Female masculinity and gender-based violence among Thai toms in urban Bangkok

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Why this topic?

- Harmful norms around masculinity underpin men’s perpetration of gender-based violence
- Violence prevention work tends to assume that masculinity only happens in male bodies, within a heterosexual world
- What happens if we challenge this assumption?
- What can the connection between masculinities and GBV tell us, when it happens in non-male bodies?
The sample: Thai toms

- ‘Toms’ are masculine-presenting assigned at birth women in Thailand, who range along a spectrum of gender identities

- Integral to tom identity is performed masculinity (especially clothing) and the male role in same-sex female relationships

Source: Sinnott 2007
What we asked

- How do Thai toms, as masculine-of-center sexual minority women in Thailand, understand, construct and live masculinity?
- How is their identity as a tom related to their experiences and perpetration of gender-based violence across the life course?
- What are the implications for violence prevention?
How we did the research

21 self-identified Thai toms

Recruitment through LGBT activist organizations

Semi-structured life history interviews

Snowball sampling to recruit new participants

Ethics approval from Mahidol University
Question 1

How do Thai toms understand, construct and live masculinity?

Interaction

Exposure to tom identity as an option, albeit stigmatized, early in childhood

Challenge

Behaviour
Question 1

How do Thai toms understand, construct and live masculinity?

- Interaction
  - Exposure to tom identity as an option, albeit stigmatized, early in childhood

- Challenge

- Behaviour
  - Dress, mannerisms, social roles, sexual roles
Question 1

How do Thai toms understand, construct and live masculinity?

Interaction

Exposure to tom identity as an option, albeit stigmatized, early in childhood

Challenge

Distinguish themselves from Thai men

Behaviour

Dress, mannerisms, social roles, sexual roles
Question 2

How is tom identity related to their experiences of gender-based violence?

**Family/peers**

“They cuss at me as I walk around, and even when I’m eating they’d walk over to dispraise me. It happened all the time.” (T_05_N 26 years old)

**Strangers**

“Sometimes people say to their kids, ‘Don't go near them, or you'll turn into these kinds of people.’ I would say, ‘Hey, this is not a sexually-transmitted disease.’” (T_06_P, 38 years old)

**Intimate partners**

She hit me. She kept hitting me. I blocked her hits. She had been drinking. She was drunk. She was not fully conscious. I didn't drink. I could have fought her, but I chose not to do it. I blocked, things like that. And her child was inside the house, her child said, "Mom, Mom, stop. Stop hitting “T_06_P”.” (T_06_P, 38 years old)
How is tom identity related to their experiences of gender-based violence?

Stigma

Stigma for failing to live up to social expectations of woman-hood

My mother didn’t want me to have a girlfriend. She said the girl would eventually go back to dating men. “Who will you live with?” she would say. So I would ask her, “What do you want me to do—date men instead?” She said, “Why don’t you try? Men are not all bad.” (D_02_A, 28 years old)

A lot of toms run into problems because of the way they dress. For example, when you go to certain places or attend certain formal functions that require women to wear skirts or dresses. A woman who wears a boy cut or a buzz cut with a dress doesn’t look polite.” (D_02_A, 28 years old)
Discrimination from family members and peers, often around the degree of “tom-ness”

Society looks at you strangely. They look at you as tom. Some people say, ee tom” (D_01_A, in her 30s)

“My friends in high school sometimes yelled at me…[that] I was being too manly, too fake.” (T_02_A 20 years old)
How is tom identity related to their experiences of gender-based violence?

Interpreting risk of violence as related to their gender identity

“When toms keep on ‘acting’ [manly] to men, they’re finding trouble for themselves. You need to know the limit...If you have a limit on yourself, then you can survive in society.” (T_05_N, 26 years old)

I think [I can feel safe in public] because I’m a tom and I look a man anyway, so if anyone thinks to harm me they might not dare to. It’s better than being a girl and getting harmed by a guy. T_07_N*
Question 3 What are the implications for violence prevention?

When we talk about gender-based violence prevention, whose violence?

Expand violence prevention to address the specific issues facing sexual minority women.

Integrate sexual minority stress and violence prevention work and gender-based violence prevention efforts.
Thank you!

For more information, please contact
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