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Contents

'JEEP-NICHE': COMPARATIVE EXPERIENTIAL STUDY OF JEEPNEY DRIVERS IN METRO MANILA UNDER THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT MODERNIZATION PROGRAM (PTMP)

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ABSTRACT

Jeepneys, a symbol of Filipino ingenuity, a mode of transport for the masses, and a 'niche' for many. With the Public Transport Modernization Program in place, this industry has been shaken up with new regulations and policies that aim to formalize this sector. Despite the policy's noble intention, it stirred a complex dynamic among stakeholders—particularly drivers. Utilizing a comparative case study design grounded in Rational Choice Theory and Institutional Theory, it investigates the motivations behind drivers' adherence or resistance—compliance dynamics, to the program among traditional and jeepney drivers in Metro Manila. Highlighting on how socio-economic factors, social pressures, and network effects influence drivers' decisions. The research reveals that financial constraints are a significant barrier to compliance while communal influences and support networks can impact conformity to the new standards. The study advocates for a more tailored approach to the modernization program, suggesting improvement in financial aiding mechanisms, community, engagement efforts, and network-building initiatives to enhance adherence. By offering a deeper insight into the drivers' compliance behaviors, this study contributes to valuable perspective for refining the implementation of the modernization program, ensuring it is more inclusive, and supportive to the unique needs of the jeepney community.

Keywords: Jeepney Modernization, Public Transportation, Policy Compliance Dynamics, Institutional Theory

INTRODUCTION

Passenger jeepneys in the Philippines are significant due to their blend of history, ingenuity, and cultural identity (Baltazar, et. al., 2024). Their origins can be traced back to the aftermath of World War II, when a gap in public transportation emerged. Filipinos, known for their resourcefulness, transformed military jeepneys left behind by Americans by extending their bodies, adding roofs, and decorating them with vibrant designs (Torre et al, 2019; Grava, 1972).

These iconic jeepneys not only became a daily commuter staple—accounting for about 40% of all motorized trips nationwide—but also symbolized Filipino core values such as resourcefulness and unity. They fostered connections among passengers through shared rides and close proximity, embodying the spirit of "bayanihan" (Baltazar et al., 2024; Parrucho & Padullo, 2023; Cruz, 2016; Gatarin, 2023). However, traditional jeepneys face challenges due to their aging conditions and outdated technology, including restricted accessibility for people with disabilities, high on-street rivalry contributing to traffic congestion, passenger safety concerns, and issues with environmental sustainability (Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020; Regidor et al., 2009).

However, despite such challenges, ordinary Filipinos favor jeepneys since it is the most affordable land-based transportation option (Mettke et. al., 2018; Ong et. al., 2023). In response to the urgent need to rehabilitate the public transportation particularly on jeepneys, the government launched the Public Utility Modernization Program (PUVMP) in 2017, in virtue of the Department of Transportation's Department Order No. 2017-011, now rebranded as Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP) as the amended version of the program under DOTr Department Order 2023-022. The program

maintains its emphasis on the modernization by complying with safety and environmental standards, and operational sustainability of the means of public transportation (Cruz, 2024).

The program mandates the phase-out of old public utility vehicles (PUVs) aging 15 years old and above, ensuring that PUVs adhere to the emission, specifications, and safety requirements set by the modernization program, that seeks to set a bar for public transportation standards in the Philippines (Gatarin, 2023; Malasique et al., 2022). The program is also aligned with the government's vision of AmBisyon Natin 2040—in achieving an efficient, affordable, and environmentally sustainable transport system (Lontoc, 2017; NEDA, 2017). Which also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals 9 and 11 of the United Nations—building a resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization, and creating inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities with access to safe, affordable, and sustainable public transportation (Lontoc, 2017).

Despite the noble intention of the program, it faced a lot of pushback and resistance from various stakeholders including transportation groups and allied political groups due to the financial hurdles that hindered drivers and operators to comply with the program (Sunio et. al., 2019; Tacderas, 2022; Tulad, 2023). Which led to numerous protests and transport strikes since 2017, with some groups calling for the total cancellation of the PUV Modernization Program (Sunio et. al., 2019; Tulad, 2023). Critics argue that the programs burden small drivers and operators disproportionately and labeled the program as anti-poor and envisaging financial hardships to the vulnerable sector of jeepney drivers and operators—with the high costs of loan obligations to comply with the modernization program (Pontawe & Napalang, 2018).

However, the proponents of the PTMP emphasize the program's potential to professionalize and enhance the livelihoods of jeepney industry stakeholders (Bautista, 2024). Initial consolidation to cooperatives or corporations is expected to streamline jeepney deployment and route rationalization. Despite the complexities and opposition to the program, the government remains committed to realizing the program's objectives for a more sustainable and efficient transportation system. The program will also cater for the affected jeepney drivers and operators with alternative livelihood options within cooperatives or consolidated PUV entities (Marcos, 2023; Bautista, 2024).

Despite existing research on individual jeepney drivers and the broader modernization program, a gap persists in understanding why some jeepney drivers and operators comply while others do not with the regulations set by the PTMP. This paper explores how socio-economic factors, social pressure within jeepney communities, and network effects influence Metro Manila's compliance and non-compliance among traditional and modern jeepney drivers.

Using Rational Choice Theory of Smith (1776) backed by Institutional Theory of Scott (2008), this study analyzes the motivations behind compliance and non-compliance with the PUV Modernization regulations. By examining these factors, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding emphasizing the compliance dynamics of jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila. Through a comparative analysis, the study examines the reasons why certain jeepneys adhere to the program's regulations while others do not. This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in compliance with PUV Modernization. This identifies areas for improvement in program manifestation, ensuring stakeholders in the jeepney sector are not left behind. Moreover, this research could offer valuable recommendations for legal and policy reforms to make the modernization program more inclusive and supportive of jeepney drivers' unique needs. Lastly, study's findings could inform discussions on how transport policies interplay with these legal areas, potentially advocating for a holistic approach to lawmaking that considers the multifaceted impacts of legal regulations on various stakeholders.

The study's objectives are: (1) To investigate the socio-economic factors influencing jeepney drivers' and operators' decision to comply with or resist the Public Transport Modernization Program in Metro Manila. (2) To analyze the motivations and demotivations for compliance and non-compliance with the Public Transport Modernization Program among jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila, using institutional theory as the lens. (3) To evaluate perceived challenges and opportunities associated with compliance and non-compliance with the Public Transport Modernization Program from the perspectives of jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila.

With that, this study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What are the specific socio-economic factors influencing the decisions of jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila to comply or not comply with the Public Transport Modernization Program? (e.g., income level, vehicle ownership, family size), (2) Using institutional theory as a lens, what are the key motivations and demotivations driving jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila to comply or not comply with the Public Transport Modernization Program?, (3) How do the perceived challenges and opportunities associated with compliance or non-compliance with the Public Transport Modernization Program influence the decision-making of jeepney drivers and operators in Metro Manila?

This study only explores the factors influencing compliance and non-compliance with the Public Transport Modernization Program

(PTMP) among traditional and modern jeepney drivers, specifically within Metro Manila. The research confined its investigation to this geographical area due to its distinct urban characteristics and transportation dynamics, providing a focused analysis. Thus, the study did not extend to the broader dynamics of other stakeholders, such as commuters, government entities, or other forms of land-based public transportation apart from jeepneys.

Literature Review

Challenges on Traditional Jeepney & System
Traditional jeepney drivers' "boundary system" as a method of earning wages is riddled with inefficiencies and issues. Under this method, drivers strive to fulfill a daily profit target, which frequently results in delays and operational issues. Drivers usually wait to fill up their vehicles before starting their routes, which causes aggravation for passengers due to prolonged travel times (Roces, 2023; Bautista & Moya, 2023). This delay becomes even worse when operators charge a daily fee, which encourages drivers to prioritize popular stops over less frequent ones, resulting in on-street competition and potentially reckless driving behaviors that can lead to accidents (Roces, 2023; Bautista & Moya, 2023; Mettke et al., 2018).

Moreover, the decentralized franchise system complicated the monitoring and control of the number of vehicles on a specific route (Roces, 2023). Moreover, the physical design of jeepneys has accessibility in terms of mobility inside the vehicle for passengers, as these medium-sized vehicles demand passengers to bend down when boarding and have a restricted legroom that reduces passenger comfort, especially when the jeep is fully loaded (Ong et al., 2023; Amponsah & Adams, 2016).

Although jeepneys have the capability to operate on either unleaded gasoline or diesel, studies revealed that jeepneys contribute to fifteen percent (15%) of the particulate matter emission in Metro Manila (Westerman, 2018). Studies emphasize that there is a need for collaboration between government initiatives and jeepney operators in prioritizing safety measures, regular maintenance (GIZ, 2019; Agaton et al., 2020), and drivers' defensive driving training, along with strict enforcement of traffic regulations (Ong et al., 2023). To address these challenges, the collaborative efforts of the government bodies under DOTr led to the development of the PUV Modernization Program in 2017.

The Rationale of PUV Modernization
The Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP), formerly PUV Modernization Program, aims to overhaul the country's public transport system, focusing on passenger safety and environmental law compliance—the Clean Air Act of 1999 or Republic Act 8749 (Lontoc, 2017; Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020). The program encompasses ten key components, including regulatory reform, route rationalization, fleet modernization, and financing of modern PUVs, with the goal of establishing modern regulations for PUVs based on passenger demands (DOTr, 2017). This regulatory strategy emphasizes reducing on-street competition by mandating the consolidation of jeepney operators as cooperatives or corporations to meet each transport route demands, thereby regulating the dispatch of traversing jeeps on the streets (GIZ, 2016; Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020).

It is crucial to address the emission problems for jeepney fleets to reduce carbon dioxide and particulate matter emissions (Fabian & Gota, 2009). With the existence of pertinent laws such as the Clean Air Act, the rationale for PTMP is also present in the government's

long-term vision, AmBisyon Natin 2040, that aims to provide Filipinos a "matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay" (stable, comfortable, and secured life). Particularly in "maginhawang buhay" through connectivity and mobility improvements (NEDA, 2017). Thereupon, in the primary objective of the PTMP to steer the modernization trend towards sustainable alternatives (GIZ, 2016; Tacderas et al., 2021), prioritizing road-based public transport is crucial for reaping short and mid-term benefits, aligning with ongoing mass transit enhancements and aiming to decrease overall motorization in the Philippines (NEDA, 2017).

The PTMP focuses on modernizing PUV fleets, streamlining franchise procedures, and promoting industry consolidation (Malasique et al., 2022; Mateo-Babiano, 2020). Industry consolidation aims to optimize revenue and minimize costs, supported by government agencies like the DOTr and the Office for Transport Cooperatives (OTC) (Pontawe & Napalang, 2018; Mateo-Babiano, 2016). The regulatory approach seeks to reduce on-street competition, necessitating most current operators to merge to meet route demands, with franchise standards now requiring applicants to be cooperatives or corporations (GIZ, 2016; Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020). The introduction of the Philippine National Standard (PNS) 2126:2017 for PUVs, developed by the Department of Trade and Industry's Bureau of Philippine Standards (BPS) in collaboration with the Truck Manufacturer's Association (TMA), sets stringent guidelines for PUVs regarding dimensions, seating arrangements, capacity, and maximum mass (Ang, 2018; Roces, 2023).

The standard aims to ensure that there is uniformity and that modern jeeps are equipped with safety features such as dash cams, speed limiters, CCTV Cameras, and automatic collection systems (Roces, 2023). With that, modern jeepneys are also reckoned to feature amenities such as air conditioning and accessibility ramps for persons with disabilities. Moreover, the lifeline of PUVs is now restricted to a maximum of 15 years (Patena, 2018; Roces, 2023). These enhancements in regulating PUVs not only improve the comfort and convenience for passengers but also align with the extensive goals of enhancing the safety and sustainability of the public transportation sector (Roces, 2023).

Implications and Challenges of PUV Modernization
The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) will only grant franchises or the certificate of public convenience (CPC) to qualifying applicants such as consolidated cooperatives or corporations, non-compliance to the consolidation rule will lead to cessation of operations (DOTr, 2017). As of 2024, approximately 73.96% of jeepneys have joined cooperatives nationwide, while in Metro Manila, the consolidation rate of jeepneys is only at around 51% (Sadongdong, 2024).

The introduction of modern PUVs offers a significant opportunity to improve air quality, as these vehicles comply with stricter emission standards, leading to a potential decrease in air pollutants like particulate matter and nitrogen oxides (GIZ, 2023). Studies by the Blacksmith Institute and Clean Air Asia Center (2017) estimate that significant reductions in these pollutants will contribute to cleaner air and improve public health. However, regular maintenance of modern PUVs is also crucial to ensure sustained emission control. While modern PUVs offer environmental benefits, affordability remains a major concern. The high costs of acquiring these vehicles may necessitate fare increases, potentially disproportionately impacting low-income Filipinos who rely heavily on public transportation (Mendoza, 2021). Similarly, Malasique et al. (2021) point out that the program might lead to job losses for some jeepney drivers and operators who need help to afford the cost of modernization.

Despite the challenges, the Public Transport Modernization Program offers potential benefits for both drivers and commuters. The profit-sharing models can incentivize program participation and offer a more stable income, along with a sense of ownership of the cooperative. Membership in cooperatives can grant access to social benefits such as SSS and PhilHealth, which is absent in the informalized jeepney sector. Additionally, the program can create opportunities for drivers to gain new skills and certifications necessary to operate modern PUVs and enhance their employability with the new system (Office for Transportation Cooperatives, 2024). Moreover, Modern PUVs offer improved efficiency and comfort. Features such as GPS-based route planning and designated lanes can optimize traffic flow, reducing congestion and leading to faster commuter times (Mettke et al., 2016). Additionally, improved comfort and amenities such as air conditioning could attract new riders, particularly those who opted for private vehicles (Redman et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework
The study utilized rational choice theory and institutional theory as the backbone for understanding the study. Rational Choice Theory of Adam Smith (1776) proposes that individuals make decisions based on a calculated assessment of a person's own interests, weighing the benefits and cost of various options to maximize their utility. Institutional Theory of W. Richard Scott (2008) on the other hand proposes that organizations, influenced by societal norms, values, and laws, adopt structures and practices from both formal and informal institutions to gain legitimacy and support, even if those practices aren't the most efficient. Formal institutions include laws, regulations, and government bodies, while informal institutions encompass cultural norms, values, and social expectations. Within the implementation of the Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP), these theories are utilized to analyze why certain jeepney drivers and operators comply with the program while others do not.

By studying the surrounding rational considerations and the interaction between legal institutions and the informal practices of jeepney drivers and operators, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how legal and governance structures impact compliance and resistance within regulated sectors. Furthermore, the theory offers insights into the broader implications for public transportation policy in Metro Manila. In acknowledging the complex interplay of institutional pressures and organizational responses, policymakers can design more effective and accepted policies.

In comparison to development theory and co-production theory, rational choice theory and institutional theory are applicable frameworks in understanding the reason behind compliance dynamics of jeepney drivers to PTMP. Development theory focuses primarily on broader social change, while co-production theory emphasizes citizen engagement and empowerment. Therefore, rational choice theory emerges as the preferred framework due to its emphasis on individual decision-making processes where people act based on perceived costs and benefits, with institutional theory that emphasizes formal rules and social norms that align well with the decision-making process and behaviors within organizations—the implementation of the PUV Modernization and the established tradition of jeepneys.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative exploratory case study design to explore the compliance dynamics of traditional and modern jeepney drivers with the Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP). The case study design was used to facilitate the in-depth detailed

exploration of a bounded system—traditional jeepney drivers (driver-operators), and modern jeepney drivers (cooperative members). As Creswell (2013) highlighted, case studies are effective for developing a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon. Furthermore, following Neuman's (2002) exploratory method, this research delved into a topic that is under-researched or not well-understood, provisioning new insights into the compliance behaviors of jeepney drivers.

The study used a purposive sampling method, as recommended by Crochan (1977), to ensure the selection of individuals with specific characteristics vital to the research goals, thereby ensuring a diverse range of participants. The sample consisted of ten (10) traditional, and ten (10) modern jeepney drivers, for a total of twenty (20) participants. This sample size aligns with the recommendations of Hagaman & Wutich (2006), which suggests that 16 or fewer interviews can be sufficient to identify common themes, while a larger sample of 20 to 40 participants ensures data saturation.

The data collection was conducted from September 12-18, 2024, through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with randomly selected traditional and modern jeepney drivers who met the qualifications set by the researcher. These KIIs were chosen as the primary method for gathering data to gain a holistic understanding of the factors influencing their adherence to PTMP. KIIs are also a practical means of getting participants to the study as Focused Group Discussion (FGD) is not viable as the availability of jeepney drivers varies and there is a low likelihood of gathering the number of participants at the same time and place. The researcher maintained a neutral and objective stance during the interviews to mitigate potential biases. Participants in this study were not offered any compensation, ensuring their responses remained uninfluenced.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures, and written informed consent was obtained. Anonymization was applied during the analysis and reporting stages to safeguard the confidentiality and identity of the participants. The researcher implemented strict measures to safeguard the data collected by securing all transcripts, and audio recordings with confidentiality. Access to these materials was limited to the researcher and his adviser, in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and the policies of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran - Manila. The data will only be retained for necessary duration to complete this research, after which it will be securely disposed of.

The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis where codes were identified and grouped into themes allowing for a comparative analysis of compliance dynamics between two groups of jeepney drivers—traditional and modern. Additionally, the comparative analysis helped to systematically examine the collected data, revealing patterns, relationships, and potential explanations for compliance and non-compliance of jeepney drivers with PTMP. Moreover, a triangulation method was employed to strengthen the credibility of the research findings. This involved incorporating multiple data sources, including KIIs with the participants and insights from relevant regulatory bodies such as the representative of the transportation department through the Public Transport Modernization Program Central Project Management Office (PTMP CPMO), a specialized unit within the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the

challenges and opportunities in complying with the regulations under the Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP), identifying the areas for improvement in program manifestation, ensuring no jeepney drivers are left behind The introduction of the PTMP marks a significant shift in the jeepney industry, prompting diverse reactions from its stakeholders. The program initially intended to solve the numbing problem of the public transport sector, being an informal economy that is subjected to unstable income variability and lack of social benefits. It is a program that is a product if national lobbying efforts of the National Confederation of Transport Unions, intending that PUV drivers and operators—which includes jeepneys, shall have an improved job security and working employment protections through the establishments of cooperative or corporations as an avenue of managing the same (International Transport Workers Confederation, 2022).

Socio-economic Factors Influencing Compliance to PTMP
ofessionalize jeepney drivers and enhance the livelihood within the jeepney industry. However, for traditional jeepney drivers, the financial burden is a major concern as Participants 1 and 3 highlighted the lack of capacity of their association-turned-cooperatives to purchase new vehicles. In contrast, Participant 3 fears the burden of installment payments, expressing that *"it's not that I don't want a modern jeep. The income is low, the price of gasoline is high, and the ownership [of the jeep] is not mine."*

Income variability is also presented as a pressing concern, with Participant 3 expressing concern about the proposed fixed salary system brought about by the cooperative system, which they believe offers lower earnings than their current variable-based income. Corollary, supported by Participants 5 and 9, which emphasized that the modernization threatens their financial autonomy. As Driver 9 noted, *"It would be better if someone provided the modern jeepney units to us for free or covered the payment. Regardless, we still need to figure out a way to cover the costs."* Additionally, drivers are concerned that the nature of their routes does not justify the cost and necessity of acquiring modern jeepney units—as highlighted by Participant 8.

Moreover, the preference for traditional jeepneys due to their durability and quality emerged as a theme, as Participants 6 and 7 argued that upgrading the existing jeepneys might be a more beneficial option than switching to modern ones. They highlighted the fear that modernization could compromise vehicle quality, stating, *"Instead of [traditional] jeepney phaseout, the government should provide us with assistance for repairs, spare parts for the jeep; we'll just fix [or upgrade] it."* Lastly, there is a clear resistance to government mandates as most of the participants feel pressured or coerced to comply with the franchise consolidation under tight deadlines set by the government, which they see as unrealistic given their financial situations and the economic factors such as fluctuating crude oil prices.

On the flip side, modern jeepney drivers navigated different socio-economic realities. For some, the modernization program as articulated by Participants 14, 15, and 16, provided the stability of income and acquiring social benefits, increased revenue and enhance vehicle safety—an aspect underscored by the International Labor Office (2013), as crucial for securing better working conditions, social protection and inclusive development for transitioning workers from the informal to formal economy. However, for some modern jeepney drivers, the modernization only meets a practical need. Participant 11, for instance, finds the modernization set-up better suited to his physical limitations as an older driver, emphasizing the social benefits, stating, *"This jeep [referring to modern jeep] is air-*

conditioned and doesn't emit [black] smoke. This transformation is not just about comfort, especially for me. I'm old; I might get sick if exposed to smoke."

Nonetheless, the sentiment towards government assistance and subsidies is mixed, while most of the modern jeepney drivers agreed that the support was sufficient, Participants 15 and 16 feels that the government support needs to be more robust to cover the high cost of amortization of the vehicles to comply with the modernization program.

In response to these multifaceted concerns, the government through the Public Transport Modernization Program Central Project Management Office (PTMP CPMO), expressed their assurance that the transportation department had reissued a new directive under DOTr Department Order 2023-022 to address concerns of both compliant and non-compliant parties with the modernization program. This includes easing the compliance requirements, such as reducing the fleet size requirements and adjusting the route rationalization criteria—in coordination with the respective LGUs. Increased subsidies are said to also be in place for purchasing modern PUVs, from PHP 80,000 - PHP 160,000 to PHP 280,000, to assist drivers in making the transition more affordable. Furthermore, to address drivers' grievances and concerns, the transportation department said that it is now focusing on easing technical compliance requirements and providing financial assistance through government-owned lenders such as Landbank and DBP.

Motivations and Demotivations for Compliance with PTMP

Motivation for Compliance
The modernization program mandates that drivers must consolidate to form cooperatives or corporations, it aims to standardize the working conditions, reduce individual costs—that are a burden to single driver-operator and under-operator drivers, and secure government mandated benefits (Lago, 2024). While some traditional drivers coherently emphasize their support and affirm the need for jeepney modernization. Participant 5 emphasized that he is in favor of modernization however with reservations they should remain in a single/driver operator set-up and not in a corporation or cooperatives. This sentiment is similarly expressed by Participant 9, which fears the loss of the historical vehicle type and cultural identity amidst modernization pressures, stating, "They [government] are replacing jeepneys with mini buses. It's not a jeep anymore; it's not the same—the look and the feel."

Moreover, many drivers desire economic security and higher income associated with traditional jeepney operations. As Participant 1 states, "I greatly prefer this lifestyle, where I'm not overly stressed about pursuing my earnings. With our daily quotas set at around five thousand pesos, there's a promising incentive: if we exceed that amount, we receive additional rewards for surpassing our quota." This perspective underscores the belief that 'hard work leads to significant income,' aligning closely with their values and financial goals. A sentiment also echoed by Participant 10 who emphasized that despite the potential amount of government subsidies, the financial burden because of modern vehicles remains insurmountable given the level of their current earnings, this underscoring financial dependency on the traditional jeepney and its system.

Contrarily, the majority of modern jeepney drivers believe that modernization inspired them to comply with the program because of the economic benefits they gained. Several factors stimulate compliance with the PTMP, notably among modern jeepney drivers.

Many drivers, including Participants 12, 13, 19, and 20, are motivated by the prospect of employment security and the desire to support their families. Participants 15 and 16 noted improved working conditions in newer jeepneys, such as increased safety features and comfort, as key motivators. Moreover, Participants 17 and 18 emphasized the cooperative model's operational efficiencies, highlighting benefits like predictable revenue and collective decision-making. They noted, "Being part of a cooperative has accelerated our operations. Our cooperative actively participates in making critical decisions, which streamlines our processes. Based on my experience, the modernization system for public utility vehicles (PUVs) is vastly superior to previous methods."

Perceived institutional barriers, such as the need for further government support and information, have eroded drivers' confidence in the modernization process. Participant 4 laments the lack of government support while emphasizing the lack of timely reliable information, suggesting a communication gap that exacerbates the drivers' concerns about modernization. Similarly, Participant 6 expresses anxiety about the shift to a cooperative model, which reduces individual authority over their activities and reinforces emotions of insecurity and impotence in the face of government mandates. Traditional jeepney drivers are intensely aware of how political leadership affects their livelihoods, as Participant 3 observed. He also stated that changes are driven by whoever is in power, implying a clear relationship between political stability and economic well-being. The disappointment expressed over unmet promises by previous administrations and election campaign promises illustrates their suspicion and cynicism of government modernization programs.

Demotivation for Compliance
The initial phase of the modernization program, aimed at industry consolidation, seeks to optimize revenue and minimize miscellaneous expenses of drivers (Pontawe & Napalang, 2018; Mateo-Babiano, 2016). However, the transition to modernization is fraught with demotivations particularly for traditional jeepney drivers, and initial reluctance from modern jeepney drivers. Participant 5 believed that "there is a significant gap in fully understanding and addressing the needs of those who have chosen not to comply, and the government didn't really ask the opinion of real drivers."

Financial barrier is an impediment, with Participant 3 and 15 cited the high cost of amortization for modern jeepneys. This notion is also supported by Participants 4 and 10 which expressed concern in the repayment viability given their financial situations. In connection, Participant 3 adds that consolidation would restrict their operational flexibility, impacting their income management. Moreover, emotional attachment is also a barrier as Participants 19 and 20 find it difficult to part with their traditional units, as it represents their livelihood and cultural heritage. Lastly, Participant 11 and 17 highlights a psychological barrier, where resistance stems from drivers' reluctance to change long-held practices.

The PTMP CPMO said that it is continuing to refine the process in on-boarding the drivers with the modernization program by reducing the technical and financial burdens. There is already an increase in available subsidies and emphasizes the freedom of cooperatives to choose modern jeepney units to any manufacturers and suggests that they can opt for lower-priced locally manufactured units as long as they comply with the program's standards. Social support initiatives are in place to mitigate demotivation and training and driver capacity building was designed to improve motivation—which the participants in this study do not have awareness and knowledge

about. The agency also intends to improve communication efforts by combating misinformation and clarifying the goals of the modernization program. Caravans showcasing modern jeepney models are part of the strategy to engage drivers and operators directly. Additionally, they said that they are refining compliance rules and coordinating with other government agencies and local governments to address broader concerns, such as route rationalization and the technical demands of modernization.

Drivers' Challenges and Opportunities in Complying with PTMP

Challenges to Compliance
International Labor Organization (2016) suggests that reformers should examine the political and economic aspects of reform in their country and identify what helps and what hinders change. However, the results show widespread resistance to modernization, primarily due to the perceived need for more government support. Participant 6 expresses the need for more government officials' understanding of the real challenges drivers face. Similarly, Participant 9 questions the necessity of switching to modern vehicles, arguing that such changes may not lead to improved services. He underscores this point, stating, *"Our [traditional] jeep is fine; it is still running. We are actually lacking jeeps on our route. People are lining up, and now they plan to remove the jeep and replace it with that minibus, which won't make a difference."*

Resistance to the push for modernization is not uncommon among drivers because they feel coerced to comply without adequate support from the government. This is voiced by Participants 3, 6, and 7, who collectively expressed that the government needs to understand their challenges fully. Participant 8 argues that the government fails to recognize the financial strain placed on drivers. Participant 9, on the other hand, advocates for the retention of current vehicles, suggesting that transitioning to modern vehicles might not yield the anticipated improvements in service. This sentiment was further emphasized by Participant 10, who underscored the need for a careful review of the modernization program. He stated, *"In this situation, we don't want to oppose the government, but if that's what they want, we have to comply. However, can we small jeepney operators actually manage this? I hope they will simply improve the existing jeepneys instead of phasing them out. Operators are willing to enhance them; they can take the old ones to the shop for repairs. It shouldn't be about switching to costly minibuses that cost 2.8 million. Where would we get that kind of money? I sincerely hope they just focus on upgrading the jeepneys."*

Transition may also be hampered by informal workers' reluctance to abandon their established routines, which is motivated by anxieties of losing independence, skepticism of formal institutions, or perceived process difficulties (Chen & Carré, 2020). This is demonstrated by conventional drivers' preference for operating independently rather than in cooperatives, which is also echoed by Participants 1 and 2, who showed a desire to own their vehicles rather than share managerial responsibilities. They believe that this autonomy will allow them to retain control over their profits. Participant 5 agreed, adding that working alone allows drivers to save more money while avoiding the difficulties of a collective pay system.

Some drivers struggle with the transition due to their emotional and sentimental attachment to traditional jeepneys. Participants 19 and 20 shared their initial reluctance to part with older models they had driven for years, as their connection to these vehicles is deeply tied to their livelihoods. This emotional bond makes it challenging for them to accept the necessity of change. The complexity of adaptation adds another layer of difficulty. Participant 17 noted that some drivers resist modernization because of their strong commitment to traditional practices. This resistance highlights the cultural and emotional aspects of the transition, showing that not all drivers are ready to embrace the new systems introduced by the PTMP.

Additionally, modern jeepney drivers face challenges such as the complexity of vehicle maintenance. Participants 12 and 13 expressed concerns about this, stating, "It's difficult [to maintain modern jeeps] because with the modern jeep, you can't just fiddle with it; a mechanic needs a laptop before they can even open it, unlike the old ones that you could fix quickly and be done. With the modern ones, it can take hours before you can operate again if it's broken." The reliance on specialized technology for repairs often leads to extended downtime and lost profits, unlike traditional jeepneys, which are low-maintenance and easy to repair.

Opportunities to Compliance
Despite the challenges, several opportunities arise from compliance. Performance-based incentives are a major motivator, as highlighted by Participant 11, who shared, *"I greatly prefer this lifestyle, where I'm not overly stressed about pursuing my earnings. With our daily quotas set at around five thousand pesos, there's a promising incentive, if we exceed that amount, we receive additional rewards for surpassing our quota."* This statement underscores how exceeding daily quotas is not only financially rewarding but also provides additional benefits, encouraging drivers to aim for higher earnings. Long-term financial security also emerges as a significant opportunity. Participant 20 expressed satisfaction with receiving a regular salary, which alleviates the stress associated with previous payment systems. This newfound stability greatly contributes to their overall peace of mind at work.

Moreover, the transition to scheduled operations at terminals has led to more stable income for many drivers. Participant 17 noted that having assigned routes eliminates the stress of searching for passengers, leading to a more reliable revenue stream. This stability significantly boosts their confidence in their day-to-day operations. The cooperative system received positive feedback from various drivers who expressed satisfaction with its operation management. Participants 19 and 20 pointed out that the cooperative alleviates many concerns, suggesting that cooperative management may enhance perceptions of government effectiveness indirectly through service delivery.

In response, the transportation department said that it is considering enhancing financial assistance through increased subsidies and offering training and support programs to build cooperative capacity. Social benefits, such as access to SSS, PAG-IBIG, and PhilHealth, are also being provided to ensure that drivers who have complied receive long-term security and support. On the other hand, for non-compliant drivers, the transportation department said that it is implementing strategies that include increasing the subsidy for vehicle purchases and providing options for lower-cost local vehicle models. The government is also addressing concerns about job displacement by offering TESDA training programs, livelihood packages, and scholarships for dependents.

The complexities surrounding the DOTr Department Order No, 2023-022, or the Public Transportation Modernization Program (PTMP), reflect the authority vested in the Department of Transportation (DOTr), an administrative agency responsible for regulating the transportation sector. This landmark reform policy aims to formalize the long-neglected public transport industry in the Philippines. The

compliance dynamics of jeepney drivers in Metro Manila with PTMP represent a critical case study. As the transportation sector grapples with modernization, long-standing practices are challenged. Implementing PTMP has caused institutional change that disrupts existing arrangements and challenges the status quo among jeepney drivers, fostering the emergence of new norms and practices. Stakeholders, especially jeepney drivers, respond differently based on their socio-economic experiences and attitudes toward the modernization program.

Traditional jeepney drivers highlight financial barriers and challenges related to vehicle ownership as critical obstacles to compliance. They also resist the government's push for cooperativism, which is often rooted in a deep attachment to their vehicles and livelihoods and a lack of trust in government intentions. This supports the notion of the rational choice theory where the resistance is a rational choice because of the socio-economic impact on their livelihood as they are reliant on their jeepneys. This resistance can be viewed through the lens of institutional theory's regulative pillar. Their reactions are not just against the financial and practical implications of modernization but also represent a response to the formal regulatory pressures exerted by the government. These drivers see the modernization program and the push towards cooperativism as external regulations that disrupt their traditional practices and livelihoods.

This resistance highlights the tension between existing socio-economic practices and the formal rules imposed by the government, illustrating how regulative forces within institutional theory can influence the behavior and attitudes of individuals and groups within a society. They prioritize familiar routines over potential financial gains, with entrenched norms and cognitive frameworks reinforcing their resistance—which is also a rational choice because maintaining the status quo will not cause disruption and changes where drivers are comfortable. For these drivers, traditional jeepneys represent more than just a mode of transport—they symbolize long-standing livelihoods and community ties, which modernization initiatives threaten. As Notche (2023) explains, jeepneys have historically represented the resilience of local entrepreneurship and community-centered livelihood.

Moreover, traditional jeepney drivers have long operated as solo driver-operators, with each owner holding a single franchise. Though economically rational, the proposed shift toward cooperative models threatens their sense of autonomy and heritage. As Scott's cultural-cognitive pillar suggests, deeply held beliefs and values embedded in jeepney operations inform this resistance. Modernization is perceived not only as an economic shift but also as a cultural dislocation. Scott's normative pillar also helps explain traditional jeepney drivers' resistance to cooperativism, which may stem from a long-standing value system that emphasizes individual ownership and autonomy, historically favoring a more independent mode of operation.

In contrast, modern jeepney drivers approach compliance with a spirit of collaboration, emphasizing the importance of cooperative dynamics, anticipated income, social benefits, and government assistance in adhering to the program. The decisions of these drivers are their rational choice and be influenced by a normative shift towards collaboration and shared responsibility, where cooperatives are viewed as a means to secure better income, social benefits, and a more sustainable business model. Participation in cooperatives has fostered a sense of agency and shared decision-making, aligning with contemporary governance principles. Moreover, modern jeepney drivers exhibit greater openness to compliance, driven largely by perceived economic benefits and governmental support.

Furthermore, Drivers' willingness to modernization aligns with global trends towards sustainability, as the modernization program emphasizes environmentally friendly and efficient transport systems. The drivers' participation in cooperative models is not merely a financial decision but reflects broader normative shifts in societal expectations regarding public transportation's role in addressing environmental challenges. Scott's normative pillar highlights how these drivers' behavior aligns with evolving societal values, where modernization is seen both as a business necessity and a contribution to national development goals. This parallels the concept of accepting the legitimacy of an authority that encourages compliance with its laws even when those laws conflict with an individual's own self-interest—where modern jeepney drivers accept the legitimacy of the DOTr.

Both traditional and modern drivers acknowledge the economic potential of the modernization program, but their attitudes are shaped by their rational choices and different institutional factors. For modern drivers, economic necessity and the perceived benefits of modernization drive compliance. In contrast, traditional drivers face financial difficulties and distrust government initiatives, complicating their engagement with the program. This aligns with Scott's (2008) cultural-cognitive pillar, which suggests that traditional jeepney drivers hold deep-seated beliefs about the jeepney's role as a symbol of individual entrepreneurship and Filipino cultural identity. Their resistance to modernization can be seen as a defense of this identity. However, modern jeepney drivers, on the other hand, may view the shift towards cooperatives and modernization as a necessary evolution to ensure the sustainability of their livelihood amidst challenging economic and environmental conditions. The government's framing of modernization as a forward-looking and essential step facilitates this perspective. This also resonates with Scott's normative pillar, highlighting how modern drivers' acceptance of cooperatives and modernization reflects broader societal shifts toward collaboration and sustainability.

In this context, the government plays a pivotal role as an institution that imposes rules, norms, and expectations. These regulations, while limiting certain individual actions, simultaneously guide decision-making behaviors within organizations. Rational Choice Theory posits that people–in this case, the jeepney drivers– engage in a cost-benefit analysis when faced with institutional constraints. Consequently, the imposition of regulations by governmental bodies can be interpreted as influencing the decision-making calculus of organizations. As organizations strive for compliance, they weigh the potential costs of adhering to regulations against the benefits derived from such compliance. This dynamic reflects the overarching premise of Rational Choice Theory, wherein actors assess their choices in light of the incentives and disincentives presented by the regulatory environment.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that the government also provides crucial resources, support, and legitimacy, which serve as incentives for compliance. The presence of these resources can significantly alter the decision-making landscape for organizations. According to Rational Choice Theory, the availability of such incentives encourages organizations to align their actions with policy directives, thereby enhancing the likelihood of compliance. In weighing the advantages of adhering to regulations against any associated costs, organizations are motivated to engage in rational decision-making that aligns with the expectations of regulatory frameworks.

To ensure the success manifestation of the PTMP, policymakers must

move beyond top-down communication and embrace a co-creation model. Developing clear and accessible communication strategies to bridge these knowledge gaps and stakeholder capacity building is key. Co-creation not only builds trust but also ensures solutions are contextually grounded in the realities faced by both traditional and modern jeepney drivers. This participatory approach aligns with Scott's institutional theory, particularly the cultural-cognitive and normative pillars. By involving drivers in the policy-making process, their deep-seated beliefs and values are acknowledged, helping to bridge the gap between traditional practices and new regulations. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and legitimacy, encouraging compliance.

Additionally, innovative financial schemes involving public-private partnerships should be explored. Collaborations with financial institutions or private investors can provide lower-interest loans or shared equity models, reducing the upfront costs for traditional drivers and making the modernization process financially feasible and socially inclusive. It could also be possible for the government to subsidize the interest rate burden to the cooperatives in the monthly amortization of modern jeepneys. In Scott's Institutional framework, addressing real needs is crucial to facilitating effective institutional change, and financial assistance is a critical component in alleviating drivers' immediate economic pressures.

Developing clear and accessible communication strategies is crucial to bridge knowledge gaps and build stakeholder capacity. These strategies should consider the socio-cultural contexts of the drivers, ensuring that information is not only disseminated but also internalized and acted upon. This approach respects the normative pillar of institutional theory by aligning new practices with the existing value systems and expectations of jeepney drivers. Apart from the strategies employed by the government, using a diverse communication channel—including community meetings, social media platforms, and local dialects—ensures that drivers fully understand the implications of the program, which will help reduce uncertainty and build confidence in governmental initiatives. Recognizing traditional jeepney drivers as credible stakeholders can nurture a collaborative mindset that is a cornerstone during the implementation of the Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP).

Finally, expanding targeted training programs focusing on cooperative models, vehicle maintenance, and financial management is essential. Providing educational resources empowers drivers and aligns with Scott's concept that institutions evolve through stakeholder capacity-building. Such training enhances drivers' knowledge and preparedness for transitioning to modernized operations and must consider their basic living needs to encourage participation. Through these comprehensive measures, the transition can advance compliance and foster a constructive, collaborative environment that resonates with the principles of institutional theory, ultimately leading to a more modernized and inclusive transportation framework.

CONCLUSION

The Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP) represents a formal government-led intervention that imposes new norms. Yet, the study fails to account for the deeply embedded values and practices that uniquely define traditional Filipino passenger jeepneys as a sector. This dissonance creates significant challenges for policy implementation. The findings underscore the importance of developing a more inclusive approach to modernization, one that is sensitive to the socio-cultural and emotional realities of traditional

jeepney drivers. Policymakers must recognize that mandating coercive measures alone will not yield compliance if it disregards the institutional context in which these drivers operate. As institutional theory suggests, successful change requires a balance between external pressures and internal institutional realities.

Rational Choice and Institutional theory offered a valuable lens for analyzing the complexities of compliance and non-compliance with the Public Transport Modernization Program (PTMP) in the case study of jeepney drivers in Metro Manila. Traditional jeepney drivers operate within an institutional context characterized by long-standing norms of single-vehicle and franchise ownership, informal employment structures, and a strong cultural attachment to their vehicles. These institutional factors create significant resistance as a result of drivers' rational choice about PTMP, as modernization challenges these drivers' established way of life. To them, traditional jeepneys are not merely a tool of livelihood—they embody independence, identity, and community connections. Institutional theory highlights how these norms and values are deeply embedded, creating path dependency that makes change difficult.

Conversely, modern jeepney drivers—already integrated into the new cooperative-based model—operate within a different institutional framework. Their adoption of modernized vehicles reflects a shift in norms toward collective ownership and a more formalized, regulated transport system. These drivers have navigated the institutional pressures of modernization, motivated by economic incentives, government support, and a future-oriented vision of public transportation. This group aligns more with the normative, coercive, and mimetic pressures of institutional change, which institutional theory describes as key drivers of organizational adaptation. By acknowledging these factors, policymakers can design interventions that are not only financially and operationally viable but also culturally and emotionally acceptable.
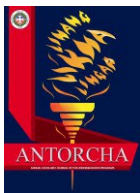
Moreover, a law or public policy must effectively serve its intended purpose, which is to benefit the welfare of its target population. To effectively manage and implement the program, jeepney drivers who have transitioned to modern jeepneys from traditional ones could play a crucial role in influencing their resistant peers. It is important for the government to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective, as the program requires the acceptance of the stakeholders it affects. The government could consider shouldering the interest rates on the monthly amortization payments for modern vehicles through state-owned lenders. Additionally, the legislature could explore reducing taxes on the manufacturing and sale of public utility vehicles (PUVs) classified as modern jeepneys for public transportation. These measures would alleviate the primary financial burden on drivers, which is a significant barrier to compliance with the program.

Future researchers could further explore the intersection of institutional pressures, socio-economic factors, and emotional motivations to create a holistic understanding of compliance dynamics in the transportation sector or other similar industries affected by government interventions influencing institutional frameworks. Given that this study is only limited to traditional and modern jeepney drivers, it can serve as a stepping stone for related studies, such as those on newly emerged and formalized sub-sectors within the jeepney industry—like public assistance officers and dispatchers. This paper could inform future reforms and strategies for manifesting the Public Transport Modernization Program, achieving the ultimate objective of this paper being to identify areas for improvement, ensuring that stakeholders in the jeepney sector are not left beyond.

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ROGUE

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ABSTRACT

Rogue is a short 2D-3D animated film about an unexpected friendship between two unlikely beings: a relentless killer robot programmed to end all living things, and a black cat named Bambam. Pollution has ruined the world, leaving the once cybernetic urban-filled cities in ruins. The only living things left are a few felines. The world is overrun by Killer N3KO Bots whose tasks are killing all living things in sight. What happens when one of the only beings left on the planet makes an unexpected friendship with a Rogue N3KO Bot? The primary objective of this project is to create a short 3D animation film entitled "ROGUE" that will bring perspective to unexpected friendships, 3D animated films, and other demonstrating skills and learnings of the animator. The film's significant impact on the audience underscores its success in sparking vital conversations. Witnessing the audience's positive feedback validates the film's objectives in featuring a dystopian future, tackling unexpected friendships and bonds formed, and lastly animation skills of the artist. Multiple respondents commented on the quality of the film and the style; some also commented about the animation and the sound design. Moreover, respondents pointed out that the film effectively communicated the message it was trying to portray despite the lack of resources and movement. Creating animations such as Rogue, an animation about unexpected friendships, can benefit the community, as it can effectively communicate important messages to people of different classes engagingly and memorably.

Keywords: *Unexpected friendship, cybernetic, unlikely beings, 3D animation*

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, dogs and cats have long coexisted in human settlements, playing important roles in society. Cats, once tamed primarily for rodent control (Driscoll, 2009), are now especially valued for their adaptability (Feuerstein, 2008). Though often seen as independent and solitary, cats frequently form unexpected social bonds with other species. A study by Tel Aviv University (2008) found that cats can develop friendships with animals such as dogs, rabbits, and birds. One notable example is Sappy, a cat who, despite being a natural predator, became the guardian of orphaned newborn squirrels. These unusual alliances challenge the stereotype of cats as aloof and highlight the potential for meaningful interspecies relationships.

Building on this theme of unexpected empathy, the rise of voice-activated assistants like Siri and Alexa, alongside humanoid robots such as Pepper, marks a new era in daily life. Service robots have grown popular thanks to rapid advances in AI, big data, sensors, and speech recognition (Jörling et al., 2019; Wirtz et al., 2018). They are recognized as significant innovators capable of performing tasks independently (Rust & Huang, 2014; Huang & Rust, 2018; Colby et al., 2016). However, questions arise when these tasks involve harming living beings. This story aims to explore how robots might deviate from their programming to develop empathy toward living creatures, paralleling the surprising social flexibility observed in cats.

Project Objectives

The main goal of this project is to create a short 3D animation film titled "Rogue," depicting a futuristic wasteland on the brink of extinction. The project aims to feature a dystopian future with 3D semi-cartoony assets and scenarios, illustrate how robots could contribute to living things' extinction, showcase my animation skills, sketching, modeling, and rendering skills, and inspire future artists who may reference this work.

Significance of the Project

This project aims to produce a globally successful 3D feature film that inspires future artists in 3D animation. It seeks to encourage aspiring artists to persevere in the creative industry, highlight students' talents at the Colegio, and provide researchers with insights into potential future scenarios. Additionally, it serves as an example and source of inspiration for future researchers, contributing positively to society.

Review of Related Works and Literature

Unexpected Friendships

Animals that appear vastly different can form unexpected friendships. Research in anthropology indicates that friendship can endure across variations in language, culture, and species (Luttrell, 2010). For example, cats and work robots, despite their differing appearances and functions, can develop relationships in workplaces (Johnson, 2018).

Robot Deviation

Given the potential for robot deviation, the mechanics of such partnerships are made more challenging. The ethical implications of autonomous robots that can reason and act independently are a growing concern as robotics technology advances (Asaro, 2012). The connection between cats and industrial robots may become increasingly challenging in this scenario as the robots begin to doubt their place in the workplace and society. Since robots lack bodily autonomy, they appear to fall outside of such humanism. A self-driving car, for instance, cannot choose to leave for the beach on its own. However, advances in machine learning, the process by which artificial intelligence is taught to teach itself, have begun challenging that premise (Heller, 2016).

Animals and Robots

According to Haraway (2003), animals and robots intersect significantly, encompassing themes like freedom versus constraint and diversity versus extinction. As robots evolve, they may have to make decisions like humans. Heller (2016) notes that society has not addressed the potential abuse of intelligent AI like Siri or driverless cars. If human moral standards apply, why should intelligent artificial life be excluded from ethical considerations? Understanding the grievances of animals may help us discern our responsibilities toward robots and each other.

Unexpected friendships among different species remind us of the importance of empathy and connection. As Luttrell (2010) suggests, friendship transcends cultural barriers; perhaps it is time to extend this understanding to non-human entities like cats and robots.

Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse

According to Debruge (2018), In the 2018 movie "Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse," After being bitten by a radioactive spider in the subway, Brooklyn teen Miles Morales gains enigmatic powers that enable him to become Spiderman. After meeting Peter Parker, he rapidly discovers that many people share the same rare, high-flying powers. Now that Miles has received new powers, he must utilize them to battle the Kingpin, a terrifying, lousy guy who has the power to bring numerous Spiderman versions into our world and open portals to other universes. *"Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse"* pioneered the 2D-3D Hybrid of the 21st century. It shows how not all animated films must incorporate a photorealistic look in line with the stability of Pixar's style. The movie serves as a gentle reminder that, like the characters in Rogue, we are all stronger when we stick together and ask for aid.

WALL-E

"WALL-E" stands for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class, and it refers to the last robot remaining in use on Earth in the 2008 film "WALL-E." During the day, he removes everything he can from the planet. After 700 years, WALL-E finally developed a personality and now feels lonely. Then he looks at EVE (Elissa Knight), an angular, sleek probe deployed on a scanning mission to Earth and just returned. As he decides to pursue EVE outside of space, WALL-E sets off on his biggest adventure to date (Ebert, n.d.). Like *"WALL-E,"* Rogue's setting would be in a similar futuristic wasteland, where there are minimal to no living things on Earth. It shows how an unlikely Friendship can form between two beings and how you can impact the people, places, and things around you.

Puss in Boots: The Last Wish

In the animated movie "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," Puss in Boots finds that his love of exploration has cost him something after discovering that he has used up eight of his nine lives. Puss sets off on a valiant mission to reclaim his nine lives and find the fabled Last Wish D'Alessandro, 2023). *"Puss in Boots: The Last Wish"* also follows the Spider-verse's innovation in terms of its art style. It focuses on 3D but stylizes its elements cartoony or 2D-like. Rogue's main protagonist is also a cat.

Cyberpunk 2077

According to Martin (2018), In the game *"Cyberpunk 2077"*, our story is set in a future cyber city; we follow a mercenary named V as they battle to deal with a mysterious cybernetic implant that threatens to overwrite their body with the personality and memories of a deceased superstar only perceived by V; the two must cooperate to be separated and save V's life. The cinematic setting of "Cyberpunk 2077" is an inspiration for Rogue in terms of how the environment of the film would look. However, it would have its twist of being a wasteland but set in the future, like cyberpunk.

Love, Death and Robots" episode "Three Robots

Based on Hilkinger's (2023) review, in the "Love, Death, and Robots" episode "Three Robots," three robots—XBOT 4000, a tall skeleton-shaped robot, K-VRC, a small doll-like robot, and 11-45-G, a triangular robot with a flat electronic assistant's voice—appear in a post-apocalyptic city. Before VRC pulls out a map and identifies the ideal site to visit next, XBOT laments that they are completely disoriented when they arrive in the city to start a sightseeing trip. They are on vacation to try comprehending how people live based on what little they know about them and what they have left behind. This episode is an example of how a futuristic abandoned wasteland would look like, which is a massive inspiration for Rogue.

Conceptual Model

The short film is created using Various hardware devices and software tools, which play crucial roles throughout the stages of pre-production, production, and post-production to achieve the desired outcomes in each phase. Employing the input-process-output methodology ensures a systematic and organized approach to successfully executing each step in the project development process, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.
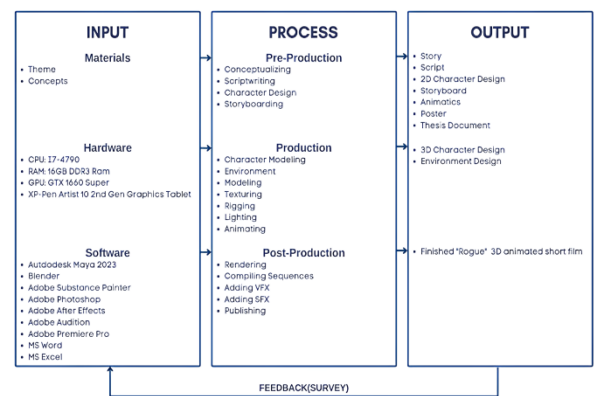

Figure 1. IPO Model

METHODOLOGY

Project Design

Creating *Rogue* follows a structured 3D animation pipeline from pre-production to post-production, designed to bring the dystopian vision to life while showcasing advanced animation, modeling, and rendering skills. The process begins with concept development and scriptwriting, where the story is crafted into a visual screenplay that frames the narrative of a futuristic wasteland threatened by robotic extinction. Next, environment and character designs are finalized, followed by storyboarding and animatics to pre-visualize the sequence and pacing of the film.

In the production phase, modeling and texturing give form and unique traits to the semi-cartoony assets, while rigging establishes skeletal structures for realistic character movement. Animation is then executed using audio tracks as references to synchronize motion and expression. Lighting is carefully set up to enhance mood and visual detail, culminating in rendering the animated scenes. Finally, post-production integrates video editing, sound effects, and background music to polish the film for its intended impact. This comprehensive methodology supports the project's goal to deliver a compelling, skillful animation that inspires future artists and explores the complex relationship between robots and living beings in a dystopian future.
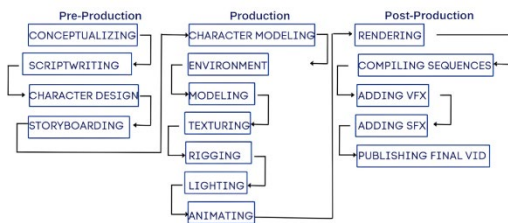
Figure 2. 3D Animation Pipeline

Project Components

The short film's 3D character models highlight the distinct traits and personalities of the main characters, significantly enhancing the audience's grasp of their essence. Promotional materials such as handbills and posters give potential viewers a glimpse of the film, helping shape their initial perceptions. Beyond capturing the characters' essence, this artistic representation is an effective marketing strategy to attract viewers.
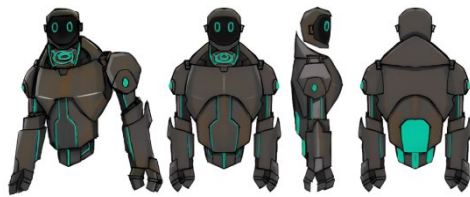

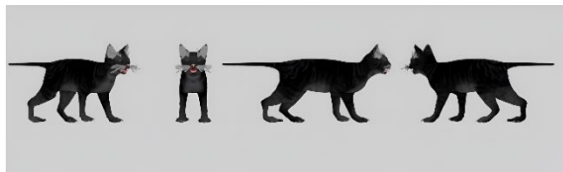**Figure 3. Rogue N3KO Bot Character Sheet**

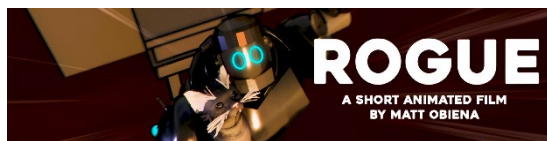**Figure 4. Bambam Character Sheet**

Figure 5. Poster

Figure 6. Handbill

Project Structure

Pre-production started with conceptualizing, storyboarding, and scriptwriting the flow of the film. These materials were then used to create the animatics, which served as a reference for how the film would look. The animatics were first done in 2D to save time for the animator and later converted to 3D for the final film.

The production of the short film started with modeling the main character models in Maya, which begins with basic polygons, using tools to streamline the process and align with the film's design.

Textures and some models are sourced from free-use websites to save time due to constraints on hardware and deadlines. Once finished, it was time to go to the next step of the production process.

Rigging the characters is facilitated by free plugins like Advance Skeleton, which simplify creating controllers and joints for accurate articulation during animation. Because of this, animating the characters has become much more straightforward than traditional animation in Maya. The Maya animation interface displays the timeline for keyframing, polygon outlines, and motion controllers from rigging. This interface is the main factor in animating in Maya. Each joint controller is manually animated in the timeline to create a complete animation tailored to the scene. This process became more manageable with the plugins used because instead of animating each polygon, we made it easier and animated each joint.

Once the animations are finished, image sequences are rendered with a resolution size of 2440x1080 to mimic the cinematic resolution. Once exported, image sequences are then imported into After Effects for visual effects and final editing. The compiled scenes are then brought into Premiere Pro for final video edits, where sound effects, background music, color grading, transitions, and text effects are added to complete the film.

Evaluation Procedure

The film was evaluated online via Google Forms after audiences had watched it, using the standardized survey instrument for Digital Arts. According to the demographics of the respondents (20 - 25 years old), the majority of the people who participated in the survey were young adults. Most of this sample consists of female respondents. Above half of the respondents were students, with a small percentage of artists, and almost 40% were non-artists.

Overall, the majority of the respondents had the highest rating for the film based on the criteria given in the survey, including the story, content graphics, music, etc. The questionnaire included items rated on a scale from 1 to 5 to gather feedback.

Table 1. Likert Scale

Numeric Scale	Descriptive Rating
5.0	Excellent
4.0	Above Average
3.0	Average
2.0	Below Average
1.0	Poor

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data collected from the assessment form is converted into meaningful results, allowing the researcher to interpret the information gathered effectively. To further evaluate the respondents' feedback, the researcher calculated the average and the mean and then interpreted them according to the numerical scale values. This calculation of the mean is a crucial step in understanding and analyzing the data, offering valuable insights for thorough interpretation and informed decision-making.

Table 2. Likert Scale Interpretation

Numeric Scale	Descriptive Rating
4.21 – 5.00	Excellent
3.41 – 4.20	Very Good
2.61 – 3.40	Satisfactory
1.81 – 2.60	Fair
1.00 – 1.80	Poor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"Rogue" is a 3D animated short film that explores an unexpected bond between a protagonist cat and a killer robot, focusing on survival and malfunctions. The film uses visual symbolism and is designed to be interpreted without voiceovers, adding complexity and drama to its storytelling. This project aims to make a brief 3D animated film that examines a possible future wasteland where all living things are in danger of going extinct. Through semi-comic 3D objects and scenes, it aims to portray a dystopian future in which robots may play a role in the extinction of living things.

The project also allows the artist to demonstrate their modeling, rendering, animating, and sketching abilities. In addition to its creative goals, the movie aims to educate viewers about the problem of extinction, hoping that it would motivate upcoming artists to use it as a reference in their work. The concept is kept simple to ensure it remains accessible to all audiences. Several adjustments were made during production as a science fiction piece, including changing the cat's color from orange to black to avoid similarities with existing designs. Additionally, various scenes were modified regarding timing, cinematography, and shot composition to enhance the overall storytelling.

Table 3. Criteria Based on Content

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The short film presents information that is clear and effective.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	27 (24.8%)	78 (71.6%)	4.68	Excellent
The short film meets the objective of the project	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.8%)	24 (22%)	83 (76.1%)	4.74	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**3 (2.8%)**	**25.5 (23.4%)**	**80.5 (37.2%)**	**4.71**	**Excellent**

Table 4. Criteria Based on Story

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The story has a beginning, middle, and end.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.8%)	17 (15.6%)	90 (82.6%)	4.81	Excellent
The film holds the audience's attention throughout.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	37 (33.9%)	67 (61.5%)	4.54	Excellent
The story adheres to the theme.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	22 (20.2%)	86 (78.9%)	4.78	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**2.3 (2.1%)**	**25.3 (23.2%)**	**81 (74.3%)**	**4.71**	**Excellent**

Table 5. Criteria Based on Production Design

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The short film makes innovative use of graphics, text-sound, and resources to create a superior film.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	31 (28.4%)	74 (67.9%)	4.64	Excellent
The title and credits are presented well.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	20 (18.3%)	88 (80.7%)	4.8	Excellent
The text is easy to read and appropriate for the contents.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.8%)	15 (13.8%)	92 (84.4%)	4.83	Excellent
The images have high resolution.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (4.6%)	26 (23.9%)	78 (71.6%)	4.67	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**3 (2.8%)**	**23 (21.1%)**	**83 (76.1%)**	**4.74**	**Excellent**

Table 6. Criteria Based on Music and Scoring

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The sound elements add to the overall quality of the short film.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (6.4%)	27 (24.8%)	75 (68.8%)	4.62	Excellent
The music played throughout the animation is fitting to the story.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.8%)	28 (25.7%)	78 (71.6%)	4.69	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**5 (4.6%)**	**27.5 (25.2%)**	**76.5 (70.2%)**	**4.66**	**Excellent**

Table 7. Criteria Based on Visual Technical Elements

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The animation's quality (color, texture, layers, and moving parts) is excellent.	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.6%)	39 (35.8%)	64 (58.7%)	4.52	Excellent
The sound and animation are synchronized.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	28 (25.7%)	80 (73.4%)	4.72	Excellent
The color balance and color choice enrich the overall effect of the film.	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (5.5%)	30 (27.5%)	72 (66.1%)	4.58	Excellent
The various elements of multimedia (text, video, audio, animation, and marketing collaterals) used appropriately are integrated throughout the film.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	21 (19.3%)	84 (77.1%)	4.73	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**4 (3.7%)**	**29.5 (27.1%)**	**75 (68.8%)**	**4.66**	**Excellent**

Table 8. Criteria Based on Uniqueness of Concept

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The short film shows originality and uniqueness.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	28 (25.7%)	80 (73.4%)	4.72	Excellent
The content and ideas are fresh, original, and unique.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	23 (21.1%)	82 (75.2%)	4.72	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**2 (1.8%)**	**25.5 (23.4%)**	**81 (74.3%)**	**4.72**	**Excellent**

Table 9. Criteria Based on Contribution to Multimedia Industry

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The short film contributes to the new media technology.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.8%)	25 (22.9%)	81 (74.3%)	4.72	Excellent
The short film is useful to Digital Arts students.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (18.3%)	89 (81.7%)	4.82	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**1.5 (1.4%)**	**22.5 (20.6%)**	**85 (78%)**	**4.77**	**Excellent**

Table 10. Criteria Based on Contribution to Multimedia Industry

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Interpretation
The short film exhibits high level of artistic creativity and technical skills.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	27 (24.8%)	81 (74.3%)	4.73	Excellent
Overall	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**1 (0.9%)**	**27 (24.8%)**	**81 (74.3%)**	**4.73**	**Excellent**

Table 11. Interpretation of Data

Category	Mean	Interpretation
Content	4.71	Excellent
Story	4.71	Excellent
Production Design	4.74	Excellent
Music and Scoring	4.66	Excellent
Visual and Technical Elements	4.66	Excellent
Uniqueness of Concept	4.72	Excellent
Contribution to Multimedia Industry	4.77	Excellent
Overall	**4.71**	**Excellent**

Despite some delays in production caused by unfinished minor tasks from the animator, the film has ultimately been a success. Survey results reveal that the movie is visually appealing and effectively communicates its story to a wide audience. According to the Criteria for Content and Story, no respondents rated the film below 3 on the Likert Scale. This reflects that most viewers clearly understood the film's message and found the storyline complete and engaging, with an impressive average rating of 4.71.

When it comes to Production Design, over half of the respondents rated it as excellent. This is further supported by a strong mean score of 4.74, indicating general satisfaction with the film's graphics and visual presentation. However, there is room for improvement in the areas of Music and Scoring as well as Visual Technical Elements. Feedback was mixed: some praised the music as a standout feature, while others found it redundant. Additionally, several viewers noted that the color treatment appeared too dark, especially on mobile devices. Consequently, these criteria received the lowest average ratings, both scoring 4.66. Despite this, most participants agreed that the film's sound quality and visual elements were appropriate and effective.

Regarding the Uniqueness of Concept, 81% of respondents felt the short film presented an original premise, with many appreciating its distinctive and less saturated style. The film's Contribution to the Multimedia Industry earned a commendable mean score of 4.77, highlighting its value and relevance to the multimedia field-one of the project's key objectives. Lastly, 82% of participants recognized the film's overall creativity, describing it as imaginative and artistically impressive.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate a consistently high level of satisfaction across all evaluation criteria, with mean scores ranging from 4.66 to 4.77. Production Design stood out as the most highly rated aspect, reflecting strong appreciation for the film's visual and technical craftsmanship, including set design and cinematography. This attention to detail significantly contributed to the film's positive reception.

In summary, the data reveals a strong positive consensus among viewers, with overall creativity and uniqueness of concept receiving the highest praise. While technical elements like music, scoring, and visuals scored slightly lower, they still maintained solid ratings, underscoring the film's overall quality and appeal.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Several areas present opportunities for improvement to further enhance the film's overall quality. The animation of the main feline protagonist, particularly in terms of movement and facial expressions, could be made more natural and fluid. By refining these elements, the character would appear more lifelike and emotionally engaging, strengthening the audience's connection. Additionally, the music and sound effects would benefit from improved consistency and higher audio quality. Enhancing these auditory elements will better support the film's atmosphere and storytelling.

Some scenes were noted to have insufficient lighting, which was partially corrected during post-processing. However, addressing lighting issues earlier in production would improve the visual clarity and mood of these scenes. Furthermore, the modeling of the environments could be refined to create a fuller, more realistic look that adds depth and immersion to the film's world. Storytelling and pacing also emerged as areas needing attention. Several participants expressed uncertainty about what happened next to the protagonists, suggesting that the narrative could be clearer and more consistent. Improving the timing and flow of the story would help guide viewers more smoothly, reducing ambiguity and avoiding unintended cliffhangers.

In conclusion, despite initial production delays and technical challenges, the animator produced a highly successful final output. The film received zero "poor" ratings for overall inventiveness, with 82% of survey respondents describing it as imaginative and artistically compelling. This positive reception reflects the animator's technical expertise and creative abilities. Survey findings show that the film is visually appealing and effectively communicates its story to a broad audience, resulting in consistently high ratings across multiple evaluation criteria. While there is room for improvement-especially in animation fluidity, sound design, lighting, and storytelling-the overall success of the film is clear.

With focused refinements in these key areas, future projects can further elevate the animator's work, enhancing both technical execution and audience engagement. The film's strong foundation and positive reception provide a promising platform for continued creative growth.

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GROWING UP SOLO: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE PERCEIVED EXISTENTIAL LONELINESS AMONG ONLY CHILDREN ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the apparent trend of declining global fertility rates and fewer children per household in recent years, only children are still viewed negatively, even theorists labeled them as 'spoiled' and 'maladjusted'. In Philippine society, only children frequently face societal stereotypes that depict them as isolated or emotionally underdeveloped for social interactions from their existential experiences. This research explored the lived experiences of six Filipino only children young adults residing in the Philippines regarding existential loneliness. Data was collected through face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews, and analyzed through coding and thematic analysis techniques. Five major themes and six sub-themes have emerged. The major themes are: Social Connection, Life Purpose, Focused Parental Attention, Coping Strategies to Alleviate Loneliness, and Personality, while the sub-themes are Support Received from Others, Suppressing or Displacing emotions, Engaging in Activities, Tendency to be reserved or Introverted, and Lack of Social Skills. The accounts of most participants indicated the absence of feelings of existential loneliness. It is recommended that future research should focus on identifying strategies that strengthen social engagement opportunities and explore the development and implementation of intervention programs that focus on enhancing only children's social skills

Keywords: *Existential loneliness, only children adults, social connection, coping with loneliness*

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of human society, the concept of family size has undergone significant transformations throughout history—from the large families of agrarian societies to the smaller nuclear ones of the modern era. In fact, the global trend of fertility rates falling below replacement levels has become widespread among approximately 122 countries across the income spectrum. The increasing prevalence of single-child families is significantly lower in developing countries, with a reported rate of approximately 7%, compared to developed countries, exceeding 15% (Kozlowski, 2012). In European countries, Portugal has the highest reported rate of single-child families, with approximately 57% of families consisting of single children. Recent data from 2019 shows that 26% of Canadian families, 21% of American families, and 20% of Iranian families had only one child. In Asia, Singapore's 2020 statistics show that 24% of couples had only one child (Foroutan & Bijani, 2020), while the average child per family in the Philippines has significantly dropped to 1.9 from its peak of 4.1 in 1993 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022; Leal, 2024).

The decline in family size and average children per household has psychosocial and economic implications. As fewer siblings are present, the support network for individuals. This fact is reflected in studies as shrinking family sizes play a role in heightening psychological distress and contributing to lower social participation (Teerawichitchainan & Ha, 2024). Moreover, in the family-centered culture of Filipinos, collectivist values are embedded in social life (Morillo et al., 2013) and in this context young adults who grew up as only children may face unique psychosocial challenges. On the other hand, slower population growth has positive implications specifically on relieving pressure on employment and public services leading to less unemployment and improvements in perceived quality of service (find source). Although in the long term, this continuous decline may lead to a shrinkage in the workforce which has sparked anxiety in

countries with falling birth rates (Boydell et al., 2023).

Birth order is a known and significant concept in the Philippines that influences the expectations of parents of their children and society of their peers on responsibilities and characteristics that one should possess based on the order of which they were born. In addition to these expectations, birth order contributes to a sense of structure in the family (Martinez, 2023). One prominent theory concerning birth order was developed by Alfred Adler and is known as the Birth Order Theory. The theory posits that the presence or absence of siblings and/or the order in which the child was born has an effect on the individual formation of a person (Adler, 1964 as cited in Horner et al., 2012). Adler viewed birth order as an objective reality and a predetermined place for a person in the existing social structure in the family in the sense that individuals cannot choose what birth order they are born in. Although the theory posits that the order in which an individual is born and whether they are an only child impacts the overall individual (Horner et al., 2012), it is not a sole determinant, in fact, Adler (1964, as cited in Shulman & Mosak, 1977) mentioned that key factors such as parent-child relationship and the psychological position also affect an individual's key traits and personality.

In this era of shifting family demographics, the experiences of Filipino only-children adults provides a lens in examining the intersection of family size and dynamics, birth order, and psychosocial outcomes. This paper investigates how Filipino only-child adults perceive and experience existential loneliness in the context of their social environment. In addition, taking into consideration the information presented, despite the apparent trend concerning global fertility rates and the drop in average children per household, only-children and one-child households are still viewed in a negative light with notions of only-children to be spoiled and

unlikable (Stronge et al., 2019). As reflected in a poll by Gallup, Inc (2023), only 3% of American adults would have a preference or would find having only one child and being a part of a family with only one child ideal.

The stereotypes permeated through society such as those of only children being self-centered, spoiled, and lonely can lead to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when the negative expectations that arise from existing stereotypes adversely impact an individual's (specifically those part of a stereotyped group, such as only children) performance contrary to their actual ability to perform well (American Psychological Association, 2023). Consequently, the presence of stereotype threat is found to negatively impact psychological and physical well being, (Aronson et al., 2013), motivation, and performance in various settings such as the workplace and the academe (Walton et al., 2015).

Statement of the Problem
Stereotypes relating to only-children imply that children who have no siblings often lack social skills, are self-centered, and are prone to loneliness. Although these notions on only-children have been widespread across different cultures and even implicated on a few psychological theories, there is little empirical evidence that proves these claims (Sissons, 2022). This underscores the importance of addressing such notions and unsubstantiated stereotypes with more robust and rigorous research Moreover, existing qualitative studies on existential loneliness are limited, with others focusing on adolescents (Garnow et al., 2022) and older adults (Sundström et al., 2018; Olofsson et al., 2021; & Larsson et al., 2023); while there is a qualitative study that included young to older adults as their participants, it overlooked existential loneliness—focusing solely on the general concept of loneliness (McKenna-Plumley et al., 2023a). Despite the extensive research about this type of loneliness, the existential and emotional outcomes of growing up as an only-child in adulthood are still not fully understood, especially in the collectivist culture of Filipinos. These findings implicate a gap in knowledge concerning existential loneliness among Filipino only-children adults. These findings highlight the need for studies that explore existential and emotional experiences of Filipino only-children adults which considers their unique cultural context and emphasize familial and other communal values.

Review of Related Literature

Personality Theories on Only-
A critical examination of personality theories concerning only children is essential for providing an evidence-based understanding of their psychological development, challenging enduring stereotypes, and contextualizing their experiences within changing familial and cultural dynamics. Psychological theories offer diverse perspectives on the personality and emotional experiences of only-children. G. Stanley Hall, a pioneer and the first president of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008), viewed being an only-child as a 'disease' in itself proliferating the notion that only-children are spoiled, maladjusted, and antisocial among many other negative characteristics. This belief of Hall is viewed to be a major contributory factor as to why stereotypes on only-children are still prevalent in today's society particularly, and even in the Philippines (Torre, 2023), despite the growing population of one-child households and the scrutiny and differing opinions of scholars in the academe (Pocock, 2015).

Throughout the history of single-children studies, only-children are theorized to differ from individuals who have siblings. This difference is attributed to presumptions that they receive more focused

attention, expectations, and resources from their family members due to the absence of a sibling (Falbo, 1980; Veenhoven & Verkuyten 1989; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Arora & Teotia, 2021; Lo, 2023). One of the prominent theorists who discussed family constellations was Adler (as cited by Feist et al., 2018, pp. 92), theorizing that only borns might develop certain personality traits. The absence of siblings could lead only-children to become self-centered and less inclined to cooperate with other people, often expecting special attention and treatment. They might struggle with forming and maintaining social relationships. Moreover, he also believed that only-children might become socially mature, independent, and self-reliant, possessing a more individualistic and self-sufficient approach to life. However, it is important to mention that Adler also emphasized that this is not universal as many only-children develop a strong sense of relationship and a sense of empathy.

Similarly, the theory of Toman (1961) posited that only-children, especially males, might seek attention and validation from others, often going to extremes to capture it. However, this could hinder their ability to form genuine peer relationships. Female only-children might struggle to understand the perspectives of others, leading to difficulties in social interactions and a tendency towards self-centeredness.

While these theories offer insights into the potential personality traits of children who grow up without siblings, it is noteworthy that they are largely rooted in Western cultural contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the cultural and societal factors that can influence individual development of only-children, specifically their emotional experiences, including feelings of loneliness and its underlying categories.

Loneliness among Only-Children and Adults
In recent years, there has been a growing body of research examining loneliness and its association with unique sibling relationships among individuals across the life span. In a quantitative study conducted by Hayes et al. (2022) on the relationship between social identity, emotion regulation, and loneliness of adults, it was found that there is a significant link between loneliness and social support given. This is likewise reflected in the sibling study of Stocker et al. (2020), indicating that older adults who have close and supportive relationships with their siblings are less likely to experience feelings of loneliness.

The limited resources studying loneliness among only-children adults suggest that this group may be less likely to experience feelings of loneliness, compared to those with siblings. In India, Arora and Teotia (2021) conducted a comparative study between only-children and children with siblings' adjustment and personality, sampling 100 participants who were aged 18 to 25 years (50 only children & 50 children with siblings). Interestingly, the study found that sibling children were higher in the personality dimension neuroticism compared to those without siblings. This implies that they are more likely to easily experience negative emotions such as moodiness, anxiety, depression, vulnerability, and anger. This is consistent with the quantitative findings of Lin et al. (2021) where it was reported that Chinese only-children emerging adults, who were within the age range of 17 to 21 years, experienced less loneliness than those with siblings. These results contradict the stereotype in China that being an only-child is associated with higher levels of loneliness.

Parallel results were found in fewer quantitative studies among only-children adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, where Shen et al. (2021) found that singleton adolescents reported lower levels of

loneliness than those with siblings. It was suggested that the differing levels of loneliness experienced by only-children and those with siblings could be attributed to the amount of care given by their families during the pandemic. Moreover, Wikle et al. (n.d.), in their quantitative study among adolescents with and without siblings, likewise reported that only-children felt lower levels of loneliness only when they were interacting with their friends and cousins. The findings implied that peer relationships can play a vital role in the emotional well-being of only-children, offering a source of support and connection.

Existential Loneliness

The concept of existential loneliness is rooted in philosophical and psychological thought and is an integral part of empirical work that features a multidimensional model of loneliness. This type of loneliness is implicated in a limited number of studies with existing evidence being primarily focused on older adults and those afflicted with life-threatening illnesses, and conceptualization. In a synthesis of qualitative data on loneliness by Mansfield et al. (2021), the researchers conceptualized existential loneliness as a part of the human condition which makes an individual feel separated from others; an experience of loneliness that is heightened when met by traumatic events, situations, and/or death. In another study by McKenna-Plumley et al. (2023b) on existential loneliness among youth to older adults, the study found major themes that constituted the experiences of participants in relation to existential loneliness: it (existential loneliness) was a deeper form of loneliness; that it was characterized by a sense of disconnection; and cognitive evaluations in the form of existential reflections where the central element is negative emotions.

The available qualitative explorations on existential loneliness throughout the decade is relatively scarce, with only four of them easily accessible to academic inquiries. In a qualitative study in 2018, Sundström et al. discovered that health care professionals observed that 'frail' older adult patients aged 75 years or older often exhibited signs of existential loneliness. This manifested in various ways, including difficulties in communication, unmet needs, privacy concerns, and a reluctance to discuss existential issues due to fear. Moreover, the results of this study is substantiated in a more recent inquiry examined by Larsson et al. last year, identifying existential loneliness among 'frail' older adults aged 75 years or older. These individuals reported suffering from illness, care, and the challenges of aging in various care settings.

Despite the existing literature on existential loneliness presented above, there is an evident scarcity of research specifically contextualizing such a topic on Filipino only-children across the age spectrum of adulthood. While a singular study has examined this topic among Filipino senior high school students, the full paper remains inaccessible, hence the necessity to pursue the present study.

Theoretical Background

Theoretical Framework

Adlerian theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the potential impact of being an only child on individual development, particularly to social relationships and emotional experiences. Alfred Adler's emphasis on social interest and the role of birth order in shaping personality aligns closely with the inquiry of how being an only child might influence one's sense of belonging and connection to others.

Key aspects of Adlerian theory that are relevant to this study include social interest and birth order. Social interest is a fundamental human

drive that motivates individuals to connect with others and contribute to the community. Only children, without the immediate influence of siblings, might face unique challenges in developing strong social bonds and cultivating a sense of belonging. While the concept of birth order provides insights on its influence on personality traits and social behaviors. As the only child, individuals may experience a unique set of dynamics within their family, which could shape their attitude toward social relationships (Horner et al., 2012).

Research Questions

The study primarily examined only children adults and their perceived existential loneliness. Specifically, the researchers sought to answer the following research questions:

- What lived experiences do Filipino only-child adults identify as distinct from those with siblings, particularly within the context of Filipino family values, social expectations, and cultural norms?
- What are the contributory factors that lead to the perceived absence or presence of existential loneliness in only children adults?
- How do only-child adults cope with or manage experiences of existential loneliness?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design that utilizes a phenomenological approach in the observation, collection, and interpretation of data. This research design is employed to allow the participants of the study to describe their internal realities which will provide in-depth insight into how their unique circumstances contribute to their perceptions. Qualitative research designs involve collecting non-numerical data to explore and explain experiences, phenomena, or concepts (Bhandari, 2023). Moreover, phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that examines individuals' lived experiences in the world (Neubauer, 2019). As qualitative phenomenological research seeks to understand and find meaning behind individuals' experiences, this type of research design is ideal for uncovering and examining the subjective perceptions of only children adults towards existential loneliness.

Participants and Study Sites

The target population for this study consisted of individuals who met the following eligibility criteria: they must be 18 years old or older, be Filipino citizens residing in the Philippines, and be only children—defined as having no biological, step-, or half-siblings.

To identify participants, the researchers employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. This method was chosen to ensure that all participants met the specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study's objectives. By intentionally selecting individuals with firsthand experience of being an only child in the Philippine cultural context, purposive sampling allowed for the in-depth exploration of unique lived experiences and perceptions of existential loneliness. A total of six participants were included in the study, consisting of five females (P1, P2, P3, P4, & P6) and one male (P5), all between the ages of 20 and 22. The sample size was deliberately kept small to align with the standards of qualitative and phenomenological research, which emphasize depth over breadth (Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994, as cited in Collins et al., 2006). This size allows for rich, detailed narratives while remaining manageable for rigorous thematic analysis.

The semi-structured interview was carried out using two methods: face-to-face interactions and online sessions conducted through the

Zoom application. Ensuring a comfortable setting for the discussion, three participants (P1, P2, and P6) were interviewed in person in a conducive area at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran - Manila that was convenient for both the researchers and the participants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in empty classrooms, chosen for their privacy, quietness, and familiarity to participants. These controlled academic settings minimized distractions and helped create a safe and comfortable environment, fostering openness and reflective dialogue during the interviews. Because of scheduling difficulties encountered by both the researchers and participants, three interviews (P3, P4, and P5) were conducted using the aforementioned online application as an alternative method.

Research Instruments
Before the conduct of the main data gathering process, the researchers conducted a preliminary data collection to screen willing participants' eligibility in participating in the study (*see Appendix E*). Through Google forms, the link and its corresponding QR code for the pre-selection part was posted on both the researchers' Facebook and Instagram accounts, including details such as the consent form, eligibility criteria, and affirmation of the participants' rights to data privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Along with these ethical considerations, the GForms also contain sections allowing potential participants to indicate their demographics, contact details, and preferred interview date, time, and location.

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview. The researchers developed a set of questions based on the research objectives, which focused on uncovering the experiences of only children on existential loneliness, the factors that contribute to the presence or absence of feelings of existential loneliness, and their coping strategies in dealing with these emotions (*see Appendix C*). The interview included 11 main questions with additional/follow-up questions based on the participants' responses, allowing the participants. Once finalized, these questions were reviewed and validated by a research expert to ensure their relevance and validity in gathering the necessary information. This interview guide facilitated a structured yet flexible conversation that allowed the participants to share their personal insights, experiences, and reflections in a comprehensive manner. The follow-up questions were intended to probe deeper into responses, depending on cases of yes or no answers, ensuring that all pertinent aspects of their experiences are fully examined.

Data Gathering Process
To recruit participants, the researchers utilized social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram, by posting digital publication materials containing a Google Forms link and its corresponding Quick Response (QR) code. Social media was chosen as the primary recruitment method due to its wide accessibility, popularity among the target age group (20–22 years), and its effectiveness in reaching a broad yet specific audience within a short period. This method was particularly beneficial in identifying individuals who met the eligibility criteria—Filipino only-child adults residing in the Philippines—while maintaining participant autonomy and voluntary consent.

The Google Form served as both a recruitment and screening tool. Interested individuals were first presented with a comprehensive informed consent form, outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality provisions, and the right to withdraw at any point. Only after acknowledging and agreeing to the consent terms could participants proceed. The form then collected basic demographic information, contact details, and

preferences for interview scheduling, including date, time, and preferred mode (face-to-face or online).

Once the target sample size was reached, eligible participants were contacted via Facebook Messenger or email to finalize interview arrangements. Three participants (P1, P2, and P6) chose to participate in face-to-face interviews conducted in empty classrooms, selected for their quiet, familiar, and distraction-free environment. The remaining three participants (P3, P4, and P5) opted for online interviews conducted via Zoom, allowing for flexibility and inclusivity regardless of geographical limitations.

All interviews followed a semi-structured format, providing a balance between consistent guiding questions and the flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth. To establish rapport, the researchers began each session with a brief personal introduction, an explanation of the interview process, and casual conversation to create a relaxed and respectful atmosphere. Participants were encouraged to speak freely, reassured of the confidentiality of their responses, and reminded that there were no right or wrong answers. This approach fostered trust and openness, which are essential in qualitative, phenomenological research. The interview questions were designed to explore three core areas: (1) the participants' unique experiences as only children, (2) the presence or absence of existential loneliness, and (3) the strategies used to cope with or manage such feelings. Follow-up and probing questions were posed to clarify and deepen understanding based on each participant's responses.

To conclude the interviews, the researchers conducted a debriefing session to address any emotional discomfort that might have arisen during the discussion. Participants were reminded that the interview was not a clinical diagnostic session and were encouraged not to self-diagnose based on the topics covered. This final step aimed to uphold ethical standards and minimize any psychological risks associated with reflecting on personal emotional experiences.

Ethical Considerations
The study is committed to adhering to ethical standards in academic research by prioritizing the confidentiality, anonymity, and well-being of all participants. Prior to continuing their participation, all participants were asked to carefully review and acknowledge their understanding of the informed consent written in the GForms. In terms of face-to-face interviews, the participants were provided with a clear explanation of the interview process and assured that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality. This step is essential to ensure that participants will be fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks before deciding to participate.

All personal information provided both in the preliminary data collection and the actual interview, including demographic data collected at the time of the study, were treated with strict confidentiality. Pertinent data like audio and video recordings, as well as transcriptions were stored in a Google drive folder that only the researchers have access to. Likewise, to ensure the anonymity of participants, the researchers used codes in place of identifying information (e.g., P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, & P6). All data will be permanently deleted upon completion of the study.

Moreover, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. The researchers reserve the right to discontinue an interview if any discomfort or distress arises between the interviewer and the participant. While the study

poses minimal risks, there is a slight possibility that participants might self-diagnose mental health conditions after answering the interview questions. As the researchers highly discouraged such a tendency, this was checked during the debriefing process after the interview to ensure that the participants will not misinterpret their responses.

Furthermore, a reflexivity journal (*see Appendix D*) was maintained throughout the research process to aid researchers in being aware of potential biases and how they might influence the study's outcomes. This journal documented thoughts, assumptions, and decision-making processes, before, after, and during the conduct of the data collection process.

Data Analysis Plan
After all interviews were transcribed, the researchers listened to the recordings and read the transcripts multiple times to accurately understand the participants' responses. Afterwards, relevant passages (phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) were highlighted as codes, which were then grouped based on recurring themes. The researchers analyzed these themes to understand their significance in the study. Finally, a thematic map was created to illustrate the essence of existential loneliness and its interconnections with other factors (*see Appendix A*).

FINDINGS

Focused Parental Attention
Parental attention is the attention a parent/s gives to their offspring and is an attitude that involves monitoring overall developments in the child (Lestari, 2020). Participants described similar experiences in the increased parental attention they receive from their parents with statements highlighting how this could either be beneficial or disadvantageous.

> "...you don't have to compete for attention because all of your parents' attention is on you." (P1)

> "It's like you're used to having all the attention to yourself, like you're the only one being cared for." (P2)

> "...since I'm an only child and I'm really the only one my mom and dad are focused on… like I said, they're very strict to the point that they don't allow me to go outside that familiar neighborhood… they always read the chat messages on my phone." (P3)

> "...even though I'm an only child, it's like, I was showered with love and the attention was all on me, it wasn't divided, so yeah, it's good, but sometimes it gets lonely." (P5)

> "The pressure from my parents is focused solely on me." (P6)

Personality
Personality encompasses the lasting traits and behaviors that define an individual's distinctive approach to life. It includes core characteristics such as major traits, interests, motivations, values, self-perception, skills, and emotional tendencies (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Tendency to be reserved or introverted
This sub-theme reflects the predisposition of participants toward preference for solitary or small-group interactions, and a cautious approach to social engagement.

> "I'm not that outgoing since I said I'm an introvert, so I'm more into cultivating a small circle of friends…" (P4, on describing their relationship with their peers)

> "Back then, people used to tell my parents, 'Oh, P1 is quiet, just sitting in a corner, always reading.'" (P1)

> "Because I also met someone who surprised me, turns out they're an only child too. But they're super extroverted. That's really our biggest difference." (P3)

> "As for me, I'm a very reserved person, like, I only choose certain people I can share things with." (P5)

Lack of Social Skills
The lack of Social Skills sub-theme is characterized by difficulty in forming relationships, feelings of isolation, and challenges in navigating social settings. The majority of the participants stated that they had difficulty socializing and attributed this lack to limited interactions they had as an only child.

> "Since I didn't really have anyone to talk to or practice my communication or social skills with, I had a hard time, especially in elementary school, making friends." (P1)

> "With my peers, actually, I really struggle to socialize—to make friends and all that, unless they were the ones who approached me, because even though I had cousins, I still didn't really know how to interact with others." (P2)

> "...maybe I'm just very particular about the people I face, so sometimes, I find it hard to communicate. It's like it takes time to build a connection with other people." (P5)

> "It's difficult because I don't know how to approach them or how to open up to them." (P6, on the extent of difficulty when connecting with peers).

Life Purpose
Life purpose is defined as the main aim in an individual's life that serves as a primary motivator and guide that influences attitude and behavior, as well as the creation of meaning for one's existence (Leonard & Kreitzer, 2024). The majority of the participants identified a clear sense of purpose while others stated that they are still having difficulty identifying theirs.

> "It's like one thing that would make me feel complete, or that I've accomplished something, is if I become a source of happiness for other people." (P5)

> "My purpose is to pursue my dreams and give back

to my parents." (P1)

"I really don't know what my purpose in life is." (P2)

"My sense of purpose is more on helping other people or understanding them." (P4)

"Even though that plan is laid out, I'm still struggling. Because it's more like. I keep questioning myself, 'Can I really do this?' and 'Am I really sure this is my purpose in life?'" (P3, on their plans to be a mental health professional)

Social Connection

The first major theme that emerged in the participants' responses is Social Connection. Social Connection is the interpersonal closeness between individuals that results in a sense of being supported and belonging through social relationships and finding relatedness in other people (Van Bel et al., 2009; Chuter, 2020). This theme encompasses two subthemes: the support received from others and understanding received from others.

Support Received from Others

Support received from others is the first subtheme for social connection wherein support is defined as a form of aid or encouragement that could either be practical or emotional (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024). The participants' statements highlight their experiences on the support they receive from their peers, friends, and family.

"...they help me and encourage me to pursue the things that would help me not just stay inside my shell... and for me to get out once in a while" (P1)

"I can say that the way they support me is okay... I get the feeling that they try to meet me halfway like they try to understand me as long as I try to understand them as well." (P2, on the support they received from their peers)

"The support and understanding from them is different because when it comes to friends, I feel much more comfortable opening up to them compared to my parents." (P3)

"They're fully supportive. There are times when, of course, we've been through different experiences, so they don't always understand the things I'm currently busy with, but they always try to be supportive, and they always try to motivate and comfort me whenever things get heavy." (P4, on the support they receive from their parents)

"Sometimes they bring up the fact that I'm an only child, so when they mention that, I tend to feel their support even more, like sometimes they treat me like a sibling." (P5, on the support they receive from their peers)

"Maybe it's because I'm an only child, so their focus—their support, is all on me. And maybe because we have a good relationship, we talk regularly, and their support feels strong." (P6)

Understanding Received from Others

A sense of understanding between individuals is established when one is able to consider the perspective of the other and relate with them. This sub-theme encapsulates the feeling of participants wherein they

describe the degree to which they feel that others can or cannot relate to them through the presence or absence of shared experiences or similar sentiments.

"It's like I don't totally feel 100% that I really belong. There are times when I feel like no one will truly understand me." (P2)

"There's no judgment no matter what happens. Sometimes, they're even the ones who say, 'Oh, I've gone through that too. This happened to me as well. Turns out we're the same.' But it's not in a way that you're comparing experiences, it's more about validating that, 'I understand how you felt because something similar happened to me too.'" (P3 on their relationship with friends)

"...another reason is that I got to know more people who understand me. I guess I've developed a sense of belonging with my friends, with my classmates." (P4)

"I feel like people who are also only children can relate to me more." (P5)

Coping Strategies in Alleviating Loneliness

Coping strategies pertain to the actions or mechanisms employed (either cognitive or behavioral efforts) that aim to reduce distressing emotion/s or help an individual adapt to situations associated with these emotions (Holahan et al., 2007). Statements from participants focused on how they cope with negative affect, particularly loneliness. This theme encompasses two subthemes: suppressing or displacing emotions and engaging in activities.

Engaging in Activities

This sub-theme pertains to the ways individuals combat loneliness by actively involving themselves in purposeful or enjoyable tasks. Engaging in activities serves as a distraction from feelings of isolation, provides opportunities for personal fulfillment, and can create pathways for social interaction. All the participants mentioned or stated their experiences on engaging in activities to cope with feelings of loneliness.

"...I try to talk to my friends or check in on my family to see how they're doing... I play games, finish my to-be-watched, or read." (P1)

"...I invite my friends to hang out. It's like I cling to my friends, or sometimes to my cousins or my uncles and aunts... I just joke around with them or ask them to go out with me, just so I can get that feeling off my mind."

"The thing I really do, although it's also unhealthy, is study. I just pour everything into studying." (P3)

"if I'm alone I can spend it doing self-care" (P4)

"...I approach my friends, like I'll invite them, 'Hey, let's go out,' something like that, because I feel lonely." (P5)

"My way of coping is reading, or watching my favorite shows, or listening to music so I don't dwell on it too much." (P6)

Suppressing or displacing emotions

This sub-theme reflects the tendency of the participants to manage loneliness by avoiding or redirecting their emotional experiences rather than directly addressing the root causes of their feelings. It involves behavior where emotions tied to loneliness (e.g. anger) are either minimized, ignored, shifted toward other outlets.

> *"I don't really pay attention to it, so what happens is it kind of builds up, and there are times when I just explode, like… you know what I mean? Like I suddenly break down because of it."* (P2)

> *"I feel like all the people I'm close to are also busy with school, so of course I don't want to, in a way, bother them, so yeah, I end up having a hard time expressing what I'm feeling."* (P1)

> *"One of the things I noticed, and actually my mom and my current friends noticed it too, is that I've become easily irritable, like I get angry quickly."* (P3)

DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino only children adults and how these realities contributed to the presence or absence of feelings of existential loneliness among them. Interestingly, the accounts of most participants indicated the absence of feelings of existential loneliness as they navigate adulthood as only children. This result aligns with existing literature, which argued that only children may not live through higher levels of loneliness associated with feelings of isolation.

The findings on focused parental attention and personality resonate with existing personality theories. Falbo (1980) and Veenhoven & Verkuyten (1989) theorize that only children differ from those with siblings in terms of personality and that this difference is due to the increased resources and more focused attention they receive from their parents and other immediate family members. Although the emergent themes on the lack of social skills and tendency to be reserved of the participants may be related to the theory that only children may be less inclined to work with others (Adler as cited in Feist et al., 2018, pp. 92), more recent empirical research on personality differences between only children and those with siblings suggest that only children has comparatively lower neuroticism than those with siblings.

Furthermore, existing loneliness research on adults states that social connection and social support affects the level of loneliness of adults and plays a significant role reducing it (Hayes et al., 2022; Stocker et al., 2020). These findings are connected with the theme of social connection which encompasses the presence of support and understanding received from others (peers, family, friends, and other only children).

Furthermore, finding meaning in life and existential reflection are two components of existential loneliness that differentiate it from normal loneliness, as implicated in the qualitative studies of Olofsson et al. (2021) and McKenna-Plumley et al. (2023b). In comparison, the identified theme on purpose in life contains existential implications as it encompasses the accounts of participants which highlighted their reflections on their purpose and their identity in connection to the world and is related to the perception of the presence or absence of existential loneliness in the participants.

Recent research underscores the relationship between social support and loneliness. Hayes et al. (2022) identified a significant connection between social identity, emotion regulation, and loneliness, suggesting that strong social support systems can alleviate feelings of loneliness. This evidence is reflected on the participants' responses. For example, P1 mentioned, *"…tinutulungan naman nila ako at ine-encourage nila ako na i-pursue 'yung mga bagay na parang, para 'di lang ako mag-stay sa shell ko… lumabas din ako,"* and P4 added, *"…other reason din kasi: I got to know more people na, na naiintindihan ako, gan'yan. Siguro nagkaroon na rin ako ng sense of belonging with my friends, gan'yan, with my classmates,' among other similar responses.* This perspective is corroborated by Lin et al.(2021), which reported that only children experienced lower levels of loneliness than their counterparts with siblings. Likewise, Wickle et al. (n.d.) suggested that only children experience reduced feelings of loneliness when engaging with peers and cousins, emphasizing the importance of extensive social networks.

Further supporting this result, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown similar trends. Shen et al. (2021) found that only children reported lower levels of loneliness compared to those with siblings, attributing this to increased family support during challenging times. In the present study, P4 stated, *"Full support naman sila. There are times na parang s'yempre magkaiba kami ng pinagdaanan, minsan hindi nila naiintindihan 'yung mga bagay na busy ako at the moment pero they always try to be supportive and they always try to motivate me and parang to comfort me whenever nagiging mabigat na rin 'yung mga pinagdadaanan."* Aside from this, P5 also shared, *"Siguro nga kasi only child lang ako so 'yung focus nila—support nila, nasa'kin lang. And siguro nga, dahil maganda 'yung relationship namin, regularly kami nakakapag-usap, 'yung support nila is parang strong."*

While several participants disclosed feelings of general loneliness as part of their daily experiences as only children, all of them have demonstrated notable adaptability in managing these emotions as they grow older. They have developed a variety of coping strategies that are effective for them on an individual basis. Common among these approaches are engaging with friends, watching shows, reading, studying, practicing self-care activities, and listening to music. These activities provide them with outlets for connection and personal fulfillment, helping to alleviate such a feeling.

However, it is important to note that half of the participants adopted less constructive coping strategies. These individuals tended to suppress their feelings of general loneliness by minimizing or ignoring their emotions, or by diverting their attention toward other activities. This approach may offer temporary relief, but it can also hinder their ability to confront and process their feelings in a healthy manner. Overall, while the participants exhibit a range of adaptive responses to loneliness, the presence of negative coping mechanisms among some—aside from appearing to be alarming—highlights the complexity of their emotional experiences.

Lastly, another significant finding to highlight is the presence of existential loneliness as derived from the responses of two female participants, P2 and P3. This feeling appears to stem from their negative life experiences with their parents, which have profoundly impacted their emotional well-being and personal existential realities. For both P2 and P3, the dynamics of their parental relationships have contributed to a sense of isolation that transcends general feelings of loneliness. Their experiences reveal a deep-seated longing for connection and understanding that they feel has been unfulfilled due to these adverse experiences. *"Nararamdaman ko lang siya kapag siguro may problema ako or… lalo na ngayon na parang hindi okay 'yung nanay at tatay ko, so parang, alam mo 'yon, nakakaramdam ako ng lungkot, 'yung parang feeling ko salo ko 'yon, salo ko lahat, parang wala rin akong mapagsabihan, naiipit ako, hindi ko alam kung anong dapat kong gawin, kasi nga, since ako lang, ako lang 'yung naiipit."* P2 associated the state of her existence with her familial struggles of carrying the burden of

struggling alone, *"...Alam ko pa rin sa sarili ko talaga na parang... hindi siya kumpleto and hindi na siya magiging kumpleto,"* concluding the interview as they described their sense of connectedness with others.

Similarly, P3 shared that their negative interactions with their parents, specifically with their mother, have fostered feelings of isolation, reinforcing their sense of existential loneliness. Growing up as an only child, their mother developed hyper-focused parental attention, mentioning, *"Nung nag-annulled 'yung biological father ko and 'yung mom ko... doon siya naging much more stricter... since only child nga ako and babae ako, 'yung mom ko, 'yung pagka-strict niya, umabot to the point of extreme so hindi na ako pinapalabas, binabasa lagi ;yung chat messages sa phone...medyo pressuring din on my end kasi nga gusto nila na sobrang palagi akong nagsisimba every single—every Sunday..."* This illustrates how unresolved issues with parental figures can lead to a more profound and existential sense of isolation. *"It feels very lonely, kasi isa pa, 'yung expectations ng family ko, 'yung iba kasi sa kanila, gusto nila na after ko grumaduate, gusto, ako naman 'yung magbibigay sa kanila. After ko maging, makakuha ng trabaho, 'yung salary, 'yung half salary, majority of them, mapupunta sa kanila, 'yung investment, 'yung gano'n. E mag-isa lang ako, so hindi ko alam kung uunahin ko ba 'yung sarili ko, uunahin ko ba 'yung pangarap ko, o uunahin ko ba sila,"* describing her conflict with determining their purpose in life as the only child of their parents.

Evidently, both P2 and P3 faced significant life events that challenged their existential perceptions among themselves. This indicator reflects the available literature on the existential loneliness experienced by older adults, regardless of birth order. All these notable qualitative studies discovered the presence of such a phenomenon on older adults who are encountering critical life experiences, including migration, frailty, illness, and the complexities of caregiving, all of which are exacerbated by the challenges of aging in different care environments (Sundström et al., 2018; Larsson et al., 2023; & Olofsson et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that the nature of existential loneliness as a deeper form of loneliness characterized by a sense of disconnection to others appears to occur during or after significant life events.

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged, particularly on the participants' demographics. First, the sample is predominantly female, with only one male participant. This imbalance in the participants' sex may introduce bias, as the emotional experiences and familial dynamics may differ between men and women, potentially affecting the study's equal representation of the perceptions of both. Second, the participants were all young adults, ranging in age from 20 to 22 years old, which may reflect only the experiences of individuals from the early adulthood stage. Third, the majority of participants (five out of six) reside in Metro Manila, with only one participant living in another region of the country. This geographical concentration could limit the study's relevance to only children adults from rural areas, where cultural, social, and economic factors may differ significantly. These demographic factors may limit the generalizability of the findings.

The findings of the study impact clinical and social work practice, as well as the understanding of existential loneliness in Filipino only child adults. It contributes to research on loneliness, only children, and the role of birth order in collectivist cultures, enriching future work in developmental psychology, social psychology, and cross-cultural studies. Moreover, they provide valuable insights for psychological practice and interventions. Since most participants did not experience existential loneliness due to strong support systems and effective coping strategies, mental health professionals can focus on strengthening these networks in therapeutic approaches. Encouraging healthy family dynamics, fostering positive peer

relationships, and developing coping skills can help mitigate psychological practice and interventions. Since most participants did not experience existential loneliness due to strong support systems and effective coping strategies, mental health professionals can focus on strengthening these networks in therapeutic approaches. Encouraging healthy family dynamics, fostering positive peer relationships, and developing coping skills can help mitigate loneliness in only children. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of communication, empathy, and shared understanding within families and society.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing scarce literature on existential loneliness by providing a nuanced understanding of how only children navigate feelings of loneliness in adulthood. The findings challenge established views and theories on the personality of these individuals, including the primary contributor to the prevalent stereotypes even in Philippine society today: G. Stanley Hall's negative characterization of them as "maladjusted"—among many other negative characteristics. It indicates that only children adults have adequately adapted to their unique familial circumstances through a range of coping strategies, particularly in managing and alleviating feelings of loneliness, which have helped them navigate potential challenges related to social isolation. This suggests the need for a broader theoretical framework that considers the complexities of familial and social contexts in shaping an individual's sense of connection to the world. Furthermore, the study may inform future research exploring the psychological well-being of only children, offering new avenues for investigating the interactions among cultural, familial, and personal factors in influencing the experience of loneliness and related existential concerns.

In consideration of the findings of this study, several recommendations for institutions are proposed to strengthen the support systems for only children adults and mitigate their emotional struggles. Educational institutions can integrate mental health programs, counseling services, and social engagement opportunities to help young adult students develop effective coping strategies and reduce feelings of isolation. Likewise, government agencies and non-profit organizations' family-centered programs can focus on enhancing parent-child relationships and supporting individuals who may lack traditional family structures, such as those raised by extended family or caregivers. By engaging these societal institutions, a comprehensive practical approach can be created based on the findings of this study.

For future studies, several key areas are suggested for future exploration. First, studies are recommended to use a more diverse sample that includes only children from various stages of adulthood, ensuring both men and women from different regions of the Philippines are equally represented. This would enhance the generalizability of the findings and impart a broader understanding of the presence or absence of existential loneliness across different demographic groups. Additionally, future research should consider sampling participants from middle adulthood (ages 30 and above), as individuals in this age group may experience significant existential events, such as a quarter-life or mid-life crisis, which could influence their experience of loneliness. Moreover, given that some participants reported significant loneliness during their teenage years, future research is advised to investigate existential loneliness among only children adolescents. Adolescence is a critical time of transition, and exploring the phenomenon during this period could offer valuable insights into its early onset.

Additionally, incorporating a quantitative approach using standardized instruments to measure the presence of existential loneliness would allow for more objective data, complementing qualitative findings. Aside from these, future research is encouraged to also examine how specific family dynamics, such as the quality of

parent-child relationships and the presence or absence of parents, contribute to such a type of loneliness. It is essential to explore how individuals raised in non-traditional family settings, such as those cared for by extended family members or without parental figures, experience loneliness differently. Finally, future researchers are urged to explore the development and implementation of intervention programs that focus on promoting social support networks for only children.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceived existential loneliness of Filipino only-child adults through the lens of their lived experiences. Using a phenomenological approach, the researchers sought to understand how being an only child within the Filipino cultural context may shape their emotional and psychological experiences, particularly in relation to feelings of isolation or disconnection. Through this inquiry, the researchers identified five major themes that highlighted different aspects of their social and emotional worlds: Social Connection, Life Purpose, Focused Parental Attention, Coping Strategies to Alleviate Loneliness, and Personality. Within these broad categories, six sub-themes emerged, including Support Received from Others and Understanding Received from Others under Social Connection; Suppressing or Displacing Emotions and Engaging in Activities under Coping Strategies; and Tendency to Be Reserved or Introverted and Lack of Social Skills under Personality. Key findings reveal that many participants experienced challenges in social interactions, which they linked to their upbringing as only children with limited sibling interaction. Their reflections on life purpose showed variability, with some expressing a clear sense of direction while others acknowledged uncertainty or ambiguity. Participants described a range of coping strategies to manage loneliness, from engaging in activities to emotionally suppressing or displacing difficult feelings. Focused parental attention was viewed ambivalently, providing both support and pressure. Additionally, personality traits such as introversion and limited social skills appeared common, suggesting familial environment influences.

Aside from the key findings mentioned above, the participants of the study share unique experiences that constitute being a Filipino only child adult and are affected by similar factors that impact their overall perception of existential loneliness. These factors are represented in the study through themes and subthemes. Importantly, the analysis indicates that existential loneliness is not an inherent experience for Filipino only-child adults. Most participants did not report persistent feelings of existential isolation, and those who did linked such feelings to significant life events—such as trauma or the COVID-19 pandemic—rather than their status as only children. This suggests that existential loneliness among this population is situational rather than a direct consequence of being an only child. The study underscores the complexity of their experiences and highlights the need to consider cultural, familial, and contextual factors rather than relying on stereotypes. Overall, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Filipino only-child adults and challenge assumptions that they are predisposed to loneliness or social maladjustment.

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