



Undermined and Interrupted: Mansplaining as Epistemic Exclusion in Academia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigates how two cisgender heterosexual women faculty members at a university in Cagayan de Oro City interpreted and navigated mansplaining, defined as a communicative behavior in which men explain matters to women in a condescending or dismissive manner, within their academic workplace. Through semi-structured interviews, the study examines the enactment of mansplaining, the contexts in which it arises, and its implications for women’s professional authority. The findings indicate that mansplaining operates as a gendered communicative practice embedded in institutional hierarchies, manifesting through interruptions, dismissal of expertise, and patronizing explanations by men in positions of authority. Participants’ responses were shaped by cultural norms emphasizing respect, harmony, and endurance. The study underscores the necessity for gender-sensitive policies and institutional mechanisms that affirm the expertise and authority of women academics in higher education.

KEYWORDS

academic communication, gendered power relations, higher education, mansplaining, women faculty experiences

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are expected to promote equity, inclusion, and scholarly exchange. These principles are articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), particularly Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Key targets include ensuring women's full participation in decision-making and strengthening institutional policies that advance gender equality. In academic contexts, these objectives necessitate environments where women can engage in academic discussions, contribute to knowledge production, and influence institutional decisions.

In the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) reinforces these commitments by safeguarding women's rights and prohibiting gender discrimination across institutions, including education (Philippine Commission on Women, 2009). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) advances gender mainstreaming in universities by promoting inclusive participation, equitable leadership opportunities, and organizational cultures that value women's perspectives and experiences. Despite these frameworks, gender inequities persist in academic workplaces, often manifesting through everyday communicative practices that influence whose voices are heard and whose knowledge is recognized.

Scholars contend that subtle and normalized gendered microaggressions continue to constrain women's influence in professional environments (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Bourabain, 2021). Mansplaining, a term popularized by Rebecca Solnit in *Men Explain Things to Me* (2008) (Joyce et al., 2021), exemplifies such microaggressions. Defined as a portmanteau of "man" and "explain," mansplaining describes instances in which men explain matters to women in a condescending or dismissive manner, presuming superior knowledge and disregarding women's expertise. Bridges (2017), Asare (2019), Llorens et al. (2021), and Myrick (2021) characterize mansplaining as a gendered microaggression that undermines women's epistemic credibility and excludes their contributions. In academic contexts, mansplaining may occur during faculty meetings, research conferences, and classroom discussions, where women are interrupted, talked over, or unnecessarily corrected despite their qualifications.

However, the specific ways in which mansplaining influences women's participation in professional activities such as meetings, collaborative projects, and policymaking processes remain understudied. Investigating these experiences is essential for developing policies and organizational cultures that foster gender-inclusive communication. Mansplaining within academic institutions cannot be fully understood separate from the organizational context in which it occurs. Interactions among academics are embedded within existing structures of authority, cultural and professional norms, and gendered power relations that determine whose knowledge is recognized, whose voices are heard, and whose contributions are valued. Therefore, examining mansplaining requires attention to both the communicative practices and the institutional conditions that produce and reinforce them.

This study investigates how mansplaining is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by two cisgender heterosexual women faculty members within the organizational context of a

university in Cagayan de Oro City. The objectives are to (1) identify communicative practices perceived as mansplaining in academic interactions; (2) analyze how women faculty members construct and interpret these experiences within their university's organizational culture; and (3) examine the communicative contexts in which mansplaining serves to exclude or marginalize women. By centering women's narratives, the study illustrates how everyday communicative practices can perpetuate unequal power relations and undermine women's epistemic authority in academia.

Literature Review

Academic institutions are regarded as meritocratic spaces that value expertise, rational discourse, and intellectual exchange. However, scholarship shows that universities are also gendered organizations where communication practices and institutional cultures privilege masculine authority while subordinating women's voices and epistemic authority. Gender inequality in academia is reproduced not only by formal structures and policies but also through routine interactions. These interactions organize who is heard, interrupted, recognized, or dismissed in conversations and decision-making practices.

Studies on conversational dynamics consistently show that women are more likely than men to experience interruptions and reduced speaking opportunities in group interactions. Tirrell (2018) argues that gender functions as a discursive constraint on women's credibility across communicative contexts. Being identified as female can weaken the perceived legitimacy of women's speech, shaping how they are received even before their message is evaluated. Similarly, Anderson and Leaper (1998) found that men interrupt women more frequently than women interrupt men, often to assert conversational dominance. Hancock and Rubin (2014) observed that women are more likely to accommodate interruptions through smiling, nodding, or agreement to sustain the interaction. In task-oriented settings, Smith-Lovin and Brody (1989) found that men interrupted women more often than other men, suggesting that gender operates as a status marker that shapes assumptions about competence and authority. Cannon et al. (2019) further argue that inequality in conversations develops incrementally, as women are assigned less participatory roles that make them more vulnerable to interruption and exclusion.

In academic settings, communicative inequalities intersect with broader institutional gender bias. Studies show that women faculty encounter subtle and overt behaviors that diminish their professional credibility and participation. Blithe and Elliott (2020) documented instances in which women academics experienced eye-rolling, dismissive gestures, aggressive nonverbal communication, and condescending remarks from male colleagues during meetings and professional interactions. Women were also advised to "temper their assertiveness and productivity" to remain "likable" within their departments. Daniels and Leaper (2011) describe this as a "double bind," in which women who communicate with confidence and authority risk being labeled abrasive, while those who communicate with restraint are perceived as weak or incompetent. Similarly, Llorens et al. (2021) found that women academics in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) reported disrespectful questioning and unprofessional feedback during conference presentations

and poster sessions, discouraging them from presenting their work. These everyday communicative acts are increasingly examined through the concept of mansplaining.

Popularized by American writer and activist Rebecca Solnit in her essay *Men Explain Things to Me* (2008), “mansplaining” refers to behaviors in which men explain concepts to women in a condescending or patronizing manner, disregarding their expertise and/or lived experiences. Johnson (2020) identifies three common forms of mansplaining: unsolicited correction, conversational takeover, and interpreting women’s assertions as requests for information. Feminist scholars argue that mansplaining indicates wider systems of epistemic inequality in which women’s knowledge is treated as less credible or authoritative than men’s (Kidd, 2017).

Scholars also situate mansplaining within the wider framework of microaggressions—subtle verbal, nonverbal, or symbolic behaviors that communicate exclusion or inferiority toward marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007). Johnson et al. (2021) classify mansplaining as a form of microinvalidation that dismisses women’s epistemic credibility and sustains gendered power hierarchies in everyday interaction. Because these behaviors are often normalized, they may go unrecognized and become accepted as “natural” communication styles. Joyce et al. (2021) argue that neologisms such as mansplaining allow individuals to identify, articulate, and challenge forms of sexism that were previously unnamed or difficult to contest. Over time, repeated exposure to such microaggressions can produce emotional fatigue, reduced confidence, and self-censorship in professional settings (Sue et al., 2019; Brondolo et al., 2009).

Although most research on mansplaining comes from Western contexts, its manifestations in Southeast Asia are determined by local gender norms and cultural expectations. Pertierra (1995) notes that social practices in Philippine communities are deeply influenced by cultural norms that preserve harmony and regulate interpersonal relations. In this context, Bisaya values such as *panag-uyon* (preserving social harmony), *kaikog* (a sense of propriety or relational sensitivity that regulates behavior) and *pagpailub* (enduring disagreement to preserve peace) function as social scripts that discourage women—especially those in subordinate positions—from challenging authority or disrupting group cohesion. In academic institutions, where hierarchies between senior and junior faculty or between faculty and administrators are already pronounced, such cultural norms may further discourage women from directly confronting mansplaining behaviors. As a result, cultural expectations around harmony may unintentionally enable the persistence of gendered microaggressions.

To analyze these dynamics, this study draws on Critical Organizational Communication (Deetz, 1992), Muted Group Theory (Kramarae, 1981), and Bisaya communicative norms. These frameworks position mansplaining as a communicative practice influenced by organizational power, gendered norms, and local culture in academic settings. Critical Organizational Communication frames communication as a site that produces and maintains power. It explains how practices like interruption, unsolicited correction, and dismissal of expertise function as mechanisms of discursive control that reinforce academic hierarchies and authority structures. Muted Group Theory complements this framework by highlighting how dominant communicative systems privilege

certain voices while constraining others, making it difficult for women academics to be fully recognized for their epistemic contributions or be valued in professional interactions. Extending the discussion beyond organizational and gendered dynamics, the findings also draw attention to Bisaya cultural norms namely *kaikog* (hesitation rooted in modesty and relational sensitivity), *panag-uyon* (social harmony), and *pagpailub* (endurance). These norms shape how participants respond to mansplaining and frame silence as a strategy for maintaining respect, harmony, and professional relationships. Overall, mansplaining is situated at the intersection of organizational, hierarchy, gendered communication norms, and Bisaya cultural expectations. The paper discusses how authority is enacted and how women academics manage participation, resistance, or silence within an academic institution.

Methods

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine how two women academics at a university in Cagayan de Oro experienced mansplaining within their workplace. Case study research enables a deep investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are interrelated (Yin, 2018). In this study, mansplaining is conceptualized not as an isolated behavior but as a mediating communicative mechanism through which gendered organizational discourse is enacted in an interaction. The case study approach allows for a contextualized examination of how academic culture, institutional hierarchies, and gendered expectations of authority and expertise shape participants' experiences of mansplaining and its consequences.

The case study is bounded within a university in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. It focuses on the accounts of two cisgender heterosexual women faculty members, with their experiences serving as embedded units of analysis through which mansplaining is examined within the institutional context. Consistent with the case study design, the participants were selected using purposive sampling to generate information-rich accounts of how mansplaining is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated in an academic setting. The two participants were selected because they provided particularly rich and illustrative accounts of mansplaining within the same institutional setting. Both describe overt experiences of interruption or silencing during academic discussions, dismissal of their opinions, and the devaluation of their expertise, ideas, and contributions by male interlocutors. These experiences made the cases especially relevant for examining how gendered power relations are communicatively enacted in everyday academic interactions. The cases were considered valuable for analysis because they revealed both common and distinct dimensions of the phenomenon. While both participants experienced mansplaining within the same university context, they differed in the specific situations in which these interactions occurred and in how the participants interpreted and responded to them. Examining these similarities and differences enabled the study to explore how mansplaining functions as a communicative practice that excludes women academics; how it is shaped by cultural norms and institutional contexts; and how women academics negotiate its effects within academic settings.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions that explored participants' experiences of mansplaining, interactional dynamics, affective reactions, identity impacts, and coping methods. Sample questions included "Can you describe an experience in which you were mansplained to? What happened during the interaction, and what was it like for you?" (2) "How did you respond to or manage the interaction? What challenges, emotions, or considerations shaped the way you handled the situation?" and (3) "How has this experience influenced how you see yourself as a woman faculty member within your college or university?" Interviews were conducted via Google Meet and lasted 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument. As a male academic, his positionality may have influenced the access and interpretation of data. To address this, reflexivity was practiced through reflective journaling and a close examination of assumptions regarding gender, authority, and communication in academic workplaces.

The study adhered to the ethical safeguards outlined by the University of the Philippines Open University Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was secured before data collection, and participants were fully informed of their right to withdraw at any stage or decline to answer sensitive questions. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and identifying institutional details were withheld. Participants were also informed about the timeline of the study and the availability of findings for verification.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis informed by the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful statements related to experiences of mansplaining were then coded. Codes were compared and organized into broader categories, which were then refined to themes that captured recurring patterns throughout participants' narratives. The analysis focused on understanding how mansplaining functioned as a communicative mechanism within the academic organizational context and how participants interpreted and responded to these interactions. After this process, 71 coded statements were generated and organized into 12 theme clusters. These clusters were further synthesized into four overarching themes describing the communicative manifestations and consequences of mansplaining within an academic workplace.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Position	Age	Highest Educational Attainment
Tina	Female	Assistant Professor and Head of the Office of External Affairs	48	Doctoral Degree
Jane	Female	Instructor and Head of their Academic Unit	37	Master's Degree

Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded four interrelated themes that explain how mansplaining is experienced, negotiated, and reproduced within the academic workplace in a university in Cagayan de Oro City. Guided by Critical Organizational Communication (Deetz, 1992) and Muted Group Theory (Kramarae, 1981), the coding and interpretation focused on how communicative acts reflect power, how authority is produced through discourse, and how gendered participation is structured in institutional interactions. Bisaya cultural norms were used as analytical lenses in interpreting participants' responses in relation to silence, respect, and relational harmony.

Theme 1: Epistemic Undermining through Gendered Communication

This theme captures how participants experienced devaluation of their expertise through communicative acts that positioned male interlocutors as more authoritative. Drawing from Deetz's Critical Organizational Communication (1992), these interactions were coded as instances of discursive closure where communication limits what can be said and whose knowledge and contributions are recognized as legitimate. From Kramarae's Muted Group Theory (1981), these were interpreted as instances where women's speech and expertise are subordinated within dominant communicative systems.

Participants described encounters in which their expertise, professional judgment, and disciplinary knowledge were questioned, dismissed, or overridden by male interlocutors. While disagreement and critique are not uncommon in academia, participants interpreted these interactions as mansplaining because they involved men asserting authority over matters in which the women possessed recognized expertise. These interactions functioned as communicative practices that privileged men's voices and forms of knowledge while undermining those of women. Both cases also reflected how women's knowledge and experiences are devalued in discursive environments where men's perspectives and ways of knowing are more readily treated as authoritative or legitimate.

Tina narrated an instance in which a male superior, via an email correspondence, questioned her participation in an international conference:

"He said, 'I did not grant you permission to apply to the conference... You've had several travels already.' I felt he was holding me to account for previous travels... I felt that he underestimated my capacity and that he still misunderstood my job after all my hard work. And I was like, who are you to act this way towards me when I've been around longer than you and have experienced more than you? I'm your [external relations] officer. I should be [traveling abroad]. Shouldn't that be common sense?"

Although framed as a managerial concern, this interaction was coded as authority-based epistemic override, wherein decision-making was exercised through communication that invalidated Tina's knowledge AND expertise to her professional role. As an external relations officer, Tina interpreted the interaction as a denial of her epistemic authority over her own functional domain.

Similarly, Jane described being interrupted in a formal meeting with the board of trustees while discussing her field of expertise, being ordered by the trustees to “cut to the chase.”

“I was cut off... and [redacted] said, ‘Oh, there’s really no need to go into details about what devcom is because right now, there’s really no need [for specialized] communication. Right now, what we need is just communication... We need to teach students how to go viral. Because, you know, people are no longer watching television. All they do is go to TikTok or YouTube for information.’ I was like, you’re really telling me that? Well, that’s how you see devcom from a business perspective. But me, I’ve taught and experienced this one. I really felt disrespected... I felt like I was just [in the meeting] for formality.”

This was coded as discursive substitution of expertise because institutional actors (board of trustees) replaced Jane’s disciplinary knowledge with their simplified and limited interpretations. From a Deetzian lens, this reflects how organizational discourse can stabilize hierarchy by controlling how knowledge is defined and circulated. Jane interpreted this interaction as mansplaining because members of the board of trustees dismissed her explanation of a field in which she possessed formal training, research, and teaching experience. Rather than engaging with her expertise, her interlocutors substituted their own interpretation of the subject matter and positioned it as sufficient. In doing so, the board of trustees not only interrupted her speech but also her authority to define and explain her area of specialization.

In both cases, participants interpreted the interactions as more than disagreement or interruption. In Tina’s case, the questioning of her participation in the conference was a challenge to her professional judgment regarding her professional role. Jane perceived the dismissal of her explanation of development communication as disregarding her expertise in a discipline she had studied, taught, and practiced. From the participants’ point of view, the issue was not simply that men spoke or disagreed with them, but that their own knowledge and experiences were not given comparable recognition in these exchanges. These accounts suggest that mansplaining functioned as a communicative practice that produces epistemic asymmetry. Mansplaining treats women’s expertise as

Theme 2: Strategic Silence and Reflexive Self-Monitoring under Hierarchical and Cultural Constraints

This theme focuses on response-management strategies, including silence, self-regulation, delayed response, calculated communication choices, and withdrawal. The interpretation was informed by Muted Group Theory, which explains how marginalized speakers adapt communication within dominant discourse systems, and Critical Organizational Communication, which posits that communication is influenced by organizational power relations. Bisaya cultural norms such as *kaikog*, *panag-uyon*, and *pagpailub* were used as interpretive frames to contextualize the participants’ responses to mansplaining as culture-driven communication.

Within this framework, Tina's account illustrates self-regulation shaped by organizational hierarchy and culturally informed restraint. She recalled:

"I did not reply right away because I had to gather my thoughts. I did not want to sound disrespectful. After all, he's my boss. I thought to myself: I'm going to take a day off from this and strategize my 'counterattack' because I cannot just not explain my side, and I think I owe it to myself."

This was coded as anticipatory self-regulation. It shows that silence and delay function as risk-managed communicative strategies in response to authority. Tina's hesitation to reply to her boss and her desire not to "sound disrespectful" reflect an enactment of *kaikog* or self-restraint rooted in modesty and a reluctance to cause tension or impose power on the other person. Therefore, delaying her response is not simply tactical but also culturally informed. It is shaped by an awareness of how authority relations and social propriety define acceptable forms of response.

Similarly, Jane's account demonstrates communicative withdrawal following epistemic invalidation:

"It really made me more... detached to [sic] the idea of pitching. [Because] when you want to pitch an idea, and obviously the other party is no longer listening to what you want to convey, you just plug off. I realized it's possible for someone, especially a person who holds a higher power than you, to twist your words and gaslight you."

This was coded as withdrawal as self-protective disengagement, where detachment from interaction functions as a response to discursive risk. Understood through Muted Group Theory, this response reflects how non-dominant speakers adjust participation when their contributions are perceived as vulnerable to dismissal or misrecognition. From a Bisaya cultural perspective, this withdrawal is further influenced by *panag-uyon* (social harmony) and *pagpailub* (enduring discomfort). Rather than confronting disrespect and risking immediate confrontation, the participant chose to distance herself from the interaction to avoid tension and preserve collegiality. Rather than attributing these responses solely to the gender of individual interlocutors, the findings point to broader communicative power relations that influence when and how women choose to speak. Within this context, mansplaining functioned to discourage participation and open dialogue.

In both accounts, silence is not treated as passive behavior but as a patterned communicative practice produced at the intersection of structural and cultural forces. Within interactions where there is communicative asymmetry, *kaikog* operates as anticipatory restraint, *panag-uyon* as relational maintenance, and *pagpailub* as endurance. These cultural norms extend Muted Group Theory by showing that communicative adaptation is not only a response to dominant discourse systems but is also mediated by local norms that define which forms kinds of speech or communicative acts are considered appropriate within hierarchical relationships

(Deetz, 1992).

Taken together, this theme suggests that silence can become a strategic, culturally mediated, and structurally conditioned response to discursive power within an academic institution.

Theme 3: Psychological and Epistemic Consequences of Mansplaining

Participants also described the psychological, emotional, and professional consequences effects of mansplaining. Their accounts revealed feelings of frustration, anxiety, self-doubt, and diminished confidence in their professional roles.

Tina reflected on how the experience made her question her sense of purpose and professional identity:

"It makes you question your life's work... I went into an existential crisis. I asked myself, why am I still here?"

Jane described lingering emotional discomfort associated with the interaction:

"It haunted me in a way that if I ever see them again, I will still tremble or get nervous. I don't want to use the word traumatic, but I would not want to be seated in the same setting with them ever again."

Both participants reported questioning their competence, expertise, and place within the institution following these experiences of mansplaining. These effects reflect how organizational power is enacted through everyday interactions that privilege some voices (men's) while undermining others (women's). By positioning men as more credible or knowledgeable, mansplaining sustains gendered hierarchies and diminishes women's epistemic authority. Although the participants were not prevented from speaking, their experiences of interruption, dismissal, and devaluation signaled that their knowledge carried less legitimacy. Overall, mansplaining not only silences women but also undermines their confidence as knowledge producers within the academic institution.

Theme 4: Organizational Hierarchy as Discursive Amplifier of Mansplaining

The final theme examines how formal institutional hierarchy shapes and intensifies experiences of mansplaining. Coding focused on instances where authority positions determined whose knowledge prevailed in interactions. Framed using Critical Organizational Communication (Deetz, 1992), hierarchy was interpreted as a system that legitimizes certain discursive positions over others. Muted Group Theory explains that institutional power and gendered communication norms can interact to constrain individuals' opportunities to have their voices and perspectives recognized and validated (Kramarae, 1981).

Tina noted how the authority of a male superior limited her capacity to act independently for her office.

“My actions will be limited because I’ll always have to seek his approval before I decide to do things, which is not good for me. That’s childish—micromanaging, even.”

Jane reflected on how institutional power shaped whose claims were taken seriously in deliberations regarding academic matters within the university. She explained:

“It instilled in me that I’m just a chairperson, and these are [board of trustees], or they’re people in power, like, no matter how you make your case, no matter how well-crafted your position is, given the power dynamics, you’re just there, you’re just that.”

These accounts were coded as hierarchically reinforced epistemic limitation because they demonstrate how authority structures can shape whose knowledge is given credibility and whose contributions are more readily deferred to. Importantly, both participants did not describe hierarchy alone, but they also recounted experiences in which gendered dismissals occurred within unequal organizational relationships. This suggests that mansplaining in academic organizations is not only enacted through gender dynamics but can also be strengthened by institutional arrangements that concentrate authority in particular actors. In such contexts, organizational position may provide added legitimacy to a speaker’s interpretations while making it more difficult for others to contest them. Findings also suggest that hierarchy can function as a mechanism that translates institutional authority into discursive authority, enabling those in positions of power to define, simplify, question, or override the knowledge claims of others during interaction.

Discussion

The analysis identified four interconnected patterns that show how mansplaining operates within an academic organizational context: epistemic undermining through gendered organizational discourse; strategic silence and reflexive monitoring under hierarchical and cultural constraints; psychological and epistemic consequences of discursive exclusion; and organizational hierarchy as discursive amplifier of mansplaining. Viewed through Critical Organization Communication (Deetz, 1992) and Muted Group Theory (Kramarae, 1981), the findings suggest that mansplaining functions not purely as interpersonal misunderstanding but as a communicative mechanism that reproduces institutional hierarchies in an academic setting.

Across the participants’ accounts, mansplaining emerged through communicative practices such as interruption, dismissive responses, unsolicited explanations, condescending correction, and challenges to professional expertise. These interactions occurred in formal organizational interactions such as meetings, presentations, and email exchanges, where authority and legitimacy were actively negotiated through discourse. The theme of Epistemic Undermining through Gendered Organizational Discourse demonstrates how certain forms of knowledge were

privileged while others were questioned or minimized. Consistent with Deetz's (1992) argument that organizational communication is a site where power is exercised and reproduced, the findings suggest that communication practices within academic institutions can regulate whose expertise is recognized as legitimate and whose contributions are treated as secondary.

The analysis further indicates that participants understood these interactions primarily through the lens of organizational hierarchy. In both accounts, mansplaining occurred in interactions with male administrators and institutional leaders who held formal authority over decision-making. However, the theme of Organizational Hierarchy as Discursive Amplifier of Mansplaining suggests that organizational rank alone does not fully explain these dynamics. Rather, hierarchy and gender appear to intersect in shaping communicative authority. While participants attributed these experiences to differences in rank and institutional power, the authority exercised over female faculty members was based on the assumption that women's expertise could be more easily challenged, corrected, or overridden. In this sense, formal organizational power may amplify gendered communicative practices by boosting legitimacy to those who exercise discursive control.

The theme Strategic Silence and Reflexive Self-Monitoring under Hierarchical and Cultural Constraints extends existing scholarship on mansplaining by highlighting the role of local cultural norms in shaping responses to communicative exclusion. Rather than interpreting silence solely as a consequence of intimidation or suppression, the findings suggest that participants' responses were influenced by culturally embedded understandings of respect, hierarchy, and interpersonal conduct. Within the Bisaya context, silence appeared to be shaped by the interplay of organizational expectations and cultural values such as *kaikog*, *panag-uyon*, and *pagpailub*.

Kaikog, understood as hesitation brought by social propriety and relational sensitivity, shaped participants' reluctance to confront authority figures directly and asserting themselves, as doing so risked appearing disruptive or causing discomfort toward a superior. In both cases, silence functioned not simply as individual restraint but as a culturally informed performance of respect for hierarchy and relational boundaries. Similarly, *panag-uyon*, or the prioritization of social harmony, influenced how disagreement was managed within professional interactions. Jane's account highlighted this dynamic when she contrasted the board of trustees' normalized culture of "shouting at each other" during their meetings with her own restrained participation. Her refusal to mirror the trustees' communication style reflected the expectation that women, particularly those in subordinate positions, should maintain composure to preserve relational harmony with superiors. Meanwhile, *pagpailub*, which means endurance or forbearance, framed silence as a form of disciplined tolerance. Rather than directly confronting perceived disrespect, participants tolerated discomfort and continued performing their professional responsibilities. This pattern suggests that endurance may serve as both a coping mechanism and a socially valued response in hierarchical organizational environments. Taken together, these cultural scripts reveal that silence is an active communicative practice shaped by culture-specific expectations of respect, deference to authority, harmony, and endurance. However, while these values can facilitate collegial relationships and organizational stability, the findings suggest that they may

also unintentionally sustain communicative asymmetries by discouraging direct challenges to exclusionary practices.

The theme Psychological and Professional Consequences of Discursive Exclusion further illustrates the epistemic consequences of mansplaining. Participants described self-doubt, withdrawal from discussions, reduced willingness to contribute ideas, and uncertainty regarding their professional competence. These findings suggest that dominant groups possess greater control over communicative norms and systems of meaning. When participants' expertise was questioned or dismissed, they experienced not only immediate emotional distress but also uncertainty about their place and authority within the institution. Therefore, mansplaining functioned as a form of epistemic regulation that determines who can speak and act, and whose knowledge counts as credible within an academic space.

While participants mainly interpreted their experience through organizational hierarchy within their academic workplace, the findings also resonate with Fricker's (2007) concept of testimonial injustice, which occurs when a speaker receives less credibility than they deserve due to prejudice operating within a given social context. Testimonial injustice does not require outright silencing of the speaker. Rather, it manifests when a person's knowledge, judgment, or testimony are systematically regarded as less credible or authoritative in interactions. Although this study cannot conclusively establish that participants' experiences were directly driven by gender-based credibility prejudice, their accounts point to instances in which their expertise was questioned, overridden, or reframed by interlocutors occupying positions of higher authority. These interactions suggest the possibility of credibility deficits that extend beyond ordinary disagreement, wherein women's professional knowledge is treated as secondary, more contestable, requiring correction, or in need of validation from others. Framed within the study's organizational lens, this raises questions about how institutional authority may influence the attribution of epistemic credibility within academic interactions. The findings suggest a need for further research on how organizational rank and gendered expectations may intersect to shape the recognition and valuation of expertise within academic discourse.

As a qualitative case study involving two women academics from a single university, this study does not seek statistical generalization. Rather, it offers an exploratory and contextually situated analysis of how mansplaining may operate within a particular academic environment. The value of the study lies in its ability to shed light on the communicative processes through which gendered authority, organizational hierarchy, and cultural norms intersect within a specific institutional setting. The findings suggest that mansplaining in academia should not be reduced to behavior or personal slight. It is a communicative practice embedded within broader organizational and sociocultural structures that shape participation, authority, and belonging.

Implications

The findings of this study may help faculty, students, administrators, and staff understand how mansplaining operates within academic spaces and how it can be addressed through institutional, administrative, and interpersonal interventions. In the Philippine context, these implications are particularly relevant in light of the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710), which promotes women's rights and gender equality across institutions, including the education sector. The findings also align with the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) agenda on gender mainstreaming through inclusive participation, equitable leadership opportunities, and organizational cultures that value women's voices and experiences. While these frameworks establish important commitments to gender equality, the findings suggest that existing policies tend to focus on formal representation and protection from overt discrimination while giving less attention to subtle communicative practices that exclude and marginalize women, including microaggressions such as mansplaining.

Therefore, the study highlights the need to strengthen existing gender policies by explicitly recognizing microaggressions as forms of workplace inequity. When done repeatedly and left unaddressed, these behaviors can undermine women's credibility, participation, and epistemic authority in academia. Higher education institutions may revisit their Gender and Development (GAD) programs, faculty manuals, codes of conduct, and workplace ethics policies to include clearer definitions, examples, reporting mechanisms, and accountability measures related to mansplaining and other gendered communication practices. Universities may also integrate discussions of communicative microaggressions into faculty orientations, gender-sensitivity seminars, and broader gender mainstreaming initiatives to translate policy commitments into everyday institutional practice.

At the administrative level, the findings may guide university leaders in fostering more inclusive and participatory organizational cultures. Administrators may implement faculty development programs, gender-sensitive communication training, and leadership workshops to encourage reflective, equitable communication practices in meetings, classrooms, consultations, and collaborative workspaces. Institutions may also conduct regular assessments of workplace communication practices to identify subtle and normalized forms of exclusion that existing gender equity measures often overlook.

At the interpersonal level, the study may encourage academics to cultivate more respectful, dialogic, and reflexive forms of interaction that affirm rather than diminish women's knowledge and expertise. By showing how mansplaining affects confidence, participation, and professional relationships, the findings may deepen awareness of the subtle power dynamics embedded in everyday academic communication. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader efforts to build safer, more inclusive, and genuinely gender-responsive academic environments—environments that move beyond formal policy compliance and toward the active recognition of women's voices and authority in higher education.

Conclusion

This study suggests that mansplaining in Philippine academia cannot be understood solely as rude behavior, personality conflict, or individual sexism. Rather, it operates through everyday institutional communication practices that subtly organize authority by determining who is allowed to speak and act, whose expertise is valued, and who must continually negotiate their right to participate.

By examining the narratives of women faculty members from a university in Cagayan de Oro City, the study shows that mansplaining operates not through explicit hostility but through normalized interactional patterns embedded within professional relationships and institutional hierarchies. Although participants themselves interpreted these experiences as products of rank and institutional power, the dynamics remained gendered in structure, as women's expertise was more easily interrupted, questioned, corrected, or overridden within these encounters. The findings, therefore, suggest that hierarchy and gender do not operate independently; rather, they intersect in ways that shape which knowledge is recognized as credible and whose participation is constrained within an academic space.

A key contribution of the study is its rethinking of silence and restrained response among women academics. Rather than interpreting them as signs of intimidation or passivity, these responses are also shaped by Bisaya cultural norms of relational sensitivity, harmony, and endurance. These cultural values influence how women navigate authority and disagreement in professional settings. This complicates dominant Western feminist explanations by showing how women negotiate institutional power while simultaneously managing cultural expectations surrounding respect and professionalism. Therefore, the study highlights the need to situate analyses of workplace communication within local cultural realities rather than relying exclusively on imported feminist frameworks.

The study also exposes the gap between formal gender equality commitments and everyday communicative practices. Even in institutions that promote gender mainstreaming and inclusive participation, subtle forms of exclusion continue to shape whose knowledge and authority are validated in academic exchanges. This suggests that inequality is reproduced not only through institutional structures but also through routine interactional practices that are normalized or left unexamined.

Overall, the study frames mansplaining as an organizational and epistemic mechanism that shapes participation, authority, and belonging in academia. It redirects focus from policy intent to the communicative conditions that perpetuate inequality in everyday academic life. In doing so, it calls for gender-responsive reforms in higher education institutions that address not only representation and institutional policy, but also the interactional practices that enable or constrain the recognition of women's expertise.

Recommendations

Future research may extend this inquiry by examining mansplaining across a larger sample of individuals, universities, disciplines, organizational cultures, and institutional positions to better understand how authority and epistemic exclusion operate through communication across different academic contexts. Researchers may also explore mansplaining in student environments, particularly in male-dominated fields such as STEM, where it is believed to be pervasive. Further studies may analyze the discursive elements surrounding mansplaining, including the context of the utterance, the relationship between the message sender and receiver, the mode of discourse, conversational behavior, turn-taking conventions, speech act performance, and conversational norms. Such analyses may deepen understanding of how communicative dominance is enacted and normalized in everyday interaction.

A preliminary understanding of mansplaining mostly emphasizes power dynamics within traditional gender relations. However, there is a dearth of literature examining the complexity of identities and power relations that extend beyond binary understandings of sex and gender. Future research may investigate the mansplaining experiences of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender men and women, and other individuals in the LGBTQIA+ spectrum to better understand how mansplaining operates across diverse identities and social locations. Research on mansplaining should also move beyond professional settings to include close personal relationships and everyday contexts, where microaggressive behaviors are also likely to occur.

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Statements and Declarations

Disclosure statement. The self-funded study is the author's master's thesis for the degree Master of Development Communication at the University of the Philippines Open University. The author identifies as a bisexual man, with a masculine gender expression and male sex characteristics. The author has not been involved in any kind of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, or abuse (SEA) complaint, allegation, or conviction. He reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

Declarations of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process. In preparing this work, the author used ChatGPT to summarize findings and Grammarly to polish the tone of the writing, improve sentence structures, condense content into more concise paragraphs, and organize citations. After using these tools/services, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

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Ethical Approval

The study was guided by feminist research principles and the UP Open University's ethics guidelines. Participants were briefed on the study's objectives, instruments, risks, and confidentiality safeguards, and signed consent forms before interviews. Participants could decline or withdraw responses at any stage without penalty. Pseudonyms were used, and participants were not required to disclose the names of colleagues involved in mansplaining incidents.

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