Identifying gender stereotypes of high school LGBTQ students

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Abstract

This study explores and identifies the prevalent gender stereotypes experienced by LGBTQ+ high school students in the Philippine public school, specifically examining how these stereotypes manifest in daily interactions and impact students' school experiences. Guided by social identity theory and intersectionality, the research aims to understand the implications of gender stereotypes on LGBTQ+ students' self-esteem, personal development, and peer relationships. Social identity theory helps frame how students' identities, influenced by their gender and sexual orientation, intersect with broader societal stereotypes, while intersectionality addresses the compounded effects of multiple marginalized identities. Using a qualitative research approach, the study conducted one-on-one interviews with LGBTQ+ students, employing a structured and validated interview protocol to collect detailed insights into their experiences and the institution's efforts to address these challenges. The analysis revealed that gender stereotypes negatively influence LGBTQ+ students' self-perception and hinder personal growth. Although the school's policies to reduce discrimination and bullying were generally beneficial, their effectiveness differed across individuals. The study acknowledges its limitations, including the small sample size and the specific school context, which may not be generalizable. Future research should consider more extensive, diverse samples across different educational environments to enhance understanding and inform the development of more effective support systems and anti-discrimination initiatives.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, increased visibility and acceptance of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations have fostered progressive conversations about inclusivity (Schlief et al., 2023; Rand et al., 2021; Tinlin-Dixon et al., 2024; Özbilgin & Erbil, 2024). However, despite societal advancements, discrimination and stereotyping based on gender and sexual orientation remain prevalent (Klysing et al., 2021), particularly in educational institutions (Sulla et al., 2025; Wickersham & Vajner, 2020). LGBTQ students, those identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, often face challenges such as bullying, prejudice, and gender stereotypes, which negatively impact their school experience and personal development.

Gender stereotypes, as defined by the OHCHR (2014), refer to generalized beliefs about the roles or characteristics expected of individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes perpetuate the traditional norms for men and women and marginalized individuals who deviate from binary gender expectations. LGBTQ students are subjected to stigma due to these rigid gender norms, making their school environments more challenging. According to studies, harmful stereotypes can worsen mental health issues among LGBTQ students, increasing their risk of anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Jiyane et al., 2021). These stereotypes can contribute to a hostile environment where students feel excluded and unsafe.

Given the importance of schools as places of learning and personal growth, it is crucial to identify and address the gender stereotypes that LGBTQ students face in the school setting. The chosen locale serves as the focal point for this study, where examining gender stereotypes in this specific context will offer insights into how stereotypes manifest and affect LGBTQ students' well-being and academic performance. Research has highlighted that the school environment plays a critical role in either perpetuating or dismantling these stereotypes. Schools that promote gender inclusivity and challenge stereotypes foster a more supportive community, leading to improvement of self confidence among LGBTQ students.

Despite initiatives by educational institutions to promote gender sensitivity, LGBTQ students continue to encounter stereotypes and biases that hinder their sense of belonging. Addressing these stereotypes is particularly important as it may lead to more inclusive policies and interventions that promote equality and acceptance for all students. As such, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender inclusivity in schools by providing insights into the challenges LGBTQ students face and how institutions can better support them.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the specific gender stereotypes LGBTQ students encounter within the school environment, (2) to determine how these stereotypes influence the personal development of LGBTQ students, and (3) to examine how the school addresses gender stereotypes. This study highlights the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ students by dismantling harmful stereotypes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gender Stereotypes Encountered by LGBTQ Students in School Environments

Gender stereotypes within schools are embedded in social norms dictating how individuals should behave based on their gender. These norms stigmatize non-comforting behavior leading to margination. Izenstark (2018) defines gender stereotypes as societal norms that dictate responsibilities and roles based on one's gender group. These entrenched norms heavily influence how LGBTQ students are perceived and treated, often creating an environment where non-conforming behaviors are stigmatized. In a study conducted by Kosciw et al. (2016), it was found that LGBTQ students experience significantly higher rates of verbal and physical harassment than their heterosexual peers. This disparity illustrates the persistent presence of gender stereotypes and their impact on students' well-being in academic settings, further highlighting the need to understand these issues.

2.2. The Impact of Stereotypes on the Development of LGBTQ Students in School

The influence of gender stereotypes on LGBTQ students extends beyond mere social discomfort; it has significant implications for their personal and academic development. These students frequently encounter discrimination and harassment, leading to issues such as loneliness, low self-esteem, and mental health struggles. According to Human Rights Watch (2017), the harassment that LGBTQ students endure often stems from entrenched gender stereotypes, manifesting in forms like physical bullying, verbal abuse, sexual assault, and even cyberbullying. Such experiences create a hostile and unfriendly environment that can severely affect LGBTQ students' ability to focus on academics and build healthy peer relationships. The cumulative effect of this discrimination contributes to feelings of alienation and can impede academic progress, as students are forced to navigate both educational and social barriers.

2.3. Institutional Responses to Gender Stereotyping and Challenges

The role of educational institutions in addressing gender stereotypes is crucial. A safe and supportive school environment does not merely imply protection from physical harm; it also involves the provision of emotional support and a culture of inclusivity. Martineau and Cyr (2024) emphasize that creating safe spaces within schools means establishing environments where students feel emotionally secure and validated. This sense of safety is particularly vital for LGBTQ students, who may otherwise struggle with anxiety and discomfort in hostile settings. The implementation of inclusive policies, anti-bullying initiatives, and gender sensitivity training for both students and staff can play a significant role in transforming school environments into more welcoming spaces for LGBTQ individuals (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016). By fostering emotional comfort and promoting acceptance, schools can create conditions where LGBTQ students are empowered to learn and grow without the burden of harmful stereotypes.

This review presents a comprehensive understanding of how gender stereotyping affects LGBTQ students and emphasizes the importance of institutional interventions. Gender stereotypes remain pervasive, influencing the social experiences and academic opportunities available to LGBTQ students (Medina & Mahowald, 2023). These stereotypes have far-reaching consequences, affecting self-esteem, mental health, and educational outcomes. The literature reveals that while some schools have implemented measures to reduce discrimination, the effectiveness of these actions varies. There remains a significant gap in addressing the specific needs of LGBTQ students, and further research is needed to explore best practices for fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. By highlighting the challenges and recommending evidence-based solutions, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender stereotypes and advocate for meaningful institutional changes.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This section examines the relevant theories that form the foundation of this study, aiming to deepen the understanding of gender stereotypes and their impact on LGBTQ students. In contemporary society, gender stereotypes have become pervasive, shaping people's perceptions and influencing judgments based on an individual's gender identity. While research on gender stereotypes affecting men and women has gained significant

attention, studies focusing on the stereotypes experienced by LGBTQ individuals remain limited. This study seeks to address this gap by identifying the gender stereotypes faced by LGBTQ students at Sta. Catalina National High School (SCNHS).

Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (1986, as cited in Nabavi & Bijandi, 2024) provides a framework for understanding how behavior is learned and influenced by environmental and social interactions. According to this theory, individuals observe and imitate the behaviors of those around them, with social and emotional factors playing a crucial role in shaping their actions and beliefs. In the context of this study, Social Cognitive Theory is essential for understanding how LGBTQ students at SCNHS may internalize or respond to gender stereotypes. By observing societal norms and the behaviors of peers, these students might adopt or resist certain behaviors, affecting their self-perception and personal development. This theory helps explain the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes influence LGBTQ students' experiences in a school setting.

Social Role Theory posits that the differences and similarities in individuals' behaviors are largely shaped by societal expectations and gender role beliefs. This theory suggests that gender stereotypes are formed based on the observation of male and female roles in society, which then lead to the assumption that individuals should behave in ways consistent with their perceived gender roles. Applying Social Role Theory to this study allows for an examination of how these societal expectations impact LGBTQ students differently. For example, the gender roles ascribed to men and women may create additional challenges for LGBTQ students who do not conform to these expectations, influencing their social interactions and academic experiences.

By integrating these theories, this study explores how gender stereotypes are learned and perpetuated in the school environment and how they impact the personal and social development of LGBTQ students. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to create more inclusive and supportive educational environments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of LGBTQ students in the chosen locale regarding gender stereotypes. This approach allowed for

an in-depth exploration of participants nuanced, live experiences, perceptions, and the social dynamics affecting them.

3.2 Research Locale and Participants

The study was conducted in one of the secondary high schools in Candelaria, Quezon. It was chosen as the research site for this study due to its substantial enrollment of LGBTQ students. The large LGBTQ population at the locale makes it an ideal context for examining the prevalence and impact of gender stereotypes, as well as understanding how institutional policies and practices address these challenges. According to Manunza et al. (2025), a large population is critical to determine the true value of the data acquired. Moreover, the sample population was identified by consulting class presidents to determine the number of LGBTQ students in each class. Participants were then selected based on the following criteria: self-identification as a member of the LGBTQ community, actively enrolled as a Senior High School student in the chosen locale, and willingness to participate in the study. A total of 15 participants were chosen as justified in Creswell (2013) qualitative research stating the sufficiency of 10-100 participants to represent a diverse range of LGBTQ identities.

3.3 Corpus of the Study

The corpus of the study consists of 15 transcriptions from audio recordings of interviews, enabling a comprehensive understanding of participants' responses, including their perspectives, emotions, and tone. To ensure the credibility and accuracy of the transcripts, the research employed Jefferson's Transcription System (University Transcriptions, 2022) as a guide for incorporating appropriate symbols in the interview transcriptions.

3.4 Research Instrument

The study utilized a non-standardized research instrument tailored to meet the specific objectives of the research. The instrument was developed in accordance with the study's focus on identifying gender stereotypes, their influence on LGBTQ students' development, and the institutional responses to these challenges. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the interview questions were developed in consultation with qualified validators over a two-week period, ensuring they were clear, unbiased, and aligned with the research objectives.

Additionally, pilot testing was conducted with 10 participants to refine the questions and confirm their relevance.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The data were collected through personal, face-to-face interviews guided by a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was carefully validated over a two-week period to ensure that it aligned with the study's objectives. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with 10 participants to refine the instrument further and confirm its clarity and effectiveness (Sundram & Romili, 2023). To ensure accurate transcription and facilitate a comprehensive data analysis, we use voice recording during the data collection phase. The consent of the participants was obtained before the recording process and the interview. The structured interviews were designed to encourage detailed, open-ended responses regarding the participants' experiences with gender stereotypes in the school environment and their perceptions of institutional policies. The recorded data were transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the research questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided by Creswell's (2009) methodological framework for qualitative data. The interview transcripts were first coded to identify emerging themes and patterns. This process involved open coding, where responses were analyzed for recurring terms and concepts related to gender stereotypes. These codes were then grouped into broader categories reflecting key themes such as physical appearance stereotypes, social behaviors, and institutional responses. The final step involved thematic analysis to explore the impact of these stereotypes on LGBTQ students' personal development and their perceptions of institutional actions. This approach ensured a systematic and transparent process for deriving meaningful insights from the data.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

To ensure that the study adheres to ethical standards, the researchers provided respondents with key information about the study's purpose and scope. Participants were invited to voluntarily participate through an informed consent process, where they had the opportunity to understand and agree to the terms of their involvement. To protect anonymity

and privacy, and to mitigate potential risks, all collected data were treated with the highest level of confidentiality, ensuring that no personal or identifiable information would be disclosed.

4. Findings and Discussion

Reported encountering various gender stereotypes, primarily related to physical appearance and body gestures. These stereotypes were often linked to specific terms such as "tomboy," "long chin," and "gay pig," which were associated with assumptions about their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Table 1

Gender stereotype encountered by LGBTQ students

Generated Theme	Responses	General Description
Verbal	- *"Kapag po ako pumapasok na nakakaranasan po ako ng panghuhusga nila sa akin pagsasalita po nila na sa akin ng masakit na salita 'ay ganyan yan.'"* - *"Sa hallway po is, naranasan ako po na i-catcall.. sinabihan nya po ako ng kung ano-ano sa identity ko at personality."*	LGBTQ students experience hurtful verbal comments and judgments, including catcalling and criticism of their way of speaking.
Body Language	- *"Parang ijujudge ka nila base sa galaw mo hindi sa kung paano ka mag-interact sa kanila."* - *"As a gay, yung kilos namin ay ginagaya namin sa babae... hinuhusgahan nila kami na ganon nga kase lalaki naman kami."*	Students are judged based on movements and gestures that don't align with traditional gender roles, leading to bullying.
Physical Appearance	- *"Kapag ako ay naka-makeup, madami po akong nagpaparinig na 'bakla daw po ako, hindi maganda,' ganon tapos 'baklang baboy' kasi mataba po ako."* - *"Jinajudge po nila ako sa insecurities ko... specific sa face ko... long chin daw."*	Participants face discrimination tied to physical appearance, including makeup use, body type, and facial features.

Transgender students face more challenges related to their physical appearance compared to gay or lesbian students, who faced more frequent judgment based on their clothing or mannerisms. Participants also expressed feelings of self-consciousness about their physical features, as well as aspects of their identity, which were seen as either conforming or deviating from societal norms. In the context of interpersonal communication, participants noted that individuals often judge others based on their physical appearance and body language. Unlu (2021) states that people (Turkish primarily) tended to focus more on clothing rather than gender, favoring an elegant dress style. Conversely, Portuguese respondents emphasized body language, especially in evaluating women based on their attire and men based on classical dressing styles.

Table 2

Gender stereotypes influence in the development of LGBTQ students in school

Generated Theme	Responses	Codes	General Description
Loss of Self-Esteem	*Nakaapekto sa akin emotionally and mentally... bumaba yung self-confidence ko dahil sa pang bubully nila...*	*It affects emotionally and mentally*	Participants expressed that bullying and judgment led to emotional distress and a decline in self-confidence, affecting their overall self-esteem.
	Amm... mas lalong nabawasan yung self-confidence ko na humarap sa kanila, makipag-socialize ganun.	*Lowered my confidence*	The individual's confidence was significantly reduced, making it difficult to engage in social interactions and affecting their self-esteem.
	Syempre po nakaka ano yun... nakakailang po kaya po minsan naka-uniform napo ako talaga kasi nasasabihan ako ng ganun nga na hindi naman kaaya-ayang tignan.	*I feel awkwardness, so I wear a uniform*	Participants reported feeling awkward and choosing to conform to uniforms to avoid being judged, signaling a decline in their self-esteem.
	Mas natatakot ako mag-expose or express ang sarili ko dahil mas madalas ko ma-encounter ang pambubully...	*We feel down, scared to express ourselves*	Fear of expressing themselves due to frequent bullying led to diminished self-confidence and emotional distress.

Generated Theme	Responses	Codes	General Description
Social Isolation	*Nahihirapan akong makisabayan sa mga straight.*	*I have a hard time keeping up*	The individual experiences social isolation, struggling to fit in with peers, particularly those who are heterosexual.
	Nahihirapan po akong mag-communicate sa ibang lalaki dahil lagi akong binu-bully...	*Hard time to communicate*	Social interactions are challenging, and the participant experiences difficulty communicating, particularly with males, due to bullying, which isolates them further.
Poor Academic Performance	*Nakakaapekto po ito sa aking pamumuhay dahil... tinatamad po mag-aral dahil sa sinasabi nila...*	*It affects my life, I get lazy to study*	Due to the emotional toll of bullying and judgment, participants reported a lack of motivation to study, leading to a decline in academic performance.
Personal Development	*Am... nung mas nag-grow ako, mas naintindihan ko kung bakit ko kailangan ma-experience yung ganong bagay sa buhay ko as part ng LGBT.*	*I grew more*	Despite the challenges, personal growth occurred as some participants used negative experiences to develop resilience and understanding.
	Ginawa ko po siyang inspirasyon para mapatunayan ng sarili ko na hindi porket part kami ng LGBT ay wala napo kaming mararating sa buhay.	*I made this as inspiration*	Some participants turned negative experiences into motivation, using them as inspiration for success and personal development.

Gender stereotypes significantly influence LGBTQ students' development, manifesting in loss of self-esteem, social isolation, and poor academic performance. However, significant personal development is also consciously described by the participants. According to the 2015 National School Climate Survey by Kosciw et al. (2016), LGBTQ students frequently face

discrimination and harassment due to their gender identity and sexual orientation, leading to feelings of loneliness and diminished self-worth.

These findings align with the research of Russell et al. (2021), which emphasizes that protective policies can help mitigate these challenges by providing educators and administrators with guidance on anti-bullying practices. When school policies are inadequately communicated, LGBTQ students may feel unsupported (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Notably, the implementation of safe school policies has been linked to reduced victimization of LGBTQ students (Palmer & Greytak, 2017).

Table 3

Institutional solutions as manifested by LGBTQ students in gender stereotypes

Generated Theme	Sample Response	Codes	General Description
Moral Support	*"Yung nagbibigay sakin ng lakas ng loob upang magpatuloy po sa ginagawa ko ngayon, para pong hinihikayat nila ako huwag mong maniwala sa sinasabi ng iba at hindi po yan totoo yon."*	They encourage me to not believe what others say	Positive support from peers and guidance has been noted, encouraging students to ignore negative stereotypes.
Supportive Actions & Encouragement	*"Dito po kami namulat na patunayan ang sarili namin na hindi lang porket isang part ng LGBT ay wala nang mararating, at dapat patunayan ng isang LGBT ay may mararating sa paroroonan, mararating ang kanyang future na gustong tuparin."*	They motivate us, don't be afraid to protect LGBT; it helps us prove ourselves	Encouragement to challenge societal stereotypes, promoting self-confidence among LGBTQ students.
School Rules and Policies	*"Sinasabi po ata nila don na bawasan daw po ang pamimakeup namin sa loob ng school."*	They said we should reduce our makeup at school	Dress code policies enforced to reduce potential negative attention but may also limit personal expression.

Generated Theme	Sample Response	Codes	General Description
Implemented Policies & Rules	*"Nag-implement sila ng mga rules, kapag kunyari nabubuly kami, pwede kaming magsumbong sa kanila tapos gumawa din sila ng ibang rules pinagbabawal na panglalait sa aming mga LGBTQ."*	They made rules prohibiting insults	Policies aimed at reducing discrimination and bullying, including anti-insult and anti-bullying measures.
School's Actions (or Lack Thereof)	*"So far wala pa namang nagagawang solution or paraan yung school regarding to that kind of issue."*	There is no solution yet	Skepticism about the effectiveness of current school policies. Some students report feeling little action taken.
Dress Code & Uniform Regulations	*"Kaylangan sa school natin na magsuot ng proper uniform para maiwasan yung mga ganoong pangyayari."*	I open up to our guidance counselor, there are policies about uniform	Dress code policies aim to reduce bullying but can also restrict students' ability to express themselves.
Lack of Personal Expression	*"Lalong lalo na po sa kasuotan na dapat daw po po naka-uniform na ganun, pero para sakin naman po ay kahit ano pong suotin ko basta po maging comfy lang po ako kasi po, pag nagpapalda po ako, hindi po ako masyadong comfy."*	They said we should wear a uniform	Uniform regulations are seen as limiting, with students preferring comfort and personal expression.
Recognition of LGBTQ Rights & Inclusion	*"Meron nang advocacies talagang tinatanggap na siya ng ating societies, so from that na bibigyan ng pansin ng mga teachers with that nabibigyan ng school ng pansin ang mga LGBTQ when it comes to lessons and then some advice."*	Advocacies, some lessons, and advice are provided	LGBTQ inclusion initiatives in schools, including lessons and advice, aim to promote understanding and reduce stereotypes.

Generated Theme	Sample Response	Codes	General Description
Formal Procedures for LGBTQ Issues	*"Ano, pag kunyari, pag nagsumbong, inaano yon sa teacher tapos sa guidance tapos yung mga policy din. Kaya kung hindi sa guidance ay sa teacher or sa advisor."*	When we report, we are told to go to the teacher, guidance, and follow policies	Clear procedures for reporting bullying and discrimination provide a formal system for students to voice concerns.
Self-expression & Personal Freedom	*"Nahrapan naman po ito ng school na kung saan mas nabibigyan po kami ng pansin mas inallow na po kami na sa pagme-makeup na po ngayon mas maluwag na po tayo sa pagsusuot ng mga fitted at masyadong na-express na po yung ano at gusto naming."*	They allowed us to wear makeup, fitted clothes, and express ourselves	Personal freedom is becoming more accepted, with some schools loosening restrictions on makeup and attire, allowing more expression.

The institution has implemented policies to reduce bullying and discrimination, such as awareness programs and anti-bullying campaigns, which have reportedly fostered greater respect and improved social interactions. However, some participants expressed skepticism regarding the effectiveness of these policies. They suggested that while these measures helped somewhat, they were insufficient to eliminate bullying and stereotyping. The students' perceptions of these policies varied, with some reporting a sense of increased protection while others felt that the measures were inadequately enforced. This disparity between students' perceptions and actual policy effectiveness underscores the need for clearer communication and more consistent implementation of anti-bullying initiatives.

Supporting evidence from Waseem and Nickerson (2023) reinforces the need for clear and enforced anti-bullying policies. The presence of these policies signals to the school community that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity will not be tolerated. A lack of effective communication regarding these policies can lead to LGBTQ students feeling unsupported (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). In contrast, robust safe school policies correlate with decreased victimization rates (Kuff et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

The study reveals that LGBTQ students encounter specific gender stereotypes primarily related to their physical appearance and body language. These stereotypes significantly influence their development, leading to issues such as loss of self-esteem, social isolation, and poor academic performance. While institutional policies aimed at reducing bullying and discrimination have had some positive effects, their overall effectiveness remains mixed. Some students feel supported, but others believe that the policies are insufficient to address the stereotyping and bullying they face.

6. Recommendation

The recommendation to strengthen anti-bullying policies and ensure consistent enforcement is rooted in the findings of the study, where some students reported a lack of enforcement and skepticism about the effectiveness of existing policies. By improving communication and implementation of these policies, the institution can foster a safer and more supportive environment for LGBTQ students.

The suggestion to provide professional development for teachers and staff on LGBTQ issues addresses the need for greater awareness and sensitivity training highlighted by the students' feedback. This initiative would equip school staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to handle LGBTQ-related matters with respect and understanding, further contributing to the creation of an inclusive environment.

The recommendation for future research to include comparative studies across different schools or regions is justified by the limitations of the current study, which was confined to a single institution. Expanding the participant pool and conducting cross-school comparisons would not only increase the generalizability of the findings but also provide a broader understanding of the challenges encountered by LGBTQ students. This could lead to the identification of common barriers as well as successful strategies employed in different schools, thus contributing to the development of best practices for promoting inclusivity in educational settings. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of anti-bullying measures on student well-being will provide insight into the effectiveness of these policies over time.

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