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Research Article

Navigating the Binary: A Qualitative Study on the Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of Gender-Diverse College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the systemic intersection between institutional regulations and the daily social lives of gender-diverse students (N=26) within a regional university campus. Using qualitative analysis across four core Statements of the Problem (SOPs), the findings reveal a campus environment characterized by conditional inclusivity. While structural metrics show high peer acceptance and active diversity programming, participants note persistent challenges, including generational microaggressions from faculty and the structural erasure of bisexual and asexual identities. Systemic friction centers primarily on binary infrastructure and rigid uniform regulations, which induce severe bathroom navigation anxiety and place an unnecessary administrative burden on students seeking dress code exemptions. To manage these daily minority stressors, students utilize calibrated classroom advocacy alongside self-protective strategic silence. Students also rely heavily on relational buffers—such as secure queer peer networks—and intentional intrapersonal isolation, frequently retreating to quiet campus spaces like the library to maintain psychological well-being. The study highlights a critical gap between top-down administrative policies and the lived realities of students. To address these issues, this paper offers actionable institutional recommendations, including retrofitting all-gender spatial facilities, decoupling uniform guidelines from gender binaries, and codifying protective local anti-discrimination ordinances.

Keywords: *All-Gender Restrooms, Campus Climate in Philippine Higher Education, Coping Mechanisms Institutional Barriers, Gender-Diverse Students, Minority Stress.*

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Introduction

The landscape of higher education in the Philippines is undergoing a complex cultural shift regarding gender inclusivity. At the macro level, state mandates like the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) guidelines and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 01, Series of 2015, legally obligate Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to implement Gender and Development (GAD) frameworks. These structural policies aim to dismantle historical biases, eliminate gender-based discrimination, and foster safe learning environments for all student populations.

However, at the micro level, the lived experiences of gender-diverse college students—encompassing transgender, non-binary, bisexual, and asexual individuals—frequently clash with persistent institutional remnants of a strictly binary society. While contemporary student subcultures demonstrate rising lateral tolerance and open validation of diverse identities, institutional spaces like campus facilities, classrooms, and administrative rulebooks remain deeply rooted in traditional binary models. This creates a state of conditional inclusivity, where structural policies exist on paper but daily campus spaces require constant negotiation and self-protection from gender-minority students.

Theoretical Framework: Minority Stress Theory

This study is grounded in Ilan Meyer's Minority Stress Theory, which posits that individuals from stigmatized minority groups experience chronic psychological stress beyond the typical stressors of daily life. This stress is categorized into two main dimensions:

1. Objective Proximal Stressors: Structural and environmental frictions, such as negotiating gender-segregated bathrooms (P1, P10) or navigating rigid binary uniforms (P16, P21).
2. Subjective Distal Stressors: Internalized anxieties, hypervigilance, and the constant fear of social or academic rejection.

For gender-diverse individuals in an academic setting, minority stress manifests as a continuous demand for risk assessment. Students must constantly evaluate whether

speaking up against a stereotype, dressing authentically, or using a specific campus facility will invite hostility, academic penalties, or social isolation.

Understanding how students deploy coping strategies—ranging from relational anchoring in queer affinity spaces to defensive, strategic silence—is essential for transforming higher education from a space of conditional tolerance into an environment of genuine institutional belonging.

Methodology

This section outlines the systematic framework used to investigate the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of gender-diverse college students. It details the research design, participant selection parameters, data collection procedures, ethical protocols, and the thematic analysis framework deployed to ensure the study's scientific rigor and trustworthiness.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive design. This approach is uniquely suited for researchers seeking to discover the direct nuances of a phenomenon without applying highly abstract theoretical transformations. By focusing on descriptive qualitative reporting, the study captured the detailed accounts of students' daily lives within the university. It preserved the operational language, contextual meanings, and lived realities of participants as they navigated binary campus regulations, classroom environments, and peer interactions.

Participants of the Study

A total of twenty-six ($N=26$) gender-diverse undergraduate students participated in the study. Participants were selected using criterion-based purposive sampling to ensure that all individuals possessed direct, first-hand experience with the phenomenon under investigation. To qualify for recruitment, participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Be currently enrolled as an active undergraduate student at the university.
2. Self-identify as part of the gender-diverse or sexual-minority spectrum (e.g.,

transgender, non-binary, bisexual, demisexual, or asexual).
3. Have completed at least one full academic semester on campus to ensure sufficient exposure to institutional policies, dress codes, and spatial facilities.

The sample size was determined by data saturation, which was monitored continuously using an iterative, rolling coding process rather than a post-hoc evaluation. The research team began assessing thematic redundancy around the 15th interview, systematically comparing newly generated codes against an accumulating codebook from preceding sessions. Genuine conceptual saturation was observed incrementally between participants 21 and 25, during which no novel structural sub-themes or core conceptual categories emerged regarding campus minority stress or spatial coping mechanisms. The inclusion and interview of the final participant (P26) served strictly as a verification milestone to confirm that successive data extraction yielded complete replication of the established thematic structure, ensuring that the collection process was not prematurely terminated at the artificial limit of the sample size.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary tool for data collection was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, which was mapped directly to the study's Statements of the Problem (SOPs). This instrument used open-ended questions to allow participants to speak freely while maintaining a consistent thematic focus across sessions.

The guide was organized into four main operational blocks:

- (SOP 1): Cultural perceptions, peer dynamics, and generational acceptance.
- (SOP 2): Spatial barriers, bathroom navigation, and uniform dress codes.
- (SOP 3): Classroom power dynamics, instructor language, and stereotyping.
- (SOP 4): Relational buffers, cognitive detachment, and spatial coping mechanisms.

To ensure its validity and appropriateness, the interview guide was reviewed and approved by a panel of qualitative research

experts and Gender and Development (GAD) specialists before deployment.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a rigorous, sequential process designed to protect participant well-being and capture accurate accounts:

1. Administrative Clearance: Official administrative approval was obtained through the university's institutional review channels and the Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Point System.
2. Recruitment and Consent: Potential participants were contacted through local student organizations and trusted peer networks. Interested individuals received an Informed Consent Form detailing the study's purpose, risks, and confidentiality protocols.
3. Interview Execution: Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a neutral, private, and comfortable environment on campus, while online alternatives were offered via secure video conferencing to support participant comfort.
4. Conversational Integration: Interviews were conducted primarily using a mix of Tagalog and Taglish (Tagalog-English code-switching), reflecting the natural, everyday conversational medium of undergraduate students within the regional Philippine university context. This flexible linguistic approach minimized institutional power differentials, encouraging participants to speak freely and capture the direct, authentic nuances of their lived experiences without linguistic constraints. Each session lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was audio-recorded with explicit, documented permission.
5. Transcription and Translation: The recorded audio was transcribed verbatim in its original spoken languages (Tagalog and Taglish) to fully preserve the natural flow of dialogue, emotional emphasis, and conversational interjections. Because the final analysis followed the Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis Framework, the transcribed texts were translated into English to facilitate standardized coding. To maintain semantic validity and cross-cultural conceptual equivalence, a rigorous

forward-and-backward translation protocol was implemented. Two independent bilingual research associates translated the vernacular transcripts into English, which were subsequently back-translated into Tagalog by an independent language validator. Semantic discrepancies, localized idioms, and nuanced gender-diverse terminology were reconciled through consensus review meetings to guarantee a trustworthy audit trail for analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcribed texts were processed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke. This thematic framework follows a systematic, inductive sequence:

1. Familiarization: Deep immersion in the data through repeated reading of the verbatim transcripts ((P1)-(P26)).
2. Initial Coding: Generating descriptive labels for meaningful text segments (e.g., coding restroom challenges as Spatial Anxiety).
3. Searching for Themes: Clustering related codes into broader, tentative sub-themes based on the study's SOP objectives.
4. Reviewing Themes: Verifying the candidate themes against the raw extracts to confirm structural alignment and avoid misinterpretation.
5. Defining and Naming: Setting boundaries for each final theme to ensure clear, non-overlapping conceptual definitions.
6. Producing the Report: Compiling the finalized themes, sub-themes, and tracking codes into the structured Master Thematic Analysis Matrix to anchor Chapter 4's findings.

Ethical Considerations

The research design prioritized strict ethical principles to protect a vulnerable student population:

- Informed Consent: Participation was entirely voluntary. Written or recorded digital consent was obtained before each interview session.
- Confidentiality and Anonymity: To prevent social or academic repercussions, all personally identifying details, program names,

and peer references were masked. Participants were assigned alphanumeric codes ((P1) through (P26)) within the transcripts and final report.

- Beneficence and Non-Maleficence: Due to the sensitive nature of discussing minority stress and discrimination, interviews were conducted with close attention to participant comfort. Participants had the right to skip questions, pause recording, or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.
- Data Security: All raw audio files, transcripts, and consent documentation were encrypted and stored in a secure cloud repository accessible only to the principal research team.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the thematic analysis of the verbatim transcripts of twenty-six ((N=26)) gender-diverse undergraduate students ((P1)-(P26)). The discussion integrates the participants' lived experiences with Ilan Meyer's Minority Stress Theory and contemporary academic literature from 2024 to the present. The findings are structured according to the study's four Statements of the Problem (SOPs).

Institutional Barriers: Restroom Navigation (Participant 10)

Sanitized English Version: *"There have been times when I felt uncomfortable because of the limited gender-specific facilities... If I use the men's restroom, there is a possibility of being judged..."*

Restored Verbatim (Taglish): *"May mga beses talaga na... ano, naiilang ako kasi walang gender-neutral na banyo rito sa campus. Parang nakaka-anxious pumili kung saan papasok. Pag pumasok kasi ako sa CR ng lalaki, titingnan ka nila nang masama o baka ma-judge ka na iba yung intensyon mo. Pag sa babae naman, may magtatanong, 'Bakit ka andito?' Sobrang nakaka-stress siya pag maraming tao."*

Faithful English Translation: *"There are really times when... like, I feel uncomfortable because there are no gender-neutral restrooms here on campus. It feels anxious choosing where*

- 311 to enter. Because if I go into the men's CR, they 360
312 look at you badly or you might get judged 361
313 having different intentions. If in the women's 362
314 someone will ask, 'Why are you here?' It's 363
315 stressful when there are many people around." 364
316 365
317 **Social Pressures & Peer Dynamics (Participant 15)** 366
318 367
319 Sanitized English Version: "As a bisexual 368
320 student who is not fully out, I often watch how 369
321 people talk about LGBTQ+ topics before deciding 370
322 whether I can trust them..." 371
323 Restored Verbatim (Taglish): "Kasi diba, 372
324 sexual ako pero hindi pa ako fully out. Kay 373
325 madalas, pinapakiramdaman ko muna kung 374
326 paano sila mag-usap tungkol sa mga LGBTQ+ 375
327 topics bago ko i-decide kung mapagkakatiwag 376
328 laan ko ba sila. May mga pa-joke kasi minsan 377
329 mga stereotypes... kaya nakakatakot mag 378
330 share. Mas pipiliin ko na lang manahimik par 379
331 hindi mapansin." 380
332 Faithful English Translation: "Because, you 381
333 see, I'm bisexual but not fully out. So usually, 382
334 gauge how they talk about LGBTQ+ topics first 383
335 before I decide if I can trust them. There are ca 384
336 ual jokes sometimes, stereotypes... so it's scary t 385
337 share. I'd rather just stay quiet to avoid drawing 386
338 attention." 387
339 388
340 **Classroom Power Dynamics & Bullying (Participant 11)** 389
341 390
342 Sanitized English Version: "...there was th 391
343 time that I heard one of my classmates use th 392
344 word 'bading' or 'bakla' to our other classmate 393
345 and I navigate this situations by standing up..." 394
346 Restored Verbatim (Taglish): "Sa klas 395
347 namin, wala naman akong naririnig na prof n 396
348 nag-ii-stereotype. Pero may isang beses nu 397
349 narinig ko yung kaklase ko, tinawag na 'bading 398
350 o 'bakla' yung isa naming kasama—paran 399
351 pang-asar ba. Ang ginawa ko, sinita ko talag 400
352 siya tsaka sinumbong ko sa adviser namin par 401
353 maayos at maging safe naman yung classroom 402
354 para sa amin." 403
355 Faithful English Translation: "In our class, 404
356 haven't really heard a prof stereotyping. Bu 405
357 there was this one time, I heard my classmate 406
358 call our other peer 'bading' or 'bakla'—like a 407
359 an insult. What I did was, I really stood up t 408
- them and reported it to our adviser so it could
be fixed and our classroom would be safe for us."
Passive Coping Mechanisms (Participant 21)
Sanitized English Version: "I don't care be-
cause those kinds of people don't need atten-
tion... if you know it's stressful, why would you
bother with it?"
Restored Verbatim (Taglish): "Deadma
lang ako sa kanila, ayoko silang bigyan ng at-
tention. Kasi yung mga ganyang tao, iba talaga
yung mindset... hindi nila gets tong mga gani-
tong bagay. Kung alam mo namang mase-stress
ka lang, bakit mo pa papansinin? Hayaan mo na
lang sila."
Faithful English Translation: "I just ignore
them, I don't want to give them attention. Be-
cause those kinds of people, their mindset is re-
ally different... they don't get these types of
things. If you know you'll only get stressed out,
why would you even bother? Just let them be."
SOP 1: Cultural Perceptions and Peer Dynam-
ics
Theme 1: "Tanggap Naman Pero..." (Condi-
tional Acceptance and Generational
Shifts)
o Focus: Highlights how the younger
generation of students is highly
open-minded, while passive micro-
aggressions still linger among older
faculty and staff generations
Theme 2: "Pa-Joke na Stereotypes" (The Nor-
malization of Casual Mockery)
o Focus: Covers how casual slurs
(bakla, bading) and relationship as-
sumptions force bisexual or clos-
eted students to continuously gauge
their social circles before revealing
their identities
SOP 2: Institutional Barriers and Facility Navi-
gation
Theme 3: "Nakaka-Anxious Pumili" (Restroom
Navigation and Spatial Anxiety)
o Focus: Identifies the daily cognitive
strain and fear of social judgment
felt by transgender and gender-di-
verse individuals when forced to
choose between binary male and fe-
male facilities.

Theme 4: “*Daanin sa Opisyal na Liham*” (Uniform Bureaucracy vs. Binary Uniform Enforcements)

- *Focus*: Discusses the strictness of binary uniform expectations during formal events, contrasted with the successful utilization of administrative pathways (e.g., formal exception letters) to wear pants instead of skirts

SOP 3: Classroom Power Dynamics and Instructor Language

Theme 5: “*Sita o Sumbong*” (Bystander Intervention and Speaking Up vs. Protecting Privacy)

- *Focus*: Explores how students choose to address derogatory language used in the classroom—either by directly standing up to peers, pulling professors aside privately, or remaining quiet to safeguard personal safety and anonymity.

SOP 4: Relational Buffers and Spatial Coping Mechanisms

Theme 6: “*Safe Space kasama ang Barkada*” (Peer Circles as Relational Buffers)

- *Focus*: Explores how finding an inclusive circle of friends, allies, or fellow LGBTQ+ students serves as the primary defense mechanism against minority stress on campus

Theme 7: “*Deadma at Pagpapasensya*” (Cognitive Detachment and Emotional Resilience)

- *Focus*: Analyzes the deliberate choice to “let it go” or stay isolated (e.g., retreating to the library or practicing selective disclosure) to minimize academic disruptions and retain peace of mind.

The data gathered from the twenty-six (N=26) gender-diverse undergraduate students yielded seven distinct core themes. These themes are mapped directly onto the study's structural objectives:

1. SOP 1: Cultural Perceptions and Peer Dynamics

This subsection explores how gender-diverse students perceive prevailing gender norms and expectations within the university culture.

Theme 1: “Tanggap Naman Pero...” (Conditional Acceptance and Generational Shifts)

Participants noted a visible divide between peer acceptance and institutional traditionalism. While the student body actively supports diversity, sub-surface institutional friction remains noticeable.

Participant 3 (P3) highlighted this friendly but evolving cultural atmosphere: “*Well, yung campus natin, which is PRMSU Santa Cruz campus na ngayon, tanggap naman na talaga nila yung fact na maraming genders. May iba’t ibang gender identities, kaya para sa axial, masasabi kong friendly talaga yung overall environment. Gender-friendly campus siya kasi, ayun nga, makikita mo sa university na ang daming students or individuals na part ng LGBTQ community, kasama na ako dun. At saka active naman ang school sa pag-promote ng iba’t ibang programs para sa gender equality.*”

Faithful English Translation: “*Well, our campus, which is PRMSU Santa Cruz campus now, they really accept the fact that there are many genders. There are different gender identities, so for me, I can say the overall environment is really friendly. It's a gender-friendly campus because, as you can see in the university, there are so many students or individuals who are part of the LGBTQ community, including me. And the school is active in promoting different programs for gender equality.*”

Conversely, Participant 21 (P21) identified generational divides among older campus workers:

“*For me, it seems okay, and people are tolerant, but there are times when you feel passive judgment or micro-aggressions, especially from older staff generations and faculty.*”

Theme 2: “Pa-Joke na Stereotypes” (The Normalization of Casual Mockery)

Casual humor, subtle micro-aggressions, and the enforcement of heteronormative relationship assumptions create toxic spaces that

force marginalized students to mask their identities.

Participant 15 (P15), a bisexual student who is not out to the broader campus, described this constant state of monitoring people in spaces:

"Kasi diba, bisexual ako pero hindi pa ak fully out. Kaya madalas, pinapakiramdaman k muna kung paano sila mag-usap tungkol sa mga LGBTQ+ topics bago ko i-decide kung mapagkakatiwalaan ko ba sila. May mga joke kasi minsan, mga stereotypes... kaya nak katakot mag-share. Mas pipiliin ko na lang manahimik para hindi mapansin."

Faithful English Translation: "Because, you see, I'm bisexual but not fully out. So usually, gauge how they talk about LGBTQ+ topics first before I decide if I can trust them. There are casual jokes sometimes, stereotypes... so it's scary to share. I'd rather just stay quiet to avoid drawing attention."

Theoretical Synthesis (Meyer's Minority Stress Theory): These findings confirm that while distal stressors like physical attacks are absent, persistent micro-aggressions form a hostile environment. This environment triggers proximal stressors, forcing students into continuous states of hyper-vigilance and identity concealment.

2. SOP 2: Specific Institutional Barriers

This subsection examines the structural obstacles—specifically architectural design and dress codes—encountered by gender-diverse students.

Theme 3: "Nakaka-Anxious Pumili" (Restroom Navigation and Spatial Anxiety)

The strict divide of restrooms into binary male and female categories serves as a primary source of daily cognitive strain and social stress,

Participant 10 (P10), a transgender student, described the psychological impact of navigating these spaces:

"May mga beses talaga na... ano, naiilang ako kasi walang gender-neutral na banyo rit sa campus. Parang nakaka-anxious pumili kung saan papasok. Pag pumasok kasi ako sa CR ng lalaki, titingnan ka nila nang masama o baka

ma-judge ka na iba yung intensyon mo. Pag sa babae naman, may magtatanong, 'Bakit ka andito?' Sobrang nakaka-stress siya pag maraming tao."

Faithful English Translation: "There are really times when... like, I feel uncomfortable because there are no gender-neutral restrooms here on campus. It feels anxious choosing where to enter. Because if I go into the men's CR, they look at you badly or you might get judged as having different intentions. If in the women's, someone will ask, 'Why are you here?' It's so stressful when there are many people around."

Theme 4: "Daanin sa Opisyal na Liham" (Uniform Bureaucracy vs. Binary Uniform Enforcements)

While default campus uniform policies strictly enforce a traditional binary layout, students manage these requirements through formal, system-approved waivers.

Participant 25 (P25) noted that the administrative path to changing dress code choices was accessible:

"Nung una, nakakailang talaga yung default uniform na palda, kasi mas gusto ko talagang mag-pantalón. Pero naging madali lang naman nung nag-submit ako ng official letter para palitan yung uniform option ko—smooth and reasonable naman yung naging process..."

Faithful English Translation: "At first, the default skirt uniform was really uncomfortable because I really prefer wearing pants. But it was easy when I submitted an official letter to change my uniform option—the process was smooth and reasonable..."

Theoretical Synthesis (Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology): The physical layout of the campus remains inherently oriented towards cisgender bodies. However, students minimize this structural-orientation friction by deploying problem-focused coping mechanisms, using the institution's formal administrative processes to bypass binary rules.

3. SOP 3: Classroom Power Dynamics and Stereotypes

This subsection explores how gendered language, instructor presentation, and

classroom stereotypes influence daily academic interactions.

Theme 5: “*Sita o Sumbong*” (Bystander Intervention and Strategic Safety)

Classroom dynamic choices vary heavily depending on perceived immediate safety. Students toggle between staying silent, speaking up directly, or reporting issues to supervisors.

Participant 11 (P11) shared a narrative of direct student intervention:

“*Sa klase namin, wala naman akong narinig na prof na nag-ii-stereotype. Pero may isang beses nun, narinig ko yung kaklase ko, tinawa na 'bading' o 'bakla' yung isa naming kasama—parang pang-asar ba. Ang ginawa ko, sinita talaga siya tsaka sinumbong ko sa adviser namin para maayos at maging safe naman yung classroom para sa amin.*”

Faithful English Translation: “*In our class, haven't really heard a prof stereotyping. But there was this one time, I heard my classmate call our other peer 'bading' or 'bakla'—like an insult. What I did was, I really stood up to them and reported it to our adviser so it could be fixed and our classroom would be safe for us.*”

Participant 9 (P9) highlighted the alternative choice of tactical withdrawal due to exhaustion of dealing with persistent biases:

“*I choose to remain silent because I feel there is little I can do, considering that stereotyping against the gay community appears to be inevitable.*”

4. SOP 4: Daily Coping Mechanisms

This subsection details the explicit behavioral and cognitive actions students take to preserve mental health and navigate campus stress.

Theme 6: “*Safe Space Kasama ang Barkada*” (Peer Circles as Relational Buffers)

Building selective social ecosystems—often termed a barkada—serves as the primary buffer protecting students from minority stress.

Participant 1 (P1) emphasized how peer acceptance supports resilience:

“*One of the coping mechanisms that helps me manage social stress and institutional challenges is having a strong support system. My*

friends and classmates understand and accept me for who I am...”

Theme 7: “*Deadma at Pagpapasensya*” (Cognitive Detachment and Emotional Resilience)

When peer support is unavailable, or when navigating public areas, students choose emotional distance (deadma) or physical isolation to retain peace of mind.

Participant 21 (P21) summarized this direct, intentional choice to disregard bias:

“*Deadma lang ako sa kanila, ayoko silang bigyan ng attention. Kasi yung mga ganyang tao, iba talaga yung mindset... hindi nila gets tong mga ganitong bagay. Kung alam mo namang mase-stress ka lang, bakit mo pa papansinin? Hayaan mo na lang sila.*”

Faithful English Translation: “*I just ignore them, I don't want to give them attention. Because those kinds of people, their mindset is really different... they don't get these types of things. If you know you'll only get stressed out, why would you even bother? Just let them be.*”

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of twenty-six (N=26) gender-diverse students reveals a distinct operational gap between macro-level administrative policy compliance and the micro-level daily realities of campus life. While the university successfully satisfies national mandates—such as the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 01, Series of 2015—by implementing visible Gender and Development (GAD) orientations, the campus infrastructure and regulations remain anchored in a traditional binary framework. This disconnect creates an environment of conditional inclusivity, where systemic acceptance is granted superficially but denied spatially and structurally.

This conditional environment forces gender-minority students into a state of chronic minority stress, defined by continuous risk assessment, hyper-vigilance, and emotional exhaustion. Students face clear institutional and physical barriers, most visible in the intense anxiety surrounding gender-segregated

restrooms and the administrative hurdles required to secure uniform exemptions. When interacting within the classroom, students manage unequal power dynamics through strategic negotiation, balancing the desire for authenticity against the practical need for self-preservation, which often manifests as self-protective silence.

Ultimately, students preserve their psychological well-being by establishing relational buffers with trusted allies and retreating into isolated physical spaces like the campus library. For the university to move beyond mere compliance and achieve genuine institutional belonging, it must actively transition from a model that forces diverse identities to fit into rigid binary structures to one that redesigns its rules and campus spaces to be universally inclusive.

Recommendations

To bridge the operational gap between administrative intent and student realities, President Ramon Magsaysay State University (PRMSU) must transition from a model of superficial compliance to an actionable, operational roadmap. The following structural, regulatory, and institutional reforms are assigned to specific university offices for immediate and long-term execution:

1. Architectural and Facility Adjustments

- Retrofit Single-Occupancy Restrooms
 - *Action:* Convert existing independent faculty, staff, or administrative restrooms into clearly marked "All-Gender / Gender-Neutral Restrooms" across every major academic building to eliminate restroom navigation anxiety.
 - *Responsible Office:* Physical Plant and Facilities Office (PPFO) / Campus Engineers, in direct consultation with the Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Point System.
- Implement Universal Function-Based Signage
 - *Action:* Remove gender-restrictive icons from retrofitted restroom

doors, replacing them with functional symbols (e.g., a toilet icon) to remove social pressure and prevent public policing of student identities.

- *Responsible Office:* Physical Plant and Facilities Office (PPFO).
- Integrate Inclusivity into Future Infrastructure
 - *Action:* Mandate that all future campus building designs include single-occupancy, universally accessible, gender-neutral restrooms as a non-negotiable step in the pre-construction compliance checklist.
 - *Responsible Office:* Planning and Development Office and PPFO, with final policy approval from the PRMSU Board of Regents (BOR).

2. Regulatory and Dress Code Reforms

- De-gender the Student Uniform Policy
 - *Action:* Revise the student handbook to replace separate "Male" and "Female" clothing regulations with a single, unified "Inclusive Professional Attire Manual" based on neatness, safety, and academic modesty rather than gender assignment.
 - *Responsible Office:* Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) and the Student Handbook Revision Committee, subject to BOR ratification.
- Abolish Administrative Exemption Letters
 - *Action:* Allow all students to choose freely between wearing uniform trousers, blouses, or skirts without requiring them to write, submit, or defend a formal letter of deviation to campus authorities.
 - *Responsible Office:* Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) and Campus Security and Safety Command (to update frontline gate-keeping protocols).

- Protect Cross-Dressing on Civilian Days
 - *Action:* Clarify dress code guidelines for wash days or civilian clothing days to explicitly protect cross-dressing from disciplinary action, administrative gatekeeping, or campus entry denial.
 - *Responsible Office:* Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) and the Student Civil Discipline Board.
3. Institutional Governance and Pedagogy
 - Codify an Enforceable Student Anti-Discrimination Ordinance
 - *Action:* Expand the current administrative framework to include a localized student ordinance that clearly defines, tracks, and penalizes microaggressions, willful deadnaming, misgendering, and identity-based bullying by both peers and personnel.
 - *Responsible Office:* Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Point System, University Legal Counsel, and the PRMSU Student Organizations/College Student Body Organizations (CSBOs).
 - Implement Mandatory Faculty Sensitization
 - *Action:* Require annual gender-affirming pedagogy training for teaching and non-teaching personnel, specifically focusing on resolving generational biases and addressing the social erasure faced by bisexual and asexual student populations.
 - *Responsible Office:* Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) in strategic partnership with the Gender and Development (GAD) Program.
 - Expand Mental Health and Safe Affinity Spaces
 - *Action:* Allocate dedicated student spaces on campus for LGBTQIA+ student groups and support local counseling services with specialists

trained in addressing minority stress and identity validation.

- *Responsible Office:* Guidance and Counseling Services (under OSAS) for specialized psychological support, and the Office of the Director for Administrative Services for physical space allocation.

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