



# Asymmetrical Sexual Scripts in Y Literature: Manifestations of a Heteronormative Discourse

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**ABSTRACT**

Issues surrounding gender and sexuality are fundamental determinants of either a liberated or restricted human experience, and comprehensive sex education has been recognized as an essential mechanism to help youth process their gender and sexuality in a standardized, open, safe, and healthy atmosphere. In the absence of such education, Y novels are a growing source of cultural resources in the social sphere of sexuality, especially among Thai girls and young women. The present study differentiated between and analyzed the sexual scripts engaged in by the two leading characters, the *pra'ek* and *nai'ek*, in scenes of erotic significance from nine such novels. The dialogue and narration from these scenes were analyzed descriptively, and clear patterns of asymmetry emerged. These patterns were discussed as manifestations of heteronormative discourses. Y novels, despite the same-sex relationships that define them, were found to re-produce heteronormative discourses around masculinity and femininity. While Y novels may be an avenue for girls and women to explore their own sexuality in the heteronormative context in which they find themselves, the genre may also endanger girls,

	women, and queer-identifying people by re-producing meaning making that defines a 'gray area' of consent in sexual encounters.
	<b>Keywords:</b> discourse, heteronormativity, sexuality, sexual scripts, Y-literature

## Introduction

The World Health Organization has given special attention to fulfilling human rights, including the expression of one's own sexuality and the enjoyment of sexual health, recognizing the centrality of sexuality to the experience of the human condition (World Health Organization, 2022). However, even breaching the topic of sexuality continues to be taboo throughout much of the world, resulting in absent, inadequate or even at times harmful sex education.

Thailand, likewise, faces taboos around sex, eroticism, and pleasure, especially as it applies to women, yet impermissibility has not prevented representations of eroticism and constructions of sexuality in literature. In fact, Piayura (2010) remarks, 'All of the great Thai classical literature had erotic scenes, all written by male authors.' (p. 34) Her research shows how these authors used metaphor in erotic scenes to establish male dominance and other ideas surrounding masculinity.

Male dominance and a culture of violence toward women have continued to play a fundamental role in eroticism represented in modern Thai media (Khopolklang et al., 2014). The rape-turned-love scene in Thai soap operas is a trope that audiences not only have come to expect as part of a romantic plot; Chawalitthada (2018) found that such scenes continue to even evoke praise from audiences when the male hero feels remorseful and holds himself accountable for the violence he has committed and when the heroine demonstrates tolerance, forgiveness, and generosity in return.

'Y Literature' is a subculture-turned-mainstream phenomenon in Thailand which could (at times) be read as an attempt to subvert patriarchal, heteronormative power structures. Given the shortcomings of sex education and the popularity of the genre among Thailand's youth, Y literature has the potential to significantly influence gender and sexual discourses among Thailand's newer generations. This study thus examines the sexual scripting (re-)produced within scenes of erotic significance in nine Y-novels, with a special focus on the dialogues surrounding sex and pleasure in erotic scenes, and discusses the patterns that emerge as manifestations of heteronormative discourses produced by hegemonic structures surrounding gender and sexuality.

## Gender, Sexuality, and Heterosexuality

In most societies today, deep, structural complexities around gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality have led to the re-production of gender roles in society that make them seem fixed and innate. Jackson (2006) argues that gender and heterosexuality, as two interrelated structural phenomena, are the most closely linked of these three. Her analysis shows that 'heterosexuality' permeates every part of the 'social,' and it is within hegemonic, heteronormative discourses that people become gendered beings. However, as meaning (a dimension of the social) is fluid rather than static, the meaning making of gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality will vary with time, place, and culture.

In Thailand, scholars have recognized the complexity of gender and its fluid, multivalent meanings, describing how gender, as a dynamic status, affects and is affected by the power systems in place at any one period of time, including class, ethnicity, and the cultural and social expectations embedded in social beliefs, attitudes, myths, customs, and social norms. The concept of gender serves to divide people according to physical or personality attributes, identity, expression, or interests, which are oftentimes classified as either 'feminine' or 'masculine,' and these divisions affect the allocation of and access to power and resources (Archavanitkul, 2011; Kaewthep, 2002; Piayura, 2018; Sae-Kuay, 2001).

Farmer (2011) argues that it would be erroneous to transpose Western concepts of gender and queerness onto Thai people. He describes the close ties between Thailand's structural and hegemonic forces and gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality as objects of discourse, informed particularly by the family network fundamental to Thai culture and identity and responsibilities toward family and nation. Thais today accept queerness as long as it does not interfere with this family network, he contends. That is, queerness must not interfere with building a heterosexual family, ensuring not only the survival and continuance of one's own family, but also the construct of the Thai nation as family, with the King as father and head of the nation, explains Farmer.

Some historians would argue, however, that it was in the mid-nineteenth century that an attempt to transpose Western concepts of heteronormativity occurred. Prior to this era, sexuality was a more individualistic notion, according to Chiang Mai University's Chalardchai Ramitanond, who was quoted in a 2009 Bangkok Post article: 'In fact, there has long been diversity in sexual orientation, but we have been trying to hide it so that our society would look nice' (Svasti, 2009). Other scholars agree that gender and sexuality were much more pluralistic, and, depending on social

class and locality, freer, prior to the era of Western colonialism in Southeast Asia. Imported Victorian values of chastity, marriage, and sex solely for the purposes of reproduction are what led to the complex, hegemonic heteronormativity embedded in every dimension of the Thai social sphere today (Boonmongkon & Jackson, 2012; Svasti, 2009).

Engchuan (2017) points out the current double standards around sexuality faced by girls and young women. She discusses the constructs of not only Victorian gender roles and sexuality imposed on Thai people since the era of colonialism, but also the construct of youth and adolescence itself, adopted in Thailand only in the 1950s. She found that even in ‘open-minded’ contemporary media, adolescent girls have been represented as: undesirable if they seek sexual pleasure outside of marriage or a loving relationship; plagued with doubt and anxieties around pregnancy if they have sex at all; shamed if they do not conform to feminine gender roles and take too much pleasure in boys’ company; and having to sacrifice their own happiness in order to meet social expectations.

Thailand is, therefore, a unique case study of how gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality are interconnected, and one context where girl’s and women’s sexual liberation seems to intersect with a queer discourse is in Y literature.

## **The Genre of Y Literature**

In Thailand, Y literature has found its most loyal base of support among girls and young women. The ‘Y’ novel is a genre of novel in which the two protagonists are of the same sex and are attracted to each other. It has its origins in Japanese Yaoi (boys’ love) and Yuri (girls’ love) literature, the majority of which has primarily been created by and for women (McLelland, 2001).

The popularity of Y content first manifested as a kind of subculture before mass media took advantage of its potential and in many ways facilitated its mainstreaming throughout the 2010s, injecting Y narratives into media and film. Prasannam (2019) outlines this phenomenon, as well as the scholarship inspired by the growth of Y literature in Thailand, ranging from narrative and textual analysis to exploration of the Yaoi subculture and its commodification, as well as sexuality and identity construction.

Boys’ love rather than girls’ is currently more popular among Thai readers. Teenage girls find pleasure in the sweet romantic relationships portrayed between men. A number of studies have focused on the implications of an international trend showing women’s interest in same-sex male eroticism, indicated in the West by women’s preferences for male gay porn (Neville, 2015), as well as a genre of fan fiction called ‘slashing,’ and in

Asian cultures by the popularity of various forms of Yaoi literature (Jiararattanakul, 2007; McLelland, 2001; Prasannam, 2019).

Jiararattanakul (2007) explored Yaoi fans' diverse perspectives toward their own Yaoi consumption, finding that some readers considered the construction of Yaoi characters to be unrealistically perfect men, while others admitted that some of their satisfaction as readers was derived from seeing a man treat another man as he would normally treat a woman. In Thai literature in general, powerful female characters that dominate men, if they occur, are portrayed as 'bad'. Boys' love eliminates this complicating trope without actually removing patriarchal power dynamics, as gender roles are generally transposed onto the characters, with one playing the dominant role and the other the submissive. Some respondents expressed their satisfaction from imagining themselves in the insertive (or top) role in sex, a role they felt they could not experience in reality. Same-sex relationships between men were also defined by some fans as different from other relationships, particularly because they were uncontaminated by expectations of having sexual intercourse for the purpose of reproduction.

Upon conducting a qualitative textual analysis of 20 homosexual characters from 10 of Thailand's boys' love series broadcasted between 2015 and 2020, as well as in-depth interviews with 15 men who have sex with men, Sutheepattarakool (2020) found that identity construction and representations of gay men in these series diverged from those of gay men in Thai soap operas and movies. Whereas gay characters in the latter were said to be presented as effeminate, overreactive, with a passionate but unrequited interest in men, same-sex male couples in boys' love series consisted of a hyper-masculine and dominant man paired with a more feminine and passive one. Once the couple became official, they lived 'happily ever after' in a monogamous relationship, being accepted by society at large. In contrast to these media and film representations, in a critical discourse analysis on the representation of male homosexuality in the more recent Thai Y novel 'My Accidental Love is You', Doungmanee et al. (2021) found that authentic social biases against same-sex relationships were used as plot devices to create conflict, which was subsequently resolved through poetic justice.

Whether boys' love TV series or Y novels, femininity tends to appear in the so-called '*nai'ek*,' who takes on female gender roles similar to the heroine ('*nang'ek*') in mainstream Thai dramas. Masculinity tends to appear in the '*pra'ek*'. The intersection between a fantastical queer male couple functioning within heterosexual discourses and female youth, who are beginning on the lifelong journey of exploring their own sexual identity within similar, heterosexual discourses, led to the research question addressed in this study: How do sexual scripts, especially as manifested in the dialogues surrounding queer sex and pleasure in Y novels, fit into patriarchal,

heterosexual discourses and represent each character's subjectivity – to conform to or resist – these hegemonic power structures?

### **Methodology**

The framework of sexual scripts (Simon & Gagnun, 1986, 2003), subsequently re-framed through a feminist approach by Jackson and Scott (2007), was used to examine scenes of erotic significance from nine Y novels in terms of the subjectivity of each of the characters. The sexual scripts and asymmetries between characters were characterized using descriptive analysis, and the patterns that emerged were then discussed in terms of their positionality within Thailand's patriarchal, heterosexual discourses.

### **Source of Data**

Y literature was selected from bestselling novels between the years 2013-2020. This 8-year period was selected because 2013 was the first year that Y Literature was officially released in leading bookstores in Thailand. Novels depicting same-sex relationships between men were chosen from among the following publishers: EverY Publishing, SENSE BOOK Publishing, Y Book Publishing House, Mee-Ds Publishing, Bongkoch Publishing, and Deep Publishing.

### **Data Selection**

Bestselling Y literature depicting same-sex relationships between men, published by the aforementioned publishers between 2013-2020, included 34 publications (28 stories) with boys' love as the main focus. From these 34 publications, purposive sampling methods were applied to select the novels and passages for this study. The final study sample included all scenes with utterances between characters that created the opportunity for sexual acts between them. If scenes with erotic significance included body language or eye contact but did not include verbal utterances, they were eliminated. Using this criteria, nine novels were selected (Table 1).

**Table 1***Selected Y Novels*

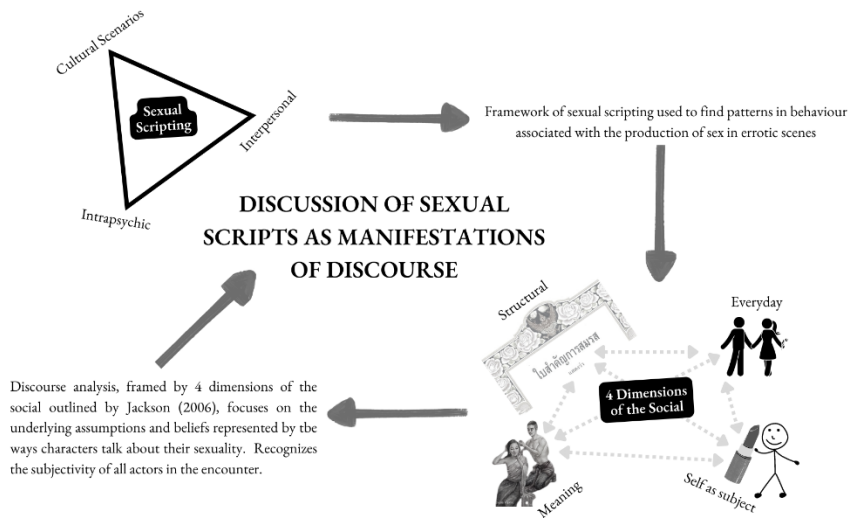
No.	Year	ISBN	Title (English)	Title (Thai)
1	2013	9786163121202	Ravenous and Hungry, a Man's Search for Loveher	<i>Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak</i>
2	2015	9786163122445	7 Great Hearts of Chaoyut	<i>7 Yod Duang Chai Chaoyut</i>
3	2016	9786160619603	2 Moons 2	<i>Duean Kiao Duean 2</i>
4	2016	9786160919505	Wedding Plan: The Evil (Love) Plan of the Groom	<i>Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao</i>
5	2017	9786160620685	Because We're...A Couple (Vol. 1-2)	<i>Phro Rao Khu Kan (1-2)</i>
6	2018	9786160622993	Dark Blue Kiss: Love Chooses No Status	<i>Dark Blue Kiss Rak Mai Rabu Sathana</i>
7	2018	9786160621910	He's Coming to Me	<i>Khao Ma Seng Meng Ti Khang Lum Phom Krap</i>
8	2020	9786161832384	The White Lion King and his Wife and Step-Children	<i>Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit</i>
9	2020	9786160039364	Live #Nong Ai's Single Life	<i>Live #NongAiLifeSot</i>

**Analytical Frameworks**

Two frameworks were used in this study. The first, sexual scripting (Simon and Gagnun, 1986), was instrumental in positioning sexuality firmly in the social. The second, discursive meaning (Foucault, 1972), shows how power and discourse contextualize sexuality. These frameworks are discussed in terms of their points of convergence by Jackson (2006), Jackson and Scott (2007), and Beres (2013) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Convergence of sexual scripts and discursive meaning frameworks to discuss sexual scripts as manifestations of discourse*



Simon and Gagnun (1986) coined the word “sexual scripting,” with three interrelated dimensions that occur simultaneously, to describe the production of sexuality within social life. The first, cultural scenarios, are what the surrounding culture treats as sexuality. This includes an enactment of “roles” which are abstract and generic but understood through the surrounding discourse, such as through media and other agents of ideology. These “instruct in times, places, sequences of gesture and utterances and...what the actor and his or her coparticipants (real or imagined) are assumed to be feeling” (Simon & Gagnun, 1986, p. 105). The second dimension, interpersonal scripting is the concrete, context-specific behavior that manifests between two or more people. This may be improvised or adapted from cultural scripts to varying degrees. Finally, intrapsychic scripting is the processing of cultural scenarios and interpersonal experience, leading to a personal set of sexual scripts, which inform a person’s individual fantasies and internal dialogues, as well as sexual engagements with others.

Foucault (1972) showed how the discursive field of sexuality accepts, gives power to, and thus re-produces certain truths about sexuality. Building on this concept, Jackson and Scott (2007) prefer to frame cultural scenarios as resources that we use to learn how to “do” sexual pleasure – how to signal an internal embodied event to a partner and how to understand our partner’s responses to sexual pleasure. Each person practices reflexivity and has agency to either conform to or resist hegemonic powers or dominant discourses. Nevertheless, Jackson and Scott (2007) observe that the scripting of sexual arousal has historically been gendered in an asymmetrical manner, and certain signals have been associated with sexual arousal for either men or women.

To further conceptualize the power of discourse, its role in the social sphere, and how the individual subject interacts and is constituted by the social, Jackson (2006) defines the social in four dimensions. Combined, these four dimensions form the cultural resources that inform the “self in process.”

The structural dimension is the institutional, macro-level social order. In Thailand as in the West, the structural dimension reinforces heteronormativity. For example, marriage by law is still defined to be between a man and woman. Certain parameters of sexuality are dictated by the institution of marriage. As mentioned, some girls and women find pleasure in Y Literature because of the absence of these factors in the relationships depicted in the same-sex male couples. This demonstrates that girls and women, if not men, can be acutely aware of the structural dimension of the social and its influence on their sexuality.

‘Meaning making,’ the ‘everyday,’ and the ‘subject’ or ‘agent’ are social dimensions that are in many ways congruent with ‘cultural scenarios,’ ‘interpersonal scripting,’ and ‘intrapsychic scripting,’ respectively, but Jackson (2006) adds some significant nuance. In ‘meaning making,’ language and discourse hold power in situated contexts that have been influenced by the structural or macro dimension. For example, children begin to learn about the non-sexual aspects of heteronormativity as soon as they learn who ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ are, or that a ‘normal’ family must have these roles. This dimension is further reinforced by the ‘everyday,’ or localized contexts and relationships that reinforce the heteronormative order. Finally, in the fourth dimension, the ‘subject’ has agency to conform to or resist the hegemonic forces manifested in the first three dimensions.

This study uses the framework of sexual scripting to identify patterns of behavior between male characters within erotic scenes in Y novels. These sexual scripts are then further analyzed as manifestations of discourse according to the framework of discursive meaning as embodied in the 4 dimensions of the social.

## Data Analysis Procedures

Once the relevant scenes had been identified from the nine novels, a close reading was done of the dialogues and narrations in the study sample. Utterances in each dialogue and the surrounding narration were categorized based on their relevance to the subjectivity of the *pra’ek* or *nai’ek*. Each utterance was then coded with an utterance type in order to identify patterns of symmetry or asymmetry between the two characters. Other cues, such as tone, mood, physicality, and positionality, were also identified and described

in terms of their significance as ‘sexual scripts.’ Finally, the sexual scripts were discussed as manifestations of heteronormative discourses.

## Results and Discussion

From the nine passages in the study sample, 86 utterances of dialogue were characterized according to type, with 48 (56%) belonging to the *pra’ek* and 38 (44%) to the *nai’ek*. Several patterns emerged that demonstrated an asymmetry between the subjects characterized as the *pra’ek* and *nai’ek* (Table 2). The major substance of dialogue fell to the *pra’ek*, who was the character charged with ‘leading’ the sexual acts, as well as getting the ‘consent’ of the *nai’ek*. The *pra’ek* used a number of strategies to convince, coax, or even trick or coerce the *nai’ek*, and these are reflected in the types of utterances he used. Meanwhile, the *nai’ek* tended to be naïve or sexually inexperienced. In some cases, the *nai’ek* was characterized as the one who caused the sexual encounter, as he tempted the *pra’ek*. In other cases, he ‘surrendered.’

**Table 2**

### *Asymmetry of Dialogue Between the Pra’ek and Nai’ek*

No.	Utterance Type	Occurrences (%)	
		<i>Pra’ek</i>	<i>Nai’ek</i>
1	Request for consent	9 (100%)	0 (0%)
2	A guarantee about the future (long-term)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
3	Clarification	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
4	Declaration of possession over the sexual partner	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
5	The paying of a compliment	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
6	Evocation of guilt regarding previously given consent	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
7	Invitation	0 (0%)	3 (100%)
8	The making of an accusation	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
9	Stammering or stuttering	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
10	Cursing	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
11	A rhetorical question	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
12	The calling out of the sexual partner’s name	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
13	Request for further explanation, more detail	6 (40%)	9 (60%)
14	Confession of feelings or emotions	8 (73%)	3 (27%)
15	Expression of denial or refusal	2 (25%)	6 (75%)
16	Supposition	3 (38%)	5 (62%)
17	Explanation of upcoming actions	6 (86%)	1 (14%)
18	A suggestion or command	4 (67%)	2 (33%)
19	Narrative about the present	1 (50%)	1 (50%)

## Asymmetry in the Sexual Scripts of the *Pra'ek* and *Nai'ek*

The asymmetries between the *pra'ek* and *nai'ek* could be summed up by the figurative language that was used to characterize the interactions. In *Khao Ma Seng Meng Ti Khang Lum Phom Krap*, the *nai'ek* (Met) compares the manner that the *pra'ek* (Tan) uses to speak directly about sex: 'as if he were talking about the daily weather' or 'holding an academic discussion.' (p. 232) These comparisons show that Met considers Tan to be in control and experienced. Met says the conversation was so strange, 'It was like a thief was asking where I had hidden all of my valuable things in my house, so he could come find them accordingly.' (p. 232) The implication is that the sexual encounter will involve Tan victimizing and taking something away from him. A similar asymmetry is embedded in a double entendre used in *Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak*, where the *pra'ek* tricks or baits the *nai'ek* and says he will 'eat' him. The *nai'ek* loves food and is always hungry and does not understand the double entendre of being 'eaten.' A third allusion to victimization of the *nai'ek* is in *Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit*, when the *nai'ek* describes the *pra'ek*, named Hot:

Anyway, I could see from his form that Hot wasn't feeling mellow like the first time. **He'd become a predator who had seen his delicious prey waiting in front of him.** In front of his fierce stare, considering his build, I didn't kid myself that I would be able to stop him, even if he was in the Felidae class of carnivore. Nonetheless, I decided to follow his commands. I lowered my hands and laid down, still and reserved on the bed.

(*Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit*, p. 162)

While some sexual scripting had less violent overtones, the dichotomy of the thief and victimized, eater and eaten, predator and prey, as well as the leader and follower was a thread throughout the nine passages. The *pra'ek* was also compared to a 'winner.' In *Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao*, the *pra'ek* declares the *nai'ek* his own, saying 'You're mine...you're mine now,' and the *nai'ek* gives him 'hot, passionate kisses as a prize.'

It should be noted that this polarity was reinforced by age and status difference in addition to *pra'ek*/*nai'ek* gender identity. For example, the *pra'ek* in *Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak* is an emperor. In *Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao*, the *nai'ek*, Nuea, calls the *pra'ek* 'Khun' Lom, demonstrating a status gap. The only instance where the *nai'ek* is shown to be older than the *pra'ek* is in *Khao Ma Seng Meng Ti Khang Lum Phom Krap*, where the *nai'ek* is actually a ghost who died young and a virgin. However, he

has aged as a ghost and by the time he meets the *pra'ek*, he is recognized as the 'older brother.'

### Subjectivity and Sexual Scripts of the *Pra'ek*

The sexual scripts demonstrated by the *pra'ek* appear to be motivated by a desire to satisfy his sex drive, receive consent from the *nai'ek* (whether genuine or superficial), and gain (or remain in) control.

#### *Satisfying His Sex Drive*

The sex drive of the *pra'ek* is almost a given, and if anything, he must 'suppress' or agree to suppress the intensity of it in order to get the consent of the *nai'ek*. In *7 Yod Duang Chai Chaoyut*, Chinchoeng (the *pra'ek*) asks, 'Can we do it or not?' but is met with Chi-aor (the *nai'ek*) saying 'No, we can't...' Chinchoeng suppresses his own desires and assures him, 'I'll be really gentle.' Chi-aor, however, responds, 'You're lying. How many hundreds of times have you said this to me before...hm?' (p. 41) This shows that Chinchoeng has likely made this promise as a strategy to get consent rather than sincerely.

P'Kia, the *pra'ek* of *Live #Nong Ai Life Sot*, also seems to try to suppress his own sex drive, but unsuccessfully. He tells In (the *nai'ek*), 'I'm not taking advantage of someone while they're drunk,' but with further 'tempting' from In, he says, 'How many times had he tempted me? I'm just one man. I could only restrain myself so much...Did he think having him just once was going to satisfy me?' (p. 283) This suggests that P'Kia has a strong, overpowering sex drive that he must satisfy.

In *Phro Rao Khu Kan, Vol. 1*, Sarawat (the *pra'ek*) is very direct: 'I want it. Fuck. I want it hard.' (p. 386) He asks Tain for consent for a range of sexual acts, but Tain repeatedly denies him. Due to Sarawat's personality, he expresses his frustrations directly. This is met with more denial from Tain (the *nai'ek*), who refuses to engage in sexual acts with him.

Whether the *nai'ek* meets the sex drive of the *pra'ek* with hesitation, tempting him, or denial, it is notable that the *nai'ek* is never mentioned in terms of his own sex drive. Unlike the insatiable sex drive of the *pra'ek*, the sex drive of the *nai'ek* seems to be entirely absent from the sexual scripting.

#### *Winning Consent*

In most passages, consent was discussed directly, but often, trickery, coercion, or force was used to achieve it; or, once consent was given by the *nai'ek*, it was considered permanent, and the *pra'ek* would use the previously given consent to guarantee follow-through or subsequent sexual acts. For

example, as already mentioned, the *pra'ek* in *Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak* uses food to trick or bait the *nai'ek*, who is characterized to be naïve about sex and does not know what he is getting into. When the *nai'ek* is still hungry but the *pra'ek* is ready to engage in sex, the *pra'ek* says, 'And wasn't it you that promised me that if I fed you and you felt full, you would take care of me in bed?' (p. 24)

In *Khao Ma Seng Meng Ti Khang Lum Phom Krap*, Tan speaks directly about sex and enjoys making Met uncomfortable while discussing sex with him. Met is visibly embarrassed and inexperienced (as well as being a ghost), as he engages in an internal monologue: 'If I were the one on top, it would probably be really difficult, plus I couldn't imagine what position we were going to use.' While he is thinking, Tan orders another whiskey. Met takes this as a signal that he wasn't pressuring him, then says in a softer voice, 'I don't even know if we can do it...But if we can really do it, I'm okay with being on the bottom.' Tan responds quickly without missing a beat to breathe: 'Now that you've said it, don't take it back.' (p. 223-224)

This shows the different strategies that Tan uses to remain in control. He seems to choose not to pressure Met by ordering the whiskey – he knows this will play in his favor. As soon as consent is given, however, he reverses and puts pressure on Met to follow through. This shows that his intention is to have control over Met, and he feels that consent must be accepted as permanent once given, no matter how tentatively. Indeed, the top-bottom arrangement agreed upon in this dialogue becomes permanent in the relationship between these characters.

In *Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit*, after Bi (the *nai'ek*) has seemed to give visual cues signifying consent for Hot (the *pra'ek*) to kiss him and the two have kissed, Hot feigns worry for Bi, asking, 'You're not injured anywhere?' When Bi says he is fine and not to worry, Hot insists on undressing him, saying, 'If I don't see with my own eyes, I won't feel sure.' Bi is startled by his words and tries to stop Hot from touching him, but Hot assails him and says, 'I'll do everything. You don't have to do anything.' (p. 160-162) This shows that once again, consent to a kiss is interpreted to be consent to 'go all the way.'

Finally, in *Dark Blue Kiss Rak Mai Rabu Sathana*, San (the *pra'ek*) professes his love for Mok (the *nai'ek*), entraps him physically against a sofa, and tells him to stop running away from his feelings.

'It's time to stop running away from your feelings now,' San urged, holding Mok's hand pressed up against the sofa, preventing him from dismissing him. **'Because however far you try to run, I'm always going to follow you...I love you,'** he confessed softly in Mok's ear, **'and I'll never let you go...'** [Mok responds:] 'After all of this, how could I not consent? If

I wasn't consenting...you would have been kicked across the room by now.' 'Heh! That was a truly great confession of love in its own way.'

(*Dark Blue Kiss Rak Mai Rabu Sathana*, p. 260-262)

On the one hand, if the two men are truly in love, San's utterances may be considered 'romantic' within existing cultural scenarios, or discourses. On the other hand, if they are not in love, 'I'm always going to follow you' and 'I'll never let you go,' are statements that take on a more threatening tone. Mok's response also demonstrates that he is giving a somewhat 'coerced' consent, as he shows that he does not feel he can refuse San after everything he has said and done. Mok adds a supposition, threatening violence in his own way while also alluding to the inappropriateness of San's comments in any context where the relationship was not consensual. Thus, Mok consents to San indirectly, using a rhetorical question and supposition, and San is satisfied that this is his way of confessing his love.

### ***Maintaining Power and Control***

The question is: Would Mok be physically able to kick San across the room? In multiple cases, the relative size of the *pra'ek* plays a role in the sexual scripting of the encounter, if not the ability for the *pra'ek* to have power and control over the *nai'ek*. While the sexual encounter in *Dark Blue Kiss Rak Mai Rabu Sathana* seems to be consensual, the one in *Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit* is more questionable, as the reader gets a glimpse into the inner dialogue of the *nai'ek* himself, who thinks '...considering his build, I didn't kid myself that I would be able to stop him.' (p. 162) The *nai'ek*, therefore, takes into account the power imbalance due to physicality before deciding to follow the commands of, or 'consent to,' the *pra'ek*.

In *Live #NongAiLifeSot*, notwithstanding the inebriated state of In (the *nai'ek*), there is a consensual sexual encounter between him and P'Kia, who asks, 'Why are you being so provocative?' and 'lightly pushes his small body away by the forehead.' (p. 283) P'Kia, continuing to narrate the encounter, again mentions that In is smaller than him: 'He was smaller than me, so he stood before me and slowly approached.' (p. 283) The positionality of In is for a third time alluded to when he 'raised his eyes' imploringly toward P'Kia. The relevance of In's build and positionality in these scenes of erotic significance speaks to the power dynamic in the sexual encounter. At the same time, In's petite figure, as well as his 'white chest,' are sexualized, demonstrating the extent to which the physicality of gender and sexuality are interrelated.

Size, positionality, or other factors tend to contribute to vulnerabilities in the *nai'ek*, who is sexualized. Notably, it is the body of In,

who is inebriated, that is pressed up against the wall in the sexual encounter: 'Because of In's luring words, we finished in that cramped bathroom. In's body was pressed up against the wall of the bathroom.' (p. 285) In *Dark Blue Kiss Rak Mai Rabu Sathana*, San holds Mok's hand 'pressed up against the sofa, preventing him from dismissing him.' (p. 260) In *Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit*, Bi is potentially injured, and in other novels, the *nai'ek* is represented as vulnerable due to inexperience.

When the *nai'ek* in *Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak* is naïvely eating his food and seems to be unsuspecting of the exchange for sex to which he has agreed, the *nai'ek* 'leaned down and embraced the charming figure, juxtaposed to his own shadow.' (p. 24) Thus, even when the *nai'ek* is completely uninterested in sex, the omniscient narrator describes his 'charming' figure, sexualizing him and juxtaposing his figure with the shadow-from-above of the *pra'ek*.

The relative size and power of the *pra'ek* contrasts with his tone of voice, described throughout the different novels using adjectives such as gentle, husky, soft, quiet, lovely, imploring, and sweet. The *pra'ek* tends to whisper, mumble, speak in a low tone, or so as to assure the *nai'ek* when it suits him. On the other hand, he can also use a direct, indifferent, or stern tone if that suits him more, showing that the underlying intention of the *pra'ek* is to control. None of these descriptors are used to describe the *nai'ek* during sexual encounters.

The *pra'ek* uses his tone of voice, in addition to his physicality and positionality, as tools to maintain power over and control the *nai'ek*, and these tools are shown to be a significant part of the sexual scripting used in the Y novels.

### Subjectivity and Sexual Scripts of the *Nai'ek*

While the *nai'ek* is in many ways characterized as 'victimized' in the analyzed passages, and at times chooses to be passive or objectified, he too is an active, embodied self. Under the limitations of the cultural resources at his disposal, his vulnerabilities within the interpersonal social interaction with the *pra'ek*, and his own set of 'intrapsychic' sexual scripts, he practices agency.

### *Surrendering Consent*

While at times the *nai'ek* stutters, rambles, or signals embarrassment, or does not understand or 'dare to speak,' scripts which are never followed by the *pra'ek*, at other times, he uses his voice to signal consent in indirect ways. Rather than lead or command, he tends to tease and signal willingness indirectly through supposition, invitation, or confession of his feelings.

In *Live #NongAiLifeSot*, P’Kia (the *pra’ek*) narrates an experience of erotic significance with In (the *nai’ek*):

‘Why are you being so provocative?’ I asked, lightly pushing his small body away by the forehead. **‘I wasn’t being provocative. P’Kia, maybe you were feeling lustful yourself?’** I gave him a small smile. ‘You don’t call that provocative?’ I wanted to maul him terribly with an embrace. There was no time for feelings of lust. How could he say I was feeling lustful? ‘I’m not taking advantage of someone while they’re drunk.’ I rubbed his cheek softly. He was smaller than me, so he stood before me and slowly approached. **‘And if I don’t mind? How are you going to take advantage of me...’**

(*Live #NongAiLifeSot*, p. 283)

The above excerpt demonstrates the indirect way that In expresses his own sexual desires. He uses denial, accusation, supposition, and finally, requests more details in order to tease and tempt P’Kia, who seems to feign denial before giving in to his own sex drive (P’Kia is the only *pra’ek* in the study sample who uses denial).

Invitation is used in three different passages. Shortly after the above exchange, P’Kia tells In that they need to move out of the bathroom, because, ‘I don’t think I’m going to stop at kissing.’ In answers him with an invitation, ‘Then don’t stop.’ (p.284-285) Rather than expressing desire for P’Kia to keep going directly, he teases and invites him. However, in *Nai Takla Hio Thong Ma Ha Rak* the *nai’ek* invites the *pra’ek* to engage in sexual acts unwittingly. After the *pra’ek* asks if he can start eating him yet, the *nai’ek* responds, ‘Go ahead!’ (p. 25) without understanding fully the implications of his invitation.

Whether unwittingly or not, the implication of inviting someone to do something is that they will do that thing either with you or to you. This contrasts with the scripts used by the *pra’ek*, who tends to command or explain what *he* is going to do.

### ***Surrendering...or Losing Control?***

A pattern that emerges in the sexual scripts relevant to the subjectivity of the *nai’ek* is the unclear boundaries between expressing consent and pleasure. The *nai’ek* in *Duean Kiao Duean 2* gives his clear consent to the *pra’ek*, P’Pa, by communicating his feelings:

‘Are you ready to be mine yet?’ ‘I’m ready...’ P’Pa whispered in his ear. ‘You want me to penetrate...go inside your body?’ ‘Yes.’ P’Pa whispered in a sweet voice, ‘Just relax then, dear...I love you.’

Even in the clear examples of non-coerced consent, as in the above example, the *nai'ek* tends to consent by 'surrendering.' Above, the sex act is equated with P'Pa gaining ownership over the *nai'ek*. When P'Pa penetrates him, it is equated with the *nai'ek* surrendering his autonomy, but he willingly gives this up. In *Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao*, Nuea (the *nai'ek*) describes his sexual encounter with *Khun Lom* (the *pra'ek*):

...I surrendered all of my feelings of conscious.... 'You're mine, Nuea. Mine, okay?' The gentle words whispered into my ear made my body surrender all of its dignity, and I was the one who threw myself at him, hugging him around his neck.

(*Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao*, p. 89)

This 'surrendering' is clearly Nuea's choice. The gentle voice of *Khun Lom* expressing his ownership over Nuea is interpreted by Nuea as love or passion, and he responds with his own reciprocal love or passion. He then 'throws' himself at *Khun Lom*. This can be compared to verbs such as 'maul,' 'embrace,' or 'press,' used to describe physical interactions initiated by the *pra'ek* in other novels. The above sexual encounter continues, revealing sexual scripts around the expression of pleasure and orgasm:

He moaned in return in a lovely way, receiving my hot, passionate kisses as a prize. My body nearly screamed with joy when...the passion brought me slowly to finish...little by little...until I was nearly overwhelmed.... 'Khun Lom...Khun Lom'...'Nuea...You're mine...You're mine now.'

(*Wedding Plan Phaen Kan (Rak) Rai Khong Nai Jao Bao*, p. 89)

The above example shows that the *pra'ek* moans while the *nai'ek* (nearly) screams with joy, (nearly) becomes overwhelmed, and verbally expresses his pleasure by calling the name of his lover. Similarly, when P'Kia and In have sex in the bathroom, In covers his mouth, implying that he also nearly screams with joy: 'He raised his hand to cover his mouth when I embraced him and kissed him lustfully all over his white chest.' (*Live #NongAiLifeSot*, p. 285)

Another instance of 'surrender' seems to occur in *Racha Singto Khao Kap Phaya Thi Mi Luk Tit*, when *pra'ek* Hot kisses *nai'ek* Bi.

'So...cute. Bi, I want to kiss you.' Hot's request finally made my mind catch up with me. I, too, wanted to kiss him. As he inched his neck closer to me according to his wishes, Hot, who had been waiting, suddenly pressed his lips against mine, and got what he'd been waiting for. **Before long, all my strength left my body.**

This pattern of surrender and visible signs showing a loss of control, such as the urge to scream, cover one's mouth, or go weak, suggests that it is a prominent feature in the sexual scripting followed by the *nai'ek*. Thus, expression of pleasure itself – not only the lead-up to it – is scripted as surrendering, or losing, control.

### Scripts as Manifestations of Heteronormative Discourses

The asymmetries in sexual scripts between *pra'ek* and *nai'ek* characters in Y Literature as revealed in this study demonstrate the polarized nature of these social relationships. Utterances from the *pra'ek* reflected his intense sex drive and his desire to satisfy it, and consequently, his aim to win consent from the *nai'ek*. While in some cases, the *pra'ek* requested consent, in others he used manipulative tactics to maintain power and control over the *nai'ek*. Discourse produced by the *nai'ek*, tended to be less substantive. Utterances often had the effect of surrendering consent or control. Such surrendering, or loss of control, was associated with “love” between the two characters.

Sakulak et al. (2014) found that traditional, heteronormative sexual discourses continue to hold power in societies in the West today, including the male sexual drive discourse, in contrast to women's lack of sex drive; men's physical approach to sex versus women's emotional approach; the pressure on men to perform during sex, versus the ‘inexperienced woman’; and initiation by men versus gatekeeping by women. In addition, men are expected to talk openly about sex whereas women are to be more discreet and inhibit their sexual expression.

While Thailand's post-colonial, heteronormative sexual discourses are similar in nature to those in the West, they are unique in their relevance to a number of strict ideologies interrelated with ‘Thai-ness.’ Boonmongkon and Jackson (2012) describe how Thailand's male sexual drive and performance discourses are evident in the classic hero of the Thai canon, who must have many wives to prove his virtue, or the Thai term *seua phu-ying* that evokes the image of a tiger preying on its victim to describe a man skilled in wooing women to appease his endless sexual appetite. As for Thai women, prominent discourses bind her to the traditional concept of *rak nuan sa-nguan tua*, or chastity until marriage, which also dictates that women should be reserved around men, restrain from saying or doing anything that may be read as sexual, and avoid being sexually violated by men. It falls clearly on the girl or woman's shoulders to be the ‘gatekeeper’ in sexual encounters, as well as to refrain from initiating sexual interactions, engaging in sexual expression, or revealing any experience she may have had.

While the *pra'ek* and *nai'ek* in Y literature are constructed outside of the *institutional* power structures that dictate heterosexuality, it is clear that they are constructed *within* heteronormative discourses produced by the contextualized *meaning making* dimension of the social:

While one's gender expression and one's sexual identity do not necessarily correspond, the division of *gays* into two polar opposites, *ruk* (รุก), 'insertive/active,' and *rap* (รับ), 'receptive/passive,' shows that they are not free of the heterosexual framework of relationships imagined as being between opposite types. This division heavily affects *gay* relationships, since those whose external characteristics or sexuality differ from this frame may not be fully accepted. *Gays* themselves may not see the true diversity of gay sexualities.

(Boonmongkon & Jackson, 2012, p. 130)

While in reality, a diversity of same-sex sexualities and couples exist, in the case of Y Literature, the *pra'ek* and *nai'ek* do not reflect such diversity. In fact, Y novels are unlikely to be products of or for the gay community and are much more likely to be products made for, if not by, the 'female gaze.' The implications of this study's findings are that consumers of Y literature do not necessarily seek to escape from heteronormativity.

A possible explanation for this is that re-producing heteronormative discourses using same-sex love between men may be a kind of loophole in a culture where female sexuality is taboo. In other words, Y literature may be a tool for girls and women who have no other cultural resources at their disposal to explore their own sexuality. It is likely that by re-producing the heteronormative discourses that they themselves find they must position themselves within, girls and women are able to see themselves in characters and see how those characters manage or engage in sexuality.

That being said, Y literature does not only *reflect* heteronormative discourses already existing in Thai society but *re-produces* those discourses. This can adversely affect not only the diverse members of the queer community, but also cis, heterosexual women themselves. As evidenced in the novels, when heteronormative sexual scripts are followed, a 'gray area' develops, often preventing an enthusiastic, consensual sexual encounter from occurring. At best, this prevents sexual exploration and pleasure led by women or 'feminine' gender identities. At worst, it leads to violations against unwilling partners and sexual violence.

## Conclusion

Despite the surface-level same-sex nature of the *pra'ek-nai'ek* relationship, the sexual scripts followed by the characters are manifestations of, and re-produce, heteronormative discourses. This suggests that current Y Literature, rather than creating alternative gender discourses or spaces where gender and sexuality can be creatively and safely explored, may re-produce the unsafe conditions that lead to gender-based violence. To address this issue, comprehensive and inclusive sex education must be developed in the Thai context. Taboos and conventions that prevent critical discourse around the topics of gender and sexuality must be overcome so that children of all genders can safely access cultural resources that will empower them around giving and receiving enthusiastic consent and engaging in safe sex practices.

Limitations of the present study include its relatively small and uniform sample size and the uniformity of research techniques. To confirm and expand on the findings from this study, further research should analyze a larger sample size in order to allow for more meaningful statistical measurements. A larger sample size could include scenes with erotic significance from movies and TV series, as well as from written literature. Additionally, during the research period for this study, few girls' love novels had been published. Further research could compare heteronormative discourses in girls' love literature to those found in boys' love literature. Aside from statistical analysis, future research may expand on findings by interviewing consumers of Y literature.

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