

# Chapter 2

## Beyond Borders and Binaries: Professional Identity Negotiation of a Filipino Transwoman Educator in Thai Higher Education

Henry II Esteva Lemana

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0551-0443>

Walailak University, Thailand

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores how a Filipino transwoman educator negotiates professional identity within the gender norms and transnational context of Thai higher education. Grounded in identity negotiation theory, it uses a qualitative instrumental case study design based on an in-depth semi-structured interview and reflective narratives. The findings show that professional identity is not fixed but continuously shaped by strategic visibility, gendered professionalism, relational recognition, and transnational positioning. Gender visibility is context-dependent and carefully calibrated in relation to safety and legitimacy. Professionalism operates as protective identity labor, requiring heightened preparation, emotional regulation, and self-monitoring. Inclusion is experienced mainly through everyday interactions rather than formal policy, making belonging fragile and contingent. While transnational positioning offers some flexibility in navigating gender norms, it also intensifies precarity through linguistic, cultural, and contractual vulnerabilities.*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-7194-8.ch002

## INTRODUCTION

Thailand is often portrayed, both regionally and globally, as comparatively open to gender and sexual diversity, particularly in contrast to other Southeast Asian societies (Langlois, 2022; Reid et al., 2022). This image is reinforced through tourism discourses, popular media, and transnational cultural circulation, including LGBTQ+ tourism and boys' love media (Baudinette, 2023; Statham & Scuzzarello, 2023; Viikmaa & Jirattikorn, 2026).

Popular representations of tolerance and visibility, however, have long been challenged by empirical research demonstrating that cultural recognition in Thailand does not necessarily translate into structural equality or robust institutional protection for gender-diverse individuals (Langlois, 2022; Reid et al., 2022). Despite social familiarity with gender diversity, LGBTQ+ people continue to encounter legal gaps, institutional precarity, and everyday forms of stigma and exclusion (Miedema et al., 2022; Ocha, 2023; Wisuttiapat, 2024).

Within educational settings, this gap between visibility and protection becomes particularly pronounced. While some Thai schools and universities may appear welcoming to queer individuals, research indicates that formal gender-inclusive policies, institutional safeguards, and professional support mechanisms remain limited or inconsistently implemented (Langlois, 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2022). In the absence of clear institutional protections, transgender educators often rely on informal acceptance, collegial goodwill, and interpersonal relationships, rendering educational workplaces sites of ongoing negotiation rather than stable spaces of belonging (Doungphummes & Phanthaphoommee, 2024; Lin et al., 2020; Nopas & Ueangchokchai, 2025; Wisuttiapat, 2024).

At the level of everyday academic practice, inclusion in higher education is frequently experienced as a lived and relational process rather than as a codified institutional policy. Research in Thai educational contexts demonstrates that gender inclusivity is commonly enacted through everyday interactions, collegial relationships, and classroom practices rather than through explicit or consistently enforced institutional frameworks (Doungphummes & Phanthaphoommee, 2024; Langlois, 2022; Lin et al., 2020; Reid et al., 2022; Ulla & Paiz, 2025). While such relational forms of inclusion can be meaningful and affirming, they also shift the burden of negotiation onto queer educators themselves, who must continually assess the professional and institutional risks of visibility and self-disclosure (Matthews et al., 2025; Miedema et al., 2022; Nopas & Ueangchokchai, 2025; Wisuttiapat, 2024).

Thailand's higher education sector further complicates these dynamics through its transnational character. Universities employ a substantial number of foreign educators (Hickey, 2018; Pongsin et al., 2023), particularly from the Philippines, who constitute one of the largest groups of migrant teachers in Thai schools and univer-

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