advocacy. It would be good for the university to reflect and analyze the value of such realities in helping the university become a healthier, safer, more empowering, and inclusive learning environment.

### **Integration of HIV-AIDS in curriculum and co-curricular activities and greater collaboration**

The results suggest that learning about HIV-AIDS in the classroom through the initiative of a concerned faculty helps create the impression that some level of openness to the controversial issue exists in the learning environment. However, knowing that one or two teachers or organizations in the university are involved in educating students about HIV-AIDS is deemed inadequate to create a collective and unified effort to empower the students against the disease. The notion that the university is still largely conservative in matters relating to the sexual lives of its students is likely to overpower the efforts of the few concerned parties and be inadequate to overturn such an impression to generate students' confidence in the university's pursuit of student welfare and wellbeing. This means enhancing the curriculum must go hand-in-hand with co-curricular activities that engage both government and non-government organizations, units within the university, and personalities large enough to impress upon students that there is a concerted effort towards developing greater awareness and driving social change to address HIV-AIDS.

### **More exposure to reinforcing activities outside of the university**

The results indicated that knowledge learned in the university is further validated when it is found or encountered outside the university. Given an existing perception among its students that the university, being traditional and conservative in more ways than one, will teach only what it deems similarly traditional and conservative, must encourage administrators to engage with like-minded institutions that help build a larger picture of empowerment where the university can play a key role. This calls for ongoing dialogues with different interest groups that can help provide a variety of activities that align with the core values of the university but cannot be provided by the university alone. This ensures that the students experience a continuity of learning that reinforces foundational learnings provided by the university.

### **Opportunities for Knowledge Dissemination and Application**

The data revealed that knowledge does not always translate immediately to its dissemination and application. Somewhere between knowing and disseminating, and knowing and applying lies a gap that must be filled by an urgency to share and act. Modeling action is key to student replication of the same and this requires that the university exposes students to activities where sharing of knowledge is valued and rewarded – both inside and outside the school. Often, students are expected to absorb knowledge in bulk before application. Many times, students apply the knowledge too late and feel very little urgency to repeat the application once grades for the application of knowledge – the reward – are given. Knowing this, there should be academic structures that seek to make a habit out of gaining, disseminating, and applying knowledge so that doing so in other contexts and situations becomes second nature to them. For example, learning a lesson must require sharing the lesson, either in the capacity of a peer tutor or member of a review group. Likewise, learning the principles behind the practice must entail constant practice and performance – a drill often seen in the training of musicians. This means the university must establish a cycle of knowing-sharing-applying across all learning opportunities so that it becomes almost automatic for them especially in times of social crisis.

### **Creating Concentric Circles of Empathy**

It was found that students were able to absorb the spirit of empathy from advocates they encountered outside of the school, many of whom are deeply committed to the cause of making environments safer and more

loving spaces, where prejudice, stereotyping, and judgmental attitude are not rewarded, if not condemned. This suggests that the university should establish networks of empathy at the many different layers of student engagement while they are in formation. Even though there is a constant lack of personal knowledge and relationship with a PLHIV among groups, particularly because PLHIV advocates are limited and many PLHIV are still fearful of social stigma attached to their illness, there is likely never going to be enough advocates to reach out to all the students in the country. And yet, data show that a personal encounter with PLHIV is greatly formative, the presence of committed advocates who are non-PLHIV is equally transformative. Hence, exposure to advocates of HIV-AIDS in all levels of formation must be encouraged so that students themselves become advocates who can be mobilized to other circles in the absence of PLHIV advocates.

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