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Bakla Ako Hindi Bakla Lang: Voices Behind Silence-Identity, Talent, Resistance, and Constrained Intellectual Flourishing in Educational Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students in constrained educational spaces, focusing on the intersection of identity expression, talent development, and resistance. Anchored on Queer Theory and Critical Pedagogy, the research aimed to understand how LGBTQIA+ learners negotiate their identities, experience institutional constraints, and sustain their intellectual, creative, and emotional capacities within school environments that are often shaped by heteronormative norms. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students who had experienced identity suppression within their educational contexts. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, leading to five major themes: (1) Negotiated Identities in Constrained Spaces, (2) Silencing Mechanisms and Institutional Invisibility, (3) Hidden Brilliance: Talent Amid Suppression, (4) Resistance and Quiet Defiance, and (5) Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential. Findings revealed that while participants experienced identity-based constraints and institutional invisibility, they also demonstrated significant intellectual capability, creativity, and resilience. However, many expressed a sense of incomplete self-realization, describing their cognitive and personal development as partially restricted due to non-inclusive educational environments. The study highlights the paradox of LGBTQIA+ learners as both marginalized and highly capable individuals whose full potential remains underrecognized. The study concludes that educational institutions must move beyond symbolic inclusion and foster genuinely affirming environments that support both identity expression and intellectual flourishing.

INTRODUCTION

Education is often imagined as a liberating space—one that nurtures identity, cultivates talent, and enables individuals to realize their fullest potential. Yet, for many LGBTQIA+ learners, particularly in culturally conservative and resource-constrained contexts, schools can function as sites of regulation rather than liberation. Within these spaces, identities are disciplined, expressions are policed, and difference is subtly or overtly suppressed. This contradiction is especially pronounced among Senior High School students, who are at a critical developmental stage marked by identity formation, self-expression, and the pursuit of future pathways.

The phrase “Bakla Ako, Hindi Bakla Lang” serves as both declaration and resistance. It challenges reductive labeling and asserts a multidimensional identity beyond socially imposed stereotypes. In the Philippine context, the term “bakla” is often laden with cultural nuance—simultaneously visible and marginalized, tolerated yet misunderstood. While LGBTQIA+ individuals may be present in schools, their lived realities often remain obscured beneath layers of silence, fear, and institutional neglect.

This study seeks to surface these silenced narratives. It focuses on LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students who experience constraints in expressing their identities, yet demonstrate remarkable creativity, intelligence, and talent. These learners embody a paradox: they are both

marginalized and exceptional, constrained yet resilient. Their stories are not merely accounts of struggle, but also of resistance, adaptation, and quiet excellence.

By examining their lived experiences, this research aims to interrogate how educational environments shape, limit, and sometimes unintentionally suppress the full realization of LGBTQIA+ students’ identities and potentials. It further seeks to illuminate how these students navigate such constraints, and how their talents persist—even flourish—within restrictive conditions.

Background of the Study

The Philippine educational system, while increasingly aligned with global standards of inclusivity, continues to grapple with deeply embedded socio-cultural norms surrounding gender and sexuality. Despite policy frameworks that promote equality and non-discrimination, implementation at the school level often remains inconsistent. Gender norms, shaped by tradition, religion, and societal expectations, continue to influence classroom dynamics, peer interactions, and institutional practices.

Senior High School represents a particularly significant phase within the K–12 system. It is a transitional stage where students refine their identities, develop specialized skills, and prepare for higher education or employment. However, for LGBTQIA+ students, this period can also

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intensify experiences of marginalization. The pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations may lead to self-censorship, internal conflict, and limited participation in school life.

Research has shown that LGBTQIA+ students frequently encounter discrimination, bullying, and microaggressions in educational settings. These experiences can negatively impact their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. However, much of the existing literature tends to focus on deficits-highlighting vulnerability, risk, and victimization-while overlooking the strengths, talents, and resilience of these students.

This study departs from deficit-based narratives by adopting a strengths-oriented perspective. It recognizes LGBTQIA+ students not only as individuals facing challenges but also as bearers of creativity, intelligence, and agency. Many of these students excel in academics, arts, leadership, and innovation, yet their contributions often remain underrecognized due to the constraints imposed on their identities.

Moreover, the notion of “constrained educational spaces” extends beyond overt discrimination. It includes subtle forms of exclusion, such as the absence of inclusive curricula, lack of representation, and institutional silence on LGBTQIA+ issues. These conditions create environments where students feel compelled to hide aspects of themselves, leading to fragmented identities and unexpressed potential.

In this context, the present study aims to explore the intersection of identity suppression and talent development among LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students. It seeks to answer a critical question: How do these students continue to thrive-intellectually and creatively-despite the limitations imposed on their identities?

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

This study is anchored in Queer Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Intersectionality, which together provide a robust framework for understanding the complexities of LGBTQIA+ experiences in education.

Queer Theory challenges fixed notions of gender and sexuality, emphasizing the fluidity and performativity of identity. It interrogates societal norms that privilege heteronormativity and seeks to deconstruct binary categorizations. Within the context of this study, Queer Theory enables an analysis of how LGBTQIA+ students negotiate their identities within restrictive school environments.

Critical Pedagogy, as articulated by Paulo Freire, views education as a site of power, where knowledge can either reproduce or challenge social inequalities. It calls for transformative practices that empower marginalized voices and foster critical consciousness. This framework is particularly relevant in examining how schools can either silence or amplify the voices of LGBTQIA+ students.

Intersectionality further enriches the analysis by recognizing that identities are shaped by multiple,

overlapping factors such as gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. LGBTQIA+ students are not a monolithic group; their experiences vary widely depending on their social contexts. This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of their lived realities.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students in constrained educational spaces, with a particular focus on identity, talent, and resistance.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions

1. How do LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students describe their experiences of identity expression within their school environments?
2. In what ways do educational spaces constrain or suppress their identities?
3. How do these students perceive and develop their talents, creativity, and intelligence despite such constraints?
4. What forms of resistance and coping mechanisms do they employ in navigating their educational experiences?
5. What implications can be drawn for creating more inclusive and empowering educational environments?
6. How do LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students experience constraints in achieving their full academic potential within their educational environments?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders: For educators, it provides insights into the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ students, encouraging more inclusive pedagogical practices and classroom environments. For school administrators, it highlights the need for policies and programs that go beyond symbolic inclusion and address the structural barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ learners.

For policymakers, it offers empirical evidence that can inform the development and implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive education policies.

For researchers, it contributes to the growing body of literature on LGBTQIA+ education by shifting the focus from deficit to strength-based perspectives.

For LGBTQIA+ students, it affirms their identities and recognizes their talents, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and valued.

Definitions of Terms

To ensure clarity, the following key terms are defined as used in this study:

LGBTQIA+ – Refers to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Bakla – A culturally specific Filipino term often used to describe effeminate gay men, though its meaning is

complex and context-dependent.

Identity Suppression – The limitation or inhibition of an individual’s ability to express their authentic self.

Constrained Educational Spaces – School environments where institutional, cultural, or social factors limit the expression of diverse identities.

Resistance – Actions or strategies employed by individuals to challenge or navigate oppressive conditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study presents a synthesis of relevant literature and empirical studies that frame the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ learners within educational spaces. It situates the present study—“Bakla Ako, Hindi Bakla Lang”: Voices Behind Silence—Identity, Talent, and Resistance of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School Students in Constrained Educational Spaces—within global and local scholarly conversations on queer identity, school climate, identity suppression, and student resilience.

The review is organized into thematic areas: (1) LGBTQIA+ students’ experiences in schools, (2) heteronormativity and constrained educational spaces, (3) identity formation and suppression, (4) talent, creativity, and resilience among LGBTQIA+ youth, (5) queer theory and critical pedagogy in education, and (6) Philippine-based literature and studies. The review concludes by identifying research gaps that justify the present investigation.

LGBTQIA+ Students’ Experiences in Educational Contexts

A growing body of international research highlights that LGBTQIA+ students frequently encounter hostile or unsupportive school environments. A systematic review of LGBTQIA+ student experiences from 2009 to 2019 found consistent patterns of bullying, discrimination, and lack of institutional support across multiple educational contexts (Abreu *et al.*, 2021). These experiences significantly impact students’ academic engagement, psychological well-being, and sense of belonging.

Similarly, qualitative research exploring LGBTQIA+ students’ perspectives in secondary schools revealed that many learners perceive their schools as inadequately responsive to their needs. Participants reported limited access to safe spaces, insufficient policy implementation, and a lack of meaningful representation within curricula (Mencarini, 2022). Notably, support often depended on individual teachers rather than systemic institutional practices, indicating structural gaps in inclusivity.

Further studies emphasize the critical role of school climate in shaping LGBTQIA+ students’ experiences. Positive school climates—characterized by inclusive policies, supportive educators, and affirming peer relationships—are associated with improved academic outcomes and mental health. Conversely, negative climates exacerbate marginalization and contribute to identity concealment (Harris *et al.*, 2021).

These findings underscore that LGBTQIA+ students’

educational experiences are not merely individual struggles but are deeply embedded in institutional and cultural structures.

Heteronormativity and Constrained Educational Spaces

Educational institutions are often governed by heteronormative assumptions that privilege binary understandings of gender and sexuality. These assumptions shape curricula, policies, and everyday interactions, creating environments where non-conforming identities are marginalized or rendered invisible.

Heteronormativity operates not only through explicit discrimination but also through subtle mechanisms such as silence, exclusion, and lack of representation. Research indicates that LGBTQIA+ students frequently experience “invisibility” in school curricula, where their identities and histories are either omitted or misrepresented (Schafer-Garcia, 2023). This absence reinforces the notion that LGBTQIA+ identities are abnormal or insignificant.

Moreover, constrained educational spaces extend beyond overt hostility. They include environments where students feel compelled to self-censor in order to avoid stigma or conflict. In such contexts, identity expression becomes a negotiated act, shaped by perceived risks and social expectations.

Recent scholarship also highlights how institutional policies—or the lack thereof—can reinforce constraints. Schools that fail to implement inclusive policies effectively create conditions where discrimination persists, even in the presence of formal equality frameworks. This disconnect between policy and practice is particularly relevant in developing contexts, where cultural norms may override institutional mandates.

Identity Formation and Suppression

Adolescence is a critical period for identity development, and for LGBTQIA+ youth, this process is often complicated by social stigma and institutional constraints. Identity formation involves not only self-recognition but also the ability to express and validate one’s identity within social contexts.

However, many LGBTQIA+ students experience identity suppression due to fear of discrimination, rejection, or violence. This suppression can manifest in various forms, including concealment of identity, modification of behavior, and internalization of negative societal attitudes.

Queer Theory provides a lens for understanding these dynamics by challenging fixed notions of identity and emphasizing the fluidity and performativity of gender and sexuality. It argues that identities are not inherent but are constructed through social interactions and discourses. Within heteronormative school environments, LGBTQIA+ students must navigate competing pressures to conform and to assert their authentic selves.

The concept of “passing” or “masking” is particularly relevant in this context. Students may adopt behaviors

that align with dominant norms in order to avoid marginalization. While this strategy can provide temporary safety, it often comes at the cost of psychological well-being and self-actualization.

Talent, Creativity, and Resilience Among LGBTQIA+ Youth

While much of the literature focuses on the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students, there is a growing recognition of their strengths, particularly in terms of creativity, intelligence, and resilience. These attributes are often developed as adaptive responses to adversity.

Research suggests that marginalized individuals may develop heightened creativity and problem-solving skills as they navigate complex social environments. For LGBTQIA+ students, this can translate into excellence in academic, artistic, and leadership domains. Despite facing constraints, many demonstrate remarkable capacity for innovation and critical thinking.

Resilience among LGBTQIA+ youth is often rooted in community support, self-acceptance, and the ability to reframe adversity as a source of strength. Studies indicate that even in unsupportive environments, students find ways to express their identities and talents through alternative spaces, such as peer networks or extracurricular activities.

However, the literature also highlights that these strengths are frequently underrecognized or undervalued within formal educational settings. This lack of recognition contributes to the “hidden potential” phenomenon, where students’ capabilities remain obscured due to identity-based marginalization.

Queer Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Inclusive Education

The integration of Queer Theory and Critical Pedagogy offers a transformative framework for understanding and addressing the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. Queer Theory challenges normative assumptions about identity, while Critical Pedagogy emphasizes the role of education in either reproducing or disrupting social inequalities.

Contemporary scholarship in LGBTQIA+ education advocates for the inclusion of queer perspectives in curricula and pedagogy. Such approaches not only validate LGBTQIA+ identities but also promote critical thinking and social awareness among all students. Educational reforms that incorporate LGBTQ+ studies have been shown to foster more inclusive and empathetic learning environments (Mizzi & Rodriguez, 2025).

Critical Pedagogy further calls for the empowerment of marginalized voices within the classroom. It emphasizes dialogue, reflection, and action as means of transforming oppressive structures. In the context of LGBTQIA+ education, this involves creating spaces where students can share their experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and participate actively in their learning processes.

Philippine Literature and Local Studies

In the Philippine context, research on LGBTQIA+ students remains limited but is gradually expanding. Existing studies highlight the persistence of gender norms influenced by cultural and religious values, which often shape attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Local research indicates that while Filipino society is often perceived as tolerant of LGBTQIA+ individuals, this tolerance does not necessarily translate into full acceptance or equality. LGBTQIA+ students frequently encounter subtle forms of discrimination, including stereotyping, exclusion, and lack of institutional support. Studies on gender and development (GAD) in education reveal that policies promoting inclusivity are often not fully implemented at the school level. This gap between policy and practice creates environments where LGBTQIA+ students remain vulnerable to marginalization.

Pelino & Protacio (2026) on career stagnation highlights how systemic barriers can limit individual growth and potential, a concept that parallels the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students whose talents remain underutilized due to identity constraints.

Recent literature suggests that exclusionary educational environments may also affect cognitive engagement and academic development. When students experience identity suppression, their participation in learning becomes constrained, limiting opportunities for intellectual growth and full academic realization. This highlights the need to view inclusion not only as a social imperative but also as a cognitive and developmental necessity.

Emerging literature suggests that exclusionary educational environments not only affect students’ emotional well-being but also influence cognitive engagement and academic development. When learners experience identity suppression, their participation in classroom discourse and intellectual activities becomes constrained, limiting opportunities for deeper learning and full academic realization. This highlights that inclusion is not solely a social concern but also a critical factor in enabling intellectual flourishing.

These studies provide a valuable foundation for understanding how structural and pedagogical factors influence student development, and they offer important insights for the present research.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The body of literature reviewed in this study underscores that the educational experiences of LGBTQIA+ students are profoundly shaped by the interplay of institutional structures, cultural norms, and interpersonal dynamics within school environments. Across both international and local studies, a consistent pattern emerges: LGBTQIA+ learners frequently encounter forms of marginalization that range from overt discrimination and bullying to more insidious mechanisms such as silence, invisibility, and lack of representation. These conditions contribute to environments where identity expression is

constrained, often compelling students to negotiate their visibility through self-censorship or strategic conformity. The literature further affirms that school climate—particularly the presence or absence of inclusive policies, supportive educators, and affirming peer relationships—plays a pivotal role in either exacerbating or mitigating these experiences.

At the same time, the reviewed studies reveal a compelling counter-narrative that challenges deficit-based portrayals of LGBTQIA+ students. Despite systemic constraints, many learners demonstrate remarkable resilience, creativity, and intellectual capacity. These strengths are frequently developed as adaptive responses to marginalization, enabling students to navigate complex social realities while sustaining academic and personal growth. However, such capabilities often remain underrecognized within formal educational settings, giving rise to what may be understood as “hidden potential.” This phenomenon reflects a critical tension between the suppression of identity and the persistence of talent—an intersection that remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship.

The integration of theoretical perspectives such as Queer Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Intersectionality further illuminates the structural and discursive forces that shape LGBTQIA+ students’ experiences. These frameworks collectively emphasize the need to interrogate dominant norms, amplify marginalized voices, and reimagine education as a transformative space. Yet, despite these conceptual advancements, empirical research has not fully captured how these dynamics unfold in specific contexts, particularly within Senior High School environments in the Philippines. Much of the current literature remains concentrated on Western settings, with limited attention to culturally nuanced experiences in Southeast Asia. Local studies, while emerging, tend to focus primarily on issues of discrimination and policy gaps, often overlooking the lived complexities of identity negotiation and the cultivation of talent among LGBTQIA+ youth.

Moreover, there is a notable scarcity of research that adopts a strengths-based lens—one that foregrounds not only the challenges but also the capacities and contributions of LGBTQIA+ students. Existing studies seldom examine how identity suppression intersects with the development and expression of creativity, intelligence, and leadership potential. This gap is particularly significant in the context of Senior High School, a critical stage for identity formation and future trajectory building. The absence of such inquiry limits the ability of educators, policymakers, and researchers to design interventions that are not only protective but also empowering.

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of LGBTQIA+ students’ experiences by centering their voices and highlighting the interplay between constraint and capability. By focusing on the narratives of Senior High School learners in Philippine public schools, this research aims to move beyond deficit-

oriented frameworks and instead illuminate the ways in which identity, talent, and resistance coexist and co-evolve within constrained educational spaces. Ultimately, it endeavors to bridge the gap between marginalization and recognition, offering insights that can inform more inclusive, affirming, and transformative educational practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach, to explore and understand the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students in constrained educational spaces. The phenomenological method was deemed appropriate as it sought to capture the essence of participants’ experiences, particularly how they navigated identity suppression while simultaneously developing and expressing their talents, creativity, and intelligence.

Phenomenology allowed the researcher to examine subjective realities from the perspectives of the participants themselves, emphasizing meaning-making and personal narratives. This approach was grounded in the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that individuals interpret their experiences within specific cultural and institutional contexts. In this study, the focus was placed on understanding how LGBTQIA+ students made sense of their identities and educational experiences within environments that may have limited their self-expression.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools offering Senior High School programs within the Philippine educational system. These schools were characterized by diverse student populations and varying degrees of institutional support for gender inclusivity. The selection of the locale was based on its relevance to the research problem, particularly in relation to the presence of LGBTQIA+ students and the observable constraints within the school environment regarding identity expression.

The Philippine context provided a culturally nuanced setting where traditional values, religious influences, and emerging inclusivity policies intersected, thereby shaping the experiences of LGBTQIA+ learners.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students who self-identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

The inclusion criteria required that participants

- Were currently enrolled in Senior High School;
- Self-identified as LGBTQIA+;

- Had experienced limitations or constraints in expressing their identity within the school environment; and
- Demonstrated engagement in academic, creative, or extracurricular activities reflecting their talents and abilities.

A total of 10–15 participants were considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, ensuring depth rather than breadth of information. The participants represented varied gender identities, sexual orientations, and socio-cultural backgrounds to capture a range of lived experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and emotions in a flexible yet guided manner. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit narratives related to identity expression, experiences of constraint, manifestations of talent, and forms of resistance or coping, including their experiences of academic engagement, intellectual development, and perceptions of their ability to achieve their full academic potential.

The interviews were conducted in a language comfortable for the participants, either English, Filipino, or a combination of both, to ensure authenticity and depth of responses. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in a safe, private, and non-judgmental setting to encourage openness.

With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and initial reflections of the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a systematic process of identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within the data. The analysis involved several stages:

Familiarization with the Data – The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the participants' narratives.

Coding – Significant statements and phrases were identified and assigned initial codes that captured key ideas and meanings.

Theme Development – Related codes were grouped into broader categories, leading to the emergence of themes that represented shared patterns across participants.

Textural and Structural Description – The researcher described both what the participants experienced (textural) and how they experienced it (structural).

Essence of the Phenomenon – A composite description was developed to capture the core essence of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students in constrained educational spaces.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher engaged in bracketing, setting aside personal biases and assumptions to ensure that the findings remained grounded in the participants' perspectives.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the study, several strategies were employed:

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data, member checking, and ensuring that participants' voices were accurately represented.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings.

Dependability was ensured through a clear and systematic documentation of the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures.

Confirmability was maintained by grounding interpretations in the data and minimizing researcher bias through reflexivity and audit trails.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. For participants below 18 years old, parental or guardian consent was also secured, along with the assent of the participants.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particular attention was given to creating a safe and supportive environment during interviews. The researcher remained mindful of potential emotional distress and was prepared to provide appropriate referrals if necessary.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In this study, the researcher assumed a reflexive stance, acknowledging personal perspectives and maintaining awareness of how these might influence the research process.

The researcher established rapport with participants, fostering trust and openness. At the same time, efforts were made to remain neutral and non-judgmental, allowing participants' voices to emerge authentically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study “Bakla Ako, Hindi Bakla Lang”: Voices Behind Silence—Identity, Talent, and Resistance of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School Students in Constrained Educational Spaces. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis,

resulting in five major themes: (1) Negotiated Identities in Constrained Spaces, (2) Silencing Mechanisms and Institutional Invisibility, (3) Hidden Brilliance: Talent Amid Suppression, (4) Resistance and Quiet Defiance and (5) Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential.

Each theme is supported by significant statements drawn from participants' narratives. These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature, particularly in the areas of queer identity, heteronormativity in schools, and resilience among LGBTQIA+ youth.

Theme 1: Negotiated Identities in Constrained Spaces

Participants consistently described their identities as constantly negotiated within school environments that implicitly demanded conformity. Identity expression was not freely enacted but strategically managed.

One participant stated: "*Hindi ako tabimik kasi gusto ko—tabimik ako kasi kailangan. Kasi pag masyado kang 'bakla,' automatic may label ka na agad. Nakakapagod mag-adjust araw-araw.*" (P3)

Another expressed frustration with imposed expectations: "*They say 'be yourself,' pero pag naging sarili mo na, sasabihin nila 'too much.' So ano ba talaga? Parang kailangan mong hatiin sarili mo para lang mag-fit.*" (P7)

These narratives align with Queer Theory's assertion that identity is performative and shaped by social constraints. The participants' experiences reflect the concept of "*passing*" or masking, where identity becomes a negotiated performance rather than an authentic expression.

Consistent with Abreu *et al.* (2021), the findings suggest that LGBTQIA+ students often regulate their behavior to avoid marginalization. The tension between authenticity and safety creates fragmented identities, reinforcing the idea that schools are not neutral spaces but sites of identity regulation.

Theme 2: Silencing Mechanisms and Institutional Invisibility

Participants reported both overt and subtle forms of silencing within their schools. While explicit discrimination was present, more pervasive were the institutional practices that rendered LGBTQIA+ identities invisible.

One participant articulated this clearly: "*Walang nagsasabi na bawal ka, pero ramdam mo. Sa lessons, sa rules, sa jokes ng teachers—parang wala kang lugar. Parang hindi ka kasama sa mundo nila.*" (P1)

Another expressed anger toward the lack of representation: "*We exist, pero parang optional lang kami. Hindi kami kasama sa curriculum, sa policies—pero pag may issue, biglang visible kami. Hypocrisy 'yun.*" (P5)

These accounts reflect Schafer-Garcia's (2023) notion of curricular invisibility, where the absence of representation functions as a form of marginalization. The participants' experiences also highlight the gap between policy and practice, a recurring issue in Philippine education.

The silence described by participants is not merely

absence but a form of control. It communicates what is acceptable and what is not, reinforcing heteronormative norms without explicit enforcement.

Theme 3: Hidden Brilliance: Talent Amid Suppression

Despite constraints, participants demonstrated exceptional creativity, intelligence, and talent. However, these abilities were often expressed in limited or alternative spaces.

One participant shared: "*I know I'm good—like academically and sa arts—but sometimes I feel like I have to prove myself twice. Kasi hindi enough na magaling ka, kailangan 'acceptable' ka rin.*" (P9)

Another expressed a more defiant stance: "*Hindi nila ako kayang patabimikin sa talento ko. Kabit i-limit nila ako sa pagiging ako, lalabas at lalabas 'yung galing ko.*" (P2)

A particularly striking statement revealed both frustration and pride: "*Ang dami kong ideas, ang dami kong kayang gawin—but sometimes I hold back. Not because I can't, but because I know they're not ready for someone like me.*" (P6)

These findings resonate with strengths-based perspectives in the literature, which emphasize resilience and adaptive creativity among marginalized groups. The concept of "*hidden potential*" is evident here—students possess high levels of capability, yet structural constraints limit their full expression.

This aligns with Pelino's work on Higher Order Thinking Skills, which underscores the importance of nurturing creativity and critical thinking. The participants' narratives suggest that such skills are present but not fully cultivated within current educational structures.

Theme 4: Resistance and Quiet Defiance

Participants exhibited various forms of resistance, ranging from subtle acts of defiance to overt expressions of identity. Resistance was not always loud but was deeply intentional.

One participant stated: "*Hindi ako sumisigam, pero hindi rin ako nagpatabimik. I choose where to speak, and when I do, I make sure may impact.*" (P4)

Another was more direct: "*Honestly, minsan wala na akong pakialam. If they can't handle me, that's their problem. I'm done shrinking myself for people who don't even try to understand.*" (P8)

A more emotional account revealed the cost of resistance: "*Every time I stand up for myself, parang may consequence. But I still do it. Kasi kung hindi ako, sino?*" (P10)

These forms of resistance align with Critical Pedagogy, which views marginalized individuals as agents of change rather than passive victims. The participants' actions reflect a reclaiming of voice and agency, even within constrained environments.

Theme 5: Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential

This theme captures the tension between participants' demonstrated intellectual capability and their constrained ability to achieve full academic potential within

their educational environments. While participants consistently expressed confidence in their intelligence, they simultaneously reported a sense of limitation, suggesting that their intellectual flourishing was restricted by structural, social, and identity-based constraints.

“Alam ko matalino ako. Kaya ko sumagot, kaya ko mag-lead—but may kulang. Parang may pader sa loob ko na hindi ko mabreak.” (P11)

“Hindi ako bobo. Actually, I know I could be more. Pero may something sa school na parang hindi ako fully nag-go-grow.” (P12)

“Minsan feeling ko, I’m operating at 60%. The rest of me? Naka-lock lang.” (P13)

This theme reflects what Goffman (1963) conceptualized as *“spoiled identity,”* where stigma disrupts full self-realization. It also aligns with Steele’s (1997) theory of stereotype threat, where individuals underperform or limit expression due to awareness of negative stereotypes. In educational contexts, this *“missing part”* is not cognitive deficiency but institutional restriction of identity-integrated learning. UNESCO (2019) argues that when learners cannot bring their full identity into learning spaces, their engagement and cognitive flourishing are significantly reduced.

In queer educational theory, this condition is further explained as *“identity fragmentation under heteronormative regulation,”* where intelligence is present but not fully activated because emotional and identity safety is absent (Britzman, 1995).

This finding is crucial because it shifts the narrative from *“LGBTQIA+ students are resilient”* to a more critical interpretation: resilience should not be required for survival in education systems that should already be enabling full human development.

Discussions of the Findings

The findings of this study reinforce and extend international and local literature on LGBTQIA+ students’ educational experiences. Consistent with UNESCO (2016), the participants experienced educational environments where inclusion was largely symbolic rather than substantive. Silence in curriculum content, absence of representation, and subtle peer and teacher biases contributed to an environment of *“institutional invisibility,”* where LGBTQIA+ identities were acknowledged only when problematic or visible in conflict.

The negotiation of identity observed in Theme 1 aligns with Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity, which posits that identity is continuously constructed through repetition within social constraints. In school contexts, this performance becomes strategic rather than expressive, as students adjust behavior to avoid stigma. Similarly, Connell (2009) argues that schools reproduce gender order through everyday practices, reinforcing heteronormativity as the dominant norm.

The silencing mechanisms identified in Theme 2 are consistent with Meyer’s (2003) minority stress model, which explains how chronic exposure to stigma,

exclusion, and anticipation of discrimination creates psychological strain among LGBTQIA+ individuals. In educational environments, this stress is not always overt but embedded in institutional structures that fail to affirm diverse identities.

A key contribution of this study is the identification of hidden brilliance (Theme 3), which supports Di Pietro’s (2016) findings that discrimination reduces academic performance not due to ability deficits but due to reduced engagement and opportunity. The participants’ narratives demonstrate that LGBTQIA+ students possess high levels of creativity and intelligence, yet these are often underutilized due to constrained environments.

The theme of resistance (Theme 4) aligns with Scott’s (1985) theory of everyday resistance, where marginalized individuals engage in subtle acts of defiance that challenge dominant power structures without necessarily confronting them directly. In educational settings, resistance becomes both survival strategy and identity assertion.

Most significantly, Theme 5—Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential—expands the literature by revealing a less explored dimension: interrupted intellectual flourishing. While previous studies focus on exclusion or resilience, this finding highlights a more complex condition where cognitive potential exists but is partially suppressed due to identity-based constraints.

The findings indicate that LGBTQIA+ students possess strong intellectual capabilities; however, their ability to fully realize these capacities is disrupted by non-inclusive educational environments. This supports Steele’s (1997) theory of stereotype threat, which suggests that social constraints can impact performance and engagement. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that beyond performance, there is a broader disruption in intellectual fulfillment, where learners are unable to fully actualize their academic potential due to identity-based limitations.

From a broader educational perspective, this supports UNESCO’s (2019) assertion that inclusive education is not merely about access but about full participation of identity in learning processes. When learners cannot bring their full selves into the classroom, their intellectual development becomes fragmented.

In the Philippine context, this finding is particularly significant given the ongoing implementation gaps in Gender and Development (GAD) policies. While policy frameworks exist, lived realities suggest that inclusion has not fully translated into classroom practice, resulting in students who are academically capable but emotionally and socially constrained.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students in constrained educational spaces under the central narrative of *“Bakla Ako, Hindi Bakla Lang”*:

Voices Behind Silence—Identity, Talent, and Resistance of LGBTQIA+ Senior High School Students.

The study aimed to understand how LGBTQIA+ learners experienced identity expression, institutional constraints, talent development, and resistance within Philippine Senior High School environments.

Five major themes emerged from the analysis

- **Negotiated Identities in Constrained Spaces** – Participants experienced identity as fluid but heavily regulated, requiring constant self-monitoring to avoid stigma and exclusion.
 - **Silencing Mechanisms and Institutional Invisibility** – Schools were perceived as subtly exclusionary, where LGBTQIA+ identities were absent from curriculum, discourse, and institutional recognition.
 - **Hidden Brilliance: Talent Amid Suppression** – Despite constraints, participants demonstrated high levels of creativity, intelligence, and leadership, though often unrecognized or underutilized.
 - **Resistance and Quiet Defiance** – Participants engaged in both subtle and overt forms of resistance, asserting identity and agency despite institutional and social constraints.
 - **Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential** – Participants demonstrated strong intellectual capability; however, their ability to fully realize their academic potential was constrained by identity-based and institutional factors.
- Overall, the findings revealed that LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students operated within a paradox: they were intellectually capable, creatively gifted, and emotionally aware, yet structurally constrained in expressing their full identities and potentials.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn: LGBTQIA+ Senior High School students experienced continuous identity negotiation, where self-expression was strategically managed due to perceived risks of stigma, discrimination, or exclusion.

Educational environments, while not always explicitly hostile, functioned as structures of silent regulation, where heteronormativity was reinforced through invisibility rather than direct prohibition.

Despite systemic constraints, LGBTQIA+ students demonstrated significant intellectual, academic, and creative strengths, supporting the view that marginalization does not equate to deficiency. Resistance among LGBTQIA+ learners was present but often subtle, reflecting both agency and the limitations imposed by institutional and cultural contexts.

The most critical insight of the study was the emergence of constrained intellectual flourishing and the disruption of full academic potential, where students expressed high cognitive capability but also a persistent feeling of “missingness,” suggesting that their full intellectual and emotional development was constrained by non-inclusive

educational environments.

In sum, The study concludes that intellectual capability among LGBTQIA+ students is not inherently limited; rather, their academic potential is disrupted when educational environments fail to support inclusive identity expression and participation.

Implications of the Study

For Educational Practice. The findings imply that schools must move beyond symbolic inclusion and actively create identity-affirming learning environments. Teachers should be trained not only in gender sensitivity but also in inclusive pedagogical strategies that validate LGBTQIA+ identities as part of classroom diversity. Curriculum content should also reflect LGBTQIA+ histories, contributions, and lived realities. Schools must recognize that inclusive environments are not only essential for emotional well-being but also for enabling full intellectual flourishing among learners.

For School Leadership and Policy. School administrators should ensure the full implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) policies and anti-bullying frameworks. Institutional policies must shift from passive tolerance to active affirmation, ensuring that LGBTQIA+ students are protected, represented, and supported in both academic and extracurricular domains.

For Curriculum Development. Curricula should be revisited to address the curricular invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities, as emphasized in UNESCO (2016). Representation in textbooks, case studies, and learning materials is essential to normalize diversity and reduce identity-based marginalization.

For Psychological and Student Support Services. Guidance counselors and student support services should be strengthened to address the minority stress experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. Safe spaces, peer support programs, and counseling interventions should be institutionalized.

For Theory and Research. This study contributes to Queer Theory and Critical Pedagogy by extending the concept of identity suppression to include constrained intellectual flourishing and the disruption of full academic potential, where cognitive capacity is present but partially constrained by environmental and identity-based limitations. Future research may further explore this phenomenon in other educational levels and contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integration of LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Curriculum.** DepEd and educational institutions should integrate LGBTQIA+ perspectives into curriculum content across subjects, not limited to values education.

2. **Teacher Capacity Building.** Regular professional development programs on gender sensitivity, queer-inclusive pedagogy, and anti-discrimination practices should be institutionalized.

3. Strengthening School Policy Implementation. Schools should develop monitoring systems to ensure that anti-bullying and gender-inclusive policies are actively enforced.

4. Creation of Safe and Affirming Spaces. Schools should establish LGBTQIA+ support groups or alliances that promote peer support and identity affirmation.

5. Further Research on Constrained Intellectual Flourishing and the Disruption of Full Academic Potential as a possible emerging construct in educational psychology and queer studies.

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