

“You are flirtatious?” “Are you one-way or two-way?”: Negotiating the Sexuality of Thai *Toms* on the YouTube Interview Show “Talk with Betty”

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Article information	Abstract
Article history:	<i>The visibility of Thai toms—a Thai term that is widely used to denote persons who are biologically female but express masculine identities and same-sex attractions toward women—has been increased in the past few years due to the emergence of new media that offer online space for them to articulate their identities or sexuality. This research paper aims to investigate how Thai toms’ sexuality is discursively negotiated in interactions between Thai toms in “Talk with Betty,” the interview-based show on YouTube, using Conversation Analysis (CA) as an analytical framework. The data is drawn from selected 14 video clips of Talk with Betty interview show from 2020–2023. The findings reveal that a broad spectrum of Thai toms’ sexuality, as evidenced by various conversational features. Thai tom’s flirtatiousness is considered as a norm within the community, which is associated with stereotypical masculine expressions. Thai toms’ sexual practices are more fluid and diverse as their sexual roles are not exclusively tied to active sexual roles, but can be both active and passive sexual roles, resulting in more versatile sexual roles. Moreover, sex is considered as a taboo topic among Thai toms since they avoid openly discussing sexual experiences in interactions. For instance, they may respond to sex-specific questions with vague answers such as “ปกติ พื้นฐาน” (“Basic”), which can be seen as a form of adherence to femininity traits. The findings highlight diverse toms’ sexual practices that challenge the stereotypical expectations of Thai toms.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Thai society, two terms are commonly used to describe female homosexual relationships. According to Miedema et al. (2022) and Sinnott (2004, 2007), the Thai term “*tom*” refers to individuals assigned to females at birth who typically express masculinity through either their personality, visual appearance, and sexual attraction to women. Their feminine partners are identified as “*dee*.” Thai *toms* are often paired with *dees* in both romantic and sexual relationships. Their intimacy replicates masculine and feminine coupling, as Thai *toms* assume the masculine role and *dees* the feminine role (Jeffries et al., 2024).

Several previous studies illustrate the stereotypical and predominantly negative portrayals of Thai *toms* in terms of their love relationships and sexual lives (Jeffries et al., 2024; Sinnott, 2007). The love relationship between Thai *toms* and their feminine partners is framed within a heterosexual dynamic, as *toms* are attached to male gender roles, such as being the leaders of the relationship, financial providers, and supporters of their partners' needs, while their feminine partners are associated with female gender roles, such as being dependent and passive. In addition, the romantic relationships between *toms* and their feminine partners are often seen as temporary or situational, as such relationships are expected to end if either partner finds the right man (Chao, 2022; Chotirosseranee & Pongpanit, 2024).

In terms of sexual activity, Thai *toms* are stereotypically expected to take active roles and act as initiators of sex (Sinnott, 2011). They prioritize satisfying their feminine partners' sexual desires before themselves. Moreover, sexual activity between *toms* and their feminine partners is not traditionally categorized as sex in this context (Sewatphatthanayothin, 2019). Because of their biologically female bodies, they are perceived as incapable of achieving true orgasm and may require help from men to satisfy their sexual needs. Consequently, sexual activity between *toms* and their partners is not typically equated with the loss of virginity, but rather viewed as a means to avoid improper sexual contact with men.

Despite these previous studies, literature on *toms* is relatively limited. Thai *toms* are underrepresented when compared to Thai transwomen or gay men. The emergence of new media provides Thai *toms* with a better opportunity to share their experiences online. One example is the YouTube channel, "Betty's Story," created by a Thai *tom* named Betty, launched an interview show titled "Talk with Betty." The show invites guests who openly express tomboyism, particularly those working in the entertainment industry, to share their experiences or perspectives on a range of topics, such as coming-out stories, body modifications, love relationships, or even sex life—a topic that tends not to be explicitly addressed—with audiences. The show became trending on social media, with the channel reaching 11 million views and 100 thousand subscribers as of February 10, 2025. The channel also received recognition as an LGBTQ+ rights supporter at the Siamrath Online Awards in 2023 for increasing visibility of Thai *toms* and introducing the *tom* community to the general public.

This paper aims to investigate how Thai *toms*' sexuality is discursively negotiated in "Talk with Betty" interview show. As the data is drawn from conversational interactions in the interview show, we adopt Conversation Analysis (CA) as an analytical framework. CA is an approach that mainly focuses on recurrent structural features of orderly talk-in-interactions in various settings (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). It provides empirical tools of interactional phenomena such as turn-taking, repair initiation, sequence organization, and preference to explicate how sexuality is manifested through talk-in-interactions. The conversational interactions between Betty and *tom* guests on the interview show reveal new and insightful narratives or practices, particularly regarding Thai *toms*' sexuality, including those which differ from stereotypical representations of *toms*.

Thai *toms*

As this paper focuses on the discursive negotiation of sexuality, this section provides background information about *toms* in Thai society. Previous research has highlighted the complexity and tension between their gender expression and sexuality. While they are expected to conform to masculine expressions, their sexual practices are more diverse and do not necessarily align with the normative expectation of sexual activeness.

In Thai context, the term “*tom*” refers to individuals assigned female at birth who adopt a masculine gender presentation and engage in same-sex relationships with feminine partners, commonly referred to as “*dee*” (Sinnott, 2004). Stereotypically, they are expected to behave in a masculine way, which includes taking part in activities that are typical of Thai men, such as drinking, smoking, or engaging in multiple sexual relationships (Sinnott, 2004). These masculine expectations also extend to their sexual behaviors.

Sexual intercourse between *toms* and their feminine partners has traditionally been characterized as a one-way dynamic, in which *toms* are expected to play the active sexual role and initiate the sexual encounter (Jeffries et al., 2024; Miederma et al., 2022; Sinnott, 2007). *Toms* are often expected to sacrifice their own sexual gratification, adhering to the practice of “untouchability,” where *toms* avoid undressing and do not allow their partners to engage sexually with their bodies (Doungphummes & Sangsingkeo, 2022; Sinnott, 2004). Rather than seeking mutual pleasure, the emphasis is placed on satisfying the feminine partner’s desires. This reaffirms that Thai *toms* position themselves as providers of sexual pleasure, rather than recipients.

However, more recent studies indicate a shift in *tom*’s sexual practices to be a two-way sexual dynamic between *toms* and their feminine partners (Doungphummes & Sangsingkeo, 2022; Miederma et al., 2022). *Toms* are no longer confined to the traditionally active, masculine role; instead, they may adopt both active and passive sexual positions—becoming more sexually versatile. They increasingly allow sexual touch initiated by their partners and emphasize mutual sexual pleasure within the relationship.

Apart from that, Thai *tom*’s active sexual role and adherence to untouchability are similar to those who are masculine female-bodied in other countries, such as butch lesbians in the US and *tomboi* in southern Philippines (Johnson, 2005; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). Butch lesbians are restricted to active sexual roles since they sexually please their partners by using strap-ons (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). *Tomboi* is also restricted to being a penetrator and initiator of sex to their partners (Johnson, 2005). Both butch lesbians and *tomboi* are not willing to be caressed and penetrated by their feminine partners since it puts them in feminine passive sexual roles, creating discomfort for them.

Previous studies of Thai *toms* in language and communication reveal that Thai *toms*’ relationships with women, whether romantic or sexual, are often misrepresented, particularly in Thai newspaper headlines. Sexual relationships between *toms* and *dees* are portrayed negatively as a sex object. It has been observed that various Thai terms, including “ching” (small cymbal)

and “tee ching” (playing the small cymbal), found in the work of Fongkaew et al. (2019), as well as “hlong dat cha ni”¹ (being obsessed with fingers) in Sanmongkol and Tinnam’s study (2024), are employed metaphorically to mock sexual intercourse between *toms* and their partners. Romantic relationships are depicted as temporary. Statements such as “Fixing *Tom* and *Dee*” or “Man changes a *Tom*” imply that both *toms* and their partners are inevitably expected to return to heterosexual relationships once they meet the right men (Sanmongkol & Tinnam, 2024). In contrast, the Thai magazine “Tomactz” portrays *tom*’s and *dee*’s relationships more positively (Rungruangying & Untaya, 2017). The use of modality (e.g., “think that,” “believe that”) and rhetorical questions (e.g., “I don’t see a relationship with a *tom* as any different from others”) to contest depictions of female same-sex relationships as deviant within dominant heterosexual discourse.

Conversation analysis and sexuality

Conversation Analysis (CA) is the study of the organization and orderliness of social interactions in various settings, aiming to discover and describe the underlying norms and practices that make interaction orderly (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). It is an interdisciplinary approach developed from the fields of ethnomethodology and sociology, pioneered by three scholars: Jefferson (2004), Sacks (1974) and Schegloff (1968). CA examines talk not as language but as action—what people do with talk, such as inviting, apologizing, or giving advice. It offers a set of concrete resources—turn-taking, repair initiation, and sequence organization—to identify the recurrent patterns or organizational structures that constitute talk-in-interaction. Through these tools, CA offers insight into how everyday social phenomena are constructed and maintained through interaction (Schegloff, 2007).

Early work on language and sexuality aimed to attribute sexual identities, such as lesbian and gay, to language styles—for example, “lesbians’ speech” (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997) or “gay men’s English” (Leap, 1997). However, with the emergence of Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1990), which views gender and sexuality as performative acts, more recent studies in CA have shifted their focus to how sexuality is performed or manifested through various conversational strategies in talk-in-interactions. Ericsson’s (2021), Kitzinger’s (2005) and Rendle-Short’s (2005) studies reveal that heterosexual people adopt person reference terms such as “wife,” “husband,” “boyfriends,” and “girlfriends,” including the production of heterosexual couples’ names to index their heterosexuality in the interactions. The use of these strategies occurs without resistance or conflict during the interactions; rather, they are employed in an unmarked, taken-for-granted way by the interactants, which contributes to the perpetuation of heteronormativity—a system that reinforces the assumption of heterosexuality as natural and normative. This highlights how the CA approach helps to unveil the seemingly natural and invisible norm of heteronormativity, making it visible and subject to critique.

Some previous CA studies have demonstrated how LGBTQ+ speakers construct their sexuality and challenge the prevailing heteronormativity through interaction. For instance, a gay character named Peter in an animated TV sitcom program initiates a repair strategy by changing another speaker’s utterance in the prior turn from “Then it’s straight to the bars to find loose

¹ These Thai expressions are transliterated according to how they are rendered in the original references.

women to have sex with,” which is associated with traditional hegemonic masculine activities, to “Then it’s straight to the gym for three hours of crunches and extended eye contact with strangers,” implying homoerotic activities that index Peter’s male homosexuality (Raymond, 2013). Similarly, in a Spanish language classroom setting, some students implicitly come out as gay through their interactions with the teacher (Liddicoat, 2009). When the teacher asks a question such as “What is your girlfriend like?,” which presumes a heterosexual relationship, the student responds by using an embedded correction as a conversational strategy to come out as gay. Specifically, they correct the feminine Spanish noun *novia* (“girlfriend”) to the masculine noun *novio* (“boyfriend”) in the teacher’s question. Transpeople challenge the misgendering, which displays cisgenderist assumptions, in interactions by using the designedly intentional misgendering as an interactional resource to frame another speaker’s actions as discriminatory and to affirm their transgender identities instead (Edmonds & Pino, 2023). All these various conversational strategies adopted by LGBTQ+ individuals subtly challenge the presumption of heteronormativity in micro-level interactions.

METHODOLOGY

The source of data is from video clips of the YouTube interview show “Talk with Betty,” hosted on the channel “Betty’s Story.” The interview show is led by Thanit Wachirarattanawong, also known as “Betty,” and features guests who self-identify as *toms*, particularly those involved in the entertainment industry. The interview show centers on discussions about the guests’ personal experiences.

“Talk with Betty” released a total of 24 episodes between 2020 and 2023. However, only 14 were selected for analysis based on specific criteria. First, the guests must either explicitly identify as *toms* or demonstrate tomboyism characteristics—such as masculine presentations and attraction to women, even if they do not label themselves as *toms*. Second, the selected episodes must consistently include the four main themes addressed by Betty—Thai *toms*’ identity realization, body modification, love relationship, and sex life. Due to space constraints, this paper focuses specifically on the themes of love relationship and sex life, as they offer valuable insights into how Thai *toms* construct their sexualities through interaction. The main topics covered by the questions asked include past relationship experiences, types, and sexual positions.

This research seeks to address the question of how Thai *toms* construct and negotiate their sexuality in interaction, with particular attention to how conversational practices reveal underlying notions of sexuality. It adopts CA as its analytical framework. CA focuses on identifying and describing the unfolding patterns that speakers orient to in order to coordinate talk and produce meaningful social action. It offers analytical tools—such as sequence organization, repair mechanisms, and turn-taking systems—which are suitable for us to gather empirical evidence for analyzing the research question as how Thai *tom*’s sexuality becomes relevant and constructed in talk-in-interaction, especially in interview contexts. While CA is traditionally applied to naturally occurring data, this study applies CA to semi-structured interview data. We consider interviews to be interactional events that can reveal how *toms*

collaboratively construct and negotiate meaning, particularly around sensitive or identity-related topics such as sexuality during interactions. The data are transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions (See Appendix) since it is the most commonly used convention for transcribing speech elements in conversation in detail.

Analysis

In this section, we investigate how Thai *toms'* sexuality are discursively constructed through interactions between Betty and Thai *tom* guests on the interview show. The analysis centers on two major issues: Thai *toms'* flirtatiousness and their sexual practices. These two issues are based on the set of questions in the selected data on the themes of love relationship and sex life. They are also important topics in past literature concerning Thai *toms*. In our analysis, we will demonstrate how certain conversational features construct Thai *toms'* sexuality in particular ways that may or may not conform to the stereotypes presented in past literature.

Thai toms' flirtatiousness

Tom's flirtatiousness is associated with masculinity since men's desire to seek numerous female sexual partners is being idealized (Kimmel & Plante, 2005). They are being flirtatious and perform girl's hunting—a practice of seeking out multiple female sexual partners—to express their masculine identity and sexual prowess. In the interview show, the interaction between Betty as a moderator and Thai *tom* guests agrees with the literature that flirtatiousness is a norm within the Thai *tom* community.

Thai *toms'* flirtatiousness is evidenced through the use of topicalization. Topicalization is a non-minimal post-expansion that is used to initiate a new sequence of the talk since some utterances are marked as interesting or new enough to invite topical elaboration or reconfirming responses (Schegloff, 2007). It consists of various devices such as "oh really" token and repeats either a full or partial repeat of prior utterances to extend the talk as illustrated in (5.1).

(5.1) Betty asks Zee whether they are a flirtatious person or not.

47	B:	เร่าเจ้าชู้
48	→ Z:	โน: ซีไม่เจ้าชู้เลย↑
49	→ B:	ใช่หรือ
50	Z:	ซีไม่เจ้าชู้
51	→ B:	เป็นคนไม่เจ้าชู้เลย
52	Z:	ไม่ใช่เป็นคนไม่เจ้าชู้ แต่ตอนนั้นซีไม่ได้เจ้าชู้
53	B:	อ่อ ((ทัวเราะ)) โวเค โวเค โวเค
54	→ Z:	โวเคไหะ
55	B:	โวเค โวเค โวเค
56	→ Z:	มันมีคำตอบอยู่ในคำตอบ ((ทัวเราะ))
57	B:	โวเค โวเค โวเค

English translation

47 B: So, you're flirtatious?
48 → Z: No: I'm not flirtatious at all.↑
49 → B: Really?
50 Z: I'm not flirtatious.
51 → B: Not flirtatious at all?
52 Z: It's not that I'm not flirtatious, but I wasn't flirtatious then.
53 B: Oh ((Laugh)) OK OK OK OK.
54 → Z: OK?
55 B: OK OK OK OK.
56 → Z: There is an answer within the answer. ((Laugh))
57 B: OK OK OK OK.

In (5.1), Betty asks Zee whether they are a flirtatious person or not, which is later denied by Zee in line 48. This adjacency pair is still extended by a topicalization token “ใช่หรือ” (“Really?”) (line 49) since Zee’s answer does not seem to convince Betty. Therefore, in line 51, a follow-up question “เป็นคนไม่เจ้าชู้เลย” (“Not flirtatious at all?”) is used as a reaffirmation that Zee is genuinely not a flirtatious person. This finally leads Zee to reveal the truth by performing a self-initiated repair in line 52. Zee clarifies Betty’s misunderstanding, not denying that they are flirtatious, but explaining that they were not at that time. The sequence of talk seems to reach a closure; however, it is further expanded by Zee instead. Zee initiates two post expansions “โอเคไหม” (“OK?”) (line 54) and “มันมีคำตอบอยู่ในคำตอบ” (“There is an answer within the answer.”) (line 56) to confirm Betty’s understanding. Then, Betty gives Zee a confirmation by responding “โอเค” (“OK”) line 57.

Moreover, Thai *toms'* flirtatiousness is elaborated by co-constructed speech. Co-constructed speech is considered as interactional works between the speakers since it requires two or more speakers to collaboratively produce the meaning or utterance, resulting in a shared turn (Lerner, 2008). When the first speaker's utterance contains of a short verbalization such as "um," it indicates that the speaker is finding the words to respond or explain at the moment which invites the second speaker to collaboratively construct the utterance by giving candidate answers for the first speaker to either accept or decline (Lind & Sønsterud, 2014). This form of co-constructed speech is adopted in (5.2).

(5.2) Betty asks Jyb if they describe themselves as a flirtatious person.

212 B: เป็นคนเจ้าชู้ให้มอง
213 J: อ่าม:::
214 B: นิยามตัวเองเป็นคนเจ้าชู้ให้ม^ก
215 → J: คือยังไงเดี๋ยว เจ้าชู้ให้เหมหรือ มัน ตอนที่เรายังไม่ได้แบบลงเอยกับแฟน เราก็รู้สึกว่าแบบ รู้สึก
ว่าแบบ อื้ม [—]
216 → B: [สนุก?]
217 → J: เออ แบบ ก็ (.) นะ ก็ (.) ก็ลื้ล่าในระดับนึง
218 B: อ่า อ่า อ่า อ่า

English translation

212 B: Are you flirtatious?
213 J: Um::
214 B: Do you define yourself as flirtatious?
215 → J: How do I put it? Am I flirtatious? When I hadn't gotten together with my girlfriend² yet, I feel like... I feel like, um [—
216 → B: [Fun?]
217 → J: Yeah. Like (.) Well (.) Quite carefree.
218 B: Ah Ah Ah Ah

In (5.2), Betty and Jyb discuss their past flirtatious experiences. The co-constructed utterance occurs between Jyb and Betty. Jyb's utterance in line 215 is unfinished and cut-off since Jyb may struggle with finding appropriate words to describe their feelings when they do not commit serious romantic relationship yet. Then, Betty offers candidate answer by providing a lexical unit “สนุก?” (“Fun?”) in line 216 to complete Jyb's utterance. Jyb accepts Betty's contribution by responding with a short verbalization “เออ” (“Yeah.”) (line 217). Both Jyb and Betty interactionally create the idea of being flirtatious as fun. This highlights the shared understanding between Jyb and Betty as Thai *toms* since they have the same idea that girl's hunting is such a fun and joyful practice.

The data show that flirtatiousness is a norm within the Thai *tom* community, as illustrated in previous literature (Kimmel & Plante, 2005). The interactions between Betty and the Thai *tom* guests demonstrate a shared understanding that pursuing women is viewed as an entertaining activity, and that flirtatiousness is expected at some point in their lives. This provides further evidence supporting claims in the literature that *toms* engage in flirtation and girl hunting as a means of expressing masculinity and sexual prowess.

Thai toms' sexual practice

In previous literature on Thai *toms'* sexuality, their sexual practices have been stereotypically confined to active sexual roles and the position of sexual initiators—roles that position them as the ones who penetrate women (Miedema et. al, 2022; Sinnott, 2004). However, the interactions between Betty and Thai *tom* guests reveal a broader spectrum of sexual practices, suggesting that Thai *toms'* sexuality is more varied and fluid than previously assumed. They are not limited to sexually active roles—traditionally associated with masculinity—but may instead adopt versatile sexual roles, depending on the individual. In some cases, they are open to engaging in sexual intercourse with transwomen, as demonstrated by the following examples.

The fluidity of *tom's* sexual experience is illustrated by topicalization. The sequence of talk can be warranted by topicalization since it initiates a new sequence of adjacency pairs in order to elicit insightful information from another speaker (Schegloff, 2007), as illustrated in (5.3).

²This translation is derived from the Thai word “ແພ່ນ,” which originally carries no gender specification. This particular translation was selected because contextual cues in the conversation suggest that the speaker's romantic partner is female.

(5.3) Betty and View are talking about their sex experience with transwomen.

100	B:	มีคนถาม เรือเคยได้กับกะเทยไทยไหม
101	V:	เคย
102	→ B:	แปลงร่าง
103	V:	แปลงแล้ว
104	→ B:	ไม่มี
105	V:	ฉันให้หงุด แต่ฉันยังไม่เคยเจอเจ้ายังที่มี
106	→ B:	แต่ถ้ามี เรือก็ไม่ติด
107	V:	ไม่ติด ได้ ถ้าสมมติเราชอบเขาจริงจริงนะคือได้หงุด ให้ฉันเป็นเมีย ถ้าในตอนนั้นความรู้สึกมันได้
108	→ B:	ถ้าไปถึงจุดจุดนั้น พอดีบ เรือก็ไม่ติดใช่ปะ
109	V:	มั่นคงไม่ติด แต่มั่นคงตกลนิคดี มันก็ต้องใช้การปรับตัวนิดนึง นึกออกปะ

English translation

100	B:	Someone asked you: have you ever had sex with transwomen?
101	V:	Yes.
102	→ B:	Have they transitioned yet?
103	V:	Yes, already.
104	→ B:	No male part?
105	V:	I'm fine with it either way, but I've never tried one with male part.
106	→ B:	But if they have it, you don't mind.
107	V:	I don't mind. It's ok. If I really like them, it's all fine. I can be their wife if at that point it feels right.
108	→ B:	If it comes to that point, at that point, you'll be fine, right?
109	V:	I'll be fine, but it'll be a little funny. It takes some adjustment. Can you imagine?

In (5.3), Betty asks View if they have had sex with transwomen. View responds that they have had sex with transwomen, even though they self-identify as a *tom*. Betty extends the same sequence of talk since the topic of having sex with transwomen appears to be relatively new by delivering multiple non-minimal post-expansions—“แปลงร่าง” (“Have they transitioned yet?”) (line 102), “ไม่มี” (“No male part?”) (line 104), and “แต่ถ้ามี เรือก็ไม่ติด” (“But if they have it, you don't mind.”) (line 106)—to invite View to elaborate further on their sexual experiences with transwomen. View's responses to these post-expansions reveal the degree of fluidity in Thai *toms*' sexuality, suggesting that having sexual intercourse with transwomen, whether they have the male part or not, is considered acceptable. Betty then delivers another post-expansion, “ถ้าไปถึงจุดจุดนั้น พอดีบ เรือก็ไม่ติดใช่ปะ” (“If it comes to that point, at that point, you'll be fine, right?”) (line 108), to reaffirm that View does not mind having sexual intercourse with transwomen who have their male part. View later acknowledges that they can accept it to the extent that their sexual role may shift to a passive one, although some adjustment would be necessary (line 107 and line 109). This suggests that *toms*' sexuality is not restricted to partners assigned female at birth, but extends to transwomen, although, as shown in the data, this appears to be a very specific case for View.

In addition, the diversity of sex positions in *tom's* sexual experience is explicated by overlapping speech. Overlapping speech takes place while the first speaker is completing their turn, a second speaker begins speaking at or near a transition relevance place (TRP)—a point in the interaction where a speaker change is projected (Schegloff, 2007). The second speaker may enter slightly before or just after the transition relevance place, resulting in overlapping speech. Despite this overlapping speech, it is often possible for the first speaker to complete their turn without yielding the conversational floor (Liddicoat, 2021). This conversational feature demonstrates the speaker's ability to predict the direction of the discussion and understand what the other person intends to convey, as illustrated in (5.4).

(5.4) Betty and Jyb are talking about sex positions.

753 → J: เออ อะไรอย่างนั้น แต่จริงจริงแล้ว คือมันก็มี ก็อย่างที่บอกว่ามันมีความลื่นไหลดลายแบบที่
มันไม่จำเป็น [ต้องอินเสิร์ท]
 754 → B: [มันมีท่าอื่น]
 755 J: มันไม่จำเป็นต้องอินเสิร์ทก็ได้ เออ อย่างนั้นแหล่ะ มันก็ มันก็เคยอะ
 756 B: อ่า อ่า อ่า

English translation

753 → J: Yeah. Something like that. But actually there are, like I said, it can be fluid
in various ways in which you don't have to [insert]
 754 → B: [There are other positions.]
 755 J: It doesn't have to involve insertion. Yeah. Like that. Well, I used to do it.
 756 B: Ah Ah Ah Ah

In (5.4), overlapping speech occurs in the conversation between Jyb and Betty. In line 753, while Jyb is saying that sexual intercourse between women is fluid and penetration is not necessary, Betty simultaneously states, “มันมีท่าอื่น” (“There are other positions.”) in line 754 before Jyb's turn is completed. This instance of overlapping speech by Betty and Jyb reflects a shared understanding among Thai *toms* that *toms'* sexuality is more flexible and varied, and it is not limited to practicing penetration to achieve orgasm.

Tom's sexual roles tend to be reversible rather than restrictive, as illustrated by co-constructed speech. The type of co-constructed speech found in (5.5) is completion. According to Lind and Sønsterud (2014), when the first speaker shows signs of having troubles in finding the words or sentences, the utterances of the first speaker contain short verbalizations such as “um” and “uh,” repetition of words, or cut-off. Consequently, the interlocutors attempt to help by offering words or sentences to complete the prior speakers' speeches. These collaborative utterances between two speakers are served to indicate the engagement and involvement of speakers in the talk.

(5.5) Betty asks Jyb if their sex role is active or can be reversible role.

748 B: ตอนนี้เป็นทอม จีบเป็นวันเวย์หรือทูเวย์
 749 J: คือตอนที่เป็นทอมเวย์คือ [—
 750 B: [คนตามกลับ] ((หัวเราะ))
 751 → J: คือ คือ คือ คืออย่างนี้ คือจริงๆ แล้วอะ คือพอ พอเราพูดว่าทูเวย์ปูบะแม่งต้องคิดแน่นอนว่า
 ภูต้อง ภูต้องผลักกันทำเหมือนแบบ [—
 752 → B: [เหมือนเลสเบี้ยน]
 753 → J: เออ อะไรอย่างนั้น แต่จริงๆแล้ว คือมันก็มี ก็อย่างที่บอกว่ามันมีความลื้นให้หล่ำຍแบบที่มัน
 'ไม่จำเป็น[ต้องอินเสิร์ท]

English translation

748 B: When you're a *tom*, are you one-way or two-way?
 749 J: When I'm a *tom*, I [—
 750 B: [You get asked back.] ((Laugh))
 751 → J: It It It's like this. Actually, as soon as I say "two-way," people immediately
 assumed that I must, I'd have to take turns like [—
 752 → B: [Like lesbians.]
 753 → J: Yeah. Something like that. But actually there are, like I said, it can be
 fluid in various ways that doesn't have to involve [insertion]

In (5.5), Betty first asks Jyb whether they are a one-way *tom* or a two-way *tom*. These two Thai terms, "one-way *tom*" and "two-way *tom*," denote a *tom*'s sexual role, indicating whether they take exclusively active roles or can be both active and passive. This suggests that the sexual roles of the Thai *toms* are flexible, as it is not exclusively tied to the active role traditionally associated with masculinity, where men are expected to be active and penetrative in sexual activity according to societal norms (Szasz, 1998). In line 751, Jyb's utterance contains a repetition of the word "คือ" ("it"), and their utterance is cut off, which signifies that Jyb has trouble finding the right words to describe two-way *tom*'s sex. Then, Jyb's utterance is co-constructed by Betty, who provides the completion through the phrase "เหมือนเลสเบี้ยน" ("Like lesbians") in line 752. This shows a bond of shared knowledge between the two speakers, as it is acknowledged by Jyb with the short verbalization "เออ" ("Yeah") in line 753. The conversation between Jyb and Betty indicates that Jyb does not directly identify as a two-way *tom*, as this would lead others to categorize them more as a lesbian. This implies that a *tom*'s sexuality is highly fluid and differs from that of a lesbian in certain ways.

Even though Betty and the guests in the interview show openly discuss their sexual experiences and sexual fluidity, some *tom* guests find it uncomfortable to discuss sexual matters and avoid doing so, implying that sex is a taboo topic. According to Thai sociocultural norms, sex topic is considered forbidden for public discussion, especially for Thai women, since Thai women are expected to be reserved and chastised (Ounjit, 2015). Sexual activities such as premarital intercourse or engaging in sexual relations with more than one man are regarded as unacceptable and shameful, leading to feelings of discomfort and offense among Thai women (Waratworawan et. al, 2021). The interactions between Betty and *tom* guests that view sex as taboo topic is demonstrated by the use of post-expansions.

Post-expansions occur after the base second pair part of the adjacency pairs. It initiates a new sequence of question-answer adjacency pairs to further the talk more than one turn. This conversational feature consists of two types: 1) topicalization 2) rejecting or challenging with the second pair parts (Liddicoat, 2021; Schegloff, 2007). The first type is topicalization. As previously mentioned, various conversational devices—such as the topicalization token “oh really”—are employed to expand the talk for eliciting more insightful information when certain utterances are considered particularly noteworthy (Schegloff, 2007). Another type is rejecting or challenging with the second pair parts. In some cases, post-expansions are oriented to dispreferred responses since speakers show overt disagreement in the base second pair parts of the adjacency pairs. This leads to initiating subsequent post-expansions after the base second pair parts in order to make another speaker backdown or reproduce an answer (Liddicoat, 2021; Schegloff, 2007). Both topicalization and rejecting or challenging with the second pair parts appear in (5.6).

(5.6) Betty and Jeab are discussing about their favorite sex position.

200	B:	ท่าที่ชอบ=
201	→ J:	=ปกติ พื้นฐาน=
202	→ B:	=อยู่ข้างบน ข้างล่าง=
203	→ J:	=คุณเบ็คคุณชอบท่าอะไร=
204	B:	=ชอบเลีย ((หัวเราะ))
205	→ J:	คือยังไงนะ คือชอบให้คนมาเลียหรือ=
206	B:	=ชอบเลียเขา=
207	→ J:	=เราทูเรย์หรือวันเรย์=
208	B:	=วันเรย์ วันเรย์=
209	→ J:	=จริงหรือ=
210	B:	=ตอบมาหลายอีพีล็อกแล้วเนี่ย=
211	J:	=ทำไม่ละ ลองดิ มันตีกีว่าวันเรย์นะเวย์ ทรีเรย์
212	B:	((หัวเราะ)) หรือ ทรีเรย์อะนะ=
213	J:	=เดียวพีทำให้ ทรีเรย์=
214	B:	=หรือ เข้ารูดหรือพี่หรือเข้าทางไหน=
215	J:	=เอ้อ เข้ารูจูกออกปากให้เลย
216	B:	((หัวเราะ))
217	J:	ทำไม่ ทำไม่ถึงชอบเลีย
218	B:	รู้สึกว่ามันเป็นท่าที่นุ่มนวลที่สุด
219	→ J:	อ้อ หรือ แล้วมีท่าไหนเด็ดสุด
220	B:	ไม่ เนี่ย คือแขกรับเชิญจะได้ถ้ามีคำถกตอบท้ายรายการ=
221	J:	=เอ้า หรือ=
222	B:	=ใช่ ใช่=
223	J:	=พอดีเป็นพิธีกรปอย แลกอั้ว แลกอั้ว
224	→ B:	เออ เออ อ้อ ตอบได้ลักษณะ สรุปว่า
225	J:	แต่แนะนำว่าเราต้องลองอย่างอื่นบ้าง วันเรย์มันไม่สนุกหรอก
226	B:	พี่เจียบลองอะไรมาแล้วบ้างแหลก
227	J:	ลองมาหลายอย่างแล้ว
228	→ B:	เออ เล่าเล่า
229	→ J:	((หัวเราะ)) อ้อ คำถกมัดมา

230 B: ((หัวเราะ)) เดี่ยววิดิท่าที่ชอบที่สุดยังไม่มาเลย
231 J: ปกติ==
232 → B: =แล้วเราอยู่บนอยู่ล่าง==
233 → J: =อยู่ข้างข้างกัน นอนจับมือ^{กัน}
234 B: เย้อ^ๆ
235 J: กุมมือ==
236 B: =กุมมือเขามาจับปีเรา ((หัวเราะ))
237 → J: ((หัวเราะ)) ชอบแบบปกติ พื้นฐานพื้นฐาน

English translation

200 B: Your favorite position==
201 → J: =Basic==
202 → B: =On top or lie on your back?=
203 → J: =Betty, what's your favorite position?=
204 B: =I like licking ((Laugh)).=
205 → J: =What do you mean? You like being licked?=
206 B: =I like licking others.=
207 → J: =Are you one-way or two-way?=
208 B: = one-way, one way.=
209 → J: =Oh really?
210 B: =I have been answering this in many episodes.=
211 J: =Why? Just try. Three-way sex is better than one-way sex.=
212 B: ((Laugh)) Really? Three-way sex?=
213 J: =I'll do three-way for you.=
214 B: =Really? Is it entering through butthole or any other ways?=
215 J: =Yeah. Entering through nostril and going out the mouth.
216 B: ((Laugh))
217 J: Why why do you like licking others?
218 B: I think it is the most gentle position.
219 → J: Oh really? What is the hottest position?=
220 B: =No. The invited guest will get to ask questions at the end of the show.=
221 J: =Oh really?=
222 B: =Yes. Yes.=
223 J: =I'm often the moderator, so I accidentally slipped into the host mode.
224 → B: Um. Um. Okay. Just answer it. So?
225 J: But I suggest you try other things. One-way sex is not fun.
226 B: What have you tried?
227 J: I have tried many things.
228 → B: Right. Tell me, tell me.
229 → J: ((Laugh)) Okay. Next question.
230 B: ((Laugh)) Wait. The most favorite sex position hasn't come yet.
231 J: It's normal=
232 → B: =On top or on your back?=

233 → J: =Next to each other, laying down holding hands.
234 B: ((Exhale))
235 J: Holding hands=
236 B: =Holding their hand to touch our pussy?
237 → J: ((Laugh)) I just like the normal position. Basic. Basic.

In (5.6), the conversation begins with Betty asking Jeab about their favorite sex position. Jeab gives a vague answer by stating that their favorite sex position is the basic one in line 201. Betty treats Jeab's answer as a dispreferred response since it is not explicit and insightful enough. So, Betty decides to adopt post expansions—rejecting or challenging the second pair part of the adjacency pair—to produce a subsequent post-expansion with a topical question such as “อยู่ข้างบน ข้างล่าง” (“On top or lie on your back?”) in line 202, inviting Jeab to produce a direct answer. However, Jeab does not give an answer to Betty's prior question but delivers a question “คุณเบ็ด คุณชอบท่าอะไร” (“Betty, what's your favorite position?”) instead. In some cases, turn types can have “double duty.” They can enact their own actions and can serve as the vehicle or instrument for another action at the same time. Jeab's question, “คุณเบ็ด คุณชอบท่าอะไร” (“Betty, what's your favorite sex position?”), in line 203 is considered a double-duty turn, as it simultaneously performs the act of questioning and requests specific information about Betty's sexual preferences. Jeab's question in line 203 signifies the change of role between Betty and Jeab. It turns out that Jeab becomes the moderator instead of Betty since they deliver several topical post-expansions such as “คือยังไงนะ คือชอบให้คนมาเลียหรือ” (“What do you mean? You like being licked?”), “เราทุ่วหรืออวันวาย” (“Are you one-way or two-way?”), “ทำไม ทำไม ถึงชอบเลีย” (“Why Why do you like licking others?”). Then, in line 259, Jeab adopts a topicalization token “จริงเหรอ” (“Oh really?”) to Betty, who is being treated as the guest at the moment, in order to elicit more details about their favorite sex position and sexual role. Betty cooperatively provides the answer to those questions as they state that their favorite sex position is licking, implying an active sexual role. This also indicates the reversal power balance between Betty and Jeab as a moderator and guest in the interview show. When Jeab temporarily becomes the moderator, they gain the power to shift the topic and control the conversational floor, leading Betty to have no choice but to comply with Jeab's authority by answering all of Jeab's questions.

Afterwards, when Jeab asks a question “แล้วมีท่าไหนเด็ดสุด” (“What's the hottest position?”) in line 219 to Betty, Betty does not answer the question but say that Jeab as an invited guest is able to ask some questions to the host at the end signaling the change of role between Betty and Jeab again. Betty resumes their role as a moderator and says “เออ เออ ลื้ะ ตอบได้ล่ะ สรุปว่า” (“Um. Um. Okay. Just answer it. So?”) and “เออ เล่าเล่า” (“Right. Tell me, tell me.”) to demand an answer from Jeab. These Betty's utterances also do the double duty for they are not just the tellings but constitute a request for more information about Jeab's favorite sex position. Nevertheless, Jeab still avoids giving an answer by attempting to change to the next question which Betty does not allow and repeats the question “แล้วเราอยู่บนอยู่ล่าง” (“On top or on your back?”) to Jeab. Still, Jeab produces the answer “อยู่ข้างข้างกัน นอนจับมือ” (“Next to each other, laying down holding hands”) and “ชอบแบบปกติ พื้นฐานพื้นฐาน” (“I just like the normal position. Basic. Basic.”) which does not meet with Betty's expectation for they are not specific or explicit enough. As a result, Betty fails in their attempt to elicit explicit and insightful answers about sex from Jeab.

Jeab's repeated attempts to avoid giving explicit answers about sex reinforce the idea that sex is a taboo topic. Initially, Jeab gives a vague answer about sex position, which implies that they do not desire to explicitly state about the topic. This prompts Betty to ask numerous follow-up questions, resulting in extended sequences of interaction. Later, Jeab desperately refuses to provide answers about sex and instead shifts their role to become the moderator of the conversation, directing sexual questions toward Betty. At the end of the conversation, Jeab continues to offer a dispreferred response “ชอบแบบปกติ พื้นฐานพื้นฐาน” (“I just like the normal position. Basic. Basic.”), accompanied by laughter in line 237. Laughter is a nonverbal vocalization, functions as a paralinguistic feature that contributes to communicative meaning (Glenn, 2003; Mazzocconi et. al, 2020). It often occurs in situations where there is a clash between social norms and speaker's comfort, as in Jeab's case. The laughter accompanying Jeab's utterance in line 237 arises from a clash between Thai sociocultural norms and speaker's comfort, as Betty explicitly mentions a sexual act—touching female genitalia—in the previous turn (line 236), which violates Thai sociocultural norms that discourage public discussion of sexual matters. Consequently, Jeab's laughter can be understood as a strategy to cope with the discomfort and awkwardness arising in this socially sensitive moment before continue speaking. This instance highlights how discomfort and reluctance for discussing sexual issues in public for Thai *toms*.

Moreover, this response can be interpreted as an adherence to femininity, as Jeab avoids discussing sexual matters explicitly—aligning with Thai sociocultural norms that expect women to be reserved and not openly associated with sexual activity (Sittitrai & Brown, 1994). This suggests that Thai *toms* adhere to femininity, reflecting the expectation for Thai women. To clarify, several *tom* guests, such as Jeab, Jyb, and Zee, in the interview show extremely avoid mentioning sexual content by giving vague or unrelated answers to sex-specific questions. Furthermore, the nature of YouTube interview show as an online platform may contribute Thai *tom* guests' discomfort or hesitation in addressing sexual topics since discussions of sex as private matters are easily accessible to a public audience.

As evidenced by the interview data, Thai *toms*' sexual practice is more diverse and fluid than traditionally portrayed. Thai *toms*' sexuality is not limited to individuals assigned female at birth but also extends to transwomen. Additionally, their sexual roles appear to be more versatile. They do not exclusively adhere to the active sexual role and the role of the sex initiator—but may adopt both active and passive roles, depending on individual desire. Despite the explicit discussion of sexual experiences on the interview show, some Thai *toms* are reluctant to openly share their own experiences. We argue that their avoidance of and reluctance to discuss sexual content reflects their conformity to traditional feminine norms, which discourage public discussion of sex, derived from Thai women's norms and the nature of the YouTube interview show.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Using CA approach to examine interactions in the YouTube interview show “Talk with Betty,” this paper explores how Thai *toms* present and navigate their sexuality in interaction. In line with previous literature, the data show that flirtatiousness is an expected trait and a normative

practice within the community. This practice can be seen as part of a masculine expression stereotypically associated with Thai *toms*. While *toms* are typically linked to the active sexual role, the interactions reveal more fluid and diverse sexual practices. At the same time, a noticeable reluctance to talk about sex openly emerges, which may reflect an alignment with traditional feminine traits as demonstrated by several *tom* guests in the interview show, such as Jeab, Zee, and Jyb. The analysis not only highlights how Thai *toms* navigate sexuality in interaction but also illustrates how sexuality is shaped by gendered expectations.

The findings of this paper correspond with research on masculine female-bodied individuals in the global context. Thai *tom*'s flirtatiousness is comparable to *tomboi* in the southern Philippines, as described in Johnson's (2005) work. Both Thai *toms* and *tombois* express their sexuality toward women by referencing the number of women they have committed to, resulting in flirtatious romantic relationships. Regarding sexual activity, both Thai *toms*' and tbs' (masculine lesbians in Hongkong) sexuality is fluid and diverse as discussed in Lai's (2003) study. Their sexual roles are not confined to active roles but can shift to passive ones with their feminine partners, as they willingly derive pleasure from being sexually caressed and penetrated by their partners, without experiencing feelings of humiliation.

Moreover, CA helps unveil how Thai *toms*' sexuality is constructed and negotiated during interaction. Various conversational features provide empirical evidence of how certain issues, especially those that people feel uncomfortable discussing such as sexual experience, are taken up or interpreted. Although these ideas are not explicitly stated or openly acknowledged, conversational practices reveal their underlying meanings.

Although the analysis offers valuable insights into Thai *toms*—including aspects that diverge from previous literature—there are certain limitations and characteristics of the data that must be considered. While CA is highly effective in providing empirical evidence of how sexuality is constructed in interaction, it is typically applied to naturally occurring conversations rather than semi-structured interactions such as interviews, as in this study. In interview settings, the interviewer often holds greater power than the interviewee. The structure of the interactions analyzed here is largely shaped by Betty, who determines the questions and directs the flow of the conversation. As such, the dialogue does not unfold entirely “naturally” but is framed and guided by the host. This asymmetrical power dynamic may influence how the guests respond. A particularly illustrative example is when Betty asks the guests to disclose their favorite sex positions. While some respond immediately, others express discomfort and avoid answering. As the host, Betty often presses further if a response is vague or indirect. Various conversational features reflect this dynamic.

This paper demonstrates the role of language in the construction of sexuality through an analysis of interactions involving Thai *toms* on a YouTube interview show. While the findings align with aspects of existing literature, they also reveal diverse and evolving practices that challenge stereotypical representations. The study sheds light not only on Thai *toms* but also on the broader Thai LGBTQ+ community, highlighting how sexuality is shaped, negotiated, and expressed through interactional discourse.

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Appendix

Jefferson's (2004) transcription convention

Symbol	Meaning
[]	Square brackets indicate the onset and end of overlapping speeches.
=	The equal sign is used to display that speakers speak without pauses.
(.)	A dot enclosed in the brackets indicates a micro interval.
?	A question mark indicates a rising inflection.
:	a colon represents that the preceding sound is being prolonged. The number of colons used indicates the length of the sound.
(())	A description enclosed in double brackets signifies non-verbal actions, such as nodding or laughter.
CAPITALS	A word in capital letters is used to mark noticeably loud speech.
—	A dash represents the cut-off of the prior words or sounds.
→	An arrow in the left margin points to specific utterances discussed in the analysis.