Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Queer Indigeneity in Philippine Higher Education: Lived Experiences of Gay Indigenous Faculty in the Cordillera Administrative Region

Francis Dave N. Mabborang

fdmabborang@asist.edu.ph

Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8450-7981

Research Article

Keywords: queer indigeneity, gay Indigenous faculty, Philippine higher education, sexuality and culture, workplace inclusion, Cordillera

Posted Date: May 22nd, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-9782955/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: The authors declare no competing interests.

Abstract

The study explores queer indigeneity in Philippine higher education through the lived experiences of gay Indigenous faculty members in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. It examines how sexuality, Indigenous identity, and academic life intersect in shaping identity negotiation, workplace inclusion, empowerment, and coping within higher education institutions. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involved five gay Indigenous faculty members selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Seven themes emerged: navigating queer Indigenous identity; conditional inclusion and workplace climate; teaching as purpose and representation; experiences of discrimination and minority stress; cultural identity as pedagogical foundation; resilience and coping mechanisms; and institutional gaps in queer Indigenous inclusion. Findings show that participants experienced sexuality and Indigenous identity as interconnected dimensions of selfhood that shaped both vulnerability and strength. Inclusion was understood not merely as formal policy but as everyday respect, psychological safety, representation, and consistent institutional practice. The study argues that culturally responsive and sexuality-affirming higher education requires institutional mechanisms that recognize intersectional identities, strengthen anti-discrimination implementation, provide safe and supportive spaces, and include gay Indigenous faculty in diversity and inclusion efforts.

Introduction

Queer indigeneity refers to the intersection of sexuality, Indigenous identity, cultural belonging, and social power. In higher education, this intersection becomes especially important because universities are not only workplaces but also cultural and institutional spaces where identities are recognized, negotiated, regulated, or silenced. For gay Indigenous faculty members, professional life may involve more than teaching and academic service; it may also involve navigating expectations attached to sexuality, Indigenous belonging, cultural responsibility, and institutional norms.

In many educational institutions, inclusion is often expressed through policies, diversity statements, or gender-sensitive programs. However, formal recognition does not always translate into everyday safety, acceptance, and meaningful participation. Faculty members whose identities are shaped by both sexuality and Indigenous belonging may still experience conditional acceptance, subtle discrimination, pressure to manage visibility, and limited institutional support. These experiences show that inclusion cannot be understood only as the existence of policy; it must also be examined through lived experience, workplace culture, collegial relations, and institutional practice.

The cultural production of heteronormativity further complicates the experiences of queer faculty members. Minniear et al. (2026) showed that heteronormative attitudes may be transmitted through family communication, including direct messages, avoidance, silence, jokes, and assumed gender roles. Such processes suggest that heteronormativity is not only an institutional issue but also a social and

cultural condition that shapes how people learn to view sexuality. For gay Indigenous faculty members, these social expectations may enter academic life through everyday judgments, collegial interaction, and assumptions about respectability, professionalism, and belonging.

Indigenous contexts also require careful attention because queer identity cannot be interpreted only through Western models of visibility and rights. Jeza and Zondi (2026) showed that Indigenous knowledge systems may accommodate, contest, or redefine queer identities within spiritual and ancestral frameworks. Their work supports the view that queer identities should be understood within culturally specific systems of meaning. In the Philippine context, this is important because Indigenous faculty members may carry cultural responsibilities, community expectations, and obligations of representation that shape how sexuality is lived and negotiated in higher education.

In the Philippine context, studies on gender, sexuality, and education have increasingly examined LGBTQ+ experiences, gender perspectives in teaching, and inclusive campus climates. Alcazaren and Labor (2025) examined queer Filipino teachers' perspectives and practices of queer pedagogy, while Añonuevo et al. (2024) explored the lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers in rural Philippine schools. Evangelista et al. (2022) also showed that LGBT+ campus climate in the Philippines and the United Kingdom was shaped by prejudice, belonging, and inclusion. More recently, Velasco et al. (2026) examined queer world-making in the Philippines through drag, showing how queer cultural practices can create alternative ways of feeling, belonging, and imagining life in the Global South. Together, these studies show that queer Filipino experience is shaped by pedagogy, workplace climate, cultural expression, and the search for belonging.

However, much of the available literature has focused on students, general LGBTQ+ populations, queer pedagogy, or cultural practices rather than faculty members whose experiences are shaped specifically by the intersection of sexuality and Indigenous identity. This gap is significant because Indigenous faculty members may carry cultural responsibilities, community expectations, and historical experiences of marginalization, while gay faculty members may also encounter heteronormative assumptions within academic spaces. When these identities intersect, the resulting experiences cannot be fully explained by examining sexuality or Indigeneity separately.

The Cordillera Administrative Region provides a meaningful context for examining this issue because Indigenous identities, community ties, customary values, and higher education institutions coexist within a distinct regional setting. In this context, gay Indigenous faculty members may negotiate professional identity not only within the formal structures of higher education but also within cultural expectations concerning respectability, representation, belonging, and responsibility. Rosario et al. (2025) showed that intersectional barriers in a Philippine teaching-focused higher education institution can be shaped by environmental, organizational, and gender-specific conditions. Although their study focused on women academics and research productivity, it supports the broader point that faculty experiences in Philippine higher education may be shaped by multiple overlapping institutional and social barriers.

The study addresses this empirical and contextual gap by exploring queer indigeneity through the lived experiences of gay Indigenous faculty members in selected state higher education institutions in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Rather than treating sexuality and Indigenous identity as separate categories, the study examines how these identities intersect in shaping participants' sense of self, workplace experiences, teaching practices, coping strategies, and visions of inclusion. By centering the narratives of gay Indigenous faculty members, the study contributes to discussions on sexuality and culture, Indigenous representation, workplace inclusion, and equity in higher education.

Guided by a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study sought to understand how participants made meaning of their experiences as gay Indigenous faculty members. Specifically, it examined how they experienced and negotiated sexuality and Indigenous identity in relation to cultural context, academic work, and workplace dynamics; how they understood culturally responsive and inclusive higher education; how they envisioned empowerment and intersectional inclusion; and what coping strategies and support systems they used in navigating professional challenges. Through this focus, the study aims to provide evidence that may inform more culturally responsive, sexuality-affirming, and intersectional approaches to inclusion in higher education.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did gay Indigenous faculty experience and negotiate queer indigeneity, particularly their sexuality and Indigenous identity, in relation to the cultural context, academic landscape, and workplace dynamics?
2. What meanings did they ascribe to a culturally responsive and inclusive workplace in higher education?
3. How did they envision empowerment and intersectional inclusion, particularly regarding queer indigeneity, within the institution?
4. What coping strategies and sources of support did gay Indigenous faculty employ to navigate challenges in higher education?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Sexuality, culture, and academic work are closely connected because sexual identities are lived within social, cultural, and institutional settings. In higher education, sexuality may shape how faculty members experience professional identity, workplace belonging, visibility, and recognition. For gay Indigenous faculty members, these experiences are further shaped by Indigenous identity, cultural belonging, community expectations, and institutional power. Their academic lives may therefore involve the simultaneous negotiation of sexuality, professional legitimacy, cultural responsibility, and belonging.

Studies on queer academics and teachers show that educational institutions may remain shaped by heteronormative expectations even when they formally promote inclusion. Cui and Burford (2025) found that gay academics in China navigated academic workplaces marked by institutional heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and restrictive gender norms. Lin et al. (2020) likewise showed that queer teacher identity in higher education is negotiated across personal and professional discourses. These studies suggest that sexuality in academic work is not merely a private identity, but part of how educators construct professional selves and move within institutional spaces.

The intersection of sexuality and culture further complicates queer identity. Liow et al. (2023) found that gay male identity development in Malaysia was shaped by multicultural, multireligious, and relational contexts. This is relevant to Asian settings where sexuality is often negotiated alongside family, religion, culture, and social belonging. For gay Indigenous faculty members, such negotiation may be intensified by expectations to preserve, represent, and honor Indigenous identity while also navigating heteronormative academic environments.

Indigenous identity is not merely a demographic category; it may also function as a source of knowledge, responsibility, memory, and community belonging. Sullivan et al. (2024) found that Indigenous LGBTIQSB+ participants in Australia experienced educational spaces as unsafe when Indigenous and queer identities were not recognized together. Their study supports the view that institutions may fail marginalized persons when sexuality and Indigenous identity are treated as separate concerns. This insight is useful in understanding queer indigeneity as an intersectional experience rather than as a simple combination of two identities.

Philippine studies also show the continuing importance of sexuality, teaching, and institutional climate. Alcazaren and Labor (2025) found that queer Filipino teachers viewed queer pedagogy as a means of promoting inclusive education and increasing awareness of gender-related issues. Añonuevo et al. (2024) found that gay and bisexual teachers in rural Philippine schools experienced discrimination connected to weak policies and limited understanding of LGBTQ+ issues. Evangelista et al. (2022) further showed that LGBT+ campus climate in the Philippines and the United Kingdom was shaped by prejudice, belonging, and inclusion. Together, these studies indicate that Filipino queer educators may experience both marginalization and agency within educational institutions.

Workplace inclusion is therefore central to the present study. Inclusion in higher education cannot be measured only by policies, gender programs, or diversity statements. It must also be examined through everyday experiences of respect, psychological safety, collegial interaction, representation, and institutional support. Mauldin (2024) found that LGBTQ+ faculty members perceived diversity policies and practices as uneven when institutional commitments failed to address sexuality and gender identity meaningfully. This suggests that inclusion may remain symbolic if it is not supported by concrete practices and protections.

The study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Intersectionality Theory (Collins & Bilge, 2020), Queer Theory (Tarrayo & Potestades, 2024), and Cultural Identity Theory grounded in

cultural relativism (Reyes et al., 2025). Intersectionality explains how sexuality, Indigenous identity, and faculty status interact with institutional power. Queer theory helps examine how participants negotiate visibility, silence, disclosure, resistance, and self-expression within heteronormative academic spaces. Cultural identity theory explains how Indigenous belonging shapes meaning, responsibility, pedagogy, and community-oriented understandings of inclusion.

Taken together, the literature shows that queer faculty members experience higher education as a space of both possibility and constraint. Existing studies have examined LGBTQ+ faculty, queer teachers, Indigenous queer educational experiences, Filipino queer pedagogy, and LGBT+ campus climate. However, limited attention has been given to gay Indigenous faculty members in Philippine higher education, particularly in the Cordillera context. This gap is important because the experiences of gay Indigenous faculty cannot be fully understood through sexuality alone or Indigenous identity alone. Their lived experiences emerge from the intersection of both identities within academic institutions that may affirm, tolerate, regulate, or overlook their presence.

Methods

Research Design

The study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how gay Indigenous faculty members made meaning of their lived experiences in higher education. Phenomenology was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' identity negotiation, workplace inclusion, discrimination, teaching roles, coping strategies, and sense of belonging from their own perspectives.

Participants and Research Context

The participants were five gay Indigenous faculty members from selected state higher education institutions in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. They were selected because they had direct experience of the phenomenon under study: navigating academic life as both gay and Indigenous faculty members. To protect anonymity during double-blind review, the specific institutions are not named in this manuscript.

Participants were eligible if they self-identified as gay, belonged to an Indigenous group in the Cordillera Administrative Region, were employed as full-time or part-time faculty members in a state higher education institution, and voluntarily agreed to participate. Faculty members who did not identify as Indigenous, did not identify as gay, or were not employed in a faculty position were excluded.

Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria and had direct experience of the phenomenon. Snowball sampling was also used because the target population was

specific and potentially difficult to identify due to the sensitivity of sexuality and Indigenous identity in professional contexts. Although the sample was small, it was appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, which prioritizes depth, meaning, and richness of lived experience rather than statistical representation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview guide contained open-ended questions about identity negotiation, workplace inclusion, empowerment, discrimination, teaching, coping, and support systems. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask common guiding questions while also following participants' narratives in greater depth.

Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw. Interviews were conducted in private and secure settings, either face-to-face or through an online platform, depending on participant availability and safety. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review or confirm the accuracy of their transcripts.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The analysis followed six recursive phases: familiarization with the data, initial coding, generation of candidate themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. The process allowed repeated patterns of meaning to be identified while remaining close to participants' accounts.

Coding focused on passages related to sexuality, Indigenous identity, workplace climate, discrimination, teaching, coping, support, and institutional inclusion. Related codes were grouped into candidate themes and reviewed for internal coherence and distinction from other themes. The final themes were refined to reflect both the participants' narratives and the study's research questions.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through in-depth interviews, transcript checking, and participant confirmation of meanings. Transferability was addressed by providing sufficient description of the research context, participants, and phenomenon without revealing identifying institutional details. Dependability was supported through a systematic data collection and analysis process. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive attention to the researcher's role, documentation of analytic decisions, and the use of participant excerpts to ground interpretations.

The study followed ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, possible risks, confidentiality measures, and their right to

withdraw without penalty. Pseudonyms or participant codes were used in transcripts and reporting. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related files were stored securely and accessed only for research purposes.

Because the study involved sexuality, Indigenous identity, and workplace experience, confidentiality and emotional safety were treated as central ethical concerns. Interviews were conducted in settings that supported privacy and comfort. Participants could pause, skip questions, or stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. No real names of participants or identifying institutional details are used in this manuscript.

Results

The thematic analysis generated seven major themes that describe how gay Indigenous faculty members experienced queer indigeneity in higher education. These themes show how sexuality, Indigenous identity, cultural belonging, and academic work intersected in shaping identity negotiation, workplace inclusion, teaching practice, discrimination, coping, and institutional support.

Theme 1: Navigating Queer Indigenous Identity

The theme describes how participants experienced sexuality and Indigenous identity as interconnected dimensions of selfhood and professional life. It includes three subthemes: identity integration, identity tension, and external perception.

Identity Integration

Participants described sexuality and Indigenous identity as complementary rather than conflicting. These identities shaped how they understood themselves, related to others, and practiced teaching. One participant shared that *“these identities together allow me to bring a holistic perspective to my work”* (R1), while another explained that sexuality and Indigenous identity shaped teaching *“with empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a strong commitment to inclusivity”* (R5). These accounts suggest that queer indigeneity was not experienced only as a burden, but also as a source of insight, authenticity, and pedagogical strength.

Identity Tension

Participants also experienced tension when deciding how much of themselves could be expressed in professional spaces. Some described having to assess whether a situation was safe before being open about identity. One participant stated, *“It can feel like I have to choose which part of myself to show”* (R3), while another explained that workplace interaction involved deciding when to be open and when to be guarded (R5). These narratives show that identity expression was shaped by caution, emotional labor, and the perceived safety of the academic environment.

External Perception

Participants' experiences were also shaped by how others interpreted their identities. Even when participants accepted themselves, reactions from colleagues and the wider community affected their sense of belonging. One participant said, *"It's often the reactions of others that can make you feel bad, even when you've done nothing wrong"* (R2). Another participant described hearing *"subtle jokes or dismissive remarks"* that reinforced the feeling of being seen as *"other"* (R3). This subtheme shows that queer Indigenous identity was negotiated not only internally, but also through social judgment and everyday workplace interaction.

Theme 2: Conditional Inclusion and Workplace Climate

The theme captures the participants' experience of inclusion as present but uneven. It includes three subthemes: supportive environment, subtle discrimination, and performative inclusion.

Supportive Environment

Some participants described their institutions as supportive in certain respects. Support was experienced through respectful relationships, gender-sensitive initiatives, openness, and encouragement from students or selected colleagues. One participant shared, *"I appreciate the institution's inclusive and gender-sensitive environment"* (R2), while another recalled *"moments of genuine inclusion and support, especially from students and a few colleagues"* (R5). These accounts suggest that inclusion became meaningful when it was experienced in daily interaction and not only stated in institutional policy.

Subtle Discrimination

Despite positive experiences, participants also described subtle forms of discrimination. These included quiet distancing, stereotypes, misunderstanding, dismissive remarks, and increased awareness of being different. One participant recalled *"subtle instances where I became more aware of my differences"* (R1), while another referred to *"subtle biases or misunderstandings"* that arose in professional settings (R5). Another participant described *"subtle jokes or dismissive remarks from colleagues"* that made their identities feel marked as *"other"* (R3). These accounts show that discrimination was not always direct, but still shaped workplace safety and belonging.

Performative Inclusion

Participants also described a gap between formal policy and lived inclusion. Some felt that institutional support existed more in written statements than in concrete programs or sustained advocacy. One participant stated that *"support feels more like policy than genuine inclusion"* (R3). Another noted that non-discrimination policies existed but that there were no specific programs or dedicated support for Indigenous or LGBTQ+ faculty. This subtheme shows that inclusion was experienced as conditional when institutional recognition was not supported by visible, consistent, and targeted action.

Theme 3: Teaching as Purpose and Representation

The theme describes how participants understood teaching as meaningful work shaped by service, visibility, and student affirmation. It includes three subthemes: student impact, representation matters,

and teaching as calling.

Student Impact

Participants found meaning in teaching when students felt affirmed, supported, and empowered. One participant shared that students *"feel seen and heard"* (R1), while another explained that the work became meaningful when marginalized students *"feel seen and empowered"* in the classroom (R5). Another participant stated that seeing Indigenous students graduate with pride made *"all the struggle worthwhile"* (R3). These accounts show that teaching was valued not only as academic instruction, but also as a way of helping students develop confidence, belonging, and hope.

Representation Matters

Participants also viewed their presence as gay Indigenous educators as a form of representation. Visibility mattered because it allowed students to recognize that marginalized identities could exist with dignity in academic spaces. One participant recalled that a student felt *"less alone"* because of the participant's openness (R5), while another described fulfillment when Indigenous students said they *"feel seen"* (R3). This subtheme shows that representation was not merely symbolic; it functioned as affirmation, recognition, and encouragement for students.

Teaching as Calling

Participants described teaching as a vocation grounded in service and purpose. One participant stated, *"I believe it's my calling to serve the student body"* (R2). Others connected teaching with helping students grow, feel valued, and become more confident in their identities. These narratives show that teaching was experienced not only as employment but as meaningful work connected to care, advocacy, and community responsibility.

Theme 4: Experiences of Discrimination and Minority Stress

The theme describes how participants experienced discrimination as both social and psychological. It includes four subthemes: social judgment, workplace microaggressions, pressure to prove competence, and psychological impact.

Social Judgment

Participants described being judged because of sexuality, Indigenous identity, or both. One participant referred to a *"judgmental society"* that *"looks down on you"* for being gay or Indigenous (R2). Another participant described becoming more conscious of difference because of how others reacted in the workplace (R1). These accounts show that discrimination was not limited to formal exclusion; it also appeared through moral judgment, stigma, and social scrutiny.

Workplace Microaggressions

Participants also experienced microaggressions through jokes, dismissive comments, misunderstanding, and exclusion. One participant shared that *"subtle jokes or dismissive remarks"* from colleagues made their identities feel treated as *"other"* (R3). Another referred to *"subtle biases or misunderstandings"* that continued even in professional environments (R5). These narratives suggest that ordinary workplace interactions could reproduce exclusion even when no overt discrimination was formally reported.

Pressure to Prove Competence

Some participants felt that they had to work harder to be respected and recognized as competent. One participant described the *"pressure to constantly prove my competence"* (R5), while another referred to a *"double burden"* of needing to earn professional respect while managing identity-based judgment (R1). This subtheme shows that professional performance was not experienced as neutral; it was shaped by the need to overcome stereotypes and demonstrate legitimacy.

Psychological Impact

Participants described emotional strain linked to discrimination, self-monitoring, and unequal expectations. One participant explained that constant alertness affected well-being and led to withdrawal from casual interaction (R3). Another shared that stereotypes and pressure could affect confidence even while trying to remain resilient (R5). These accounts show that discrimination had effects beyond the immediate interaction, shaping emotional safety, confidence, and workplace ease.

Theme 5: Cultural Identity as Pedagogical Foundation

The theme describes how participants used Indigenous identity as a foundation for teaching and professional purpose. It includes three subthemes: Indigenous values in teaching, integration of local knowledge, and cultural responsibility.

Indigenous Values in Teaching

Participants described Indigenous values as central to their teaching practice. These values included respect, humility, community orientation, relational care, and storytelling. One participant explained that *"cultural values such as respect, community orientation, and humility guide my interactions"* (R1), while another said that Indigenous identity shaped teaching through *"community, respect, and storytelling"* (R5). These accounts show that Indigenous identity informed not only what participants taught, but how they related to students.

Integration of Local Knowledge

Participants also integrated local knowledge and Indigenous practices into teaching. One participant shared, *"I often integrate local knowledge and practices into my teaching to make learning grounded and relevant"* (R1). Another connected Indigenous identity with storytelling and advocacy for culturally

responsive higher education (R5). This subtheme shows that local knowledge was treated as a meaningful academic resource that made learning more relevant to students' cultural and social realities.

Cultural Responsibility

Participants viewed teaching as connected to cultural preservation and representation. One participant described the role as *"honoring and representing my culture while advocating for more inclusive and culturally responsive practices in higher education"* (R5). Another described teaching as carrying *"my ancestors' hope that education should uplift our people without making them forget who they are"* (R3). These accounts show that cultural responsibility was experienced as both personal commitment and professional obligation.

Theme 6: Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

The theme describes how participants responded to challenges through personal strength, relational support, and purpose. It includes three subthemes: personal strength, social support systems, and purpose-driven coping.

Personal Strength

Participants coped by drawing from authenticity, self-acceptance, and resilience. One participant stated, *"I cope by leaning into my authenticity"* (R1), while another explained that strength came from *"identity, community, and personal resilience"* (R5). These accounts show that personal strength helped participants preserve dignity and continue functioning despite exclusion, misunderstanding, or uncertainty.

Social Support Systems

Participants also relied on support from co-faculty, colleagues, mentors, friends, and community members. One participant said, *"I have my co-faculty who always support me"* (R2), while another identified *"trusted colleagues and mentors who value my work"* as sources of strength (R1). These narratives show that coping was not only individual; it was sustained through affirming relationships that reduced isolation and strengthened belonging.

Purpose-Driven Coping

Participants also managed difficulties by focusing on their purpose as educators. One participant shared that coping involved *"focusing on my purpose to serve students"* (R3), while another explained that staying grounded in the purpose of being an educator helped them move forward during difficult times (R5). This subtheme shows that meaning and service helped participants transform struggle into continued commitment.

Theme 7: Institutional Gaps in Queer Indigenous Inclusion

The theme describes participants' view that inclusion remained incomplete without targeted support, policy implementation, and structural change. It includes three subthemes: lack of targeted support, weak policy implementation, and need for structural change.

Lack of Targeted Support

Participants pointed to the absence of specific programs, dedicated services, and safe spaces for faculty with intersectional identities. One participant stated that there were *"no specific programs or dedicated support"* for Indigenous or LGBTQ+ faculty (R3), while another called for *"more consistent and visible support systems"* where concerns could be meaningfully addressed (R5). These accounts show that general inclusion initiatives were not enough to respond to the specific realities of gay Indigenous faculty.

Weak Policy Implementation

Participants also described a gap between written policies and actual institutional practice. One participant acknowledged that diversity efforts existed but emphasized the need for *"deeper cultural sensitivity and consistent implementation"* (R1). Another noted that non-discrimination policies were present, but concrete programs for Indigenous or LGBTQ+ faculty were lacking (R3). This subtheme shows that policies were experienced as limited when they were not translated into consistent support, accountability, and everyday practice.

Need for Structural Change

Participants called for deeper institutional transformation through representation, safe spaces, mental health support, and participation in decision-making. One participant emphasized the need for *"greater representation in leadership roles"* and visible support systems, including mental health resources for marginalized faculty (R5). Another called for safe spaces, intersection-specific training, and the active inclusion of faculty like them in institutional diversity conversations (R3). These accounts show that participants envisioned inclusion as structural and participatory, not merely symbolic.

Discussion

Queer Indigeneity, Identity Negotiation, and Minority Stress

The results on **Navigating Queer Indigenous Identity** and **Experiences of Discrimination and Minority Stress** show that participants experienced queer indigeneity as an intersectional condition shaped by sexuality, Indigenous belonging, professional role, and workplace climate. Their narratives suggest that being gay and Indigenous was not lived as two separate identities but as overlapping dimensions of selfhood that shaped how they understood themselves, interacted with others, taught students, and

managed visibility in academic spaces. While queer Indigenous identity became a source of empathy, authenticity, and cultural strength, it also required caution, self-monitoring, and emotional labor because participants had to assess when to be open, guarded, or silent.

It suggests that higher education institutions should understand queer Indigenous identity as a whole and layered experience. Inclusion should not treat LGBTQ+ concerns and Indigenous concerns as separate policy categories only, because gay Indigenous faculty members experience both identities together in professional life. Institutions therefore need intersectional inclusion programs that address identity safety, disclosure, collegial respect, minority stress, and the emotional burden of navigating academic spaces as both queer and Indigenous.

The interpretation is supported by Lin et al. (2020), who showed that queer teacher identity in Thai higher education is shaped across personal and professional discourses. It is also consistent with Cui and Burford (2025), who found that gay academics in China negotiated institutional heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and restrictive gender norms in higher education workplaces. Liow et al. (2023) likewise showed that gay male identity development in Malaysia is shaped by multicultural, multireligious, and relational contexts. Together, these studies affirm that queer identity in Asian and academic settings is negotiated within broader cultural and institutional expectations rather than experienced only as an individual identity.

Conditional Inclusion, Workplace Climate, and Institutional Gaps

The results on **Conditional Inclusion and Workplace Climate** and **Institutional Gaps in Queer Indigenous Inclusion** show that participants experienced inclusion as present but inconsistent. Some participants recognized supportive colleagues, affirming students, and gender-sensitive initiatives; however, they also described subtle discrimination, performative inclusion, weak policy implementation, and the absence of dedicated programs for Indigenous or LGBTQ+ faculty. Inclusion, therefore, was not completely absent, but it was conditional, uneven, and often dependent on informal relationships rather than strong institutional systems.

It points to the need for higher education institutions to move from symbolic inclusion to implemented inclusion. Written policies, diversity statements, and gender-sensitive programs are insufficient if faculty members still experience silence, jokes, stereotypes, lack of safe spaces, or absence of targeted support. Institutions should strengthen anti-discrimination implementation, safe reporting mechanisms, mental health services, mentoring systems, and leadership representation for faculty with intersectional identities. Inclusion should be assessed not only by the existence of policies but by whether faculty members actually experience safety, recognition, and belonging.

The interpretation is consistent with Evangelista et al. (2022), who found that LGBT+ campus climate in the United Kingdom and the Philippines was shaped by prejudice, belonging, and perceived inclusion in higher education. It is also supported by Mauldin (2024), whose study of LGBTQ+ faculty members showed that diversity policies and practices may still contribute to marginalization when institutional

language and implementation fail to address sexuality and gender identity meaningfully. Añonuevo et al. (2024) also supports this interpretation by showing that gay and bisexual teachers in rural Philippine schools experienced difficulties connected to discrimination, weak policy support, and limited understanding of LGBTQ+ concerns.

Teaching, Representation, and Culturally Grounded Pedagogy

The results on **Teaching as Purpose and Representation** and **Cultural Identity as Pedagogical Foundation** show that participants understood teaching not only as employment but also as service, representation, and cultural responsibility. Their presence as gay Indigenous faculty members allowed students to feel seen, affirmed, and represented. At the same time, participants drew from Indigenous values such as respect, humility, community orientation, storytelling, and local knowledge in shaping their teaching practice. Teaching therefore became a space where sexuality, Indigenous identity, pedagogy, and representation intersected.

It suggests that higher education institutions should recognize queer Indigenous faculty members as contributors not only to instruction but also to culturally responsive and identity-affirming education. Representation matters because students may experience belonging when they see faculty members whose identities challenge dominant expectations. Institutions should also support the integration of Indigenous knowledge, local narratives, and culturally grounded pedagogy into higher education. This support should not depend only on individual faculty effort; it should be embedded in curriculum development, faculty development, and institutional inclusion programs.

The interpretation is supported by Alcazaren and Labor (2025), who found that queer Filipino teachers viewed queer pedagogy as a way to promote inclusive education and increase consciousness of gender-related issues. It is also supported by Sullivan et al. (2024), whose study of Indigenous LGBTIQSB+ educational experiences in Australia showed the importance of recognizing Indigenous and queer identities together in educational spaces. The present study extends these works by showing how queer pedagogy and Indigenous pedagogy intersect in the professional lives of gay Indigenous faculty members.

Resilience, Support Systems, and Institutional Responsibility

The results on **Resilience and Coping Mechanisms** show that participants coped through authenticity, personal strength, supportive colleagues, mentors, community ties, and purpose-driven teaching. However, resilience was not purely individual. Participants became more able to cope when they had affirming relationships and meaningful sources of support. This suggests that resilience was strengthened by both personal conviction and social connection.

It indicates that institutions should not romanticize resilience or expect marginalized faculty to survive through personal strength alone. While authenticity and purpose helped participants endure challenges, these should be supported by institutional care. Higher education institutions should provide mentoring,

peer networks, confidential counseling, safe spaces, and faculty wellness programs that are responsive to both sexuality and Indigenous identity. Resilience should be treated not only as an individual trait but also as an institutional responsibility.

The interpretation is supported by Evangelista et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of belonging in LGBT+ campus climate. It also relates to Mauldin (2024), who showed that institutional policies and practices shape whether LGBTQ+ faculty members experience marginalization or inclusion. Sullivan et al. (2024) further supports this interpretation by showing that educational safety for Indigenous LGBTIQSB+ persons depends on whether institutions recognize and respond to intersecting identities.

Limitations and Future Research

The study involved five gay Indigenous faculty members from selected state higher education institutions in the Cordillera Administrative Region; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. The study also focused specifically on gay Indigenous faculty members and did not include lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, nonbinary, or heterosexual Indigenous faculty. Because the topic involved sexuality, Indigenous identity, and workplace experience, participants may also have withheld some details to protect themselves or their institutions.

Future research may include a larger and more diverse group of LGBTQ+ Indigenous educators across different Philippine regions. Comparative studies may examine how gender identity, academic rank, institutional type, discipline, and Indigenous affiliation shape experiences of inclusion and discrimination. Future studies may also examine how students experience the presence of queer Indigenous faculty, how higher education institutions implement intersectional inclusion policies, and how Indigenous knowledge systems can inform sexuality-affirming educational practice.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings show that queer indigeneity in higher education is not simply an identity label. It is a lived intersection of sexuality, culture, professional work, discrimination, resilience, and institutional possibility. Meaningful inclusion requires more than tolerance or formal policy; it requires everyday respect, cultural recognition, psychological safety, representation, targeted support, and consistent institutional accountability. The study contributes to scholarship on sexuality and culture by foregrounding gay Indigenous faculty members in Philippine higher education, a group whose experiences remain insufficiently examined in existing research.

Declarations

Funding

The author declares that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

Competing Interests

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethics Approval and Institutional Review

The study was reviewed and approved for academic and ethical conduct by an institutional research review panel composed of the subject teachers and panel members prior to data collection. Permission to conduct the study was also secured from the appropriate institutional authorities. The study followed ethical safeguards for research involving human participants, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization of participant identities, secure handling of interview data, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Consent to Publish

Participants provided consent for the publication of anonymized excerpts from their interview responses.

Data Availability

Due to the sensitive and potentially identifiable nature of the interview data, the datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available. Relevant anonymized excerpts are included in the article.

Use of AI-assisted Tools

AI-assisted tools were used to support language refinement, organization, manuscript formatting, and journal-guideline alignment. The author reviewed, revised, verified, and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, citations, analysis, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript. No AI tool is listed as an author.

Author Contribution

The author was responsible for the study conception and design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, revision, and approval of the final version.

References

1. Alcazaren HKG, Labor JS (2025) Queering the classrooms: Filipino teachers' perspectives and practices of queer pedagogy. Asia-Pacific Social Sci Rev 25(3). Article 9. https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1584

2. Añonuevo RG, Labor JS, Digo GS (2024) Lived experiences of gay and bisexual teachers: The case of basic education teachers in rural Philippines. Kasetsart J Social Sci 45(4):1217–1228. https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2024.45.4.15
3. Braun V, Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Res Psychol 3(2):77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
4. Collins PH, Bilge S (2020) Intersectionality (2nd ed.). *Polity Press*. https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Intersectionality%2C%2B2nd%2BEdition-p-9781509539673
5. Cui L, Burford J (2025) Institutional heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and soft resistance: Gay academics' experiences in Chinese academia. *Sexuality & Culture, 29, 2206–2226*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-025-10364-x
6. Evangelista ZM, Lido C, Swingler M, Bohan J (2022) Exploring LGBT+ campus climate in the UK and Philippines: How prejudice and belonging shape inclusion in higher education. Eur J Social Psychol 52(2):342–360. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2801
7. Jeza ZC, Zondi LP (2026) Ancestral dialogues and queer identities: Understanding iZangoma's Indigenous knowledge on homosexuality in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Sex Cult. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-026-10559-w
8. Lin H, Trakulkasemsuk W, Zilli PJ (2020) When queer meets teacher: A narrative inquiry of the lived experience of a teacher of English as a foreign language. Sex Cult 24:1064–1081. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09748-y
9. Liow JW, Chong JW, Ting RSK (2023) Constructing gay male identity in a multicultural society: A qualitative grounded theory study in Malaysia. Sex Cult 27:1456–1480. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10074-2
10. Mauldin SA (2024) LGBTQ+ faculty members' perceptions of diversity policies and practices in higher education. Adv Developing Hum Resour 26(4):134–159. https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223241268253
11. Minniear MJ, Smith H, Maisano T (2026) They would get the heebeejeebees: Indirect and direct family socialization of heteronormativity. Sex Cult 30:1017–1037. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-025-10451-z
12. Reyes MSE, Postrano JG, Adubal NBA, Ngo CGA (2025) Echoes of heritage: Cultural identity as a predictor of the Indigenous students' attitude towards English language. World J Engl Lang 15(6):224–235. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n6p224
13. Rosario LMD, Gamit SPR, Navigar NR, Simporios LLP, Taylan FF, Jarabe MLT (2025) Intersectional barriers to research productivity of women academics in a Philippine teaching-focused institution. Asian Women 41(3):63–81. https://doi.org/10.64446/aw.2025.9.41.3.63
14. Sullivan C, Tran D, Spurway K, Briskman L, Leha J, Trewlynn W, Soldatic K (2024) Absolutely it was not safe: Indigenous LGBTIQSB+ experiences of education in Australia. Australian J Indigenous Educ 53(1). https://doi.org/10.55146/ajie.v53i1.664

15. Tarrayo VN, Potestades RR (2024) Understanding queer Filipino university teachers' queering efforts in the English classroom. TESOL Q 58(2):830–855. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3256
16. Velasco JC, Arellano YM, Gaza J, Sulla AE (2026) The affective architecture of queer world-making in the Global South: Examining the cultural politics of drag in the Philippines. Sex Cult. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-026-10528-3