

## THE STUDY OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN BOARDING SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** This article is part of a qualitative research. The purpose is to study the problems and challenges faced by transgender students. The research was based on the theory of stigmatization of Link and Phelan (Link & Phelan: 2001) as a framework of this research. The main tool to collect and analyze data was using structured interviews with 3 transgender students in a state school in Chiang Mai who defined themselves as “Tom”. However, this was not a participatory observation, instead observation of social behavior of a group of transgender students who define themselves as “Tom” took place in the school by their teacher. The study showed that transgender students who define themselves as “Tom” faced bullying in the forms of verbal bullying, physically bullying, and Tom hate groups within the school. This made transgender students into the subject of ridicule and being sidelined from the large group activities. Which can lead to severe the depression. This research gathered information about the challenges and consequences that transgender students face. Within such findings proper training is entailed. And clear penalties can be imposed since the school has no policy to prevent bullying of students seen as a transgender yet.

**Keywords:** transgender student, stigma, boarding school

### **Introduction**

“Transgender” refers to people who do not identify with their biological sex and may or may not be in a state of transition to the opposite sex through hormone treatment or sex reassignment surgery. These people feel guilty or dissatisfied with their existing sex or do not want to express the gender they were born to. When discussing the acceptance of transgender people in Thai society today the image regarding sex will be free and open to a third sex or alternative sex.

As can be seen in general, where the third sex or alternative sex does not have to hide. However, in reality, Thai society still has areas that are blocked and

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do not accept these groups of third-sex or alternative sex. Although there is acceptance It is not conditionally accepted. This situation can provide a good solution to creating understanding and more acceptance of gender diversity in Thai society. Which is necessary for society to be aware of because no matter which gender everyone is equally valuable and has human dignity. When we look at all people equally and live in society together and honor each other the phenomenon of bullying and bias about gender differences will gradually be exhausted or fade.

Especially in the school area, according to the research of “Bullying in LGBT Group of Thai High School” (Plan Organization International, Unesco and Mahidol University : 2013) Some female students who define themselves as Tom give information that many times they were faced with a male student who teased them, by saying, “Tom, maybe it’s just a phase you are going through?” Female students who call themselves “Dee” often heard taunting from the gossip of the male students that “The genuine thing is better than artificial.” According to the above research, it is only some transgender students that define themselves as Tom. Withing the transgender groups “Toms” seem to receive the greatest level of sexual and gender discrimination at school inspite of it being a place that should be safe and free from violence.

Even the representation of gender diversity mentioned in the textbook, teaching sexuality between men and women and of the queer (Queer), it appears that queer’s sexual behavior and identity are not met the norms of society. Punnapon Theppanich (2016: 135-137) cited in the study of Nerida & Peter (1999) which indicates the modern sex of transgender people that is unacceptable in society. As a result of the creation of knowledge that meets the needs of the national state, which uses two-gender norms (men and women) and the idea of “Being Thai” is a criterion that makes sex in Thai society a matter of politics in which the state has the power to divide people and define these rules. This makes it clear that equality in which the state intends to appear in the Thai sex education model that ignores the importance of alternative sex. Since, the Thai state has made homosexual relationships (Homosexuality) become a deviance and guilty in society. There is also a definition and a limitation that indicates the refusal to recognize.

The research report to review sexuality education in Thai high schools and vocational education, in regard to neglect of teaching on sexual diversity, of students surveyed found that about 10-15 percent identified themselves as having sexual identity in the form of female and female, male and male, or transgender. However, the findings from the survey of students and teachers Including qualitative findings suggesting that current sexuality education also

ignores sexual diversity issues, such as safe sex for same-sex couples and bullying of students of various sexual groups. Thus, teaching this issue in a negative way and only in accordance with the main attitudes in society often reinforces the misunderstanding of stigma, inequality and violence. This may be the result of the guidance, indicators, and core learning materials in the learning strand, health education and physical education in 2008. Also using the term “sexual deviation” in the mention of sexual diversity may lead to stigmatization of students of the same sex group and transgender people. Another part may be the result of training or support activities for teachers of sexuality education that still lack subtlety on gender diversity issues. In addition, safe sexual teaching is often focused on teaching only male and female couples. Causing students who have sex with same-sex couples to feel they are not receiving information they can actually use. As well as in the sense of trust and safety in the classroom, sexuality education classes for all sex classes are combined. Also makes students shy when learning about the topic of sex “opposite sex” as well. The distrust and shame of some students may be caused by mockery that occurs in the class. Therefore, the teacher must have skills in explaining to students to understand the dangers of mocking friends. From the survey of UNICEF Thailand (2012:38). In terms of, of organizing sex education classes to be safe areas found that 73.2 percent of students answered that they had teased or mocked while studying. This number responds that teachers sometimes ban mockery, up to 55.2 percent, while 40 percent of students say that teachers prohibited teasing at all times, 4.8 percent of students responded that teachers do not ban mockery at all. (2012:38) The Ministry of Education conducted qualitative research. The research report to review sexual education in Thai high schools and vocational schools also found that there was teasing in the classroom. However, some teachers understand that it is normal. Therefore, allowing mimicry in the sex education class to become normalized and another problem has found the atmosphere in the classroom is not friendly. Especially for students with gender diversity more sensitive to being teased. Hence, this group of students in many schools did not dare to ask and comment for fear of being mocked by friends.

From the above mentioned, it is thought that sex stigma situation is considered part of the process in creating a “marginalized person”, pushing to create otherness. And unfairly separating the minority from the mainstream of society causes these people to lack bargaining power and still be seen as a problem (Surachai Wankeaw: 2003).

In general, when talking about gender in the society, equality is limited to heterosexual men and women. Gender differences or gender factors affect the

interactions and the way exopinions are expressed between females and males. In addition, social factors or perceptions about social norms about gender are also considered important variables (Montira TaMuang: 2012). In which most Thai societies still do not accept transgender people and see them in a negative way. It is objectionable if the child has a leaning behavior or tends to be opposed to the gender considered accepted by people in society especially at school age. Often after being mocked by friends many people were pressured by parents and teachers to change their behavior back to their own gender. Data from in-depth interviews in the research found that there is still a stigma about sexual diversity in transgender people. Including self-stigma and stigma from schools in the school as well. For this reason, people who have gender identity that is beyond the gender norms of society, such as same-sex lovers or transgender people, are branded by people in the society as an abnormal group. Sex outside the gender norm becomes a problem when people in society do not accept the sexuality of these people. In the area of school itself, this causes unfair practices and problems in the schools. These reasons show that people in society that do not understand that fundamental rights and multicultural sexuality is not limited to just in the classroom. Therefore, teachers considered schools to play an important role in socialization and providing sexual understanding to students. As well as build relationships for students to understand the opposite sex and same-sex friends, and create gender equality not limited to male and female only. This includes people who have gender identities that are beyond the norms of social sex such as gay, bi-sexual, or transgender people to gain equal knowledge and skills in living.

### **Objectives**

To study the problems and challenges that transgender students define themselves as “Tom” must face.

### **Benefit of Research**

Made aware of the stigma of sexual, transgender students in schools. And understand the nature of the stigma and gender identity in schools. Well aware of the challenges and consequences of transgender students. Faced with the stigma.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Stigmatization***

Stigmatization can translate into Thailand, several awards include stigma (Alongkorn Pariwootipong, 2010: 23) stigma is a stigma that meant the medals or the feeling that a seal or a sin which is deeply embedded in the mind forever. Stigma is socially constructed. Means the person is seen as a social disorder. There is a difference there is a way that deviates from others in society or that

the seal is not complete. This unusual style is stamped on the body of the person being a social stigma. As a result, society viewed the person as a slave or those with a criminal (Goffman, 1963) The study of Goffman (1963), the classification of the stigma out of the following three categories.

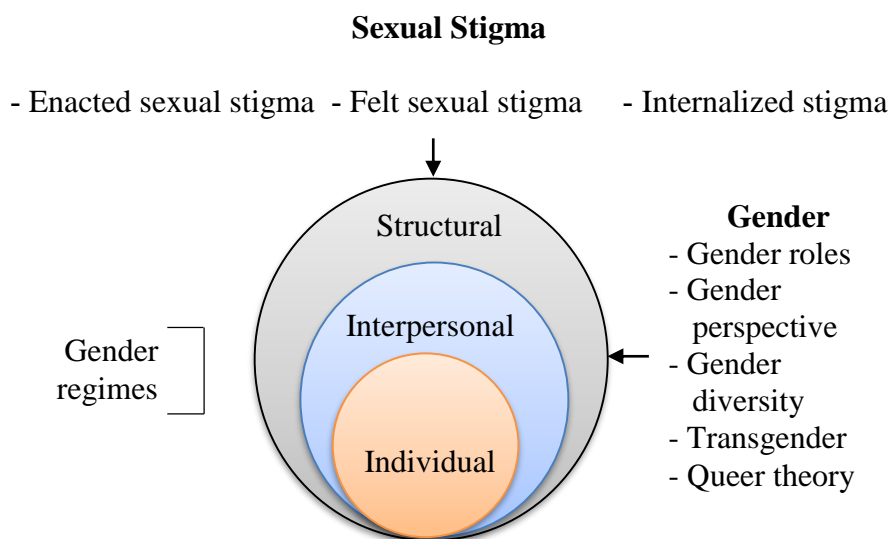
- 1) Stigmatization caused by physical characteristics. Refers to the physical characteristics that are different from the usual norm. Physical imperfections, such as guilt, sex, guilt is a chronic disease, etc. In this way it can be changed by the recognition of a person or patient or others.
- 2) Stigma or stigmatization resulting from an unblemished character refers to the nature of personality, abnormal deviations from the standard of a society, such as drug addiction. This behavior does not match their gender. Chronic alcoholics Psychiatric patients sexually transmitted infection and so on.
- 3) Stigma or discrimination due to race or prejudice. Guilt occurs when people compare. It found that others have impaired the norms of their own creation. What happens when a group of people aware of their own race or ethnicity and so on.

The concept of stigma that has been developed by various researchers. Related to the characteristics of individuals who are different from others. In this manner, by referring to external attributes. And interior features which result in the person being valuable (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998) In other words, the stigma is the relationship between quality negative. Or feature someone or something or the image many people have of a particular type of person. Or what is often true in reality (Goffman, 1963).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Trying to understand the study of transgender students in school-related stigma circumstances. Levels and dimensions that must be considered.

This theory focuses on gender differences and gender identity is built through the creation of gender boundaries that occur in everyday life. Through experience and interaction, it may be said that the gender differences are often made with a corporate and institutional hierarchy. The cause of the gender inequality. The guidelines on gender specific. This understanding of the guidelines to determine gender identity will make us understand that the recognition of the fundamental differences between men and women (gender, etc.) that were set up mainly in the life of society, however.



**Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework of This Study***

### **Method and Procedure**

This is a study-oriented evaluation by using the principles of Qualitative Research to collect information related to problems and challenges that cross-gender students define themselves as “Tom” face. The researcher’s procedure is as follows:

The first step: The researchers understand the meaning of the word “stigma” due to the effects of that stigma. It is the part that makes cross-gender students, who defines themselves as “Tom”, excluded from the society in school or be alienated from school society until becoming a marginalized person. The researcher can have a better understanding when they know the various meanings related to education issues.

The Second step: The introduction of concepts, theories, and the explanations of sexual stigma that occur with Transgender people to explore / examine / consider various dimensions related to educational aspects.

The Third Step: Apply theories and ideas that describe the concepts of gender and stigma. Continue to see the reflection of gender bias towards transgender people which is clearly seen as lessons that are used in teaching and learning in certain subject group’s that still present content that is stretching and harassing sexuality among students of diverse sexual groups.

The Fourth Step: The researcher submitted a request for a certificate from the Ethics Committee in person. Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

The fifth Step: The researcher used the criteria for selection of population groups and voluntary samples for interviews by applying the snowball technique. The sample used in the study is a cross-gender student group that defines themselves as Toms. The group comprised 3 students one from each grade 4th through 6th. All were in the 1st semester of the 2018 academic year at a boarding school in Chiang Mai. According to the research objectives in this research, researchers used structured interview methods as well as non-participatory observation. In terms of elimination, criteria the sample used in the study must be cross-gender students that defines itself as Tom. Therefore, the criteria for screening for the researcher is whether the gender of the research participant meets the sexual orientation that the researcher is targeting.

### ***Population and Sample***

The population and samples used in this research are 3 transgender students in a state school in Chiang Mai, Grade 1 -3, 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, and academic year 2018.

### ***Data collection***

After coordinating with the important informants/ contacts which were students' counselors to access the campus to gather the information from the sample group. The researcher presented the clarification documents, which are documents providing basic information of the research project risks that may occur when participating in research and risk prevention guidelines of the research project, and answered questions they had about the research project after reading.

Participants were able to ask the research project leader, representative, or research participant for access to the documents to read, discuss, and question. After which the research participants had full freedom in deciding whether to cooperate or not. Those who did not participate in this research did not have any effect on the outcome of the project. If there are unwanted side effects, comments, or questions about this research, participants can contact the researcher at The Department of Basic and Educational Development Faculty of Education Chiang Mai University. The personal data of the participants will be preserved and not publicly disclosed. However, it will report research results as public information from the data of individual participants. The

researcher will use the newly generated code and will not specify the name of the research participants in order to maintain the privacy of the participants.

### ***Data Analysis***

In order to manage all the information obtained, from the observational interview, the researcher chose to use the Excel program because this program has the ability to help manage and integrate different types of data as well. After the researcher retrieved information from the document Interview tape and compiled data from the observations, all information was published in the program. Thus, the information is organized in a conceptual fashion and was identified with a distinct type of data collection and data analysis. The researcher did not do only one round from the beginning until the end of the research which must be in accordance with the objectives that the researcher puts into the topic. It depends on recognizing the topics that occur in the resources that are found as well as emphasizing what is said. The researcher will try to preserve the true meaning without trying to change the words that reflect the information obtained from the conceptualization which will be presented in quotation marks. While presenting the findings in the words within that quotation, may reduce the ease of reading messages. However, it is the only chance that the reader must look at himself for what the information provider wants to present.

### **Results**

Transgender students defining themselves as “Tom” have to face both verbal and physical bullying. The areas where they find most bullying are classrooms and public spaces that are hidden from school teachers. Because of the expression of Tom's students that is overflowing from masculinity Causing nausea, hatred, or prejudice against Tom or even teachers in the school that is both women and men which is violent from the words that emerge as a “Tom Tom” discourse, “fix Tom”, “repair girl”, “turn Tom into her”, “Tom return program to women” or “cool fingers or fight a warm tendon” All of them are hidden in all words of violence. Physical bullying Tom's students were often friends, male students, juniors, seniors, male students, punches and kicks, especially students Tom, who had a gruff appearance. Often being bullied from younger friends, senior students, male students because he was accused of stealing a man's boyfriend or having a girlfriend more beautiful than a man until causing nausea. Until leading to the student Tom have to face a flat, not talking or not allowing to enter the work group including using eyes to look in the manner of dislike and cynical with words that is violent from words to physical violence and affect the fight. Therefore, resulting in Tom's students is looked at by cynical eyes, looking at him, dislikes, dislikes, until the group gathered to hate Tom within the school. To show that he didn't like Tom the



consequences that result in Tom's students not being accepted in the classroom. The effects of bullying all have a negative effect on the ability of students to cross-gender learning. An obstacle that prevents the development of children to progress to an unsatisfactory level because of the lack of understanding, prejudice and hatred of people as Tom. These make student group Tom feel pressure and lead to the feeling that he wanted to take revenge, wanting to return, being teased, bullying that happened in the student group that was Tom. Being treated in such a manner will result in the victim feeling that they are at a disadvantage. Moreover, to makes it feel like getting revenge or wanting to return in order for some of the people who have come to deal with them to receive such pain. The background of transgender students defines themselves as "Tom" some have poor family background. Some students choose to come to boarding school. For the reason that "Being a sexually abused stepfather" themselves, feeling insecure when their mother had to go to work and they are home alone. The mother and stepfather will go to work together, but in return each time. Which day the stepfather returned first they were often harassed by being hugged, smitten, cheeked and caught on the buttocks many times, being told to tell their mothers. However, their mother always said that the stepfather loved them like a real child and only want to show fatherly love to the child. Thus, mother's words made them feel sorry. However, the most important thing is to endure the fear, cruelty and shame of this incident for almost 1 year until moving into this school. Some students who have moved to study here need to violate the religious rules of religion. Which some people regard Islam. Islam also looks at the third gender as a human being. Only looking at this matter is wrong and does not promote which the issue of sexuality in Islam is considered almost all sin with the beliefs that come from the same-sex love is considered obscene and even not eating pork. Nevertheless, when coming to this school, it is necessary to eat pork. This is because the food that the cooker cafeteria makes is a menu that requires every ingredient of pork and every meal in the day. In additions, some students are not accepted by the family. Since, their own sexuality is Tom until having to run away from home.

Bullying of cross-sex students who suffer from being bullied, whether verbally and physically. In the classroom, they still stigmatize their transgender people as well. Thai society is forging people to believe that having a sex-based lifestyle is something that should be done. If there is a way of life that is strange from the origin of sex, it will be perceived as anomalous. Men must be paired with women. Not to love the same sex. More specifically, refining through educational institutions such as sex education in schools. Many books still state that same sex is "Sexual deviation" or "abnormal" must be corrected and many teachers still have an attitude towards these students that are inferior

to ordinary male and female students' basil has been branded as a deviant and inferior deviation, so it is like a push for transgender students to become a strange point, being focused of other students and more likely to be teased or bullied than other students. Those that were not branded which the problems and consequences of stigma that cross-gender students define themselves as "Tom" must face it causing some students to become stressed and depressed, lack of self-confidence and didn't want to come to study. The story is still a common thing that teachers see as just teasing each other without any punishment. Sometimes give reasons to students who are bullied that this group of students in cross-gender groups likes to express themselves that are overflowing from masculinity. Thus, causing repulsion, hatred, and other people to choose to pretend to cross-gender students until it becomes a common bullying of students in the school. In the fact, the problem of bullying in schools is appropriate to cross-gender students. This may be the beginning of cultivating violence in children. Because the harm is affecting both children emotional, physical, and long-term quality of life Cross-child sex that is being bullied often causes stress, depression and social problems. If severe or chronic pressure may lead to harming others for revenge or hurt oneself and severe to commit suicide while those who bully others until they become familiar may become aggressive. They may use violence to solve problems when grown up.



## Discussion

From the above study, it can be said that transgender students who defined themselves as "Tom" have faced bullying in the form of verbal abuse. A group was created who hate the Tom in the school; the common areas that they often got bullied in were the classrooms and or public spaces that were out of teachers' sight. Causing students across this group to be mocked and made fun of, be discriminated against by a large group of people, be excluded from participating in activities, and led to the formation of a group who hated Tom within the school. This leads to depression according to the survey done by the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health (2018). The

Director-General of the Department of Mental Health disclosed the results of their survey in the project that monitored children and youth's mental condition within the province by looking at their behavior and other key factors. It was found that about 600,000 children in Thailand are being bullied in educational institutions, making it the number 2nd highest in the world. Students are being bullied by fellow students at a rate as high as 40 percent, just below Japan. While in 2010, the survey of students and college students in educational institutions across the country indicated that 33% was cyber bullying and 43% was direct bullied.

Bullying in school is considered a problem that will have a long term effect that can lead to violence. A student who was bullied may use violence to solve problems when they become adults, possibly leading to criminality. Moreover, the Director General of the Department of Mental Health Ministry of Public Health also reported that bullying starts as early as kindergarten, students faced with bullying and ridicule suffer from stress, depression, and anxiety as well as not wanting to go to school.

### **Conclusion**

This research therefore leads to information that addresses the challenges and impacts that cross-gender students face. Such basic information brings a determination of training measures and set clear penalties, since in the past the school has not had a policy to prevent bullying for students who are seen as transgender. This is consistent from the research of the organization International, UNESCO and Mahidol University (2013) which revealed that schools in Thailand do not have specific policies or measures to prevent problems with bullying of students who are or are seen as transgender or same-sex lovers. Most of the methods used are to cope with immediate problems and punishment of offenders when informed of the incident. Therefore, it should have suggested that Thai educational institutions establish policies against bullying and contain antibullying information in teaching and learning courses. There must be a change of attitude of students, teachers, and parents who look at students who love the same sex or have gender characteristics that are considered mental disorders. As well as Phawana Nguyarawee, Secretary-General of the Pattha Health Foundation (2015) has said that the solution must be done in all aspects and together by starting to have and create understanding of gender equality and not support the use of violence with learners "Schools should establish mechanisms to prevent and care for violence. Develop teachers and personnel in schools. It should establish a system that is friendly to confidentiality and there should be a space to meet family and community, and to meet, consult, and advise about bullying rather than just paying tuition fees at the school once a year. At the policy level, the education sector must

create a network of teachers to have concrete and actual operations.” Therefore, when there is no specific measure to deal with this problem, it also shows structural and cultural violence. This reflects that the existing policy cannot prevent or create an atmosphere of safety in schools for transgender students and the stigma of cross-gender students is “Deviant people” or “unusual”, and is considered a cultural violence that supports and justifies bullying in this group. This is because it is creating impairment for this group of students thereby leading to being bullied without much fault. With all the problems of violence and bullying of cross-gender students in schools which is caused by the expression of students with same-sex love tastes education institutions should create understanding of social biases in gender equality and set training measures. Moreover, it should set clear penalties for bullying students who are seen as transgender. Society must accept and understand that many sexualities exist, Thai society should not have prejudice against transgender people. In the case of transgender people, they must reduce their stigma in themselves and create pride for themselves. There must be no stigma among the transgender people, and everyone must help to build acceptance from family, school, community and society, not to stigmatize and discriminate against transgender groups.

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