LIVING BEYOND THE RAINBOW SPECTRUM:

The Spirituality and Gender Fluidity of Filipino College Students (A Basis for Affirmative Counseling Approach)

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Philippine Queer Studies Conference
U.P. Diliman, April 24-26, 2026

OBJECTIVES

Central Question: *What are the lived experiences of Filipino college students in terms of their spirituality and gender fluidity?*

Specific Questions:

1. What are the major concerns, issues, and challenges that Filipino college students face in their spirituality and gender fluidity?

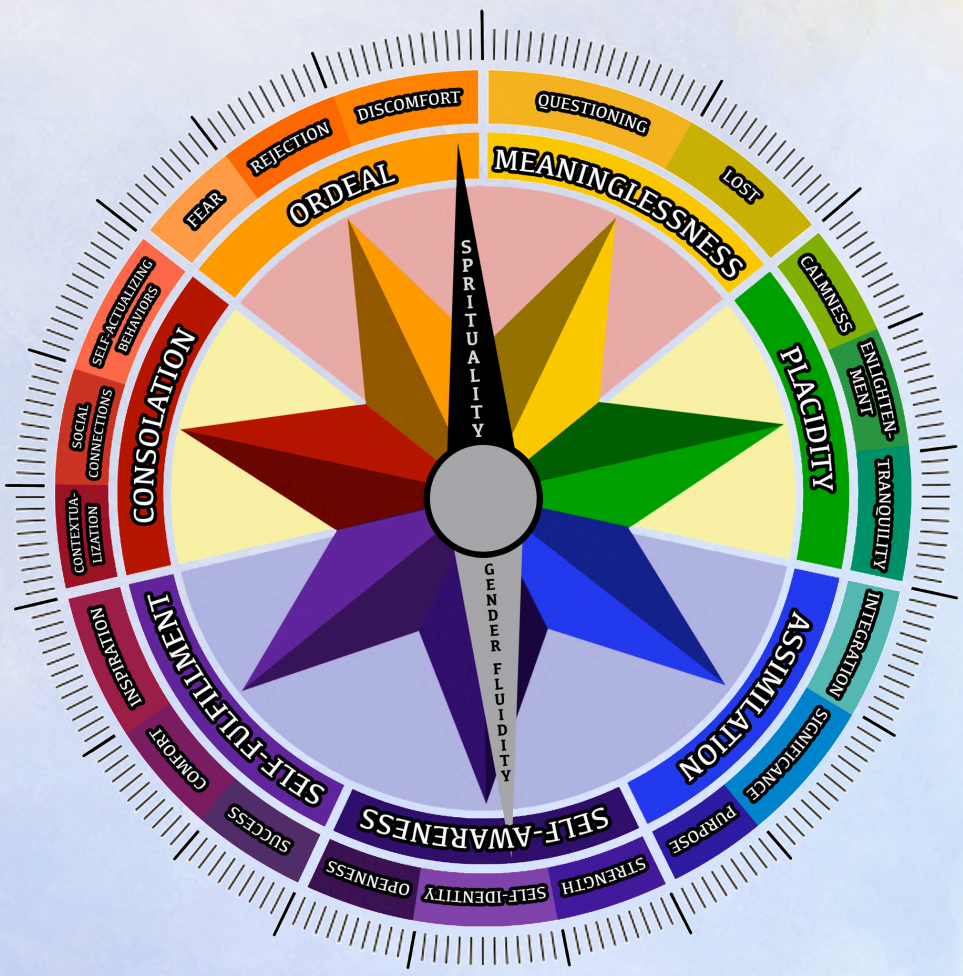
2. What are the coping strategies of these college students with regards to their spirituality and gender fluidity?

3. What are the impacts of these concerns, issues, and challenges on college students' spirituality and gender fluidity?

"... I am a very proud member of the community, I still also am very secure in my faith." (Participant 5)

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research design integrating grounded theory, phenomenology, and social constructivism to understand the connection between spirituality and gender fluidity among Filipino college students. The researcher employed purposive-snowball sampling to select ten actual interview participants who were at least 18 years old and identified as spiritual LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing gender fluidity. Data collection involved online semi-structured interviews. The primary research instrument was a validated *aide memoire* to flexibly explore the participants' lived experiences and subjective meanings. The gathered data underwent a six-step Thematic Analysis process. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study incorporated member checking, peer debriefing, external auditors, and the maintenance of an audit trail. Additionally, the researcher used a reflexive journal to bracket personal biases during the research process. All methodological procedures were conducted following ethical clearance from the ADMU Research Ethics Committee.



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the lived experiences is centered on the Life C.O.M.P.A.S.S. of Spirituality and Gender Fluidity, a hypothesized theoretical framework that uses a compass metaphor to describe how students navigate their life journeys. In this model, the needles of the compass represent spirituality and gender fluidity as separate but interrelated handles that guide the individual. The individual's path is defined by seven conceptual themes: Ordeal and Meaninglessness, which capture negative experiences such as fear, rejection, and feelings of emptiness; Consolation and Placidity, representing coping strategies like building social connections and finding enlightenment; and Assimilation, Self-Awareness, and Self-Fulfillment, which reflect the long-term positive impacts of integrating one's spiritual and gender identities. These themes are not linear stages but represent different paths and journeys that individuals navigate repeatedly throughout their lives based on their choices and contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that spirituality and gender fluidity are not conflicting phenomena but can be integrated as significant factors in a student's holistic identity formation. While traditional society often views these aspects as contrasting, spirituality is defined as a personal and phenomenological experience that allows individuals to maintain a meaningful connection to a Higher Being within their own private world. Gender fluidity is framed as an experience that allows individuals to live with endless possibilities by moving beyond traditional binary views. The study finds that when LGBTQ+ students are supported in inclusive school environments, they demonstrate increased motivation, higher self-esteem, and better academic performance. The ultimate goal for students navigating these identities is to reach an authentic sense of self characterized by genuine happiness and optimism.

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