



Research Article

Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Minorities through Romance TV Drama Series with LGBT Characters: The Voices of College Students in Thailand

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Abstract

This study focused on the views of 77 current college students in Thailand on gay-related romantic TV dramas and their social impact. The survey aims to determine how gay-related romantic dramas affect the understanding of and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in Thai society and to propose solutions based on the results. The survey results suggest that gay-related romantic dramas may have an impact on social perceptions and tolerance toward LGBTQ+ people. Positive opinions emphasized that the dramas promote understanding between different generations and cultures and provide opportunities to accept LGBTQ+ identities. On the other hand, negative opinions expressed concern that the dramas are removed from reality and do not adequately reflect the real situations and issues of LGBTQ+ people. Based on these findings, this study provides valuable suggestions for improving LGBTQ+ public awareness and understanding. These recommendations aim to enhance public awareness and comprehension of LGBTQ+ matters, with the understanding that the students' voices are crucial in this process.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Romantic TV Series, Diversity Representation, Media, College Students, Thailand

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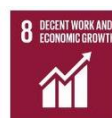
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1. Introduction

TV dramas depicting male-male romance are popular in Asian countries, including Thailand, and have been studied from various perspectives. In Thailand, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) people were marginalized and discriminated against. However, the LGBTQ+ community in Thai society is growing, and LGBTQ+ people are more accepted than they were in the past (Kanchanabundhu & Trakulkasemsuk, 2022). The growing popularity of gay-related romantic TV dramas may be linked to promoting LGBTQ+ understanding. *Love Sick the Series*, a gay-related romantic drama produced in 2014, first gained popularity in Thailand (Uaychinda, 2023a). In 2016, *SOTUS*, a drama about a romance between two male college students, was produced and became popular in Thailand and other Asian countries and regions. Since 2016, many male-to-male romantic TV drama series have been produced every month. Due in part to this phenomenon, people in Thai society have come to value the existence of gender diversity, and Thai LGBTQ+ people are gradually becoming a mainstream part of society (Kanchanabundhu & Trakulkasemsuk, 2022). Recent Thai dramas have offered a more realistic and less romantic portrayal of LGBTQ+ people and the social problems they face, such as non-acceptance by conservative parents, issues related to marriage status, and bullying in school (Amaki, 2022; Uaychinda, 2023a). In this study, I surveyed the younger generation to determine the extent to which gay-related romantic TV drama series, which have become a social phenomenon in Thailand, have led to greater understanding among LGBTQ+ people.

2. Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how current college students in Thailand view the popularity of gay-related romance dramas on Thai television and the extent to which these social phenomena affect their perceptions of prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. In addition, the study will explore the extent to which Thai youth have basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues. The popular wave of gay-related romance dramas is expected to have a significant impact on college students' awareness and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. The phenomenon of globally popular gay-related TV drama series in Thailand is also expected to play an important role in increasing young people's understanding of LGBTQ+ people.

3. Theoretical Perspective

In this study, I will use cultivation theory to assess how people's repeated viewing of TV programs affects their attitudes and beliefs about society. The idea is that people who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that are often portrayed in television messages than those who watch less television (Gerbner, 1969). When positive references to LGBTQ+ people are included in gay-related romantic TV dramas, viewers may recognize LGBTQ+ people as valuable members of society and become more accepting of them. Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) also examined the impact of the media on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. They noted that role models in the media influenced their self-realization and the coming out process. As another example, Baudinette (2020) surveyed Filipino fans of gay-related romantic TV dramas in Thailand and noted that one bisexual respondent recognized that same-sex

relationships were possible by watching the dramas, which led her to come out as bisexual. Repeatedly sending positive content messages about LGBTQ+ to viewers through gay-related romantic TV drama series may help viewers develop positive attitudes toward the diversity of LGBTQ+ people and make them more accepting. This study will consider what specific positive messages to include and deliver to viewers in gay-related TV drama series.

4. Literature Review

Research on the impact of television and other media on attitudes regarding sexual and racial minorities is being conducted around the world. However, few studies have focused on how romantic TV dramas about gay male couples have affected the LGBTQ+ attitudes and awareness of Thai youth. One of the reasons why many LGBTQ+ people experience prejudice and discrimination is because many people still hold negative stereotypes and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. Broadcasting gay-related romantic TV dramas may be a solution to help people of all ages understand the isolation of LGBTQ+ people.

4.1 Promoting Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Minorities through TV Programs

Recently, sexual minorities have been featured frequently in TV programs, including entertainment programs and dramas. Żerebecki, Oprea, Hofhuis, & Janssen (2021) summarized various findings on how viewers' attitudes toward diversity have been changed through TV programs. Their research examined how TV influences viewers' attitudes toward diversity and the characteristics of TV programs that influence the formation of those attitudes.

There are both positive and negative aspects of the media's impact. Żerebecki et al. (2021) also point out that the media's frequent use of negative portrayals of minorities may reinforce existing prejudices against minorities and solidify negative views. Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGBs) complained about stereotypical characters and negative portrayals of LGBT people in TV programs. It is important to reduce negative portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters in the media to avoid contributing to prejudice and discrimination.

On the other hand, viewers' attitudes toward diversity may be more positive in TV programs that feature minorities in a positive way. Żerebecki et al. (2021) found that when viewers watch more TV programs featuring minorities, they tend to believe that minority people are more common in society and become more aware of the existence of sexual minorities. Also, Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) stated that sexual minority role models in TV shows and other media can comfort sexual minority people and help them see being a sexual minority in a more positive light. Increasing positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ people is an important step toward reducing prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people.

Żerebecki et al. (2021) also noted that little research had been done on stereotype change in the media and that this is a topic for future work. Since one of the causes of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is related to prejudice and stereotypes (Amaki, 2021), future research should also be conducted to determine whether there is a positive effect on the stereotypes people have through viewing gay-related romantic dramas.

5. Research Method

The subjects of this study were current college students at national and private universities in Thailand. I conducted an online survey on the impact of the wave of popular gay-related TV romance dramas on students' understanding of LGBTQ+ people. Because I did not have connections with many universities in Thailand, I asked university faculty who understood the purpose of this survey to complete the questionnaire with their students. The response time was approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The survey was conducted with 77 college students. The survey results revealed the extent to which students have basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues and commonalities and differences in college students' opinions and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. Some survey questions were designed based on the national survey on attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities (Kamano et al., 2016) and the survey on basic knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues for college students with study abroad experience (Amaki, 2021).

In the background of the questionnaire, I asked each student's gender and year in college. Next, I asked about basic knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues and whether respondents felt that LGBTQ+ people continue to face prejudice and discrimination in Thai society. The survey measured whether Thai society appears to be growing more tolerant of LGBTQ+ people in response to the wave of popular gay-related TV romance dramas.

In the last section of the questionnaire, the students were asked to enter open-ended comments, and a qualitative analysis was conducted. The question to the students was: What do you think? Given the wave of popular gay-related romantic TV drama series, do you think that Thai society is becoming more tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people?

All quantitative data were collected and analyzed using cross-tabulations in the SPSS system. Open-ended comments in the questionnaire were also processed using KH Coder text mining software (Higuchi, 2016; Higuchi, 2017). Co-occurrence networks were connected by the KH Coder software based on word patterns and frequencies extracted from respondents' comments. Strongly related words are connected by lines, as shown in the figure in the data analysis section below. In addition, participant information was kept confidential in this study. Each participant was given an identification number, and his or her name was not included in any of the data.

6. Quantitative Data Analysis

77 college students completed the survey. Of the 77, 41 were female students, 20 were male students, and 16 were "other" about gender. Respondents were categorized as female students, male students, and other students. I believe that students who chose "other" in the gender section of the questionnaire include both students who do not want to identify their gender and students who are LGBTQ+.

The respondents were asked questions regarding their basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues. They responded on a 4-point scale (1=totally disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=totally agree), with 4 representing "totally agree." Table 1 shows an analysis of the college students' responses on the agree-disagree scale.

For question 1, which asked whether students could distinguish between what it means to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and what it means to be transgender, the mean values were not as high as expected and were particularly low for male students. Many students indicated that they could not accurately distinguish among the meanings of LGBT terms. In question 2, when asked whether there is prejudice against LGBTQ+ people in Thai society, the mean values did not differ significantly. However, male students, in particular, indicated that they felt there was prejudice against LGBTQ+ people.

In question 3, when asked if they were familiar with the term “ally” to understand and support LGBTQ+ people, it was clear that few students in any group were familiar with the term. Furthermore, in the next question, question 4, which asked whether they would like to become LGBTQ+ allies and contribute to activities to create a society that is more comfortable for LGBTQ+ people to live in, most female and “other” students answered in the positive. On the other hand, many male students indicated that they do not want to become LGBTQ+ allies.

Table 1: Recognitions and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ People

Questions		Female Student	Male Student	Other Student	Total
1. Are you able to distinguish between what it means to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual and what it means to be transgender?	Mean	2.83	2.40	2.75	2.70
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.44	0.82	0.58	0.61
2. Do you think many people have a prejudice against LGBTQ+ people in Thailand?	Mean	2.90	3.05	2.94	2.95
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.58	0.89	0.93	0.74
3. Did you know that “ally” refers to a non-LGBTQ+ person empathizing with and wanting to associate with LGBTQ+ people?	Mean	1.76	1.35	1.75	1.65
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.89	0.75	0.93	0.87
4. Do you consider yourself someone who wants to be an LGBTQ+ ally and participate in activities to build a society where it is easier for LGBTQ+ people to make lives?	Mean	3.29	2.85	3.75	3.27
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.90	1.00	0.78	0.94
	Mean	1.22	1.95	1.31	1.43
	N	41	20	16	77

Questions		Female Student	Male Student	Other Student	Total
5. Frankly speaking, do you feel that you don't understand LGBTQ+ people or cannot accept same-sex relationships?	SD	0.65	0.99	0.87	0.85
6. If you found yourself attracted to someone of the same-sex even only once, do you think that would make you homosexual?	Mean	2.32	2.15	2.81	2.38
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	1.04	0.93	1.05	1.03
7. Do you think that the environment in which a person grows up has an influence on sexual orientation?	Mean	2.73	3.10	2.06	2.69
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	1.05	0.97	1.00	1.07
8. Do you think that homosexuality is considered a mental disorder?	Mean	1.10	1.85	1.38	1.35
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.44	0.99	0.81	0.76
9. Have you ever heard of or experienced discrimination, hazing, or bullying based on gender or against LGBTQ+ people on your campus?	Mean	2.61	2.50	2.56	2.57
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	1.18	1.00	1.03	1.09
10. Have you ever encountered LGBTQ-related material in your studies at your university?	Mean	3.02	2.85	3.19	3.01
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	1.08	1.23	1.11	1.12
11. Do you think college students need to learn about LGBTQ+ issues in class?	Mean	3.59	3.50	3.50	3.55
	N	41	20	16	77
	SD	0.63	0.83	0.82	0.72
12. Due to the wave of the popularity of romance TV drama series depicting the portrayal of gay male youths' everyday lives, do you think that	Mean	2.73	2.95	2.81	2.81
	N	41	20	16	77

Questions		Female Student	Male Student	Other Student	Total
Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people?	SD	0.90	1.05	0.75	0.90

In question 5, when asked frankly if they cannot understand LGBTQ+ people or accept same-sex relationships, all three groups of students had lower mean values, indicating that they have more understanding and accepting attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. But female and "other" students show a stronger attitude of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people than do male students.

In questions 6 through 8, students were asked about their basic knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues. In question 6, students were asked whether they thought that if they were ever attracted to someone of the same sex, that would make them homosexual. While the mean values for all three groups are low, it is clear that few students responded that they did not think this would make them homosexual at all. Furthermore, in question 7, students were asked whether they believe that the environment in which a person is raised influences sexual orientation. Compared to the two groups of female and "other" students, the mean value of male students was higher. Many male students believe that sexual orientation is influenced by the environment in which they were raised. In question 8, students were asked if they thought homosexuality was a mental disorder, and all three groups showed low mean values, indicating that many students understood that it was not a mental disorder. These questions suggest that students in the three groups have basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues. However, some students believe that the environment in which a person is raised influences their sexual orientation. There are many students, especially male students, who believe this to be the case, and it is important to educate them to convey basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues.

In questions 9 through 11, the students were asked to respond to questions about the current situation of bullying against LGBTQ+ people in college life and whether or not they have had classes that deal with LGBTQ+ issues. In question 9, when asked if they had heard of or experienced gender-based discrimination or bullying against LGBTQ+ people on campus, few students indicated that they had heard of or experienced these things. Question 10 also asked whether LGBTQ-related materials or topics had been covered in class, and while male students had a slightly lower mean value, female and "other" students indicated that they had taken such classes. Question 11 asked about the need for college students to learn about LGBTQ+ issues in their classes. All three groups have high mean values here, indicating that they believe that LGBTQ+ issues need to be taught in college classes.

As the final question in the survey, I asked whether Thai society is becoming more tolerant of LGBTQ+ people in response to the wave of popular gay youth romance TV dramas. The results show that the mean values for all three groups are roughly the same, indicating that they feel that there is a change in acceptance of LGBTQ+ people, partly due to gay-related TV dramas and other influences. In the next section, I analyze the students' thoughts and opinions by conducting a

qualitative study on the growing tolerance for LGBTQ+ people in Thai society and among young people through the increasing popularity of gay-related romance TV dramas.

7. Qualitative Analysis of the Data

77 undergraduate and graduate students responded to the open-ended questions in the survey. The students were asked to enter comments on whether Thai society appears to be growing more tolerant of LGBTQ+ people in the wake of the wave of popular gay-related romance TV drama series. Figure 1 shows a co-occurrence network graph based on the comments collected. Characteristic words in the same subgraph are connected by solid lines. When characteristic words co-occur in other subgraphs, words are connected by broken lines. Among the respondents, 7.8% were freshmen, 16.9% were sophomores, 13% were juniors, 15.6% were seniors, and 46.8% were graduate students. The majority of the groups were graduate students.

7-1 The View of Female Students

The quantitative data indicated that 68.3% of female students "somewhat" to "totally" agree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people. They believe that the broadcasting of gay youth romance TV drama series has led to positive perceptions of LGBTQ+ people in Thailand. I extracted three positive concepts from the female group of characteristic words extracted using KH Coder software.

The first concept is that there is a disparity in the level of understanding about LGBTQ+ issues between big cities and rural areas. While there are people of diverse genders and sexualities in large cities, for those living in rural areas especially, dramas help to promote LGBTQ+ understanding.

In Figure 1, "generation" is related to "younger," "watch," "acceptance," "live," "big," and "grow." Another group is that "awareness" is related to "mother," "person," "male," "phase," and "romance." Female students wrote these comments:

TV drama is still a niche market. Some people might say they accept LGBTQ+, but still gossip behind their backs. Some parents can accept someone's kids to be LGBTQ+ and say understanding words, but they cannot accept their own kids to be LGBTQ+. Also, I think those who live in Bangkok or a big city which has more varieties of genders have more acceptance for the LGBTQ+ than those who live in rural areas. And the increase in the younger generation, in a sense, also leads to more acceptance of LGBTQ+. Hence the acceptance seems to be growing, even though slowly, but constantly.

I am aware that gay-related romance drama series are becoming popular not only in Thailand but also in other countries. I do not watch the drama that much. People of the upper generation, like my parents, may not know about drama series, but my mother knows those drama series. Those who do not watch these drama series might have prejudice toward LGBTQ+. As for my opinion, I have many people who are LGBTQ+, and I like reading romance comic books, so I accept LGBTQ+ people. As for my mother's opinion, she usually says that LGBTQ+ is a person who is not natural in the world

mechanism. She does not dislike them and can interact with them in the same way she interacts with the same men and women.

The second concept is that viewing gay-related romantic TV dramas can make it easier for LGBTQ+ people to come out, prevent bullying against LGBTQ+ people, and change the mindset of drama viewers toward LGBTQ+ people. “Change” is related to “positive,” “negative,” “many,” “become,” “popular,” and “LGBTQ.” Female students wrote these comments:

I agree that the expansion of the drama market has brought about a change in Thai people’s behavior toward LGBTQ+, and more and more people are accepting LGBTQ+ in society. It has both positive and negative aspects. I see some positive aspects, and an example is that people feel free to come out or people stop bullying LGBTQ+, and LGBTQ+ become normal like straight people. On the other hand, in negative aspects, the TV drama series only show LGBTQ+ as entertainment, and they also broadcast sexual scenes. I think this is why some people do not want to be accepted as LGBTQ+.

Most Thai gay-related TV drama series are made by straights who mostly see gay-related romance drama, so some of them don’t really understand how it happens in the real LGBTQ+ communities and have a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+. However, we need to understand the current situation in which gay-related drama series are helping to promote LGBTQ+ understanding. Many people change their mindsets about LGBTQ+ people by watching the drama.

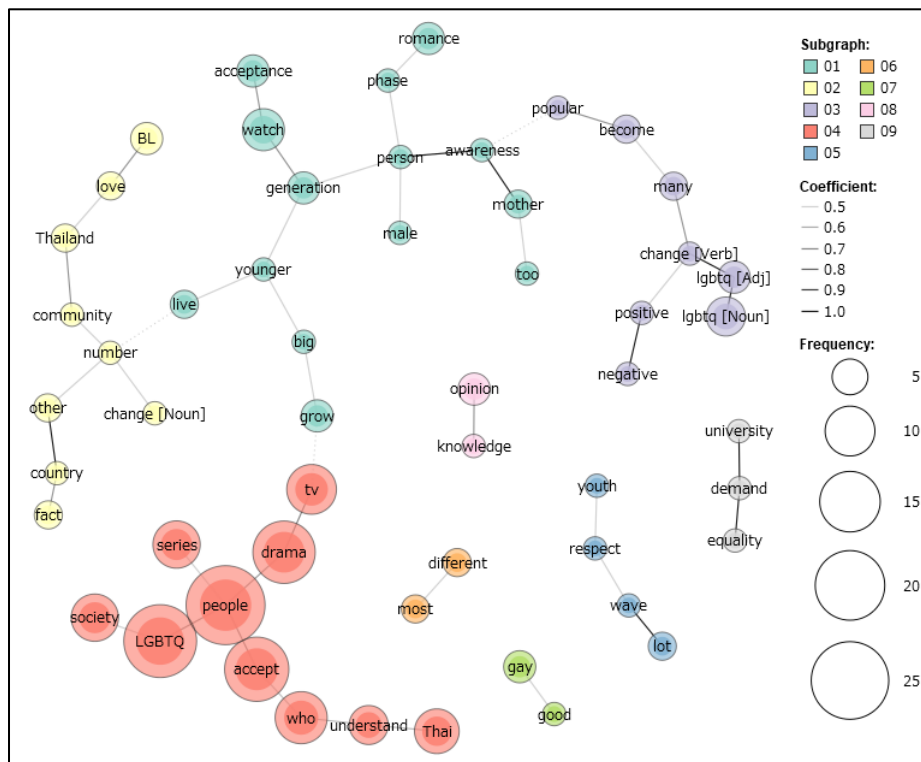


Figure 1: Co-occurrence Network of Female Students' Positive Responses

The third concept is that the content of current gay-related romantic TV drama series is aimed at young people and also contains content that is misleading about LGBTQ+ communities. By developing the drama content into something that the students' parents' generation would also want to watch, it would provide an opportunity for the parent's generation, who may have a prejudice against LGBTQ+ communities, to become more accepting of LGBTQ+ people. "Community" is related to "Thailand," "love," "number," "change," "other," and "country." Female students wrote these comments:

While many people in the older generation find it difficult to accept LGBTQ people, most young people understand and respect the gender and the choices of others through the wave of romantic TV dramas about LGBTQ. But because Thailand is an ageing society, many people cannot accept LGBTQ in this country, even if there are many TV dramas about sexual minorities. For me, I want to understand and respect LGBT people regardless of their sexual orientation.

I think romantic TV drama series play a part in normalizing same-sex relationships and LGBTQ people in Thailand. However, many of the roles of characters in the drama are played by straight men, which may convey misinformation about LGBTQ communities to viewers. In many drama series, the person who happens to fall in love with a person is the same sex. If the story were about a gay character falling in love with a gay person, the viewer's perspective on sexual minorities would be different.

However, 31.7% of female students "somewhat" to "totally" disagree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people at the peak of the popularity of gay-related romance drama series. As Figure 2 shows, four negative concepts were extracted from the female group of characteristic words.

The first concept is that gay-related drama is a fantasy story that is far removed from the reality of LGBTQ+ people, and the popularity of the dramas does not lead to understanding and support for LGBTQ+ people. In Figure 2, "fantasy" is related to "write," "straight," and "gay." Female students wrote these comments:

Many TV drama programs do not raise awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. Many of the drama's plots are based on the fantasies of its straight authors. They are not a member of LGBTQ+ communities. I do not think they understand the current situation in LGBTQ+ communities.

Gay-related romance TV drama series in Thailand is about a fantasy love story for straight people, and people enjoy watching the young gay couple's story. I don't think everyone supports LGBT people in their daily life.

The second concept is that the gay-related romance drama series are an opportunity to market young actors. Therefore, education about LGBTQ+ issues, not through dramas, is needed to promote understanding. In Figure 2, "LGBTQ+" is related to "support," "actor," "themselves," and "place." Female students wrote these comments:

Most people enjoy watching the romance of young gay people kissing each other, but many people, including actors themselves, do not support same-sex marriage. I feel like they watch gay couples as entertainment instead of an actual couple in the drama.

I don't think Thai people will accept LGBTQ+ people in the real world, unlike the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in TV dramas. The wave of popularity of the dramas is popular only within a small range, such as among the youth of Generation Z and Generation Y. Moreover, the dramas are not written by LGBTQ authors. Its dramas do not depict the real daily lives of LGBTQ people but rather the fantasy worlds that the authors themselves want to enjoy.

I don't think the popularity of gay-related TV dramas is a sign of a real movement of understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. Also, gay-related TV drama stories include sexual portrayals using popular male actors, which is one of the reasons for its popularity.

7-2 The View of Male Students

75% of male students "somewhat" to "totally" agree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people because of the popularity of romance TV drama series. Figure 3 shows two positive concepts that were extracted from the characteristic words in the male group.

The first concept is that TV drama series have influenced the way Thai people treat LGBTQ+ people, and this trend will continue to reduce discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. "Equality" is related to "demand," "accept," "way," and "media." Male students wrote these comments:

I agree on that. The TV drama series about LGBTQ+ shows a variety of representations of the LGBTQ+ community. I believe that generalization of LGBTQ+ people in the media will provide an easy way to integrate them into society and reduce the discrimination that occurs due to a lack of knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community.

I think that is just part of what makes Thai society open-minded about LGBTQ+ in Thai society. Protests continue at my university demanding gender equality, and my university has organized a parade in support of equality and demanding legally equal marriage. Thus, this reflects the fact that the laws of Thai society do not yet recognize it.

The second concept is that the influence of gay-related TV dramas in Thailand has led to the understanding and promotion of LGBTQ+ people, especially among the young generation, and that to promote understanding further, the Thai government and society need to consider education about LGBTQ+ people. "Thai" is related to "LGBTQ" and "people." Male students wrote these comments:

Thai people, especially the teens and working generation, understand and respect LGBTQ more than in the past. It will be even better if the Thai government takes various measures for LGBTQ people than it has done so far.

The more TV drama series we have in Thailand, the more open the Thai people will become to LGBTQ+ people. I have never felt uncomfortable with gay people in relationships. However, the issues facing LGBTQ+ people have become a global challenge and we need to consider how we should be educated.

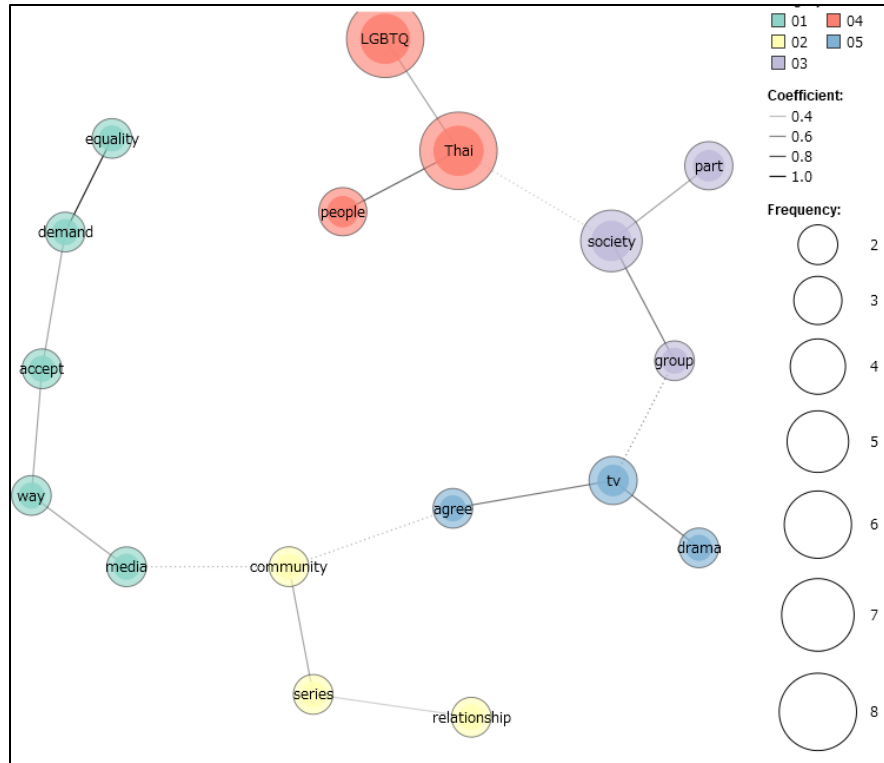


Figure 3: Co-occurrence Network of Male Students' Positive Responses

However, 25% of male students "somewhat" and "totally" disagree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people at the peak of the popularity of gay-related TV drama series. As Figure 4 shows, one negative concept was extracted from the male group of extracted characteristic words. The concept is that this drama series tells people that they live in a time when it does not matter who loves whom. "Drama" is related to "LGBTQ," "people," "media," "think," "love," and "tv." Male students wrote these comments:

The popularity of gay-related dramas has not necessarily had an impact on promoting acceptance of LGBTQ people. Some people see these media and discriminate more explicitly against LGBTQ people, probably because the media gives a clearer understanding of LGBTQ culture.

I don't think gay-related TV dramas are the main reason people are becoming more tolerant of LGBTQ people. The original topic could be people's freedom. For example, under the law, anyone can do anything and love anyone, even the same sex. And love is what people pay most attention to. So we can create a new topic, which we should call rights and love, whichever we want.

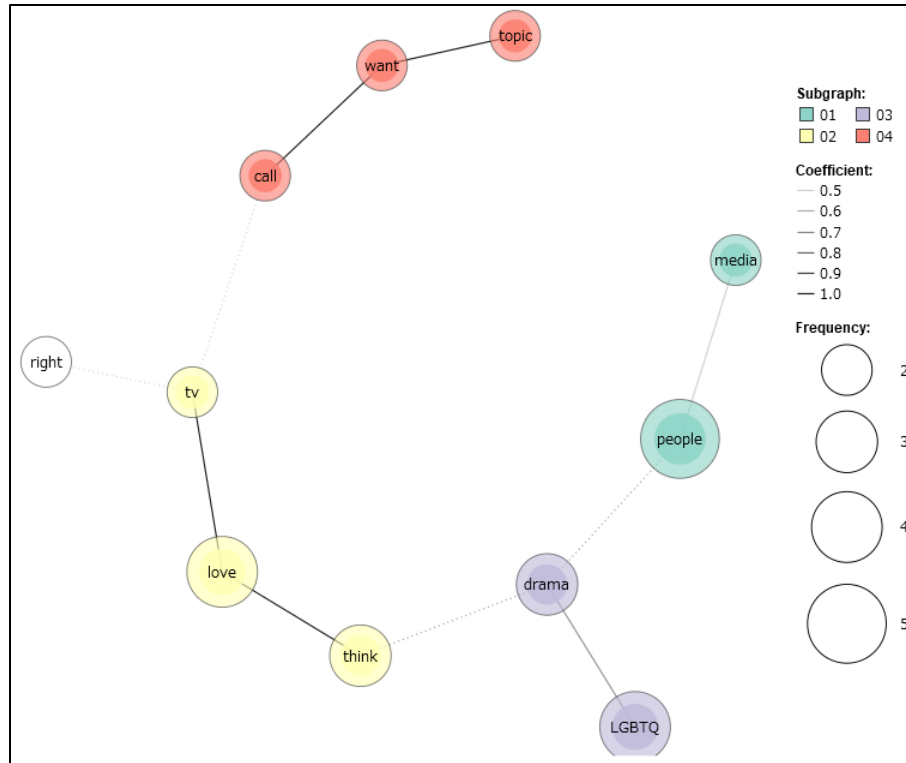


Figure 4: Co-occurrence Network of Male Students' Negative Responses

7-3 The View of Students who Chose "Other" for the Gender Option

62.6% of students who chose "other" for the gender option in the survey "somewhat" to "totally" agree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ people because of the popularity of romance TV drama series. As Figure 5 shows, two positive concepts were extracted from the "other" group of characteristic words.

The first concept is that the influence of gay-related TV dramas has led to the promotion of understanding of LGBTQ people and has positively affected their daily lives. As Figure 5 shows, "they" is related to "drama," "series," and "LGBTQ." Students who chose "Other" wrote these comments:

Thai TV dramas have reproduced many cases of romance between men, often in the form of unsuccessful relationships. While it is true that many gay couples in real life have successful relationships, there are also many cases where romance does not work out. However, there is one aspect of Thai TV drama media that reproduces and stigmatizes LGBTQ in a negative light.

I believe that young people today understand LGBTQ better than in the past. We meet them in our daily lives, but we should not hate them. We should love them for who they are. However, in TV dramas, actors do not realize this.

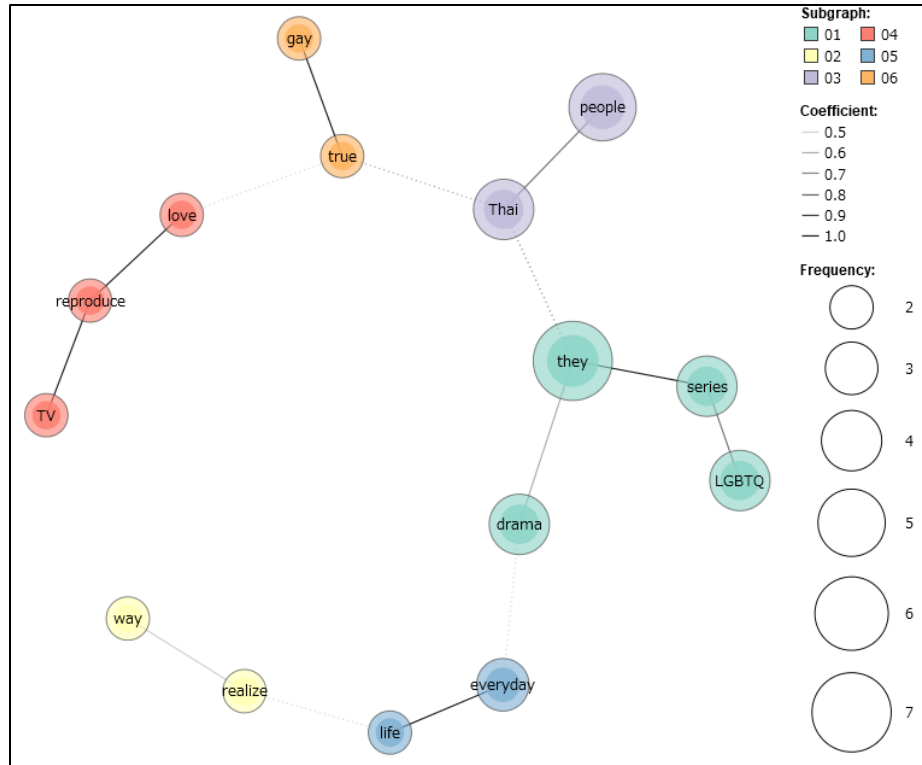


Figure 5: Co-occurrence Network of "Other" Students' Positive Responses

The second concept is that gay-related romance TV dramas are one opportunity to teach Thai people how to treat LGBTQ+ people and to understand what LGBTQ+ means. "Thai" is related to "people," "gay," and "true." Another group is that "TV" is "reproduce" and "love." Students who chose "Other" wrote these comments:

The gay-related TV drama series have become an indicator of understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand. However, in reality, most Thai people do not fully understand what LGBTQ+ is and for some reason still see it only as a commercial tool and entertainer.

In my opinion, these gay-related romance dramas teach Thai people how to treat LGBTQ+ people and what their identities are like.

However, 37.5% of "other" students "somewhat" and "totally" disagree that Thai society appears to be growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ+ at the peak of the popularity of gay-related drama series. As Figure 6 shows, two negative concepts were extracted from the "other" student group of extracted characteristic words.

The first concept is that the dramas are not about supporting the LGBT community but about two men falling in love. While some people like to watch the gay-related romance drama, they may not understand LGBT people in the real world. "LGBT" is related to "content," "community," "love," "Thailand," and "man." Students who chose "Other" wrote these comments:

Although there are TV dramas in Thailand that deal with LGBT people, the content of the TV dramas does not support LGBT communities. Most people like to watch two men fall in love. Moreover, most people like to see two men making love.

The people who watch the drama are a minority, so some of them may not be able to accept LGBTQ+ people. There are many homophobes in Thailand. That's why I think they cannot accept LGBTQ+ in TV dramas.

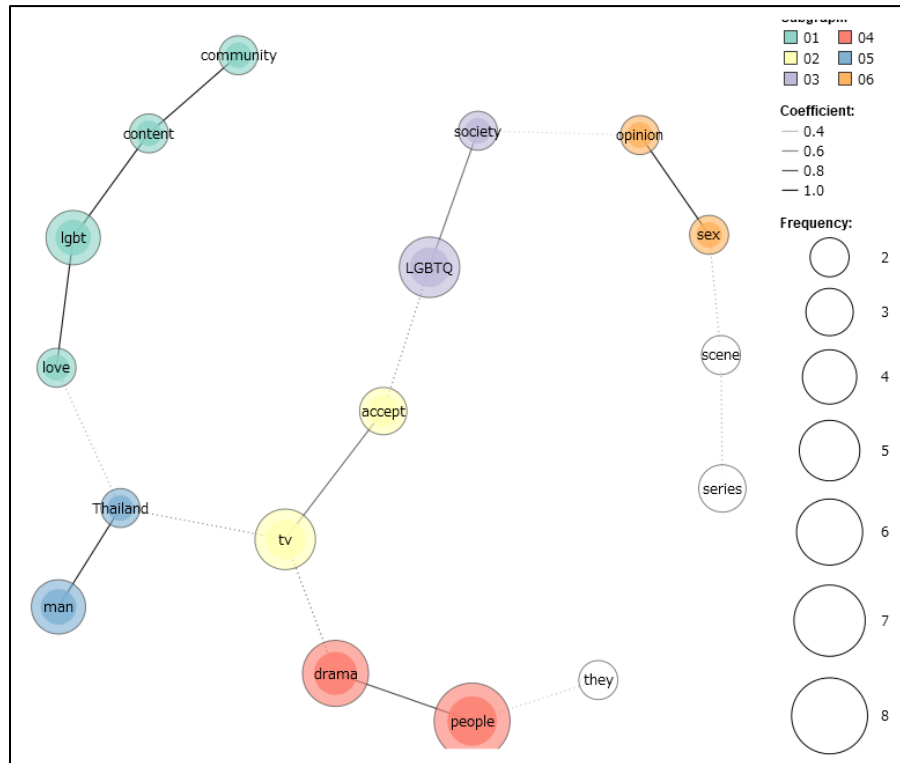


Figure 6: Co-occurrence Network of "Other" Students' Negative Responses

The second concept is that gay-related romance TV drama series often contain scenes of kissing and sex that are misleading to LGBTQ+ people. "LGBTQ" is related "society," "accept," "tv," "drama," and "people." Another group is that "opinion" is related to "sex," "scene," and "series." Students who chose "Other" wrote these comments:

In my opinion, I do not believe that Thai society is accepting of LGBTQ+ people because most of the content in the TV dramas is about sex and there are misconceptions about LGBTQ+ people.

I am a lesbian. In fact, the stories always have kissing and sex scenes. I find it very weird. My girlfriend and I have a normal life. We do not need those scenes anymore.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

Quantitative survey results show that, overall, few students can distinguish between LGBTQ+ identities, and many male students, in particular, are unable to make these distinctions. Furthermore, the results indicate that few students have knowledge about LGBTQ+ allies, but students who chose “other” in the gender section had a strong awareness of the roles an LGBTQ+ ally plays. Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) stated that LGB college students believe that it is important that their career role model be LGB or someone who supports LGB. The presence of LGBTQ+-supporting allies can be seen to play an important role in the career prospects of LGBTQ+ youth. The survey results also showed that few students have basic knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues, and many students, especially male students, believe that the environment in which they live affects their sexual orientation. All three groups recognized their own lack of knowledge and suggested that more LGBTQ-related classes should be included in their college courses.

The qualitative survey categorized respondents into three groups: female, male, and other students. The respondents expressed positive and negative thoughts and opinions on the question of whether Thai society is becoming more tolerant of LGBTQ+ people in response to the wave of popularity of gay youth romantic TV drama series. Positive comments and thoughts from the three groups can be summarized as follows. Gay-related dramas play an important role in narrowing the gap in understanding LGBTQ+ people between large cities and rural areas and promoting understanding among different generations and cultures. At the same time, they provide opportunities for LGBTQ+ people to embrace their identities and come out, helping to reduce discrimination in society at large. They also serve as an opportunity to stimulate discussion about LGBTQ+ understanding and its importance in Thailand, as well as to promote greater education by the government and society.

One summary of the positive comments was that the gay-related drama series would encourage LGBTQ+ people to come out. The media plays a significant role in helping LGBTQ+ youth find their own identities, so accurate information must be provided. As an example, a study shows lesbian and gay youth use a variety of media to learn about lesbian and gay identity (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). Also, in addition to love stories between two men, the dramas depict social issues faced by LGBTQ+ youth and the struggles faced by those in the LGBTQ+ community (Uaychinda, 2023b). Viewers of these dramas in the LGBTQ+ community believe they are a powerful tool to help others see life from their perspective and help conservative parents understand and accept their children as they are (Uaychinda, 2023b). Uaychinda (2003b) states that some gay-related dramas include reality as well as fantasy. By incorporating not only fantasy but also the realities faced by LGBTQ+ people, many people may consider same-sex relationships to be normal.

Next, the following is a summary of the negative opinions of the three groups who believe that the growing popularity of gay-related romance TV drama series has not made Thai society more tolerant of LGBTQ+ people. There are suggestions that the drama series is fantasy and that their disconnect from reality does not lead to LGBTQ+ support, that the self-promotion of actors is more important than LGBTQ+ education, and that the dramas do not provide accurate information about the LGBTQ+ community and may create misunderstandings. There is also a

view that while popular among young people, the drama series is not well received by Thai society as a whole, and that while the dramas can clarify LGBTQ+ culture, they may conversely also promote discrimination. Furthermore, there are also criticisms that the drama series merely portray romance and are not supportive of the LGBTQ+ community and that the sexualized portrayals in the dramas may be misleading.

The male respondents talk about gay-related dramas more generally than the female respondents and then comment on things beyond the dramas, like protests and so on. The female respondents are more informed about the dramas and more skeptical of their positive influence. Also, those who think negatively about the popularity of the dramas believe that they do not reflect the reality of LGBTQ+ people and are mostly a tool to market young actors. Ishida (2015) and Baudinette (2020) state that gay-related romantic TV dramas were sometimes criticized for not representing the reality of the gay male experience. Through the dramas, it is important to convey not only the fantasy but also the reality faced by gay people. Also, as one of the key factors driving the popularity of gay-related TV dramas, Uaychinda (2023a) states that it serves as a gateway for aspiring young actors to gain fame and popularity. Some of the respondents to this survey pointed out that many of the actors in the dramas are not supportive of LGBTQ+ people. When the series ends, many fan clubs are formed for the actors, and it may be inevitable that the dramas are seen as a gateway to success for young actors and their future careers.

Based on the students' positive and negative comments and opinions about whether the growing popularity of gay-related romance dramas has increased their understanding of LGBTQ+ people, I would like to propose the following five solutions.

The first is to use gay-related dramas as an educational tool to implement educational programs that promote accurate information and understanding about the LGBTQ+ community. This will include opportunities for students to reflect on the drama's themes through group discussions and workshops that will take place after watching dramas. The second is producing content that promotes inter-regional understanding of LGBTQ+ issues. In rural areas with small populations, communities are small, and once a person comes out, rumors quickly spread, potentially making living difficult. In the production of gay-related dramas, there is a need to focus on stories and characters that narrow the gap in understanding of LGBTQ+ people between urban and rural areas and promote inter-regional understanding.

Third, it is necessary to emphasize the social responsibility of actors and producers. Gay-related drama actors and producers need to be encouraged to focus on social contributions rather than self-promotion and to actively participate in supporting and raising awareness of the LGBTQ+ community. Their social responsibility should allow them to take advantage of dramas' influence more positively. Fourth, sexual scenes may be one of the reasons for the popularity of the dramas. When producing gay-related dramas, attention should be paid to sensitive portrayals. Since viewers of various age groups are likely to watch the dramas, special attention should be paid to sensitive themes and depictions in the production of the dramas. Appropriate representation, taking into account cultural backgrounds and regulations, can also help avoid misunderstanding about LGBTQ+ people. Educators need to consider how gay-related dramas, including sexual scenes, should be successfully used in sexuality education.

Fifth, there is a need for collaboration with government. Through work with the Thai government and educational institutions, gay-related dramas can be integrated into educational programs and awareness campaigns to strengthen efforts to increase understanding of the LGBTQ+ community. The popularity of gay-related romance TV drama series in Thailand has resulted in recent moves toward the legalization of same-sex marriage in the country (Uaychinda, 2023b). More effective educational activities can be developed with support and guidance from the government. By implementing these solutions in a comprehensive way, gay-related drama series can become more meaningful as content and help promote understanding and support of the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand.

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