Queer: The Meaning Constructed and its Identities of “Gay” in Social Space

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Abstract

The meaning constructed and its identities of gay in social space have been described in the present study. The results showed that gay can be classified as feminine and masculine gay. Both have the different identities from the social norm, including feminine and homosexual identity. The meaning of gay depends on the definitions in any situation or social context and at anytime. The discourse from the social makes the otherness and the marginality to gay. At the first stage, the feminine gay feel different from the other men. They often join the group of friends who are women or gay and the society isolate them from the other men. They inadvertently perceive this behavior and completely accept the definition of homosexuality by the discourse of the society. While masculine gay begin to define themselves when they feel they are homosexual. However, the complete indication of masculine gay is the emotionless in heterosexuality. As in general society and the thought of gay themselves, their unmanly behavior is different from the social norm, so they rather express themselves out as gay in the gay communities, such as, bedroom, gay sauna, or gay bar more than in the social public, such as, workspace, the university. The feminine gay will show the “feminine” identity in all spaces they trust and feel safe. The homosexual and feminine identity will express together. Masculine gay do not express the feminine identity, but they express the homosexual identity in the personal spaces specific for gay and conceal the “gay” identity in all common places.

Introduction

When “sexual” is mentioned, the only acceptance of social norm or dominant discourse in sexual is heterosexuality. That is why the heterosexuality of men and women is worth for the visible sexual identity. Nowadays, however, there is “the third gender” which the sexual behavior is different from the acceptance of social norm or the dominant discourse of ideology. The numbers of people in this gender which are rapidly increasing reflect the complication and the fluidity of sexual identity. These groups of people are called “gay.”

In the recent years, there are several theories attempt to describe the development of gay in any men and there are also several visions to this issue. In the vision of religion, especially Christianity, do not accept gay to be Christians. Christians try to change gay to men as they consider gay are person who fool themselves and do not accept their biological state (Thungsiri, 2001: 2). In vision of psychology, especially the theory of Sigmund Freud, remarked that everyone must pass the heterosexual stage and anyone who has a problem from this stage will become the homosexual. On the contrary, there are some opposed visions noted that the homosexual is causes by the disappointment in love; the failure from heterosexual love, or the selection of the individuals to be gay or a real men. In biological vision,
there are several genetic theories mentioned about the cause of gay, such as, the differences in adult brains, the hormone level, the birth order, gay gene, etc. (Rueangtragoon, 2007: 13-18). In social vision, the theory of symbolic interaction remarked that the development of gay identity is caused by the interaction of the person in society and then define the meaning of identity by themselves (Naksing, 2004: 185-190). In sociocultural theory described that the sexual behavior of people in society with different cultures often have the differences in details, such as, some cultures determine men to have sex with men before marriage only, but after that men are limited to have sex with women only. Men in this culture are considered to be homosexual by the cause of culture, and they are called facultative homosexual. As for people with no culture, are called obligative homosexual (Tengtrirat and others, 2004.: 346-347). In the vision of anthropology, especially, the discourse idea of Michael Foucault noticed that “gay” are constructed, produced, defined, and specified the identity by the knowledge, truth, and power until gay are not acceptable from the society (Maneesrikum, 2002: 8-9). Although Thai society does not resist gay in common, but there are some people who still object or refuse gay from the society. It force gay to feel they are abnormal from the others in society. The otherness makes gay confused in their gender role and their appropriate behavior, and they may express their identity deviated from the social norm. The potential stress and worry may occur and make the effort to conceal their emotional state. They may express themselves with the acceptable identity to the society or negotiate to release their emotions which cannot be expressed in some social spaces.

From the phenomenon mentioned above, the author questioned how gay construct and identify themselves in social space while society makes the otherness and the marginality to gay. The social interaction of gay is also investigated. In this study, the author presents the point of the meaning constructed, the identities, and the negotiation of gay through the social space to create the new perspective for social learning and understanding of gay lifestyle which they have constructed their identities and the identity negotiation to live in any social spaces.

Objectives

To study the meaning constructed, identities, and negotiation of gay through social space.

Technical Terms

Gay: homosexual men.
Feminine gay: homosexual men who have the “feminine” identity, such as, girlish or coquettish manner, and talking with puckered lips.
Masculine gay: homosexual men who do not have the difference in gender identity from men and they express their strength and appearance as the real men in society.
Social space: the physical spaces gay live in and have the relationship with the others, such as, family, educational space, workspace, gay sauna, gay bar, etc.
Identity: the attempt of person or the groups of people to define the meaning of themselves when they interact with the others in society.
Discourse: the power, knowledge, and truth made up by the society obstructing gay to be the marginality of society.
Otherness: the devaluation and the isolation feeling from the society of gay caused by the homosexuality lifestyle.
Marginality: the devaluation and objection feeling from the others in society allow gay to be the margin of sexual center.
Framework of the study

The author studied the meaning constructed and the identities of “gay” in social space by taking the identity concept of Michael Foucault\(^1\) to investigate and analyze the meaning construct of gay and how gay identify themselves in any social space leading to the construction of sexual dominant discourse in society making gay to be the margin of sexual center and allow gay to fight, negotiate, or construct the meaning of space and the their identities to obstruct the power of these dominant discourses in the social spaces, such as, sauna, exercise space, family, workspace. The author analyzed the identification how and when gay reveal and conceal themselves in the social space and the concept of opposition and negotiation of Michel de Certeau\(^2\) was used to analyze the negotiation power of gay without fighting, direct negotiation, or meaning construct but with strategies to take part into the power space and take advantage to the opportunities. Gay may use these strategies rather than the direct negotiation. Furthermore, the author also applies some concepts, including the origin of gay, the definition and background of gay, gay discourse from West to East, and the construction of the marginality and the otherness to explain how the genetics, socioculture, and environment influence the background and the assemble of gay. The construction of discourse to oppose the dominant discourse from the society making the otherness and the marginality of gay are also described.

Research Methodology

The author presents the qualitative study by the investigation the relationship of the informants in several spaces they interact with the others, such as, following up one gay to his home, workspace, educational space, gay sauna, gay bar, and sport center. The key informants are 18 homosexuals (gay) who live in Hat Yai city with various occupations, education, age, socially, status, and religion. First, the author started to live with gay by joining their exercise and sport activities as the author interested in many sports and exercise activities. This can make the author talk and accompany with the group of gay who interested in the same sports and exercise activities as well. These activities include fitness, swimming, and volleyball. The society define these activities as the personal spaces only for gay and this first group of gay introduce the author to know the other group of gays. The first activity leads to the next activities, such as, going out for eating, visiting some places; home or family, workspace, study space, men and women bar, and some private places for homosexual; gay sauna, gay bar. The author participated with the people in these places by

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\(^1\) Michael Foucault (1978: 100) mentioned that the discourse is partly in the set of discontinuous discourse. It is specific and different in strategies. At the same time, it pressure and obstruct the identity and the meaning of something or make them disappear from the society.

\(^2\) Michel de Certeau described about the procedure that the weaker use the opportunities to take the advantage of benefits from the stronger. He explained that the daily life is the controversy and negotiation with the power relations between “regulator” and “user”. The resistance of de Certeau is not the destruction to switch the power relations, but it is the ways to take part to the strategies and the otherness or avoidance the strategies without separation. So that strategies do not oppositely relate to tricks. (Highmore, 2002 : 154-159)
the helps of gay friends for research only. As the informants including friends, relatives of
gay, the author studied, collected, and analyzed data from the in-dept interview, the
participant and non-participant observation. The obtained data were classified into subtopics
and then decoded and summarized in accordance to the objective.

Results and Discussion

1. Identity expression: The behavior formation\(^1\) and the meaning constructed of
“gay” in social space.

Identity expression means the identity of “gay” which different from the other
males in society. This identity of gay including homosexual and feminine identity considered
as the “otherness” or the “marginality” identity which discourse to gay by the society.
Although gay are objected, why they can not return to be common men. Details are as
follows.

**Type of gay: the diversity of sex.** It is difficult to classify gay in the term of
sex which cannot be fixed. However, gay can be generally classified by gender\(^2\) into 2 types;
feminine and masculine gay.

Most feminine gay, nowadays, express the feminine identity without
concealment as in the past. Some of them may express their identity in all public spaces, such
as, ending the conversation with women word, talking with puckered lips, speaking with
sharp voice, expressing the girlish manner, and coquettish gesticulation. The identity of
feminine gay is similar to the comedy actors in public media, such as, the characters in
television programs or movies accepted from the audiences. The masculine gay scarcely
express the feminine identity. They conceal this identity and express themselves as any
general men in the society.

**The behavior formation of “gay” and the fluidity of sexual identity**
Foucault (1978: 100) described that the individual is the result of discourse and discourse
operation created by the power of discourse. Gay is one of the discourses created by many
conditions and factors. Stuart Hall (1996: 5-6) noted that the most important feature of our
identity is the position displacement which cannot be fixed with any inflexible feature. So
gay have sexual fluidity and are the transition from real men to feminine or masculine gay. It
is the complicated transition of gender from heterosexual to homosexual or bisexual, or from
bisexual to homosexual caused by rather the environmental context and the assemble of
society than from the genetics.

For example, brother Vee who have the diversity of sexual identity; gay,
masculine gay, and bisexual (Vee (alias), Interview: 2009). However, the genetics which can
influence the behavior formation of gay cannot be excluded, such as, the informant who has
had the feminine aspects since he was young, can partly form the gay identity (Pu (alias),
Interview: 2009). However, the conditions which some gay are influenced by their gay
relatives may not be the conditions for some men (Bom (alias), Interview: 2009). As we will
see, most of feminine gay which have had the feminine gay identity since they were young
will become gay by raising, education, training, and perceiving from social institutions.
While the first sexual experience is used to identify the identity for most feminine gay, which

\(^1\) The **behavior formation** describes the background of behavior formation of “gay”.

\(^2\) **Gender** means masculinity and feminity. Men have to be strong and man, while women have to be gentle, sensitive,
and weak as in social norm.
occurred during the childhood to teenage from the curious, inquisitive, and lust (Bee and Somsak (alias), Interview: 2008). It is different from the behavior formation in masculine gay. There would be the change point or turning point unintentionally change heterosexual to homosexual, for instant, the interest in body or muscles of men. It is the important condition changing heterosexual to homosexual (Vee (alias), Interview: 2009). The disappointment in heterosexual, the closeness with men friends changing their feeling to love (Peat (alias), Interview: 2009). Sexual violation or sexual activities of men or gay are the conditions changing someone to be homosexual from the attraction of sex (Ngeck (alias), Interview: 2009). It is in line with the vision of Phirakan (pen name, 2008: 2-3) who explained that childhood experience affect the homosexual behavior.

From the data above, the author believes gay formation is caused by the environmental context and the socioculture assemble, but could not apparently conclude what arise from anytime period.

Most feminine and masculine gay give the reason they are unable to love women because of the annoyance from some women habits, the disappointment from the heterosexual love, even the compassionate of motherhood (Vee, Bee and Somsak (alias), Interview: 2009). However, there are some gay which can have sex with women even though they are homosexual (Bic (alias), Interview: 2008). Even if the behavior formation of gay arise from whatever conditions, the important things make gay feel different from the other men in society are the otherness and the marginality of gay.

**Gay and gay definition** At the first stage, most feminine gay feel they are different from the other men because of the otherness of gay. They begin with the feminine behavior and were isolated from the society which they often join the group of friends who are women or gay. They inadvertently perceive this behavior until the society construct the meaning of gay for them and completely accept the definition of homosexuality by the discourse of the social. As we will see, gay often construct the new identity of “gay” and define some terms, including transvestism, pimp or gay, Gay King, Gay Queen, shemale, bisexual, etc., which depend on the environmental context, situation, and time to fight, negotiate with the heterosexual discourse. Hall (1996) described that the otherness (this implies “gay”) which contrary to the discourse (heterosexual) could negotiate, questions, or reject the social position being forced into. This may construct and replace by a new identity. Moreover, most masculine gay will begin to define themselves as gay when they feel their behavior is different from the other common men. However, the definition of gay cannot be certainly defined by themselves because they only know they prefer men or they are gay. The complete indication of masculine gay is the emotionless in heterosexuality.

**“Gay or men”: the meaning controversy of masculinity** Due to the social institution, such as, family and educational institute always construct the otherness to people with sexual different from social norm, especially feminine gay. They are always in the otherness and the marginality of their men or gay friends. This make gay to accept or surrender to these power discourses, although they have ever fight these. Masculine gay define themselves by the raising and educational knowledge from social institutions making gay to agree with these power discourses. However, they keep the feelings hidden deep waiting for the opportunity to release themselves mostly in personal spaces for gay. These spaces are the space of controversy and negotiation between the power discourse of heterosexual and homosexual with the force of heterosexual concept from common Thai society. This allows gay and other people in society to think gay have unmanly gender. The more they express unmanly, the more they have gay identity. Not gay are only in the otherness of society, but they also construct the otherness to some men by construct the meaning of “gay” to all men that similar to gay. This behavior is the negotiation to the power discourse of heterosexual by increasing the sexual partner leading to the more participation of
homosexual men in society. As de Certeau described that this negotiation is not the destruction to switch the relation of power, but is the procedure the weaker use the opportunities to take the advantage of benefits from the stronger (Highmore, 2002: 154-159).

2. “Social space” the space where “gay” express themselves.

In Thai society, self-expression of “gay” is the anxious behavior for homosexual. The otherness and marginality of gay make them to be confused and worried. If gay can find out the strategies to fight and negotiate the dominant discourse and heterosexual discourse, they can live in society by concealing their homosexual identity or can choose to express their identity only in some spaces. The author divided self-expression of “gay” identity in social space into 2 types, including public social space and personal social space. They can be classified into 2 subtopics, which are personal space, personal life with family: alternation of identity and self-expression of “gay” in “public space”.

2.1 Personal space

Personal life with family: alternation of identity

“Home” or “family” is considered as a personal space for people in common, but for some gay they cannot express some identity out. They have to express their identity only in their bedroom or the space without anyone in the family. It is the space for gay to alternate the identity.

Some feminine gay express their feminine identity in their home as their family accept it even with intentionally or unintentionally expression. They express this identity to women rather than to men in the family because of the more compatible behavior of them to women (Dep (alias), Interview: 2009). There are some feminine gay, however, are difficult to express the identity because they are afraid of the rejection from their family, so they negotiate by disguising themselves. Moreover, most feminine gay express this secret to female rather than male because of the more compatible behavior of them to women (Tu (alias), Interview: 2009). Although feminine gay have to conceal their homosexual identity, they may have the bisexual indeed. From this concept, feminine gay may not be able to conceal their identity, so they express the feminine identity to society. For masculine gay, they conceal homosexual identity by expressing themselves as men who are unmarried in some ways, such as, being silent, declining, or talking about their girlfriends to the family. But this homosexual identity may be expressed by the oppression of the family. They may be frustrated, worried and try to find the ways to express the identity in personal space or the space for gay.

“Personal life” relates to the life with couples, spouses, and family.¹ The spouses of heterosexual are the way to have family by marrying with women, have the married status, and may also be father. There are few gays spend their life with their homosexual spouses like the heterosexual. Most gay have the opinion about gay love that it cannot last long because of the disappointment in love. The relationship of feminine gay with their lovers is formed in personal space or specific space for gay by talking or chatting with

¹ Social space - the space gay can live in and have relationship to the others, including family, home or habitat, educational space, workspace, sport center, gay sauna, gay bar, etc.

² Personal space is the private space that person who “own” their space can freely enter or leave; home, bedroom, etc.

³ Alternation of identity means that gay choose to express or conceal the “gay” identity in personal space, personal life, and members in family, which similar to the alternation between masculine identity; masculinity and heterosexual with gay identity; feminity and homosexual.

¹ The implication of family is not the family with father, mother, or relatives but it implies family with spouses or lovers.
people in these spaces, such as, the internet world, or the accidental conversation. They would express the homosexual identity in the personal space, for instant, bedroom and express the feminine identity when they certain that their lover could accept this identity. Some feminine gay are not necessary to conceal both feminine and homosexual identity to their couples because of the society vision that both identities are together, but they independently express their identity in personal space. The power of feminine identity would be decreased. For masculine gay, they conceal the homosexual love in the public space, but they express their homosexual identity in the personal space or specific space for gay. Some gay have last long love because they love and understand each other.

2.2 Identity-expression of “gay” in “public space”

Workspace We often see the “gay” identity expressed from feminine gay rather than from masculine gay. Some feminine gay express the feminine identity which implicitly related to the homosexual identity from the social concept that feminine identity would be along with homosexuality. Moreover, feminine identity also related to the happiness, fun, and joy. The multiple identities overlap in the same situation. Feminine gay would express homosexual identity in personal space or specific space even in workspace (Ree (alias), Interview: 2009). From the observation, the feminine identity would be mainly expressed to the women colleagues that accept this identity and rather be familiar to gay than men. Some feminine gay may not be able to express the feminine identity in all spaces of workspace. For example of Bee who is a teacher in a primary school, has to conceal his homosexual identity. He has to speak with low voice instead of sharp voice, the majestic posture instead of the delicate posture. He feels pressured to conceal his real identity (Bee (alias), Interview: 2009). The “gay” identity would be released in the personal space or specific space for homosexual outside the workspace, including sauna, gay bar, internet café, etc. Most of the masculine gay conceal the homosexual identity in the workspace, both of public and personal workspace. Furthermore, some gay would usurp the meaning construct of heterosexual identity by defining the others in workspace to fight, negotiate to the workspace society and themselves.

Romjumpa (2002: 38-190) and Jackson (1999: 226-242) described that Thai public media always presents the deterioration of gay, such as, gay homicide from jealousness, gay are AIDs carriers, gay sell themselves as a prostitute for the foreigner, or gay make the pornographic video clips by using the young actor. Moreover, Maneesrikum (2002) explained that gay are viewed as a social ill, so they express the identity only in the personal space. The social creation identity of gay would be expressed in public workspace and personal space, including office lounge, or bedroom. As brother Vee told about his identity in the workspace when he has already told his secret to his trusted colleague in the office lounge,

“...One of my colleagues knows that I am a gay. I told this to him only. He is so nice that he gives me the advice without the any objection. He told me I am a good man and he does not mind my homosexual identity. ...And many of my colleagues said that they feel good with me as I can entertain

1 Public space is a social space anyone can freely enter or leave without regulations to pass through that space. The public spaces in this article include workspace, university space, gay sauna, and gay bar.
them. They also told me that I have the positive and creative thinking, and have good human relation. My colleagues like me as I entertain them. But we have to work hard. I sometimes warn them to work hard, but they understand me. After work we are friends. I am a supervisor of production line. I have to reach the goal of work. I can create the new things for work....when I want to change job, my boss told me he would up my salary because he want me to work here. My colleagues ask me to work here as I can entertain them...” (Vee (alias), Interview: 2009).

From the identity of brother Vee who have good human relations. He is also hard-working and delightful that most of his colleagues love him. This shows that the adaptation to society and the intelligence to solve the problems are more important than the “abnormal” identity and allow gay to live happily in society. The meaning construct for his identity is creative which good gay would negotiate the discourse of society defined gay as the “bad” or “deteriorated moral” person.

**University** is the social space for higher education of gay from the interaction of gay students with the others, including the professor, heterosexual friends, and even gay friends. Gay would be constructed the “otherness” from the social norm, so they have to impersonate the identity\(^1\) in university. They have to fight, negotiate with the heterosexual discourse and the powerful of being men and women discourse. Most feminine gay would not express their identity while they were studying among all the students and the professor, but they would express it outside the class, such as, lunch time, break time. Their identity would be expressed to their close friends, mostly women and feminine gay. Some feminine gay unintentionally expressed their feminine identity which the others can conclude that they are gay. There are some feminine gay express “gay” identities in all the university spaces. For masculine gay, they intend to conceal their identity when they are in public space of the university and express the strength and boldness of men, the heterosexual identity to their friends, although some gay wear gay style clothes. They would express their own identity in the personal space; internet world, bedroom, and when they are with their gay couples (Pon (alias), Interview: 2009).

**Gay sauna and gay bar** is the public space which has become the personal space for gay. It is constructed the meaning of the space for homosexual to have their sexual relationship. It is also the space for the temporary relationship, one night sex, for gay (Fog (alias), Interview: 2009). But it may be space for some gay to seek for their love (Vee (alias), Interview: 2009). Furthermore, gay-sauna is the space for gay to extremely express their identity, especially having sex with men. Both feminine and masculine gay need the homosexual identity expression to attract the other homosexual. It is the consequence of the discourse from the West that gay prefer men with masculine identity than feminine identity, some gay may build their body muscles by exercising to attract the other gay in gay-sauna. On the other hand, gay bar is the space for most feminine gay acting as masculine gay at the first time, when the time pass, they get drunk and dance. The more they dance, the more they express their feminine identity. Some gay bars have the stages for gay to dance alone, with couples, or with gay groups. This activity can group gay friends altogether for relaxing and finding their loves. Moreover, gay unintentionally make love; hug, kiss, touch, and fondle to

\(^1\) **Impersonation of identity** means gay choose to express or conceal the “gay” identity in the university.
each other. It can be apparently observed when the bar is closed and gay do not care to make love with their couples while walking out from the bar.

The data from the gay sauna and gay bar shows that gay groups change the public space to personal space or private space for gay communities because they cannot independently reveal themselves in general public spaces. Therefore, they negotiate by constructing the meaning of gay sauna and gay bar as the space for homosexual men.

From the study of the meaning constructed and its identity of “gay” in social space, it can be concluded that “gay” identity which is different from the social norm, including feminine and homosexual identity. The meaning of gay depends on the definitions in any situation or social context and at anytime. The discourse from the society makes the otherness and the marginality of gay through the social institutions, such as, family, educational institute, group of friends, or media. For the expression of “gay”, they attempt to conceal “gay” identity in public spaces and express themselves out as gay in the personal space or the gay communities. They negotiate with the heterosexual discourse by any strategies, such as, the formation of new behavior, taking part into the power space (heterosexual) and taking the advantage to the opportunities.

Recommenda
tions

General recommendations The study of the meaning constructed and its identities of “gay” in social can make the new dimension and perspective of fighting, negotiation of gay to society. Moreover, it can point out the dignity of humanity and the equality in ability to the others in society. Therefore, the readers need to open their own perspective to receive the method, analysis, and discussion of this study they can see and understand the lifestyle and identity of gay. In the different viewpoint from another research, it can open the attitude and vision of gay to recognize that some gay may be troubles of the society. Moreover, the research may be the reflection of gay identity through any social space even it is good or bad identity. If gay create the good things for the society, it will be peaceful because of the good image of gay.

Recommendations for further research The further study should scope more dimensions, such as, gay in the political sciences, economical or cultural sciences, or the dimension in morality and ethics of gay.

References


Interview


