

Restricted Discourse: The Social Lives of Queer Thai University Students

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Purpose

This project, explores (1) the social challenges that LGBTQ+ students face in a Thai university environment, (2) the language that Thai university students and Thai society as a whole use to describe LGBTQ+ people, and (3) the correlation between the language used to describe LGBTQ+ people and individual perceptions on members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Background

- Faculty members are generally not equipped to discuss identity ¹
- Queerness is typically not mentioned in Thai university classrooms ²
- Prior studies on LGBTQ+ Thai students suggest conflation between gender and sexual orientation in participant categorizations ³
- Modern models of gender and sexual identity come from the West, but conflict with “traditional” Thai norms ⁴
- Concepts regarding LGBTQ+ identities are reshaped by individual cultural contexts ⁵
- prior studies indicate that separating gender identity and sexual orientation as distinct concepts maximizes understanding ⁶

Methods

Procedure 1: Narrative Analysis

- Interviewed six Thai LGBTQ+ university students on their university experiences, measured across five domains
- Recruited participants through snowball sampling
- Interviews were conducted in English at Mahidol University International College

Procedure 2: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Analyzed nine articles, written by Thai publications (in either Thai or English)
- Summarized key themes and analyzed how language is used to communicate about LGBTQ+ issues
- Compared language use to data on anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes

Procedure 3: Quantitative Analysis

- Six students (both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+) completed a Qualtrics survey which tested:
 - (1) overall attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people
 - (2) language used to describe sexual orientations and gender identities

Results

Procedure 1

Coming Out

- If not asked about identity, they keep it to their trusted friends
- Unlikely to correct university employees who assume their sexual orientation
- Confusion between the terms “gender” and “sexual orientation”

Students

- Maintain a small group of friends
- Abide by most societal gender norms
- With follow-up questions, some participants experienced discrimination

Professors

- Typically maintain a more professional, transactional relationship
- Professors (mostly) treat everyone the same, with some exceptions

Administrators

- Students feel that administrators work behind the scenes
- Students only interact with university administrators when necessary

Resources

- No resources to support LGBTQ+ students
- Use outside resources for sexual health
- Want greater access to mental and sexual health services

Procedure 2

Language that distinguishes the LGBTQ+ community from the majority group, such as gender-diverse, may contribute to othering and reinforce stereotypes and discrimination

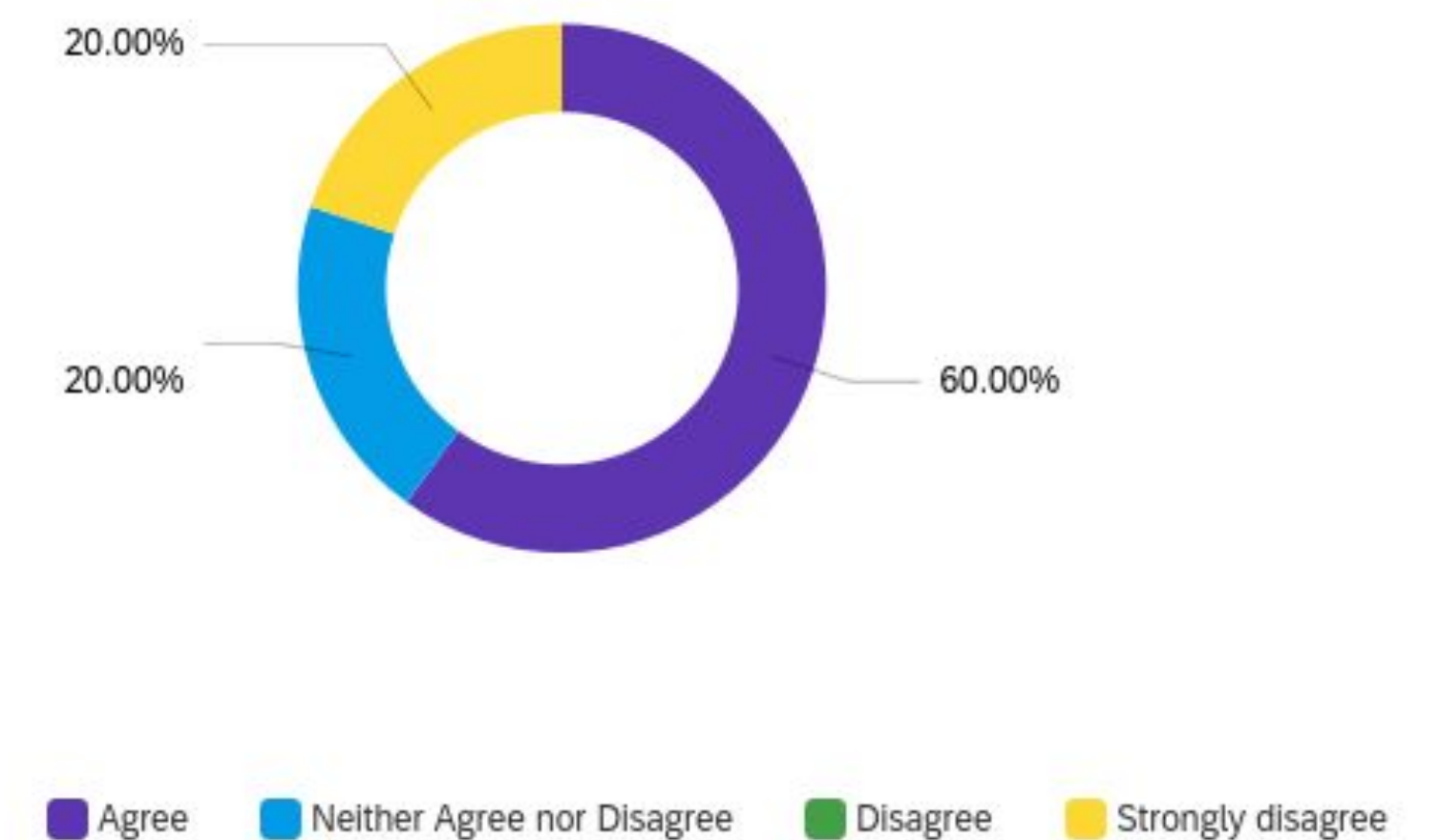
Positive language, such as “celebrating individual differences” and “raising awareness about gender diversity,” reinforces the idea that acceptance and inclusivity are important values

Neutral language, such as “transgender”, “cisgender,” and “LGBTQ+” promotes inclusivity and avoids reinforcing stereotypes and discrimination

Procedure 3

Prompt:

I use the term “gender” when referring to gay, lesbian, or bisexual people



Discussion

- Implicit in both the CDA and the narrative analysis is that homophobia and transphobia are still prevalent in Thailand, both in and out of university (although most articles and interviews have more positive tones)
- It is possible that the collective desire to appear accepting and/or accepted pushes many Thai people to subconsciously rewrite the narrative regarding the social experiences of LGBTQ+ people
- Descriptions provided by both the interviewees and the news articles suggest that there might be inconsistencies in how people are educated on the LGBTQ+ community
- This is also reflected in some of the responses to the Survey prompts in Procedure 3

Gaps & Limitations

- Our interviews were conducted at an international school and in the English language
- We do not analyze cohort differences in LGBTQ+ experiences
- We do not analyze experiences based on cultural background or income
- Future research should examine students’ thoughts on the language used to describe LGBTQ+ people & LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum

References

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