

It's Time To End These Backward Beliefs About LGBTQ+ In Thailand (Interviews)

Friday 19 August 2022, by [TUN-ATIRUJ Choltanutkun](#) (Date first published: 17 June 2022).

"Top or bottom?" "You'll never find true love being gay," "How do you have sex?" "Lesbianism is fixed by sex with a man." They just gonna go on and on.

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On the surface, Thailand seems to be one of the most LGBTQ+ friendly places in the world. But the same persistent attitudes and stereotypes say otherwise.

While two bills – one granting civil unions, the other full marriage rights – just [passed first readings in parliament](#), there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality. The country has no laws that protect or provide basic rights to LGBTQ+ individuals. This doesn't even touch on ultra-conservative and religious beliefs, backward attitudes, and the endless "jokes."

We spoke to LGBTQ+ people living Bangkok about the myths and stereotypes that stubbornly persist.

Myth: LGBTQ+ people can't find true love. You'll never have a good family because you're gay.

Anticha Sangchai (right), philosophy lecturer at Prince of Songkla University and painting therapist

For this myth, it's not just straight people who tell us this. It's even people from our community who believe this. Then it turns into a lack of confidence, and makes LGBTQ+ people feel unstable.

Some people from this community feel that they don't deserve true love, or are unable to have stable relationships. This is something deeply rooted in our hearts, because we grew up in a society that doesn't empower us to believe in ourselves and families taught us that love has to be binary between a man and a woman.

No one taught us that we, too, could love someone deeply and create a happy, loving, healthy family. If you feel like this, it's not your fault at all. It's the people in power who try to keep things the way

they are and not allow things to chance. Society can be cruel. But you can try and give yourself love, take care of the relationship that you have with yourself until you feel you deserve to be loved and confident enough to love back.

Myth: Real relationships require a wife and husband

Amornsak “Turk” Dejhuaipai, content creator and entrepreneur and Sudy Nataraj, engineer

They keep thinking that there needs to be a man and a woman in our relationship in order to separate different roles. This myth is deep-rooted in the heterosexual world. For example, for us, we don't have roles, and we do things together whether it's house chores or not. We both work.

Then, the straight people ask us questions like, “Who's top or who's bottom? Who wears the pants in our relationship, or who takes care of the expenses?” We don't go around asking them who dominates in their relationships. This belief is a bit narrow-minded.

Straight people can't seem to believe that people can be together just because they love each other. They always seem to think that, like their relationships, there must be some kind of transaction. The idea of marriage or partnership is so narrowed to straight people that they cannot think beyond men and the women, or how the men must pay for the women. But there are many other kinds of relationships, shapes of love. Just because you are put in the straight box, doesn't mean you are right.

Myth: Sex with a man will fix being a lesbian/transgender man.

Thitikarn “Kook” Jaturapit, bodybuilder and personal trainer

Thai men often think that when a lesbian or transgender person has sex with a man, they are magically “fixed” by their dick. Saying this is disrespectful and harassment. You wouldn't like it if I said to you, a man, that you could be turned to be gay if you had sex with a man.

Some men who are not open to diversity at all always ask lesbians or transgender men, “How do you guys have sex?” and there's this “joke” in Thai society that goes something like this, “How are cold fingers going to win over warm vessels?” Love is not limited by gender, only people put a limit on it. Love is love and if you love someone, the sex will work out. It's also not your business to ask us how we have sex. It's none of your business. The bottom line is that we just have to respect each other.

Myth: Transgender women are obsessed with having sex and being touched.

Nada Chaiyajit, human rights campaign advisor at Manushya Foundation

This is a very bad myth because men feel like they can sexually harass us. Transgender women want to look like a woman, to feel connected to ourselves, but men see it as trying to look beautiful because we want to be fucked.

And then they ask, “Then why are you trying to look beautiful? Isn't it because you want men to love you, to want you? Having sex with men will empower you, right? So you feel like a real woman.” Or they think that when a transgender person gets her breasts done it's because she wants the men to

touch them, or when she gets a transgender surgery, it's because she wants to be fucked. This myth just reflects on the toxic masculinity in Thailand.

For many transgender people, regardless of how they identify themselves, when they transition, they do it for themselves, not to serve any man's dick. The universe doesn't revolve around your dick. If you can't comprehend this, then don't come near us. It will make us feel safer and will make society safer.

Myth: The LGBTQ+ lifestyle is a sin.

Sirisak Chaited, human rights, LGBTQ+, and sex worker activist

Religious people believe that being LGBTQ+ is a sin, some kind of punishment for our previous life where we were having an affair with someone. That's why in this life, we're born LGBTQ+. This myth is extreme because it involves religion, and religion, for some people, is the center of their lives and has the power to influence how they live. It leads some people's lives. So if a religion tells them to think something, like how being LGBTQ+ is a sin, or that you need to pity the LGBTQ+ people and help them via a religious process, many people will believe it.

My family is Catholic and always made me confess my sins. Religion is a big thing in my family and they would never tell me straight-up but talk about how the things apart from what god created - Adam and Eve, man and a woman - are a sin, and how I need to confess my sins.

Religious beliefs affect a lot of families, especially very religious families. The parents try to find a way to "handle" their LGBTQ+ children. Every time we try to push for marriage equality, the religious always get involved in the conversation—even though there's no explicit teaching that being gay is a sin in the Bible. This kind of belief is backward already. My family is still trying to get me to marry a woman.

Myth: It's easy for transgender people to transition

Chitsanupong "Best" Nithiwana, executive director of Young Pride Club

The media only shows transgender people who have already successfully transitioned. The representation in Thai society is limited only to the binary image that if you're a transgender woman, you must already look like a "real" woman to get media space, conformed to what the society can handle. But in reality, it's not that easy to have access to these processes, especially for transgender people outside of Bangkok.

People often think it's easy to do this in Thailand, but the truth is that unless you are in at least the upper-middle class, these processes are not accessible to you. On top of the financial aspect, many health professionals around Thailand are also still not diverse when it comes to this. For some medical facilities, they still require permission from your parents up until you're 20 years old. But what if you are not out to your parents yet? What if your parents live in a different province far away? The government could help by providing more data and information to healthcare professionals.

Myth: Being gay means you'll get AIDS.

Oat Montien, artist and founder of the LGBTQ+ Bodhisattva Gallery

It's a myth that many people, my friends, and even my mom told me. It's not logical, but I think I know why it's still here. I blame the media and the narrative since the AIDS epidemic in Thailand in the late 1990s.

Thailand is actually one of the very few countries in the world where you can get free PREP (*Ed. note: a drug that prevent contracting AIDS*), but there's a stigma. When there are still many people saying, "When you're gay, you'll get AIDS," people are afraid to go get checked.

Yes, the AIDS epidemic did affect our community really badly and the number is still growing in our community, but on the other hand, it's not just gay people that have HIV. The research that says gays have more chances is bullshit because they never did any research on straight people. They would use anal sex as an argument but that doesn't just fall onto gays. Statistically, the people who pass on AIDS are usually the married couples, because they never check as they are married, and think they are safe. We should turn this myth around, whether you're gay or straight: get checked, and not use it as a stigma.

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