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**Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language
in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and
Gender-Diverse Students.**

A thesis
submitted partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
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Abstract

Gender-inclusive language has increasingly been recognised as a key dimension of equity and inclusion in higher education. However, limited research has explored how such language is understood, experienced, and enacted within everyday university teaching contexts, particularly from the perspectives of both academic staff and gender-diverse students. Guided by Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST), this qualitative study examines how gender-inclusive language shapes experiences of safety, belonging, and participation in a university setting in Aotearoa New Zealand. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with academic staff, and focus groups and individual interviews with gender-diverse students at the University of Waikato. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to explore participants' perceptions and practices related to gender-inclusive language in teaching and institutional contexts. The findings suggest that while many staff members express commitment to inclusive language, its implementation is uneven and often constrained by institutional structures and pedagogical norms. Gender-diverse students' accounts highlight both affirming experiences and ongoing instances of misrecognition and minority stress, illustrating the gap between institutional intentions and lived realities.

Through the lens of GMST, the study demonstrates that gender-inclusive language functions as both a protective factor and a potential stressor. By bringing student and staff perspectives into dialogue, the research underscores the need for inclusion to be understood not merely as individual practice but as a collective and institutionally supported responsibility. The study foregrounds language as a critical site of inclusion and exclusion and offers practical recommendations for teaching practice and institutional policy, suggesting that sustainable inclusion requires structurally embedded approaches that move beyond symbolic commitments towards transformative change in university cultures and practices.

Key terms: Gender-inclusive language; gender diversity; higher education; Gender Minority Stress Theory; university teaching; inclusion; campus climate; qualitative research; Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	4
2.1 Importance of Gender-Inclusive Campuses	4
2.2 Gender Minority Stress Theory.....	5
2.3 Language, Universities, and Inclusion	7
2.4 Barriers to Inclusive Language Use	9
2.5 Conclusion.....	10
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	12
3.1 Research Design and Methodological Approach	12
3.2 Participants	13
3.2.1 <i>Inclusion Criteria</i>	14
3.2.2 <i>Recruitment Strategy</i>	14
3.3 Data Collection.....	16
3.3.1 <i>Focus Groups and Interviews for Gender-Diverse Students</i>	16
3.3.2 <i>Semi-Structured Interviews for Academic Staff</i>	18
3.4 Data Collection Process and Reflexivity.....	20
3.5 Data Analysis	21
3.6 Trustworthiness	22
3.7 Ethical considerations	23
3.8 Methodological Limitations	23
3.9 Conclusion.....	24
Chapter 4: Gender-Diverse Student Perspectives on Gender-Inclusive Language.....	26
4.1 Inclusive Language as a Signal of Safety and Belonging	27
4.1.1 <i>Early Cues of Safety in the Classroom</i>	27
4.1.2 <i>Feeling Safe Without Having to Explain Oneself</i>	28
4.1.3 <i>Belonging as Conditional and Contextual</i>	28
4.2 Recognition Without Exposure: The Balance Between Visibility and Protection.....	29
4.2.1 <i>Valuing Recognition That Does Not Demand Visibility</i>	29
4.2.2 <i>Hypervisibility as a Source of Stress</i>	30

4.3 Superficial Inclusion and Risks to Autonomy.....	30
4.4 Misgendering as a Chronic and Accumulative Stressor.....	32
4.4.1 <i>The Emotional Weight of Repetition</i>	32
4.4.2 <i>Strategic Silence and Self-Protection</i>	32
4.5 Consistency as the Foundation of Trust	34
4.5.1 <i>Inclusion Across Time and Contexts</i>	34
4.5.2 <i>Modelling Mistakes as Repairable</i>	35
4.6 Inclusive Language as Cognitive and Emotional Relief	35
4.6.1 <i>Reducing Vigilance and Cognitive Load</i>	35
4.6.2 <i>Participation and Academic Confidence</i>	36
4.7 Structural and Written Inclusivity as Evidence of Institutional Commitment	36
4.7.1 <i>Teaching Materials as Moral Indicators</i>	36
4.7.2 <i>Responsibility Beyond Individual Goodwill</i>	37
4.8 Staff Authority, Intervention, and Protection of Student Dignity	37
4.8.1 <i>Intervention as Norm-Setting</i>	37
4.8.2 <i>Centring Student Preferences</i>	38
4.9 Summary of Gender-Diverse Student Findings	38
Chapter 5: Academic Staff Perspectives on Gender-Inclusive Language	41
5.1 Inclusive Language as an Ethical and Pedagogical Responsibility.....	41
5.1.1 <i>“It would be wrong not to”: Ethical Commitments to Respect</i>	42
5.1.2 <i>Inclusion as Part of Teaching Identity</i>	43
5.2 Practising Inclusion Through Everyday Teaching Strategies	44
5.2.1 <i>Names, Pronouns, and Student Agency</i>	44
5.2.2 <i>Inclusive Address and Classroom Language</i>	45
5.3 Learning Through Students and Relational Accountability	46
5.3.1 <i>Students as Teachers</i>	46
5.3.2 <i>Trust, Accountability, and Repair</i>	47
5.4 Navigating Challenges, Tensions, and Emotional Labour	47
5.4.1 <i>Cognitive and Emotional Challenges</i>	48
5.4.2 <i>Disciplinary and Historical Tensions</i>	48
5.5 Institutional Gaps and the Need for Structural Support	49
5.6 Summary of Staff Perspectives Findings	49
Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations.....	51

6.1 Integrated Discussion of Student and Staff Findings	51
6.1.1 <i>Gender-Inclusive Language as a Moderator of Minority Stress</i>	51
6.1.2 <i>Alignments and Tensions Between Staff Intentions and Student Experiences</i>	53
6.1.2.1 <i>Autonomy, Disclosure, and the Politics of Visibility</i>	54
6.1.3 <i>Misgendering, Repair, and the Ethics of Accountability</i>	55
6.1.4 <i>Consistency as the Foundation of Trust and Belonging</i>	56
6.1.5 <i>Institutional Responsibility Beyond Individual Goodwill</i>	57
6.2 Limitations of the Study	58
6.3 Implications for Pedagogy and Higher Education Practice	60
6.4 Recommendations for Teaching Practice, Staff Training, and Institutional Policy	61
6.4.1 <i>Teaching Practice and Professional Development</i>	62
6.4.2 <i>Recommendations for Institutional Policy and Leadership</i>	63
Chapter 7: Conclusion	65
7.1 Recommendations for Future Research	66
References	67
Appendices	72
APPENDIX A: Focus Group / Interview Questions for Gender-Diverse Students	73
APPENDIX B: Interview Questions for Academic Staff	76
APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet for Gender-Diverse Students Participating in Focus Groups / Interviews	77
APPENDIX D: Participant Information Sheet for Academic Staff Interview	80
APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form for Gender-Diverse Students Participating in Focus Groups/Interviews	83
APPENDIX F: Participant Consent Form for Academic Staff Interview	85
APPENDIX G: Recruitment Email for Academic Staff	87
APPENDIX H: Focus Group Recruitment Slide for Lecture Presentation	88
APPENDIX I: Focus Group Recruitment Poster	89
APPENDIX J: Demographic Information Form for Gender-Diverse Student Participants	90
APPENDIX K: Demographic Information Form for Academic Staff Participants	92
APPENDIX L: CHECKLIST	93

Chapter 1: Introduction

Universities are increasingly positioning themselves as spaces that value diversity, inclusion, and student well-being. Within higher education, institutional policies, diversity statements, and strategic plans reflect growing recognition that students' experiences of belonging and safety are shaped not only by academic outcomes, but also by the everyday social and institutional environments in which learning occurs (Rankin et al., 2010). Language plays a critical role within these environments, functioning as a key mechanism through which identities are recognised, affirmed, or marginalised. The concept of inclusive language has a long history, with feminist linguists and activists in the 1970s critiquing supposedly 'gender-neutral' terms such as generic masculine pronouns and occupational titles as androcentric and advocating for gender-neutral alternatives, a reform that became foundational to subsequent debates about non-sexist and inclusive language use in English (Mills & Mullany, 2011; Laugesen, 2019).

For gender-diverse students, whose identities often fall outside dominant binary and cisnormative frameworks, everyday language use within university settings can shape experiences of inclusion, well-being, and engagement (Budge et al., 2020). Practices such as misgendering, assumptions about gender, and inconsistent recognition of identities can undermine students' sense of safety and belonging, even in institutions that formally endorse inclusion. Research across international and Aotearoa New Zealand contexts indicates that gender-diverse students' experiences of marginalisation within tertiary education are often subtle, embedded within routine interactions such as classroom discussions, administrative processes, and staff–student communication (Brown, Schmidt, & Veale, 2020; Morrison et al., 2024). In response, gender-inclusive language has emerged as a central focus within inclusive education, encompassing practices such as the use of correct pronouns, gender-neutral terms, and respectful forms of address, which have been shown to affirm identity and reduce experiences of exclusion (Perales et al., 2022; Budge et al., 2020). However, the

implementation of these practices remains uneven across higher education settings, as staff often report uncertainty, lack of confidence, or fear of making mistakes in the absence of clear institutional guidance and professional development (Brown et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2022). Consequently, even well-intentioned efforts toward inclusion may be inconsistent or avoided altogether, with unintended consequences for student well-being.

Understanding these dynamics requires a framework that situates individual experiences within broader social and institutional structures. Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST) provides such a lens by conceptualising the stress experienced by gender-diverse individuals as arising from systemic and interpersonal forms of marginalisation rather than from gender diversity itself (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019). GMST highlights how chronic exposure to invalidation, exclusion, and discrimination contributes to psychological distress, while affirming environments and practices can function as protective factors. Within university contexts, language operates as a key site through which minority stress is either reinforced or mitigated, linking institutional norms to everyday student experiences (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Testa et al., 2015).

While existing literature has documented the experiences of gender-diverse students within higher education, there remains a need for research that explicitly focuses on how gender-inclusive language is understood, enacted, and negotiated within university settings. Much of the current research (e.g., Brown, Schmidt, & Veale, 2020; Budge et al., 2020; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Seelman, 2014) examines either student experiences or institutional policy, with less attention given to the perspectives of academic staff and how they navigate inclusive language in practice. Studies conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand indicate that staff often recognise the importance of inclusion but feel underprepared to implement affirming practices consistently, particularly when responsibility for education about gender diversity is implicitly shifted onto students (Brown et al., 2020; Treharne et al., 2016). This gap points to the importance of exploring

both staff and student perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how inclusive language functions within everyday academic life.

This thesis responds to these gaps by exploring perceptions of gender-inclusive language among academic staff and gender-diverse students at an Aotearoa New Zealand university. Grounded in GMST, the study examines how language practices shape experiences of belonging, safety, and inclusion, as well as examining the institutional and interpersonal factors that influence how inclusive language is understood and enacted. By centring both staff and student voices, the research aims to illuminate areas of alignment and tension between intentions and experiences, contributing a nuanced understanding of inclusion within higher education.

The findings of this study have implications for institutional policy, professional development, and teaching practice. By examining gender-inclusive language as an everyday practice rather than a purely policy-based concern, this research seeks to inform more effective and contextually grounded approaches to inclusion within tertiary education. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing conversations about equity, well-being, and belonging in universities, particularly within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

This Introduction has outlined the rationale for this study and situated it within broader debates about inclusion, language, and student well-being. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and theoretical framework underpinning the research. Chapter 3 then outlines the qualitative methodology employed, including participant recruitment, data collection, and analytic approach. Subsequent chapters present and discuss the findings, before concluding with implications for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature on the use of gender-inclusive language in higher education, paying particular attention to gender-diverse students' experiences of belonging, inclusion, and marginalisation. It situates gender-inclusive language within broader debates about campus climates and student well-being, introduces Gender Minority Stress Theory as the central theoretical framework guiding the study, and examines how institutional practices, staff behaviour, and language use shape experiences of inclusion within university settings. The chapter concludes by identifying key gaps in the literature that inform the focus of the current research.

2.1 Importance of Gender-Inclusive Campuses

A strong sense of belonging is widely recognised as a foundational component of positive student experiences in higher education, contributing to student engagement, academic motivation, persistence, and retention across diverse student populations (Rankin et al., 2010; Evans, 2001). Research consistently demonstrates that students who feel valued and respected within their learning environments are likely to participate actively in academic life and report better overall well-being. For gender-diverse students, belonging is particularly important because they are likely to encounter marginalisation, invisibility, and exclusion within institutional contexts that remain structured around binary and cisnormative assumptions (Budge et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2020).

Research indicates that gender-diverse students frequently experience barriers to belonging within university settings, including misgendering, lack of institutional recognition, and inconsistent staff practices, which contribute to feelings of isolation and heightened stress (Budge et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020). Budge et al. (2020) found that gender-diverse students in higher education often experience elevated stress linked to feelings of exclusion and lack of belonging. Morrison et al. (2024), drawing on research conducted within Aotearoa New Zealand, similarly found that rainbow students' perceptions of institutional support strongly influenced both their academic success and

overall well-being. These findings highlight that a sense of belonging is closely shaped by whether institutions actively recognise and affirm students' identities.

At the same time, research demonstrates that gender-diverse students can experience a strong sense of belonging when institutions make deliberate efforts to create inclusive environments. Existing research demonstrates that inclusive campuses are associated with improved educational outcomes and mental health for gender-diverse students, particularly when institutional practices actively recognise and affirm gender diversity (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Singh et al., 2011; Budge et al., 2020). When gender-diverse students experience learning environments in which their identities are recognised and respected, they are more likely to thrive academically and personally, reporting higher levels of engagement, resilience, and well-being. The processes through which exclusion and inclusion operate are theorised through Gender Minority Stress Theory, which is discussed in detail in the following section.

2.2 Gender Minority Stress Theory

Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST) is the central theoretical framework underpinning this thesis and provides a lens for understanding how institutional environments and everyday interactions shape gender-diverse students' experiences in higher education. In particular, GMST enables analysis of how staff language use, classroom practices, and institutional policies can either reproduce minority stress or foster affirming and inclusive environments. GMST is an extension of Minority Stress Theory, originally proposed by Meyer (2003) to explain the specific psychological distress associated with holding a stigmatised sexual minority identity in contexts characterised by prejudice and discrimination. Importantly, Minority Stress Theory conceptualises this minority-related distress as a consequence of systemic discrimination and heteronormativity, thereby shifting the focus away from individual pathology and rejecting the idea that distress is inherent to minority identities. Rather than locating the source of harm within the individual, the theory suggests that

psychological distress linked to minority status arises from external social prejudice, stigma, and structural exclusion, rather than from the sexual minority identity itself (Meyer, 2003).

Hendricks and Testa (2012) later adapted this framework specifically for gender-diverse populations, explicitly countering the historical pathologisation of transgender and gender-diverse identities. Rather than framing distress as an outcome of gender diversity itself, GMST positions psychological harms related to being trans or gender diverse as products of cisnormative and transphobic social environments, including institutional practices and interpersonal interactions that invalidate or marginalise gender diversity. The current study is grounded in GMST, as this framework offers a robust lens for understanding how social structures and everyday interactions within universities can negatively affect the mental health and well-being of gender-diverse individuals (Tan et al., 2019).

One of the key mechanisms through which cisnormativity is reproduced is language, particularly language that ignores, erases, or invalidates non-binary and transgender identities (Tan et al., 2019). GMST highlights that minority stress arises not only from the absence of affirming practices, but also from the presence of harmful interactions such as misgendering, exclusion, and invalidation, which function as chronic stressors (Testa et al., 2015). Emerging research has increasingly linked language-based practices to minority stress processes, with studies demonstrating that repeated experiences of misgendering and linguistic exclusion are associated with heightened distress and reduced well-being among gender-diverse individuals (Perales et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2020). While Testa et al. (2015) do not explicitly focus on gender-inclusive language, their work provides empirical support for the role of everyday interpersonal interactions as key contributors to minority stress.

International research, such as Dolezal et al. (2025), demonstrates that gender-diverse students in United States university settings experience minority stress as a result of both overt discrimination and more subtle forms of institutional exclusion, including classroom practices and

administrative processes. Similar patterns have been identified within Aotearoa New Zealand, where gender-diverse students report experiences of marginalisation within tertiary education settings despite the presence of formal inclusion policies (Brown, Schmidt, & Veale, 2020; Treharne et al., 2016). In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the educational landscape is further shaped by bicultural and multicultural influences. Gender inclusivity intersects with *te ao Māori*, the Māori worldview, which encompasses diverse and historically grounded understandings of gender and identity. This bicultural context adds complexity to the implementation of gender-inclusive language, as educators must navigate both Indigenous frameworks of gender diversity and Western institutional norms that often remain grounded in binary categories (Graham et al., 2022). At the same time, this context makes inclusive language practices especially vital, as failing to engage respectfully with both gender diversity and *te ao Māori* risks reinforcing multiple forms of marginalisation (Graham et al., 2022).

2.3 Language, Universities, and Inclusion

A substantial body of literature highlights language as a central mechanism through which inclusion or exclusion is enacted within higher education environments. While affirming language benefits all students, it is particularly critical for gender-diverse students because language functions as a primary means through which their identities are either recognised or invalidated in everyday academic interactions (Budge et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2024; Perales et al., 2022). Within the framework of GMST, language operates as a daily interactional site where minority stress is either reinforced or mitigated, linking broader institutional structures to individual student experiences.

Norris (2020), writing from a South African university context, argues that pronoun use and gendered language function as everyday indicators of institutional values and norms regarding gender diversity. International studies further demonstrate that even in institutions with explicit diversity policies, classroom interactions may continue to reproduce cisnormative assumptions (Ripley et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2020). These patterns are also evident within Aotearoa New

Zealand, where Brown, Schmidt, and Veale (2020) found that gender-diverse students frequently encountered misgendering and microaggressions from academic staff, contributing to feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. Similarly, Treharne et al. (2016), in a report examining campus climate at the University of Otago, found that despite institutional diversity statements, students experienced inconsistency in staff behaviour and pedagogical practices. Taken together, these international and Aotearoa-based studies indicate that institutional commitments to inclusion do not necessarily translate into consistent everyday teaching practices. Evans (2001) conceptualises this disconnect as a form of covert exclusion, whereby policies supporting diversity are not accompanied by meaningful changes in everyday interactions. These findings highlight the importance of examining language use not only as an individual practice, but as a reflection of broader institutional cultures.

Language-based inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand is further shaped by te ao Māori understandings of gender and identity. Graham et al. (2022) argue that teaching practices informed by te ao Māori require educators to recognise gender diversity as relational, contextual, and embedded within whakapapa and community, rather than as a fixed binary construct. In this context, inclusive language is not solely about adopting neutral or non-gendered terms, but about engaging respectfully with Indigenous understandings of identity while operating within Western institutional structures. This broader cultural framing is important for situating discussions of gender-inclusive language in Aotearoa. Although the present study does not empirically examine Māori-specific experiences, this framing underscores the importance of recognising the bicultural context within which gender-inclusive language practices are enacted in Aotearoa universities.

The literature also indicates that institutional culture, policy, and leadership play a crucial role in shaping inclusive practices and perceptions of belonging. When universities explicitly recognise gender diversity through language, policy, and staff development, they contribute to environments that affirm identity and reduce minority stress (Budge et al., 2020; Rankin et al., 2010). Conversely,

limited awareness or inconsistent implementation of inclusive practices can reinforce binary norms and signal exclusion, affecting both student and staff experiences (Brown et al., 2020; Treharne et al., 2016).

This synthesis of international and Aotearoa-based literature on gender-inclusive language, minority stress, and higher education environments highlights a key gap addressed by the current study: while institutional commitments to inclusion are increasingly visible, little is known about how gender-inclusive language is understood, enacted, and experienced by both staff and gender-diverse students within university settings.

2.4 Barriers to Inclusive Language Use

Several studies, including those conducted within Aotearoa New Zealand, identify persistent barriers to the consistent use of gender-inclusive language in tertiary education. Graham et al. (2022) report that many university staff feel hesitant to engage with gender-diverse inclusion due to fears of making mistakes or causing offence, particularly in the absence of clear institutional guidance. This uncertainty often results in avoidance, rather than engagement. Brown et al. (2020) similarly found that staff who wished to be supportive frequently lacked confidence with enacting inclusive practices, especially when institutional policies were unclear or inconsistently communicated.

Within the local context, resources such as the New Zealand Public Service Commission's *Rainbow Inclusive Language Guide* (Public Service Commission, n.d.) and Treharne et al.'s (2016) *Eight Thoughts on Gender-Inclusive Language* offer practical guidance for inclusive communication across educational settings. Lewis (2022), in a New Zealand tertiary education context, found that inclusive literacy resources increased educators' confidence and preparedness to create affirming learning environments, highlighting the importance of contextualised support. However, research suggests that access to resources alone may be insufficient without accompanying professional development.

International literature further supports the role of professional development in addressing these barriers. Zapletal et al. (2023), in a United States-based study, evaluated a professional development programme for university staff and found notable improvements in participants' confidence in using inclusive language and responding to gender-diverse student needs. McEntarfer and Iovannone (2020) similarly emphasise the importance of institutional policies surrounding chosen names and pronouns, demonstrating that when university staff understand and implement these practices effectively, they contribute to cultures of respect and affirmation. Research on inclusive language initiatives in STEM education illustrates that affirming practices are relevant across disciplines, challenging assumptions that such approaches are confined to the social sciences and humanities (Monash University, 2023). Recommendations from studies focusing on university staff experiences and institutional practices also underscore the need for visible leadership, clear policies, and role-modelling of inclusive behaviour within lectures, assessments, and tutorials (Airton, 2013; Coefield, 2017).

Additionally, resistance to inclusive language has been linked to broader social and psychological processes. Cundiff et al. (2021) explore how anti-transgender bias and person perception processes can contribute to resistance, suggesting that professional development must address not only knowledge gaps but also implicit attitudes and assumptions.

Taken together, this literature indicates that institutional barriers, both cultural and procedural, can interfere with the adoption of inclusive language. The current research therefore aims to investigate how such barriers manifest in the context of an Aotearoa New Zealand university and to what extent institutional supports facilitate or obstruct the use of affirming language practices.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the literature demonstrates that gender-inclusive language is a central component of creating affirming university environments rather than a peripheral concern. GMST provides a critical framework for understanding how exclusionary practices generate stress for

gender-diverse populations, while inclusive language and institutional support function as protective factors. Despite increasing institutional commitments to diversity, substantial gaps remain between policy and everyday practice, particularly within classroom interactions. This study responds to these gaps by exploring both staff and student perspectives at an Aotearoa New Zealand university, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how gender-inclusive language is experienced, understood, and enacted in tertiary education contexts. While the study is situated within a bicultural national context, its primary contribution lies in examining language practices rather than providing culturally specific analysis, highlighting the need for further research that explicitly centres Māori and other Indigenous gender-diverse perspectives. The following chapter outlines the qualitative methodological approach used to investigate these experiences, including participant recruitment, data collection, and analytic strategies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding this study. It describes the research design, participant recruitment, data collection procedures, analytic approach, reflexivity, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. The study employed a qualitative research design informed by reflexive thematic analysis, guided by Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST), as outlined in the previous chapter. This research design intersects intentionally with GMST by enabling close attention to how institutional structures, everyday practices, and interpersonal interactions shape experiences of inclusion and minority stress. Taking a qualitative approach thus supports the study's aim of examining how gender-inclusive language is understood and experienced by academic staff and gender-diverse students within an Aotearoa New Zealand university context.

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore perceptions of gender-inclusive language in university settings. Qualitative approaches are particularly suited to examining complex social phenomena, meanings, and lived experiences, allowing for rich, contextualised insights into participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Specifically, this research examines how gender-diverse students and academic staff perceive the role of language in shaping inclusive learning environments.

Drawing from an interpretivist paradigm, the study is grounded in the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that meaning is produced through interaction, context, and interpretation rather than existing as an objective truth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This critical qualitative orientation enables attention to power, identity, and resistance, and is particularly suited to examining how normative language practices can reproduce inequities while also

identifying moments where language fosters safety, belonging, and affirmation for gender-diverse individuals within higher education contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

GMST provides the theoretical framework guiding this research. As outlined in the previous chapter, GMST highlights how structural stigma, interpersonal discrimination, and internalised stressors shape the experiences of gender-diverse individuals (Testa et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2019). Within this study, GMST is used as an interpretive lens to examine how participants' accounts of language use relate to broader experiences of inclusion, exclusion, affirmation, and stress within the university environment. This framework enables consideration of how gender-inclusive language may function either as a buffer against minority stress or as a reinforcement of stress when absent or inconsistently applied.

The research was designed to combine semi-structured interviews with academic staff and focus groups with gender-diverse students (although, as detailed below, some students were also interviewed individually). This design enabled both individual reflection and collective meaning-making, providing a holistic understanding of the institutional and interpersonal dynamics surrounding gender-inclusive language. Focus groups are well suited to exploring shared experiences, social norms, and collective sense-making, particularly in relation to marginalised identities, as interaction between participants can surface consensus, tension, and divergence (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to articulate personal perspectives in depth while maintaining sufficient structure to address key research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For academic staff, semi-structured individual interviews supported deeper exploration of pedagogical practices, personal beliefs, and institutional constraints shaping inclusive language use.

3.2 Participants

Participants included academic staff and gender-diverse students at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand. Students were eligible if they identified under the gender-diverse umbrella (defined in

more detail below) and were currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate study. Academic staff were eligible if they were currently teaching at the university.

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

From the outset, the study was designed to recruit two analytically distinct participant groups at the University of Waikato: gender-diverse students and academic staff. Inclusion criteria for gender-diverse students were: (a) current enrolment at the University of Waikato, and (b) self-identification as transgender, non-binary, gender-fluid, takatāpui, or any other non-cisgender identity. Inclusion criteria for academic staff were: (a) employment as a lecturer or course convenor at the University of Waikato, and (b) active involvement in teaching at the time of the study. A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit participants from a range of disciplines to ensure diversity of perspectives and experiences.

3.2.2 Recruitment Strategy

A multi-pronged recruitment strategy was employed to ensure accessibility and broad participation. For gender-diverse students, recruitment posters were displayed on faculty and school noticeboards across campus (see Appendix I). Digital versions of the recruitment poster were shared via email through university LGBTQIA+ support offices, including UniQ, Rainbow Alliance, and relevant student services pages (see Appendix I). Recruitment slides were emailed to lecturers, who then presented them to students in their lecture classes with their permission (Appendix H and Appendix I). Snowball recruitment was also undertaken by inviting participants to share study information with peers. For academic staff, email invitations were distributed via faculty mailing lists and staff networks (Appendix G). Staff were recruited across a range of disciplines rather than being targeted based on prior engagement with diversity or inclusion work, resulting in participation from staff with varied disciplinary backgrounds and levels of familiarity with gender-inclusive language. Flexible interview scheduling was offered to accommodate teaching timetables.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC; approval/file number FS2025-34). All participants received an information sheet outlining the study aims, confidentiality, and right to withdraw (Appendix C for students; Appendix D for staff), and provided informed consent before participation (Appendix E for students; Appendix F for staff). In line with the approved ethics application, the researcher remained attentive to potential emotional discomfort and was prepared to direct participants to appropriate university support services if required. The research process is outlined in detail below, with ethical considerations discussed further in Section 3.7.

The study initially aimed to recruit approximately ten academic staff members and two focus groups comprising around ten gender-diverse students in total. However, these recruitment targets were not achieved. This outcome likely reflects the relatively small proportion of gender-diverse students within tertiary education populations, alongside constraints on staff availability (Brown et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, five gender-diverse student participants and three academic staff participants were recruited. Data collection for the student group included one focus group of three students and two individual interviews with students who were unable to attend the focus group due to scheduling conflicts. While recruitment numbers were lower than initially anticipated, the final sample provided rich, nuanced insights into experiences of gender-inclusive language in university contexts, supporting the depth and quality of the qualitative analysis.

The collection of demographic data was limited to age, study level (undergraduate/postgraduate), and faculty affiliation. Variables such as ethnicity were not collected. This decision was guided by ethical considerations around anonymity and participant protection. Given the small number of gender-diverse students enrolled in tertiary institutions and the potential for identifiability within a single institutional context, collecting data around aspects such as ethnicity in addition to being gender-diverse would have created the potential for individuals to be identified. This is further discussed in the limitations section in Chapter 6.

3.3 Data Collection

Two qualitative methods were employed in the data collection process, as detailed below.

3.3.1 Focus Groups and Interviews for Gender-Diverse Students

A semi-structured guide was prepared for the student focus groups (Appendix A), incorporating open-ended questions and vignette-style prompts to support discussion of hypothetical yet realistic university scenarios without requiring participants to disclose personal experiences. Vignette-based approaches are commonly used in qualitative research to facilitate reflection on sensitive topics, reduce pressure for self-disclosure, and enable participants to discuss social norms and institutional practices at a broader level (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The scenarios reflected typical university interactions, including classroom communication, assessment feedback, and informal staff–student interactions, allowing participants to consider both inclusive and exclusionary language practices.

As noted above, although the intention was to run two focus groups, in practice only one was conducted, comprising three gender-diverse students, which was held in a library study room at the university. A further two individual interviews were undertaken in the same setting for students unable to attend the focus group. This constituted a pragmatic methodological adaptation rather than an intentional mixed-method design and was approved by the Ethics Committee as an amendment following the original ethical approval. The same prompts, facilitation style, and supportive approach were used across both formats to maintain consistency in the data generated.

The focus group and individual student interviews were conducted in quiet, accessible study rooms on campus. Sessions were structured to support participant comfort and open discussion, with refreshments provided throughout. Participants were informed that vignette-style prompts would be used to guide discussion and were advised that they were free to share personal experiences if they felt comfortable doing so. Participants were asked for their preferred names and pronouns and were

informed that they could pause or withdraw at any point. Student participants received a \$20 koha (Warehouse voucher) as a token of appreciation for their time, in accordance with the study's ethical approval. While modest incentives are commonly used in qualitative research to acknowledge participant contribution, care was taken to emphasise voluntary participation and minimise any potential for coercion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The focus group discussion was initially scheduled for approximately 90 minutes but extended to two hours, which suggests high levels of participant engagement and comfort with the topic. Ground rules were established at the outset to promote respectful communication, confidentiality, and balanced participation. Participants were specifically asked not to mention course names or other contextual details that could make them or anyone else easily identifiable, particularly given the relatively small number of gender-diverse students across the university. While most participants adhered to this guidance, a small number of identifying contextual details were occasionally mentioned during discussion; these were removed during transcription to protect anonymity.

The researcher facilitated the discussion while actively monitoring group dynamics to ensure that all participants had opportunities to contribute. Effective focus group facilitation is recognised as central to managing power dynamics and encouraging equitable participation, particularly when working with marginalised populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Prompts explored reflections on language practices such as pronoun use, misgendering, binary assumptions, and institutional communication. While discussions were initially structured around vignette-based scenarios, participants frequently and voluntarily drew on their own lived experiences, allowing the conversation to move flexibly between hypothetical examples and personal accounts. The individual interviews undertaken with students who were unable to attend the focus group followed the same semi-structured format and utilised the same vignette prompts as the focus group to ensure

comparability across data sources. The two individual interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and 40 minutes respectively.

All focus groups and individual interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcription was conducted manually by the researcher, with repeated listening to ensure accurate representation of pauses, emphasis, and emotional tone. Given the researcher's active role in data generation and interpretation, transcription was treated as a reflexive process, paying careful attention to how meaning and emotion were represented in the written text. Participants were provided with the opportunity to review their transcripts to check for accuracy and clarify meanings, with transcripts shared securely via email. Focus group participants were provided only with their own contributions rather than the full group transcript to protect the confidentiality of others. A small number of student participants suggested minor clarifications, such as adjustments to punctuation, wording, or representation of emotional tone; these changes did not alter the substantive content of the data. The majority of participants indicated that their transcripts accurately reflected their contributions.

To further protect anonymity, participants are referred to in the analytic chapters using non-identifying descriptors (e.g., "one student participant") rather than pseudonyms. Field notes were recorded immediately following each focus group and interview to capture contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and reflections on group dynamics, supporting reflexive engagement with the data and informing later stages of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Field notes were stored securely alongside other research materials and did not include identifying information.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews for Academic Staff

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic staff to explore their perspectives on the implementation of gender-inclusive language in teaching and interactions with students. Three academic staff participants were interviewed via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, according to their preference and availability, to accommodate teaching schedules and other professional commitments.

The three interviews lasted 12 minutes, 20 minutes, and 24 minutes respectively. Although shorter than initially anticipated, the interviews were intentionally concise in recognition of lecturers' demanding schedules. The semi-structured format enabled focused and purposeful discussion, resulting in data that directly addressed the research questions while minimising time burden on participants. Interviews were introduced by outlining the purpose of the study, confirming informed consent, and reiterating participants' rights to pause, decline to answer questions, or withdraw at any point. Participants were also invited to ask questions before the interview commenced.

The staff interview guide (Appendix B) addressed key domains, including awareness and understanding of gender-inclusive language and associated policies, perceptions of institutional support or barriers to inclusive practice, experiences of using inclusive language in teaching, assessment, and feedback, reflections on challenges and successes in promoting inclusivity in the classroom, and personal beliefs about the importance of inclusive language in higher education. While the guide provided a consistent structure, participants were encouraged to elaborate on issues they felt were particularly salient in their own teaching philosophies and experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they allow for consistency across participants while retaining flexibility to explore individual experiences in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is particularly appropriate for examining whether institutional policies and norms are interpreted and enacted differently across teaching contexts. Participants were encouraged to reflect on both their intentions and actual practices, enabling exploration of the gap between policy, belief, and implementation.

All staff interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher, following the same transcription procedures used for the student data, with repeated listening to ensure accurate capture of emphasis, pauses, and emotional tone. Identifying contextual details, such as specific courses or departments, were removed during transcription to protect anonymity. Participants were given the opportunity to review their

transcripts; no staff participants requested removal of data, though two suggested minor clarifications, such as adjustments to wording or the representation of emotional tone, which did not alter the substantive content of the interviews. As with the student focus groups and interviews, field notes were taken following each interview to document contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and moments of hesitation or emphasis that could inform later interpretation.

3.4 Data Collection Process and Reflexivity

Data collection occurred over a three-month period, with sessions scheduled flexibly to accommodate participant availability. The researcher adopted a participant-centred approach, prioritising the creation of supportive and affirming environments for participants. Participant-centred qualitative approaches are recognised for their role in fostering trust, minimising participant discomfort, and enhancing data quality, particularly in research involving marginalised groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Power dynamics were consistently considered throughout the research process. While the researcher held equal institutional status to student participants and a lower institutional status than staff participants, broader academic power relations and the authority associated with the researcher's role in knowledge production were acknowledged. Efforts were made to minimise hierarchy by emphasising voluntary participation, positioning participants as experts on their own experiences, and adopting an open, conversational interview style. Critical qualitative research highlights the importance of recognising and actively managing such power relations to support ethical and inclusive knowledge production (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

Reflexivity was integral to the data collection process. Reflexive practice is central to qualitative research, particularly within interpretivist and critical paradigms, as it acknowledges the researcher's role in shaping the research encounter and interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As noted above, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document assumptions, emotional responses, positionality, and methodological decisions. As a postgraduate student in Applied

Psychology with a strong interest in inclusive education, the researcher critically reflected on how personal experiences, expectations, and values may have influenced participant interactions, question framing, and interpretation of responses.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) approach. This method was selected for its compatibility with interpretivist and critical qualitative research and its explicit recognition of the researcher's active role in meaning-making. Analysis proceeded through six phases; however, as Braun and Clarke (2019) note, in practice these phases are not always strictly linear or discrete, and the analytic process involved ongoing movement between phases.

Familiarisation began with the manual transcription of all audio recordings, which supported close and repeated engagement with the data. This was followed by multiple readings of transcripts and field notes to deepen familiarity. Initial observations, emerging patterns, and reflective insights were documented in the researcher's reflexive journal to capture early analytic thinking and inform subsequent stages. Transcripts were then manually coded line by line, utilising both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-informed) approaches, a practice commonly adopted within reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive coding remained open to participants' language and meanings, while deductive coding was informed by concepts from GMST.

Themes were developed through iterative engagement with the data, recognising that within reflexive thematic analysis, themes are actively constructed through the researcher's interpretive engagement rather than identified as pre-existing entities (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Student and staff datasets were initially analysed separately to allow analytic clarity and attention to distinct positionalities. Following these separate analyses, patterns of overlap, divergence, and convergence across the two datasets were examined to develop a comparative understanding of experiences and perceptions across participant groups. Candidate themes were reviewed against the dataset to ensure

they accurately represented participant accounts, with overlapping or inconsistent codes refined, merged, or redefined. Themes were then clearly defined and named to reflect their core meaning and relevance to the research questions, with explicit links made between participants' accounts and theoretical concepts from GMST. Finally, themes were integrated into the written findings, situating participants' experiences in relation to the broader literature on gender-inclusive language and minority stress, and illustrated using selected participant quotations. Throughout the analytic process, reflexive journaling, memo writing, and engagement with field notes supported transparency and analytic rigour, consistent with recommendations for reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.6 Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness is central to qualitative research, as it strengthens the credibility and rigour of interpretations and enhances confidence in the findings. Trustworthiness was addressed using established qualitative criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with participants during data collection, and member checking, whereby participants were invited to review their responses. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, contextualised descriptions of participants' experiences, institutional settings, and teaching contexts, allowing readers to make informed judgements about the relevance and applicability of the findings to other higher education settings rather than assuming direct generalisation. Dependability was strengthened through detailed documentation of methodological decisions, coding processes, and theme development across the analytic stages. Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling, debriefing with the researcher's supervisor, and the maintenance of an audit trail to ensure that analytic interpretations were grounded in the data rather than researcher bias.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix L). Informed consent was obtained from all participants (Appendices E and F) following the provision of participant information sheets outlining the study aims, procedures, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without consequence (Appendices C and D). Consistent with the approved ethics application, the researcher remained attentive to participants' wellbeing during data collection and was prepared to provide information about relevant university counselling and student support services if required.

Confidentiality was maintained through the use of non-identifying participant descriptors and the removal of identifying details from transcripts and reports. All digital data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms, were stored securely on the University of Waikato's password-protected OneDrive system, which is backed up and managed by the university. Access to the data was restricted to the researcher and the supervisor only, with no involvement of third parties such as external transcribers. Transcripts were anonymised and stored separately from identifying information. All data will be retained for a period of five years following completion of the research, in accordance with ethical approval, after which they will be permanently deleted using secure digital file deletion procedures, including file shredding software or permanent erasure from cloud storage.

3.8 Methodological Limitations

This section focuses on methodological limitations to ensure transparency in the research design. Broader limitations related to interpretation and transferability are revisited in the concluding chapter.

Self-selection bias may have influenced participation, as individuals who volunteered may have greater awareness of, interest in, or personal investment in gender-inclusive language than those who did not participate. In the case of academic staff, this may have resulted in a sample that has

relatively high levels of engagement with inclusion-related issues, potentially shaping the emphasis of accounts toward reflective or supportive perspectives on gender-inclusive language practices.

Methodological adaptations resulted in one focus group and two individual interviews with gender-diverse students. While this did not compromise the quality of the data collected, it may have influenced opportunities for collective interaction across the full student sample. Methodological literature notes that focus groups and interviews generate different forms of data, with focus groups producing interactional data shaped by collective sense-making and peer dynamics, and interviews eliciting more individualised and reflective accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As such, variations in data richness reflect the distinct strengths of each method rather than methodological weakness. These differences were accounted for analytically but may nonetheless have shaped the emphasis and form of participant responses.

Although the koha provided was modest, its potential influence on participation decisions cannot be entirely excluded. At the same time, acknowledging the time and expertise contributed by student participants was considered ethically important, particularly given the emotional and intellectual labour involved in discussing experiences of gender-inclusive language. Providing koha recognised participants' contributions without constituting a level of incentive likely to exert undue influence.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the qualitative methodology underpinning the study, including the research design, participant recruitment, data collection procedures, analytic approach, reflexivity, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. Together, these methodological choices provide a rigorous and reflexive framework for exploring how gender-inclusive language is understood and experienced by gender-diverse students and academic staff in university settings.

The following three chapters discuss the results of this analytical process. Chapter 4 presents the findings from gender-diverse students, focusing on how gender-inclusive language is experienced within university teaching and learning contexts. Chapter 5 presents the findings from academic staff, examining how inclusive language is understood, enacted, and negotiated in academic practice. These two empirical chapters are presented separately to allow for analytic clarity and to attend to the distinct positionalities, experiences, and institutional roles of students and staff. Chapter 6 then brings these perspectives together in an integrative discussion, drawing connections across the two datasets to consider broader implications for pedagogy, policy, and institutional responsibility.

Chapter 4: Gender-Diverse Student Perspectives on Gender-Inclusive Language

This chapter presents findings from gender-diverse students' narrative accounts of their experiences with and perceptions of gender-inclusive language in university teaching contexts. Drawing on data from one focus group with three gender-diverse students and two individual semi-structured interviews, this analysis explores how everyday language practices shape experiences of safety, belonging, autonomy, and stress within learning environments.

Guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), these findings foreground participants' meaning-making processes and situate their experiences within broader institutional and relational contexts. Interpreted through Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST), classroom language practices are understood as routine encounters that can either heighten minority stress through misrecognition and vigilance or reduce stress by affirming students' identities and minimising emotional labour (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Budge et al., 2020).

Although vignettes were used in the focus group to prompt discussion (as outlined in Chapter 3 and provided in Appendix A), participants' reflections often extended beyond the specific scenarios presented. Consequently, the analysis in this chapter focuses less on the vignettes themselves and more on the broader meanings and experiences that participants articulated in relation to gender-inclusive language in university settings.

The student findings are organised around seven interconnected themes: inclusive language as a signal of safety and belonging; recognition without exposure; forced inclusivity and loss of autonomy; misgendering as a chronic stressor; consistency and trust; inclusive language as emotional relief; and structural inclusivity as institutional commitment. Together, these themes illustrate how inclusive language is experienced as relational, contextual, and cumulative in shaping students' sense of safety, legitimacy, and engagement.

4.1 Inclusive Language as a Signal of Safety and Belonging

4.1.1 Early Cues of Safety in the Classroom

Participants consistently described inclusive language as one of the earliest and most salient indicators of whether a classroom environment would be safe for gender-diverse students. Within the first lectures or tutorials, students reported scanning for cues that signalled whether their identities would be respected, ignored, or contested. These cues included how lecturers addressed the class, whether gendered assumptions were made, and whether norms around respect and inclusion were explicitly articulated.

One gender-diverse student participant described entering new classes in a heightened state of alertness, paying close attention to the language used by teaching staff in the opening minutes of a session to determine whether they would need to remain guarded or could relax into the learning environment. As they stated, *“I’m always listening really closely at the start, like how they talk about students, if they say ‘ladies and gentlemen’ or if they use more neutral words, that tells me straight away if I need to be on edge.”*

Several participants noted that use of inclusive language at the outset of a course reduced anticipatory anxiety, allowing students to settle into the learning environment more quickly. Participants emphasised that safety was communicated not through grand statements, but through seemingly small linguistic choices such as avoiding binary groupings, using gender-neutral terms when referring to students, or acknowledging diverse identities without attaching them to particular individuals. One participant noted, *“When they just say ‘everyone’ instead of splitting us into genders, it makes me feel like people like me were actually considered.”*

From a GMST perspective, these early classroom moments functioned within participants’ accounts as points at which anticipatory stress was either activated or reduced (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Budge et al., 2020). As discussed further in Section 4.6.1, early inclusive cues reduce the cognitive and emotional resources required to manage identity-related vigilance. This

finding aligns with existing research suggesting that the campus climate, understood as the everyday social and pedagogical environment through which norms, expectations, and belonging are communicated, is shaped by cumulative everyday interactions rather than isolated incidents (Rankin et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020).

4.1.2 Feeling Safe Without Having to Explain Oneself

A key aspect of perceived safety involves not having to explain or justify one's gender identity. Participants described inclusive classrooms as spaces where their presence does not require clarification. When lecturers avoid gendered assumptions or refrain from asking intrusive questions, students feel able to participate as learners rather than representatives of a marginalised group.

One participant explained that when teaching staff do not draw attention to gender diversity, it relieves them of the implicit expectation to educate others about their identity. As they stated, *"I don't want to be the 'gender-diverse' person in the room who has to answer questions. I just want to be a student."* Other reflections on not having to think about one's gender in class are discussed in Section 4.6.1.

4.1.3 Belonging as Conditional and Contextual

While inclusive language enhances feelings of belonging, participants emphasised that this sense of belonging is shaped primarily by differences across courses and staff, rather than by fluctuations within a single class. Belonging was described as conditional and context-dependent, varying across courses and lecturers. Inclusive language practices can strengthen belonging, but inconsistency across staff undermines it.

One gender-diverse student participant described feeling welcomed and affirmed in one course while simultaneously feeling cautious and withdrawn in another. The student explained, *"In one class I feel really seen, but in another I just keep my head down because I don't know how they're going to treat me."* Another participant echoed this contrast, stating, *"It really depends on the*

lecturer. Some make you feel safe, and others just don't.” This highlights how belonging is shaped at the level of individual teaching practices rather than institutional culture. This fragmentation reinforces the sense that inclusion is unevenly distributed and dependent on personal goodwill rather than systemic commitment.

Within GMST, such inconsistency can intensify uncertainty stress, requiring students to continually reassess safety across contexts. Participants’ accounts suggest that fluctuating inclusion undermines the possibility of sustained belonging, reinforcing vigilance even in otherwise affirming spaces.

4.2 Recognition Without Exposure: The Balance Between Visibility and Protection

4.2.1 Valuing Recognition That Does Not Demand Visibility

Participants repeatedly articulated a desire to be recognised without being exposed. Inclusive language was most positively received when it allowed gender diversity to be acknowledged broadly, rather than drawing attention to specific individuals.

Participants described appreciating when lecturers use gender-neutral examples because this affirms their identity without requiring them to be publicly identifiable as gender-diverse, reflected in statements such as, *“When they just use neutral examples, I feel included without everyone looking at me.”* This form of recognition is experienced as respectful, as it does not require disclosure or invite scrutiny from peers.

Participants contrasted this with practices that positioned gender diversity as something unusual or worthy of special mention. While often well-intentioned, these approaches are experienced as unsettling, particularly when they prompt peers to look towards gender-diverse students or speculate about who is being referenced. As one student put it, *“When they make a big deal about it, everyone starts looking around like ‘who are they talking about?’ and that feels really*

uncomfortable.” Another participant echoed this discomfort, noting, *“It makes you feel like you’ve been singled out, even if they didn’t mean to.”*

From a GMST perspective, these moments reflect how visibility can function as both affirmation and risk. Participants’ accounts highlight that implicit acknowledgement that gender is not simply binary is welcomed, but that unwanted visibility can heighten vulnerability to stigma, even in inclusive contexts.

4.2.2 Hypervisibility as a Source of Stress

Several participants described moments where inclusive gestures inadvertently produced hypervisibility. In these situations, gender diversity became a focal point rather than a background norm. This hypervisibility heightened self-consciousness and, in some cases, led students to withdraw from participation in classes.

Participants explained that being singled out, even positively, reinforces a sense of difference. This was evidenced in statements such as, *“Even if they mean well, it still makes you feel like the odd one out”*, or *“It just reminds you that you’re not like everyone else in the room.”* Rather than feeling included, they felt marked as exceptions within a predominantly cisnormative environment.

These accounts resonate with critical scholarship that cautions against inclusion strategies that centre marginalised identities in ways that reproduce surveillance and regulation (Airton, 2013; Spade, 2011). Within GMST, hypervisibility operates as a stressor by increasing exposure to evaluation and potential invalidation.

4.3 Superficial Inclusion and Risks to Autonomy

Inclusive practices in the classroom are valued by students when they are meaningful, relational, and allowed autonomy over identity disclosure. Conversely, practices that are formulaic, performative, or mandatory are experienced as undermining agency and increasing stress.

Participants consistently highlighted that inclusion is not simply about using correct pronouns or

following institutional checklists; it must be enacted in ways that respect individual choice and privacy.

Students described mandatory pronoun-sharing activities as particularly challenging. While appropriate pronoun use is a critical aspect of inclusion, requiring public disclosure removes control over personal identity. Students explained that pronoun disclosure is not a neutral act, it carries social, cultural, and emotional risks that vary among individuals. One participant reflected, *“Sometimes you’re not ready to say your pronouns out loud, but you don’t want to lie either. It feels like you’re trapped.”* Another added, *“It shouldn’t be on us to have to explain ourselves in front of everyone.”* From a GMST perspective, mandatory disclosure functions as a structural stressor, constraining the ability to manage identity-related risk (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019).

Participants also critiqued inclusion that was enacted superficially or as a one-off ‘tick-box’ exercise. For instance, pronouns might be requested on the first day of class but subsequently ignored, signalling performativity rather than genuine engagement. One student noted, *“They asked for pronouns on the first day, but then kept getting mine wrong after that. It just felt like a tick-box thing.”* Another reflected, *“It feels like they did it just to say they did it.”*

By combining these critiques, it becomes clear that both mandatory disclosure and performative inclusion are expressions of superficial practices that undermine relational depth, compromise autonomy, and heighten minority stress. Inclusive practices are protective only when students retain agency, can choose disclosure, and observe consistent follow-through over time.

From a GMST perspective, these experiences illustrate structural stressors: superficial or mandatory inclusion practices force students to navigate exposure, concealment, and identity-related risk, rather than protecting well-being (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020). Relational, thoughtful inclusion that respects autonomy serves as a buffering factor, reducing cognitive and emotional burden while fostering engagement and trust.

4.4 Misgendering as a Chronic and Accumulative Stressor

4.4.1 *The Emotional Weight of Repetition*

Participants differentiated between isolated mistakes and patterns of repeated misgendering. While occasional errors were often excused, ongoing misgendering was described as deeply destabilising. Participants explained that repeated misgendering communicates a lack of care or effort, regardless of whether the intent is malicious.

Several participants described how each instance of misgendering layered onto previous experiences, producing a cumulative emotional toll. As one participant shared, *“It’s not just one time; it’s over and over. After a while it just wears you down”*, and another stated, *“It just builds up and makes you feel invisible.”* Rather than being experienced as separate events, these moments blend into a broader sense of being persistently unseen or unrecognised within academic spaces. From a GMST perspective, this reflects the cumulative nature of minority stress, whereby repeated microaggressions contribute to chronic psychological strain over time rather than being resolved through single corrective moments (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Dolezal et al., 2025).

Participants’ accounts also suggest that repeated misgendering requires ongoing emotional regulation, as students weighed whether to respond, correct, or disengage. This was described in statements such as, *“Every time it happens, you have to decide if it’s worth saying something. That’s exhausting”*, or *“You’re always calculating what’s safest for you.”* This process contributes to exhaustion and disengagement, reinforcing findings that link persistent identity invalidation to reduced academic participation and well-being (Budge et al., 2020).

4.4.2 *Strategic Silence and Self-Protection*

Student participants described being positioned as informal educators within the classroom, with staff relying on students to correct misgendering or explain gender diversity to others. This expectation is experienced as emotionally exhausting and unfair, as it places responsibility onto those

already navigating marginalisation for educating individual staff members, rather than addressing responsibility at a broader institutional level. One participant explained, *“It feels like we’re always the ones having to explain things.”* Another student similarly stated, *“We shouldn’t have to teach staff how to respect us.”*

While Section 4.1.2 explored this expectation as a structural burden placed on gender-diverse students, this section focuses on how students respond to this burden in practice. In particular, participants described adopting silence, withdrawal, or disengagement as strategies to minimise emotional labour and unwanted attention. Although it is possible that this dynamic arises because some staff intend to empower gender-diverse students by positioning them as ‘experts’ in matters of gender diversity, students described these moments as draining, particularly when they occurred repeatedly or in public settings.

In this context, ‘strategic silence’ refers to a conscious decision not to intervene, correct, or educate others, rather than an absence of agency. From a GMST lens, this reflects proximal stress processes, particularly concealment and self-monitoring, which are commonly adopted to minimise harm in environments where students anticipate additional emotional burden (Tan et al., 2019).

While silence sometimes offered short-term protection, participants suggested that it also carries psychological costs, including feelings of invisibility, frustration, and resignation, as their identities remain unacknowledged and institutional responsibility is deferred. These findings align with research in university contexts demonstrating that gender-diverse students may disengage or withdraw as a coping strategy when institutional environments fail to provide adequate support (Budge et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2011). Such strategies highlight the unequal burden placed on marginalised students to manage their own safety within educational spaces.

4.5 Consistency as the Foundation of Trust

4.5.1 Inclusion Across Time and Contexts

As foreshadowed in Section 4.1.3, consistency across courses and institutional contexts emerged as a key factor in whether inclusive language practices were trusted by participants. Students described valuing lecturers who demonstrate inclusive language use not only verbally during lectures, but also across emails, learning management systems, assessment instructions, and informal interactions.

When inclusive language was sustained over time, it was interpreted as evidence of genuine commitment rather than compliance with institutional expectations. As one participant stated, *“It’s not just about what they say in class. It’s also how they write their emails and the words they use in the course materials.”* Another participant emphasised the meaning of this consistency, explaining, *“If they’re inclusive in every space, you know it’s not just for show.”*

This consistency reduces uncertainty and allows students to focus on learning rather than monitoring for potential harm. Within GMST, such consistency can be understood as reducing anticipatory stress and vigilance, as students no longer need to continually reassess whether their identities will be respected in different contexts (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019).

Conversely, inconsistency across contexts or over time heightens uncertainty and reinforces vigilance. Participants described situations in which initial inclusive gestures were undermined by later misgendering or gendered assumptions, resulting in diminished trust. One student explained, *“They asked for pronouns on the first day, but after that they just went back to using the wrong ones.”* Another participant described this shift as disheartening, noting, *“It makes it feel like they never really cared in the first place.”*

These findings echo research suggesting that campus climate is shaped through repeated interactions rather than isolated practices (Rankin et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020).

4.5.2 Modelling Mistakes as Repairable

Participants spoke positively of lecturers who model how to make and repair mistakes related to gendered language. Brief self-corrections were experienced as a learning process that normalised inclusivity, rather than a performance. Participants suggested that these moments signal accountability without drawing unnecessary attention to the error, and described them as reassuring with statements such as, *“When they just correct themselves and move on, it feels normal and not awkward”*, or *“It shows they’re trying without making it a big thing.”*

In contrast, excessive apologies were described as uncomfortable and disruptive, often shifting emotional labour onto students by requiring them to reassure staff or manage awkwardness. This is referenced again in Section 4.8.2 regarding student preference for private follow-ups.

4.6 Inclusive Language as Cognitive and Emotional Relief

4.6.1 Reducing Vigilance and Cognitive Load

Participants described inclusive learning environments as mentally quieter and less taxing. When gender is not repeatedly misrepresented or questioned, students reported reduced vigilance and an increased ability to concentrate on academic content. Several participants contrasted inclusive classrooms with environments where they feel compelled to remain alert for potential misgendering or invalidation. One student described a sense of physical and emotional relief when inclusive language is used consistently, noting, *“When they use gender-neutral terms, I just feel my shoulders drop a bit. I don’t have to think about my gender all the time.”* Another student explained the effect this had on their engagement, *“In classes where they get it right, I can just focus on the work.”*

From a GMST framework, this reduction in vigilance represents a buffering effect, whereby inclusive practices reduce the cognitive and emotional demands associated with minority stress (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019). Participants’ accounts suggest that inclusive language alleviates the constant background monitoring often required in less supportive environments.

4.6.2 Participation and Academic Confidence

Inclusive language is directly linked to increased classroom participation and academic confidence. Participants described feeling more comfortable contributing to discussions, asking questions, and engaging critically with course material when they trusted that their identities would not become points of contention. One participant shared, *“I’m way more likely to speak up in classes where I feel respected.”*

Consistent, everyday inclusive practices reduce self-consciousness and anxiety, enabling full engagement with learning. Conversely, inconsistent or exclusionary language sometimes led students to withdraw entirely. Within GMST, these experiences show how inclusive language functions as a protective factor, reducing stress-related withdrawal and supporting resilience and engagement (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Budge et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2011).

4.7 Structural and Written Inclusivity as Evidence of Institutional Commitment

4.7.1 Teaching Materials as Moral Indicators

Participants placed considerable emphasis on written teaching materials as indicators of genuine commitment to inclusion. Inclusive language in slides, readings, assessment instructions, and surveys was interpreted as requiring forethought and preparation, and therefore carried greater weight than spoken adjustments alone.

Participants described outdated or binary language in written materials as undermining trust, particularly in teaching materials produced or adapted by lecturers themselves. However, some participants also implicitly acknowledged the constraints associated with prescribed or historical texts, suggesting a tension between institutional ideals of inclusivity and the practical limitations of existing academic resources.

From a GMST perspective, such inconsistencies function as structural stressors, reinforcing cisnormative assumptions and signalling that inclusion is optional rather than embedded (Tan et al.,

2019; Spade, 2011). These findings align with research emphasising the importance of systemic and material forms of inclusion in educational settings (Brown et al., 2020; Lewis, 2022; Morrison et al., 2024).

4.7.2 Responsibility Beyond Individual Goodwill

Building on earlier discussions of consistency (Sections 4.1.3 and 4.5), participants emphasised that inclusion should not rely solely on individual lecturers' goodwill or awareness. Structural inclusivity embedded within institutional systems, policies, and resources was viewed as essential for sustainable change. One student explained, *"It shouldn't depend on whether your lecturer is nice or not. It should just be the standard."*

Reliance on individual staff members creates uneven experiences and reinforces uncertainty. From a GMST standpoint, systemic inclusion reduces exposure to chronic stress by distributing responsibility across institutions rather than placing the burden on marginalised individuals to self-advocate (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019).

4.8 Staff Authority, Intervention, and Protection of Student Dignity

4.8.1 Intervention as Norm-Setting

Teaching staff were identified as key authority figures whose responses to misgendering shaped classroom norms. Participants emphasised that calm, prompt, and matter-of-fact interventions signal clear expectations regarding respect and inclusion. As one participant explained, *"When a lecturer corrects someone straight away, it makes it clear that it's not ok."*

Such interventions function as public cues for acceptable language and behaviour. Silence, in contrast, is often interpreted as tacit acceptance, signalling unsafety. Effective interventions are concise and corrective, avoiding excessive attention or prolonged apologies that could heighten student visibility or emotional burden.

From a GMST perspective, these interventions mitigate distal stressors by reducing normalisation of stigma and protecting students' psychological safety (Budge et al., 2020; Rankin et al., 2010; Tan et al., 2019). By establishing classroom norms, staff support gender-diverse students while signalling broader institutional values.

4.8.2 Centring Student Preferences

Participants stressed that support should be guided by individual preferences rather than assumed needs. While public norm-setting was valued, private follow-ups were often described as equally important for emotional support. One participant described experiencing emotional discomfort when staff responses became prolonged or highly visible in public classroom settings.

Research suggests that support for gender-diverse students is most effective when it is offered in ways that protect privacy, avoid unwanted visibility, and allow students to control the extent of their disclosure (Brown et al., 2020; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020). Discreet forms of communication, such as private emails or brief one-to-one conversations, have been shown to reduce the risk of singling students out while still providing access to support (Graham et al., 2022; Rankin et al., 2010). Framing these interactions around general wellbeing rather than explicitly referencing gender identity can further minimise the potential for unwanted exposure, allowing students to engage on their own terms (Budge et al., 2020). This balance allows staff to address harmful behaviour while respecting students' autonomy and privacy. Within GMST, respecting individual preferences supports agency and reduces the likelihood of additional stress associated with unwanted attention or exposure (Tan et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2011).

4.9 Summary of Gender-Diverse Student Findings

This chapter has presented gender-diverse students' accounts of their experiences and perceptions of gender-inclusive language in university teaching contexts. Inclusive language

emerged as a central mechanism through which students negotiate feelings of safety, belonging, and legitimacy, shaping their engagement, participation, and academic confidence.

Across the seven thematic areas, several key patterns were identified:

1. **Safety and Belonging:** Early cues of inclusive language signal whether classrooms are safe spaces. Students described reduced anticipatory stress and cognitive load when teaching staff used gender-neutral language and avoided assumptions, allowing them to participate without vigilance or anxiety. Belonging was described as conditional and context-dependent, varying across courses and lecturers.
2. **Recognition Without Exposure:** Students valued being acknowledged without being singled out. Inclusive practices that affirmed gender diversity without requiring disclosure were experienced as respectful, whereas hypervisibility or spotlighting increased vulnerability and stress.
3. **Autonomy and Forced Disclosure:** Practices that require public pronoun-sharing or followed superficial ‘tick-box’ approaches undermine agency, increase emotional labour, and heightened minority stress. Students emphasised they do not wish to be positioned as educators with respect to gender diversity, highlighting the need for institutional rather than student-led responsibility.
4. **Misgendering and Cumulative Stress:** Repeated misgendering is experienced as emotionally taxing, producing a chronic and accumulative stressor. Students described employing strategic silence or withdrawal as protective strategies, though these carry psychological costs, including frustration, invisibility, and disengagement.
5. **Consistency and Trust:** Consistent inclusive practices across lectures, course materials, communications, and interactions signal genuine commitment and fostered trust. Inconsistent practices, including initial inclusive gestures followed by errors or misgendering, undermine credibility and reinforce vigilance. Modelling mistakes as repairable, rather than

excessively apologising, was preferred, as it normalises inclusivity without burdening students emotionally.

6. **Cognitive and Emotional Relief:** Inclusive language is experienced as reducing vigilance, cognitive load, and emotional labour, allowing students to focus on learning and engage fully in academic work. Conversely, exclusionary or inconsistent practices increase stress and hinder participation.

7. **Structural and Institutional Commitment:** Students emphasised that inclusion must extend beyond individual lecturer goodwill. Written materials, systemic policies, and consistent institutional practices were interpreted as evidence of genuine commitment to inclusion. Reliance on individual staff members creates uneven experiences, highlighting the importance of embedding inclusivity at a structural level.

Interpreted through GMST, these findings illustrate how everyday language practices function as both stressors and buffers within higher education. Inclusive language mitigates minority stress by reducing anticipatory vigilance, emotional labour, and identity-related risk, whereas inconsistent, performative, or autonomy-limiting practices exacerbate stress and reinforce marginalisation. Importantly, students stressed that the burden of educating staff should not fall on them, underscoring the need for institutional responsibility in fostering truly inclusive learning environments.

Together, these findings highlight that inclusive language is not simply a matter of correct terminology; it is relational, context-sensitive, and structurally embedded, supporting psychological safety, engagement, and well-being while signalling genuine institutional commitment. The next chapter presents academic staff perspectives on inclusive language. A critical examination of alignment, tensions, and responsibilities across student and staff experiences is then undertaken in Chapter 6, where the two sets of findings are brought into dialogue.

Chapter 5: Academic Staff Perspectives on Gender-Inclusive Language

This chapter presents findings from academic staff accounts of gender-inclusive language in university teaching contexts. Drawing on three semi-structured interviews with lecturers from different disciplinary and teaching backgrounds, the analysis explores how staff understand, enact, and navigate inclusive language in their everyday teaching practice, and how these practices are shaped by ethical commitments, student relationships, and institutional contexts.

Guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), the findings foreground staff members' meaning-making processes and situate their experiences within broader pedagogical, relational, and structural conditions. Interpreted through Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST), classroom language practices are understood as routine interactions that can either contribute to students' minority stress through misrecognition and exclusion, or help reduce stress by affirming identities, fostering trust, and minimising the emotional labour associated with identity management (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019; Budge et al., 2020).

The staff findings are organised around five interconnected themes: inclusive language as an ethical and pedagogical responsibility; everyday strategies for practising inclusion; learning through student relationships and feedback; emotional and practical challenges in inclusive practice; and perceived gaps in institutional guidance and support. Together, these themes illustrate how inclusive language is understood by staff as an ongoing, relational, and context-dependent practice, shaped by disciplinary norms, power dynamics, and the broader institutional environment.

5.1 Inclusive Language as an Ethical and Pedagogical Responsibility

Across all staff interviews, gender-inclusive language was framed as a moral and professional obligation rather than a performative or optional practice. Staff consistently positioned inclusive

language as part of their responsibility to create learning environments where students feel respected, safe, and able to participate meaningfully. Inclusive language was not described as a policy requirement but as something deeply tied to how staff understood their role as educators.

The way staff framed gender-inclusive language as a moral obligation can be understood through GMST, which emphasises the role of interpersonal contexts in either amplifying or buffering stress experienced by gender-diverse people (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019). When staff position inclusive language as non-negotiable rather than discretionary, they contribute to more predictable classroom environments that reduce anticipated stigma and signal safety to gender-diverse students.

5.1.1 “It would be wrong not to”: Ethical Commitments to Respect

One staff member described their commitment to inclusive language in straightforward moral terms, explaining: *“I mean the way somebody is the way they are so, it would be, I know it would just be wrong not to. I hadn't really thought about it, yeah.”* This framing suggests that inclusivity was understood as self-evident, emerging from basic respect for students rather than formal training or theoretical engagement. This moral framing suggests that inclusive language functions as a form of everyday affirmation, which GMST identifies as a key protective factor against chronic minority stress (Testa et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2019). Rather than being driven by policy compliance, the commitments expressed by these staff participants appear rooted in relational ethics, aligning with research showing that authentic, values-based inclusion is more impactful for student well-being than performative practices (Budge et al., 2020).

Another staff member connected inclusive language to students' sense of belonging and emotional safety, stating: *“It's really important to use gender inclusive language so that everybody feels welcomed into that space... a way for students to feel safe is to feel seen.”* They further emphasised that inclusive language could help counter marginalisation: *“So using gender inclusive language means that hopefully students who may feel marginalised in other contexts will at least feel*

included in my papers.” This participant also framed inclusive language as a form of academic leadership, particularly in the context of contemporary political debates: *“We’re operating in a time of... culture wars... and so I think it’s really important that university academics take a leadership role in acknowledging the problematic ways... of gender-based language.”* A third staff member emphasised the ethical importance of inclusive language within hierarchical classroom relationships: *“There might be some extra damage done by being publicly addressed inappropriately by someone in a teaching position.”*

The emphasis on power dynamics within teaching relationships is particularly relevant, as GMST highlights how stress is intensified when invalidation comes from authority figures or institutional representatives (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2025). In this context, misgendering or exclusionary language is not a neutral error but a potent interpersonal stressor. At the same time, staff authority also holds the potential to function as a protective force, where inclusive language practices can actively signal legitimacy, safety, and leadership in affirming gender-diverse identities. Together, these accounts illustrate that staff participants viewed inclusive language as a moral obligation grounded in respect, care, and responsibility toward students.

5.1.2 Inclusion as Part of Teaching Identity

For all three staff participants, inclusive language is deeply embedded in how they understand themselves as educators. Rather than being treated as a discrete policy requirement, inclusive language was described as intertwined with teaching philosophy, academic integrity, and relational responsibility. This description reflects what GMST describes as structural and interpersonal conditions that shape daily experiences of safety and belonging for gender-diverse individuals (Tan et al., 2019). By integrating inclusive language into their sense of self as educators, staff reduce the likelihood that inclusion is experienced by students as fragile, conditional, or dependent on individual goodwill.

One staff member explained that their approach extends beyond the classroom into everyday life: *“I try to apply it in my life, but I think in the classroom there are hierarchies that make it more important.”* Another reflected on their own learning process, stating: *“It’s a work in progress... there are certain phrases that I use unconsciously when I’m tired.”* All participants acknowledged that their practice was ongoing and evolving, rather than perfect or complete. As one participant noted: *“I have this uncomfortable awareness that I could be better educated and have better practice.”*

Acknowledging inclusive practice as an ongoing process rather than a finished competency challenges deficit-based expectations of perfection and positions reflexivity as a core element of ethical teaching practice (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Graham et al., 2022).

5.2 Practising Inclusion Through Everyday Teaching Strategies

While staff members shared ethical commitments to inclusion, they differed in how these commitments were enacted in everyday teaching practices. Inclusive language was most commonly operationalised through small, routine strategies rather than formalised interventions.

The translation of ethical commitments into routine practices highlights how inclusive language functions as a micro-level intervention in campus climate. From a GMST perspective, these everyday practices can reduce cumulative exposure to identity-related stressors over time (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019).

5.2.1 Names, Pronouns, and Student Agency

One staff member described using a seating chart to give students control over how they were addressed: *“I always say that it’s up to them what name goes on there... it doesn’t have to be the name that’s official on the university.”* Students are also invited to share pronouns, but only if they wished: *“They always say include their personal pronouns if they want to.”* This approach prioritises student agency and flexibility, allowing students to decide what feels safe or appropriate for them.

Prioritising student agency directly addresses a core mechanism of gender minority stress: loss of control over self-definition within institutional contexts (Spade, 2011; Tan et al., 2019).

Another staff member described intentionally initiating discussions about pronouns, while also acknowledging the need for sensitivity: *“You’ve got to kind of balance a student’s need to be seen, with the student’s need to decide... when to disclose whether or not they’re gender-diverse.”* They explained that they avoid putting students on the spot: *“Students can then decide for themselves if they want to offer their pronouns.”*

In contrast, the third staff member deliberately avoided pronoun rounds altogether: *“I essentially try to address students... using their names, or if I need to use a pronoun, use them.”* They explained: *“I don’t think you lose anything by just being gender neutral.”* Defaulting to gender-neutral language functions as a harm-minimisation strategy that reduces pressure to disclose and lowers the risk of involuntary outing (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020)

5.2.2 Inclusive Address and Classroom Language

All three participants described avoiding gendered collective terms. One staff member explained: *“When I go up to a group of students in the lab, I’ll tend to say, ‘hey team,’ or ‘hey everyone,’ so that I’m not like, ‘hey guys.’* Another noted that using gender-neutral language did not diminish clarity or relational connection with students, emphasising that inclusive address could still feel natural and engaging. These small linguistic shifts function as symbolic signals of belonging that can reduce anticipatory stress for gender-diverse students (Tan et al., 2019; Budge et al., 2020).

Inclusive practice also extends to teaching materials. One staff member explained how student feedback reshaped their content: *“The feedback from students was that it was much more restrictive in terms of definitions of gender... As a result, I have changed how I present to that paper and what kind of readings I recommend.”* Another described intentionally embedding discussions of gender and equality into course content: *“It gives those students again an opportunity to be seen.”* Curricular representation has been shown to play a key role in students’ sense of legitimacy and

academic belonging, particularly for gender and sexuality diverse students (Brown et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2022).

5.3 Learning Through Students and Relational Accountability

One of the strongest themes across staff narratives was the role of students as key drivers of learning and change. Inclusive language practices were not described as fixed competencies acquired through training but as relational practices shaped through ongoing interaction.

This relational framing aligns with GMST, which emphasises that both stress and resilience are produced through interpersonal relationships rather than individual actions alone (Singh et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2019).

5.3.1 Students as Teachers

One staff member described a pivotal experience when a former student returned after transitioning: *“He put really big letters on his lab coat... to help not just me, but everyone around him.”* They reflected: *“That was my wake-up call to start using, like asking students what personal pronouns they are using.”* Another staff member described learning through both gentle and confrontational correction: *“My students teach me... I have adapted my language because I’ve been called out in gentle and confrontational ways.”* They added: *“I’d love to be able to say I’m front footed... but I’m not.”* A third staff member similarly reflected on learning through student feedback, stating: *“That definitely was a moment of learning from students, learning from younger people.”* These accounts demonstrate how students function as key educational agents, prompting reflection, change, and growth in staff practice.

While these moments promoted learning, they also highlight how the burden of education is frequently placed on gender-diverse students in the absence of formal institutional guidance (Airton, 2013; Brown et al., 2020). This is problematic given that students in the previous chapter described these educational expectations as emotionally draining and unfair. Together, these accounts reveal

that staff learning is often relationally produced, but unevenly distributed in ways that place disproportionate emotional and pedagogical labour on gender-diverse students.

5.3.2 Trust, Accountability, and Repair

Relational trust emerged as critical to navigating mistakes. One staff member reflected on how misgendering felt more impactful precisely because of the trust students had placed in them: *“The student was just horrified and talked me through the pain of being misgendered.”* They explained: *“They minded it coming from me, because we had a trust relationship.”* They emphasised the importance of repair: *“That gives you, as a teacher, an opportunity to kind of... apologize and lose some of your mana.”*

From a GMST perspective, responsive repair can interrupt the internalisation of stigma following misgendering and support psychological safety (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Testa et al., 2015). This emphasis on repair aligns with literature suggesting that responsiveness and willingness to learn may be more impactful for student well-being than flawless language use (Budge et al., 2020).

5.4 Navigating Challenges, Tensions, and Emotional Labour

Despite strong commitments to inclusion, staff members described multiple challenges that complicate their practice. These difficulties should not be interpreted solely as individual failings; while some may stem from personal uncertainty or inexperience, more often they reflect institutional conditions that provide limited structural support for inclusive practice. GMST emphasises that stress is produced not only through explicit discrimination but also through systemic gaps that leave both staff and students navigating uncertainty (Tan et al., 2019; Dolezal et al., 2025).

5.4.1 Cognitive and Emotional Challenges

Remembering pronouns, particularly gender-neutral pronouns was described as difficult at times, especially when students' gender expression does not align with staff members' internalised expectations. Two staff members described difficulties remembering pronouns. One explained: *"I do really struggle to remember to use 'they', because people present in gendered ways."* Another acknowledged uncertainty: *"There are so many different pronouns... I don't know what all the other pronouns mean."*

This lack of institutional preparation heightens anxiety around getting language 'wrong', particularly given the public nature of classroom interactions. GMST suggests that such uncertainty can contribute to heightened interpersonal stress for gender-diverse students when language errors occur in public or authoritative contexts (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2025).

5.4.2 Disciplinary and Historical Tensions

Only one staff member raised disciplinary challenges related to teaching historical content. This related to the use of historically accurate, gendered language in contexts where such terms may no longer be considered inclusive or representative of diverse identities. They explained: *"There's a tension for me about the historical accessibility and the historical significance of gendered language."* Rather than resolving this tension, the participant described ongoing reflection and selective language use depending on context, illustrating how inclusive practice can be constrained by disciplinary histories. They described using both terms: *"Currently I use both terms: pregnant women and pregnant people."*

This point was not shared by other staff and potentially reflect a challenge that is more likely to occur in historical teaching contexts. This tension illustrates how disciplinary histories can constrain inclusive language practice, even when staff hold strong ethical commitments to inclusion (Graham et al., 2022).

5.5 Institutional Gaps and the Need for Structural Support

Across all interviews, staff members identified clear gaps in institutional guidance and support. None of the participants reported receiving formal training on gender-inclusive language, despite being specifically asked about this in the interview. Instead they reported relying on personal reading, student feedback, and informal conversations with colleagues. One stated: *“I feel like we don’t get training in this as teachers.”* Another said: *“It would be really good to have a communication guide, a hundred percent.”* A third emphasised institutional responsibility: *“I don’t think that it should be left up to individuals to navigate this alongside all of the rest of the things they need to do in their job.”* Staff consistently called for practical, accessible guidelines rather than lengthy workshops.

The absence of formal training places responsibility on individual staff and students, consistent with critiques of neoliberal responsibilisation within universities (Spade, 2011; Graham et al., 2022). From a GMST framework, institutional guidance functions as a structural buffer that can reduce both staff anxiety and student exposure to harmful language practices (Tan et al., 2019).

5.6 Summary of Staff Perspectives Findings

Together, these findings illustrate that academic staff approach gender-inclusive language as an ethical, relational, and evolving practice rather than a fixed set of rules. While staff demonstrated strong commitments to inclusion, their practices are shaped by student interactions, disciplinary contexts, and institutional constraints. Inclusive language emerged as deeply connected to trust, accountability, and belonging, but also as labour-intensive and unevenly supported at an institutional level.

Overall, these findings suggest that staff members’ efforts to use gender-inclusive language may function as both a protective and strained practice within institutional settings, a dynamic consistent with GMST, as staff attempts to reduce harm through inclusive language also occur within

structural conditions that limited formal training, relied on student labour, and create ongoing uncertainty about ‘getting it right,’ potentially reproducing stress for both staff and gender-diverse students (Tan et al., 2019).

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The previous two chapters presenting staff and gender-diverse student perspectives have highlighted both shared commitments to gender-inclusive language and divergent experiences of how such practices are enacted in university teaching contexts. Bringing these perspectives together allows for points of convergence, tension, and misalignment to be examined. The integrated discussion in this chapter brings the two datasets into dialogue with each other through the lens of Gender Minority Stress Theory (GMST). In doing so, this chapter establishes a foundation for examining the pedagogical, institutional, and ethical implications of gender-inclusive language practices, and for developing practical recommendations grounded in the study's findings.

6.1 Integrated Discussion of Student and Staff Findings

Building on the preceding findings chapters, this section synthesises gender-diverse student and academic staff perspectives to examine how gender-inclusive language operates across teaching and learning contexts. Specifically, this discussion attends to where student and staff perspectives converge or diverge, and how these alignments and tensions enable a critical analysis of current teaching practices in relation to the needs of gender-diverse students. Drawing on GMST, the discussion foregrounds how everyday linguistic practices function as sites of both protection and stress and explores points of convergence and tension between staff intentions and student experiences. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the analysis highlights how inclusion is negotiated relationally, enacted unevenly, and shaped by broader institutional conditions within higher education.

6.1.1 *Gender-Inclusive Language as a Moderator of Minority Stress*

Across student and staff accounts, inclusive language emerged as a powerful moderator of minority stress processes. Students referred to everyday language practices such as the use of

inclusive examples in teaching materials, respectful pronoun use in classroom interaction and written feedback, and the avoidance of gendered assumptions when addressing others. Staff described ethical obligations such as modelling inclusive terminology, correcting misgendering when it occurred, and signalling openness to students' identities without compelling disclosure. For gender-diverse students, everyday language practices shaped anticipatory vigilance, emotional labour, and cognitive load, while for staff, these practices were understood as ethical obligations embedded within their professional identity.

These findings illustrate that language operates not merely as a representational tool but also as a mechanism through which safety, legitimacy, and belonging are either reinforced or undermined. For gender-diverse students, the cumulative effects of inclusive or non-inclusive language shapes how much cognitive and emotional energy could be allocated to learning, rather than to self-protection or identity management.

Consistent with GMST (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019), the findings demonstrate how micro-level interactions accumulate into broader patterns of stress or protection. Inclusive language reduces the need for self-monitoring and identity management, allowing students to engage more fully with academic content. Conversely, inconsistent or coercive practices such as optional or structured pronoun-sharing activities, or the use of inclusive language in lectures but not in assessment feedback, intensifies stress by reinforcing uncertainty and exposure.

As noted earlier, campus climates can be understood as the everyday social and pedagogical environment through which norms, expectations, and belonging are communicated. These findings extend prior research demonstrating that campus climate is not determined solely by policy or overt discrimination, but by routine, often unnoticed interactions that signal whose identities are anticipated and respected (Rankin et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020). By foregrounding the everyday nature of these interactions, this study underscores how inclusion is produced through routine

pedagogical practices rather than exceptional moments. In doing so, it positions gender-inclusive language as a central, rather than supplementary, component of teaching practice.

6.1.2 Alignments and Tensions Between Staff Intentions and Student Experiences

A key contribution of this study lies in revealing both convergence and disjuncture between staff intentions and student experiences. All staff participants framed inclusive language as an ethical and pedagogical responsibility, often grounded in personal values rather than institutional mandate. This aligns with research suggesting that inclusive teaching practices are most sustainable when internalised as part of educators' professional identities (McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020).

However, students' accounts suggest that ethical intent alone is insufficient. Inclusion is evaluated not by stated values, but by consistency, relational sensitivity, and material enactment across contexts. As one student explained, *"it's not about someone saying the right thing once, it's about whether I can trust that I won't have to keep correcting or explaining myself every week."* Students described feeling supported when lecturers consistently use inclusive language across lectures, emails, and assessments, but reported heightened stress when inclusive intentions are expressed verbally yet undermined by repeated misgendering or rigid classroom practices. Rather than reflecting a divergence in values, this tension reflects students' expectations that lecturers' stated commitments to inclusion be consistently enacted over time and across teaching contexts, particularly given the unequal risks associated with disclosure and correction.

While staff often framed inclusion as an expression of care or moral responsibility, students assessed inclusion through its material effects, namely, whether practices reduced uncertainty, protected autonomy, and are sustained across teaching contexts. As one staff participant reflected, *"I might think I'm being inclusive because I care, but the student experiences it through what actually happens, not what I intend,"* capturing the very tension identified above between intention and enactment.

Importantly, staff in this study were often reflexive and ethically motivated. However, in the absence of clear and consistent institutional guidance and support, even reflexive practices could be experienced by students as uneven or unpredictable. This suggests that ethical intention is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reducing minority stress. From a GMST perspective, inclusion that is inconsistently enacted across contexts risks reintroducing vigilance and self-management, even when staff intentions are positive.

This tension echoes broader critiques within critical trans scholarship, which argue that when responsibility for inclusion is located primarily at the level of individual goodwill, structural accountability is obscured, placing the burden of navigating inconsistency onto marginalised individuals (Spade, 2011; Airton, 2013).

6.1.2.1 Autonomy, Disclosure, and the Politics of Visibility

Issues of autonomy, disclosure, and visibility function as clear examples of the broader alignments and tensions between staff intentions and student experiences. Students and staff in this research were broadly aligned in recognising that forced visibility carries risk; however, they differed in how the consequences of these practices were experienced and managed.

Students described mandatory pronoun-sharing activities as particularly fraught. While such practices were often framed by staff participants as normalising inclusion, they generally approached these activities cautiously rather than implementing them as mandatory, students emphasised the importance of feeling safe without having to explain oneself. One student reflected, *“Sometimes the safest thing is not having to say anything, I just want to exist in the space without my gender becoming a discussion.”* At the same time, recognition remains meaningful when it is offered without pressure. Another student noted, *“It does matter when staff get it right, I just don’t want to be put on the spot for it.”*

A key tension emerged around hypervisibility. Students described moments where inclusive practices unintentionally made them more visible than they wished to be, particularly in small classes

or early-semester activities. As one participant explained, *“Being asked to share pronouns in front of everyone just made me feel like all eyes were on me like I became ‘the gender person’ in the room.”*

Staff accounts echoed discomfort with coercive practices. One staff member acknowledged this tension directly, stating, *“I worry that the things we’re told are ‘best practice’ can actually put students in unsafe positions if we don’t think carefully about choice.”*

From a GMST perspective, autonomy over identity disclosure is central to managing risk and minimising stress (Tan et al., 2019). Staff participants sometimes described practices such as compulsory pronoun sharing or classroom activities that required public disclosure of gender identity as well-intentioned attempts to signal safety or normalisation. However, for gender-diverse students, these practices could function as structural stressors when they constrained students’ ability to navigate safety on their own terms.

Taken together, these insights highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that move beyond one-size-fits-all inclusion strategies (Norris, 2020; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020) and underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that centre choice rather than compliance. Both students and staff highlighted alternative practices, including optional pronoun sharing via private surveys, modelling pronoun use without expectation of reciprocity, and normalising flexibility around participation, as ways of supporting inclusion while preserving autonomy.

6.1.3 Misgendering, Repair, and the Ethics of Accountability

Misgendering emerged as a particularly salient site of stress. Student participants emphasised that isolated or occasional mistakes were not, in themselves, experienced as harmful; rather, stress arose when misgendering was repeated, unacknowledged, or poorly repaired. Students also distinguished between errors made within a context of care and those embedded in patterns of inattention, reinforcing GMST’s emphasis on cumulative stress processes (Dolezal et al., 2025). Importantly, staff narratives revealed an awareness of the emotional weight of mistakes and a commitment to repair. When lecturers model brief correction and accountability, students experience

these moments as affirming rather than disruptive. This aligns with research highlighting the importance of responsiveness and repair over linguistic perfection (Budge et al., 2020).

These accounts suggest that accountability in inclusive practice is less about achieving linguistic perfection and more about demonstrating ongoing attentiveness, responsiveness, and respect. When staff frame misgendering as a personal failure requiring reassurance or emotional validation from students, responsibility shifts toward students to manage the lecturer's discomfort. In contrast, when staff acknowledge a mistake and correct it without centring themselves, emotional labour remains with the educator. This distinction is crucial, as it illustrates how affective responses to misgendering can either redistribute or reproduce emotional labour within pedagogical relationships.

6.1.4 Consistency as the Foundation of Trust and Belonging

Consistency across time and contexts emerged as a critical determinant of trust in students' evaluations of gender-inclusive language. Rather than assessing inclusion through isolated moments or symbolic gestures, gender-diverse students described inclusion as something that must be sustained across lectures, emails, assessments, and learning management systems in order to be experienced as genuine. Staff similarly conceptualised inclusive language as an ongoing practice embedded within everyday teaching routines, rather than as a discrete skill that could be mastered once and applied sporadically.

Students were particularly critical of what they described as 'inclusivity as a checklist,' where visible gestures such as a slide on pronouns or a statement in the course outline were not followed through in everyday interaction. As one student put it, *"It feels like they tick the inclusion box and then stop paying attention."* From a GMST perspective, such checklist-based approaches undermine trust by creating unpredictability. Staff similarly expressed concern that inclusion could become procedural rather than relational, with one noting, *"If it's just a policy requirement, it doesn't translate into how people actually teach."*

From the perspective of gender-diverse students, consistency functions as a key mechanism of safety. Predictable and sustained inclusive practices reduce the need for vigilance and anticipatory stress, enabling students to engage more fully with academic content and classroom interaction. In contrast, inconsistent practices such as inclusive language used in lectures but not in written feedback or digital platforms reintroduce uncertainty and require ongoing monitoring of risk. Within GMST, consistency operates as a protective buffer by reducing cognitive load and allowing emotional and cognitive resources to be redirected away from self-protection and toward well-being and meaningful engagement. For staff, this ongoing consistency was understood as necessary to building trust, reinforcing the idea that pedagogical commitment and student safety are mutually reinforcing rather than separate concerns. This finding aligns with research emphasising that belonging is cultivated through repeated interactions rather than symbolic acts (Rankin et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020) and underscores the importance of sustained institutional and pedagogical commitment in fostering inclusive learning environments.

6.1.5 Institutional Responsibility Beyond Individual Goodwill

A central finding that cuts across student and staff accounts is that gender-diverse students should not be positioned as educators about gender diversity. Students consistently described the expectation to explain terminology, correct staff, or justify their identities as draining and unfair. As one student stated, *“I’m here to learn, not to teach my lecturers how to respect me.”* This finding directly intersects with staff reflections. All staff participants acknowledged moments where students had corrected them or provided guidance, often accompanied by discomfort about relying on students for this labour. One staff participant reflected, *“It’s not the student’s job to train us, that’s something the institution should be doing.”*

While staff participants demonstrated strong personal commitment to gender-inclusive language, both student and staff accounts pointed to clear institutional gaps that shape how inclusion is experienced in practice. The absence of formal training, clear guidelines, and material support

mean that inclusive practices rely heavily on individual educators' knowledge, confidence, and goodwill, rather than being systematically supported at an institutional level. When inclusion is left to individual discretion, accountability becomes diffuse. Practices are shaped by personal motivation rather than institutional obligation, resulting in fragmented and uneven student experiences across programmes and departments. This variability reinforces uncertainty for gender-diverse students, who must continually assess the safety of different learning environments, and highlights the limitations of relying on individual goodwill as the primary mechanism for inclusion.

Using a GMST lens suggests that the expectation that students act as educators constitutes an additional layer of minority stress, redistributing institutional responsibility onto those already navigating marginalisation. This dynamic reinforces the importance of institutional education and training, rather than ad hoc reliance on student intervention. From a structural perspective, this pattern reflects what Spade (2011) conceptualises as administrative violence, wherein institutions symbolically endorse inclusion while failing to redistribute responsibility in material and sustained ways. Rather than embedding inclusive language within policies, professional development, and teaching infrastructure, responsibility is displaced onto individual actors. For inclusive pedagogy to be sustainable, universities should endeavour to move beyond rhetorical commitments and invest in coordinated, institution-wide approaches that include leadership endorsement, resourcing, and the integration of inclusive language into institutional systems and practices.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

This study is exploratory and shaped by several limitations, including its small sample size and focus on a single institutional context. These constraints mean the findings should be interpreted as contextually situated and exploratory, rather than generalisable across all tertiary education settings.

First, the study was conducted within a single tertiary institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although this context is theoretically and socially important, the findings are shaped by the specific

institutional policies, practices, and cultural environment of this university, and may not be directly transferable to universities operating under different regulatory or institutional conditions. Rather than aiming for broad generalisability, the study seeks to offer analytically useful insights that may resonate with, or inform, understandings in other contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Second, while demographic information was collected from participants, ethnicity data were not gathered from student participants. As discussed in Chapter 2, this decision reflected ethical considerations around participant anonymity. Given the small size of the gender-diverse student population, collecting ethnicity data in this context was assessed as potentially increasing the risk of participant identifiability. As a result, the study is limited in its ability to examine how experiences of gender-inclusive language may intersect with ethnicity. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether Māori students were represented within the sample, nor to examine how experiences of gender-inclusive language may be shaped by the distinct cultural and institutional contexts that Māori students navigate. Given the emphasis in earlier chapters on the importance of recognising Indigenous gender-diverse identities and the specific responsibilities of universities in Aotearoa to reflect te ao Māori, this represents a significant limitation of the present study, which is thus unable to make culturally specific claims or recommendations in relation to Māori experiences. While recognising gender diversity as a universal principle of inclusion is likely to implicitly support gender-diverse Māori students, this limitation with respect to the current project does highlight a crucial area for future research.

Third, the study focuses on participants' perceptions and reported experiences of gender-inclusive language, rather than direct observation of classroom practices or institutional processes. All data are therefore interpretive and reflect participants' understandings of their experiences, which aligns with the study's qualitative, constructivist approach. Within this framework, subjective perceptions are understood not as secondary to 'objective' reality, but as constitutive of lived

experience: it is through individuals' interpretations and sense-making with respect to interactions that feelings of inclusion, safety, and belonging are produced or undermined, shaping the lived experiences of gender-diverse students (Budge et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020).

Fourth, the scope of the study did not allow for sustained examination of differences across disciplines, class sizes, or modes of teaching delivery. Teaching practices and institutional cultures vary considerably across academic contexts, and future research could explore how these structural differences shape both staff confidence and student experiences of gender-inclusive language.

Finally, as noted in the methodological limitations, the potential for self-selection bias must be considered when interpreting the findings. Participants who chose to take part may have held particularly strong views about gender-inclusive language, whether supportive or critical, meaning that perspectives of those less engaged with or indifferent to these issues may not be fully represented.

Taken together, these limitations highlight the importance of interpreting the findings as contextually situated and exploratory and underscore the value of further research across diverse institutional settings and methodological approaches.

6.3 Implications for Pedagogy and Higher Education Practice

Taken together, the findings of this study have several important implications for pedagogy and higher education practice. First, gender-inclusive language should be recognised as a pedagogical practice that directly shapes student engagement, participation, and learning. This aligns with wider research demonstrating that inclusive language and climates influence wellbeing and belonging for gender-diverse people in a range of settings, and specifically impact educational outcomes for gender-diverse students (Budge et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020; Perales et al., 2022).

Second, inclusive language operates as a relational practice that requires responsiveness, reflexivity, and attention to power. Effective inclusion depends not only on what language is used, but on how practices are introduced, enacted, and repaired in response to student needs. Pedagogical

approaches that prioritise choice, autonomy, and consistency are more likely to reduce minority stress and foster trust among gender-diverse students.

Third, the findings underscore inclusive language as a structural practice that necessitates institutional responsibility. Universities cannot rely on individual educators to shoulder the burden of inclusion without adequate support, nor can they rely on gender-diverse students to educate staff and peers in the absence of formal institutional provision. Formal training, clear guidelines, and accessible resources are essential to ensuring that inclusive practices are sustained, equitable, and embedded across teaching contexts.

Finally, these implications point to the need for universities to critically evaluate well-intentioned inclusion initiatives. Practices such as mandatory pronoun-sharing or in-class activities that require public disclosure or revelation of gender identity, when implemented without flexibility or reflexivity, may inadvertently intensify stress rather than alleviate it. Institutions must therefore adopt inclusion strategies that are evidence-informed, context-sensitive, and responsive to the lived experiences of gender-diverse students.

6.4 Recommendations for Teaching Practice, Staff Training, and Institutional Policy

Building on the study's findings, this section outlines practical recommendations to support the effective and sustainable implementation of gender-inclusive language within university teaching contexts. Informed by GMST, these recommendations emphasise the importance of reducing anticipatory stress, supporting student autonomy, and embedding inclusion structurally rather than relying on individual goodwill (Tan et al., 2019; Hendricks & Testa, 2012).

Research demonstrates that when gender-diverse students experience consistent and respectful recognition in teaching environments, this is associated with stronger feelings of belonging, increased engagement, and improved wellbeing, aligning with universities' broader goals of student success and retention (Budge et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020; Rankin et al., 2010). The recommendations that follow are directed toward academic staff, institutional leadership, and

universities more broadly, with the aim of translating empirical insights into actionable and sustainable change (Brown et al., 2020; Budge et al., 2020).

6.4.1 Teaching Practice and Professional Development

Academic staff interviewed for this research consistently expressed a need for clearer institutional guidance and education regarding gender-inclusive language. In the absence of such support, staff may rely on ad hoc strategies that, while well-intentioned, risk increasing student discomfort or unintentionally positioning gender-diverse students as sources of education. In order to address this, professional development emerges as a key mechanism through which staff can develop shared understandings, practical skills, and confidence in inclusive teaching practice.

Gender-inclusive language is best approached as an ongoing pedagogical practice rather than a fixed skill or checklist. Professional development can support staff to understand inclusive language as evolving and contextual, requiring reflexivity and responsiveness rather than linguistic perfection (McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020; Zapletal et al., 2023). This framing responds directly to student concerns about performative or inconsistent inclusion and supports staff to engage in inclusive practices without fear of ‘getting it wrong.’

The findings also highlight the importance of student autonomy in relation to identity disclosure. Teaching practices that allow choice such as optional pronoun sharing, multiple participation avenues (verbal, written, or online) and flexible classroom norms that do not require public self-disclosure enable students to manage visibility and safety on their own terms (Norris, 2020; Tan et al., 2019). These approaches reduce minority stress and minimise the pressure associated with forced disclosure or hypervisibility (Dolezal et al., 2025).

Staff would benefit from structured institutional support to respond to misgendering in ways that minimise disruption and emotional labour for students. This support could take the form of professional development workshops, shared guidance, and peer learning spaces facilitated through teaching and learning units. Training can emphasise brief, accountable repair strategies such as calm

correction and moving on rather than heightened emotional responses that may inadvertently centre staff discomfort (Budge et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020).

Consistency in inclusive language use across teaching contexts was identified as foundational to student trust and belonging. Encouraging predictable practices across lectures, course materials, assessment feedback, email communication, and learning management systems helps reduce uncertainty and enables students to engage more fully with their learning (Rankin et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020). Professional development initiatives can support staff to implement this consistency in ways that are sustainable rather than burdensome.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Institutional Policy and Leadership

The findings suggest that inclusive teaching practices are difficult to sustain when responsibility rests solely with individual staff members. Universities can play a critical role by embedding expectations around gender-inclusive language within institutional policies, teaching guidelines, and quality assurance processes. This structural approach reduces reliance on personal goodwill and promotes more equitable experiences for students across courses and departments (Spade, 2011; Brown et al., 2020).

Rather than prescriptive mandates, institutional guidance could outline flexible principles such as choice, consistency, and care that align with this study's findings with respect to student autonomy and wellbeing. Clear examples, case studies, and teaching-focused resources would support staff to translate these principles into practice while avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches that may increase student hypervisibility (Norris, 2020; Public Service Commission, n.d.).

At an institutional level, leadership could also support inclusive pedagogy by allocating material resources, including paid time for staff training, access to specialist expertise, and the integration of inclusive options within centrally managed teaching systems, e.g., enrolment records, learning management system defaults, and institutional templates. While individual staff develop teaching content, these system-level settings shape what is possible in practice. Without such

resourcing, inclusion risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative (Spade, 2011; Brown et al., 2020; Coefield, 2017).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Building on the findings presented throughout this thesis, this study affirms that gender-inclusive language is not merely a symbolic practice but a relational and institutional mechanism that shapes everyday experiences of safety, recognition, and participation in university teaching contexts. Viewed through the Gender Minority Stress Theory, inclusive language functions as both a protective factor and a site of vulnerability, revealing how micro-level interactions within classrooms intersect with broader structural and cultural conditions to influence gender-diverse students' wellbeing and educational engagement (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Tan et al., 2019).

The integration of student and academic staff perspectives demonstrates that while there is acknowledgment of the importance of gender-inclusive language, its enactment remains uneven and contingent. Staff participants often expressed goodwill and emerging awareness, yet students' accounts highlighted persistent gaps between institutional commitments and lived realities. This tension reflects broader patterns identified in higher education research, where inclusive policies coexist with subtle forms of exclusion embedded in everyday pedagogical practices and institutional norms (Budge et al., 2020; McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020; Graham et al., 2022).

This research contributes to existing literature on gender diversity, campus climate, and inclusion by foregrounding language as a critical yet under-examined dimension of minority stress and resilience in university settings (Brown et al., 2020; Treharne et al., 2016). Providing a local Aotearoa perspective is particularly valuable given the relative paucity of research in this context. The study also extends qualitative insights into how gender-diverse students navigate visibility, agency, and belonging in academic spaces, echoing international scholarship on the interplay between institutional structures and individual strategies of coping and resistance (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Farmer et al., 2020).

Overall, this thesis underscores that meaningful inclusion requires more than individual awareness or isolated initiatives. Instead, it calls for sustained institutional commitment, pedagogical

reflexivity, and structurally embedded practices that recognise gender diversity as integral to equitable education. In doing so, the study not only illuminates the lived consequences of language in university contexts but also offers pathways for transforming higher education environments into spaces where gender-diverse students can participate fully and authentically.

7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Building on the exploratory nature of this research, and in order to address its contextual limitations, future research could examine how gender-inclusive language practices are experienced across a wider range of institutional and disciplinary contexts, including variations in class size, teaching modality, and cultural settings (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Treharne et al., 2016). Longitudinal studies would be valuable in investigating how sustained and consistent inclusive language practices influence student wellbeing, belonging, and academic engagement over time (Budge et al., 2020; Dolezal et al., 2025).

Additional research explicitly centring the voices of local Indigenous gender-diverse students, particularly Māori students within Aotearoa New Zealand, alongside other intersecting marginalised identities, could further deepen understanding of how race, disability, indigeneity, and international student status shape experiences of inclusion and visibility in higher education (Alexander, 2015; Morrison et al., 2024). Such studies would extend the present findings beyond a single institutional context, contributing to a more nuanced and generalisable understanding of inclusive pedagogical practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Focus group / interview questions for gender-diverse students.....	73
Appendix B - Interview questions for academic staff.....	76
Appendix C - Participant information sheet for gender-diverse students participating in focus groups / interviews.....	77
Appendix D - Participant information sheet for academic staff interview.....	80
Appendix E - Participant consent form for gender-diverse students participating in focus groups / interviews.....	83
Appendix F - Participant consent form for academic staff interview.....	85
Appendix G - Recruitment email for academic staff.....	87
Appendix H - Focus group recruitment slide for lecture presentation.....	88
Appendix I - Focus group recruitment poster.....	89
Appendix J - Demographic information form for gender-diverse student participants.....	90
Appendix K - Demographic information form for academic staff participants.....	92
Appendix L - Checklist.....	93

APPENDIX A: Focus Group / Interview Questions for Gender-Diverse Students

Introduction to Focus Groups:

Each focus group or interview will begin with a brief welcome and introduction to the research purpose. Ground rules will be established to support confidentiality, respectful listening, and voluntary sharing. Participants will be reminded that they may skip any question or leave at any time. We will then begin reviewing and discussing each scenario together.

Focus Group Questions:

1. Vai, a Samoan fa'afafine student, is in an anthropology course. When Vai introduces themselves, the lecturer acknowledges fa'afafine as a traditional Samoan identity and invites students to share the cultural terms or identities they use.
 - How might this public acknowledgment impact Vai's comfort?
 - Is it valuable for lecturers to recognize culturally specific gender identities?
 - How could this influence the overall classroom atmosphere?
2. Imani, a non-binary person who uses they/them pronouns and is often perceived as feminine, introduced themselves during the first tutorial. Despite this, the tutor consistently used "she" pronouns when referring to Imani and did not encourage others to share their pronouns. Over time, Imani felt that their identity was misunderstood and began to disengage from class discussions.
 - How might repeated pronoun errors affect Imani's classroom engagement?
 - What message does it send when tutors ignore shared pronouns?
 - Why is it important for staff to model inclusive practices beyond the first day?
 - How can classroom environments support the affirmation of complex gender identities?
3. Aroha, a takatāpui Māori student, is about to begin a new university course. During the first group activity, the lecturer gently reminds everyone to be respectful of each other's identities and to avoid assumptions, encouraging open-mindedness and inclusive language in discussions without singling anyone out.
 - How might Aroha feel about the lecturer's general reminder to the class?
 - Do you think private or public gestures of inclusivity are more helpful, or are both important? Why? Should the lecturer contact Aroha individually?
 - How could this type of approach affect how students interact with one another?
4. Alex (they/them), a non-binary and outspoken student in their second year of sociology, often feels energized when classes engage with inclusive practices. In one of their lectures, Alex noticed that the lecturer often used gendered language in the examples

and discussions, such as referring to binary gender roles in society. This language felt alienating to Alex, who doesn't identify within the gender binary. Another lecturer used examples that avoided binary assumptions. Alex felt noticeably more comfortable and seen in that space.

- How might Alex feel when binary gender roles or assumptions are used in lecture content or examples?
 - What difference did the second lecturer's language make for Alex's experience?
 - Why might inclusive language in lecture content matter for students of diverse gender identities?
 - How can lecturers ensure their everyday language affirms all students?
5. Riley, a genderqueer and observant student in a second-year engineering course, noticed that the lecturer often addressed the class as "you guys." This habit continued throughout the semester, even after Riley and a few peers quietly mentioned it in course feedback. Riley, who usually pays close attention to subtle patterns in language, began to feel increasingly overlooked and disconnected in class.
- How might repeated use of gendered language affect Riley's sense of inclusion?
 - What role does consistency in language use play in fostering an inclusive environment?
 - Why might small habits, like saying "you guys," seem minor to some but alienating to others?
 - What could lecturers do when made aware of these concerns?
6. A lecturer included their pronouns on a welcome slide and encouraged students to share theirs. They also revised assignment instructions and examples to use inclusive language.
- What impact might this first-day approach have on students' expectations of the course?
 - How does integrating inclusive language into course materials signal respect?
 - What message is sent when staff voluntarily share their own pronouns?
7. Noah (he/they), a transmasculine student who is highly engaged and detail-oriented, was excited to begin a gender studies course. However, they quickly noticed that the course readings and lecture slides frequently used gendered terms like "he or she" rather than inclusive options like "they." Despite the course content focusing on gender diversity, the language used in teaching materials felt outdated and binary, leading Noah to question the course's commitment to inclusivity.
- How might Noah feel about the mismatch between course content and language use?
 - Why does inclusive language in written materials matter, especially in gender-related courses?

- What steps could lecturers take to ensure their materials reflect inclusive practices?
 - How might outdated language affect students' trust in the course's learning environment?
8. In a tutorial, a student misgenders another peer who is trans. The tutor immediately and calmly corrects the mistake, reminds the group about using correct pronouns, and checks in privately with the misgendered student afterward.
- How might this action affect the misgendered student's feelings of safety?
 - Why is the tutor's role important in moments like this?
 - How can staff balance public correction with private support?

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions for Academic Staff

Introductory Definitions:

- **Gender-neutral language** refers to speech and writing that avoid bias toward a particular sex or social gender (Public Service Commission, n.d.). It typically replaces gendered terms with neutral alternatives to avoid assumptions. For example, using “police officer” instead of “policeman,” or using “they” as a singular pronoun instead of “he” or “she.”
- **Gender-inclusive language** acknowledges, respects, and actively includes diverse gender identities, particularly those that fall outside the male-female binary (University of California Merced Pride Center, n.d.). Rather than simply avoiding gendered terms, it intentionally affirms a broad range of gender experiences. For example, inviting people to share their pronouns (“she/her,” “they/them,” “he/him”) during introductions, or using terms like “all genders” instead of “ladies and gentlemen” in public announcements.

Do you make an effort to use gender-inclusive language in your teaching?

If YES (they use gender-inclusive language):

1. Why do you think it is important to use gender-inclusive language in your teaching?
2. What specific strategies or practices do you use to make your classroom more inclusive?
3. Can you share an example of a time you adapted your language or approach based on student needs or feedback?
4. Have you experienced any challenges in using gender-inclusive language? How did you navigate or respond to them?
5. What support, resources, or training would further help you strengthen your use of gender-inclusive language in the classroom?

If NO (they don’t currently use gender-inclusive language):

1. Can you share your thoughts on why gender-inclusive language may not feel necessary or relevant in your context?
2. Are there any barriers or challenges that have prevented you from implementing specific strategies? If yes, can you please outline these.
3. Have you encountered situations where students raised concerns about language or inclusivity, and how did you respond?
4. How do you think your language use might shape the learning environment, even if no students have openly identified as gender-diverse?
5. What support (e.g., training, resources) would help you consider using gender-inclusive language in the future?

APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet for Gender-Diverse Students Participating in Focus Groups / Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

HUMAN ETHICS RESEARCH

Research Title:

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

- Who the researchers are?

This project is being conducted by Nivedha Bhaskar, a Master of Applied Psychology (Behaviour Analysis) student at the University of Waikato. The research is supervised by Dr Johanna Schmidt, who has extensive experience supervising and conducting qualitative research with gender-diverse communities. As the primary researcher, I will be responsible for designing the study, collecting data, analysing the information, and reporting the findings. My goal is to conduct this research respectfully, with care for participants' comfort, privacy, and autonomy throughout the process. Your experiences and insights are valued and will help shape important conversations about inclusion in university settings.

- How they can be contacted?

If you have any questions before, during, or after your participation, you are welcome to contact me directly via phone or email. My contact details are:

Nivedha Bhaskar (Researcher) – Email: nb460@students.waikato.ac.nz / Contact: 022 199 5841

My supervisor, Dr Johanna Schmidt, can also be contacted at: Email: johanna.schmidt@waikato.ac.nz

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Secretary of the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee at: alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

- The topic of the research

This research explores how gender-inclusive language is experienced by students and used by staff in university classrooms. Gender-diverse students often experience language that excludes or invalidates their identities, even in otherwise inclusive environments. The study aims to understand how inclusive language impacts feelings of safety and belonging for students, and how academic staff understand and apply inclusive language in their teaching. The research focuses on the real-world experiences of participants to identify what supports, barriers, or gaps exist. The goal is to help promote inclusive practices in higher education, especially for gender-diverse learners.

- Who is paying for it or sponsoring it?

This research is part of my master's thesis at the University of Waikato and is not funded by any external organisation. The University is supporting the project by providing access to cloud storage, transcription tools, and other academic resources. In appreciation of their time and contribution, each student participant in the focus group will receive a \$20 voucher. Light refreshments will also be provided during the session. These costs are covered by approved research funding from the University of Waikato. There are no commercial sponsors or financial conflicts of interest related to this research.

- What the participant/s have to do and how long it will take?

If you choose to participate, you will attend a focus group with other gender-diverse students or take part in a one-on-one interview if you are unable to attend the group session. The session will last about 60 to 90 minutes and will involve discussing a few scenarios and your own experiences related to inclusive or exclusive language in university settings. With your permission, the discussion will be audio recorded. After the session, you will receive a transcript of your contributions, and you will have one week to review, request edits, or withdraw any part. Before the focus group or interview, you will also be asked to complete a short demographic form (Appendix J) to help describe the group of participants involved in the study. You may skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. Information provided on the demographic form will be anonymised and used only to describe the overall makeup of the participant group (e.g., number of participants in different study levels or gender identities). Your name or individual demographic responses will not be linked to any quotes or identifiable data in the final report or publications.

- What the researcher expects the major outcomes of the research will be, including where findings will be published/disseminated?

This research will help develop a better understanding of how inclusive or exclusive language impacts classroom experiences and professional practice. Findings will be used to support inclusive teaching, guide staff development, and contribute to institutional policy. The results will be submitted as part of my master's thesis and may also be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. Your identity will not be revealed in any outputs. If you wish, you can request a summary of the findings in plain language after the project is completed.

- The degrees and kinds of confidentiality and anonymity that are promised in this research, and how these will be achieved?

Your participation is **confidential**. If your participation is in an individual interview, full confidentiality can be maintained, as there will be no other participants present. However, in a focus group setting, we cannot **guarantee anonymity among other participants**. All group members will be asked to agree to **keep what is shared private**, and we will begin the session by going over ground rules to help create a safe and respectful space. Your comments will be anonymised in the transcript, and your name or any identifying information will not be included in reports or publications. However, because conversations can overlap and refer to other participants, **complete removal of your contributions may not always be possible** if you later withdraw. We will do our best to remove your individual input without compromising the group dialogue.

- How the collected information will be stored, for how long, and who (if anyone) will have access to it under what conditions?

All digital data such as audio files, transcripts, consent forms will be securely stored using the University of Waikato's OneDrive system, which is password protected and backed up by the university. Transcripts will be anonymised and stored separately from identifying information. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data. No third parties, such as external transcribers, will be involved. All data will be kept for five years after the completion of the research, after which it will be permanently deleted using secure digital deletion methods approved by the university.

- Whether participants will be provided with access to findings/publications?

Yes. You can request a plain-language summary of the findings once the research is complete. This summary will include an overview of key themes and any recommendations developed from the data. If published in a journal or presented at a conference, a link or reference can be provided upon request. The findings will focus on general themes and will not include any identifying information about participants. You may indicate on your consent form whether or not you would like to receive this summary.

- Participants may also be promised one or more of the following, depending on the methodology of the research:

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question and can stop the session at any time. You may ask to turn off the audio recorder at any point. After the session, you will receive a transcript and have one week to review and request changes or withdraw any of your responses. You can also withdraw from the study entirely within that time. You are encouraged to ask questions at any point before, during, or after your participation. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing later will have no negative consequences.

Ethics Approval Statement

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee at: alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX D: Participant Information Sheet for Academic Staff Interview

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

HUMAN ETHICS RESEARCH

Research Title:

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

- Who the researchers are?

This project is being conducted by Nivedha Bhaskar, a Master of Applied Psychology (Behaviour Analysis) student at the University of Waikato. The research is supervised by Dr Johanna Schmidt, who has extensive experience supervising and conducting qualitative research with gender-diverse communities. As the primary researcher, I will be responsible for designing the study, collecting data, analysing the information, and reporting the findings. My goal is to conduct this research respectfully, with care for participants' comfort, privacy, and autonomy throughout the process. Your experiences and insights are valued and will help shape important conversations about inclusion in university settings.

- How they can be contacted?

If you have any questions before, during, or after your participation, you are welcome to contact me directly via phone or email. My contact details are:

Nivedha Bhaskar (Researcher) – Email: nb460@students.waikato.ac.nz / Contact: 022 199 5841

My supervisor, Dr Johanna Schmidt, can also be contacted at: Email: johanna.schmidt@waikato.ac.nz

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Secretary of the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee at: alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

- The topic of the research

This research explores how gender-inclusive language is experienced by students and used by staff in university classrooms. Gender-diverse students often experience language that excludes or invalidates their identities, even in otherwise inclusive environments. The study aims to understand how inclusive language impacts feelings of safety and belonging for students, and how academic staff understand and apply inclusive language in their teaching. The research focuses on the real-world experiences of participants to identify what supports, barriers, or gaps exist. The goal is to help promote inclusive practices in higher education, especially for gender-diverse learners.

- Who is paying for it or sponsoring it?

This research is part of my master's thesis at the University of Waikato and is not funded by any external organisation. The University is supporting the project by providing access to cloud storage, transcription tools, and other academic resources. There are no commercial sponsors or financial conflicts of interest related to this research.

- What the participant/s have to do and how long it will take?

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview, either in person or over Zoom. The interview will last around 45 to 60 minutes, and will involve questions about your use and perceptions of gender-inclusive language in teaching. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. You will receive a transcript afterward and have one week to review and request changes or withdraw content. Before the interview, you will also be asked to complete a brief demographic form to help describe the research sample. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. Any information provided on the demographic form will be anonymised and will not be linked to your interview responses. It will only be used to give a general description of the participant sample (e.g., length of teaching experience, gender identity). Your individual answers will remain confidential and will not appear in any reporting.

- What the researcher expects the major outcomes of the research will be, including where findings will be published/disseminated?

This research will help develop a better understanding of how inclusive or exclusive language impacts classroom experiences and professional practice. Findings will be used to support inclusive teaching, guide staff development, and contribute to institutional policy. The results will be submitted as part of my master's thesis and may also be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. Your identity will not be revealed in any outputs. If you wish, you can request a summary of the findings in plain language after the project is completed.

- The degrees and kinds of confidentiality and anonymity that are promised in this research, and how these will be achieved?

Your identity will be kept **confidential**. Transcripts will be anonymised, and no identifiable information will appear in the thesis or publications. Only I and my supervisor will see the anonymised data. Because my supervisor works at the same university, any transcripts shared with her will be anonymised first.

- How the collected information will be stored, for how long, and who (if anyone) will have access to it under what conditions?

All digital data such as audio files, transcripts, consent forms will be securely stored using the University of Waikato's OneDrive system, which is password protected and backed up by the university. Transcripts will be anonymised and stored separately from identifying information. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data. No third parties, such as external transcribers, will be involved. All data will be kept for five years after the completion of the research, after which it will be permanently deleted using secure digital deletion methods approved by the university.

- Whether participants will be provided with access to findings/publications?

Yes. You can request a plain-language summary of the findings once the research is complete. This summary will include an overview of key themes and any recommendations developed from the data. If published in a journal or presented at a conference, a link or reference can be provided upon request. The findings will focus on general themes and will not include any identifying information about participants. You may indicate on your consent form whether or not you would like to receive this summary.

- Participants may also be promised one or more of the following, depending on the methodology of the research?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question and can stop the session at any time. You may ask to turn off the audio recorder at any point. After the session, you will receive a transcript and have one week to review and request changes or withdraw any of your responses. You can also withdraw from the study entirely within that time. You are encouraged to ask questions at any point before, during, or after your participation. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing later will have no negative consequences.

Ethics Approval Statement

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee at: alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form for Gender-Diverse Students Participating in Focus Groups/Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

DIVISION of ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Research Project Title:

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

Name of person interviewed:

I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions I have had about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any point during the research and that participation is voluntary.

I understand that I can leave the focus group or interview at any time or skip any question I do not wish to answer. I may also ask to stop the audio recording at any point. I will receive a transcript of my contributions and have up to one week to request any changes or withdraw my input.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my contributions, but I give consent for the researcher to use them for the purposes of this study, as described in the information sheet. I understand that my identity will remain confidential in any presentations, reports, or publications resulting from this research.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [P] the appropriate box for each point.	YES [P]	NO [X]
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.		
I understand that I can withdraw at any time before or up to one week after transcript receipt.		
I understand that the focus group or interview will be audio recorded.		
I understand that I may bring a support person if I choose.		
I understand that all identifying information will be anonymised.		
I wish to receive a summary of the study findings.		

Participant :		Researcher :	
Signature :		Signature :	
Date :		Date :	
Contact :		Contact :	
Email :		Email :	

APPENDIX F: Participant Consent Form for Academic Staff Interview

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

DIVISION of ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Research Project Title:

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

Name of person interviewed:

I have received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions I have had about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any point during the research and that participation is voluntary.

I understand that I can stop the interview at any time or skip any question I do not wish to answer. I may also ask to stop the audio recording at any point. I will receive a transcript of the interview and have up to one week to request any changes or withdraw my input.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use it for the purposes of this study, as described in the information sheet. I understand that my identity will remain confidential in any presentations, reports, or publications resulting from this research.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [P] the appropriate box for each point.	YES [P]	NO [X]
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.		
I understand that I can withdraw at any time before or up to one week after transcript receipt.		
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.		
I understand that I may bring a support person if I choose.		
I understand that all identifying information will be anonymised.		
I wish to receive a summary of the study findings.		

Participant :		Researcher :	
Signature :		Signature :	
Date :		Date :	
Contact :		Contact :	
Email :		Email :	

APPENDIX G: Recruitment Email for Academic Staff

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Interview on Inclusive Language in University Teaching

Tēnā koe,

My name is Nivedha Bhaskar, and I am a Master's student in Applied Psychology (Behaviour Analysis) at the University of Waikato. I am conducting a research project exploring how gender-inclusive language is understood and used by academic staff in university teaching environments.

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview (approx. 45–60 minutes), which can be held in person on campus or via Zoom, depending on your preference. The interview will involve general questions about your teaching experiences and perceptions of gender-inclusive language. Your insights will help support inclusive practices in higher education.

Participation is entirely voluntary and confidential. You are welcome to withdraw at any time. After the interview, I will send you a transcript of your responses. You will have one week to review it and can request any edits or removal of content during that time.

If you are interested or would like more information, please contact me via email at nb460@students.waikato.ac.nz. A copy of the participant information sheet and consent form will be provided.

Ngā mihi nui,

Nivedha Bhaskar

Master of Applied Psychology (Behaviour Analysis)

University of Waikato

nb460@students.waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX H: Focus Group Recruitment Slide for Lecture Presentation

CALLING ALL GENDER-DIVERSE STUDENTS

This research is being conducted as part of a Master's thesis through the School of Psychology, University of Waikato.

What's it about?

Discuss how language in university classrooms affects inclusion for gender-diverse students.

Who can join: Students over 18 years and identify as gender-diverse (e.g. non-binary, genderqueer, fa'afafine, takatāpui)

What you'll do:

- Join a focus group (max 5 students)
 - Focus group duration: Approximately 60 mins
- Share your experiences and respond to classroom scenarios

 **What you'll get:** \$20 voucher & refreshments

 **Interested? Contact:** Nivedha Bhaskar
nb460@students.Waikato.ac.nz



Approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX I: Focus Group Recruitment Poster

CALLING ALL GENDER-DIVERSE STUDENTS

Focus Group on Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings

Are you over 18 and identify as gender-diverse (e.g. non-binary, genderqueer, fa'afafine, takatāpui)?
Share your experiences of inclusivity on campus.



Receive a \$20 voucher &
Refreshments

This research is being conducted as part of a Master's thesis through the School of Psychology, University of Waikato.

Confidential – your identity will not be shared

Share your experiences and respond to classroom scenarios.

DURATION: Approximately 60 MINUTES

To participate, please contact:

Nivedha Bhaskar

 nb460@students.waikato.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX J: Demographic Information Form for Gender-Diverse Student Participants

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

Please complete the following demographic information. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. All information will be kept confidential and will only be used to describe the research sample.

1. Name:

☐ Prefer not to say

2. Age:

☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your gender identity?

☐ Prefer not to say

4. What pronouns do you use? (e.g., she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.)

5. What is your current level of study?

- ☐ Undergraduate – Year 1
- ☐ Undergraduate – Year 2
- ☐ Undergraduate – Year 3 or above
- ☐ Postgraduate
- ☐ Other (please specify):

6. What degree and major are you studying in? (e.g., Psychology, Engineering, etc.)

7. Are you involved in any campus diversity or rainbow groups (e.g., UniQ, Equity groups)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify the group(s):

APPENDIX K: Demographic Information Form for Academic Staff Participants

Exploring Perceptions of Inclusivity Through Gender-Inclusive Language in University Settings: A Qualitative Study Among Academic Staff and Gender-Diverse Students

Please complete the following demographic information. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. All information will be kept confidential and will only be used to describe the research sample.

1. Name:

☐ Prefer not to say

2. What is your gender identity?

☐ Prefer not to say

3. What pronouns do you use? (e.g., she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.)

☐ Prefer not to say

4. How long have you been teaching at university level?

☐ Prefer not to say

5. What faculty/school are you part of?

☐ Prefer not to say

6. Have you received any training related to inclusive language or diversity awareness in your teaching role?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

☐ Prefer not to say

APPENDIX L: CHECKLIST

DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

HUMAN ETHICS RESEARCH

Please print this checklist, tick where appropriate, sign and attach to the *signed* top copy of your Ethics Application form. **REMEMBER** the original signed Application must be sent to the Ethics Committee.

I NIVEDHA BHASKAR confirm the following:

Name of Applicant

- ☐ **P** I have signed my Ethics Application Form
- ☐ **P** ALL of my supervisors have signed my Ethics Application Form
- ☐ **P** I have attached the Information Sheet(s) (if applicable)
- ☐ **P** I have attached the Consent Form(s) (if applicable)
- ☐ **P** I have emailed to the Ethics Administrator my Ethics Application Form



Signed by Applicant

Date 17.06.2025