

# **The Role of Social Media in Negotiating Gender Identity among Young Thai Women**

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at University College London (UCL)

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May 2022

## **Declaration**

I, Kamolmas Chanvised, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## **Abstract**

This study explored how 18-year-old women in Bangkok used social media to negotiate and express their gender identities online. In Thailand, prevailing cultures and traditional public discourses on hetero-normative sexualities constrain young women's gender performance both offline and online. The study interrogated processes of adaptation and resistance of traditional mainstream discourses through the consideration of social media as an alternative and flexible space for young women to negotiate and communicate diverse, autonomous gender performances. A gap was identified in terms of the ways in which identity was tactically managed and constructed within different class structures. To investigate these, young women were recruited from three socioeconomic backgrounds: lower class, middle class, and upper class. Data were gathered through interviews, focus groups, and online ethnographies, such as posted pictures, shared contents, and comments on profiles, and interpreted through a multimodal and social semiotic lens to gain deeper understandings of women's classed and gendered social media practices. By examining and cross-referencing qualitative data and the construction of online profiles deriving from different social backgrounds, insights were yielded and a snapshot of the everyday identity work of Thai young women captured as they responded to and resisted traditional forms of feminine conduct.

## **Impact Statement**

The impacts of the thesis can be considered both inside and outside academia. Firstly, inside academia, the thesis contributes to the knowledge in the area of youth cultural studies and gender studies, by providing new ways of understanding the nature and significance of novel social phenomena related to young people's everyday gender negotiations. In particular, in the sociocultural, youth, and media field, the thesis fills in the gap by addressing social class differentials as the significant implication in the ways in which young people negotiate their gender identities in an online environment. The thesis's findings and insights are potentially beneficial for the curriculum design in schools, especially for any subjects related to gender and media studies such as sex education and media literacies in Thai schools and other Asian countries.

Secondly, the benefits outside academia can occur nationally in terms of public health, public policy design, laws, public discourse, culture, equality, and rights. As the thesis's discovery is involved many issues of gender equality, public discourse, and girl's right, this could be one of the impactful opportunities that public policy makers can seize to raise awareness regarding these issues in both Western and Asian societies.

Lastly, the thesis has the impacts regionally and locally in offering suggestions and more comprehensive views to parents and family members of girls in order to understand their children's gender-cultural practices in contemporary social contexts – in other words, those found online.

## **Acknowledgments**

I have been very fortunate to complete a PhD with a great deal of personal and institutional support. A group of people that I am eternally grateful for their help and support throughout my PhD journey is my supervisory team.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Andrew Burn and Dr Michelle Cannon, who have been supportive and constructively critical of my work. Their expertise and experience have been invaluable in my academic life over three years. Several insightful comments and sincere suggestions are helpful for my academic career path in the future. Despite the long spell of the Covid-19 pandemic, their enthusiasm and attentive supervision in every process of my PhD project remain undisrupted. Most of all, it is a great honour to be your student, and thank you for trusting me throughout this journey.

I also want to thank Dr Didem Ozkul, my prior second supervisor who guided and supported me when I was a first-year PhD student. She has been involved in my academic journey from MA in 2017 to the beginning of PhD in 2018. I am grateful for her help and support throughout the path.

I am very lucky to have unconditional love, that is family and friends who are the fellow travelers on this process. To my parents, Buncha and Sajeena, who have been behind me in every step of this journey, I am thankful for their physical, mental and financial support throughout my study life. To my beloved friends, Win, Yao, P' Nat, Tar, Meow, Auem, and others. I am thankful for their friendship, which made my life in London enjoyable and memorable.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Owing to the rising Internet penetration rates, social media has been popularly used by young people for many reasons. One of these is that they use social media as arenas for self-presentation: the display of identity, the performing of self (Hjorth and Hinton, 2019; Rui and Stefanone, 2013a). Importantly, it is evidenced that social media plays a significant role in youth's daily lives, as the venue for expressing their sexual matters: sexting, finding (sexual) partners, as well as performing gender identity (Hjorth, 2009). Social media platforms potentially provide opportunities for users to upload self-created digital images through manageable profile pages (Ringrose et al., 2013). They can employ these platforms to create their self-gender images for social purposes, and create strategic profiles to manage an impression in accordance with social values and practices (Seidman, 2014). Many research studies explore social media and visual communication by focusing on the visual meaning-making resources in social media environments, such as blogs, Facebook, and Instagram (Adami and Jewitt, 2016). One of the key themes that previous research has suggested is that identity construction through multimodal texts is shared online by the individual's profiles (Adami and Jewitt, 2016). This critical theme implies that social media provides a creative space for expressing and constructing the identity of individuals through shared visual contents – like the ways we express our identity through clothes and furniture (ibid). With the emergence of social media, gender

studies also have animated recent debates in the new media field, with attempts to investigate the relationship between gender performance in youth and the impacts of these on online sites. Online spaces are seen as significant locations by many researchers who wish to explore how young people use these online sites in negotiating their gender performance. Thus, due to the high impacts of social media related to youth cultural identity, this kind of topic can be seen as a novel social and cultural phenomenon in digital culture, youth culture, and communication.

In Thailand, there have been many research interests focusing on the exploration of youth's gender concerning social media environments (Songsamphan, 2008; Boonmongkon et al., 2013; Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Most of the Thai scholars still suggest the ambiguity and controversy regarding the social media's roles in the gender performance of young women. On the one hand, it is suggested that even though online spaces provide more opportunities for young women to express their selves and gender identities, girls still cannot escape the influences of mainstream gender discourses in the offline society (Songsamphan, 2008). On the other hand, more recently, scholars consider that young women have more choices to perform their multiple and alternative gender identities on social media (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Due to the controversies, my current study aimed to follow up the critical debates by investigating how young women employ social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to negotiate their gender identities by extending the question of the

social class of girls. Through the multiple lenses of frameworks, the performance of identity concept (Goffman, 1959), the subculture and resistance in the youth framework (Hall and Jefferson, 2006), and the social class and capital concept (Bourdieu, 1970) were applied to serve as the analytical background in understanding girl's represented identity in online spaces.



## **1.2 The rationale of the study**

There are many global statistics of people's social media usage around the world. These crucially provide an understanding of how the plenty use of the Internet, the technological communication sites, or the social media platforms plays a significant role in an individual's everyday life in several aspects. The global statistic data regarding social media usage as outlined below will discuss the significant implications for both global and Asian countries to show the rationale of the study due to social media's high impacts on youth culture.

The Internet World Stats indicates that the most Internet users in the world are in Asia (49.8%), followed by European users (16.3%) (Internet World Stats, 2019). Thailand, one of the southeast Asia countries, is in the 'third place' worldwide in terms of Internet usage (Global Digital Report, 2019). The online space in Thailand continues to go from strength to strength with levels of online penetration and more active smartphones than people across the country. The global digital survey found that 74% of the total Thailand population are active social media users, with 'Facebook' being currently ranked first in terms of the most widely used platform in the country (Global Digital Report, 2019). From this survey, it is unsurprising that social media has significant implications on the study in terms of individual's self and identity communication, especially youth cultural communication. A previous Thai scholar argues that teenage users use these online sites to constantly make a public declaration regarding their life stories,

perform their gender identities, as well as express their sexual desire and emotion through their profile pages (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Thereby, it can be seen that because of the high impact of social media usage, especially in young users, it is worthwhile to study the relationship between social media's roles and the negotiation of gender identity of youth living in the strongly patriarchal society in Thailand.

Thai national surveys have found that young Thai women have higher rates of Internet and social media use, and computer literacy skills than young Thai men (National Statistics Office of Thailand, 2020). From this, it can be seen that Thai girls have more engagement with online activities and online interactions than Thai men. Importantly, there are many traditional public discourses regarding femininity that put more pressure on women than on men in Thai culture (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). For instance, the “*rak nuan san guan tua* – รักนวลสงวนตัว” discourse is a traditional form of female value, demanding that young women should maintain virginity until marriage. Owing to the crucial points discussed above, I propose that 1) the impacts of social media used by young Thai women related to their gender identities, and 2) the presence of strict mainstream discourses regarding femininity in Thailand are both the key rationales of the study. The study aimed to explore how young Thai women negotiate their gender identities through the use of social media, as well as, how they struggle in the sexual matter for sexual autonomy due to the constraints of traditional dominant discourses in Thai culture.

### 1.3 Overview of the study

With the complexity of the relationship between young women's gender performance and their social media use, the study aimed to offer explanations regarding social media's role in negotiating gender identity, by focussing on the process of girl's adaption and/or resistance to the political social norms and values of femininity in Thai culture. In other words, the study focused on the complexity of how young women interact, contradict, or resist mainstream discourse or dominant culture derived from offline relations. Thus, the study ultimately elucidated a deeper understanding of the link between online and offline interactions of girl's cultural communication in terms of gender matters. Importantly, a research gap was identified in terms of the ways in which identity is tactically managed and constructed within different class structures. Hence, the issue of class structure in Thailand will be discussed to provide a picture of how Thai society is structured in a complex hierarchy by the *sakdina* system – “dignity marks” (Thongsawang et al., 2020). The followings are brief discussions: A. definitions of gender identity; B. definitions of the concept of class, especially by Western scholars; C. debates about social class in Thailand; D. my own definitions of class (as an operational model) in the study; and E. summary of the thesis, respectively.

### *A. Definitions of 'gender identity'*

In sociocultural disciplines, gender identity is defined as a complex internalisation of cultural systems of meaning and subject to variation across cultures and historical periods (Butler, 1990; Mead, 1949). According to the folk concept of gender identity, gender identity is “a sense of oneself as a man, woman, or some other gender” (Jenkins, 2018). This promotes the view that gender terms such as ‘man’ and ‘woman’ should to be understood in terms of gender identity: to be a man is to identify as a man (or to have a male gender identity); to be a woman is to identify as a woman (or, to have a female gender identity); to be a non-binary person is to identify as non- binary (or, to have a non-binary gender identity), and so on (Jenkins, 2018). In short, gender identity is each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). All things considered, I note that gender is perceived as social and cultural performances by individuals within a given society and these performances do not need to conform to the biological organ of being female or male, called biological sex. When gender is defined as social and cultural communicative practices in specific cultural contexts, gender identity is thus used to refer to socially constructed characteristics and cultural representations in specific communities (Tangmunkongvorakul et al., 2010). Individuals can construct their own gender

identities through diverse performances via their costumes, hairstyles, manners, speeches, music, and other physical presentations (Wongpanarak et al, 2010). Because of these diverse and flexible performances of individuals, I am led to assume that young Thai women potentially construct their own desired gender identities through the multimodal texts, such as profile pictures, moving images, and content status on their social media profiles. This consideration led me to conceptualise the thesis's research question "**How is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?**" This research question emerged for two key research purposes: firstly, to interrogate how young Thai women use social media to negotiate their gender identities; secondly, to interrogate how different class structures are related to these gender negotiations online. To explore how gender and class are related, a gender lens alone is not sufficient to understand this; rather, adopting an intersectional approach would be necessary. The theory of intersectionality by Crenshaw (1989), Collins (1990), and Hooks (2000) can be usefully applied as one of the analytical frameworks for understanding how young Thai women's gender identity relates to their social class. Briefly, intersectionality identifies multiple factors, such as gender, race, class, religion, disability, appearance, and etc. to understand how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. The intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing. In short, since the intersectional approach is considered as the analytical framework

to conceptualise how the social class is related to gender negotiations, I will investigate how this can connect with the data in the final chapter of the thesis.

## *B. Definitions of the concept of class*

Definitions of the concept of class have been debated by many scholars since its appearance in the writings of Marx and Weber in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The concept of class has then been popular through the works of scholars such as Wright (1980), Bourdieu (1997), Goldthorpe (2000) and recently of Skeggs (2002), Savage (2000), and Devine and Savage (2000). The exact definition of the concept of class and its applicability in the study of social phenomena have been and still are extensively debated. In the thesis's introductory chapter, I will address the definition of the concept of class by applying the recent debates by, for example, Bottero (2014), van Hear (2014), and Savage (2000). Then, I will discuss critical aspects of this in the Theoretical Framework Chapter, particular in the section of Social Class and Capital Theories.

In the definition of the concept of class, Bottero (2014) identified two current concepts of class: one follows traditional class theories by Marx and Weber, whereas the other builds on recent works and encompasses both 'social and cultural formations' inspired by Bourdieu's class and capital concept. In the first

strand, the definition of class inspired by traditional class theorists by Marx and Weber considers class “as a social category pertaining to individuals or groups sharing comparable behaviours, characteristics and way of life” (Bottero, 2014). Class is viewed as “collective, explicit and oppositional” (ibid). This implies that class is “regarded as a collectivity that acts in pursuit of the common interests” (van Hear, 2014). According to traditional Marxist theories, class is mainly discussed by the terms of economic and resource opportunities: it is much about quantitative materials possessed by individuals such as income, car, land, and property. Particularly, in the field of economics, these physical materials can position the individual’s class, which explicitly represents individuals or groups’ behaviours, characteristics and way of life.

In the second concept of class, however, class is viewed as “cultural, individualised, implicit and hierarchical” (Bottero, 2014). Drawing on recent perspectives on class, particularly from Bourdieu, the concept of class focuses on the processes of culture, lifestyle and taste. The concept of class is developed from the issue of economic inequalities to culture, symbolic, cultural, and social capital of individuals as Bourdieu argued (1986). This view is in line with the recent work by Savage (2000), who remarked that the traditional concept of class still exists, but it is expanded in an inconspicuous and individualised manner.



Hence, in dealing with class issues, it appears important to consider the invisible forces that reproduce social divisions by looking closely at individual practices, subjectivities, perceptions, and discourses. These perspectives among Western scholars should be considered in relation to social class in Thailand, which will be addressed in the following section. After providing debates of Thai social class by Thai scholars, I will present my perspectives regarding the definition of class, which is as an operational model that I adopted to conduct the research methodology, especially for the criterion of participant recruitment of their social class.

### *C. Debates about social class in Thailand*

Before we pursue the research question “**How is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?**”, I suggest that it is worth discussing briefly Thai social class, so as to understand an overall picture of Thailand’s social hierarchy, structure, and system as the research context.

Briefly, social hierarchy in Thailand was developed in the late Ayutthaya period under the Chakri dynasty in 1782 - 1873 (Thongsawang et al., 2020). Thai social structure is closely intertwined with an emerging capitalist structure of social classes because of transformations to capitalism and democracy in Thailand’s political development (ibid). The emergence of social classes in capitalist societies was not only observed in Thailand, but also in wider Southeast Asia (Thongsawang et al., 2020). The early Thai scholar Akin (1996), who explored social stratification in Thailand, argued that Thai population was divided into four legal categories: *chao* (lords or king), *khunnang* (nobles), *phrai* (commoners) and *that* (slaves). The first two categories, *chao* and *khunnang*, are the ruling classes, while *phrai* and *that* are the subordinates. It was asserted that the classification is based on a social system called *sakdina*, which means “dignity marks” (Akin, 1996, cited by Thongsawang et al., 2020). This system was believed to lead to much social inequality as well as oppression between the privileged and underprivileged classes in the country –Thailand was claimed to have the third-

highest social inequality in the world (Pasuk and Baker, 2016). Importantly, owing to the *sakdina* system, social tension arose in the political arena in Thailand in 2006 between The Yellow Shirts people – mainly from the Bangkok middle to upper classes, the military and the royal and bureaucratic elites – and The Red Shirts people – rooted in the rural provinces in the North and Northeast, such as peasants, cosmopolitan villagers and migrant workers with a rural background (Keyes, 2014). The political and social tension shows the complicated hierarchy and social structure in Thailand, as well as the class struggle between the dominant and the subordinate groups from past until present (Sirikanya, 2014). Due to this ongoing struggle, I view social class as a salient element related to or with an impact on youth's everyday life, especially the matter of gender negotiation.

#### *D. My own definitions of class (as an operational model) in the study*

Previously, we have discussed debates of the social class definitions in Western and Thai societies. It can be seen that the recent works on social class among Western scholars, particularly Bottero (2014), suggest critical debates about social class related to “cultural, individualised, implicit and hierarchical” dimensions. Class distinction, it is argued, is down to cultural preferences and individual choices – rather than something that is fixed, explicit, or collective. While social class in western culture is viewed as social and cultural formations, which are more fluid, inconspicuous, and individual, the traditional social class in Thailand is defined by the remnants of the feudal system: a hierarchical structure encompassing the aristocracy and the (rural) peasantry.

However, there has been the emergence and expansion of a new urban middle class in Southeast Asia, including Thailand, which is socially coherent, culturally and intellectually hegemonic, and politically ascendant (Takashi, 2004). Funatsu and Kagoya (2002) proposed that this new urban middle class has emerged by educational expansion and advancement of professional careers, whereas the traditional ones are people who have less than a high school degree in education and their occupational status is derived from being small store owners or skilled workers. Due to these two factors: educational expansion and advancement of professional careers, the new urban middle class possesses more cultural and intellectual hegemony than they did in the past, and then such cultural hegemony has been successfully translated into political power in society until now. The

emerging new urban Thai middle class, described as a form of the new bourgeoisie, exists alongside the industrial proletariat and the cosmopolitan peasantry in contemporary rural Thailand (Walker, 2012). This new emergent class could be unsettling traditional rigid hierarchies of Thai society and vestigial feudal demarcations of class (Keyes, 2014). I consider that this disruption correlates with increasing forms of resistance to dominant systems, patriarchy, and traditional cultural values.

Thus, in my own definition of Thai social class, I identify more fluidity and dynamics in individuals' cultural preferences due to the emergence of the newly rich-urban middle class. This raises the possibility, to be explored in my study, that even though traditional social class in Thailand is a strict hierarchal structure, there may be room for resistance for young girls, and a place for fluid-cultural performances for girls to express their identities. Will the ascending new urban middle class begin to challenge the patriarchal society and rigid hierarchal structure of Thai society? From this question, I would define the Thai middle class as the group that begins to have some freedom and social and cultural agency, economically and educationally. There might be possibilities for them to resist and push at the edges of the old hierarchies since they are the group that perhaps aspire to get some of the privileges of the old aristocracy of Thailand.

Nevertheless, it is difficult for working-class people to resist this because they are still trapped in their economic, education, and welfare issues. For example, they

still await the compensation and/or a raw deal from the state, while studying at temple schools, which are opportunity expansion schools supported by the government. Hence, I view the working class, or referred to as the lower or underprivileged class, as the group that typically aspires to be promoted and to climb to a further step of the social hierarchy if they can attain more opportunities, educations, or degrees. The elite groups may not wish to resist or change the old hierarchical structure since they have plenty of privileges already. Instead, they typically wish to protect their privilege and social status. In this study, I define social class in Thailand as something more fluid, individual, and cultural, inspired by Western models. This is because of the emergence of the new urban middle class in Thailand. Young Thai women can now push further at the old Thai hierarchy, potentially resist the rigid structures, and find some of the flexibility to explore gender differences or new gender roles that we see in Western culture.

To link my definition of class with the classical Marxist theory, I propose that the Thai working class, or perceived as the lower class, can be defined as corresponding roughly to Marx's proletariat, the people who potentially resist the oppressive nature of the more powerful groups in society, while the Thai middle class seems more like Marx's bourgeoisie, or the ruling capitalist class – people who own the means of production, manage a distribution of economic opportunities and resources, and perhaps conform to their social norms enacted by their group. However, it is the parents who conform to these dominant norms and the youth who are resisting these. According to Birmingham's school cultural

studies, the “youth” is a kind of class fragment, resisting the conventions of their parental group (Hall, 1993). Thus, even though Thai middle-class parents are perceived as bourgeoisie in Marx’s terms, their children seem to be another fragment separated from parent class and typically challenge the parents’ culture. Lastly, the elite or upper-class group seems to partly resemble Marx’s bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class, which has disappeared effectively in the Western model, but still existed in Thai society. For more details about the socioeconomic background of each class of participants, the Methodology chapter has addressed this to clarify how young Thai women as the research participants were recruited by the SES indicators, which consist not only of their school types – from temple schools to well-known public high schools and high calibre private schools – but also their parent’s income, education, and occupation.

### *E. Summary about the thesis*

To pursue the main research question, the study was conducted in two fieldworks in Bangkok: the PILOT study and the MAIN study. The pilot fieldwork study – which was conducted in June 2019 – aimed to develop the research design for the main study. Then, the main study was conducted in January 2020 and differed from the pilot in terms of the sampling, the procedure of participant recruitment, and other research aspects. One of the significant differences is the issue of class differences of participants, which will be fully explained in the Methodology chapter.

To sum up, the study explored the relationship between class differences of young women and their social media usage in gender matters. In other words, the study interrogated how girls with different class backgrounds deploy social media to negotiate and express their gender identities. To provide an overview about the thesis's structure, chapter 1 is the introduction, featuring the study background, the rationale, and the overview of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review, in which I discuss the social context, the prevailing culture regarding gender in Thailand, and the previous works of Thai scholars who have explored youth culture and gender studies. Meanwhile, I separate the theoretical frameworks from these reviewed works of literature into chapter 3. In the theories chapter, I categorise the frameworks into three themes: Identity and Gender theories, Discourse and Power theories, and Social Class and Capital theories to serve as



a conceptual background for the pursuit of the research's aims and question. Next, chapter 4 is the research methodology, consisting of two sections separately: the first section is the research design for the PILOT study, and the second is the research methodology for the MAIN study. After that, chapter 5, 6, and 7 are the data analyses of the main study, organised by social grouping into lower, middle, and upper classes. Lastly, chapter 8 is the discussion and conclusion in which I discuss the research findings linked with theoretical considerations and my stated research aims. Additionally, the appendix is a substantial piece of work in which the five arguments that emerged from the pilot study are developed.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

In prior research studies in Thailand, many scholars have investigated girl's struggles in gender matters owing to the impact of the prevailing culture and traditional form of female values in Thailand. One of the empirical research studies asserts that girls find alternative spaces as a form of resistance toward traditional values to gain more agency in sexual expression (Boonmongkon et al., 2008, 2013). Thanks to this empirical research, my current study built on the theme of this prior study, but I extended it by addressing the question of social class in young women. The class difference hence was identified as the research gap and became the main factor that I mainly focused on in the study. My central research question is **“how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?”** and the literature review chapter shows how previous research studies in the West and in Asia largely debate the relationship between social media sites and gender performances in youth, while neglecting class differentiations. In this chapter, I start to discuss the prevailing culture and the traditional public discourses regarding gender in Thailand to provide an understanding of social context, social norms, and other social issues related to gender in Thai culture. Then, I discuss how social media, as an alternative space for gender negotiation in young people, interests many scholars both Western and Asian research communities. Next, I review how research paradigms in gender studies have shifted from psychological and biomedical perspectives to sociocultural disciplines, whilst suggesting my

contribution to the knowledge in the field. In the last section, the research gap is identified to show how my current study followed up on the theme of prior Thai studies, and how my study has filled the gap by addressing the question of social class.

## **2.1 Traditional public discourses regarding gender in Thailand**

In Thailand, there are many prevailing cultures and traditional public discourses regarding gender that constrain young women's gender performances. In the twenty-first century, various Thai scholars still assert that young Thai people are struggling to deal with traditional forms of female values and mainstream discourses in femininity (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016; Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Although empirical studies consider that the proliferation of social media, which impacts young people's lived experiences, can offer more opportunities to express non-normative gendered practices and sexual desires, there are still debates that these young people cannot abandon traditional public discourses that are derived from their offline culture, particularly those rooted in family cultures. I will advance these debates seeing the potential changes in young women's gender performances in both the online and offline worlds.

In this section, to preliminarily understand the gendered culture in Thailand, I will provide the prevailing concepts of gender in Thai society, such as social norms, values, and discourses in femininity. At the same time, I will discuss how these influential discourses impact on how young women embody sexual politics in society. The following are the themes emanating from gender discourses in Thai culture, which have been identified by Thai scholars.

1. The '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve chastity) (e.g., Klausner (2000), Boonmongkon et al., (2013), and Songsamphan (2008))
2. The '*kalathesa*' discourse (contextual sensitivity) (e.g., Thaweessit (2004), Jackson and Cook (1999), and Van Esterick (2000))
3. The motherhood and wifhood discourses (e.g., Suriyasarn (2014), Xu, et al., (2011), Thaweessit (2004), and Suriyasarn (2014))
4. The parental discourse: 'dutiful daughters' in Thai families (e.g., Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo (2020), and Angeles and Sunanta (2009))

To clarify briefly, the first is the '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' (รักนวลสงวนตัว) discourse refers to young women who should preserve their chastity (or virginity) in relation to concepts of 'good' and 'bad' women. Secondly, the '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ) discourse (or 'contextual sensitivity') is the common sense of self-presentation (including gender) that relates to values of 'times and places', particularly in adult culture. Thirdly, due to the existing patriarchal society in Asia, especially in Thailand, the motherhood and wifhood discourses still influence gender roles among young Thai women. Most of these women's discourses put pressure on young women to perform their selves and identities whilst conforming to gender roles. Lastly, the parental discourse of 'dutiful daughters' in Thai families is another influential traditional discourse that still has an impact on how young women perform their gender identities.

Overall, young Thai girls have long fostered the idea that sexual matters must be kept private, and sex has become a strongly prohibited subject for open discussion due to the discourse of the inappropriate and distasteful nature of sexual expression in public areas (The Guardian, 2012). “Sex is still considered ‘dirty’ and adults seldom discuss openly with each other, let alone with their kids” (UNDP and USAID, 2014). According to the Department of Health (2015), Thai children seldom learn about sex from either parents or teachers, and when they do learn about sex at school, it is always restricted to the context of biology, and rarely touches upon the emotional and sexual desires related to this subject. However, the parent and educator’s inability to teach and converse about sex is arguably not at fault as they too grew up in the same culture that frowns upon talk of sex (The Nation Thailand, 2014). In short, this literature review section will discuss how each traditional public discourses of gender in Thailand impact young women’s belief, attitude, and behaviour in terms of sexual matters. It is essential to understand how these discourses still influence them in the performance of gender identity, and then the later section will discuss the potential resistance and negotiation of gender through social media use.

### **2.1.1 ‘Rak nuan sanguan tua’ discourse (to preserve chastity)**

Needless to say, one of the most traditional public discourses in Thai female values is to preserve chastity. Young women have been pressured by this traditional discourse. For example, they need to maintain their virginity until marriage and they need to follow what adults judge to be right and wrong action in gender. Within the Asian countries, this kind of normative discourse would be the strictest value of femininity that influences how young women negotiate their gender offline or online (Klausner, 2000). In Thailand, the ‘*rak nuan sanguan tua*’ (รักนวลสงวนตัว) discourse is highly produced and reproduced through adult culture and many public spheres in Thai society (Klausner, 2000). Specifically, such traditional public discourse becomes a mainstream value in femininity, which is always reinforced by teachers at school, parents at home, mainstream media, and other social institutions in Thailand (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). The previous Thai research asserts that even though we are more acceptable in non-normative gendered practices in public spheres, there are still difficulties for young women to express their ‘intrinsic’ identity and gender due to the strictness of the traditional form of female values, that is the ‘*rak nuan sanguan tua*’ discourse (Boonmongkon et al., 2008; 2013). This suggests that young women feel constrained and struggle with this conservative discourse, which is deep-rooted by adult culture. It is affirmed by the previous study that talking about gender-related issues in Thailand has never been easy

due to the inexpressive nature of Thai people and their attitudes toward sex and gender as a generally taboo topic in most social circumstances (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020).

Importantly, to maintain virginity until marriage life is one of the most conservative discourses that directly impact young women's gender negotiation. This kind of discourse has been linked to the notion of the 'good' and 'bad' women concept in Thai culture. According to Fongkeaw (1995) and Cook and Jackson (1999), the concept of maintaining virginity is arguably related to the cultural dichotomy whereby Thai women are categorised as good (*kon-dee*) or bad (*kon-chua*). The given categories of good (*kon-dee*) and bad (*kon-chua*) qualities imply that if young women perform their selves and gender identities conforming to conventional works from their parent's discourse, they will be categorised as 'good' women. In contrast, if they are performing vice versa to the normative discourse, they will be categorised as 'bad' women. Specifically, sex before marriage is deemed a 'bad' example. By contrast, by maintaining virginity until marriage, they will be seen as 'good' women (Songsamphan, 2008). Additionally, if they follow the common sense of mainstream discourses in femininity, such as being naïve, submissive, and obedient, they will also be considered as 'good' women (Songsamphan, 2008). From the concept of 'good' (*kon-dee*) and 'bad' (*kon-chua*) qualities, it is evident that the traditional discourses of women in Thailand shape and pressure young women to conform and follow the mainstream norms of feminine propriety.



To give a set of gender research studies in Thailand, many Thai scholars are of the same opinion regarding the impact of traditional feminine discourses in young women of Thai culture. For instance, for the very first time in 1995 to 1999, the studies assert that the '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' (รักนวลสงวนตัว) discourse puts pressure on young women, limiting the expression of their gender (Fongkeaw, 1995; Cook and Jackson, 1999). After that, many studies have been conducted to explore how the conservative discourse impacts young people in terms of their gender empowerment, such as autonomy, agency, choices, and embodiment. For example, Boonmongkon et al. (2008) proposes that the prevailing traditional discourse in femininity enables young women to struggle for gender matters and young women need to strive to achieve their autonomy to express their gender identity. Thus, the study argues that due to the constraint of women discourses, young women need to find some alternative spaces as a form of resistance against this traditional value to gain more degree of agency in gender negotiation (Boonmongkon et al., 2008). This finding is in line with that of another study: because of the restriction of conventional behaviour in femininity, young people lack choices to perform their multiple gender identities (Chamsanit, 2008). Moving to the twenty-first century, many scholars argue that the traditional values of femininity still are associated with the cultural dichotomy of good or bad qualities even there are choices of social media sphere (Boonmongkon et al, 2013; Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). I will discuss this issue in more details – social media as the alternative platform for gender negotiation – in section 2.2.

See this further to understand the shift of gender practices by young Thai women when social media becomes predominant.

Based on the reviewed previous scholars, it can be seen that mainstream discourse in female value is the underlying theme which is interested in many researchers to explore on gendered culture in Thailand. This section overall shows the initial concepts of the prevailing culture and traditional public discourses in Thailand. Since there are other influential discourses regarding femininity in Thai culture, I consider that '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve the chastity) is one of the grounded concepts as regard to gender that impacts how young women negotiate their gender identity both offline and online; specifically, this potentially leads them struggling in gender matters. From this point, I thus aim to follow up the process of adaptation and negotiation regarding gender by young women on social media where I suggest these sites as alternative spaces offering more opportunity to resist mainstream discourses of women in society. Additionally, I intend to ask: are they building their subculture online to subvert toward the dominant discourses? If yes, how do they practise this through their profile pages? Are there any tactical or strategic ways to do this? These are some of the issues I explore to understand how young Thai women use social media in negotiating gender identity.

### 2.1.2 'Kalathesa' discourse – 'contextual sensitivity'

Besides the '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve the chastity), the '*kalathesa*' discourse, or 'contextual sensitivity', has been considered an impactful traditional public discourse regarding gender in Thai culture from the past until now. There are many traditional forms of female values in Thailand that most young women certainly perceive as common sense. One of the most influential feminine practices of common sense is the '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ) discourse (Thaweessit, 2004). According to Jackson and Cook (1999), gender culture in Thailand is a complex web of intersecting patterns, '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ). The 'times and places' concept is the social framework that highly contextualises gender norms in Thailand. This framework stipulates that Thai women and men routinely move between differently structured gendered contexts, in which they know what is proper in each time and place; thus, scholars call this framework 'contextual sensitivity' (Jackson and Cook, 1999). Similarly, Van Esterick (2000) suggests that gendered presentations in appearance terms, called 'aesthetic surface effects', are highly valued and take precedence over ideas of inner 'essences' of Thais. The word 'essence' refers to a person's spiritual essence, or a person's inner purity, or a person's inner being (Jackson, 2004). There is a clear difference between Thai and Western cultural perspectives. In the West, it is the inner being that is conceived as real with the image being a "mere" surface that expresses or follows the contours of the inner self. In the Thai case, the relationship is reversed. It is the surface image that has the power to mold the inner being (Jackson, 2004).

Thus, the '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ) discourse is a "historically dominant discourse in Thailand that permits appearances and truths to be radically disjunct" (Morris, 2002, p. 53). Importantly, it is suggested that Thailand is a society in which "surfaces matter" and where identity is constituted upon "an assumption of the self as a knowable surface" (Van Esterik 2000, p. 39).

The '*Kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ) discourse is what Thai people acknowledge when and where they should perform their selves and identities according to the social expectation. In other words, it is the notion that Thais, especially young people, need to perform their selves and identities according to the 'times and places' concept to conform to the social norms and values in society. They are conscious of when is the right 'time' and where is the right 'place' to perform something according to social desirability, especially in adult culture. In terms of aesthetic surface effects, it is related to the discourse of contextual sensitivity since young Thai people are concerned with their social images; in other words, they present their gender identities with the concern of the appearance terms. The aesthetic surface effects can potentially alter a person's behaviours and semiotic practices in any matters, especially in sexual matters. For example, young women may shift their gender practices and presentations to comply with traditional expectations and qualities of being submissive, docile, and naïve.

The '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ) discourse has become the common sense of gender practice by which young women alter their performance of gender in different

social contexts (Thaweessit, 2004). From this, it enables the tension of young women in terms of their gender negotiation: they are struggling in gender matters between images of what they want to practice and what they practice in everyday life, due to the concern of 'aesthetic surface effects' in Thai culture (Thaweessit, 2004; Van Esterick, 2000). Manderson (1992) calls this tension the discordance between ideology and practice of individuals in society. Even though the '*kalathesa*' discourse perhaps allows girls to change and shift their identity performances depending on times and spaces, I view that it still constrains the ways in which girls perform their gender diversity. This is because they need to be aware of what times and which places that society find those behaviours acceptable, which might lead to struggles in gender expression. Young women might struggle with their gender identity performances due to the tension between the social ideology and their own desired practices. Thus, I note that conservative discourses, like the case of '*kalathesa*' (กาลเทศะ), or 'contextual sensitivity', can potentially demonstrate the girl's tension among the state's ideologies and their own agency in the negotiation of their gender identities.

Goffman's terminology of 'front stage' and 'back stage' through his dramaturgical model (1959) is in line with when Thais perform their selves according to the 'times and places' concept. Specifically, young Thai people are aware of when is the right time and where is the right place to perform their selves and identities according to the social context. This accords with the ways Goffman viewed how individuals perform their selves at the front stage (with the observing by

audiences) and express themselves on the backstage (with more relaxation since there is no audience watching). It is a kind of desired and undesired images of selves that individuals select to be presented since they purpose to manage their impression with their social relationships: friends, family, teachers, and others. In short, the social framework of the '*kalathesa*' discourse refers to when Thai people acknowledge when and where are the proper 'time' and 'place' to perform their selves to manage the impression for social interaction.

The distinction of the Thai cultural logics can be made between the surface image/ outward appearance (or referred to as 'ideal self' in Goffman's frontstage term) and the inner identity/inner essence being/inner truth (or referred to as 'real self' in Goffman's backstage term). Also, as I mentioned previously, Thai cultural perspectives are different from those of the West. In Thailand, the surface image has the power to mold the inner being (Jackson, 2004). Thus, most of the Thai conservative discourses, including '*kalathesa*' (contextual sensitivity), are dominant to permit appearances and truths to be radically disjunct" (Morris, 2002). Similarly, Van Esterik (2000) describes Thailand as a society that "encourages an essentialism of appearances or surfaces: the real is hidden and unchallenged, while the surface is taken for real." (p. 4). In contrast to the Western culture, a performative identity is suggested as the pattern of modern Thai subjectivities, that is 'essential Thai identity' (*ekkalak Thai tha*), such as being courteous, gentle, smiley, and genteel (Jackson, 2004). Judith Butler (2000) argues that it is the performative force associated with the repetition of culturally sanctioned ways of

acting that confers on such behaviours the sense that they are 'natural' or 'essential' parts of personal identity. Hence, this may be the beginning of a model for understanding the impact of the surface-directed form of Thai power on subjectivity, which produces the cultural effect of a set of behaviours that have come to be perceived as an 'essential Thai identity' (Jackson, 2004).

In conclusion, the '*kalathesa*' concept is considered contextual sensitivity: it is a person's common sense concerning appropriateness of self-presentation of how to perform their selves based on the social context of time and place values (Van Esterick, 2000). It is argued that the common sense of the 'times and places' discourse in Thai culture reinforces the 'aesthetic surface effects' which limit the ways young people express and/or perform about selves and identities (Van Esterick, 2000). Also, Thai scholars highlight the popular point of view that most of the gender discourses in Thai culture are coherent and dichotomous: as 'good' versus 'bad', or 'modern' versus 'traditional' (Thaweessit, 2004). This is similar to the ways I discussed in the previous section that the discourse of maintaining virginity ('*rak nuan sanguan tua*') is also associated with 'good' or 'bad' women. From this, it is argued that the "gender discourse is a fundamental domain in which gender identity is negotiated and enacted traditionally" (Thaweessit, 2004). Thus, the influential discourse, like in the case of the '*kalathesa*' (times and places) discourse, is viewed as the limitation of gender practices by young women. When a social discourse defines what, when, where, and how to present gender identity or defines womanhood, Thai women struggle to detach

themselves from socially unacceptable images, and they attempt to link themselves to socially acceptable and respectable images of women (Thaweesit, 2004). This enables the ambivalence and tension between ideology and practice of individuals as I discussed previously and also leads young people to resist and challenge the norms. Specifically, when social media becomes significant part of the young generation's daily lives at the present, the negotiation of gender identity in online spaces has been considered to expose ambivalence and tension of young women and their gender concerns. Even if their gender practices are incongruent with certain authoritative or ideological discourses in society, online spaces might be the potential sites to enact new practices and cultural phenomena. From this crucial debate, it is interesting to follow up on how young women challenge traditional common-sense norms of womanhood in the offline society through the affordances of social media – this is the key theme of how my research question is conceptualised.



### **2.1.3 Motherhood and wifhood discourses**

In Thailand, according to the motherhood and wifhood concepts, the ideological discourses of the being 'good' woman reinforce the qualities of being virtuous, submissive, and monogamous (Thaweessit, 2004). Women are expected to tolerate marital problems for their children's sake; in addition, they are expected to remain married until death (Suriyasarn, 2014). It is evident that the burdens of maintaining a married life and ensuring the welfare of the offspring have often fallen heavily on women rather than men (Xu, et al., 2011). This can be parallel to dominant discourses on womanhood: that is, women should not be in the surrounding of adultery and promiscuity (Thaweessit, 2004; Suriyasarn, 2014). If women commit adultery, they are strongly condemned and are seen as 'bad women' (bid). The term 'bad woman' is applied to women who are intimately involved with more than one man and are therefore considered promiscuous (Thaweessit, 2004). Even though polygamy and promiscuity have been discouraged for both men and women, it is women who are expected by society to follow the rules strictly (Suriyasarn, 2014). Although there is more openness that the reality of women's lived experiences is often contradictory to, or even incongruent with, sexual hegemonic discourses, the discourses of femininity in Thailand, such as motherhood and wifhood, still shape women's lives in terms of gender practices (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). This is because they live their lives by following discursive regimes that prescribe gender practices in society (Suriyasarn, 2014; Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). The implication is

that the social desirability and expectations of gender in Thailand have often fallen heavily on women more than men. Also, the normative discourses in Thai society have been reproduced in the same theme of gender stereotype: referring to women as a figure of motherhood and being submissive, subordinate, and dependent, while men as superior, active, dominant, and independent (Thaweessit, 2004). Importantly, when discussing social class in relation to sexual attitude, the previous study asserts that lower-class young women tend to be the most comfortable group in discussing premarital sexual experiences (Thianthai, 2004). The girls from this social group seem to accept the idea that women who have premarital sex are not bad. They think that as long as a girl loves a man, it is all right to have sex with him (Thianthai, 2004). In the meantime, middle-class young women display more understanding of the pressures placed on women to abstain from sex before marriage than upper-class young women do. Certainly, upper-class girls are the group that is conservative in this respect (Thianthai, 2004).

Other scholar suggests that Buddhism plays a vital role in Thai patriarchal culture, which places men's social power higher than that of Thai women (Xu et al., 2011). Thai men are eligible for ordination while women are primarily limited to participating in merit-making rituals and domestic work around temples (Xu et al., 2011; Falk, 2008). This gender hierarchy has been adopted as a practical norm in social relations in the private and public spheres in Thailand (Xu et al., 2011). Although the norm has gradually become less influential in terms of

socioeconomic opportunities and employment (UNDP, 2019), its influence on gender roles and sexual relations remains intact. For instance, there exists a notion that men are considered as the family's main provider, while women are expected to take on a supportive position by handling household responsibilities (Xu et al., 2011). Followed through these pieces of evidence, the motherhood, wifehood, and other girlhood discourses seem to put restrictions on young women's gender practices and sexual expression offline or online.

In addition to the influence of social discourses regarding motherhood, wifehood, and girlhood on how young women construct their gender identity both online and offline, the state and institutional constraints wield significant influence. In Thailand, gender in young women tends to be controlled by society and the state (Boonmongkon et al., 2008). For instance, sex education in Thai schools still revolves around promoting abstinence, especially in young women, and mass media campaigns also repeat the same theme as regards the traditional form of female values (Thaweesit and Boonmongkon 2011). This theme is also reinforced by the women discourses in society, such as the '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve the chastity), and the '*kalathesa*' discourse (times and places value) as I discussed in the last two sections. These conservative sexual values and discourses shape and pressure young Thai women to conform to and follow mainstream norms of feminine propriety.

To sum up, the traditional public discourses of women still influence and impact not only the negotiation of gender identity of young women, but also the expression of sexuality – sexual feelings, desires, and emotions – as well as the everyday life of sexual experiences. Additionally, the social control, which exerts pressure on young women's gender by social institutions such as families, schools, and the media, further encourages young women use social media as a way to escape from the moral policing in terms of gender (Songsamphan, 2008). Thus, the debates about the impact of the motherhood and wifeness discourse in young Thai women are still ongoing, but what is clear is that the traditional common sense of female practices have been reinforced by the 'bad' view of social media discourse in adult culture. This 'bad' social media discourse – a negative view and drawback of media including both traditional and new media in parental and adult culture – will be further reviewed in the following section.

## **2.1.4 Parental discourse: ‘Dutiful daughters’ in Thai families**

After we understand the specific traditional public discourse regarding gender and the prevailing culture in Thailand in the previous section, I will now show more specific details about the parental discourse as the constraint on young Thai women. This section will discuss the concept of ‘dutiful daughters’ in Thai families by highlighting how this parental discourse can control, shape, and impact their children in terms of sexual matters both online and offline. To clarify briefly, the notion of ‘dutiful daughters’ is an influential discourse that is highly valued in Thai families. As young people adopt their position and status from their parent’s discourse, it is believed that young people are restricted in terms of gender from the parental discourses, norms, and values in the family setting as well. How being a dutiful daughter in a Thai family is considered as the constraint on a girl’s identity performance of gender? My assumption is that being a dutiful daughter is related to the concept of female discourses: ‘good’ (*kon-dee*) and ‘bad’ (*kon-chua*) women (Cook and Jackson; 1999) – as I discussed in the first section of this chapter. Being a dutiful daughter is the value that shapes the ways in which young women behave their selves and identity since they need to comply to the parental discourses, such as being grateful and being a teachable and docile person, after which they will be perceived as ‘good’ women.

In Thailand, the 'dutiful daughter' discourse in Thai families have a significant implication in terms of young women's performance of selves and identities. The latest study in Thailand argues that the quality of gratitude such as being a dutiful/good daughter is the highest value in Thai families (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Similarly, Angeles and Sunanta (2009) suggest that family obligation is one of the influential norms in Thailand, especially when female children need to satisfactorily fulfill their family obligations through many ways. For example, they must endeavour to ease their parents' concerns about their well-being. In other words, children need to have a series of interpersonal strategies and negotiations to fulfill their family obligations in order to be 'good' daughters (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009). The term 'good' daughters here implies the notion of 'dutiful' daughters in Thai family life, and many parents pass this prevailing norm of filial piety to their children. Thus, this norm of 'good' daughters continues to restrict young women's sexual expression in diverse ways both in the online and offline contexts, particularly the need to fulfill the expectations of their family (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). For example, many Thai families expect their daughters to present their sexual identity in line with the heterosexual norm due to the patriarchal culture. Although parents may be not much distressed about their children being lesbian or other non-normative identities, non-binary children still experience a sense of failure that they are not 'good' daughters, since they cannot gain their parent's acceptance and satisfy their expectations (ibid).

The latest empirical study suggests that the dutiful daughter concept includes the qualities of being submissive, docile, and teachable (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020), which are also associated with the concept of cultural dichotomy: 'good' (*kon-dee*) or 'bad' (*kon-chua*) women as previous scholars argued (Fongkeaw, 1995; Cook and Jackson, 1999). Specifically, it is argued that the mother's voice on social and cultural matters (particularly in sexual matters) is highly regarded and conforms to conventional expectations about the daughter's duty (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Furthermore, due to the dominance of patriarchal culture in Thailand, the father's position also becomes the crucial factor leading the family control in children's lived experience. This kind of control and the discourse of the daughter's obligation in Thai families result in the restriction of young women's sexual matters (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020; Boonmongkon et al, 2013). For instance, young women should limit their performance of gender identities and should conform to normative gender and the 'girlishness' of Thai femininity.

Although the latest study argues that the 'dutiful daughters' concept is highly valued in Thai families, which currently still restricts young women's gender negotiation and sexual expression (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020), there is still a lack of critical understanding of how this concept is dispersed among different classes of young women. In other words, there are still no explicit shreds of evidence showing which class of young women in Thai culture is the value of being dutiful daughters applied to. This is because previous studies explored this

issue with only the middle class in urban Bangkok. There is no clear-cut reference to other classes of young women. From this research gap, I aim to expand the understanding regarding the complexity of social class in Thailand related to sexual discourses and gender performance of young Thai women.

However, other recent studies suggest that the public discourse in Thai society is considered acceptable in non-normative gender (Jackson, 2011; Sanders, 2011). Plus, the 'virtual world' online, such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook is ubiquitous, leading to more openness for non-binary gender identities and other non-normativities in gender performances in a global society (Smith, 2018). To sum up, I consider that, there is still insufficient research in Thailand that has explored new practices of gender in young women, particularly in digital youth culture regarding gender issues. Here, I aimed to investigate how the conventional parental discourse continues to impact young women's gender negotiation online. Also, I sought to understand how young Thai women continue to construct or re-construct their gender identity online and, at the same time, how they resist such mainstream values and women discourses. Thus, my research investigated how young women challenge conventional norms, parental discourse, as well as other traditional public discourses through the use of social media, whilst living in the dominant patriarchal culture of contemporary Thailand.



## **2.2 Social media used in the negotiation of gender by young Thai women**

In the previous section, I discussed how the prevailing culture and traditional public discourses regarding gender impact and constrain how young Thai women perform their gender identity. Specifically, most of the gender discourses put pressure on young women to conform to the normative ideas, gender roles and norms that society has constructed. For example, it is suggested by many scholars that the parental discourse can control their children in terms of gender practice. Thus children have been placed in the struggle between what they want to practice and what their parents set to practice (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Additionally, it is demonstrated previously that Thais have long fostered the idea that gender must be kept private, and sex is a strongly prohibited subject for open discussion (The Guardian, 2012). I consider that traditional public discourses in gender limit young Thai women to think about, to be, and to practise their gender in dynamic and creative ways.

However, since the rise of communication through online platforms has become increasingly important, especially among teens, it is argued that the major factors leading to changes in gender culture in Thailand are mobile phones, the Internet, and social media (Chantong et al., 2009). It is considered that these factors can provide easier access to information regarding gender; besides, it conveniently facilitates the initiation of sex and relationships among teens, and it also provides

more private communication between individuals (ibid). From this, I will highlight that due to the proliferation of social media in young people's everyday life, these children find some alternative ways to rebel against the traditional public discourses derived from the offline society through the use of social media. Overall, the followings are the sub-themes of this section: firstly, social media as an alternative space for more sexual autonomy; secondly, the popularities of the '*manga*' culture in Asia and 'cosplay' sexual activities on social media; and lastly, the controversies over the 'bad' social media discourse in Thailand.

Many Thai and Western scholars have investigated the impact of social media on sexual negotiation of young girls (Ellison and boyd, 2013); Hjorth et al., 2017); Boonmongkon et al., 2013). In the first strand, Thai scholars argued that social media is a novel alternative space for sexual autonomy in young people (Boonmongkon et al, 2013; Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). For example, they claimed that young people use social media to get more opportunities for sexual expression, sexual relationship building, and gender identity performance (Boonmongkon et al, 2013). In the second strand, Kang (2017) and Leng (2014) argued that the popularities of the '*manga*' culture and 'cosplay' activities are seen as ways of sexual negotiation and gender performance in young people, especially in fluid identity performers. This is due to the fact that they can switch their gender identities through role-play characters via many choices of dress, costumes, props, hairstyles, make-up, etc. In the final point, owing to the controversies surrounding the 'bad' media discourse in Thailand as discussed by

Songsamphan (2008), Chantong et al (2009), and Parker (2009), I view that it is worthwhile to review how the 'bad' media discourse has been debated from the past until now? How is the media discourse developed and changed now? Do parents and adult cultures still reproduce this discourse and pass it to their children?

To sum up, the three strands are significant in the context of my study, which is defined by the literature and studies from both Thai and Western scholars – as I discussed above. I view that it is crucial to discuss the impact of social media on gender negotiation of young people, which has emerged into three sections. Overall, social media is seen as a novel alternative space for sexual autonomy. In a detailed picture, the 'cosplay' activity is a way of gender performance on social media showing fluidity and diversity. Lastly, the debates about the 'bad' social media discourse can provide a picture that helps understand how the parental and adult cultures in Thailand still shape and impact young people's social media use and its relationship with their gender negotiation.

## **2.2.1 Social media as a novel alternative space offering more sexual autonomy**

Many scholars in media studies explore the impact of social media on young people's lived experiences (boyd and Heer, 2006; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Ellison and boyd, 2013; Hjorth et al., 2017). Various researchers consider these online platforms as novel social spaces with which young people engage for many purposes, such as for self-presentation, for building relationships, for civic participation, for political engagement, sexual expression, and gender negotiation (Baker, 2013; Bosch 2011; Hjorth 2010). Also, there are many empirical research studies on social media and visual communication, and these studies aim to investigate the visual meaning-making resources in social media environments, such as blogs, Tumblr, Facebook, and Instagram (Adami and Jewitt, 2016). For instance, research on social media within the field of multimodal studies includes genre analysis of Facebook publishing (Eisenlauer, 2010), identity work through repurposing resources (Leppänen et al., 2013), text compositional practices on Facebook (Bezemer and Kress, 2014), the aesthetic meaning potential of web design (Adami, 2015), the expression of style in Tumblr and Pinterest (Jewitt and Henriksen, 2017), and multimodal critical discourse analysis of gendered identity in stock photography (Aiello and Woodhouse, 2016).

Adami and Jewitt (2016) suggest four themes that are pertinent to visual communication and social media: emerging genres and practices; identity

construction; everyday public/private vernacular practices; and transmedia circulation, appropriation, and control. These critical themes allow for a better understanding that social media provides a creative space for multimodal text production including “the emergence of new genres, that is, new configurations of typified communicative forms that fulfil specific and diversified social functions” (Adami and Jewitt, 2016, p. 265). Furthermore, it is suggested that the identity of individuals is expressed and constructed through visuals shared online like the ways we express our identity through clothes and furniture (ibid). From this point, it is argued that “identity construction is dynamic and can change in viewer’s perceptions of the very same image over time, through contextual transformations and layering of information and media discourses” (Adami and Jewitt, 2016, p. 266). Overall, it can be seen that there is a considerable interest by many researchers in exploring social media and the characteristics of the users, their attitudes, behaviours, and practices, especially in terms of identity construction. As we have renewed agency in constructing and projecting our identities through online materials such as text, image, video, sound (Adami and Jewitt, 2016), these multimodal texts seem useful to represent meaning-making by users. Based on these reviewed papers, I aimed to understand how young Thai women use these multimodal online texts on social media to (re) construct their gender identity while living in the patriarchal society that characterises contemporary Thailand.

To discuss social media and gender in youth in more detail, the followings are scholars who assert that social media serve as alternative spaces that potentially offer opportunities for young people to deal with sexual struggle as well as their sexual autonomy. Ellison and boyd (2013) suggested that young people use social media as tools to express and develop their gender identity and sexuality. For example, they use these sites to cultivate sexual relations, to express sexual emotions, and to display feelings of intimacy and desire. Similarly, Baker (2013), boyd (2014), and Marwick and boyd (2011) highlighted that young people not only meet new people, foster sexual relations, and express their sexual identities in their schools with groups of friends, but they also engage in these activities on online sites where there are more diverse friends, multiple audiences, and new patterns of social interactions through online activities, such as comments, shared status, posted pictures, and other interactive features. In Thailand, several scholars have explored social media's impact on young people's lived experiences and these scholars mostly tend to understand the new social phenomenon in youth culture in the digital environment. For instance, the recent Thai studies suggest that although the dominant state and social institutions still pressure young women's sexual expression in the offline world, young women can ignore the mainstream discourses and traditional patterns of female practices in the online world (Boonmongkon et al, 2013; Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). Specifically, the studies argue that young women can express their 'intrinsic' gender identity, diverse sexuality, and/or fluid identity through their social media profile pages (ibid).

As I discussed previously that, in the past, Thai children seldom learned about sex from either parents or teachers, and when they learned about sex at school, it was always restricted to the context of biology, which rarely touched upon the emotional and sexual desires related to the essence of sex (Chantong et al., 2009). However, Thai scholars have put forward the notion that young Thai people now live in an information society. The Internet and social media provide them easier access to information despite the 'undesirable' issues, like sex and gender (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). The 'undesirable' is part of a code of conduct that Thai parents and adults culture employ to limit their children from learning about and exhibiting sexually inappropriate behaviour, such as sexting, watching pornography, and reading erotica both online and offline.

The Internet, social media, and other communicative technology potentially facilitate the initiation of sex and relationships among teens conveniently and offer them more choices for non-conventional practices (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). Boonmongkon et al. (2013) consider that social media can help teenage girls perform their gender identity and other sexual matters with more freedom since these sites facilitate them to express love, responsibility, intimacy, and sexual desire easily. It is argued that because social media play a crucial role in helping young women to restructure values, ideas, and norms regarding sexual subjectivities, young women can exert agency in negotiating their sexuality and performing their gender identity on online sites (Boonmongkon et al., 2013).

Similarly, another scholar who explored gender and sexuality in the online space has found that young women as 'active agents' achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy and construct their gender identities through their profile pages (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). Therefore, it is apparent that, in online spaces, young Thai women can display their bodies and express their gender identity and sexuality within contesting feminine discourses shaped by the dominant state, social institutions, the mainstream media, as well as by young women's discourses (Boonmongkon et al., 2008).

To sum up, I am of the view that even though young Thai women may never entirely escape the dominant forces of the state inflicted upon them by the media, family, and school, they can newly create spaces to challenge these forces via new communicative ways/tools. Online platforms can be seen as social and/or cultural artifacts that young people can use to play with their identity performances. For example, they can create multiple social media sites to diversely negotiate their gender identity through profile pages. This consideration links to de Certeau's argument that individuals can contest and challenge the dominant culture in the city, according to his work, *Walking in the City* (1980). When young Thai women can create their norms and dynamic practices through social media, it is in line with the suggestion by de Certeau (1980) that individuals can adapt their ends even they are living in contexts where they are constrained by a dominant cultural order. The work by de Certeau (1980) can be used as a theoretical framework to better understand the contesting, adapting, as well as



challenging by young women towards Thai dominant culture. The next theory chapter will discuss this framework in more detail. I conclude my main argument here that social media used by young women in the negotiation of gender is best understood as a place of rebelling against hegemonic power imposed by schools (teachers), families (parents), as well as other forms of adult culture in Thai society.

## 2.2.2 Popularities of 'Manga' (or 'yaoi') and 'Cosplay' sexual activities on social media

The previous section discusses the notion of social media as the alternative platform offering more sexual autonomy for young women. In this section, I will elaborate more on how young women use these online sites to rebel against normative practices of gender. In other words, this section highlights how young women use the online communicative platform to challenge mainstream discourses regarding gender in Thai society. For example, they might create their online community on the social media platform to communicate, express, and exchange their non-normative gender practices. I suggest the popularities of '*manga*' (or '*yaoi*') and 'cosplay' sexual activities on social media as the alternative ways that young women perform their dynamic, diverse, and non-normative gender identities.

Since the late 1990s, the '*manga*' culture – a popular Japanese comics, cartoons, and animation – has become popular among young Thai women (Keenapan, 2001). This kind of pop culture is commonly referred to as '*yaoi*' or '*cartoon wa*', which is a specific genre of the much wider category of manga. This sort of *yaoi* Japanese pop culture is linked to the Boys Love (BL) culture (a male same-sex relationship) consumed by many young women. In other words, Boys Love (BL) is a genre of Japanese popular culture specifically designed for homosexual female audiences, focusing on the romantic relationships between beautiful male

youths known as *bishōnen* (McLelland and Welker, 2015). In short, whether called 'manga', 'yoai, or Boys Love (BL), it is a genre of homoerotic media originating in Japan, which is now widespread in Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, and also Thailand (McLelland and Welker, 2015). In the latest Thai work that explored the adaptation of homoerotic media (i.e., BL) from Japanese pop culture to contemporary Thai pop culture, the author suggests that the series 'wai' has become a new genre of Thai mainstream media and part of a pop culture among young women in Thailand (Baudinette, 2019). Additionally, homosexual young women between 15 – 22 years old are the key audiences of this series 'wai' (Baudinette, 2019). Likewise, Kang (2017) considers similarly that the series 'wai' in the Thai mediascape empowers Thai BL fans who are young women, especially in the context of the online community.

This kind of BL fandom has a similar pattern to the case of *Star Trek* Fan culture in American and Western culture. The homoerotic and 'slash' fan fiction of *Star Trek* is a subset of the more general category of fandom. It is argued that young people can rewrite popular texts to serve different interests. This fan writing is called 'textual poaching' (Jenkins, 1988). For example, many young women create same-sex fan works, as shown in the *Kirk-Spock* relationship in the *Star Trek* universe driven by their fashion or interest. Jenkins (1988) argues that this so-called 'fandom' is a vehicle for marginalised subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, etc.).

Exploring deeper into the literature in the area of fanculture, fan art and fan fiction are created by serious fans who borrow the content from the mainstream media (Lopez, 2012). Generally, fan fiction authors maintain the setting of the original story, but they extend the story or change its ending (Bolt, 2004). Fan art and fan fiction are different from cosplay in which fans dress as movie, comic, or game characters. Cosplay events require actual meetings in the real-world setting, but fan art and fan fiction do not need them (Arunrangsiwed, 2016) Moreover, fan art and fan fiction can also be combined with cosplay events. For example, Lamerichs (2013) who attended a cosplay event in Japan found that fans were selling their own copy of artwork during the event. Many cosplayers also called themselves with the same pseudonym that they signed in fan art and fan fiction. Slash or *Yaoi* fan art and fiction are a type of fan creations. They tell the stories about the homosexual relationship between male fictional characters. Most of Slash and *Yaoi* fan creations have been created by female fans (Jenkins, 1992).

More recently, most of the studies have described the criteria for the selection of characters for Slash and *Yaoi* creations by applying qualitative content analysis methods. In other words, they aim to understand how the Slash or *Yaoi* fan works are developed, as well as to understand the Slash characters and the impacts of fanculture in relation to other youth cultures online. The findings from previous studies suggest that Slash characters are nonhuman beings, and the homosexual relationship in Slash fan creations is developed from friendship in the original media (Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Furthermore, more recent research interests have

been devoted to exploring the relation of fan creations and copyright from the business point of view. However, it is still under debate whether fan fiction writing negatively affects the business of copyright owners, or instead supports the original media, just like word-of-mouth advertising (Kalinowski, 2014).

In terms of the 'textual poaching' concept by Jenkins (1988), it is a term that used to articulate the processes by which dedicated fans respond to popular media. In Jenkins's argument, fans are not simply passive consumers of popular texts but "become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (Jenkins 1992, 24). Fans, often constructed as mere dupes of the official culture industry, are in fact savvy, subversive readers operating outside of the cultural industry's paradigms – especially since they are not only readers (Jenkins 1992). Jenkins emphasises fans as producers of new cultural material: fans "poach" their favoured texts to create a variety of new analytical and creative works. Importantly, social media is a powerful tool for fans to share their creations and to search for creations by other fans – unlike the traditional print/book/painting artworks of fans in the past (Lam, 2010). Hence, social media platforms can help fans to publish their creations faster and to reach more audiences as well as to build the relationship with their fan community online (Lam, 2010).

The above-mentioned Jenkins's argument and literature can be applied to understand same-sex communities as well as fan communities in online sites among young Thai women; in addition, they can help to understand how original

pieces of work, for example *manga* or *yaoi*, are transferred as subcultural works by young women. There is a strong possibility that young women create their sexual activities online with the intention to rebel against normative gender practices. It is clear that Boys Love (BL) in Japanese pop culture has come to influence Thai conceptualisations of gender and sexuality, especially fluid identities and LGBTQ+ (Baudinette, 2019). Other studies also argue in the same ways that the conceptualisations of queer gender in Thailand are originally derived from the social process based on the *manga* Japanese and Korean pop culture (Jackson, 2011; Sinnott, 2012). From this, it shows that the Japanese *manga* phenomenon is significant for the popular culture in the Thai context since it can influence the conceptualisation of gender, particularly non-binary gender in young Thai people. Importantly, the *manga* culture (often called *manga-bunka* in the literature) is the groundwork of many popular cultures and subcultural activities of young people across many countries. For example, the 'cosplay' activity is one of the striking examples originating from the *manga* culture that show how teenage southeast-Asian girls perform their non-normative gender practices. In Thai pop culture, this cosplay is a sort of 'role-play' activity that has its origin in the Japanese *manga* pop culture as well (Leng, 2014). Many young Thai women do role-play cosplay by switching their gender with their partners and they wear cosplay costumes with the aim of mimicking characters from *manga* cartoons or animations. When they are role-playing characters, they have many choices to perform their alternative gender identities through, for example, their

costumes, props, hairstyles, and make-up. These unlimited choices enable them to perform more playful, creative, and diverse forms of gender identity.

Korean pop culture – a culture that emerged from the Japanese *manga* culture – is another influential pattern that leads to diverse gender practices in Thai pop culture. Kang (2017) suggests that, within Asian cultural flows, gender practices and performances are transforming in many unexpected ways due to the presence of the K-pop wave. This K-pop wave includes Korean popular music, K-pop cover dances, and K-pop artists. For example, many K-pop fans try to copy choreographed movements, dresses, make-up styles, and characters from music videos of their favourite boyband artists and then they perform them in organised events both online or offline. The scholar believe that these K-pop fan activities have become definitive social activities among Asian ‘sissies’ (referred to as young women and feminine gay men) (Kang, 2015; 2017). This finding demonstrates that Korean popular culture is the cultural flow in Asia that empowers diversity and dynamics of gender as well as transgender performance, especially in the LGBTQ+ community. At the same time, the author highlights the personal and national development that indexes participation in a new cosmopolitan Asian sphere (Kang, 2017).

In conclusion, many previous pieces of research discuss how the Japanese *manga* culture influences other pop cultures, and also how the manga-culture phenomenon can help to conceptualise gender identity and gender performance

in Thai pop culture. In my current study, the 'manga' and 'yaoi' phenomena, as well as the popularities of 'cosplay' activity and 'K-pop' culture, are considered to be the significant foundation for the quest to understand how young Thai women perform their fluid identities and other non-normative practices on social media. The evidence suggests that they use social media to create their subcultural community online to negotiate their desired images of gender. To sum up, I consider that when they play with these creative activities online, they are challenging traditional public discourses, such as normative femininity, normative gender roles, and heteronormativity in the prevailing culture in Thailand.



### **2.2.3 Controversies over the 'bad' social media discourse in Thailand**

Even though social media offer more autonomy for young women in terms of sexual matters such as sexual feelings, sexual desires, and gender identity, many scholars have maintained that young women still cannot escape the influence of mainstream discourses of women both online and offline. This is due to the controversies surrounding the 'bad' social media discourse promoted by some adult public discourses and mainstream institutions, such as in family settings, educational settings, and state institutions. The Thai state continually has tried to block access to some online spaces because of fears of sexual immorality (Songsamphan, 2008; Chantong et al., 2009). In Asian countries, especially Thailand, young women are expected to not express their sexual desires or interest in the opposite sex. Parker (2009) considers that sexual norms are reproduced by the diverse and complex relations between culture, power, and sexual politics in society. These social systems, such as cultural values, power, and sexual politics, arguably determine young women's sexual subjectivities and practices (Park, 2009). He calls these social systems social organisations regarding sexual interactions, a concept which is in line with the consideration of the 'institution discourse', recognised as the 'expert' by Foucault (1998).

When Foucault suggests that 'institutions' (seen as the 'expert') enact the 'truth' in society (1998), we can better understand how the Thai state and social

institutions constitute gender norms and sexual values in young women through knowledge and power relations. In other words, when the Thai state tries to embark on a series of processes attempting to control, regulate and suppress young women's gender and sexuality, they produce the 'truths' through a series of moral panics and fears of sexual immorality, which are widely popular among conservative urbanites (Brickell, 2012; Chantong et al., 2009). These moral panics offer a rationale for state intervention, such as the provision of sexuality education and the enforcement of a media rating system to evaluate sexual and other 'undesirable' content in advertisements, television shows, movies, and drama (Tanabe, 1991). All these actions restrain and control young women's gender identity and sexual expression, shaping them to be 'proper' and in line with the desired sexual morality of the '*kunlasatree*' discourse (or 'well-behaved woman') by hegemonic processes enforced through the Thai state (Fongkaew et al. 2007; Chantong et al., 2009).

Furthermore, it is suggested that social media used by young women in expressing their gender and sexual interest have resulted in a moral panic, which is condemned by social institutions, impacting discursive practices and discourses (Fongkaew et al., 2007). For instance, young women who use social media for building sexual relationships can be branded as 'not good women' (Bosch, 2011; Brickell, 2012). Young Thai women's sexual expression online is mostly controlled through mass media or public policies which attempt to criticise its negative consequences. This results in the assumption that social media used

by young women puts them at risk of developing reproductive and sexual health problems (Fongkaew et al., 2007).

At the same time, there is the notion that men are trying to take advantage of women, and women thus are seen as victims in the online society (Chantong et al., 2009). A previous study highlights the myth that sexualities online are played out in a space that is full of deceit owing to its anonymity (Chantong et al., 2009). This leads some young Thai women to believe that true love cannot be found online (ibid). Likewise, adult people repeat that online spaces put their children at risk of being sexually violated, and they also believe that building the sexual relationship in online spaces is not safe (Boonmongkon, et al., 2008).

The literature exposes debates and controversies surrounding the 'bad' social media discourse in young people's everyday life usage. Specifically, previous studies have mostly tended to portray young women as victims and focused on the negative impacts of social media (Chantong et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2012). In addition, the role of social media in the gender performance of young women remains vague. A recent study found that the traditional discourse on women's chastity, which puts pressure on women to maintain their virginity, still influences online content, messages, and images among young women on social media sites in some respects (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). On the one hand, the scholar considers that young women have many choices to perform their multiple and alternative gender identities on social media; on the other hand, young women

still need to evade their 'intrinsic' gender identity and create the socially desirable images of female identity on their profile pages due to the significant impact of audiences inside the platforms (ibid). Similarly, Songsamphan (2008) suggests that even though online spaces may provide young women more opportunities to express their selves and gender identities in some ways, young women still cannot escape the influences of women discourses as well as the common sense of female practices in offline society. This is not only due to the complex or collapsed audiences inside the platforms, but also due to our inability to abandon the mainstream discourses in the online sphere which represents social relations, interactions, and networks derived from the offline world. From this, the link between offline and online interactions is demonstrated: although young Thai women have some degree of sexual autonomy in online spaces, the conservative values, and mainstream discourses remain significant factors that control, prevent, and abstain young women from performing their gender identity and engaging in sexual expression.

In summary, the impact of social media on traditional discourses remains controversial. Social media could offer more autonomy in sexual matters, or have a reinforcing role in traditional Thai public discourses, or have other social functions in youth culture. Owing to these ongoing debates, I hypothesise the complexity of social media as a contested space by young women: the social media sphere is considered a subversive space working against normative discourses in adult culture. In short, to help resolve the controversies, this thesis

aims to pursue how young Thai women employ social media platforms to negotiate their gender identities, by focusing on how they contradict, resist, or interact with conventional values of normative gender through their multimodal texts on online profiles.

## 2.3. Research paradigms of gender studies in Thailand

### 2.3.1 From psychological and biomedical discipline to a sociocultural field

A body of literature in gender studies in Thailand shows that early studies of gender by Thai scholars were dominated by Western biomedical, sexological, and psychological paradigms that problematised and stigmatised homosexuals and other non-binary gender practices as perverted and sexually deviant (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). Many early Thai researchers termed the pervert as '*wiparit*' (วิปริต) or '*phit-phet*' (ผิดเพศ) and termed the sexually deviant as '*biang-ben thang-phet*' (เบี้ยงเบนทางเพศ) (Jackson et al., 1999). Subsequently, in the early 2000s, a newer generation of Thai researchers debated the earlier biomedical scientific paradigm that pathologised queer people; they thus shifted from this scientific paradigm to a cultural and sociological view to understand gender and sexual diversity, particularly sexual minority status, gender/sex identity, and lifestyles (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Duangwises, 2013). More recently, a Thai study has explored diverse understandings of sexuality, which they referred to as '*phet-withi*' (เพศวิถี) (Kang, 2015; Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). At the same time, many Thai scholars are interested in the cultural and historical specificity of Thai discourses of gender and sexuality and the differences from Western conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Specifically, Thai scholars propose the concept of sex, gender, and sexuality by applying Western definitions. For example, there is a definition by Thai scholars that 'sex' is a biological characteristic that defines humans as female or male (Wongpanarak et al, 2010). This conception is applied by The World Health Organization (WHO) (2006) who refers to the term 'sex' as identical to biological sex, based on one's sexual organs. While sex is perceived as the biological organ of being female or male, 'gender' tends to denote the social and cultural role of each sex within a given society (Wongpanarak et al, 2010). Specifically, gender is used to differentiate the roles of men and women that are determined by social and cultural attributes and opportunities (ibid). In short, it can be said that gender is a social construction that is not purely assigned by genetics; rather, people often develop their gender roles in response to their environment, including family interactions, the media, peers, and education. Thus, gender varies from society to society and can be changed to socially constructed characteristics, such as the norms, roles, and relationships between specific groups (Songsamphan, 2008; WHO, 2006).

As for 'sexuality', many Thai scholars are of the view that sexuality is the experience and expression in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, and relationships (Wongpanarak et al, 2010). It is argued that sexuality is about who individuals are attracted to sexually and romantically (Songsamphan, 2008). People who are attracted to others of a different sex are known as 'heterosexual' or 'straight'. People who are attracted to those of the same sex are known as

'homosexual', 'gay', or 'lesbian'. However, sexuality is more complicated than just being gay or straight. Queer theories explore sexuality as fluid and diverse, as Butler argues that both gender and sexuality are performative and produced through millions of individual actions, rather than something that comes naturally to men and women (1988, p. 132). From these definitions and explanations about sex, gender, and sexuality, the research paradigm of gender studies in Thailand has seemingly shifted from the biomedical or sexological discipline to the sociocultural field in terms of discourses and the social construction of sex, gender, and sexuality.

An in-depth review of the research paradigm in Thailand, before the 1990s, reveals that early studies of homosexual or non-binary gender practices were dominated by psychological and biomedical forms of knowledge as discussed. Sud Saengwichien, M.D., is an influential medical doctor who started talking about hermaphrodite and transvestite physiology in Thailand (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). In 1961, Saengwichien's study of the physiology of non-binary gender people – labeled as '*kathoe*' – is grounded on scientific paradigms. At the same time, through his study, he introduces Western sexological concepts of homosexuality and transgenderism to the modern Thai academy (ibid). After that, the term '*kathoe*', which is applied to someone of non-normative gender, is introduced into other categories by a much newer generation of researchers. They claim that the framework of '*kathoe*' in Saengwichien's study is misunderstanding and has overlooked the multiplicity of socio-cultural contexts in



Thailand (Tangmunkongvorakul, et al., 2010; Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). The hybrid Thai-Western sexological knowledge, which combined pathologising Western biomedicine and stigmatising Thai cultural views, is overlooking the embodiment of cross-gender behaviours and lifestyles through their membership of social groups and personal impressions (Kang, 2015; Jackson, 2003). Thus, to just conclude that being *'kathoey'* is a psychological and physiological problem, or to label it as a mental disorder and sexual perversion, is a misunderstanding and insufficient. From this, in critiquing and debating the older sexological and biomedical accounts of *'kathoey'*, a newer generation of Thai scholars have contributed to a new field of sexuality studies (*'phet-withi-seuksa'*) based on the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, women studies as well as queer studies (Tangmunkongvorakul, et al, 2010).

For example, Jackson and Duangwises's study (2013) consider that Thailand has long been a culturally diverse society in which plural forms of gender and sexuality are found in local communities. This study indicates that Thai male and female homosexuals are not unified as a single gay, kathoey, and tom-dee group, as is often the case in dominant stereotypes in Thailand. Rather, queer communities have regional and language differences, as well as educational, socio-economic, and class-based differences within each geographical/language region (Jackson and Duangwises, 2013). This historical and anthropological study promotes the understanding that non-normative sexuality and other non-binary gender practices (called, in short, *'kathoey'*) are not viewed as mental disorders and

cannot be categorised by dominant stereotypes in society (ibid). Indeed, *'kathoey'* identities and non-normative behaviours are viewed as social and cultural practices by which individuals creatively produce their styles of gender identity (ibid). From this, it is evident that the recent Thai scholars in gender studies have shifted the understanding of gender practices into cultural expression.

In other words, the research paradigm of gender studies in Thailand has moved from a psychological and biomedical discipline to the sociocultural field in which gender practices are arguably seen as cultural functions and/or cultural communicative practices in specific communities. To sum up, the research of gender studies today aims to contribute not only to knowledge in the sociocultural discipline, but also to knowledge within a cultural and human rights frame, including gender equality, especially for sexual minorities, such as young women, transmen, and LGBTQ+ groups. I am interested in the shifting ways of research paradigms in Thailand because my current study aims to make contributions to the knowledge in the sociocultural discipline. I aim to offer more up-to-date knowledge for Thai scholars in gender research studies related to youth and media studies. From past to present, as the research paradigm of gender studies in Thailand has moved from a psychological and biomedical discipline to the sociocultural field, my current study attempts to offer some suggestions and a more comprehensive view of cultural practices of youth in terms of gender in contemporary social contexts – in other words, those found online. There is a growing body of Thai literature examining the social significance of gender

performance, which is seen as a cultural communicative practice in specific communities of youth, but little attempt has been made to map patterns of online engagement and the interactions of young people related to sexual issues. Thus, my current study aims to fill in the gap by providing new ways of understanding the nature and significance of this novel social phenomenon to understand young people's everyday gender negotiations.

### **2.3.2 'Class difference' as the research gap in gender studies in Thailand (Identifying the research gap)**

Today researchers in gender studies in Thailand mostly focus on middle-class families in urban areas, which limits what can be concluded from such small-scale studies that lack diversity. There is a dearth of studies exploring other factors related to young women's gender performance, such as class, age, socioeconomic status, and region. I believe that 'social class' is crucial as an underlying factor influencing how young women perform their gender identity. Hence, this section identifies the research gap, exploring the relationship between class difference and gender performance through social media use by young women.

Within most Asian cultures, social class impacts cultural expression and communication between individuals. Since individuals differentially have their social expectations from their friends, families, and other forms of adult culture, I thus deem class difference as a crucial factor influencing young women's diverse gender negotiation. Although some previous studies have already explored the relationship between gender and class differences with the implications for healthcare (the prevention of HIV/AIDS risk in Thailand) (Thianthai, 2004), what is still lacking is the study of social media's role in negotiating gender identities through the focus on the class difference in Thailand. The class difference can be seen as a major variation that influences the ways that young Thai women

express their gender identities. It is crucial to study how class difference impacts young women's expression since each class possesses their sexual patterns, norms, and values. A previous study has found that upper-class young women are taught to 'not' have multiple sexual partners, while upper-class young men have more freedom to do this (Thianthai, 2004). Likewise, Fongkeaw (2000) suggests that maintaining a virgin until marriage is a strictly social expectation for upper-class women rather than the other classes of women. Thai cultural norms expect women to be naive and inexperienced in sexual matters. According to the '*rak nua sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve the chastity), young women are constrained to perform their gender by the notion of virginity at marriage and the marital relationships from adult culture – as I discussed previously in the very first section. Following the scholars' finding above, even though there is evidence that upper-class young women are considered more conservative, strict, and pressured in sexual values than other classes of young women, there is a limited understanding of how each class of young women uses social media to challenge, contradict, conform to, or interact with those conservative values through their meaning-making of multimodal texts on online profiles.

I consider that each class of young women might have their own discourses, patterns, and values in gender under different social expectations. It can be said that even though young women who come from different social classes might have some shared experiences in common, they potentially have their own discourses in terms of gender. Importantly, based on my own definition of class,

social class is not only an economic or educational term; rather, it is about the traditional hierarchies of Thai society, about the aspirations of the newly emerging middle class, and about individual's cultural preferences and performances – as I discussed in the introductory chapter.

However, there is a lack of critical studies exploring the class difference in terms of young women's gender performance on social media. I consider that social class presents a research gap that is a key variable that my thesis aims to investigate. Why does social class have significant implications in Thai society? There are many studies and literature in favour of the idea that the emergence of Thai social class potentially impacts social tensions and class struggle between dominant and non-dominant groups. In the literature, Thailand has great levels of social inequality between superordinate and subordinate classes, as asserted by a report that Thailand has the third-highest social inequality in the world (Pasuk and Baker, 2016). Thai scholar considers that social classification in Thailand is based on a system called *sakdina*, which means “dignity marks” (Thongsawang, 2020). This social system causes Thailand to form a complicated structured society which has multiple dimensions of oppression between the privileged and underprivileged classes (Keyes, 2014). Importantly, this complicated structural hierarchy of Thailand leads to the social tension and class struggle in terms of political issues from 2006 until now (Sirikanya, 2014).

From these lines of literature suggest that social class matters in Thai's everyday life practices, especially the ways in which young girls perform their identity and gender under the social forces and dominances. However, there is still a lack of studies in young women's class differentials in relation to their gender practices. I hypothesise that the girls who come from the subordinate class may perform their gender identity with a challenge to dominant culture, while the girls from the superordinate group may just protect their advantages from the society, and perhaps perform their gender identity in compliance with the values of their social group.

The research gap identified helps me shape the question 'what is the relationship between class and gender performance in online sites?' Or, how does each class of young women manipulate social media to negotiate their gender identity even as they inhabit a dominant culture, steeped in traditional and patriarchal Thai culture? I aim to bridge the gap to examine the class difference of young Thai women related to their social media use in negotiating gender identity. To clarify briefly, the class difference of young women was based on their socioeconomic backgrounds: parents' income, education, and occupation. Young women from different social classes and different secondary school's levels in Bangkok were recruited as the research participants which I categorised into three labels: upper-class (UC), middle-class (MC), and lower-class (LC). Further details about participant recruitment, the significance of Bangkok setting, and other criteria are presented in the Methodology, in the section of the MAIN study.

In summary, as a recent study suggests that the theme that social media potentially allows young women to exert more agency in sexual matters (Boonmongkon et al, 2013), my current study sets out to follow the theme of whether young women truly exert more agency in terms of their gender on social media, and how girl's class difference impacts this exertion in online sites? I aim to answer the main research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** As I hypothesise that the social media sphere is considered a subversive space working against normative discourses in adult culture, the class difference of participants is considered another factor to be explored to understand how social class potentially relates to gender performances of young women on social media sites. In short, due to the significant implication of class difference in Thailand, I aim to investigate the relationship between young women's gender performance and their social class based on socioeconomic backgrounds (incomes, parental education, and occupation) by focusing on the role that social media plays. To pursue this research aim, theoretical frameworks regarding gender and identity, discourses and power, and social class and capital will be applied and discussed in the next theory chapter, in order to conceptualise the potential themes and help me to answer the central research question.



## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

**How is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** This research question aims to interrogate processes of adaptation and resistance of traditional mainstream discourses through the consideration of social media as an alternative and flexible space for young women in negotiating and communicating diverse, autonomous gender performances. In short, the study aims to explore the relationship between youth's gender performance online and their social class. The study conceptualises the theoretical frameworks into three themes: 1. Identity and Gender theories, 2. Discourse and Power theories, and 3. Social Class and Capital theories. Each theme of the frameworks features a body of works by such as Goffman's the presentation of self (1959), Butler's gender performativity (1990), McRobbie's post-feminism masquerade (2009). However, I note that the scholars, the frameworks, and the concepts that will be applied in my study are selected for a particular reason. Particularly, the scholars that will be mentioned during the data interpretation process are selected based on the relevance to the answer of the research question. Thus, the study will not rely on the whole framework of each scholar, but will be select certain elements of each framework and apply them in a particular context, to conceptualise the understanding of youth's gender matter online. The following shows each theme of the theoretical frameworks.

The first theme is to discuss what Goffman (1959) talks about in the presentation of self in everyday life: how individuals manage their impression for social interaction, and how they present their selves on the front and the backstage according to the dramaturgical model. This will be applied to understand how young women present their selves and their identities in a sense of gender through social media sites as the metaphor of the front and the backstage. Also, when Butler (1990) proposed the term of gender performativity, this framework can help to understand the ways young Thai women perform their gender identity on online sites. At the same time, post-feminism by McRobbie (2009) is a useful framework for understanding how post-feminism is undermining the progress made by the first and the second waves of feminism. This will help to understand the third-wave of feminism that allows young women to gain 'choice' and 'empowerment' through political engagement and politically civic affairs regarding girl's rights on social media (Snyder, 2008). However, McRobbie (2009) tried to argue with this, her view was that girls were still limited in their agency to do this due to the adoption of neoliberal values and consumerism.

Secondly, Discourse and Power will be applied as the second theme of theoretical frameworks to understand how the 'truth' of sexuality is created through the discourse and power in society which is the main concept by Foucault's theory (1998). After we understand how the truth or the knowledge of sexuality is formed, the creation of subculture and resistance in youth culture by Hall and Jefferson

(1993) from Birmingham's CCCS will be applied to understand the subversion through social media platforms by young women.

Lastly, the third theme is to discuss theories about social class and social capital. This sort of theoretical framework will be applied to understand the background of how social class in society emerges, how social capital plays a significant role in the impact and judgement of individual's tastes, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as how family and education position the children's cultural capital. These related social class and capital theories will rely on classical Bourdieu's framework (1970). At the same time, even though the social capital of children is positioned by their family and education according to Bourdieu, they can have their own *strategic* or *tactical* ways to resist those conventional objects from their parent's discourse or adult culture according to de Certeau. The kind of strategic and tactical resistance can be applied by the work of de Certeau (2010), *Walking in the City* concept. Overall, all the three key themes in Chapter 3 and some reviewed pieces of literature in Chapter 2 will serve as useful frameworks and concepts to explain and help to contextualise the common themes as the research findings and to answer the main research question.

## **3.1 Identity and Gender theories**

### **3.1.1 Goffman's dramaturgical model applied to gender identity online**

As I highlighted previously, my theoretical framework will be divided into three sections. The first section will be the theme of 'Identity and Gender', which includes various theories and approaches, such as Goffman's presentation of identity as dramaturgical (1959), Butler's gender performativity (1990), and McRobbie's post-feminism masquerade (2009). In this section, I will discuss Goffman's theories, which are related to his dramaturgical framework, the presentation of self, impression management, and the idealised version of the self. Goffman's theories are widely used in the conceptual framework by many researchers in the media and cultural studies to understand social and cultural phenomena, in online or offline settings. Thus, Goffman's theories will be applied to provide a better understanding of how young Thai women perform their gender identity as well as how they interact with and manage impressions of multiple audiences in the online environment.

*"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely a player."*

This is a famous Shakespearean line that helps Erving Goffman to build his sociological perspective. He suggests that people try to instill the desired image

and try to avoid portraying one that is undesired for self-presentation based on the minds of the audiences. This suggestion leads to the dramaturgical model which is his key theory of self-presentation: he argues that “members of society are constantly engaged in dramaturgical modes of interaction with each other, meaning our behaviours metaphorically represent being on a theatrical stage.” (Goffman, 1959). In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) argues that, through the process of social interactions, individuals operate techniques to control receivers’ perceptions about their identity.

This leads to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. In social interaction, as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the “actors” (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspects of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region or stage that can also be considered as a hidden or private place where individuals can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity in society. Goffman used the term ‘performance’ to refer to all the activity of an individual in front of a particular set of observers, or audience. The setting for the performance includes the scenery, props, and location in which the interaction takes place. The actor’s front, as labelled by Goffman, is the part of the individual’s performance which functions to define the situation for the observers, or audience. Appearance functions to portray to the audience the performer’s social statuses. Manner refers to how the individual plays the role and functions to warn the audience of how the performer will act or seek to act in role. Erving Goffman introduced a popular

thinking within the symbolic-interaction perspective called the dramaturgical approach (sometimes referred to as dramaturgical analysis). Dramaturgical analysis is defined as the study of social interaction in terms of theatrical performance. Goffman described a person's performance as the presentation of self. This simply means a person's efforts to create specific impressions in the minds of others. This is also known as impression management.

How is the concept of 'performance' related to a dichotomous concept between an idealized and real identity? In Goffman's view, idealisation is an important socialisation mechanism people commonly employ – that is, performers have the tendency to offer observers impressions idealised in several different ways in social interaction. One aspect of this idealisation that Goffman delved into with some details is the concealment of aspects of their lives that the performers do not want the observers to see and, therefore systematically attempt to hide. In contrast, reality is the real performance, not contrived at all, naturally occurring as it is the unintentional and unconscious response to the conditions surrounding him/her. In Goffman's argument this dichotomous categorisation obscures the scientific reality, and that there is no intrinsic or necessary relationship between appearance/idealisation and reality.

As Goffman analysed this dichotomous concept from the perspective of the Western culture, I would argue that this is different in Thai culture. The relationship between appearance and reality still has significant implications in

Thai people's self and identity performance. As reviewed in the literature, Thailand is a society that "encourages an essentialism of appearances or surfaces: the real is hidden and unchallenged, while the surface is taken for real." (Van Esterik, 2000, p. 4). Most of the Thai conservative discourses – such as '*kalathesa*' (contextual sensitivity) – are dominant to permit appearances and truths to be radically disjunct" (Morris, 2002). In short, Thai cultural logics value surface images or the outward appearances of individual's performance, and these surface images have the power to mold the inner being (Jackson, 2004). For example, being a courteous, gentle, smiley and genteel person is a pattern of modern Thai subjectivities in order to perform identities – called 'essential Thai identity' (*Ekkalak Thai Tha*) (Jackson, 2004). To sum up, I would say that there is the distinction of Thai and Western cultural logics in terms of the dichotomous concept between appearance and reality. In Thailand, the contextual sensitivity still plays an influential part, especially in the relationship between surface appearance and reality of individual's identity performance.

I consider that Goffman's dramaturgical analysis can help to understand the ways young Thai women perform their selves and identities online as they can employ techniques/features/tools of social media platforms to construct their desired images of gender identity. Moreover, in terms of interaction in the online setting, social media platforms can be seen to highly adhere to audience expectations, and these expectations potentially shape how young women perform and manage their desired identities, which need to be consistent with those audience

expectations. Moreover, there is the notion that offline norms impact interactions, performances, and normative practices in virtual online settings (Tashmin, 2016). This consideration can be further demonstrated by scholars who study Goffmanian perspectives on Facebook and whose analytical conceptual frameworks are explained in Figure 1 (Tashmin, 2016).

The Theater	Facebook
Play	Flow of Interaction
Characters	Persons Using Facebook
Actor	Individual
Role	Way of Interacting
Audience	People Observing the Individual
Front Stage	Where the Individual's Action is Performed
Back Stage	Where Individual's Action is Oriented towards What is Going to Happen or Toward What has Happened

Figure 1: Goffmanian perspective on Facebook analysis through a conceptual framework (Tashmin, 2016).

Briefly, Figure 1 shows the metaphor of Facebook as the theater according to Goffman's concept. The scholar suggests that online users need to play with the flow of interaction on Facebook. At the same time, they need to acknowledge where is the frontstage or the backstage of Facebook to have a good preparation for the performance of identity (Tashmin, 2016). I consider that this application of Goffmanian perspective on Facebook is quite useful for the very first step of the data analysis in the study. There is a clear explanation and metaphor between



the dramaturgical model of Goffman and Facebook's elements in terms of social interaction on the platform. However, it might be too simplistic to study participants' online interactions in any depth. Specifically, in terms of the front and the backstage metaphor, I suggest that it is inadequate to explain the difference between the places in which individuals interact on social media. Simply dividing "where the individual's action is performed" – as the frontstage, and "where individual's action is oriented toward what is going to happen" – as the backstage seems insufficient. In fact, the Facebook platform contains other modes of functionality for social interaction. For example, there are various technical features of the platform that provide different opportunities for users to deal with their front/backstage. From this, I suggest that Facebook can be considered as the frontstage and the backstage simultaneously, without division. When several scholars adopt Goffman's front/backstage framework to the Facebook setting, there are different interpretations. For example, Tufekci (2008) and Lewis et al. (2008) think of Facebook as the backstage related to the concept of privacy, while Farquhar (2009) views Facebook as a frontstage where users perform to their audience and present contents that can be viewed by all of them. From this controversy, I would argue that social media, especially Facebook, can be considered as both the frontstage – where users can present their desired images of themselves through posting different contents, participating in different activities, and presenting their ideal self – and the backstage – where they can contact and interact with their online audiences and retain their offline lives.

However, there are still debates about the application of Goffman's dramaturgical framework with online presentations of the self. Many researchers consider that even though Goffman's theories were formed before the emergence of the Internet, his ideas can be particularly valuable for studying phenomena on the Internet. For example, Lamb and Davidson (2002) considered that Goffman's dramaturgy frameworks such as co-construction of identity, awareness of the audience, and idealised of self can be used as the key bases for shaping identity, whether in the online or offline worlds. Similarly, Hogan (2010) suggested that Goffman's approach is a useful grounding for studying identity construction and online self-presentation. More recently, Pearce and Vitak (2016) used Goffman's theories to study the affordances of social media for surveillance and impression management in the case of LinkedIn. Likewise, Marwick and boyd (2010), explored the Twitter platform and claimed that users adopt the imagined audience technique to manage their audience's impressions. From these scholars, it can be seen that several researchers have applied Goffman's frameworks to study the link between identity performance and online settings.

Nevertheless, there are still debates regarding this link. Goffman's concepts have been criticised by researchers in terms of the study of people's interaction online. For example, Ahmed et al (2014) argued against Goffman's notion of audience segregation that "the current online social networks do not provide users with a fine-grained mechanism to separate and manage various audiences. Many social network sites only provide their users with the option to collect one list of contacts,

called friends". Similarly, other researchers highlight the difficulty of managing multiple audiences on social media and align this problem with Goffman (Marder et al., 2012). In the same way, Rui and Stefanone (2013) indicated that impression management on social media was challenging because users are faced with multiple audiences where they have to use one single front from one hand and have no opportunity to present for specific audience members and achieve desirable impressions from the other hand. Nevertheless, my hypothesis contradicts the above criticism from the previous studies: my argument is that users are dramatically creative in managing multiple audiences on social media by adopting several features of technologies online. In other words, I propose that young Thai women can manage multiple faces on social media platforms by constructing different online identities and creating purposeful specific audience zones to avoid any threat to their public image.

Although young Thai women can manipulate multiple audiences to perform their desired identity in online settings, they might have some struggles derived from the offline interaction which they cannot escape in the online world. There is more criticism regarding the adoption of Goffman's theories in terms of the performance and the stages of interaction (the frontstage and the backstage) to the online environment. For instance, Hogan (2010) argued that Facebook offers a group of divided presentations which are performances that can take place in synchronous 'situations', and Facebook is an artefact, which takes place in asynchronous 'exhibitions'. For him, online users are not engaged in performances, but rather it

is a form of an exhibition where they leave artefacts for their audiences to view at their convenience. When Hogan suggested that users employ Facebook as the exhibition rather than performance, I would argue that users utilise social media for both performances and artefacts to display their desired identities since they have many strategically/tactically tools or features to operate this.

When Goffman suggested that people manage their impression through social interaction to perform the idealised self and avoid the undesired image, I hold a different view that Goffman's suggestion is both applicable and inapplicable in different respects with online studies. In one respect, Goffman's approach can be applied as the theoretical framework to understand how young Thai women can present their idealised version of themselves through the use of social media in the same way as many scholars have argued. This supports the applicability of Goffman's framework with online research studies. Specifically, when Goffman stated that people (as performers) present their idealised images to their audiences (like the performance on the theatre), online users are viewed to present the perfect version of selves and conceal many aspects of their personalities through several features of social media tools.

In other respects, I suggest that Goffman's theories are probably inapplicable when it comes to the relationship between the online and offline performances of individuals. According to the notion of presenting the ideal self by Goffman, there is the debate of this idea that the nature of social media provides users to present

an online identity that is reflective of their offline self. This encourages the notion of the presentation of a real, rather than the idealised version of the self in the online setting. This notion is in line with many newer generations of researchers, such as Lin et al. (2017), who argued in the study '*you are what you post in "circle of friends" of WeChat,*' that user interaction online reflects the user's real personality traits. Similarly, Gosling et.al. (2011) stated that people extend their offline personalities on Facebook rather than escaping them. Thus, it can be seen that many social media users perform their online identities as a reflection of their offline identities rather than just a performance of the idealisation of self because they have an increased tendency to connect, interact, and maintain their offline relationships and prevailing culture in the offline setting. To sum up, the challenge of Goffman's theories is useful for the conceptualisation of the complexity of performance of self and identity among young Thai women in the online setting. Due to the complicated culture and strict norms in Thailand, studying how young women perform their gender identity is challenging Goffman's suggestion for the terms of the idealised self, social interaction, and audience segmentation in the model of the dramaturgical approach.

### **3.1.2 Butler's gender performativity in online sites**

To gain a deeper understanding of the gender performance of young women in online sites, Judith Butler's gender performativity (1990) can be applied as a theoretical framework to develop the ideas of how young Thai women employ online spaces to perform their gender identities. The theorist Judith Butler (1990) conceptualised gender as a performance. In her theory, popular thoughts of gender and sexuality have evolved through discourse and social processes. Importantly, she argued that "gender is performative which is produced through millions of individual actions, rather than something that comes naturally to men and women." (1990, p.83)

Various scholars such as Van Doorn (2011), Cook, and Hasmath, (2014) applied Butler's gender performativity as a queer theory to understand how individuals express their gender identity and sexuality through online spaces. They explored social media and found that users may also interact and communicate without corporeal cues, such as appearance and voice. The disembodiment hypothesis holds that social media users, liberated from the limitations of the body, can optionally choose which sexuality or gender to 'be' (Marwick, 2013). This can potentially create alternate sexual identities nothing like their own (ibid). The user's ability to self-consciously adopt and play with diverse gender identities can reveal the choices involved in the production of gender, which can possibly support gender fluidity and diversity, as well as break down the notion of binaries

in gender and sexuality (Cook and Hasmath, 2014). From this, many scholars are in favour of the view that, through the framework of Butler's gender performativity, individuals have more gender choices and opportunities online as they can diversely perform their gender identity and sexuality, which might not be the same as their intrinsic gender identities offline.

In Judith Butler's work of *Gender Trouble* (1990), gender is a fluid social construct that changes with context, cultures, and periods; thus, gender is best seen as a way of doing the body in performance (1990, p.172). From this consideration, Butler's performance of gender framework can be applied in the self-selected gender in the online space. For example, young women users can select their gender images through the profile picture and other picture postings. Given the explosion in popularity of social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, these platforms have increasingly become the researchers' choices that improve our understanding of the social media's role in managing social relations, expressing self and identity, and negotiating gender identity. It can be seen that a new generation of researchers have shifted from studying gender performance in the offline context to the online context by using Butler's performativity as a conceptual framework.

When Butler stated that "gender is performative produced by individual's actions", this closely links to the ways young Thai women perform their gender identity in the online setting since they can have plenty of action through the online activities

representing their gender identity. For example, they can interact with their online friends through the language such as commenting, status posting, and chatting, through visual materials such as pictures, emojis, and stickers, and through non-verbal materials such as self-video clips – like in the case of Instagram’s Stories features or TikTok features, which show body movement, facial expression, and some sexual action. As Butler argued in her framework that “gender is performative by individual’s actions rather than by something that comes naturally to men and women” (1990, p.83), this framework can be demonstrated by the action of online activities by young women to represent their meaning-making of gender identity.

Butler’s performance of gender is in line with the argument of West and Zimmerman (1987) that gender is something a person does, rather than has. From the “doing gender” concept, this performative model conceptualises gender as an interactional achievement in society. Similarly, Cameron (1999) considered that gender “has constantly to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts under the cultural norms...which define ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’” (p. 444). She thus argued that gender identities are unstable and variable: people perform different gender identities in different contexts. Following these arguments, many theorists have moved beyond a dichotomous view of gender to an acceptance of diversity as Cameron (2003) proposed that gender is quite fluid and changeable, rather than inherent and fixed.



To conclude, Butler (1990) presented the truth/meaning of something as being constructed by the discourse and language in one's society; thus masculinity and femininity are social constructions. Gender is argued as being a socially constructed point of view of identity (Butler, 1990). Specifically, as Butler stated, gender is performative by individuals' actions, which can help to conceptualise the ways young Thai women perform their gender through online activities. In my view, they manipulate social media platforms to perform their fluid, multiple, and alterable gender identities through many actions. As I discussed previously, while there are still debates on whether social media offers more opportunities to negotiate idealised images of gender or not, it is worth studying the process of constructing and negotiating gender identity of young women on social media by applying Butler's gender performativity as the theoretical framework to contextualise further research data, themes and discussion.

### 3.1.3 McRobbie's criticism of post-feminism and girls' agency through a nuanced lens

#### *A. McRobbie, a Critique of Post-Feminism*

In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change*, McRobbie (2009) identified post-feminism as a cultural phenomenon in popular culture and critiques the adoption of neo-liberal values and capitalism since she considered that it subverts the progress of feminism. In other words, she believed that the third wave of feminism is undermining the advances made by the first and second waves of feminism. This is because post-feminism, she argued, adopts the values of neoliberalism and capitalism, such as using 'beauty' or 'girlie' products to represent new feminine identities as strong and independent; the inference being that these kinds of beauty products reinforce normative femininity, heterosexual norms, and ultimately reinforce patriarchal values. For example, McRobbie presented Bridget Jones, the title character in the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as a classic post-feminist example of new feminine characters – modern, independent, and flirty. As Bridget is incessantly self-reflexive, weight-obsessed, and plagued by anxiety over finding a husband, modern femininity is presented in a way that could be called new 'girlie' feminism. However, McRobbie proposed that even though popular cultural figures like Bridget Jones are liberating for girls in practice, they are constrained by the old patriarchal forces.

Not only did McRobbie explore the popular film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), but she also explored other cultural texts, such as women's fashion magazines and the makeover TV show, *What Not To Wear* (2003). She claimed that these sorts of popular media promoting the idea of modern femininity, as flirty, smart, and sexy, are (re)producing hegemonic patriarchy. McRobbie suggested that although young girls (or 'girly feminists') seem to have power and agency, they are constrained by these. While girls are practising in post-feminism cultures, such as their enjoyment of beauty products and girly materials, wearing make-up, high heels, and boots, they are allowing patriarchy and heterosexual norms to be re-established. Through McRobbie's argument, it can be said that post-feminism is an illusion of girl power and agency which betrays first- and second-wave feminism.

In 2004, the essay "Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong" by third-wave feminists Baumgardner and Richards, proposed the idea of contemporary feminism, that is, the enjoyment of feminine products, such as make-up, high heels, and thongs. They suggested 'girlie' feminism as a way for young women to challenge socio-historical associations of femininity with weakness and subordination (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004). They argued that young feminists do not need to reject consumerism to be political; in fact, 'girlie' feminists often embrace green nail polish, Hello Kitty, the Spice Girls, and Brazilian bikini waxes as they cultivate their new feminist identities (ibid). In other words, Baumgardner and Richards

proposed that 'girlie' feminism is a can-do, sex-positive, all-access pass that allows women to be independent, strong, smart, and sexy. Even though Baumgardner and Richards's argument makes sense in a post-feminist context, McRobbie claimed that they offer an ultimately anti-feminist argument. McRobbie considered that beauty, being sexy, and girliness are used to empower feminism in some ways, but these stem from the beauty culture and feminine goods, which are eventually supporting normative femininity and hegemonic patriarchy. In other words, McRobbie argued that due to the growth of consumerism of feminine products, there have been more 'choices' for young women and they have more alternative ways to choose to present themselves in society; however, this is ultimately sustaining traditional patriarchal values. Hence, it can be seen that McRobbie presented the opposite of post-feminist arguments drawing on the neo-liberal vocabulary of 'empowerment' and 'choice' to represent young women as substitutes for more radical feminist political activity (McRobbie, 2004).

Such ideas of 'empowerment' and 'choice' related to post-feminism in third-wave feminism can be applied to understand the novel context of social media which many young women use to represent agency, freedom, change, and gender equality. As third-wave feminism is a political movement, it is where girls and women are politically engaging in civic affairs (Snyder, 2008). Social media are adopted by many girl feminists to proclaim the rights of girls to resist the constraints of patriarchal values (Gillis, et al., 2004). For instance, in Thailand, there is 'Feminista' (เฟมินิสต้า), a feminist community of young Thai women on

Twitter. This online community aims to promote women's rights, agency, capacity, and freedom as well as support young Thai women in having more choices to present their new feminine identities. At the same time, individual young women employ social media to express desired images of themselves in many strategic and tactical ways on their social media profiles. From this, it can be seen that, in the third wave of feminism, many young women mobilise social media to reflect their capacities, freedom, and choices (Snyder, 2008). Therefore, the prevailing social media can be considered as a useful novel platform in contemporary feminism to empower women not only in terms of rights and equality but also for personal choices and independence.

Nevertheless, as McRobbie (2009) critiqued the post-feminism's argument allowing girls to have more power, agency, choice, and empowerment, she suggested the concept of a 'post-feminist masquerade' as a form of dispersed and body-oriented gender power central to the (re)production of masculine hegemony. This post-feminist masquerade framework can be exemplified by the so-called *fashionista*. McRobbie proposed the term 'masquerade' as a 'provocation to feminism', in negative ways. McRobbie considered that the post-feminist masquerade and its various incarnations are a "triumphant gesture on the part of resurgent patriarchy" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 67). For example, to be well-educated working girls and swearing and boozing phallic girls are statements of personal choice and female empowerment that potentially call patriarchal values back in feminism again. How young women can enact the masquerade, such as

dressing up and wearing make-up seem to allow them more power and agency; however, it is a 'false' illusion of girl power. McRobbie claimed that feminism is being undermined and betrayed by these 'masquerade' actions.

To link this with the context of social media, it can be noticed that we see many young women post pictures on their social media profiles to show off wearing a miniskirt, make-up, and high heels, as well as other new feminine identities, such as sexy, flirty, and girlie characters. Also, there are many cases of young Thai women using social media to perform as 'fashionistas' by fashion magazines, photographs, and other makeover shows in popular media in Thailand. This can be due to the cross-cultural flows, ties, and/or transmissions from Western women to non-Western women. McRobbie stated that discourses of 'thong-wearing Western girls' recreate and reinforce notions of Western superiority, possibly transmitted to non-Western women (2009, p. 27). From these cases, I consider that when young Thai women perform their 'fashionista' personae online by, for example performing the fashionable, modern, cheeky, and fierce characters on profiles – which McRobbie described as a post-feminist 'masquerade' – they seem liberated, free and empowered; in fact, they are still oppressed by masculinity, patriarchy, and heteronormative power. Hence, McRobbie's framework is useful for a better understanding of third-wave feminism and post-feminism, which are especially related to online environments and movements, and also for a better understanding of resultant contemporary feminism in which girls' agency is conceived as constrained. Consequently, McRobbie's feminism

work can be applied as the theoretical framework to conceptualise how young Thai women use social media to practise their gender and agency. Importantly, the following questions have emerged: what is the process of adaptation and resistance to traditional discourses in order to fight for their sexual agency through the use of social media? Or how do they deal with their sexual struggle by applying alternative spaces of online sites? McRobbie's feminism work can be one of the useful frameworks to help to conceptualise these questions.

## *B. Girls' Agency in Contemporary Feminism Through a Nuanced Lens*

According to the Women's Study Group (Bland, Brunsdon, Hobson, and Winship, 1978) in Birmingham's CCCS, they integrated feminism studies with Cultural Studies, in the *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination* (1978). They argued that popular culture is a site of struggle. Specifically, McRobbie (1997) proposed that teenage girls read Jackie magazine not only for interesting love relationships but also as a way to demonstrate social struggles against norms, such as to challenge sexual traditional norms and patterns. Thus, if popular culture is persistently a site of struggle, feminism is also a battling or contesting patriarchy in the name of the agency for girls and women.

When McRobbie critiqued post-feminism as 'false' feminism since it subverts the progress of previous waves of feminism and allows hegemonic patriarchy to thrive nowadays, I suggest that we need to re-conceptualise the representation of girl's identities in the digital age as a playful, modern, and flirty identity through a more nuanced lens that allows for ambiguity. This is in line with Gonick et al. (2009), who published the article *Rethinking agency and resistance: What comes after girl power?* They argued that due to rapidly changing social, economic, political, and cultural conditions, resistance is a general uncertainty unlike what it looked like in the past since the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s: thus, we need more new 'complex and nuanced' approaches to understand girl's agency and resistance in



contemporary feminism. Importantly, they suggest that girls' agency and resistance need to be theorised within the logic of the production of gender, the body, and sexual, racial and cultural differences. It can be seen that they present a complex embodied equation of gender subjectivities that are about contingent and ambiguous practices of identity rather than just binary divisions between agency (girl power) and compliance (girl victims). Gonick et al.'s argument (2009) is in line with other recent feminist scholars' findings such as those of Harris and Dobson (2015), who proposed a more fine-grained approach to the definitions of agency and constraint in girls and women. Harris and Dobson (2015) theorised agency in post-girlpower times by offering the new vocabulary of "suffering actors" of girls. This term embodies the complexity of girls' relationships to structure and agency. They argued that conventional ideas about girl's agency as linked to choice, empowerment, and voice are inadequate; they claimed a need for more complicated notions of post-feminism, post-girlpower, and neoliberalism. This means new conceptual frameworks are needed to allow for the kind of plurality, contradiction, and mobility that characterise contemporary experiences of girl's subjectification. Therefore, 'suffering actors' is the new term offered by Harris and Dobson (2015), meaning that girls are neither 'pure' agents, nor 'victims': they are not explicitly as liberated as 'pure agents', but at the same time, they are not as constrained as 'pure victims'. At the end of the discussion, they hope other feminist scholars will take up the idea of 'suffering actors' and build upon it for more up-to-date contemporary understandings of feminism.

Following these scholars' arguments, the implication is that girls' gendered agency is practiced within normative social, economic, and political processes, while the constraints of gender and normative femininity are always a factor in its production, expression, and resistance (Gonick et al., 2009). Consequently, gender is never separate from its various spatialities and contexts, and the concept of a girl's agency and resistance is inevitably contingent and ambiguous (Harris and Dobson, 2015).

To sum up, to understand how young girls negotiate their gender identity in the online environment, I consider that McRobbie's criticism on post-feminism and her work on girl's 'masquerade' in contemporary feminism should be applied in the analysis chapter. Since she believed that post-feminism is 'false' feminism that subverts the progress of previous waves of feminism and allows hegemonic patriarchy to thrive today, I will apply this idea to conceptualise the data in the analysis chapter in order to pursue the research question of how young Thai girls negotiate their gender identities in the contemporary feminism, particularly in the context of the online environment. Even though there are many traditional discourses on Thai females that constrain girl's agency and autonomy in gender, I believe we need to re-conceptualise the representation of girl's identities in the digital age through a more nuanced lens that allows for ambiguity.

In my opinion, to understand girl's agency and resistance in contemporary feminism, a theory needs to be conceived within a nuanced lens – as in line with

Gonick et al's argument (2009) that gender subjectivities are about contingent and ambiguous practices of identity rather than just binary divisions between agency (girl power) and compliance (girl victims). Thus, I try to apply these nuanced and ambiguous views to the analysis chapter so as to understand youth's gender matters in everyday lives online and to pursue the main research question. There is a potential link between a girl's agency and pleasurable resistance in post-feminism culture, which will be discussed in the coming section. For instance, girls' performance of playful identities, such as dressing up, wearing a hairpiece, and applying creative make-up, are perceived as a girl's subversion of hetero-normative values, and, at the same time, as a pleasurable resistance.

### *C. Cosplay and Pleasurable Resistance*

Joel (2011) explored queer performance, that is cosplay activity, originating from Japanese popular culture, which is regarded as pleasurable resistance. He considered that cosplay activity should be seen as an embodied sense of agency in expressing pleasure since they play with dressing up, make-up, and other props through the imitation of characters in films, comic books, or video games. As cosplayers have an ambiguous appearance that may seem to challenge the essential differences of the gendered body, these sorts of playful acts are considered as the unstable simulation of the visual image (Joel, 2011).

Joel (2011) argues that cosplay performance should first be understood as an expression of emotional attachment to the animated body, cosplay, therefore, becomes a creative and pleasurable gesture that is at once incompatible with the discursive effects of the gendered body. In the context of online sites, I consider that the ways young women deploy social media to practise creative activity (like cosplay) and perform dynamic non-normative behaviours (like lesbian identity) can be regarded as playful subversion or pleasurable resistance. This is because while they practise these creative and dynamic performances – as ways of challenging dominant authorities and cultural structures – they use social media as alternative sites for pleasure, playfulness, and everyday creative opportunities.

More recently, the feminist scholar Valle (2020) proposed the new term “a feminist technopolitical tactic” to understand the emergence of sexual agency/pleasure as regards the appropriation and subversion of online gender-based violence. The author borrows from the activist-scholar Adrienne Maree Brown’s (2019) contention that pleasure “is a measure of freedom”, defining it as a “feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment”. Thereby, Valle (2020) defines sexual pleasure as both an element of freedom/agency of expression and as the ability to express and feel satisfaction and enjoyment through sexuality. Specifically, for Valle, sexuality is expressed by using technologies and platforms as vehicles and spaces, such as sexting, sharing erotic videos, online dating, as well as other sexual-related interactions. The concept of 'technopolitical strategising' by girls and women explains how marginalised individual’s freedom and sexual pleasures are expressed (Valle, 2020). This concept can help to conceptualise how young Thai women express their freedom in terms of sexual matters since social media as alternative spaces of digital technologies are offering users for sharing emotion, sexting, finding partners, or flirting online. Social media can therefore be seen as the vehicle to express a girl’s freedom and sexual pleasures according to the 'technopolitical strategising' concept.

#### *D. Intersectionality – a relationship between social class and gender*

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, to understand the relationship between social class and gender, intersectionality can be applied as an analytical framework and critical perspective. Briefly, the theory of intersectionality was introduced to the field of legal studies by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). The theory originally begins with the issue of oppression of black women in society: it is argued that this kind of oppression is intersecting with many layers of different forms of oppression, including many aspects of social identities such as race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, religion, and body type. These identities are most referenced in the fourth wave of feminism, which broadens the lens of the first and second waves of feminism, which largely focused on the experiences of women who are both white and middle-class, to include the different experiences of women of colour, women who are poor, immigrant women, and other groups. Thus, Crenshaw (1989) used intersectionality to denote how race, class, gender, and other systems combine to shape the experiences of many by making room for privilege and oppression.

In Thailand, there is a discussion from a Thai feminist scholar that intersectionality provides many more dimensions of social identity to understand oppression and privilege in Thai society. Thongsiri (2021) argued that women from all classes are oppressed by patriarchal forces in Thai dominant culture, but women from underprivileged classes seem to be further oppressed by a range of social forces.

For example, poor marginalised lesbians who live in Chiangmai, a northern part of Thailand, seem to be oppressed by not only the patriarchal forces in Thai culture, but also other intersecting social dimensions such as their economic status, class, citizenship, and ability. To explain this, due to the fact that they are lesbian, they are oppressed by patriarchal forces and heteronormativity in Thai dominant culture. In addition, since they are the poor marginalised people who live in the northern part of Thailand, they seem to be more oppressed due to their lower-class and poor economic status. At the same time, as they are in a northern part of Thailand where hill tribe people called กระเหรี่ยง (*Ka-ren*) live along the Thai-Myanmar border, they are the minorities in Thailand who have no citizenship and criticised for their lack of ability. In short, owing to their social and political identities such as lower class, limited citizenship, and lack of skills, they seem to be more oppressed in society, compared to Bangkok's middle-class women who have higher economic status, class, and professional jobs.

To sum up, the theory of intersectionality can be applied to understand how class and gender are intersected. Since my study aims to categorise participants into three groups, the LC, the MC and the UC, it can be hypothesised that the oppression that the underprivilege class people are under, especially the lower class, may intersect with other layers of different forms of oppression in Thai society, such as the oppression in terms of class, politics, economy, education, skill levels, and residential area. These are connected to the ways in which they

negotiate their gender identity online; plus, their own specific youth culture and subculture on social media might also be factors impacting this negotiation.



## **3.2 Discourse and Power theories**

### **3.2.1 Foucault's discourse and power to sexuality**

This section will mainly discuss the terms of discourse and power with sexuality according to Foucault (1990), who proposed his theory in the *History of Sexuality*. As discussed in the foreground of the chapter, Foucault highlighted how the truth of sexuality in society is created through discourse and power. In addition to discourse and power, there are further terminologies proposed by Foucault to demonstrate how the state or institution (called the 'expert') employ some 'weapon' to build the knowledge regarding sexuality in society. I support the idea of Foucault that gender is a social construction through discourse, power, and knowledge. As gender is constructed by social discourse, language, and power, Foucault's framework should be employed to understand how young Thai women deal with that social construction as well as other conventional discourses by adult culture and power. From this, the resistance and subculture in youth culture by Hall and Jefferson (1993) from Birmingham's CCCS will be applied in the next section to understand the sexual struggles of young Thai women. Birmingham's CCCS studies will help to conceptualise how young Thai women build their subculture through their 'rituals' on social media to subvert those conventional works.

The concept of power and knowledge by Foucault (1990) described in the *History of Sexuality*, argues that: “the different discourses on sexuality are not *about* sexuality, they *constitute* the reality of sexuality” (Foucault, 1990, p. 134). This is not to say that “sexuality does not exist non-discursively, but to claim that our ‘knowledge of sexuality and the ‘power’ relations of sexuality are discursive” (Foucault, 1990). Moreover, Foucault considered that “discourses produce knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon of power: thus, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (1998, p. 318). This can be applied to understand how the Thai state or social institutions constitute gender norms and sexual values in young women through knowledge and power relation. To elaborate, the states and institutions are not just producing knowledge about sexuality; they also seek to produce power over sexuality. Specifically, Foucault (1998) argued that when the power produces reality through discourse, it produces the ‘truths’ that people live. In other words, he considered social constructions of sexuality to be internalised by that group of people, leading them to see sexuality as the ‘truth’ about themselves (Foucault, 1990 cited in Hall, 2001). Also, he developed the idea of ‘the discourses of institution’, recognised as the ‘expert’, with the understanding of the human body that had effects on the treatment of people by the state and its agent (Foucault, 1990).

To apply this, gender norms in Thai culture are mostly contextualised by the discourse of ‘times and places’ – *Kalathesa* (กาละเทศะ) (or called ‘contextual sensitivity’), which is derived from the shapers of the institution. These shapers

seem as the 'experts' in the development of the social discourse, which is potentially influenced by Buddhist orientation and Thai historical politics and governments (Van Esterick, 2000). Furthermore, it can be seen that social institutions in Thailand, such as educational institution, family, and the state, try to repeat the same theme of 'times and places' (*'kalathesa'*), which is the primary concern in 'surface and appearance', rather than the concern in inner essence gender identity (Van Esterick, 2000). This enables Thais to perceive and acknowledge what is the proper time and proper place to express something according to the 'times and places' discourse repeated by the state. For example, young Thai women are aware of when and where to express sexual matters, such as sexual desires, emotions, and identity according to family discourse and social expectations of sexuality in Thai culture. In the same way, young Thai men are also aware of gender roles that family, education, and media repeat for normative masculinity. These include the proper way to perform selves and identities to conform with the Thai prevailing culture. From these examples, the shapers of Thai institutions appear to produce and reproduce the ideas of normative masculinity and femininity, which are the ideological orientations, particularly fixed binary gender identities and normative sexualities. This affirms the notion that young Thai women's gender expression is still strongly shaped by social institutions, the state, and family: they are abstinent in gender practices and sexual expression and need to follow the 'good' women dogma influenced by normative discourses of femininity in Thailand.

However, in Foucault's later works, Foucault (1998) shifted his consideration away from the directions that external forces and discourses can restrict people, towards a focus on how discourses can bring people to "police" themselves. In the sexuality framework, "sexuality does not have to be actively regulated by the state, because people would be very careful to monitor their behaviour themselves" (Foucault, 1998, p. 142). From this, Foucault's consideration shifted from a world constructed from 'without' – external discourses imposed to people – to a world constructed from 'within' – the individual's dynamic adaptation to their surroundings (1998, p. 159). Subsequently, it can be argued that although the wider social environment or external discourse remains significant, individual's subjective responses to it become more interested as internalised constraint, and more creative resistance (Foucault, 1998).

This can be further analysed through the framework of power by Foucault (1998). According to the power concept, it only makes sense in one particular context because of the diverse dimensional definition of power. It cannot be simply argued that power is held by one group; in fact, power is everywhere and plays a role in all relationships and interactions (Foucault, 1998). Social interactions and flows through networks of relationships are the key things that exercise power (ibid). For example, while women can point to paths that patriarchal society encourages men's power, on the level of individual relationships, it is always easy to find instances where women seem to have more power than men (Gauntlett, 2008). Even though the external discourses and power in society still play a significant

role in people's gender performance, the individual's unique subjectivities seem to be more crucial in terms of their sexual autonomy and agency. This consideration can be applied to understand the recent gendered culture in young Thai women. The gender and sexual subjectivities of young Thai women appear caught up in their desires as much as in the power of normative discourses. The diversity and complexity of discourses – which affect women's everyday life subjectivities – appear fluid and changeable (Boonmongkon et al, 2013). Particularly, women can negotiate, change, and transform the dominant ideological discourses regarding gender and sexuality (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016).

As Foucault shifted his consideration away from the forces of external discourse, towards a focus on internal individual's dynamics, individuals are said to be increasingly able to negotiate lifestyle choices within diverse discourses and their own created discourses. This is in line with a previous study claiming that as a result of progressive modernisation, Thai women's self-presentation and sexual expression are more fluid and inconsistent, compared with the being of Thai women in the past (Thaweessit, 2004). This study shows that Thai women in the working class have more choices to express their gender identity and sexuality because of not only the openness and modernisation, but also of the devaluation of social expectations and norms in society. In short, it is apparent the women's sexual subjectivity is rather considered by their desire than considered by the

power of ideological normative discourses in society. Individuals have open choices to perform their gender identity and sexuality with the diverse discourse.

Following on from this, notions of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990) in women's sexuality are shifting. Specifically, forms of femininity, that previously went unchallenged, have now been subverted by other ways for women to perform their identity (Gauntlett, 2008). This can be seen in the modern day by the changes that constitute being a Thai woman: traditional discourses in feminine sexuality have given way to a variety of newly emerging discourses, encouraging personal autonomy, gender equality, modernity, and so on (ibid). Therefore, women's new gender identity as independent wage-earners have permitted them to resist Thai hegemonic feminine discourses (Thaweessit, 2004). Nevertheless, indeed, these hegemonic discourses have never completely lost their hold. To resolve the contradiction in women's lives in the modern world, they often negotiate their desires against the backdrop of ideological discourses, which this negotiating process inevitably brings about women's incongruent and fragmented gender expression and sexuality (ibid). Therefore, this is the reconstitution of female's sexual subjectivity and gender in contemporary Thailand which can be best understood as a dialectical interplay of discursively defined modern choices and social expectations (Thaweessit, 2004).

In conclusion, even if women appear to see themselves as being caught up in the disciplinary regime of dominant discourses, they seem to be able to find their

ways and assert their agency to challenge and negotiate institutionalised definitions of traditional femininity. Overall, I consider that Foucault's discourse and power (1990) can be applied as the theoretical framework to understand the origin of gendered culture in Thailand, such as to understand how the 'truth' regarding gender and sexuality in society is formed by the discourse, language, and power. At the same time, the framework helps to understand the social construction in terms of normative sexuality, such as normative masculinity and femininity through the knowledge by the experts from the shapers of the institution. Also, when Foucault's shifting consideration from the force of external discourse to internal individual's dynamics helps to understand the recent gendered culture in young Thai women. For example, they can create their discourses and patterns in sexual matters as well as have own choices to perform their sexual subjectivities. This is also in line with the concept of third-wave feminism discussed in McRobbie's framework that the new generation of young women have more, 'choices', 'capacity', and 'freedom' in gender performance both in the online and offline settings. Therefore, young Thai women can assert their agency and increasingly able to negotiate lifestyle choices that challenge institutionalised normativity and/or traditional public discourse in Thai culture. To provide a link to this notion, the next section will discuss the resistance and subculture in the youth by Birmingham's CCCS studies.

### **3.2.2 Birmingham's subculture and resistance in youth culture (Hall and Jefferson, 2006)**

As I discussed previously that young women are challenging traditional public discourses in the dominant culture, Hall and Jefferson's subculture and resistance concept in the book, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain (2nd edn)* (2006), is useful for understanding the ways that young Thai women use social media to rebel against conventional works by parent's or institution's discourses in Thai culture.

In the second edition of the subcultures classic, *Resistance through Rituals* (RTR), published 30 years after the first edition, the original text remains the same but the editors, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, provided a new introduction. They began to ask in the introduction what the *RTR* project was. How has it been built upon, contested, and critiqued? What is its contemporary relevance? These questions were discussed in the new introduction, which features the key issues of the second edition of the book. They argued that although there are new trajectories and new senses of contemporary (post-subcultural) youth culture, subcultures are not different from that of the *RTR* subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). In the original language of *RTR*, they presented the 'incorporation' of the hoodie in the fashion world as an example of the 'diffusion' and 'defusion' of stylistic 'resistance'. In short, they concluded that even though there are diverse,



dynamic, and creative subcultures in post-subcultural youth culture, the key argument of 'resistance' is still the same idea.

However, there is controversy surrounding subcultural and post-subcultural theory in the investigation of youth cultural forms and practices. The term post-subculture is fruitfully defined and developed by David Muggleton (2000) in his book *Inside Subculture: The postmodern meaning of style*. Muggleton situated the transition from subcultural to post-subcultural youth during the 1980s and 1990s, which he described as “decades of subcultural fragmentation and proliferation, with a glut of revivals, hybrids and transformations, and the coexistence of myriad styles at any one point in time” (2000, p. 47). Through the combination of Weberian and postmodern analysis, Muggleton argued that the pick and mix approach to style evident among the respondents in his study is due to “the increasing proliferation of youth styles, and the prominence of the retro market – combined with the new postmodern sensibilities of style” (2000, 48). It is further argued that “individualism has surpassed an emphasis on collectivity as a means by which social actors seek out desirable visual images, and construct sociocultural identities, for themselves” (Muggleton, 2000). From this argument, the post-subcultural theory has subsequently seen a range of conceptual frameworks employed, most notably 'neo-tribe', 'lifestyle', and 'scene' (Bennett, 2011).

On the other hand, critiques of post-subcultural theory relate to the lack of a strong association with the social class of the original Birmingham Centre theory. It is considered that post-subcultural theory wholly fails to comprehend the extent to which structured inequalities continue to inform both young people's access to cultural commodities and their ultimate use of such commodities in the fashioning of identities (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006). In short, although the post-subcultural theory has presented credible arguments as to how and why the collective cultural affiliations of youth can be seen as changing in ways that embrace new, more fluid dynamic, reflexive, and interchangeable dimensions, few scholars have investigated what kinds of collectively endorsed aesthetic, cultural and other lifestyle discourse and practices inform these (Bennett, 2011). Importantly, it is argued that youth cultural studies should be investigated through a "more nuanced and locally sensitive analysis of where and how patterns of consumption, leisure and lifestyle map onto structural experiences of class, gender, race and so on" (Bennett, 2011). Thus, I consider that the studies in youth cultural forms and practices should be analysed through relations of class, gender, race, and ethnicity in the formation of both individual and collective youth cultural identities.

Even though post-subcultural scholars largely argue that young people's tastes, interests, and cultural affiliations are fluid and interchangeable, I suggest that there is little in the way of reliable data to assert such claims at a wider sociocultural level. Thus, to support what Bennett (2011) suggested, youth

cultural studies should fruitfully draw on both post-subcultural and subcultural approaches to address the limitations and to provide more comprehensive data about the cultural practices of youth in contemporary social contexts. I suggest that both these approaches be adopted to make my study's findings and discussion more nuanced. Above all, the social class should be one of the crucial variables with which to understand youth cultural identities as originally argued by Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).

As part of Birmingham' CCCS, a classical framework by Hall and Jefferson (2006) would be the notable one that explains the subculture and resistance in the youth. In arguing that popular culture is a site of struggle, Hall and Jefferson (2006) suggested the idea of resistance and subculture in youth culture as a way to rebel against the dominant culture. In the original book, they consider that the 'exotic', 'bizarre', or 'deviant' forms of youth culture in England do not simply represent an explicitly youthful or generational response to mass media's attempts to shape their leisure activities and consumption patterns. Rather, "youth culture arises out of and cannot be understood apart from how young people translate the problematics of their class position into symbolic forms which both articulate the common elements of their social experience and subvert the cultural authority of the dominant social classes" (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). In short, youth culture is an ideological means of resistance to the standards and values of the dominant culture. From this, when Hall and Jefferson argued that the youth are rebelling against norms and patterns in the dominant culture, this can be applied to the

case of young Thai women who use social media to challenge the traditional norms in sexuality, particularly femininity and heteronormativity in Thai culture. For example, in online spaces, they can show their non-normative gender through gender-switching in the cosplay activity – this can be seen as one of the notable cases of resistance toward normative discourses or dominant culture.

Moreover, as Hall and Jefferson (2006) put forward, as youth cultures form coherent social worlds of family, neighborhood, and school in life, the youth are struggling with the power and privilege between the superordinate and subordinate social classes. Specifically, the school and the labor market are the main institutions that connect working-class families and communities to the larger society, enabling young people to negotiate with families, schools, and workplaces relationships (as the members of these groups) to respond to the power relations and dominant cultures. Hall and Jefferson's classical consideration of power and dominant culture in British society is similar to the dominant culture of institutions in Thai society. In Thailand, as institutions such as family, neighbourhood, and school are also labelled as the dominant society, young Thai people need to deal with the social struggles of power and privilege in society. They thus find alternative spaces to challenge these to express their dynamics and creativity through the subculture which are contradicting the traditional public discourses by parent's culture. In terms of Hall and Jefferson's framework (2006), these youthful behaviours that adults call 'criminal',

'destructive', 'vicious', or 'absurd' are actually an expressive mode of rebellion, a protest against an inferior status in the class structure.

From the relationship between subculture, resistance, and class structure, Hall and Jefferson rationally suggested a return to a classic Marxist model of class affiliation. Specifically, social class revolves around the issue of dominant culture's definition of right and wrong ways of behaviour and the issue of dominant culture's ideas about the proper distribution of economic opportunities and resources (Heller, 2019). The working-class youth as a subordinate group tend to be the people that potentially express symbolic opposition to the dominant culture's moral authority in the superordinate group (ibid). With reference to this, I consider that it is a worthwhile attempt to study how the social class of young Thai women relates to resistance and subculture in terms of sexual matters in the online context. As I suggest that social media can be considered as the alternative space to subvert traditional public discourses in the dominant culture, I intend to study how young Thai women employ these online platforms to rebel against their families, neighborhoods, and schools (as the influential institutions) in terms of gender discourses. Also, how does class affiliation relate to how young Thai women rebel against these powerful institutions? To answer these research questions, the Birmingham Centre's model of subculture and resistance in youth culture proposed in Hall and Jefferson (2006) is a valuable theoretical framework that provides a better understanding of this issue. Meanwhile, some aspects of Marxist theory and Bourdieu's social class and capital will be applied in the next

section for a more in-depth understanding in terms of class struggle and social capital in youth culture.

### **3.3 Social Class and Capital Theories**

#### **3.3.1 Bourdieu's social class and capital in youth**

Before we discuss the concept of Bourdieu's social class and capital, which has been broadly debated across cultures and social contexts, we need to consider some brief ideas from classical Marxist definitions concerning class, which influences Bourdieu's concept. The followings are discussions of the concept of class: A. Classical Marxist definitions of class; B. Bourdieu's class and capital concept; C. Critical debates about Thai social class, drawing on Bourdieu and other sociological frameworks, respectively.

### *A. Classical Marxist definitions of class*

The classical concept of class by Karl Marx (1867) offers an explanation of social alienation and human struggle leading to the formation of class structure in society. Political economics contributes to Marxist theories, centering on the concept of "origin of income" where society is divided into three sub-groups: Rentier, Capitalist, and Worker (Marx, 1867). This construction is based on David Ricardo's theory of capitalism. Marx (1867) strengthened this with a discussion over verifiable class relationships. He sought to define class as embedded in productive relations rather than social status. His political and economic thoughts developed towards an interest in production as opposed to distribution, and then this became the central theme in his concept of class).

Marx (1867) distinguished one class from another on the basis of two criteria: ownership of the 'means of production' and control of the 'labour power' of others. He stated "society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie, and proletariat". The 'bourgeoisie' or capitalists refer to a group of people who own the means of production and purchase the labour power of others, while the 'proletariat' or workers imply a group of people who do not own any means of production or the ability to purchase the labour power of others. Rather, they sell their own labour power (Marx, 1867). Therefore, in classical Marxist theories, class is thus determined by property and production relations, not by income or status. These factors are determined by distribution and consumption, which



mirror the production and power relations of classes. Max Weber's classical work (1978), "Class, Status, Party", from his *Economic Society*, volume 2, aims to elaborate on Marx's notion of class with a discussion on the importance of status groups and political parties for an improved understanding of the unequal distribution of power. The major distinction between Marx and Weber is that whereas Marx viewed classes in terms of their relations to the "production process", Weber conceptualised social class in terms of "market situation" or "exchange relations" (Weber, 1978).

Back to the classical Marxist concept of class, Marx highlighted the process of production with two criteria, the ownership of the 'means of production' and control of the 'labour power'. Consequently, the two social classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, are two distinct classes that have been extensively used and understood as the middle class and the working class across the world today. To apply the classical Marxist definitions of the class in Thai society, I argue that there are many similarities linking to Marxist's argument. The middle class across the world, even in European or non-European countries (including Thailand), typically are people who own the means of production and are more wealthy and have more access to education and power. This view of the middle class across the world is linked with and similar to the terms 'bourgeoisie' or 'capitalists' in the classical Marxist definitions. The group of the working class across the world (also Thailand) generally are the people who are poor, do not own the means of production, and typically get a raw deal from the

state and the society. In other words, they do the work, but they do not get any of the rewards, only compensation from their own labour. This is in line with the Marx' definition of 'proletariat', which are viewed as the group who sell their own labour power. This view on the working class is quite similar to the Thai lower-class group – or industrial urban working class – who are the workers producing the wealth for the capitalists, but not owning the means of production. Moreover, in cultural terms, the working class typically refers to people who are under the control of the bourgeoisie class, or who need to follow the social rules and norms set by the dominant class. This can lead to the class struggle between two distinct groups in society: while the bourgeoisie (or dominant or advantage) group aim to enact norms, rules, regulation, social convention and discourses of what can be said and what cannot be said, the proletariat (or non-dominant or disadvantage) group potentially resist these through their rituals such as their speech, costumes, acting, and other forms of expression. Specifically, we can see this classical struggle between agency and structure in the parent-child relationship. As discussed in the section of Birmingham's Resistance through Rituals in Youth Culture, young people can create their own subculture to resist parental discourses through their own rituals, such as music, play, dress, speech, and other modes of communication (Hall and Jefferson, 2006).

To conclude, I argue that social class in Thailand conforms to the ways of classical Marxist definitions since Thai social class is similar to post-industrial society across the world. Although the aristocracy (royal, king, and elite) has not been

relatively significant in terms of power relation in western society today, they have wielded significant influence in Thai society until today. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, Thai social structure and hierarchy were developed in the late Ayutthaya period in 1782-1873 by the *sakdina* system, which means 'dignity marks' (Thongsawang et al., 2020). In the Thai feudal society, there are two distinct classes that lead to the class struggle: *chao* (lords or king), and *khunnang* (nobles), are the ruling classes, while *prai* (commoners) and *that* (slaves) are the subordinates (ibid). In addition, the peasantry, or the peasant class, still exist in Thai society, especially in rural provinces in the North and the Northeast, even though there is a new political society (called "cosmopolitan peasants" or "cosmopolitan villagers") that has emerged in contemporary rural Thailand (Walker, 2012; Keyes, 2014). Thus, owing to the existence of the aristocracy (royal, king, elite), the peasantry, or even cosmopolitan peasants in Thai society, Thai social class and structure are rendered different from that of Western structure. In short, I note that Thai social class still conforms to the ways of classical Marxist definitions, but with the exceptions of the role of the monarchy and the aristocracy, and the rural groups. That is, the bourgeoisie in Thai social class is defined as the middle class (or capitalists) – this is due to the emergence of the newly rich-urban middle class in Thailand – while the proletariat is defined as the working class (or called the lower-class; industrial urban working class; peasant class; or cosmopolitan peasants). Lastly, the aristocracy (royal, king, elite) are defined as the upper class in Thailand, including the people who work with the king and government such as politicians, ambassadors, lawyers, and

senior commissioned officers. All of these theories that I apply to define and classify the research participant's social class will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter. The theories applied for the purposes of organising the groups of participants will be aligned with a more schematic tabulation of social classes in Thailand – this will be presented in detail in the Methodology chapter.

## *B. Bourdieu's class and capital concept*

When discussing social class and capital, Pierre Bourdieu's framework serves as an influential work that should be applied to understand this concept. Bourdieu developed theories of social stratification based on aesthetic taste in his 1979 work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. He suggested how social classes, especially the ruling and intellectual classes, preserve their social privileges across generations despite the myth that contemporary post-industrial society boasts equality of opportunity and high social mobility, achieved through formal education. Bourdieu's social class framework is influenced by Marxist theory, called the ruling capitalist class as 'the bourgeoisie' and the wage-labourers class as 'proletariat' (Bourdieu, 1979). As discussed, the social class involves the issue of the dominant culture that defines what are right or wrong ways of behaviour. In other words, in capitalist societies, the bourgeoisie produce social constructions of something – like the ways that Gramsci called 'common sense' through the ideology (1979) – such as the construction of social norms, patterns, and values in any fields: education, lifestyle, music, gender roles, etc. In short, it can be said that the bourgeoisie maintains power to construct the social patterns and to control the proper distribution of economic opportunities and resources (Bourdieu, 1979). In Bourdieu's term, capital has been suggested to function as a social relation of power.

While Marxist theorists consider social class and capital concept in terms of economic and resource opportunities as the main points, Bourdieu (1979) expanded such consideration into four types of capital: economic, symbolic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu (1979) introduced the notion of capital, defining it “as sums particular assets put to productive use”. By Bourdieu’s capital framework, those assets could take various forms, habitually referring to several principal forms of capital that are economic, symbolic, cultural, and social as I mentioned previously. Bourdieu (1979) claimed that how individuals possess their aesthetic tastes depends on their social status, capital, and position. Specifically, children are passed on the social status, capital, and position by their senior family members, especially their parents. For example, parents have been passing on the cultural capital to their children by introducing them to dance and music, taking them to theatres, galleries, and historic sites, and by talking about literature and art over the dinner table (Bourdieu, 1979 cited in Szeman, and Kaposy, eds., 2010). Thus, young people learn how to express their tastes, practices, and beliefs that are appropriate for their social position adopted by their parents.

Bourdieu (1979) suggested capital be divided into four types: economic, symbolic, cultural, and social: however, I will focus on only three of them, excluding economic capital. In my view, the economic capital in terms of Bourdieu’s framework is quite similar to what Marxist theorists consider: it is all about quantitative materials of individuals, such as income, car, land, and property, which should be mainly discussed in the field of economics even though this kind

of capital can flow to other types of capital. Hence, the followings are the detailed explanations of the cultural, symbolic, and social capital framework by Bourdieu. Firstly, the cultural capital of individuals is the cultural asset, such as competencies, skills, and university qualifications – that are derived from the cultural norms and values of each individual's society. To clarify briefly, cultural capital has been derived extensively from three forms: the embodied form, the objectified form, and the institutionalised form. The embodied form comes from the ways that individuals are instilled from the society and family at the early age of life; they thus possess the cultural products from their parents, such as art, music, individual personality, and 'natural' ability (Bourdieu, 1979). The objectified form is a 'biens cultural', a cultural material that is objective and cumulative, such as a book, a draw-art picture, and a musical instrument, while the institutionalised form includes university qualification, the reputation of the university, and the degree of the education, all of which can increase the value in economic capital, particularly in the labour market (Bourdieu, 1979).

Secondly, Bourdieu (1979) considers symbolic capital such as prestige, honour, and attention as a crucial source of power. This type of capital is perceived through socially inculcated classificatory schemes. Bourdieu claimed that this cultural capital leads to 'symbolic domination' from the superordinate group toward the subordinate group. In other words, when a holder of symbolic capital uses the power to purpose against an agent who holds less and seeks thereby to alter their actions, they exercise 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1979). This kind

of violence enables the class struggle between the superordinate (advantage) and the subordinate (disadvantage) groups in society. Lastly, social capital in Bourdieu's framework is defined "as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1979 cited in Szeman, and Kaposy, eds., 2010). Bourdieu stated that social capital describes individuals' ability to capture both the potential and actual resources embedded in their social network. Specifically, children have been inherited the social capital from their families, receiving the opportunity to realise their potentials through education and then they pass on those same values to their children in the same way when they first gained those values. Over time, the individuals in those families have amassed the social capital that gives them an inherent advantage over the other groups of people in society. Bourdieu believed that because of this inherent advantage, from the past until now, there is a variation in academic achievement in children with the different social classes. In Bourdieu's view, such social capital of individuals results in different levels of respect, status, and position in society (Bourdieu, 1979). Importantly, when individuals pursue power and status in society through politics or other means, this leads to inequality that we see in the world.

It can be considered that social, cultural, and symbolic capital, along with economic capital contribute to the class struggle and lead to inequality in the end. As Bourdieu stated, these assets are transferred from one generation to the next



generation, and they are considered as 'natural' assets, such as abilities, skills, manners, and behaviours that are accumulated throughout generations from parents to children. Particularly, education represents the key example of this process. According to Bourdieu's argument, educational success entails a whole range of cultural behaviour, extending to non-academic features like gait, dress, or accent (Bourdieu, 1979). This argument motivated me to study how different education backgrounds of young Thai women relate to how they perform their gender in online sites. As I consider that social class is derived from not only economic terms, but also from social, cultural, and symbolic terms (as Bourdieu argued), the different educational backgrounds of young Thai women will be one of the elements in class difference which will be studied. (See further discussion on how the social class of young Thai women is categorised and studied in the Methodology chapter).

Bourdieu's statement that privileged children have learned the behaviour (gait, dress, and accent), as have their teachers, conceptualises the question of how upper-class young Thai women express their behaviour in terms of sexual matters and, at the same time, how the behaviour of the privileged children is different from the children of underprivileged backgrounds in the matters of gender. When Bourdieu considers that the privileged children fit the pattern of their teachers' expectations with apparent 'ease', as they are 'docile', can this consideration be applied with the upper-class young Thai women when they perform themselves in the online context? Do children with underprivileged backgrounds (that is lower-

class young women) need to be 'difficult' (to present challenges) all the time? Or do they need to be 'unfit' with the pattern of their teachers' expectations both in the online or offline contexts? These questions led me to pursue the goal of understanding how the class difference of young Thai women relates to the ways they perform their gender identity.

To sum up, the different levels of economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital in Bourdieu's framework, enabled me to study how these different levels of capital in young Thai women cause them to have different tastes, manners, behaviours, thoughts, and performances in gender in the online setting. It is my argument that the performance of gender identity on social media of young Thai women can be significantly linked to the construction of social capital. In short, how they post, share, like, and comment on online profiles is the representation of their social capital, such as their educational achievements, their language, their dress, and their aesthetic tastes – like the case of music that they shared and pictures that they posted online.

To link the subcultural theory to Bourdieuan taste, capital, etc., I refer to the subcultural capital concept (1995) by Sara Thornton as an additional framework to understand this. Thornton examined the shift from live to recorded music for public dancing and resistance to recording technology's enculturation of the "authentic," valued cultural form. Her work analysed the dynamics of "hipness," critiquing Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital with her formulation of "subcultural

capital" (Thornton, 1995). Contrary to youth-subcultural ideologies, "subcultures do not proliferate from a seed and grow by force of their energy into mysterious 'movements' only to be digested by the media" (Thornton, 1995). Rather, the media and other cultural industries are there and effective right from the start. They are central to the process of subcultural formation (ibid). From Thornton's framework, it can be seen that youth-subcultural practices, for instance the case of dance music in the club culture of Thornton's work, form subcultural capital in youth. It is suggested that youth's subcultural capital is distinct from pop culture. To illustrate, dance music in club culture (whether called "clubber" or "raver") is dissociated from pop music of mass consumption (Thornton, 1995). They have their own 'niche media' for this kind of club culture. In short, when we interpret youth's subcultural practices, we should focus on their niche media and other cultural industries as the subcultural formation in the youth according to Thornton's subcultural capital (1995).

### *C. Debates on social class in Thailand as applied by Bourdieu*

In this section, I will provide some critical debates by Thai scholars concerning how Thai social class can be theorised in a sociological framework, particularly by Bourdieu's class and capital. One empirical work by Rungnapa (2007), who studied social class structure in Thailand, especially Thai elites, draws on the framework of Bourdieu's class, capital, and reproduction. In her study's findings, Thai elites include members of the royal family, descendants of overseas Chinese businessmen, intellectuals, politicians and bureaucrats who hold economic capital in the form of land, labour, business investments, cash and property rights. In addition, they accumulate social capital, often formed by networking and alliances, both within and across groups. These members of the Thai elite also create their own cultural capital to differentiate themselves from others. Rungnapa stated that the characteristics of Thai elite capital are similar in the periods before and after the 1932 revolution. This seems to indicate that political change has not significantly transformed the definition of elite capital, and that members of the Thai elite have successfully deployed strategies to reproduce their capital over time (Rungnapa, 2007).

Moreover, there is another Thai scholar, Supang (1991) who investigated the Thai social structure by applying Goldthorpe's concept of social stratification. The tradition of Goldthorpe's social stratification mainly discusses the issue of socioeconomic background or status (SES) of individuals, which is associated

with occupation, education, and income indicators through a prestige-score ranking. Goldthorpe's SES ranking in will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter with the details of schematic tabulation of social classes in Thailand – to provide how I cluster young Thai women as research participants within three social groups, namely the lower, the middle, and the upper classes, based on their socioeconomic status.

Supang (1991) examined Thai social stratification through occupations in the 1980s by applying Goldthorpe's tradition. An occupational prestige scale was developed to rank eighty-nine occupations, which were grouped into nine categories; namely, 1) professional and technical, 2) administrative and managerial, 3) clerical and related work, 4) sales, 5) services, 6) agricultural and production work, 7) wage labour, 8) military and police officers, and 9) others. Then, a prestige-score ranking, with a scale from 1 to 100, was presented to the sample group. Finally, the study clustered the scores into four strata: the high prestige stratum (comprising professions such as ministers, medical scientists or directors-general), the high-middle prestige stratum, the low-middle prestige stratum and the low prestige stratum (comprising professions such as sex workers or bus ticket collectors) (Supang, 1991). In relation to the *sakdina* system, Supang (1991) observed an emerging 'modern' middle, while the top and the bottom of the social structure remained similar to the *sakdina* system.

More recently, Supasit et al. (2018) studied Thai social stratification using both occupational prestige and capital, drawing on the merged concepts from both Bourdieu and Goldthorpe. Based on objective indicators (social origin, standard of living, economic status and level of education) and subjective indicators (occupational prestige, life chances and lifestyle), the research team identified five social strata: the “leading class” (high-ranking military officers and officials, politicians and CEOs), the “professional middle class” (managers and professionals), “salary men” (teachers, specialist technicians, clerical workers and craftsmen), “secured hourly workers” (lower-rank armed forces and police, sales, technicians and service worker) and the “unsecured” (garbage collectors, cleaners and general workers) (Supasit et al. 2018).

Specifically, to show how Thai social class can be theorised by Bourdieu’s concept in a recent Thai study, Thongsawang et al. (2020) argued that, in Thai society, the disposal of capital is not so much a result of competition but a heritage that is reproduced from one generation to the next. They highlighted that in the capitalist societies of Thailand, this legacy is passed on within boundaries of social classes. Hence, the concept of social class in Thailand is defined as “a tradition line that reproduces itself from one generation to the next by passing on relevant capital and habitus traits and by symbolically distinguishing itself from other classes” (Thongsawang et al., 2020).

All things considered, I propose that the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's class and capital and also other sociological frameworks such as Goldthorpe's SES and even classical Marxist of class are worth being applied to conceptualise social class in Thailand as many Thai scholars have used these frameworks as theoretical backgrounds to understand the research context and objectives. I present the argument that Bourdieu's sociology allows for a culturally sensitive approach that combines deductive and inductive aspects in an interpretative procedure. There are several aspects that can be applied to the Thai context, especially social class in capitalist society. Bourdieu developed his sociological theory for European society with a long capitalist past, which seems to be applicable to a broad range of societies and contexts globally; thus, it can be used for conceptualising non-European settings as well.

To sum up, Bourdieu's framework is deemed appropriate and useful for addressing the question of social class in Thailand, which is the key component of my thesis. As I aim to explore how class differentials of girls impact and/or relate to the ways in which they negotiate their gender identities on social media, girl's social class needs to be clustered by categorising each girl's capital, and then by operationalising these categories. The Methodology chapter will present the detailed organisation of the groups of participants, with the tabulation of social classes in Thailand. However, I would argue that to study girl's social class in relation to gender negotiation online, not only do we need to be aware of and understand the concept of the emergence of social class and capital in society,

but we also need to look closely at other invisible forces that allow for nuance and ambiguity such as individual practices, subjectivities, perceptions, and discourses.



### **3.3.2 De Certeau's strategic/tactic concept related to class struggle**

In the previous section, I argue that the performance of identity on social media is the construction of social capital according to Bourdieu's framework. The ways in which young women post, share, and comment on their online profiles are the representation of their social and cultural capital, such as their education, their manners, their tastes, and their behaviours of any matters.

It could be said that Bourdieu's work serves as a useful theoretical framework to understand how different levels of social prestige, status, and position of individuals impact the ways they perform their selves and identities in both online and offline settings. Not only can Bourdieu's framework be applied to understand how individual's capital impact the ways they express themselves, but it can also be used to understand the class struggle between superordinate/privileged people and subordinate/underprivileged people in society where this class struggle leads to inequality as we perceive in the world. When talking about class struggle or battle, Michel de Certeau would be the influential name to mention and his work can help understand this issue better.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau combined his disparate scholarly interests to develop a theory of the productive and consumptive activity inherent in everyday life. De Certeau considered that everyday life is distinctive

from other practices of daily existence because it is repetitive and unconscious (De Certeau, 1984 cited in Ahearne, 2014). In his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he distinguished between the concepts of *strategy* and *tactics*. De Certeau (1984) linked 'strategies' with institutions and structures of power who are the 'producers', while individuals are 'consumers' or 'poachers', who are against with 'strategic' environment by using 'tactics'. In the *Walking in the City* chapter (1984), De Certeau asserted that 'the city' is generated by the strategies of governments, corporations, and other institutional bodies who produce things like maps that describe the city as a unified whole (Szeman, and Kaposy eds., 2010). By contrast, the walker at street level moves in ways that are tactical and never fully determined by the plans of organising bodies, taking shortcuts despite the strategic grid of the streets (ibid). De Certeau argued that "everyday life works by a process of poaching on the territory of others, using the rules and products that already exist in a culture in a way that is influenced, but never wholly determined, by those rules and products" (de Certeau, 1984 cited in Ahearne, 2014). This is in line with the ways that Jenkins presented the example of *Star Trek* Fan culture, referring that young fan can rewrite the popular texts to serve different interests, a practice called 'textual poaching' and originally derived from De Certeau's framework (Jenkins, 1988). In short, it can be seen that the key concept of de Certeau's framework is the study of 'popular culture and the everyday 'resistance' to regimes of power by the groups of the subordinate class or the marginalised subculture.

Importantly, the 'tactics/strategy' metaphor from de Certeau becomes useful for a better understanding of when each class of young Thai women uses social media as a tactic way and strategic way to perform their gender identities. My view is that the ways in which dominant people employ their 'strategies' to behave their selves and identity in a hierarchal society refer to the power that they possess in that society. At the same time, the ways in which non-dominant people have their 'tactical' ways to express these matters refer to individual's agency and autonomy.

In conclusion, de Certeau considered that the 'walkers' (a metaphor for individuals/ordinary people) can walk on the shortcut route by using 'tactics' despite the strategic grid of the streets. This implies that individuals can challenge the dominant culture through their tactically alternative methods. This can be used to hypothesise the case of lower-to-middle class girls who may use social media to tactically present their selves like they are walking in the street. In the meantime, the dominant group lives in the 'city' where their group enacts the rules and the structures - like the metaphor for institutions and government that produce maps to describe the city as a unified whole. This kind of 'city' metaphor can be applied to understand how upper-class girls may use social media to follow what their parents set as the norms in gender matters.

### 3.4 Conclusion

As discussed thoroughly, the study aims to investigate the relationship among three variables: 1) gender performance, 2) social class, and 3) social media usage in young Thai women. Specifically, the study was designed to address the question: how does the class difference of young women impact the ways they negotiate their gender identities through the online platform? To pursue this question, theoretical frameworks of three themes, namely identity and gender, discourse and power, and social class and capital, can help to conceptualise research data in the analysis process and to understand the link among the three factors (gender, social class, and social media), which are the key points of the study.

By cross-referencing different themes of theories, all themes of the framework are connected to each other's and can serve as an analytical background to understand how young women perform their gender identity through online sites by focusing on the relation of class. In the first theoretical theme, Goffman's theory (1959) can be applied to understand the basic presentation of self in everyday life both online and offline. As Goffman argued that individuals manage their impression for social interaction through the frontstage and the backstage according to the dramaturgical model, a better understanding of how young women present their selves and identities in terms of gender through social media sites can be achieved. I suggest that social media can be considered as both

frontstage and backstage concurrently, since it can manage both public images of selves (everyone can see) and private images of selves (selected audiences to be seen). Thus, how young Thai women manage their social media profiles to present either their idealized selves, desired images, or selected images of self can be considered as the ways they manage their impression through the social interaction inside the online platform according to Goffman's impression management concept (1959).

Butler's gender performativity (1990) can be used as the identity and gender framework in this study, similar to Goffman's theory. As Butler described gender as performance, and sexuality has been derived from discourse and social processes in society, his theory can help understand how young Thai women perform their gender through "millions of individual actions" which are changeable and performative. Similarly, the concept of "doing gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987) postulates that "gender is something a person does, rather than has". They argued that the performative model is conceptualised gender as an interactional achievement in society and they viewed gender as something unstable and variable. This can be applied in the context of social media that when individuals self-select and perform their gender identities through millions of individual actions such as changing the profile pictures, or editing the pictures posted, they can perform their multiple gender identities which do not need to be fixed or identical to the biological sex they naturally have.

At the same time, McRobbie (2009) provided a useful framework to understand that even though girls in post-feminism seem liberated and successful in gaining choices and empowerment of their expression of their gender and sexuality, in fact, their agency is still constrained. McRobbie argued that a new modern identity, or 'new girlie feminism', is a false identity that encourages and perpetuates patriarchal values. Thus, she critiqued that post-feminism, by adopting the values of neoliberalism and consumerism, eventually undermines the progress of feminism. However, I suggest that to understand a girl's agency in contemporary feminism, it should be viewed by a more nuanced lens of individual aesthetics. For example, the cosplay activity – a playful act by queer performers – is a complex pleasurable expression involving aesthetic tastes and embodiment of cosplay characters. Thus, to understand them, we need to analyse not only the animation's bodies (cosplay's visual images) but also the underlying aesthetics, as well as the cosplayer's cultural taste, aesthetics, class, capital, etc. in accordance with what Bourdieu proposed (1970). I maintain that to study youth culture, subculture, and their constructed identity, the actual class affiliations of young people should be analysed, as advanced by Bourdieu's framework of social class and capital (1970), which will be concluded in the third theme of theoretical frameworks.

In the second theoretical theme, I conclude that Foucault's theory (1998) is useful for understanding of how the 'truth' of sexuality is created through the discourse and power in society. As many young women need to deal with their struggle

against dominant discourses made by societal structure, viewed as the institutional 'expert', Foucault shifted the classical consideration away from the directions that external forces and discourses can restrict people, towards a focus on how discourses can bring people to "police" themselves (1998). This can be applied to understand that although the wider social environment, or the external discourse, remains significant, girl's subjective responses become more interested and crucial. This is in line with what a previous Thai scholar found that sexual subjectivities of young Thai women appear caught up in their desires as much as in the power of normative discourses (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Importantly, the diversity and complexity of discourse, which affect women's everyday life subjectivities, appear fluid and changeable today (ibid).

Hall and Jefferson (1993) from Birmingham's CCCS presented a worthwhile concept for a better understanding of the creation of subculture and resistance in youth culture. As they argued against the classical notion that popular culture is a site of struggle, they suggested that the way young people create their subcultures through rituals is a form of resistance against the dominant culture. Although the post-subcultural theory seems useful as the conceptual approach to understand youth cultural identities, it lacks a strong association with the social class of the original Birmingham Centre theory. Moreover, the post-subcultural theory has presented arguments as to how and why the collective cultural affiliations of youth can be seen as changing in ways that embrace new, more fluid dynamics, reflex, and interchangeable dimensions; however, few scholars

come out to suggest what kinds of collectively endorsed aesthetics, cultural and other lifestyle discourses and practices inform these (Bennett, 2011). Thereby, I support the idea that youth cultural studies should be investigated through a “more nuanced and locally sensitive analysis of where and how patterns of consumption, leisure and lifestyle map onto structural experiences of class, gender, race and so on” (Bennett, 2011).

Lastly, in the third theoretical theme, I suggest that the class affiliations of young women should be analysed according to Bourdieu’s framework of social class and capital (1970). The framework can be applied to understand how each class of young Thai women impacts and shapes individual’s tastes, beliefs, and behaviors in any field, including sexual matters. As there are many types of capital – economic, social, cultural, symbolic – in Bourdieu’s framework, family’s education can be considered as one of the significant cultural assets that can position the children’s cultural capital and provide a link to their cultural behaviour, extending to non-academic features like gait, dress, or accent (Webb, et al., 2001). For example, girls with privileged backgrounds (or higher education) are seen as a conformity group with teacher’s and parent’s expectations: they are considered as docile and submissive. Nevertheless, the social capital of these children is positioned by their family and education according to Bourdieu’s framework; they can have their own *strategic* or *tactical* ways to resist those conventional objects from their parents’ generation (de Certeau (2010). With the metaphor of strategic/tactical method in the *Walking in the City* concept, de



Certeau argued that even though the road map and other rules in the city are *strategically* enacted by the state or the powerful people, underprivileged people can have their shortcut to walk in the city by using *tactical* ways. This can be applied to understand the class struggle between privilege and underprivileged young women in Thai society. My suggestion is that girls with a privileged background are *strategically* deploying the resources of their social group in terms of education, gender, and power to realise the advantages of their class, while girls with underprivileged backgrounds are *tactically* deploying resources to critique and oppose these dominant values. From this, it is undoubtful that privileged girls have manners, tastes, and lifestyles conforming to those of their social group, especially those of their parents' culture, whereas girls in the powerless class seem to challenge and rebel against dominant forces and/or mainstream culture due to the disadvantages of their class.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The study aims to investigate **how social media is used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** In other words, the goal is to understand how 18-year-old women use social media to negotiate and express their gender online. In Thailand, prevailing cultures and traditional public discourses on hetero-normative sexualities constrain young women's gender practice and sexual expression both offline and online. The study interrogates processes of adaptation and resistance of traditional mainstream discourses by considering social media as an alternative space for the youth's sexual negotiation. A gap was identified in terms of how identity was tactically managed and constructed within different class structures. Even though there is a previous research study on class difference and sexual attitudes of young women, its implication is for healthcare purposes, that is, the reduction of the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission in Thailand (Thianthai, 2004). There is still a lack of studies exploring the new dimension of social media's role in the negotiation of gender identity of girls through the focus on class difference in Thailand. Due to this unavailability of information, my current study has filled in the gap by addressing the question of social class. I investigated young women who came from different socioeconomic backgrounds: the lower class (LC), the middle class (MC), and the upper class (UC). The data was gathered through interviews, focus groups, and online ethnographies, such as posted pictures, shared contents, and comments on profiles, and interpreted through a multimodal

and social semiotic lens to gain deeper understandings of women's classed and gendered social media practices. By examining and cross-referencing qualitative data and the construction of online profiles that had been derived from different social backgrounds, insights were generated yielding a snapshot of the everyday identity work of Thai young women as they responded to and resisted traditional forms of feminine conduct.

In the study, I have adopted the ethnographic research methodology to explore the research's objectives. Such an approach seems to be the appropriated choice of research methodology for a study of the youth's lived cultures on social media, as this approach has been shown in other social media studies such as those of boyd (2008a) and Baker (2013). Particularly, boyd has performed multiple ethnographic studies on social media including Facebook, Myspace and Twitter, enabling in-depth analysis of the users on these sites (2006; 2007, 2008b; 2014). I deem online ethnography as the appropriate approach to collect the online data of the participants' production of their everyday life, and to understand the ways in which they negotiate their gender identities on the site.

However, despite the fixed tools/features, layouts, and interfaces of social media platforms that users can exploit for the negotiation of their identities, the ways in which they utilise their different tools are unique to each participant when it comes to the representation of their gender identities and characteristics (Pink, 2013).

Thus, it is worth utilising this approach to insightfully understand the representation and communication of the participants in everyday life matters by observing their actual practices online, such as posting, sharing, commenting, tagging, status writing, etc. (Pink, 2013). Ethically, from the researcher's point of view, online ethnography enables me to step back from my position as an active member of the participant's social networks, to visually and critically examine the construction of their profiles from the position of their audience.

## ***Self-reflexivity – A nature of the ethnographic study***

A self-reflexive view is one of the crucial features of ethnographic practices that help gain insights into the study's subject. I will discuss this to show the link between my positionality and the lived culture of young Thai women in the matter of gender performance online. As my nationality and cultural contexts lived and language used are all Thai, my positionality is quite familiar with the fieldwork, the research context, and the study's subject. In terms of reflexivity in the ethnographic study, there are possibilities of reflecting on what the researchers are doing, what kinds of knowledge are being produced, which concepts are too rigid, and which frameworks hide more than they reveal (Gray, 2003). These are significant epistemological questions which, if you are able to ask them of your own work, then you have achieved a flexible and reflexive approach to your study (Gray, 2003). Marcus and Fischer (1986) noted the emergence of interpretive anthropology, which they use as a description that covers "a diverse set of reflections upon both the practice of ethnography and the concept of culture". The metaphor of culture as a text established by Clifford Geertz (1973) opened the doors to debates about the moments of interpretation at all stages in the ethnographic project. There is thus a potential for reflexivity, which makes ethnographic methods so useful for the exploration and investigation of cultural processes and the production of meaning. It is argued that reflexivity is useful to think it through in relation to our broader epistemological position (Gray, 2003). A reflexive approach is one that questions the theoretical and other assumptions of the project. A reflexive process, thus, needs to pay close attention to social actors,

to cultural and social processes, and to the political context in the subject that the researcher aims to study.

Positioning myself as a middle-class person, I would say that I am more familiar with and understand the cultural and social processes and the political context and perspectives in the Thai middle-class group. I understand that being in the middle class is to a certain extent to be overlapped in the Thai class scheme where we are more adaptable, diverse, and struggling with political conflicts. To explain this, it is because we are derived from mixed social origins, which feature an overlap between the upper class and the lower class; in addition, this is also due to the emerging newly rich middle class in Thailand (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2003). We thus have access to educational, healthcare, economic resources more than we did in the past; at the same time, we are the new middle class who become wealthier and achieve some authority and opportunities to speak up in society through social actors and social processes.

However, there is a higher social scheme in Thailand, the elite class, a politically and socially powerful and dominant group involved with the Thai aristocracy derived from the historically Thai social system “*sakdina*” (dignity marks) (Thongsawang et al., 2020). This kind of system has caused Thailand to become a socially complex hierarchy and far from equal until the present (Thongsawang et al., 2020). As a result, the Thai middle class typically struggle with social

tension between the elite and the subordinate group in society. They fight for the social and cultural resources that the elite people have possessed in society. As a Thai middle-class girl who studied in the Thai educational system, I expect and assume that Thai middle-class young women potentially challenge Thai politics and engage in civic affairs as well as political activism in social matters such as corruption, gender inequality, the law of gender-based violence, and the patriarchal system in Thailand. For example, I am interested in interrogating the issues of gender performance, diversity, and political expression in the young generation since I see a significant implication and meanings that young people make in their daily lives in the matter of gender. I would say that the inquiry into such social issues is derived from my self-motivation, which is not only involved in the implication of gender issues in young Thai women, but also the political expression, engagement, and social and cultural process in the matter of social class system in Thailand.

According to the nature of ethnographic approach in cultural studies, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) pointed out that “all associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, not given natural facts” (p. 4). To explore a sociologically, textually and the ethnographically “lived culture” within particular social and cultural settings, the ethnographer should conceptualise culture and subjectivity as in process and flux (Gray, 2003). Importantly, Morris (1997) provided a notion of the “critique of everyday life”, suggesting this as the heart of cultural studies: “an investigation of particular ways of using ‘culture’, of

what is available as culture to people inhabiting particular social contexts, and of people's ways of making culture" (p. 43). Overall, my view is in line with Gray's discussion (2003) that an epistemological sense and choices of qualitative methodology in the inquiry of the "critique of everyday life" (Morris, 1997) is to understand that the world is to be discovered and that knowledge and 'truth' are always provisional and contingent.

The reflexive process, as it allows the project to grow and particular avenues to be pursued, is open and genuinely exploratory (Gray, 2003). It is argued that by the nature of the ethnographic project, the researcher can enter a range of dialogues (Willis, 1980). The dialogues through conversational interviews and less formal conversations provide the possibility of open work – as Willis describes, "the potential for a surprise" (1980, p. 90). From this consideration, as a Thai middle-class woman, I found myself dealing with a great amount of data materials and interpretation during the fieldwork. In terms of expectations of the study's subject, my positionality potentially influences the interpretation that young Thai women would have resistance against the patriarchal society, particularly the middle-class group, since they are the group who are more open and 'speak up' for sexual autonomy – as I discussed previously. In other words, my social position and background necessarily influenced the interpretation during the fieldworks since the study's subject is about a dependent personal disclosure, which is related to the process of dialogues with my research participants' accounts of their social world. Importantly, my positionality helpfully



ties the relationship with the participants since the dialogues in conversational interviews can make it less formal and allow for a more open conversation – as Willis described, “potential for a surprise” (1980, p. 90). Hence, the relationship between myself and the research participants helped to familiarise them with the conversation and made them feel confident in speaking in front of me, which was helpful for the in-depth data collection process. To sum up, through the self-reflexivity, my positionality, and social and cultural backgrounds significantly help to delve into the depth of ethnographic narrative and contribute to the argument forming the basis of the research’s objective.

## 4.1 Research question and objectives

Drawing on themes that have emerged from the literature review (see Chapter 2), gender performance online among young women is considered a significant implication for empirical study. In Thailand, as there are various traditional public discourses for females, which still constraint young women's gender performance in the offline context, social media platforms will therefore be the best place to understand how they apply these sites to negotiate, construct, maintain, and/or contradict their gender identity. This consideration led me to conceptualise the research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** I note that the research question emerged from two key research purposes: firstly, to interrogate how young Thai women use social media to negotiate their gender identities; and secondly, to explore how different class structures are related to these gender negotiations online. To further explain, there are two research objectives:

- 1) to explore the social media's role in negotiating gender identity among young Thai women.
- 2) to understand the relationship between social class and gender negotiation online by young Thai women.

However, I am aware of the debates concerning the concept of gender terms. As discussed in the introductory chapter, gender identity in sociocultural discipline is viewed as a complex internalisation of cultural systems of meaning and subject

to variation across cultures and historical periods (Butler, 1990; Mead, 1949). In other words, gender is defined as social and cultural communicative practices in specific communities (Tangmunkongvorakul, et al., 2010). While gender identity is referred to socially constructed characteristics and cultural representations, sexuality is more complicated than just performing characteristics of being gay, lesbian, or others through bodily appearances, but sexuality is “the experience and expression in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, and relationships” (Wongpanarak et al., 2010). In short, sexuality is a kind of sexual expression, building sexual relationships, expressing sexual desires and fantasies, expressing sexual preferences and orientations, as well as actually having sex. From this, even though the study’s main purpose is to explore how young women from different social classes use social media to negotiate their gender identity, the study takes into account and allows other sexual-related issues – that potentially emerge from the data – to be merged and be analysed as the research findings. These include sexuality, sexual autonomy, sexual expression, a courtship, building a sexual relationship, sexual desires, and emotional expression online.

To pursue the research question ‘**how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?**’, I mainly make reference to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profile pages as sites where young Thai women express and/or perform their gender identity through the display of picture profiles, personal information, shared contents, and

status updates. To sum up, the study interrogates the ways in which young women who are from different class backgrounds negotiate their gender identities on social media through online activities and multimodal texts, such as posted pictures, picture profiles, shared videos, written statuses and comments, and other forms of online content.

## **4.2 Methodology for the PILOT study**

As the pilot study aimed to explore the roles of social media in negotiating gender identity among young Thai women, the ethnographic research methodology was adopted to investigate the research's objectives. Due to the nature of the ethnographic study, qualitative methods were used to investigate how young women negotiated and/or performed their gender identity on social media. To gain in-depth understandings of how they negotiated their gender identity online, and how they adapted and/or resisted traditional forms of female values through social media platforms, I adopted three research methods to collect the data: 1) the focus group, 2) the individual in-depth interview, and 3) the online observation (online ethnography).

### **4.2.1 Sampling and the procedures of participant recruitment**

The participants were 18-year-old Thai women who used social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and studied in upper secondary schools (Grade: Matthayom 6) in Bangkok. Why did I choose 18-year-old women? I make reference to the work by Wongpanarak et al. (2010), which investigated early adolescent Thai's perceptions of gender identity. Although, arguably, it could happen earlier, the authors maintained that the age of 18 spans an early adolescent transition from childhood to adulthood. During this period, there is a

significant development in terms of their gender identity. For example, they may have doubts about their gender identity, how they fit into the world, as well as experience potential tensions and insecurities about their self-image. Thus, this bolsters my case for studying issues of gender and social media use by 18-year-old women.

Participants were recruited by using a purposive snowball sampling method. To clarify the process, I contacted school teachers through the help of existing acquaintances to acquire permission before I had arrived in Bangkok. In this stage, the permission letter to the gatekeeper (school director) was also sent to gain consent before starting any data collection. In the process of ethics application, I obtained ethical approval from UCL for conducting this pilot study before I conducted the fieldwork in Bangkok. All ethics policies and processes were used with reference to the ethical guidelines from the British Sociological Association (BSA), Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by reading the relevant documents and other terms of service of Facebook. Overall, due to confidentiality, anonymity, and security, I was always concerned about these ethical issues that may arise in the study and strictly followed the ethical guidelines as explicitly indicated in the ethics application.

In Thailand, there is no requirement for any criminal checks (like the DBS in the UK) to research schools. Instead, the study gained permission from the school

director through a permission letter. After I obtained consent from the gatekeeper, I started the participants' recruitment process by asking school teachers to select two groups of students. This teacher's selection was based on a homogeneous group of girls, such as the closeness, intimacy, and similarity in habits, lifestyles, and personalities as girl gangs. This can be further discussed through the framework of focus group research (Ivanoff and Hultberg, 2006). As participants who are selected by the "homogeneity" have something in common, called "like-minded people", this makes them feel more comfortable talking to each other and also more likely to talk openly (ibid). Thus, participants in the focus group study shared some of the social and cultural backgrounds or had similar lived experiences or some combination of these. As I wished to obtain the participants' insights, thoughts, and experiences about sensitive issues such as gender, sexuality, and sexual behaviours, homogeneous groups in the focus group study were appropriate for this.

In the study, two groups of young women students who were selected by homogeneity were asked to participate in the study, with each group consisting of five students. In this stage, the participants were given research information sheets and the consent form before any data collection was conducted. Based on their willingness, both groups of young women were asked to participate in three research activities: 1) focus group, 2) individual in-depth interview, and 3) online observation. These three activities involved the same participants throughout the process of data collection.

## 4.2.2 Data Collection

### A) Focus groups (a small group of 5):

The study started to collect the data by conducting focus group interviews. There were two focus groups, each of which containing five students. Thus, the total number of participants in the focus group study was ten students. Based on the broad themes discussed in the literature review, the focus groups were structured to assist me in answering the defined research questions while addressing the overarching concerns. The scope of the focus groups was defined within the framework of the participants' practices regarding gender both online and offline.

Thus, the main five themes highlighted in the focus groups are as follows:

- **The awareness/perception regarding gender identity:** How did they initiatively become aware of their gender? How do they describe their gender identity? How do they perceive themselves in terms of characteristics and orientation of sexuality?
- **Sex education:** How were they taught about gender by schools? What are the gender issues that teachers always talked about? How do young women think about Thai sex education, such as the lessons, the contents, and the impacts?



- **Parental guidance/family influence:** How are they guided about gender by parents? How do they think about this guidance? If there are any specific concerns in the family, how do they feel about these?
- **Traditional mainstream discourses regarding gender in Thailand:** How did they become aware of gender discourses? How do they think about social norms and practices in feminine sexuality, such as “*rak-nuan-sa-gnuan-tua*” (maintaining virginity), “*kul-la-sa-tree*” (socially well-behaved of female), and “*ching-suk-gon-haum* (virginity until marriage)”?
- **Social media use:** How do they post the contents that potentially represent their gender identity and other sexual-related issues (e.g., sexual desires, preferences, and relationships)? How do they share pictures related to their sexual matters, such as sexual orientations, desires, emotions, and experiences? Do they tweet/retweet any content related to sexual issues in society? If yes, how do they post these on their profiles? Are there any tactical or strategic ways to do that?

According to the nature of focus group research, the framework of group interaction is the hallmark of the focus group study. It is argued that this interaction can 1) produce the quality of data and insights, 2) reveal points of agreement, conflict, and uncertainty in any sensitive issues, including gender, and 3) unveil the reality of the group by providing an understanding of how group members think and express their viewpoints (Morgan, 1997; Ivanoff and Hultberg, 2006). This framework helped to reveal that the interaction of focus groups in the study

was about sharing experiences about gender. Participants certainly provided the shared experiences in similar themes of sexual behaviours. It can be seen that participants are not only the products of their environment but also influenced by others around them (Krueger, 1988, cited in Liamputtong, 2011). Thereby, the concept of group interaction is valuable as it can reveal the group's shared experiences of everyday life, language, and culture, as well as cultural norms in sexuality. Importantly, while individual in-depth interview allows the interviewer to delve deeply into the participants' social and personal matters, the focus group allows the interviewer to elicit a wide range of experiences but, because of the public nature of the process, prevents delving deeply into the individuals (Morgan, 1997). Since the focus group is the study with multiple participants sharing their knowledge, experiences or perspectives about a specific subject, the data should also include observative descriptions of group dynamics and the analyses should integrate the interactive dynamics with each group (Morgan, 1997).

Overall, in the study, the focus group spent around a minimum of 45 to a maximum of 90 minutes per one group. While conducting each group, I took notes and recorded the video during the activity, based on the participant's willingness as indicated in the consent form and research information sheets.

## **B) In-depth interviews:**

An in-depth interview is a significantly useful method in qualitative research to understand the informant's point of views about their lives, beliefs, situations, and experiences as expressed in their own words (Kvale, 1996). In-depth interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data. The different qualitative interviewing strategies that are in common use emerged from diverse disciplinary perspectives resulting in a wide variation among interviewing approaches. In social science, in-depth interview seeks to foster an understanding about individual experiences and perspectives on a given set of issues (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Rubin, 2005). The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees (Johnson, 2002). Qualitative interviews have been categorised in a variety of ways, with many contemporary texts loosely differentiating qualitative interviews as unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Warren and Karner, 2005). In my current study, I applied the semi-structured formats since it can allow the interviewer (me) to delve deeply into participants' social and personal matters in terms of gender, which I could organise around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between myself and the participants.

To deeply understand young Thai women's social media use of their gender identity performance, the study applied the in-depth interview as a second research method to investigate the research's aim. Also, the same participants from focus groups were asked to join the interview individually on a different day. As participants might respond differently to some questions as a group and as an individual, the in-depth interview aimed to offer participants more chances to express their voices and experiences about gender and to gain more insights into the data. In short, the themes of questions in the interview study were similar to those of the focus groups study but were deeper in details.

The main themes highlighted in the interviews were structured and scoped in a similar manner to the focus groups as follows:

- **The awareness/perception about gender identity**
- **Sex education**
- **Parental guidance/family influence**
- **Traditional mainstream discourses of gender in Thailand**
- **The social media use**

At the end of each interview, based on the original analysis conducted for each participant, specific questions tailored individually were presented to each of them, to gain further details and insights and to elicit a greater understanding. Moreover, based on their responses, additional questions were subsequently

asked to either clarify certain responses or to delve deeper into specific highlighted areas of interest.

To confirm the intended meanings provided by the participants, an interpretation was also made during the interviews, which I demonstrated to the participants with an interpretation of what the participants just said (Debatin et al., 2009). This kind of interpretation was applied particularly in the follow-up interviews to validate and elaborate upon preliminary findings (Kvale, 1996). It is argued this approach is significantly useful in the qualitative study when the researcher is interviewing participants to require the understanding of human behaviours, particularly in the field of social and cultural studies (Kvale, 1996). After in-depth interviews were conducted, all notes and data were transcribed and coded to generate the common themes by using the NVivo programme. Importantly, cross-references of different types of data, the focus group, the interview, and the online ethnography, were made to triangulate the data and insights provided by participants.

Overall, the in-depth interview took time per person around a minimum of 45 to a maximum of 60 minutes. As written on the research information sheet and the consent form, during the interview, I took notes and recorded the audio with the consent of the participants.

### **C) Online ethnography (a study of the participant's social media use):**

As the study aimed to explore the participant's social media use in negotiating their gender identity, the online ethnographic method was adopted to investigate the research's objectives by the observation of the participants' profile pages. This approach seems to be the appropriate choice for a study exploring lived cultures on social media and is used by numerous social media scholars, from boyd and Heer (2006), to Marwick, and boyd (2011), and Baker (2013). Particularly, boyd conducted multiple online ethnographic studies on social media including Myspace, Twitter, and Facebook, to understand the teenage user's practices on these sites (2007; 2008; 2014). This online ethnography enables in-depth analysis of users by the observation of the ways that they share, post, and update on their social media pages. This can provide an understanding of meanings that they have made on the platforms. From the researcher's point of view, the key benefit of online ethnographic research is its ability to allow me to gain insights through first-hand observations of behaviour (Hair and Clark, 2003). According to Baker (2013), Facebook as ethnographic resource positions the platform to serve three functions: "as a communicative medium, as context, and as data" (p. 132). These functions are a valuable reference for the study which aims to unravel the meanings underlying choices online that participants have selected and made in creating their gender identities.

In addition, as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are positioned as 'social interactive spaces', the relevance of exploring the participants' interactions within the medium of these sites are underscored (Baker, 2013). This notion of online interaction is supported by previous scholars, such as boyd (2008), whose work focused on performing qualitative internet research. She stated that the user's online self-presentation can be defined through the relationship and social groups in social networks (2008). This can be applied to understand that young women's negotiations of gender are arguably framed by their social connections and audience interactions with other users on the sites, reflected by an observable manner that they engage with their audiences.

As my current study adopted the online ethnographic method to explore participants' gender practices on their social media profile pages, I newly created Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts with my UCL credentials as a researcher and provided detailed information about the study on my researcher profile page. Due to the security, anonymity, and confidentiality, it would be beneficial for both me and participants to use these newly created accounts in conducting the research only for the purposes of trustworthiness and prevention of ethical harassment.

Online ethnography aims to study the participants' online production related to gender meanings, by observing their social media profile pages. The criteria that

I used to identify gender meanings in participants' online productions were the posts related to the personal sense of bodily appearance and other expression of gender, such as costumes, hairstyles, props, speech and mannerisms that are related to gender issues both personally and socially. The criteria were based on the definition of gender provided in the introductory chapter. As defined, gender identity is as "socially constructed characteristics and cultural representations" (Tangmunkongvorakul, et al., 2010). Specifically, I identified the gender meaning of participants' production as "a person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, including the personal sense of the body – bodily appearance – and other expressions of gender, such as dress, speech and mannerisms – defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Thus, the criteria I used to select the online production of the participants were the posts associated with personal sense of bodily appearance and other forms of gender expression that cover perspectives, attitudes, behaviours, and experiences in gender matters.

Overall, in the process of the online ethnographic study, I reached out to the same ten participants, who were fully informed by the research information sheets and the consent form. I explained to them that they could customise what they wanted to allow me to see on their pages. Therefore, they knew that they did not have to give me full access to their profiles and they could also opt-out from this stage if they were not comfortable with it. Once I obtained their fully informed consent, I sent them friend or following requests on social media accounts to access their



profiles, before starting to observe their online activities on online sites. Recalling the aim of the pilot study, this study aimed to develop the research design for the MAIN study. The pilot study intended to explore how young Thai women used social media as the negotiation of their gender, without the issue of their different class backgrounds, which emerged as a salient theme and dimension to be further explored in the MAIN study. Thus, all key themes that emerged in the pilot study were derived from the data analysis with ten participants regardless of their different class backgrounds. In the appendix, I showed a substantial piece of work of this analysis, suggesting the five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, which these themes were developed for further understanding in the MAIN study.

### **4.3 Methodology for the MAIN study**

The main study was the ethnographic methodology, which was the same as the pilot study; yet the details were different in terms of sampling and the procedures of participant recruitment. The main study has two key different points compared with the pilot study: to use a questionnaire survey as an initial tool to recruit participants; to recruit participants by categorising their social classes into three groups, namely the lower class (LC), the middle class (MC), and the upper class (UC).

Briefly, a questionnaire survey was adopted as an initial tool to recruit participants. The aim of using this questionnaire survey was to understand their demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and also to understand the frequency and engagement of their usage of each social media platform (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). The ultimate goals were to understand which platform they used the most, how they engaged with each platform, what kinds of content they posted for each platform, and which modes of multimodal texts, such as posted pictures, shared videos, updated statuses, shared emojis and stickers, they had frequently used on their profiles. In short, the questionnaires mainly asked participants in two main aspects: their demographic information (referred to as their socioeconomic status (SES) – parent's incomes, education, and occupation); and the basic information concerning their behaviour in social media use. Based on the richness of the information provided by the participants during the survey, the

participants were then selected to involve with three research activities in the same way as done in the pilot study: the focus group, the individual in-depth interview, and the online observation, respectively.

## A. Analytical Concepts in Social Class

Since the social class was identified as the research gap, to classify the participants' social class, we need to apply the analytical concept or approach to process this. As consistently discussed, since the different class backgrounds of young women could be an underlying variable impacting and/or related to their gender negotiation, they were thus recruited as the research participants, categorised by their socioeconomic status (SES).

To apply the analytical concepts of classifying participants' social class, I used a revised class scheme by the Academia Sinica on East Asia (Hsiao, 1999) – a modified version of the class scheme proposed by John Goldthorpe (1992), the standard scheme in the West (Table 1).

TABLE I  
CLASS SCHEME USED IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The Original Scheme as Proposed by Goldthorpe		Revised Asian Class Scheme by the Academia Sinica	
I	Higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials	I	Capitalist
II	Lower-grade professionals, administrators, and officials	II	New middle class
IIIa	Routine nonmanual employees	IIIa+b	Marginal middle class
IIIb	Personal service workers		
IVa	Small proprietors, artisans, etc., with employees	IVa+b	Old middle class
IVb	Small proprietors, artisans, etc., without employees		
IVc	Farmers and small holders, etc.	IVc+VIIb	Farmers/agricultural workers
VIIb	Agricultural workers		
V	Lower-grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers	V+VI+VIIa	Working class
VI	Skilled manual workers		
VIIa	Semiskilled and unskilled manual workers		

Sources: Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992, pp. 38–39) and Hsiao (1999, pp. 6–9).

Table 1: The revised Asian class scheme by Academia Sinica (Hsiao, 1999), which was proposed by John Goldthorpe's original scheme in the West (1992).

To clarify this, Table 1 is the revised Asian class scheme by the Academia Sinica on East Asia – a Central Research Academy in the Republic of China (Taiwan) (Hsiao, 1999), originating from the standard class scheme in the West (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992a, 1992b). In Table 1, both Goldthorpe's classical work on the West class scheme and Academia Sinica's traditional work on Asian class scheme mainly consider only 'occupation' as the SES indicator through a prestige-score ranking (referred as I, II, IIIa..., V..., VIIa). However, I applied other contemporary indicators by combining more recent research by the Thai National Cohort Study Team exploring socioeconomic status in Thailand (Seubsman, et al., 2011). They proposed the contemporary SES indicators, namely education, income, and occupation, with the prestige-scale ranking, to study social class of the Thai population. To clarify this, the SES indicators in the study of Thai social class are defined by the level of education, the monthly income, and the occupational status ranked by the prestige value in society (Seubsman, et al., 2011).

To combine these contemporary SES indicators with the concept of original work in Table 1, with minor additional adjustments made to suit the situations and

contexts of Thailand, I suggest a new revised version of the class scheme in Thailand, which is classified by three SES indicators: educational level, monthly income, and occupational status (Table 2). Please see Table 2 below for a detailed presentation of classification. All the information was also included in the questionnaire survey.

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Income (Thai baht)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Class Scheme</b>
'Aristocracy' (royal, king, elite), professional, technical, administrative, executive managerial workers, and government officials	> 50,000	Master to Doctoral	<b>Upper</b>
'Bourgeoisie' – the newly rich-urban middle class in Thailand, e.g., small to medium proprietor, white collar in private company, and artisan with and without employee	20,000 – 50,000	Secondary education to Bachelor	<b>Middle</b>
'Proletariat' e.g., labour worker	< 20,000	Below than secondary education	<b>Lower</b>

Table 2: A revised version of the class scheme in Thailand (with additional adjustments to better suit the situation of the research's context), emerging

from the classical work of Goldthorpe (1992), the standard scheme in the West, and Hsiao (1999), a class scheme in Asia in Table 1.

Briefly, Table 2 includes three contemporary SES indicators (occupation, income, and education). These SES indicators were used to finally classify participants into three class schemes: the upper class (UC), the middle class (MC), and the lower class (LC). As mentioned, young Thai women were asked about their SES information (parent's occupation, income, and education) through the questionnaire survey in the initial stage of the research. They were then classified into three social groups, based on the information they provided to us in the survey. The details of classification are as follows:

In the first group, the upper class (UC) have the highest occupational status, monthly income, and educational level in overall. This occupational status refers to members of the aristocracy (royal, king, elite), professionals, technical workers, administrative workers, executive managerial workers, and government officials. To explain this, their occupational status belongs to that of the aristocracy: in other words, the people who are part of the traditional aristocracy and work with government departments such as politicians, ambassadors, lawyers, senior commissioned officers, a board of directors in a government office, or university professors. It also includes people whose jobs were not related to the aristocracy but related to private or international companies, such as professionals in

software engineering, managing directors (MD) in airline companies, private banking managers, chartered accountants, solicitors, investment analysts, college lecturers, and business owners. The average income is more than 50,000 baht per month, and the level of education is between Master's degree to Doctoral degree. To sum up, I would say that Thai upper class belong to the traditional Thai aristocracy – they have obtained the privileged social position which helped them acquire the high occupational status. However, some of them might have their roots in the lower social group – they have worked their way up through the system by their own hard work. Thus, this shows the complex and overlapping group in the Thai social class scheme, which is cannot be explained simply by occupation. Due to the high income, high professional occupations, and high educational achievements, the upper class are considered as symbols of a *hi-so* identity, which is drawn from the Western concepts of 'high-society' (Vorng, 2012). This *hi-so* identity is the new status hierarchy deemed as high-cultural standing or social prestige. For example, they study in private tutoring schools, they live in exclusive condos, and they shop in the elite shopping malls, located in the expensive central Bangkok (Jackson, 2004; Vorng, 2012). It is argued that elite people, especially those who live in urban Bangkok, possess modern (*thansamai* - ทันสมัย) culture, civilised (*kwaam charoen* - ความเจริญ) lifestyles, and privilege (*abhisit* - อภิสิทธิ์) (Mills, 2012; Wilson, 2003). Overall, upper-class people tend to have a greater access to education, better employment opportunities, and higher salaries than people who have a lower socioeconomic background (Hutchings, 2000).



In the second group, the middle class (MC) have a medium or average occupational status, income, and education overall. The occupational status belongs to the bourgeoisie, or the capitalist/new middle class/new rich group, encompassing small-to-medium proprietors and white-collar workers in private companies, to artisans with and without employees. They could run small-to-medium businesses in the catering and hospitality industry, work as routine editors in broadcasting companies, and routine employees in hotels. The average income is between 20,000 – 50,000 baht per month, and the educational attainment between secondary education/or equivalent to Bachelor's degree. Due to the emergence of the newly rich-urban middle class in Thailand, I define the Thai middle class as the bourgeoisie in the classical Marxist term. As considered in the Theory chapter, the social class scheme in Thailand conforms to the ways of classical Marxist definitions, but with the exceptions of the role of the monarchy and aristocracy, and the rural groups. The bourgeoisie, as the Thai 'middle class', refers to a group of people who own the means of production and purchase the labour power of others (Marx, 1867). To apply this in the context of Thai society, the emerging newly rich-urban Thai middle class are new start-up businessmen, or entrepreneurs who started small and local businesses and expanded them into large and national ones. They own the means of production and are more wealthy and have more access to education and power.

In the third group, those with the lowest average value in occupational status, income, and education are members of the lower class (LC). Their occupational status is that of the labour workers – or what classical Goldthorpe’s concept calls “lower-grade technicians and unskilled to skilled manual workers” (1992). In my own operational definition, I call this group the proletariat, as applied by the classical Marxist term which refers to a group of people who do not own any means of production and sell their own labour power to earn the money (Marx, 1867). In other words, the Thai lower class, as the proletariat in Marxism, are the industrial urban working class or the peasant class. Instead of calling them the rural peasantry, there is a new term coined for this lower-class group, that is “cosmopolitan peasants” or “cosmopolitan villagers” (Walker, 2012). This is due to the emergence of new political society in contemporary rural Thailand (Keyes, 2014). Thus, their occupations range from peasants and housekeepers to draymen/truck men, messengers, local guides, semi-skilled workers of building contractor, and daily-wage workers. The average income is less than 20,000 baht, and the educational level is below secondary education.

To sum up, I note that Thai social class still conforms to the ways of classical Marxist definitions, but with the exceptions of the roles of the monarchy and aristocracy, and the rural groups. In my own operational definitions applied with the classical Marxist definitions, the aristocracy (royal, king, elite) is defined as the upper class in Thailand, which include the people who work with the king and government departments such as politicians, ambassadors, lawyers, and senior

commissioned officers. This upper-class group belongs to the traditional Thai aristocracy, which have the privileged social position that helps them get the high occupational status. However, there are some of them who originally come from the lower social group – they have climbed up the hierarchical system by their own efforts. The next group is the middle class. Due to the emergence of the newly rich-urban Thai middle class, this class would be defined as the bourgeoisie (or the capitalists), meaning the people who own the means of production, are wealthy, and have more access to education and power. Lastly, the proletariat is defined as the working class (or called the lower-class; the industrial urban working class; the peasant class; or the cosmopolitan peasants in Thailand) which include people who do not own the means of production, are poor, and typically get a raw deal from the state and the society. In other words, they do the work, but they do not get any of the rewards, only compensation from their own labour. At the same time, they are under the control of the bourgeoisie class and need to follow the social rules and norms set by the dominant class. Overall, owing to the existing role of the aristocracy, the power of the bourgeoisie/emergent Thai middle class, and the situation of the proletariat who live in the urban environment, I consider that the Thai social class scheme conforms to the classical Marxist definitions – but with the exceptions of the role of the monarchy and aristocracy, and the rural groups. Importantly, this renders the Thai social class a complex structure; at the same time, we can see the overlap of classes in many schemes such as the group between the upper and the middle, and one between the middle and the lower. This is due to the emergence of the urban social strata in Thailand

which have a mixture of social origins and struggles of social climbing – trying to be higher social class by getting higher education and incomes (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2003).

In conclusion, the main study was the ethnographic methodology, which explored how different classes of young Thai women negotiate their gender identity through the use of social media. The questionnaire survey was the initial tool used to recruit the participants based on the information of the SES indicators in Table 2. The total number of participants was 30, including 10 students per social group (10 for the UC, 10 for the MC, and 10 for the LC). The analytical concept of social class was inspired by the original work from Goldthorpe's standard scheme in the West (1992) and Academia Sinica's class scheme in Asia (Hsiao, 1999) – Table 1. However, the contemporary approach to classify participant's social class was developed by the SES indicators from the recent Thai National Cohort Study (Seubsman, et al., 2011). I thus suggest a revised class scheme in Thailand (Table 2) to be used for classifying the participants' social class by looking at three SES indicators: educational level, monthly income, and occupational status, as discussed. After they were classified into their social groups, they were selected to participate in three research activities in the same way as conducted in the pilot study. These were the focus group, the individual in-depth interview, and the online observation, respectively.

## *B. Bangkok – the context where the participants are based*

In the process of participant recruitment, the criteria for classifying the participants' social class not only included their parent's SES (income, education, and occupation), but also young women's school levels located in Bangkok. First of all, why is Bangkok considered as the context where the participants are based? It is due to the fact that the capital city is seen as being diverse and flexible, and has adopted many international values and patterns. Importantly, Bangkok is a place where many rural-migrant students from different regions, ethnicities, occupations, and socioeconomic statuses move around (Timpan, 2005). This is since they want to get more educational and economic opportunities. Due to the demographic diversities, Bangkok is not only geographically, linguistically, and culturally different from other Thai regions, but it is also seen as the first economic, cultural, communication, and tourism centre in Thailand (Tangmunkongvorakul, 2009). As a result of modernisation, Bangkok has a diversity of social values and patterns, influenced by Western culture, internationalisation, and others (ibid). Specifically, Bangkok is seen as a site of migration for young rural residents: thus, Bangkok is a new social space removed from the community and social support or surveillance of families and relatives (Timpan, 2005). As young migrants live in rented rooms among strangers who pay little attention to them, they hence gain new friends and social networks that they define as their own culture with certain freedoms to adopt new social behaviours, values, patterns, and eventually sexual partners (Timpan, 2005; Tangmunkongvorakul, 2009). Not only does demographic diversity in Bangkok

provide a diverse representative sample of young women groups in Thailand, but it also delivers opportunities for diverse sexual patterns and practices. Bangkok becomes the crucial context in which to study and understand the dynamics of sexual matters for young women.

To sum up, Bangkok is the context where the participants were recruited. As mentioned, the criteria for classifying participant's social class not only included their parent's SES (income, education, and occupation), but also young women's school levels located in Bangkok. The participants were recruited from three different types of secondary schools in Bangkok. The upper class (UC) were students attending high calibre private and well-known public high schools. At the same time, their socioeconomic status was linked to the traditional Thai aristocracy since their parents worked with government departments with high social positions, such as politicians, ambassadors, lawyers, senior commissioned officers. Thus, I would define the upper class as the traditional Thai aristocracy – they have obtained the privileged social position which helps them get the high status of occupation. However, some of them might have moved up the social ladder with their own hard work. Next, the middle class (MC) consists of students who attend other public high schools and/or public colleges. Their parents possess a medium or average occupational status, income, and education overall. I would call this middle-class group the bourgeoisie or the capitalists, as applied by classical Marxism. The emerging newly rich Thai middle class is the bourgeoisie who own the means of production and purchase the labour power of

others (Marx, 1867). Hence, they are the new rich middle-class group in the society, working, for instance, as start-up businessmen locally or nationally; at the same time, they are wealthier and have more access to education and power compared to the inferior group. Lastly, the lower class (LC) are students who study in opportunity expansion schools, such as temple schools, supported by the government. Their parents' occupational status is that of labour workers, the proletariat in the classical Marxist term. The Thai lower class refers to people who do not own any means of production and sell their own labour power to earn the money (Marx, 1867). Due to the emergence of a new political society in contemporary rural Thailand, there is a new term proposed for this Thai lower-class group: the "cosmopolitan peasants" or "cosmopolitan villagers", instead of the rural peasantry (Walker, 2012). Thus, I would define the Thai lower class as the industrial urban working class and, at the same time, as the proletariat according to Marxist term.

### 4.3.1 Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis to initially conceptualise themes for qualitative data. Then, multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) was another supportive approach to analyse the visual and textual data for online materials on social media such as posted pictures, shared contents, comments, retweeted contents, and other online texts. Specifically, three different types of data were coded and patterned as the emergent themes through the thematic analysis. I then referred to the multimodal metafunctions framework, representation, interaction, and composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), as they appear relevant to the reinforcement of the argument. Thus, the metafunction analysis supports the interpretation of meaning-making by the participants as regards gender matters both online and offline.

To explain this in detail through the qualitative content analysis from the focus group and the interview data, all audio records, video records, and fieldnotes were transcribed and categorised into codes and common themes by using NVivo. These potential themes were contextualised by similar patterns according to thematic analysis. For online ethnographic data, the initial approach was to investigate each participant's profile page individually, which was analysed by separate contained sections: profile pictures, personal information, status updates, and shared contents. Then, the selected materials, such as visual images, written contents, and still and moving images, from social media profiles



were referred through the lens of the social semiotic multimodality framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) to understand how these media texts produce the meaning potentials in terms of gender.

I argue that the multimodal lens, which is rooted in social semiotics, is valuable to the study's data analysis as an analytical framework. As this approach is a form of semiotics, which is a theory for the analysis of sign systems, or modes of communication (Burn and Parker, 2003), this kind of semiotics can produce the potential meanings of any fields, especially of cultural communication. Based on the participants' displays on profile pages, all online materials, such as posted pictures, shared videos, comments, and posted statuses are recognised as textual and visual media that can potentially provide the meanings regarding gender matters of young women.

According to van Leeuwen and Jewitt, the multimodal discourse analysis is primarily the domain of mediated discourse analysts, social semioticians, and systemic functional linguists (2001). This approach considers how texts draw on modes of communication in combination with words to make meaning (ibid). In the definition by Kress (2009), "mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning". Images, writing, layouts, music, gestures, speech, moving images, soundtracks and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication (Kress, 2009). Importantly, Kress considered that phenomena and objects which are the product of social work

have meaning in their cultural environments: furniture, clothing, food, 'have' meaning (2009). Hence, many objects and cultural phenomena are also included as modes that can be used to make meaning and communicate. Overall, this consideration can be applied to understand the meaning-making of young women in terms of gender matters through the multimodal texts on their social media profiles, such as profile pictures, status updates, and retweeted contents.

By the social semiotic framework, the aim of social semiotics is to understand the social dimensions of meaning, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implications (Jewitt, et al., 2016). It sets out to reveal how processes of meaning making (i.e., signification and interpretation or what is called semiosis) shape individuals and societies. Its basic assumption is that meanings derive from social action and interaction using semiotic resources as tools (Jewitt, et al., 2016). Importantly, social semiotics emphasises the agency of the sign maker. Sign systems are shaped through social usage; they are not prior or given or abstract; it is not possible to separate a sign system from society and its contexts of use by people (Jewitt, et al., 2016).

There is a development of a concept of the motivated sign to account for the role of human agency and social context in the construction of meaning and the variability of meanings (Jewitt, et al., 2016). Motivated signs are understood as arising out of and motivated by the cultural, social and historical experiences and context of the sign maker: a product of the social process of meaning making

(ibid). That is, social semiotics presents a social theory of meaning making and communication in which modes or sign systems, such as language or images are intertwined with their user and social context of use (ibid). In short, the multimodal analysis grounded in social semiotic theory aims to understand the social dimensions of meaning which is derived from social action and interaction using semiotic resources as tools. In other words, semiotic “resources” have been used to understand the meaning-making of the participants, which are people, places, and things (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Social semiotics employs different modes of communication to understand how such people, places, and things in the media text say or represent meanings and how such media texts can be interpreted.

Kress and van Leeuwen suggested a metafunction framework in multimodal social semiotics: the three keys of semiotic work that are representation, interaction, and composition (1996). To highlight this, the following is the chart depicting the multimodal metafunctions drawn by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), which I will apply as deemed relevant to reinforce the argument when analysing the data.

<b>Representation</b>	<b>Interaction</b>	<b>Composition</b>
A. Narrative structure	A. Point of view	A. Information value
B. Conceptual structure	B. Distance	B. Framing
	C. Contact	C. Saliency
	D. Modality	

(Reference: Kress and van Leeuwen’s metafunctions, *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*, 1996)

The metafunctions were applied by Kress and van Leeuwen’s multimodal social semiotics framework (1996), and was originally derived from Halliday’s metafunctions: the ideational metafunction, the inter-personal metafunction, and the textual metafunction (1978). Kress and van Leeuwen described three main kinds of semiotic work into images particularly, with the slightly different terminology: ‘representational’ instead of ‘ideational’, ‘interactive’ instead of ‘interpersonal’, and ‘compositional’ instead of ‘textual’ (1996). To clarify, the chart includes the columns, which represent the key metafunctions: representation, interaction, and composition; and the rows, which represent the detailed dimensions, such as narrative structure, point of view, distance, contact, framing, and other elements as outlined in the above table.

Jewitt and Oyama (2004) explain that “representational meaning is first of all conveyed by the (abstract or concrete) ‘participants’ (people, places or things) depicted” (p. 10). The representational work considers that semiotic modes, such

as 'syntax' of images, are sources of representational meaning. In other words, the resources potentially indicate what is 'doing' or 'happening', who is the 'actor' or the 'reactor', or who is 'active' or 'passive' in the image. In time-based semiotic modes such as language and music, "syntax is a matter of sequencing order, for example, word order" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). In space-based semiotic modes such as images and architecture, "it is a matter of spatial relationships, of 'where things are' in the semiotic space and of whether or not they are connected through lines, or through visual 'rhymes' of colour and shape" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004).

They describe how visual syntactic patterns operate in terms of their function of relating to visual participants and suggest that there are two kinds of pattern. "Narrative representations relate to participants in terms of 'doings' and 'happenings', of the unfolding of actions, events, or processes of change" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, p. 11). While narrative representations refer to what participants are doing, conceptual patterns relate to "participants in terms of their more generalised, stable or timeless 'essences'" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, p. 11). This means conceptual patterns representing what participants are being, or having certain characteristics. Jewitt and Oyama (2004) suggest that the decision to represent something in a narrative or conceptual way is crucial as it is the key to understanding the discourses which mediate their representation.

The second is the interactive function. This function highlights social relations of participants (people, places or things) through particular actions, such as gaze,

gesture, facial expression, and body movement, as well as through many resources such as contact, point of view, distance, and modality (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). In the picture frame, particular relations between viewers and the world can be produced by the communicative modes – these modes can interact with the viewers and provide the attitude toward what is being represented. Jewitt and Oyama (2004) suggest four factors played a key role in the realisation of the meanings: distance, contact, point of view, and modality. They explain that, in every interaction, “the norms of social relations determine the ‘distance’ we keep from each other” (p. 15). Specifically, “images can bring people, places and things close to the viewer or ‘keep them at arm's length’” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, p. 15). This can be called the size of a frame of shots, for example, to see people close up is to see them in the way we would normally see people with whom we are quite intimately acquainted (ibid). Jewitt and Oyama (2004) suggest that the terminology of film and television can be used to describe these. That is, an intimate or personal relationship can be made by a close-up shot (head and shoulders or less), while a medium shot, cutting off the human figure between the waist and the knees, refers to a social relationship, and a long shot, showing the full figure or wide distance, can indicate an impersonal relationship (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). These camera positions are the ‘distance’ in the interactive function that produces diverse meanings (ibid). In terms of the ‘contact’, when people inside the picture frame look directly at the viewer, they can make contact and establish an (imaginary) relation with them. Jewitt and Oyama (2004) call such pictures “demand” pictures: “the people in the picture symbolically demand

something from the viewer” (p.15). For example, they can demand deference through facial expressions and gestures such as by unblinkingly looking down on the viewers (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004).

The third factor is ‘point of view’. “This resource allows people, places and things to be depicted from above or below (or at eye-level), and from the front, the side or the back” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, p.3). There are ranges of vertical angles between the ‘bird's eye’ view and eye-level, and ranges of horizontal angles between frontality and the profile. These are dimensions of points of view in the pictures that created potential meanings diversely. In the case of the vertical angle, this relation will be one of symbolic power. For instance, “if you look down on something, you look at it from a position of symbolic power; in contrast, if you look up at something, that something has some kind of symbolic power over you” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, p.3). While the vertical angel shows the symbolic power, the eye-level constructs a relation of symbolic equality. In the case of the horizontal angle, it is about the degree of involvement or detachment. To explain this, frontality can offer the creation of maximum involvement: it is when the viewer is directly confronted with what is in the picture. In contrast, if something is depicted from the side, the viewer remains on the sidelines – this refers to the detachment meaning. However, Jewitt and Oyama (2004) thoroughly emphasise that there are many degrees of involved or detached engagement in between. Importantly, it is noted that social semiotics is a contemporary and post-

structuralist discipline, not a structuralist one – hence it is impossible to say what the points of view of the picture will mean exactly (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004).

The last term ‘modality’ refers to the truth value of a text which is negotiated between the text and the reader/viewer (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). As modality is the reality value, the claim to be real is based on different definitions of reality. “Naturalistic modality defines visual reality as follows: the greater the congruence between what you see of an object in an image and what you can see of it in reality with the naked eye, in a specific situation and from a specific angle, the higher the modality of that image (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). On the other hand, “scientific modality is based not on what things, in a specific situation and from a specific angle, look like, but on how things are in general, or regularly, or according to some deeper, ‘hidden’ truth (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Overall, it could be said that the term of ‘modality’ implies to the reality the value of a text which is negotiated between the text and the reader/viewer. However, as my data analysis lacks access to the audience of these texts, (only the author and the text are available), I can only analyse the modality claim – how the author/text claims to be true or credible. Also, I consider that the metafunctions are interrelated in complex ways – when we analyse the interactive meanings, we should think about how these are possibly linked to representational and compositional meanings. Therefore, I see that the modality can be analysed and be linked to the compositional as well as representational meaning – as we can see some lack of clarity and diverse uses of Kress and van Leeuwen’s metafunctions in the



literature. Importantly, I will discuss an aspect of how the modality is possibly viewed under the compositional meaning as well in the following section.

Lastly, the third metafunction is the compositional work, which considers how layout, placement, and other relative salience of media texts can provide the meaning potentials. In other words, the visual composition in the image, such as the framing, the layout, and the placement, left or right, can allow us to perceive some social meanings. There are three resources of compositional meaning: information value; framing; and salience, offered by Jewitt and Oyama (2004). Information values are realised by the placement of the elements of a composition. The idea is that the role of any particular element in the whole will depend on whether it is placed on the left or on the right, in the centre or the margin, or in the upper or the lower part of the picture space or page (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Briefly, left-right placement creates a 'given-new' structure. The elements placed on the left are presented as 'given', which means as something the viewer or reader already knows, or as a familiar and agreed departure point for the message. The elements placed on the right are represented as 'new', referring as something not yet known and not yet already agreed upon by the viewer or reader, hence they must pay special attention. "The 'new' is therefore problematic, contestable, the information 'at issue', while the 'given' is presented as commonsensical and self-evident" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). In the case of top and bottom placement, if some of the constituent elements are placed on top, these are presented as what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) called the 'ideal',

whereas what is called the 'real' is placed at the bottom. For something to be 'ideal' means that it is presented as the idealised or generalised essence of the information, hence usually also as its ideologically most salient part. "The 'real' is then opposed to this in that it is its meaning potential to present more 'down to earth information'" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004).

The term 'framing' indicates that elements of a composition can either be given separate identities, or represented as belonging together (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). In other words, framing 'connects' or 'disconnects' elements. Disconnection can be created in many ways, through framelines – which may be thick or thin – there are degrees of framing, through the empty space between elements, and through contrasts of colour or form, or any other visual feature. In short, through any form of discontinuity, disconnection or contrast can be visually signified. Connection can be achieved in exactly the opposite way, through similarities and rhymes of colour and form, through vectors that connect elements, and through the absence of framelines or the empty space between elements. The term 'saliency' was used by Jewitt and Oyama (2004) to indicate that some elements can be made more eye-catching than others. This again can be made in many different ways through size, or through colour contrasts. For example, red is always a very salient colour and provides a tonal contrast. In short, saliency is achieved through anything that can make a given element stand out from its surroundings.

There are many uses by scholars with a loose and different structure between the three metafunctions. For example, modality is an aspect of the interactive metafunction in Kress and van Leeuwen's original work, but we can see some scholars analyse modality through the compositional meaning (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). In *the handbook of visual analysis* by Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004), metafunctions are shown to be interrelated in complex ways. I view that though the modality is placed in the interactive metafunction as Kress and van Leeuwen originally proposed, its meaning potentially relates to the compositional meaning. This is because the compositional metafunction works to realise or express the meanings of the other two metafunctions, so when we analyse compositional structures, we should think how these make the representational and interactive meanings possible. Thus, while the modality is an aspect of the interactive metafunction since the truth value of a text is negotiated between the text and the reader/viewer, it is possible that the modality interrelates with compositional meanings and perhaps with representational meaning as well.

Following this consideration, the social semiotics can be seen as a useful theoretical approach for the interpretation of sign-maker's productions and practices and can provide an overall stance onto meaning making. It is worth applying this framework to understand how young Thai women represent their feelings, meanings, and demanding regarding gender through the multimodal texts on social media sites.

To conclude, as an ethnographic study, the multimodal semiotic framework is a valuable tool that helps understand how representational structure, interactive structure, and compositional structure in media texts represent gender meanings made by participants. The aim is to understand that how young Thai women use social media to perform and/or construct their gender meanings through their cultural communicative practices, such as through the tweeted contents, through the shared contents, through the posted pictures, and through other visual media texts in online sites. Overall, I argue that the multimodal discourse analysis grounded in social semiotics is a valuable resource for the study's analytical process as it can conceptualise the complex array of semiotic resources which are used to create meaning of the participants' data, as well as provide insights into how visual and textual communication in the participants' online profile represents gender meanings that they create.

By the use of triangulation, the data analysis was conducted systematically by cross-referencing three data types, social media data, interview data and focus group data. Specifically, the focus group data featured spoken language and non-verbal language from video records; the interview data involved spoken utterances from transcripts; and the online ethnographic data focussed on still and/or moving images. All the different types of data were conceptualised by cross-referencing through thematic analysis. Then, I referred to the multimodal metafunctions framework: representation, interaction, and composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) as deemed relevant to strengthen the argument.

In short, the qualitative data derived from the focus group, the interview, and the online ethnography were integrated into the analytical process by using thematic analysis. These qualitative data were categorised into similar patterns which then became the key themes. The emerging themes were subsequently analysed by the multimodal metafunction to reinforce the argument; in the meantime, both reviewed pieces of literature and theoretical frameworks also served as an analytical background to explain and contextualise the key themes that grew into the research findings.

## **Chapter 5: Lower class and the subversion by negotiated subcultures online**

This chapter interrogates how can social media used by LC participants reveal any information about their gender identity? What will online sites tell us about their gender performance? Is there any room for resistance to Thai dominant discourses by the LC participants? How do they resist this? How do they build their subcultures online to subvert the mainstream social convention of femininity through social media use? Which platform appears as the salient political activism site for them?

These questions will be discussed throughout the chapter to pursue the research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** As the literature review reveals, there are traditional public discourses regarding gender in Thailand which still restrain young women's gender performance (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). The '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' (to preserve chastity) value, the '*ka la the sa*' (contextual sensitivity) idea, the motherhood and girlhood discourse, and the 'dutiful' daughter role in Thai families are the key feminine discourses related to simple conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' women (Suriyasarn, 2014). With reference to this literature framework, chapter 5 will explore how the LC participants resist those traditional discourses through their own created subcultures online.

Briefly, I propose that they tactically use Twitter as the salient site of political activism to express political gender issues as well as to subvert the mainstream social convention of femininity through their own building subcultures online. As suggested by several lines of evidence, Twitter use is not ubiquitous in the LC parents' society: the parents have no Twitter accounts and are not used to it. Crucially, from the perspective of the LC participants, Twitter appears to be the most private platform for self-presentation, gender performance, and sexual expression; in addition, they predominantly use this online site to voice their ideas and opinions about gender diversity, social issues, and other political issues which are seen as dangerous and risky topics to speak about in the offline society. The LC participants view Twitter as the most private platform to display authentic perspectives of users due to its functions and features: *tweeting and retweeting* under anonymity. Instagram and Facebook, by contrast, are more visual and represent networks of communication which are more interactive with other private and public spheres of society, particularly the adult society, as evident in, for example, the posting and tagging of pictures with others, or commenting on posts, as a way to connect with online friends.

Furthermore, Twitter is believed to be the only platform where LC participants can keep their privacy away from their parents, relatives, teachers, or even their school friends, since they are not connecting to or following profile pages among their circle of friends at school. The evidence suggests that Twitter is a crucial platform to negotiate gender and sexual expression among the LC participants

owing to its privacy. It is demonstrated that they speak about dangerous and risky social issues on the Twitter space to support the subversion of traditional values of women and to challenge the repression of Thai women's sexuality through textual communication online, particularly by *retweeting* content. Under these considerations, chapter 5 will interrogate how the LC participants use Twitter to subvert normative sexuality by building their subcultures online via diverse communicative modes, such as textual communication (i.e., *retweet* and *hashtag* patterns), and visual image communication (i.e., profile pictures on Twitter).

When we consider the resistance of youth, *Resistance through Rituals* by Hall and Jefferson (1993) could be one of the valuable studies that can be applied to understand this issue. The subcultures online enacted by the LC participants can be suggested as forms of resistance. Youth subcultures (rituals) are interpreted as a response (symbolic resistance) primarily to class oppression (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). In cultural hegemony, it is argued that the dominant middle class possesses the power to enact the rules and mobilise common sense in popular culture through the ideology of people's daily routines. The dominant classes are also considered to be the producers and re-producers of mainstream discourses regarding normative sexuality in society (Gramsci, 1971). However, these dominant discourses and social normativity can be resisted by subclasses that are the lower class via youth subcultures and rituals according to the concept of cultural resistance (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). By applying this concept to the context of gender negotiation in Thailand, we have come to an understanding that



there is still room for resistance in Thai cultural hegemony among the LC participants, who seem to use Twitter as the place of subversion by building their subcultures online to resist conservative politics regarding gender normative such as traditional feminine norms and values.

In conclusion, chapter 5 proposes three themes discussing the subcultures on Twitter created by the LC participants. For example, they create a role-play activity called '*Both*', an activity on Twitter by LGBTQ+ users, especially lesbians, with specific sexual aspirations. They retweet political gender contents by borrowing original texts from other authors to negotiate their gender performance and desires. To analyse this, I suggest a close analysis of one participant, known under her pseudonym as 'Ploy', with supportive evidence from other participants: Ink, Fah, Yok, Pawee, Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat, Taew, all of which are pseudonyms. With the data collected from these participants, the following theme has emerged: **Lower class and their subversion of cultural norms through the negotiation of online subcultures.** The qualitative data analysis was conducted systematically by cross-referencing three data types – social media data, interview data, and focus group data. Specifically, three different types of data were coded and patterned as emergent themes through thematic analysis. I then referred them to the multimodal metafunctions framework, which features representation, interaction, and composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) as deemed relevant to reinforce the argument. The metafunction analysis

supports the understanding of meaning-making by the LC participants as regards gender matters, both online and offline.

## **Theme 1: *Resistance to traditional forms of feminine conducts and the conflict of expression by the LC participants***

In this chapter, it is argued that the LC participants are the group who resist Thai traditional public discourses regarding gender norms in Thai society. By cross-referencing three data types in the study – social media data (particularly Twitter), interview and focus group data, I will provide a full picture of the emerging themes from all LC participants' triangulated data. Ploy, one of the LC participants who mentioned sexual restraint in Thailand, said that:

Love, affection, or sexual relation is the only one topic that I cannot talk about with my parents. .... I cannot let them know about this..... This is because they don't want me to have the same bad experience as my mother did when she was pregnant while studying in high school. ***[The expression by a quiet speech and soft and quivering speaking suggests that she was quite afraid and/or hesitant to talk about this]***

This spoken language in the interview setting suggests the representation of oppressiveness in terms of domestic issues. This is due to the forbidden discussion of taboo topics in offline contexts, especially with family members. Young Thai women are prohibited from talking about and disagreeing with sexual discourses that their parents adhere to (Thaweessit, 2004). In support of this idea,

the representation of the oppressiveness in the case of Ploy can be further demonstrated through the mode of speech.

The mode of speech can be considered as one of the significant resources that produce potential meanings, such as certainty, intensity, hesitation or even reluctance (Jewitt, et al., 2016). Also, paralinguistic features are the aspects of spoken communication that do not involve words. These may add emphasis or shades of meaning to what people say, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone and pitch of voice. In the spoken utterance of Ploy's case, her expression was a ***quiet speech, and soft and quivering speaking, suggesting that she was quite afraid and/or hesitant to talk about this.*** Her tone and voice implied the reluctance to speak about sexual issues in front of me (as the interviewer). Also, when considering the word selection of Ploy's spoken language in detail, she used words and phrases that represented a strong sense of prohibition in sexuality such as, the repetition of "I cannot". For instance, "I cannot talk with my parents.....I cannot let them know about this". This kind of repetition of "I cannot" demonstrates a strong sense of prohibition, concerning the parental suppression of sexual expression.

To provide more examples by other participants, Ink, Fah, and Yok, who sat close together in the focus group setting, revealed that they quite felt oppressed by the Thai traditional norms and values since they refused to talk and express any kinds of gender issues in Thai society, especially at the school and at home with the

family members. Specifically, Yok said that “Thailand has many norms attached to women behaviours which are very strict to us, and which I really do not like of course”. Similarly, Pawee referred to the notion of sexual restraint in Thailand that heavily oppresses young Thai women rather than men as she said “Thailand has too many strict norms on women. I want to ask a question of why it should be women, not men?” These examples from the interview and the focus group data show that the LC participants had similar attitudes and experiences regarding sexual restraint and that they rather disagreed with the traditional forms of feminine conducts in Thailand since they felt oppressed by these normative moulds.

While they hesitated to express gender issues due to the oppressiveness of offline conditions (i.e., the family, the school, or even the interview setting), this contradicts with online expression. To triangulate data between offline and online settings, I show many instances of social media data where the LC participants explicitly challenged, resisted, and engaged in political and social issues in online sites regarding gender issues. From their photos on Twitter – as the most used platform among the LC participants as emerged in the survey – I would argue that there is a contradiction between the spoken and interactive meanings according to the metafunction framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006).

There are many cases of retweeted content about the issues of sexual restraint and the traditional public discourse on Thai women – from the participants named

Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat, Taew, and Ploy. Before giving explicit examples of retweet messages in the LC group, I am going to provide a full picture of the Twitter landscape as painted by LC participants – derived from both the interview data and the survey’s outcome. Twitter is considered by the LC participants as the crucial space for resistance regarding traditional forms of feminine code of conduct in Thai society. The ‘*retweeting*’ and ‘*hashtag*’ features have become the most popular tools that explicitly challenge the traditional gender-coded rules. A finding has emerged that Twitter seems to be the online community for activism due to the various functional advantages such as retweeting, tweeting, hashtags, and DM. These digital features mostly appear in the form of textual communication, as in written texts in the tweeted and retweeted contents, while online activities in other social media platforms (IG and Facebook) manifest themselves through visual images and moving images as modes of communication. Due to the default setting, Twitter posts are normally set as public, but the users can make their tweet stream private (Zappavigna, 2015). Importantly, many media scholars argue that both the *retweeting* and *hashtag* features afforded by Twitter are considered social semiotic resources facilitating “interpersonal social relations” (Page, 2012). Thus, social media is a complicated novel space in youth’s everyday social practices (boyd, 2013). As argued by Baker (2013), young people manipulate social media to negotiate their sexual matters since they can interact with their friends online and build relationships through the use of social semiotic resources to make their meanings.

In the case of the LC participants, Twitter is seen as the space for political subversion, especially sexual politics since they can express, negotiate, and perform their gender and sexual matters on this site. As these issues are dangerous and risky to talk about in the offline context because of the presence of normative heterosexuality and strongly dominant culture of hegemonic masculinity in Thailand, they deploy the platform of Twitter instead to speak and challenge these through the *retweet* feature. However, they retweet the contents from other authors without any original contents from their own comments. The ways in which they rely on borrowed words from others seem to be a kind of diminished form of agency which can be related to the hesitancy that I have noticed in their spoken discourse in the interview. There is a possibility of the LC participants supporting or wanting to promote the ideas of political gender when they borrow the words on Twitter. Importantly, the political gender issues that they want to promote on Twitter can be supported by other lines of evidence from the interview since they said what they believed through their own words. I will proceed to show these spoken discourses after interpreting the retweet activities.

Most of the LC participants retweeted many social issues in terms of resistance against traditional values of femininity and the subversion of dominant masculinity in Thai society. About 8 out of 10 participants retweeted content on these kinds of social issues. Indeed, each participant retweeted sensitive content such as this about 7 to 10 times per day. The following are the sample cases by participants

Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat, Taew, and Ploy, which show how they retweeted these social issues in terms of gender expression.

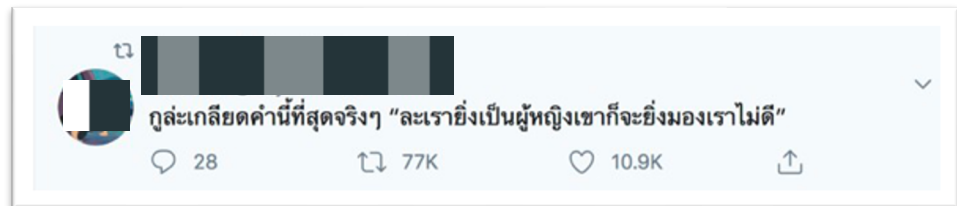


Figure 2: *"I do hate the speech: "as we are women, others will look at us badly,"* a retweeted message by Jang.

Jang explicitly retweeted about the sexual oppression of Thai women on her Twitter profile. Figure 2 rather presents a negative view on the traditional public speech on Thai women: when Thai women do something that does not follow the traditional form of female conduct in Thai culture, they can be looked down on (i.e., perceived as 'bad' women). This retweeted content demonstrates a perspective of gender inequality, which implies that social expectations concerning sexuality are imposed on women only, not on men. According to the dominant discourses on womanhood in Thailand, women should not be in the surrounding of adultery and promiscuity (Thaweessit, 2004). In Jang's case, when she retweeted about gender issues (Figure 2), this conformed to Thaweessit's argument that if Thai women committed adultery, promiscuity, or got involved with premarital sex, they would be strongly condemned and seen as 'bad women'.



Similarly, Boonmongkon et al. (2013) also maintain that the term 'bad woman' is applied to women who are intimately involved with more than one man and are therefore considered promiscuous. Even though polygamy and promiscuity have been discouraged for the both men and women, it is women who are expected by society to follow the rules strictly (Boonmongkon et al. (2013). Hence, according to Jang's retweets: "*I do hate the speech: "as we are women, others will look at us badly"*" (Figure 2), this evidence confirms and advances the findings from Boonmongkon et al's study (2013) and Suriyasarn's study (2014). Specifically, the emergent evidence not only concurs with the previous study showing that the LC young women are more open to talk about their sexual experiences than middle and upper class girls (Thianthai, 2004), but also advances the argument that the LC is the group subverting the Thai traditional form of feminine conducts through their own created subcultures online.

According to Figure 2, the social media data from Jang's retweeted content can be linked with evidence from the interview data. Jang said in the interview setting, "I think that Thailand has so many women's discourses, for example the one that always pops up in my mind is to '*rak nuan sanguan tua*'. Does this mean if we do not preserve our virginity, we will look bad? This is such nonsense". This Jang's spoken expression shows that she disagrees with sexual abstinence and public discourses on Thai women. Hence, it may be acknowledged that even though she borrowed the words from others on Twitter to promote her ideas – which appears like a very diminished form of agency – she expressed such ideas

(sexual abstinence and public discourses on women) through her own words in the interview, showing that she really believed in these ideas.

In the literature, the female discourses in Thailand have been shown to shape the ways in which young women behave and perform their gender identities; importantly, they need to perform their gender identities by conforming to the normative discourse – to be perceived as ‘good’ women. In contrast, if they challenge this, they will be viewed as ‘bad’ women. This is due to the categorisation of ‘good (*kon-dee*) and bad (*kon-chua*)’ discourses on women (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Thus, the concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women is linked to the ways in which Jang retweeted messages on her profile (Figure 2): *“I do really hate the speech that: “as we are women, others will look at us badly”*. This kind of retweeted content explicitly represents opposition to the normative discourse. It shows that she disagreed with the discourses on women that dramatically restrict and shape women’s gender negotiation in society. Thus, by triangulating the data, the content from the Twitter data (Figure 2) is in line with the spoken language in the interview data given by Jang.

There are other instances of retweet content made by the LC participants. Most of the contents have a similar pattern as viewed within the LC group, that is, they would rather *retweet* than *tweet* the original content to convey radical points of view about sex and gender. In other words, they did the re-posting from others by borrowing the words of other people rather than posting the content by

themselves on Twitter. The resistance to the normative sexual discourse observed in online activity among the LC participants was thus conducted through the *retweet* function. The appropriate cultural semiotic sources online they used reflect their views about sexual matters, which are all about the subversion of traditional feminine values that still oppress them. Please see below for more representative cases of the retweeted contents that consist of similar points of view by the LC participants – Nui, Pooh, Phat, Taew, and Ploy.

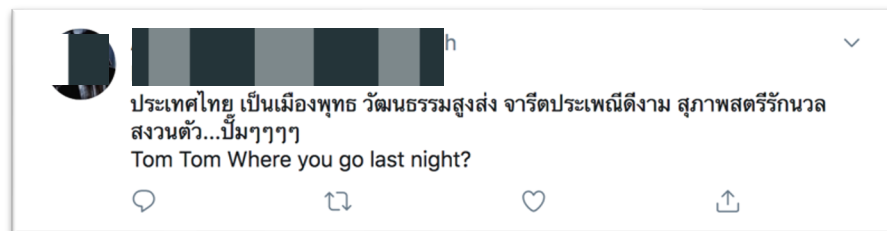


Figure 3: *“Thailand is a Buddhist country. We have so many high values and high culture, and women should preserve their virginity, but .... ‘Tom Tom where did you go last night?’”, a sarcastic content retweeted by Nui*

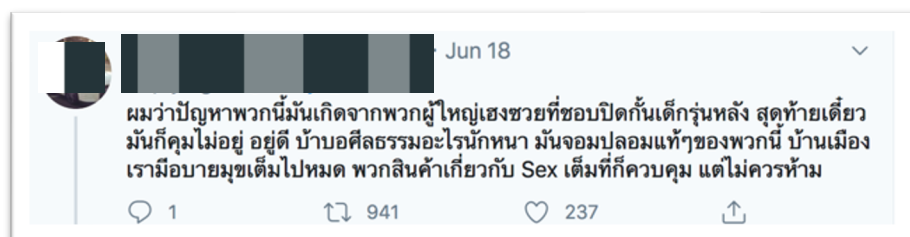
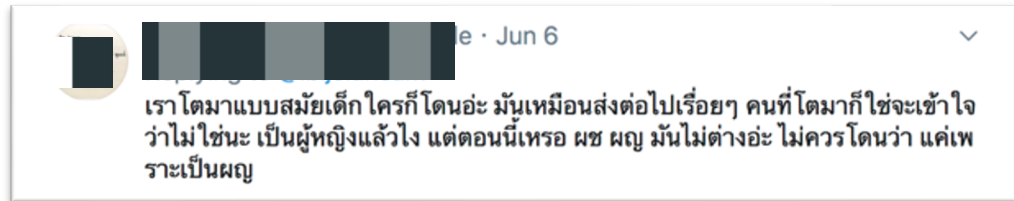
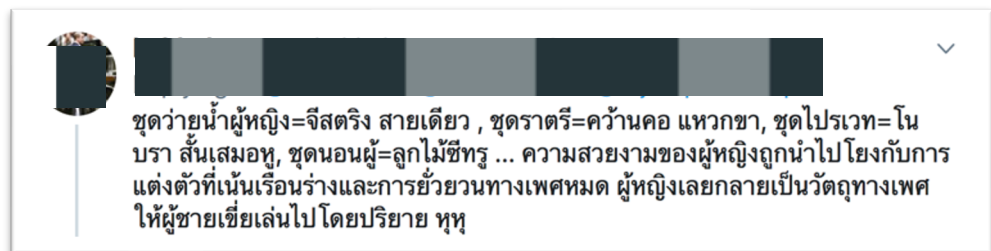


Figure 4: *“I think the problem is that adult people like to restrict the younger generation from knowing about sex. This is crazy. Why are we so crazy*

*about fake virtue? That is not helping our society get better. We should not constrain girls. Our society is full of debauchery and the sale of sex toys should be controlled at most but should not be prohibited.” – retweeted by Pooh.*



*Figure 5: “We are born and raised with conservative ideas; it is like we forward this kind of dominant idea through adults, teachers, friends, and the environment. Men and women are not that different now. We should not be blamed for it because of the reason that we are just women” – retweeted by Phat.*



*Figure 6: “Female swimsuit = G-string or thong, evening dress = sexy dress, casual dress = mini skirt, nightdress = see-through lace dress ...*

*why all girl's beauty has been linked to body and seduction insinuating that girls entice boys for sexual activity. Girls seem like sexual objects for boys; actually, girls just wanna play with their dressing” – retweeted by Taew.*

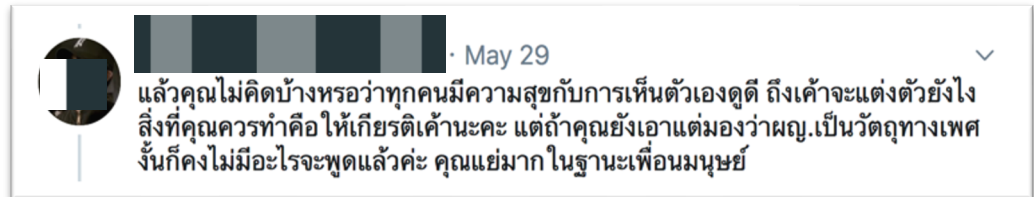


Figure 7: *“Why don’t you think that girls just enjoy and are happy with their dress? Whatever and how she dresses, you should respect her. If you persist in seeing her as a toy for sex, then I have nothing else to say to you. You are so bad without humanisation.” – retweeted by Ploy.*

Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 exhibit similar patterns of how the LC participants retweeted sensitive contents, i.e., the conservative ideas about femininity, the dominant culture in Thailand, and the consideration of females as sexual objects. They retweeted the contents from others to reflect what they thought about and believed in sexual matters. To emphasise this, Ploy said in the interview that she used Twitter to just share the contents that she agreed with. Thus, it is possible to assume that the contents that the LC participants retweeted or borrowed from other authors are the reflection of ideas and things that they believed in.

Specifically, the things that they retweeted are about the subversion of traditional feminine values. For example, in Figure 3, Nui retweeted the content that *“Thailand is a Buddhist country. We have so many high values and high culture, and women should preserve their virginity, but .... ‘Tom Tom, where did you go last night?’*”. This is one of the sarcastic remarks showing that Nui had a negative view on Thai traditional values which mainly put pressure on women. The retweeted content in Figure 3 means that even though Thailand has so many high values and high culture, particularly in Thai women's discourses, there are still nightclubs and free sex activities among teenagers in the nighttime – as disclosed here *“Tom Tom, where did you go last night?”* – this sentence is one of the sarcastic lyrics from a popular Thai song. Also, in Figure 3, the retweeted content specifically includes the traditional public discourse – *‘rak nuan sa nguan tua’* (to preserve virginity) – this emphasises the notion from the literature that Thailand has many traditional public discourses on women that still constrain young women’s gender performances. Consistent with the triangulated data between the Twitter information and the interview, Nui indicated in the interview that “Thai parents seem to shape their children to follow Thai values and norms, especially feminine values – even, actually, it is normal that human has love, compassion, aspiration, and fantasy towards each other”. Similarly, Ploy said that “it is so non-humanised if we cannot express our love, desire, and fantasy. Thai parents are overly concerned about moral principles or virtues in Thailand. So I think we should make these issues more human or civilised in Thai society”. These spoken languages by both Nui and Ploy reinforce the ways they express on Twitter, where

they borrowed contents from other authors to retweet what they believed in (Figure 3 and 7).

The ways in which the LC participants retweeted about (sexual) political contents are in line with Snyder's argument (2008): young girls are politically engaged in civic affairs in the third wave of feminism. Snyder (2008) states that many girl feminists use social media to proclaim girls' rights and equality to gain empowerment and choice. According to post-feminism, 'empowerment' and 'choice' in third-wave feminism have been adopted by exponents of neo-liberal values and capitalism, to represent girls as having achieved freedom, education, and equality (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004).

However, I am now addressing the ambiguity via a nuanced lens regarding the issues of the girl's empowerment, rights, and resistance in post-feminism. I argue that the political resistance of the LC participants in the above Twitter examples shows that the LC girls' sexual activities online seem to be equivocal: it is a subversion of hegemonic constraints, but concurrently, these are pleasurable, playful, and creative acts of gendered identity performances. Whilst the empowerment, freedom, and sense of equality of the LC girls can be explained by the notion of third-wave feminism scholars (Snyder, 2008; Baumgardner and Richards, 2004), McRobbie (2009) on the other hand, notes that girls' activities in post-feminism are an illusion. She provides a counterargument, describing this theory as a "post-feminist masquerade" since it re-mobilises patriarchal values

back to contemporary feminism. Nevertheless, I would critique that McRobbie's judgment may be a little too severe, in that it does not allow for the pleasures and playfulness of girlhood. Returning to my argument, I still argue that to understand girls' everyday sexual negotiations, particularly between their resistance and pleasurable acts, we need to analyse them with a more nuanced lens. I thus propose that in the act of the LC participants making certain choices and achieving a sense of empowerment by resisting the dominant culture, they are simultaneously playful and derive pleasure from their sexual activities online.

I now turn to a close analysis of Ploy, who expressed strong views on sexual oppression and gender inequality in Thailand through her retweeted content on her Twitter profile page.

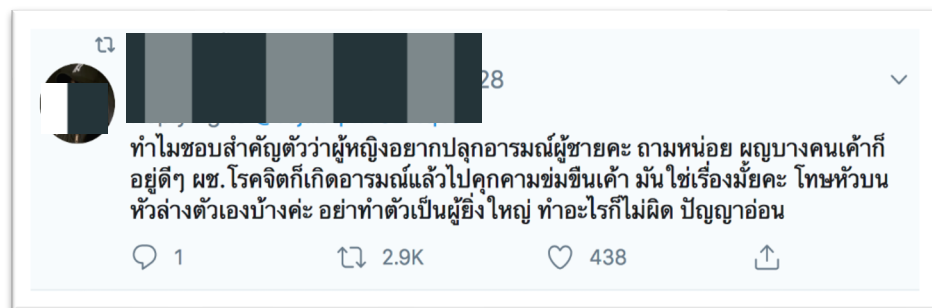


Figure 8: *“Why do Thai men always blame women when rapes happen in our society? Men always think that women flirt with them by wearing a voluptuous dress, or using sex appeal to exploit them. Please try to blame your head and dick head once in a while. This is a super repulsive idea*



*that emphasises 'gender inequality' and empowers 'masculine hegemony' considering that men are always right and powerful according to social norms in Thailand"* – a retweeted content by Ploy.

Figure 8 shows that Ploy dramatically engaged with political issues in terms of gender inequality. She strongly subverted the mainstream values regarding feminine conduct as well as masculine hegemony in Thai society through her retweeted content. This kind of content could be referred to as a deleterious expression in the offline society; the LC participants thus used Twitter instead to share this point of view, and finally used it to build their subcultures to rebel against normative sexual ideals.

As mentioned previously, I would argue that there is a contradiction between the spoken and interactive meanings in Ploy's expression and I will use Kress and van Leeuwen's metafunction framework to explain this (1996, 2006). At the beginning of Ploy's interview, she spoke of sexual restraint in Thailand that "Love, affection, or sexual relation is the only one topic that I cannot talk about with my parents [*The expression by a quiet speech, and soft and quivering speaking, suggesting that she was quite afraid and/or hesitant to talk about this*]" . When we analyse her expression through her spoken utterances, such as her tone and voice, volume, intonation, and certainty of speech, it is revealed that she hesitated to talk about gender and sexual issues. In the representational metafunction, Ploy's spoken language (i.e. a *quiet, soft, and quivering speech*)

represents the lack of confidence or uncertainty to speak about political gender issues, such as the issue of gender inequality, gender-based violence, and victim blaming in the case of rape in Thailand. Particularly, if we analyse her language expression through the paralinguistic features, her tone and sound imply quietness and hesitancy. At the same time, the repetition of the word “I cannot” demonstrates a very strong sense of prohibition.

While the (offline) interview data represents oppressiveness and hesitation to speak about gender issues, Ploy’s expression in the online world seems to be in conflict with this. Though sexual restraint and other sexual matters are taboo topics that young Thai women are prohibited from discussing in offline spaces (Thaweessit, 2004), these issues are instead expressed by the LC participants in online settings more explicitly: they seem confident, strong, and certain in retweeting the content from others. Although it is retweeted content, not their own words, it may show that they believed in such content since they were agreeing with the modality claim of the original authors of the tweets. To explain this, if we analyse the modality of these retweeted contents through the interactive metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), a high modality claim by the LC participants will be evident. This is because most of the social media data on Twitter by the LC participants were derived from secondary resources – they borrowed/retweeted the contents from others. As argued, modality is the truth value of a text which is negotiated between the text and the reader/viewer (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). However, my data analysis lacks access to the

audience of the texts, only the author and the text; instead, I can only analyse the modality claim – how the author/text claims to be true or credible. The modality in the interactive metafunction relates to how the modality claim is judged by the audience. In Ploy's case, she was the audience of the texts that she retweeted from the original author; in other words, she presented those retweets, but she was also an audience of the person who wrote the original texts on Twitter. Hence, we can interpret this as Ploy agreeing with the modality claim of the original author of the tweet, and she was presenting her own modality claim by retweeting. Therefore, I observe that while she was quite hesitant to speak about the discourse of women's oppression through her own language in offline settings, she was borrowing the confidence of the tweeter to represent her attitudes and gender politics since she was agreeing with the modality (truth) claim of the original author of the tweet – as the audience, herself.

To present the evidence from Ploy, Figure 8 is the retweeted content with strong discursive representations of gender politics in her Twitter feeds, which are quite different from what she said in her interview. In other words, Ploy's expression on Twitter was more political, explicit and strong than the ways she expressed herself through her language in the interview setting. The retweeted content in Figure 8 includes many gender politics which are quite dangerous to speak in the public area such as *“Why do Thai men always blame women when rapes happen in our society? Men always think that women flirt with them by wearing a voluptuous dress, or using sex appeal to exploit them. Please try to blame your head and*

*dick head once in a while. This is a super repulsive idea that emphasises 'gender inequality' and empowers 'masculine hegemony' considering that men are always right and powerful according to social norms in Thailand."* All of these issues in Ploy's retweeted content represent particular attitudes towards gender politics (as a part of social movement), thus resisting mainstream discourses that oppress gender equality in Thailand. In short, I maintain that there is a contradiction between the spoken/vocal meanings and interactive meanings in Ploy's case. We can see that the spoken meaning refers to the notion of oppressiveness which she was uncertain to express through language resources such as tone and voice, the level of sound, and certainty of the speech. In contrast, the borrowed tweets imply a strong sense of confidence where she was more explicit and open to debate gender issues due to a high modality claim of the retweeted content from the original authors.

In conclusion, by cross-referencing three data types from the LC participants – social media data (Twitter), interview and focus group data, both offline and online data show that there are many forms of resistance to the traditional values of femininity as well as dominant discourses in Thai culture that still restrain young Thai women's gender expression. Due to many traditional public discourses regarding femininity in Thailand, as discussed in the literature review, many young women use novel cultural artefacts (social media) to challenge this dominant culture (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). I highlight that the *retweet* tool is considered the most popular function on Twitter that the LC participants used to resist popular

Thai culture. They tactically *transmitted* texts or original words from influential people in the online society, and retweeted (or re-posted or shared) them to the public, and their friends also repeated this with the comments made to each other.

Overall, I argue that Twitter has become the salient site of political activism for the LC participants. For them, Twitter can serve as the most private platform to share dangerous or risky points of view, such as the criticism of traditional norms in females, the dominant masculinity, and the gender inequality in Thailand. Even though the default setting and norms on Twitter are public, users can make their tweet or retweet stream protected, or private (boyd et al., 2010). Thus, Twitter is suggested as an appropriate choice for the LC participants to challenge the dominant ideas through tactically creative methods, such as retweets and hashtag features. The next section is the discussion of hashtag communication on Twitter as the subcultural resistance. In short, the LC participants use Twitter to rebel against mainstream normative discourses regarding sexuality by creating their subcultures online. Subcultural activities result in online communities, which enable the subversion of the sexual politics of girls. This notion is similar to Gillis, et al's study (2004), which argued that many girls feminists, in the third-wave of feminism, use social media as a novel platform for political engagement in civic affairs to subvert the constraints of patriarchal values. Mendes, et al. (2018, 2019) also suggest a similar way in which some girls develop "digital feminist activism" through social media to fight against social-political issues, including gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and rape culture. Even though the LC

participants were not actually engaged in the “digital feminist activism” like the ways Mendes, et al. (2018, 2019) argue, they created their own subcultural activities (or called pre-activism) to challenge political gender in Thailand. The following section will explore how the LC participants create their own subcultures online through hashtags to express their gender matters as well as to perform their sexual activities. Further discussion on these hashtag activities on Twitter as the subcultural resistance is provided in the next heading.

## **Theme 2: *Resistance through online subcultures: ‘Re-Tweet-Fav’, ‘Re-Tweet-DM’, and ‘Re-Tweet-Follow’ hashtags***

As discussed in the previous theme, I consider that the LC participants manipulate social media (Twitter) as a form of resistance against traditional values of feminine conduct through many tactically communicative ways. *The hashtag* has become another popular feature used by the LC participants to communicate their sexual desire and emotions. The hashtag sexual activities are used to negotiate their gender identity and sexual expression as well as contest normative sexuality in Thai culture. This section will show how gender involves aspects of sexuality: sexual feelings, desire, aspirations, and imagination.

It is argued that an important dimension of social media discourse is its searchability (Zappavigna, 2018). The hashtag is one of the key semiotic resources supporting this function on Twitter – it is a form of social tagging that allows microbloggers to embed metadata in social media posts (Zappavigna, 2015). Many previous scholars refer to the hashtag, an advent of Twitter service, as “searchable talk” (Zappavigna 2018), and imply the retweet feature, a spreadable network afforded by Twitter, as “conversational practice” (boyd et al., 2010). Both hashtags and retweets are social semiotic resources supporting searchable talk and social processes of ambient affiliation (Zappavigna 2018). Many scholars explain the technical affordances of Twitter in that they can facilitate “conversation” (Rossi and Magnani, 2012) or “discussion” (Bruns, 2011;

Bruns and Burgess, 2011). They also view the structure of those conversations as an “interchange” (Zappavigna, 2015). This kind of interchange leads to the notion that “hashtags are a novel form of metadata because, rather than simply operating on the service of information management, they also operate on the service of interpersonal social relations” (Zappavigna, 2015). In other words, they are involved in “interpersonal dimensions” of meaning-making such as supporting visibility and participation (Page, 2012).

I will provide a picture of how LC participants manipulate Twitter as a form of resistance through social semiotic resources – hashtag and retweet. As reviewed above, both the hashtag and the retweet are “searchable talk” (Zappavigna 2018), “conversational practice” (boyd et al., 2010), “interchange” (Zappavigna, 2015) and “interpersonal dimensions” of meaning-making of the users. The following section shows how the LC participants use Twitter to express their sexual feelings, desire, and emotions, as well as how they interchange and build their relationships with others through hashtags for sexual purposes.

To cross-reference the three types of data, I will start with the interview and focus group data, and then will show the triangulated data from the social media sites. When asking the LC participants about the usages and online activities on Twitter, they revealed that creating a specific hashtag is one of the sexual activities that have been practised among their group for sexual purposes. Ploy said in the interview that “**#Re-Tweet-Fav, #Re-Tweet-DM, and #Re-Tweet-Follow**’ are the



hashtag patterns that we use to invite others for further interactions, and of course that those interactions are mainly for building a sexual relation". In the focus group setting, most of the LC participants (i.e., Ploy, Yok, Pawee, Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat, Taew) agreed that they had been using **#Re-Tweet-Fav, #Re-Tweet-DM, and #Re-Tweet-Follow** to find the (sexual) partners.

Ink had the same experiences of these hashtag activities. She said in the focus group that "I think most of us have been using it, and I see many of my friends, including my group and other school friends, have been using it. I think these hashtag activities are something close to online dating. We use such hashtags to invite someone to follow us back or to DM back to us, and then we might some chat with each other via DM on Twitter, and then go out for dating". Similarly, Fah explained more in-depth that, "these hashtag activities (**#Re-Tweet-Fav, #Re-Tweet-DM, and #Re-Tweet-Follow**) are not used to just increase the number of retweets or followers. Rather, we use such hashtags to specifically find and/or flirt with someone for sexual purposes only. What we normally do is putting some short sentences or phrases to make our tweet contents interesting, and then end with those hashtags". Ploy gave some examples of the phrases that they used along with the hashtags that read, for example, "I'm friendly, please follow me back **#Re-Tweet-Follow**", "I'm a lonely girl. If you are, please DM to me **#Re-Tweet-DM**", "I'm not a playgirl. If you like, please Fav to me **#Re-Tweet-Fav**". With an initial insight into the hashtag activities of the LC participants, I will next provide the triangulated data from actual social media practices – in order to

explore the possibilities of similarities or differences between social media data and what they said in the interview.

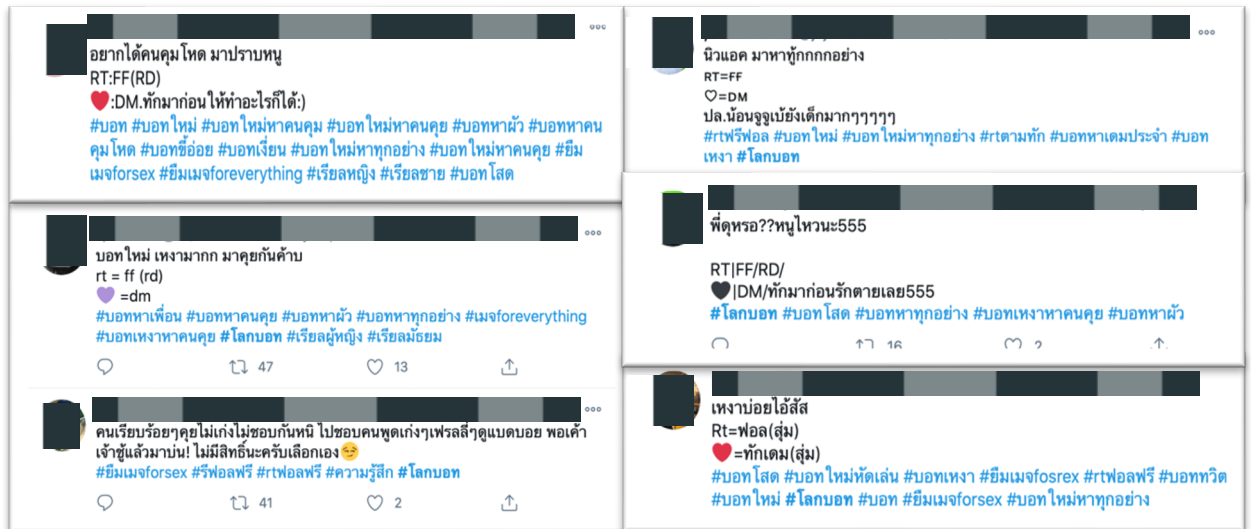


Figure 9: A collection of creative hashtags by the LC participants: *#'Re-Tweet-Fav'*, *'Re-Tweet-DM'*, and *'Re-Tweet-Follow'* for sexual purposes (i.e., finding sexual partners or forming sexual relationships) through their Twitter profiles.

In Figure 9, the hashtags *'Re-Tweet-Fav'*, *'Re-Tweet-DM'*, and *'Re-Tweet-Follow'* are the most tactically creative modes of communication made by the LC participants who aimed to start a courtship online particularly. Most of the LC participants preferred to use these kinds of creative hashtags to communicate their gender and sexuality. Even if my research question aims to pursue how social media used by young women can negotiate gender identity, I observe that gender involves aspects of sexuality as well as sexual desires, relationships, and

fantasies. In other words, the evidence obtained from the LC participants suggests an emergence of multi-faceted sexual elements. To clarify this, while gender is defined as each person's deeply felt internal and individual expression – which may involve modification of bodily appearances and other identity plays such as dress, speech and mannerisms – sexuality is the experience and expression in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, and relationships (Wongpanarak et al, 2010). Thus, when the LC participants play their gender identities through their dress, speech, and mannerisms, they also express their thoughts, fantasies, and desires involved in sexuality, as in the case of hashtag activities in which they may have imagined sexual relations or fantasies of sex with someone online. Therefore, I present an indication of aspects of sexuality emerging from the data since the LC participants used Twitter as a place for not only expressing their gender identities, but also for conveying their sexual fantasy, aspirations, desire, and preferences, which I will discuss in more detail shortly.

When interviewing them individually about the usage and engagement of such hashtags, there were about 8 out of 10 participants who engaged with and enjoyed these hashtags, and more than 5 times per day they posted these hashtags to disseminate their (sexual) meanings. These creative hashtags can be translated as: *“If you RETWEET me, then I will press FAVOURITE you”*, *“If you RETWEET me, then I will DIRECT MESSAGE you”*, and *“If you RETWEET me, then I will FOLLOW you back”* (as explained by Ploy, Yok, Pawee, Jang, and Nui in the interview). They shortcut these communicative sentences into the short

hashtags: *'Re-Tweet-Fav'*, *'Re-Tweet-DM'*, and *'Re-Tweet-Follow'* to flirt or find, or perform courtships and build relationships online.

Figure 9 is a collection of hashtags made by the LC participants on their Twitter profiles. One of these is Ploy's case. She retweeted that *"this is my new Both, I am so lonely, someone please come to me. RT = FF (rd) purple heart emoji = DM"*. She used the hashtag *#Re-Tweet-DM* and Thai hashtag *"#Rt ตามห้ก"* (meaning that if you retweet me, then I will DM you back). She also used the hashtag *#Re-Tweet-Follow*, plus with *"#Rt ฝากฟ้"*, meaning that if someone retweets her, then she will follow her/him back for sexual purposes. These hashtags – which were her tweet contents, not retweet text from others – show that she tactically created short textual communications to find or flirt with someone online for sexual purposes. After Ploy requested the (sexual) relationship through her hashtags on tweet contents, I found that there were around 41 - 50 retweets by others shown on her profiles which were quite successful. It can be seen that LC participants created diverse hashtags to tactically express their sexual emotions, feelings, and desire. For example, in Ploy's case, her sentences used in the retweeted content were *"I am so lonely"* and *"someone please come to me"*, with the specific hashtags of *"RT = FF (rd) = DM"*. I consider that the use of such sentences and hashtags represents the meanings of her sexual emotions, feelings, and desire. She desires to build a sexual relation with someone by an invitation through her written language and hashtag created on Twitter.

By triangulating the three data types – the interview, the focus group, and the social media data (Twitter), I found similar patterns of resistance and the subculture online activities created by the LC participants. As I argued in the previous section, the LC participants are the group who explicitly and implicitly resist traditional forms of feminine conduct. In this section, I confirm that they are still subverting those discourses through their own created subculture online: the hashtags on Twitter. As Ploy, one of the LC participants, revealed in the interview: “love, affection, or sexual relation is the only one topic that I cannot talk about with my parents”. This shows that it is impossible for her to express those sexual feelings and desires in the offline setting, especially at school and at home. However, I found that there are possibilities that LC participants can express these sexual feelings, emotions, and desire on the online sites; at the same time, they are able to resist those traditional discourses and feminine conduct through their own subculture – as shown in the case of the hashtags in Figure 9.

The ways in which LC participants express their gender and sexual desires through textual communication, such as the hashtags “*Rt ตามห้ก*”, and “*Rt ฝอลฟรี*” represent the intention of flirting for sexual purposes, while the visual communication, such as profile pictures, seems to fall in other visual dimensions that need to be analysed further – this will be discussed in the next section. Importantly, we can better understand the meanings and cultural communities online among the LC participants through the explanation offered by the

participatory practices; hence, Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture (2015, 2018) becomes useful. This helps us understand the representation of gender and sexuality meanings made by the LC participants through their actions, interactions, and cultural participation.

According to Jenkins, "participatory culture embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions...which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices" (2015, p. 2). This Jenkin's framework can be applied to understand online interactions, participation and expression in gender matters through subculture activities on Twitter by the LC group. The LC participants had some degree of social connection with one another through the use of social media features inside the platform (i.e., hashtags and retweets) in order to communicate, interact, and negotiate about sexual matters. In the case of Ploy, she was one of Twitter's community members who played and engaged with hashtag activities. When participatory culture was invoked through the concepts of diversity and democracy, Ploy seemed also to engage in participatory culture – as happened online – since she was able to make decisions to express her sexual feelings and desires as well as perform a broad range of different forms and practices on Twitter. As she did, she used Twitter's features as tools to express her sexual desires and emotions as well as to perform courtship behaviour online, as seen

previously in the hashtags *#Re-Tweet-Fav*, *#Re-Tweet-DM*, and *#Re-Tweet-Follow#*, *#Rt ตามทัก*, *#Rt ฟอลฟรี*.

This consideration accords with how Jenkins makes conceptual clarification: “social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube are not necessarily participatory cultures; they are rather tools often used as a means of maintaining social contact” (2015, p.3). Thus, social media used by the LC participants is seen not only as a form of resistance against normative feminine sexuality in Thai mainstream culture, but it is also suggested as a ‘tool’ (or ‘means’ by Henry Jenkins’ concept) to negotiate gender matters, such as gender performance, sexual expression, courtship display, and establishment of sexual relationships. When “participation refers to the property of the culture where groups collectively or individually make decisions that have an impact on their shared experiences” (Jenkins and Ito, 2015), I argue that the LC participants employ Twitter as a tool and a site where they rebel against mainstream cultures of femininity. This subversion is through cultural participation as well as fan communities in which members devise and/or invent their subcultures. This fandom culture will be fully addressed in the next section.

My argument can be supported by many media scholars who argue that Twitter is not universally adopted. Twitter supports an active community with its own set of unique practices that happen in youth culture (boyd, 2013; Baker, 2013). Because Twitter’s structure disperses conversation throughout a network of

interconnected actors rather than constraining conversation within bounded spaces or groups, many people may talk about a particular topic at once, such that others have a sense of being surrounded by a conversation, despite perhaps not being an active contributor (Zappavigna, 2015; boyd et al., 2010). In short, the LC participants use many social semiotic resources – hashtag and retweet – to operate on interpersonal social relations for sexual purposes. This argument is in line with the previous studies that saw young people use social media services to “manage information” (Zappavigna, 2015, 2018) and participate in “interpersonal dimensions” through visibility and participation in the online sites (Page, 2012).

Moreover, Hall and Jefferson’s subculture and resistance concept (2006) can be also applied to understand the subversion made by the LC participants. They argue that popular culture is a site of struggle where the youth always subvert the cultural authority of the dominant social classes through their subcultures. It is claimed that youth culture forms coherent everyday social worlds of family, neighbourhood, and school. The youth are thus struggling with power and privilege inherent in superordinate and subordinate social classes (Hall and Jefferson (2006). This is also in line with the classical Marxist model of class affiliation (1859). As social class revolves around the issue of dominant culture’s definition of right and wrong ways of behaviour and the issue of dominant culture’s ideas about the proper distribution of economic opportunities and resources, the working-class youth, as a subordinate group, tend to be the people that potentially express symbolic opposition to the dominant culture's moral authority (Marx,



1859). According to this concept, LC participants are the subordinate or disadvantaged group, and they seem to find alternative spaces to challenge class structure to express their dynamics and creativity through their subcultures. Therefore, when the LC participants create their subcultures on Twitter as a form of popular cultural expression, i.e., retweet content, hashtag content, and *Both* (role-play activity) – which will be discussed in the following section – these youthful behaviours, which some traditionally-minded adults may regard as criminal, destructive, vicious, or absurd, are actually an expressive mode of rebellion, a protest against their perceived inferior status in the class structure (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). To sum up, I suggest that Twitter, perceived as the most private platform, is inhabited by the LC participants who wish for the subversion against traditional values of female conduct in Thai mainstream culture. Not only do they use Twitter to play their gender identities, but they also use it to express their sexual aspirations, fantasies, and relationships. They tactically create their subcultures online through diverse communicative modes, with the hashtag being one of the popular features employed to challenge the dominant culture. The next theme focuses on another subculture created by the LC group, namely *'Both'* (or role-player), a sexual online activity on Twitter that involves the use of profile pictures to negotiate users' sexual orientation, particularly among lesbian users.

**Theme 3: *Role-player activity called 'Both' on Twitter as the negotiation of gender identity by LGBTQ+ users***

To provide a full picture about *'Both'*, role-play activities aimed at building sexual relationships on Twitter within the LC group, I will present the interview and the focus group data about this issue, and then will provide a triangulated data from social media data, which is the actual practice on Twitter.

In the interview setting, many LC participants (i.e., Ploy, Ink, Fah, Yok, Pawee, and Jang) indicated their popular social activity on Twitter that is *'Both'*. Ploy explained that *'Both'* (บุ๊ต) is a sexual activity by which her group used Korean artist images, both male and female, as their profile pictures on Twitter for sexual purposes. Similarly, Ink, Fah, Yok, Pawee, and Jang explained in the focus group setting that after they chose the characters of Korean artists and set those as their profile pictures, they will role-play by imagining the characters of such Korean artists and use those roles to chat with someone online for sexual courtships. For example, Ink indicated in the interview that "I use Taeyeon, one of the female members of a famous Korean girl group, as my profile picture on Twitter. This is intended to match with another player who uses a Korean female artist character like what I did". As Ink identified herself as a lesbian, this shows that *'Both'* activity in the fan community is based on a diverse range of gender identification: it can be matched diversely between a girl and a boy, a boy and a boy, a girl and a girl, or between other role-plays. Fah also explained further that "*Both* is like an online dating activity but without using our own real profile pictures. Rather, we use Korean artist characters whom we adore to chat with someone who also plays

the role with which we are fascinated. So, *'Both'* is a role-play activity created for flirting with someone and potentially having a dating life outside the online site". Similarly, Yok had the same experience of *'Both'* activity as she said that "I have used *'Both'* to find someone for a relationship. For example, I have had a chat with them – it can be a call or a video call – and I have had an experience of dating them in the offline world".

In the focus group, Pawee and Jang quite agreed that *'Both'* sexual online activity is based on community participation in the fan culture. They reveal that all *'Both'* players are fans of Korean artists. Thus, to understand *'Both'*, as an online activity for building sexual relationships, an in-depth analysis of cultural participation, especially the fan community online, needs to be conducted. The aim of engaging in *'Both'* activity is for playing and interacting with other members of the fan culture to find sexual partners within their local community online. To understand the meanings of the media texts they created, attempts need to be made to initially understand how these creative texts are based on what kind of community they are in. I propose that the *'Both'* activity has its roots in the fan community, whose objects of admiration are mainly Korean pop artists. As participants such as Pawee and Jang indicated in the focus group study, they dramatically engaged with the fan community on Twitter, which is a Korean boy band and girl group artists. It can be said that community participation makes up a major part of the fans' activities on the online site. Based on the online fandom community among LC groups, Twitter was used as a site to involve themselves deeply in

communication with others and to create their nuances of actions and languages through the *'Both'* role-playing, which are supposed to be understood only among members of their teen community. At the same time, the observation lends strong support to the claim that they performed these unique actions within the local online community for sexual purposes, such as building sexual relationships and displaying courtships. However, I distinguish these online sexual activities from physical sexual relations since there is no explicit evidence showing that they actually have engaged in the physical intimacy of sex or relationships in the offline world. I put forward the notion that the ways in which they playfully construct gender identities in the online sites reflect forms of sexual aspirations, imagined sexual relations, or sexual fantasies.

The *'Both'* role-play activity on Twitter by the LC group can be further understood by Henry Jenkins' concept of fan culture or the idea of "textual poachers" in fan worlds (1992). Jenkins characterises fan writers as *'textual poachers'* (1992), which became a crucial theoretical concept for fandom studies. Jenkins explains that fans "poach" (steal) cultural resources from their idols and repurpose them. For instance, he considers *Star Trek* as one kind of *textual poacher* because this original media text was rerun, reread, and rewritten by fans, especially the creation of same-sex fan texts, like the *Kirk-Spock* relationship (Jenkins, 1988). From this, it could be argued that fan community practices among the LC participants in online sites stem from the subculture of fan's imagination, and this is derived from the consumption of their favourite original media text, which they

then remodel or remake into different fan stories to serve their political sexual interests. In the case of the *'Both'* activity, the LC participants use Korean artist images as their profile pictures by editing, rearranging, or remaking the images to become their own profile pictures on Twitter and use these images as the role-play for building sexual relationships with others.

This kind of rearrangement or remake in the case of *'Both'* activity by the LC group has a similar pattern with the *manga* fan culture. There are many works of fanfiction regarding *manga* characters in comic media texts in which male homoerotic relationships fictions are written with reference to *manga* characters, as well as imagine relationships between themselves and *manga* characters (McLelland and Welker, 2015). Hence, this *manga* fan culture is in line with the ways the LC participants play and engage with the *'Both'* online activity through the use of 'beautiful' male images (Korean pop artists) as their profile pictures on Twitter. This also aligns with Kang's findings (2017): the 'Korean-style soft masculinity' of men is linked with Japanese and Korean popular culture amongst same-sex desiring men (Kang, 2017). To show how the LC participants use such 'Korean-style soft masculinity', which is based on Japanese and Korean popular culture amongst same-sex relationships of men, the next section will focus on the triangulated data from the social media data – to show the actual practices of the *'Both'* activity on Twitter by the LC participants.

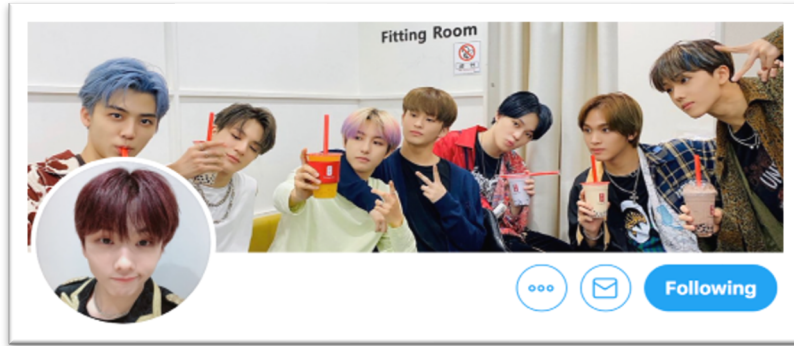


Figure 10: Korean pop artist images for ‘Both’ – role-play activity – by Pawee.

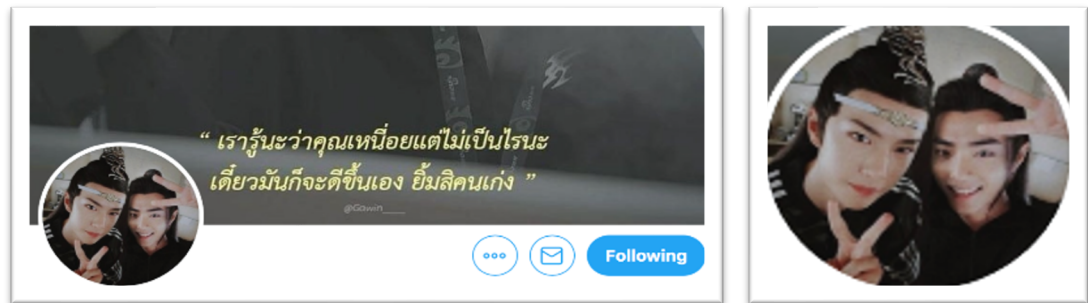


Figure 11: The profile picture of boys’ love characters for ‘Both’ (role-play activity) – by Jang.

From the online data, I consider that, on Twitter, the LC participants employ Korean pop artist images (set as their profile pictures) to carry out their sexual activity online, a phenomenon called ‘Both’ – บอท, or a role-play activity purposely designed for a display of courtship. ‘Both’ is called by Twitter’s users belonging to the fan community of Korean boy bands. As Pawee explained in the interview data, “Both is created for fans’ online interaction: it is not only for updating,

communicating, and engaging with artist's works among fandom members, but it is also mainly for sexual purposes". The main purpose is to build sexual relationships online, e.g., a chat, as well as a date – if the relationship develops successfully. The insight from Pawee's interview revealed that she had a successful relationship from *'Both'* activity since she got a real dating and having an actual relationship in a physical offline world.

Thus, I argue that LC participants use the artist images (Korean artist characters) and play such roles for their sexual expression and gender performance. Specifically, LGBTQ+ users are the main group who employ such *'Both'* activity as the subculture for negotiation of their gender identities. This especially happens for lesbian and gay identities – as indicated by the LC participants (i.e., Ink, Pawee, and Jang) in the interview data and as shown by the profile pictures on Twitter according to Figures 10 and 11. My central argument here is that Twitter provides crucial spaces for the LC participants to create their subcultures against normative heterosexuality. Not only do they use this site as the subversion of the dominant culture in Thailand, but they also employ it as a form of empowerment for fluid identities, supporting the notion of gender diversity.

Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the cases of Pawee and Jang, demonstrating how they apply *'Both'* online activity as the subculture against heteronormativity in Thai culture. Figure 10 is a general portrayal of how Pawee used Korean-style soft masculinity image as her profile picture and cover picture; at the same time,

Figure 11 is a specific case of Jang who used a couple of boy artist images as her profile picture for playing the *'Both'* activity. This was affirmed by Jang through the explanation in the interview that she played the role of *'Both'* for finding a sexual partner, and the relationship between her and her partner had been developed successfully as they became a real couple in the offline world. Since Jang's case provides a more significant implication for the *'Both'* activity, I will specifically perform a close analysis of Figure 11 to understand how Jang used social semiotic resources (images) to negotiate her gender identity by applying the multimodal metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006).

Figure 11 is the profile picture set by Jang, who used a couple of (pretty) boy artist images. The use of this particular artist image shows that Jang is one of the fan's community members of the Korean boy band. As she explained in the interview setting, she used a Korean boy artist image for *'Both'* activity on Twitter and played that role to accomplish the sexual relationship with her partner. This was successful since they ended up being a real couple in the offline world through the use of such *'Both'* role-play characters on Twitter.

To provide a better picture to this, she played the role of a 'gay' boy, who was depicted as the left character in the image in Figure 11, and she was seeking another 'pretty' boy who was depicted as the right character in the image to match with her before embarking on the *'Both'* dating. This implies that *'Both'* is the imaginary world inhabited by members of the fandom, who desire to match



themselves with other members and find sexual partners. By analysing Figure 11 in detail through the multimodal metafunction, different meanings can be interpreted from the role-play characters positioned on the left and the right in the image. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, information values are realised by the placement of the elements of a composition (2006). The idea is that the role of any particular element in the whole will depend on whether it is placed on the left or on the right, in the centre or the margin, or in the upper or the lower part of the picture space or page. Briefly, the elements placed on the left are presented as 'given', the elements placed on the right as 'new' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In other words, the left placement is seen as the departure point (or initiating point) for the message, referring to a person who acts something first or something the viewer or reader already knows or feels familiar or agrees with, while right placement is seen as something 'new', 'unfamiliar', or something not yet known and not yet already to be agreed upon by the viewer or reader, hence as something to which the viewer or reader must pay special attention (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The 'new' is therefore problematic, contestable, and the information 'at issue', while the 'given' is presented as commonsensical and self-evident.

To combine the compositional meaning with representational meaning, I argue that the left participant on Figure 11 – as being something akin to the 'given' information (what is known) – shows the self-evident meaning of being an 'agent' who has an active expression of gender performance. In contrast, the one on the

right – who represents ‘new’ information – denotes the quality of being a ‘patient’ or a ‘passive’ gender identity. In other words, in the representational metafunction for narrative structures, the ‘gay’ boy character which is placed on the left represents a confident and active expression of gender performance, while the other ‘pretty boy’ character on the right a more hesitant and passive gender identity.

In the case of Figure 11, the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ meanings through the representational metafunction and the ‘agent’ and ‘patient’ meanings through the compositional metafunction can be affirmed by other modes of communication, such as facial expression, staring, smiling, and gestures through the interactive metafunction. For example, through the mode of gaze, both role-play characters on the left and right in Figure 11 are directly staring at the viewers (look at the camera), which can produce eye contact with the audiences. This kind of eye contact is suggested to produce a sexually “demanding” presence according to the interactive metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Moreover, through the gesture analysis, both characters in the image represent a same-sex relationship between masculine and feminine gay men. To explain this, they do a selfie close together by snuggling while raising two fingers for a pretty post like feminine acting. Also, the gay boy character on the left has a closed-lip smile, giving off a rather cool boyish and masculine vibe, while another pretty boy character on the right defines the meaning of a girlish and feminine character with his grinned smiling that is rather lively or cheerful. Furthermore, when we interpret

the participants through other modes in the interactive metafunction, there is a suggestion of intimacy between them. In everyday interaction, the norms of social relations determine the “distance” we keep from each other (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). Through the frame size of shots, there are many intermediate degrees between a close-up – referring to the most intimate relations – and a long shot – the total absence of a relation or a “distance” (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). For example, to see people, a close-up shot (head and shoulders or less) is to see them in the way we would normally only see people with whom we are more intimately acquainted. Thus, when the profile picture in Figure 11 uses a close-up shot, this implies an intimate/ personal relationship between the participants inside the image. To emphasise this, other modes of the interactive metafunction symbolise their relations. Choices of the “point of view” angle allows people, places and things to be depicted from above or below, or at eye-level, and from the front, the side or the back which has a bearing on the relationships between elements in an image (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). From a vertical angle, Figure 11 has an eye-level point of view, which denotes equal relations. In the case of the horizontal angle, the relation will be one of involvement with, or detachment from each other (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). The left participant in Figure 11 is positioned in front and therefore seems to take a more prominent role than the right participant who is beside the image does.

These two gay characters can undergo further analysis through the ‘*yaoi*’ concept from ‘*manga*’ fanfiction, also known as ‘Boys Love’ (BL) in Japanese popular

culture. Briefly, since the late 1990s, Japanese BL – usually in the form of ‘*manga*’ comics and referred to as ‘*yaoi*’ or more commonly as ‘cartoon *wai*’ – has become popular amongst young Thai women (Keenapan, 2001). The latest Thai study (i.e., Baudinette, 2019), exploring the adaptation from Japanese BL to contemporary Thai popular culture, suggests that there is a new genre of Thai mainstream media known as series ‘*wai*’, and this is derived from ‘*yaoi*’, a genre of homoerotic media originating in Japan. This series ‘*wai*’ in Thai mediascape empowers Thai fans of Boys Love (BL) among young women's culture, especially in online contexts. Japanese Boys Love (BL) is a genre of Japanese popular culture specifically designed for female audiences consuming homosexual contents that centre on the romantic relationships between beautiful male youths known as *bishōnen* (McLelland and Welker, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that Boys Love (BL) in Japanese popular culture has come to influence Thai conceptualisations of sexuality, especially same-sex relationships as well as fluid identities, like LGBTQ+ (Baudinette, 2019). Moreover, a broadly social process of knowledge deriving from Japanese and Korean popular culture is contouring contemporary conceptualisations of queer gender in Thailand (Jackson, 2011; Sinnott, 2012; Kang, 2017).

According to the literature review, the origin of fan communities on Twitter among the LC girls, that is, ‘*Both*’ (role-play) online activities can be understood to have emerged through the foundation of *manga* or *yaoi* (male same-sex relationships), which is derived from Japanese pop culture. I consider that the LC participants

develop *'Both'* online activity to push back normative heterosexuality. Engagement with same-sex attraction from Japanese *manga* comics has become the model used to create a "globalised" code, which is becoming increasingly influential among young Thai women (Baudinette, 2019). This is in line with Turner's (2006) theories in the field of transcultural research. The research particularly focuses on *yaoi* Japanese popular culture influencing young Thai women's online practices. The findings show that young Thai women's fan communities are inspired by online relationships and activities rather than by traditional approaches that are exclusively read in print (Turner, 2006).

As interpreted previously, Jang in Figure 11 plays the 'gay' men role, represented by the boyish character in the image, while she seeks another role-play of a 'feminine' male character for a match as her sexual partner. This case points to Jang's imagination of herself as a 'gay' man with a 'masculine' identity. At the same time, it implies that Jang's sexual orientation is towards a person who exhibits feminine qualities. There is supportive evidence from the focus group data that the major *'Both'* players on Twitter are females, both heterosexual and homosexual. It can also be interpreted that Jang who is on the left position in Figure 11 is considered a *tom* (butch lesbian), and her sexual preference is *dee* (cis-gendered lesbian). As argued by previous a Thai scholar, an interpretation of gender identities and sexual orientation can be diverse due to the fluid identities in contemporary Thai gender culture (Sinnott, 2012). For example, Sinnott (2012) identifies *tom gay king* as a further refinement of *tom gay*, stressing an individual's

'active' sexual positioning in the relationship. Thus, this can be applied in the case of Jang. When Jang is placed on the left in the image, referred to as an 'agent' or 'active' expression of gender performance, she can be identified as *tom gay king* – as Sinnott considered (2012). Alternatively, she can be defined as a heterosexual female who is just a fandom member fancying male homoerotic relationships, like the Boys Love (BL) community. In short, it can be said that the complexity of gender identity and sexual orientation owing to the influence of the BL genre from Japanese and Korean popular culture has become common amongst Thai women who have a fondness for male-male romance.

To sum up, with the collection of evidence from the triangulated data – social media, interview, and the focus group data – I suggest that the role-play '*Both*' activity created by the LC participants on Twitter is the subcultural resistance against normative heterosexuality, arising from the Boys' Love (BL) fandom and community online in Thailand. The '*Both*' role-play activity shares a similar pattern with the creation of fan works of BL literature in Japanese popular culture (such as *yaoi*, *manga* fanfiction) or the *Kirk-Spock* relationship in *Star Trek* in American society. Henry Jenkins's fan culture theory (1992), which was developed from empirical studies related to fandom or fan culture, can be applied to understand how the case of *yaoi* Japanese popular culture (or now known as Boys' Love – BL) and Korean pop artists in the music and entertainment industry has become "global" codes regarding male homoerotic relationships consumed by heterosexual females. The case of the '*Both*' online activity in the LC group is not

only for the interaction within the BL fans' community, but it is also for sexual purposes, since they play the roles to find sexual partners (like online dating) as discussed. It can be concluded that the online BL communities allow for the exchange of sexually fantasised fanfiction, such as slash stories, as well as for the expression of gender identity and sexual orientation. In the meanwhile, social media can facilitate greater awareness of non-normative sexual identities, such as 'gay' or 'beautiful' male relationships. This could stand as a confirmation that many fan works reinterpret Kirk's sexuality in *Star Trek* away from the film's code as heterosexual and towards pansexuality or polyamory (Jenkins, 1988 cited in Kies, 1970). A similar interpretation can be drawn from the case of Jang, who used a Korean-style soft masculinity image as her profile picture (in Figure 11) on Twitter to role-play that character so as to find her sexual partner, which was successful in the offline world. To sum up, I argue that the 'Both' role-play online activity by LC participants on Twitter is seen as the resistance to the normative heterosexuality in Thai culture, and, at the same time, they participate in this online activity to negotiate gender identity and sexual orientation, especially for LGBTQ+ identities users.

## Conclusion

The focus of my overarching argument is that the use of social media by the LC participants is seen as the subversion against normative sexuality in Thai culture. According to the key theme, **Lower class, and the subversion by negotiated subcultures online**, I argue that they tactically build their subcultures online to subvert the mainstream social convention of femininity. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, to understand the relation between social class and gender, intersectionality can be applied as an analytical framework and critical perspective to understand this. Crenshaw (1989) uses intersectionality to denote how race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, religion, body type, and other systems combine to shape the experiences of many by making room for privilege and oppression. This is how I am going to explain how gender and class in LC participants' case is connected through the framework of intersectionality. I observe that LC participants are more oppressed by society when compared to other groups of participants. Specifically, since they are defined as the underprivileged class in Thai society, they seem to be more oppressed due to other aspects of their social identity, such as poor economic status, lower parent's income and education, parent's unskilled in professional career, and living in developing area. Due to the class oppression in Thai society, the underprivileged class seems to negotiate their gender identity with more resistance than privileged class in society. This is because the latter's gender performance is linked to their political power, class opportunities, privilege in society. Thus, we can see the



evidence in this chapter shows that LC participants use social media as the subverting site against gender normativity and patriarchal system in Thai culture, for example they create '*Both*' role play activity on Twitter to resist heteronormativity, they retweet contents to challenge Thai's ideology and discourse in gender.

In particular, the Twitter platform is considered the underlying proto-activism site in terms of gender for them due to its privacy. As they revealed in the interview data, Twitter was the only platform of which their parents had no accounts, Facebook was the most active platform with which parents engaged, and Instagram was the site with slight online interaction with their parents; however, young children had their tactics to hide and conceal their identities from their parents. This suggests that Twitter is used for expressing dangerous and risky issues, such as sexual oppression in Thai females, gender inequality, and rape culture. This is in line with Mendes and Ringrose's (2019) argument that girl feminists' strong engagement with "digital feminist activism" is a way of challenging rape culture and gender-based violence in women. Furthermore, I highlight that the LC participants use Twitter not only to express their gender identities through their dress, speech, and mannerism, but also to express their sexuality, which encompasses sexual desires, relationships, fantasies. This is because gender identity involves aspects of sexuality such as sexual feelings, aspirations, and imaginings as well. Even though the thesis aims to explore the negotiation of gender identity terms only in social media, the evidence obtained

suggests that elements of sexuality have emerged from the findings as well. Thus, the discussion of the concept of gender identity and performance must involve forms of sexual identification, sexual aspirations, sexual imaginings and representation, and playful negotiation and fantasies – but not in the literal sense of physical sexuality or physical sexual relations in the offline world in the case of the LC participants.

Importantly, a classical Marxist theory could be applied to understand the class struggle between superordinate and subordinate groups in society. Since the bourgeoisie, perceived as the most economically powerful class in society, is the group who own the means of production and purchase the labour power from others, they create dominant culture's definition of right and wrong ways of behaviour and the issue of proper distribution of economic opportunities and resources. This is opposite to the proletariat, perceived as the working class in society, who do not own any means of production, but sell their own labour power to earn the money. This working-class group, being in the subordinate role, tend to express symbolic opposition to the dominant culture's moral authority (Marx, 1859). When we look back at traditional aristocracy in Thailand, the working-class group, called a (rural) peasantry or cosmopolitan/urban peasants, are clearly oppressed by the bourgeoisie, who are defined as the middle class or capitalists in Thai social class (Walker, 2012). This makes the subordinate class, known as the proletariat class by Marxist definition (1859), resist the oppressive nature of the more powerful groups in society. Thus, this is a form of resistance to class

struggling between superordinate and subordinate groups in society. Specifically, I assert that the LC participants are the social group who resist traditional forms of feminine conduct and women discourses in Thailand.

As already argued, the LC participants have been found to retweet dangerous sexual content on Twitter instead of speaking in public offline spaces. I propose that owing to the nature and features/tools afforded by Twitter, the LC participants use this site as a strategy of subversion against normative sexuality by diverse modes of communication online, such as *retweet* and *hashtag* communication. Twitter supports active communities with its own set of unique practices that happen in youth culture (boyd, 2013; Baker, 2013). This is because Twitter's structure disperses conversation throughout a network of interconnected actors rather than constraining conversation within bounded spaces or groups (Zappavigna, 2015). Young people thus may talk about a particular topic at once, such that they have a sense of being surrounded by a conversation, despite perhaps not being an active contributor (boyd et al., 2010). It has been suggested that young people use social media services not only to "manage information" (Zappavigna, 2015, 2018), but also to participate in "interpersonal dimensions" through visibility and participation online (Page, 2012). The LC participants also use such online sites to operate on interpersonal social relations for gender performance. In short, due to the structural affordances of Twitter, LC participants are empowered to use this site for resistance via the negotiation of the subcultures online employing social semiotic resources such as hangtags and

retweets. I propose three emerging themes from the subcultures online: *retweet*, *hashtag*, and the *'Both'* role-play activity.

Firstly, I consider that the LC participants use Twitter to subvert normative sexualities; at the same time, there are conflicts between the offline and online expression of them when analysing through the lens of triangulating data. I would argue that there is a contradiction between the spoken and interactive meanings in the LC participants' expression according to the multimodal metafunction framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). Ploy would be one of the cases in this conflict issue. Based on the speech mode, she was quite hesitant or uncertain to speak about the oppressiveness in women discourse through her own spoken utterances in the offline setting, such as through her tone and voice, volume, and intonation. For example, she had a ***quiet, soft, and quivering speech*** when she expressed her sexual oppression in the domestic setting. However, she was confident to speak about her attitudes and gender politics on Twitter by borrowing others' tweets since she agreed with the modality (truth) claim of the original authors of such tweets – as she herself was the audience of the text. For instance, she retweeted the content showing explicit gender politics in Thai society, especially about the women discourses and gender inequality in Thailand – as shown below:

Why do wearing a skirt and doing the make-up represent the intention of women to entice (sexually) men? This is total nonsense in the gender

culture of our society. Why are young Thai women always taught that their behaviour needs to conform to the social norms in the feminine discourse and value? Specifically, most of the norms and values in femininity talk about keeping virginity (purity), which represents the 'sexual morality' in society. – retweeted by Ploy.

This case of Ploy's retweeted content can be associated with broader issues, like gender inequality and masculine hegemony in the presence of a patriarchal society in Thailand. The implication is that textual communication through the *retweet* mode on Twitter is seen as the way to openly and explicitly express individual's points of view and attitudes, particularly on risky social topics. Thus, there is a contradiction between the spoken and interactive meanings in Ploy's case. We can see that the representational meaning refers to the notion of oppressiveness, which is the uncertainty of expression through language resources such as tone and voice, the level of sound, and certainty of the speech. In contrast, the interactive meaning implies a very strong sense of confidence with a more explicit and open expression of gender politics and issues due to the high modality claim by retweeting the content from original authors.

Overall, I would argue that the LC participants use social media as a space to resist traditional forms of feminine conducts that still restrain the gender expression of young Thai women. This is in agreement with the previous study in which young Thai women used novel cultural artefacts of social media to

challenge Thai dominant culture and traditional public discourses on women gender (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). I highlight that the *retweet* tool is considered the most popular function on Twitter that the LC participants use for resistance against popular Thai culture. They tactically *transmit* texts or original words from influential people in the online society, and retweet (or re-post or share) to the public, and their friends also repeat this with comments on each other. Thus, the *retweet*, as one of the social semiotic recourses, is used by the LC participants to represent their perspectives, opinions, and beliefs, especially in social ‘risky’ issues, such as gender inequality and rape culture experienced by females. I have therefore put forward the notion that the LC participants use Twitter by this *retweet* feature to express the gender politics and to challenge traditional forms of feminine values in Thai mainstream culture.

Secondly, the *hashtag* feature has become another popular mode used by the LC participants to resist normative discourses regarding femininity in Thai culture. ‘*Re-Tweet-Fav*’, ‘*Re-Tweet-DM*’, and ‘*Re-Tweet-Follow*’ are the patterns of hashtags used by the LC group for sexual purposes. These kinds of creative hashtags carry many significant implications. For example, they create hashtags to communicate their sexual desires and emotions, as shown in the cases of ‘*Rt ตามทัก*’ (*Re-Tweet-DM*) by the participants Ploy, Fah, Yok, and Pawee. Also, this particular hashtag can be used for sexual purposes as in, for instance, ‘*#บอกหาคนคุย*’ (*for finding a sexual relationship*) – as seen in the cases of Jang and Nui. Such observations suggest that the LC participants tactically use the hashtag feature

for diverse sexual matters, from displaying courtship to building a sexual relationship. I consider such a hashtag activity carried out by the LC group to be in line with findings from previous scholars who argued that the hashtag feature is not only viewed as “searchable talk” (Zappavigna 2018) or “conversational practice” (boyd et al., 2010), but also as the “interchange” (Zappavigna, 2015) and “interpersonal dimensions” of meaning-making of the users (Page, 2012). However, my findings point to an additional layer of the hashtag function used by the LC participants, that they are not just engaging in a social interchange of information or in interpersonal dimensions between their online friends. They are also building their relationships for sexual purposes, which are manifested in the form of courtship and personal expression of sexuality and desires.

Overall, I suggest that the LC participants manipulate Twitter as the subcultural resistance drawing on social semiotic resources, which are hashtags and retweets afforded by Twitter. As discussed in the literature review, Thailand has many women discourses that still restrain young women’s sexual expression. For example, the *‘rak nuan sanguan tua’*, *‘ka la the sa’*, girlhood, and ‘dutiful daughter’ values in Thai families are the mainstream public discourses linked to the categorisation of being ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women (Boonmongkon et al., 2013), Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). I consider that the LC participants are oppressed by these discourses, especially in the family setting. For example, in the discussion of Ploy’s case in the previous section, she revealed in the interview that the only topic she could not talk with parents was the sex issue. She said that

“this is because they don’t want me to have the same bad experience as my mother did when she was pregnant while studying in high school”. This revelation helps to understand why she refrained from expressing her sexuality and having a sexual relationship due to her domestic issues. With the reason provided, this case demonstrates to a great extent that family members of the LC participants are still too conservative to let their daughter express sexuality owing to the parent myth regarding bad experience in the past. Thus, it is not doubtful why gender and sexuality remain a taboo subject among young women in Thai families. Turning to the online context, Twitter is suggested as a choice to challenge the mainstream and normative discourses through many tactically creative ways, such as the *retweet* and *hashtag* modes of communication, as I have continuously argued.

Lastly, I suggest the ‘*Both*’ (role-play) activity as the ways by which the LC participants challenge normative heterosexuality in Thai society. They used Korean pop artist images as Twitter’s profile pictures to serve a particular sexual purpose. The ‘beautiful’ male images they employed are based on fan works regarding same-sex relationships, like Boys Love (BL) in Japanese popular culture. The profile images they used for the ‘*Both*’ online activity can potentially produce diverse meanings through the compositional metafunction framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). For example, in the case of Jang (Figure 11), my analysis holds that she plays the role of a ‘gay’ boy character which is placed on the left. This left placement represents a rather sexually ‘agent’ position



and a 'demanding' nature in sexuality when compared to another 'pretty' male character on the right in the image. Moreover, other communicative modes in the image, such as gesture, gaze, and smiling can produce additional meanings when viewed from the interactive metafunction framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). The body posing/acting (i.e., a close selfie by snuggling and raising two fingers for cute posing) can demonstrate the meaning of male homosexual relationships. Also, the closed-lip smiling by the left male character and the grinned smiling by another right male character in the image emphasise the visual component of male homoeroticism. All things considered, it can be seen that there are many visual modes of communication that can potentially produce the meanings in terms of sexuality and gender identity. Figure 11 is an example of how the '*Both*' role-play activity by the LC participants can be used to subvert normative heterosexuality. They use the '*Both*' (role-play) sexual activity, which arose from the fan community, to negotiate their sexual orientation and gender identity, including not only heterosexual identities but also other fluid identities.

Besides Jenkin's concept of fan culture (1988, 1992), de Certeau's secondary production concept (1984) can also be applied to understand the LC participants' fan community on Twitter. As Jenkins proposes the idea of "textual poachers" (1992) in fan culture, he explains that the fans "poach" (steal) cultural resources from their idols and repurpose them. For instance, *Star Trek* is one kind of *textual poacher* because this original media text was rerun, reread, and rewritten by fans, especially the creation of same-sex fan texts, like the *Kirk-Spock* relationship

(Jenkins, 1988). From this, it could be argued that the *'Both'* role-play activity among the LC participants on Twitter originates from the subculture of fan's imagination, derived from the consumption of their favourite original media texts, which they then remodel or remake into different fan stories to serve their political sexual interests. To explain this, they reuse the Korean pop artist images, set them as their profile pictures on Twitter, and then rebuild the different stories to serve their sexual interests – that is flirting with a same-sex partner. As mentioned, de Certeau's secondary production could be another concept that can be applied to understand this.

This concept proposes the notion that mass culture is not produced or reproduced by the cultural industry alone. The Frankfurt school refers to this as 'passive' consumption (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1992). In this view, people can have their imaginary world both individually and collectively to produce their cultural products (or subculture), called "secondary production" (de Certeau, 1984). To apply this in the case of fan works among the LC participants, such as the imaginary homoerotic relationships between their Korean male artists, the *'Both'* role-play activity is suggested as the cultural product made by their subgroup (as members of the online fan community). Although this role-play subculture in the online community is seen to be an unprofessional activity by 'amateurs' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1992), they still decide to produce their cultural products which do not need to conform with the standardisation of the culture industry in the mainstream culture (ibid). Hence, the *'Both'* (role-play

online activity) on Twitter is considered a cultural product made by a subgroup of the LC participants. Thus, they do not have to comply with the mainstream discourses and heterosexual norms through such a created subculture online. In other words, they create this subculture online as a strategy of subversion against traditional forms of female conducts, and as a means to negotiate sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly by LGBTQ+ users.

In conclusion, through the key themes in the LC group, I argue that the LC participants are the group who use social media to subvert traditional public discourses in Thai society. However, I suggest that to study the ongoing types of feminism, we should analyse the relationship between girls' agency and resistance from a more nuanced perspective that allows for ambiguity. Even though these LC girls seem to be able to feel empowerment, choice, capacity, and independence to perform subversive acts and engage in post-feminist culture, their sexual activities re-mobilise patriarchal values, as argued by McRobbie (2009). They cannot completely disregard patriarchal forces, the dominant culture, and normative femininity, since they are still invested in the beauty culture/products related to capitalism (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2009) argues that girls' activities today, such as dressing up, enjoying make-up, wearing high heels, and other props – which are adopted as statements of personal choice and female empowerment – are like a 'post-feminist masquerade'. It is a "form of dispersed and body-oriented gender power central to the (re)production of masculine hegemony" (McRobbie, 2009). In short, she argues that girls'

empowerment and choice in post-feminism culture are a “provocation to feminism”: it is a kind of illusion that undermines the progress of previous waves of feminism.

According to McRobbie’s argument, it appears that girls’ agency is still limited in terms of sexual matters even though they have more opportunities to resist the constraints of patriarchal values than they did in the past. As previously critiqued, McRobbie’s judgment may be a little too severe in not allowing choices of pleasures and playfulness for the youth. I continue to argue that the ways in which the LC participants perform their online selves seem to be acts of political resistance, and, at the same time, it appears to be the play and act of pleasure in the negotiation of their gender identity. This can be shown by their retweeting and hashtag practices, and the ‘*Both*’ sexual activity on Twitter. While they are resisting the dominant culture through Twitter’s political activities, they seem to derive pleasure from these playful activities online. For instance, in Figures 6 and 7, the retweeted content “*girls just wanna play with their dressing*” and “*girls just have fun and are happy with their dress*” indicates that young women express their agency (i.e., playing with their clothes and having fun with make-up and girly materials) in the sense of expressing pleasure. In other words, it can be said that the resistance on social media by the LC participants are the playful subversion or pleasurable resistance strategies by young women. The LC sexual activities are therefore unstable, a challenge towards, and a resistance to Thai dominant

culture, and, at the same time, creative, playful, and pleasurable practices for the performance of their gender identity.

## **Chapter 6: Middle class, diversity in gender performance, and sexual autonomy**

This chapter investigates how the MC participants negotiate their gender identity through the use of social media. There are specific questions this chapter seeks to address. How do they resist traditional discourses on Thai women? Which is the platform they perform that kind of resistance? How do LC and MC resistance differ? And how is the spoken discourse of the MC participants related to their social class as well as to gender?

As discussed thoroughly previously, there is a possibility that social class exerts influence on the ways in which young Thai women express their gender online. Importantly, each social group possesses their own discourses and social norms due to their different indicators of socioeconomic status (SES) such as social background, education, and parent's income as discussed in the Methodology chapter. Also, each social group may differentially use social media to negotiate their gender identities depending on the people and the community impacted on that online platform. Instagram was the most used social media by the MC participants since their parents, school teachers, relatives, and other adults related to their social communities lacked access to this site. Thus, based on the research question "**How is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?**", this chapter interrogates how the MC participants perform a diversity of gender and struggle

with sexual autonomy on social media since they may constitute a social group that is also oppressed by the elite class. Furthermore, as I proposed previously, social media function as alternative and/or multiple spaces in which young women have more freedom to assert their gender identity – they can play out within contested traditional discourses in Thai society. To acquire a deeper understanding, I suggest a close analysis of one sample participant (called Natty, as a pseudonym) to support the emergent theme in the chapter: the **MC participants perform diversity of gender and struggle sexual autonomy such as freedom and self-determination as regards gender identity on social media**. Also, data from the rest of the participants (June, Puifai, Perth, Gam, Mook, Mapang, View, Bell, Top) will be discussed to show similar patterns of the theme. This key theme has been derived from data analysis patterns across the MC participants. Specifically, the theme has emerged after the cross-referencing of three data types: the interview, the focus group, and the social media by using thematic analysis as the framework. The theme will then be deemed as relevant by multimodal metafunction as discussed in the Methodology section.

## **Theme 1: *Non-binary cosplay and resistance to hetero-normative discourses***

According to the key theme, the MC participants seem to be the group making up the most diverse gender performances online. They use social media to communicate and/or express their gender with diversity and they are active users who employ social media to struggle for sexual autonomy. Cosplay is one of the online activities in which they engage to negotiate their gender diversity; meanwhile, it is performed to resist hetero-normative discourses in Thai culture.

By cross-referencing three data types in the study – social media data (Instagram), interview, and focus group data – I will provide a full picture of emerging themes from all the MC participants' triangulated data. I will start by giving the picture from the interview and focus group data and then will present the triangulated data from the social media site. Natty, one of the MC participants who mentioned sexual autonomy in Thailand, said that:

Gender is an individual's own judgment; we thus need to have a freedom to decide our gender because this is 2020! We should have our own decision in expression, not only of gender identity but also of sexuality.  
***[the intensive expression by raising the volume of her voice suggests strength and confidence]***



Natty's spoken utterances in the interview data suggest the representation of struggles for sexual autonomy. She spoke for empowerment of freedom, choices, and rights of women gender, aiming to promote self-judgment regarding gender identities as well as sexual autonomy in Thai society. When we interpret her speech mode, we can sense her confidence and evidently agree with what she asserted regarding the concept of sexual autonomy. Natty used an intensive tone (or strong voice) and she raised her volume up to show confidence in the main point of her speech. This interpretation of the speech mode **[intensive expression by raising the volume of her voice suggests strength and confidence]** can be seen as one of the crucial resources to produce *intensity* in multimodal communication (Jewitt, et al., 2016). The intensity of vocal tone in the case of Natty can serve to stress the idea of sexual autonomy and diversity of gender performance that she tried to assert through her speech discourse. To conclude Natty's remark, her tone of voice – as signifying resources of her meaning-making – helps the audience to realise that she had a strong belief in and perspective on sexual autonomy, gender diversity, and freedom in expression of gender and sexuality, which is meant to challenge normative ideas, especially hetero-normative discourse in Thai society.

Similar to the results from the LC participants in the previous chapter, I observe that the emerging data from the MC participants have given rise to additional issues related to the study. Even though the research question aims to focus on

gender terms in young Thai women, sexuality has implications that are simultaneously associated with gender. When I focused on asking the participants about gender perception, their answers showed the link between gender and sexuality concepts. For example, in Natty's case, her spoken discourses in the interview indicate that she wanted to promote the ideas of both gender identity and sexuality – e.g., *“we should have our own decision in expression of not only gender identity but also of sexuality.”* This demonstrates that Natty perceived gender in association with sexuality. In fact, the two terms are intertwined with each other since gender is perceived much more as bodily appearances through dress, speech, and mannerisms, while sexuality is understood as an inner expression such as thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, and relationships. Hence, similar to what I proposed in the previous LC chapter, I maintain that the two concepts of gender and sexuality are implicated simultaneously in the communicative intentions of the MC participants. Specifically, when the participants expressed their gender identities through their spoken discourses as well as through their social media profiles, they also negotiated their sexual expression, which encompasses aspirations, fantasies, desires, and relationships. For instance, cosplay is one of the online activities that achieve gender negotiation through dress, hairstyle, make-up, their sexual desires, fantasies, and relationships are indirectly expressed even these might not be manifested in the physical sexual relationship – please see further discussion after this.

In the focus group setting, June, Puifai, Perth, Gam, and Mook also emphasised the promotion of sexual autonomy in Thai society. They revealed that Thailand has strict norms of femininity that shape the ways in which young girls perform their gender. For example, June said that “the idea of being a dutiful daughter in a Thai family imposes a fairly strict control on the performance of our gender since we need to conform to what our parents say. This is not only about being the dutiful daughter in a Thai family but also about other women discourses in Thailand that place a high value on women’s expression of gender and sexuality. Because we are women, we are so oppressed by these values” **[this confident expression shows the certainty of the speech]**. Here, June’s expression is in line with Natty’s spoken discourses in the individual interview previously. It suggests that June perceived gender to have implications for sexuality – as she said “women discourses in Thailand place a high value on women’s expression in gender and sexuality”. Importantly, she is confident to speak about the oppression of women by such a traditional form of femininity. This confirms the certainty of her speech, which also corresponds to Natty’s speech. Furthermore, in terms of group dynamic and interaction, while June expressed the issues of traditional discourses and oppression of Thai women, Puifai, Perth, Gam, and Mook who were sitting together in the focus group setting, showed their agreement with June’s expression by nodding their head. Through the mode of gesture and body language in the interactive metafunction, lowering and raising one’s head slightly and briefly refers to the meaning of agreement, assent, understanding, or a way of giving someone a signal. This kind of signal means

that they quite agreed with what their friends expressed when they were in a group.

To triangulate the data, there are cases of how the MC participants used social media sites as a space to resist hetero-normative discourse as well as other femininity norms in Thai culture. Based on the survey's outcome, Instagram was the MC participants' most frequently used social media platform; particularly, they used IG's stories feature to express their sexual fantasies and relationships – for example, cosplay activity represents how they engaged in social media to express their non-binary gender.



Figure 12: A short selfie video (with the length of 5 seconds depicting four scenes) on IG's stories – by Natty (on the left)

According to the theme '**middle-class, diversity of gender performance, and sexual autonomy**', I propose that social media used by the MC participants not only allows them to perform diversity and/or alternatives of gender but also empowers them to resist hetero-normative discourses in Thailand, such as gender binary and sexual restraints in young Thai women. The evidence reveals that they wished to speak out about sexual autonomy and promote gender diversity in Thai society by using online platforms to express these ideas.

Figure 12 is one of the cases demonstrating how the MC participants negotiated multiple gender identities and sexual expression with more freedom through the use of social media. I observe that different types of audiences, i.e., school friends, online friends, parents, relatives, and school teachers on each social media platform can cause different performances of gender. In other words, the MC participants used different platforms for the practice of their different and/or multiple gender performances – as revealed by Natty's interview and social media profiles. On Instagram, Natty engaged in the cosplay activity to represent her 'boyish' character, while she presented herself as a 'girly' person on her Facebook profile. The online expression on both Instagram and Facebook to a certain extent was in contrast with her biological sex, which is female, when we observed her in the physical context. Such a contradiction reinforces the theme that the MC

participants perform their diversities of gender through online communication within different platforms. As I mentioned, they are the social group making up the greatest diversity in gender performance through social media use, while also being the active users who struggle for sexual autonomy.

Figure 12 is the cosplay activity posted on Natty's IG's stories, which demonstrated the meaning of non-binary gender and sexual fantasies. To explain this, the non-binary meaning in Natty's cosplay activity is a form of popular culture among teenage girls in Asia. This cultural practice (cosplay) is derived from *manga* Japanese popular culture and is ubiquitous in many countries, such as Korea, China, as well as Thailand (Leng, 2014). As reviewed in the literature, cosplay activity originated from '*manga*' Japanese comics, cartoons, and animation, and has become popular among young Thai women (Keenapan, 2001). I suggest that popular cosplay sexual activities on social media are the alternative ways for the MC participants to perform their dynamic, diverse, and non-normative gender and sexuality. In Natty's case, the diverse and/or alternative gender identities can be interpreted through the gender switch role-playing concept in cosplay activity. For example, Natty, in Figure 12, who is on the left adopts a role play of a 'boyish' character, while the other participant on the right in the image portrays a less boyish (more 'girly') character. It is noted that the gender switching in cosplay activity can be altered from boy to girl, or girl to boy, or even to tomboy. Thus, when the participants expressed their alternative gender identities through the cosplay via switching the role-play activity, it

reinforced the theme that the MC participants were the active users making up a group with the most gender diversity and struggling for sexual autonomy. At the same time, this practice possibly conveyed the notion of resistance against hetero-normative discourses in Thai culture.

Even though the MC participants expressed their diversity in terms of gender identity and sexual expression such as thoughts, desires, fantasies, and aspirations in cosplay activity, there was no explicit evidence showing that they had actual sex or sexual relationships in a physical context. Specifically, the cosplay activity shown on the IG video infers gender roles playing through a kiss on the cheek; not actual sex or any further sexual relationships in a physical setting. Thus, this evidence promotes the understanding that the MC participants engaged in cosplay activity to playfully explore their diverse gender identities; at the same time, they mobilised sexual autonomy and sexuality since they can have sexual fantasies, desires, and aspirations with their friends, despite the absence of evidence claiming that they engaged in physical sexual relationships in an offline context. With reference to the performance of their diversity of gender identity and mobilisation of sexual autonomy through cosplay activity, I suggest this as a form of playful negotiation and/or pleasurable resistance. This finding can be further discussed by Joel's study (2011), which argues that cosplay activity, especially in queer performers, can be considered as "pleasurable resistance". He argues that cosplay can be seen as a sense of agency in expressing pleasure since cosplayers can play with dressing up, make-up, and

other props through the imitation of characters. While they are playing with this, they are expressing pleasure and agency. In the meantime, they are resisting normative gender practices in the dominant culture. Thus, it could be inferred that the ways in which MC participants engaged in cosplay activity are creative and pleasurable in nature and are accompanied by the intention to subvert Thai public discourses and conventional norms.

Natty's case, for example, shows that she rebelled against gender binary practices in the Thai dominant culture through the meaningful manifestation of gender diversity instead. There are four scenes in Figure 12 that represent different meanings made by Natty on her IG stories. We can see diverse meanings of gender through the acting of both participants (left and right). In the first scene (on the top left side), when the left participant starts to kiss the one on the right, the meaning produced is that the left participant is the 'actor' (performs an action) between the two. In the meantime, the participant on the right is the 'goal' (receiver) of the action.

In the second scene, (on the top right side), when Natty on the left (as the agent) kisses the one on the right (as the patient), Natty is interacting with the viewers by looking at the camera. After that, the participant to the right uses her hand to cover her face. This kind of gesture and body movement (using the hand to cover the face) are performances of gender roles for that moment. She may be performing the feeling of shyness and a passive gender identity since she hides



her feeling by covering her face. While the right participant may perform her shyness through her gesture and acting, the participant to the left is smiling with confidence and staring directly at the camera.

Next is the third scene (on the bottom left side). This scene shows the opposite meaning. When the left participant starts to kiss the participant on the right in the first scene, this seems vice versa in the third scene. That is, the right participant kisses the left participant back in the third scene. Hence, it is the participant to the right who is the actor (performs an action) between the two, while the left participant then becomes the goal (receiver) of the kiss – this action is totally opposite to the first scene. However, there is one major difference between the actions of the first and third scenes. For the first scene, when the left participant initiates the kiss, the right participant still uses her hand to cover her face and closes her eyes. This gesture and acting imply the meaning of shyness and submissive qualities. On the other hand, for the third scene, when the participant to the right returns the kiss, the left participant still gazes directly at the camera, dramatically interacting with the viewers and producing the meaning of 'demand' according to the interactive metafunction. Thus, this major difference reinforces the meaning that the participant to the left performs as the actor, possibly representing the active role and identity, whereas the participant to the right performs as the goal, inferring the passive role and identity.

Lastly, in the fourth scene, (on the bottom right side), when the kissing action from both finishes, the left participant still gazes directly at the viewers and smiles with confidence (ingratiating smile); but the participant to the right gazes at the other side, not directly to the viewers. This kind of gaze direction suggests that the participant on the right decides to avoid making any 'contact' with the viewers and may not show the symbolic 'demand' from the viewer. In contrast, every scene of the left participant's gazing directly at the camera refers to the 'demand' in gender performance. In the interactive metafunction framework, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call such pictures as 'demand' pictures – the people in the picture symbolically demand something from the viewers. This is referred to as a kind of 'contact' in the interactive metafunction – it is when people 'make contact' with the viewers, which can establish an (imaginary) relation with them. Thereby, the left participant is interacting with the viewers by looking at the camera which can produce the meaning of 'demand' in gender performance. It seems that she is demanding the audiences be on her side or agree with her. Her action, eye contact, and other facial expression emphasise her sense of confidence and the fact that she demands agreement and/or solidarity: she wants her audiences of the image to believe and agree with her intimate relationship.

In short, the evidence suggests that the participant to the left represents herself as the 'actor' who performs the action through her body movement, acting, gaze, and facial expression. Specifically, Natty expresses the demand in gender performance by unblinkingly gazing at the camera, which significantly highlights

her interaction with the viewers. She also emphasises this with the viewers by the ingratiating smile. Nevertheless, this is quite opposite the participant to the right, who performs herself as the 'goal' of the action, whose performance can be interpreted through her acting, gaze, and facial expression. She closes her eyes in the first scene when she is kissed by Natty. She then stares at the other side, not to the camera – an act performed without showing any symbolic demand from the viewer. Also, she uses her hand to cover her face in almost all scenes, implying the meaning of shyness, submissive quality, and a passive gender identity. However, due to the nature of multimodal analysis, it can produce numerous different meaning potentials depending on social contexts and specific environments of that text. For example, the left participant in Figure 12 seems also to be holding the camera, which might suggest that she is more active in that sense too. On the other hand, the other participant's shyness might be because she is being recorded while she has not initiated the videoing. We can see that multimodal analysis can produce divergent meanings due to the different social contexts of the participants. Importantly, social semiotics emphasises the agency of the sign maker. Sign systems are shaped through social usage; it is not possible to separate a sign system from society and its contexts of use by people (Jewitt, et al., 2016). I hence maintain that we need to understand the meaning making of the participants (also for Natty's case in Figure 12) through the nuanced lens that allows for ambiguity. This is because the multimodal analysis, which is grounded in social semiotic theory, aims to understand the social dimensions of meaning derived from social action and interaction using semiotic resources –

this can provide the ambiguity of meaning making by the participants (Jewitt, et al., 2016). Thus, different interpretations are possible in the case of Natty. Even if there is some ambiguity about what roles they are performing exactly, it seems Natty is taking the role as the actor who challenges the norms of Thai society, as we can see this meaning through Natty's agentive movements, positions and gestures in the image. On the other side, the girl to the right feasibly carries out the role of the passive partner in the lesbian relationship owing to her vague action and gesture in the image. Alternatively, the fact that she is being recorded and has not initiated the recording, possibly explains her expression of shyness. In short, there are many possible ways to interpret the meanings of this non-verbal communication since the participants are performing these roles for the moment as part of the performance of gender identity which can take diverse and complex forms.

In terms of a range of props in visual communication, the participants in Figure 12 are made salient in the interactive metafunction through their size, position, colour, and use of lighting. The term 'saliency' is used by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to indicate that some elements can be made more eye-catching than others. This can be made in many different ways through size and colour contrasts. For example, red is always a very salient colour with a tonal contrast – in short through anything that can make a given element stand out from its surroundings (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). In the case of Figure 12, the most significant representative props which are salient in the image are the dresses

(i.e., the cosplay dress – black theme for masculine quality and white theme for feminine quality). These dresses are recognised as symbolic attributes which are gender performances through the gender-switched in the cosplay activity. Specifically, Natty on the left position is represented as a more ‘boyish’ figure through the costume of black colour, while another girl on the right is considered to have more ‘girly’ inner through the costume of white colour. The categorisation of black and white colour is quite linked to the cultural perception in one society of which diversity is a major element. Black and white colour produce the contrast meanings according to the colour theories and psychology studies (O’connor, 2011; Katz, 2013). While black is commonly associated with power, authority, and strength, and has been used with men, white is considered as righteous, good, peaceful, and submissive, and has been used with women (O’connor, 2011). In other words, black evokes sophistication, power, and activeness, while white communicates innocence, naivety, puerility, and passiveness (Katz, 2013). This implies that black and white are opposites – a tonal contrast. In colour theory and psychology in commercial advertisement, we can see an advertisement like the case of Ralph Lauren’s Polo Black that uses black colour for targeting men. This particular advertisement aims to express dark and strong, communicating qualities of mystery, depth, and power. To apply this in the case of Figure 12, Natty, who wears the black cosplay costume, can represent the meaning of ‘boyish’, ‘active’, and ‘agent’, while the other girl, who wears the white cosplay costume, communicates the meaning of feminine quality – righteous, peaceful, and submissive. To sum up, I maintain that the meanings through the visual

modes of communication in Natty's case are conventionally associated with symbolic values attached to props, dresses, accessories, facial expressions, and gestures. Thus, the symbolic values as interpreted in Figure 12 illustrate the notion of diversity of gender identity performed via the cosplay activity, which is a form of sexual autonomy that the MC participants struggle towards as the key theme.

In order to support this argument, I found that more than half of the MC participants had similar patterns in playing with their costumes in the cosplay activity. This reinforces the argument that they are the most active users who mobilise sexual autonomy and constitute a group of individuals who perform gender identities with the greatest diversity. The followings are the evidence in support of the argument.



Figure 13: June takes a selfie of her cosplay picture showing an 'unconventional' expression of gender role – she subverts heterosexuality by switching her biological sex (as female) into 'tom'. Plus, she wrote the caption in the image: “ผมคุณะ พี่ไหวหรือ” (*I'm so aggressive, can you handle me?*) to convey the hidden feeling of sexiness and a touch of sadism.

Figure 13 is a selfie picture posted on June's IG profile. She expresses her diverse identities through the cosplay character who wears a black wig, glasses, a make-up, a black necklace, and clothes. These elements convey an 'unconventional' gender role and identity via the switch of her biological sex (as female) into 'tom'. According to Sinnott, 'toms' and 'dees' are terms widely recognised in Thailand in the context of female same-sex relationships, both of which are etymologically derived from the English words "tomboy" and "lady" (2012). In many Western countries, women who subscribe to these relationship roles are often casually referred to as "butch" or "femme" lesbians. When coupled, one acts more masculine, while the other is typically feminine. In Thailand, Sinnott (2012) terms a masculine woman, particularly caring and attentive, as 'tom' (butch lesbian), and her more feminine partner as 'dee' (cis-gendered lesbian). Thus, we can interpret that June tried to convey her 'tom' character through her selfie picture via many elements in the cosplay. Common characteristics of such 'tom' identity include wearing masculine clothing (a black hoodie), a short haircut, a black necklace and nerdy glasses as props that are physical in nature and are considered in Thai dominant cultures to be unfeminine, or the domain of boys.

Due to these props and elements, Sinnott (2012) suggests that *'tom'* (masculine woman) is considered as the “active agent” in the sexual positioning of the relationship – which is similar to *'tom gay king'* as a further refinement of *'tom gay'* in Thai society. Furthermore, this active agent of *'tom'* can also be interpreted through the written caption, written on the image by June as “ผมดูนะ พี่ไหวหรือ” (*I'm so aggressive, can you handle me?*). This sentence can be alternatively translated, for example, as “*I'm gonna go rough on you, can you handle me?*”, “*I'm so fierce, can you go with it? Or are you okay with that?*” It is a slang sentence and has become popular on social media (IG, Facebook, and Twitter) among Thai teenagers since the band *Mean*, a Thai pop boyband, posted this caption on their Instagram profile and subsequently went viral online. This sentence is a tease between couples to convey some hidden feelings of sexiness and a touch of sadism; also, it can be used for flirting with someone for sexual fantasies and relationships online.

Overall, Figure 13 demonstrates an ‘unconventional’ representation of gender identities made by June. She subverts heterosexuality by switching her biological sex (as female) into *'tom'*. I observe that June’s exhibition of her *'tom'* identity – a characteristic considered typical of a boy – is the reproduction of gender stereotype and normativity on men in Thai society. Specifically, June’s expression in the cosplay through costume, haircut, and other props still reinforce masculine gender norms in Thai dominant culture. However, I wish to point out that the cosplay activity on social media allows June to subvert heterosexual norms by



switching her biological sex to non-binary gender. I thus argue that social media sites still provide more room and opportunity to practise gender diversity and sexual autonomy. The following is another expression by June.



Figure 14: June shows a similar performative pattern to what was posted on Natty's IG stories (Figure 12). She takes a selfie with her friend (on the right) to represent the diversity of their cosplay characters, mannerism, and identities.

Figure 14 is a piece of supportive evidence that reinforces the argument of how the MC participants exhibit their non-binary gender through the cosplay activity. June demonstrates a similar performative pattern to what is seen in Natty's IG stories in Figure 12, showing how she alters her characters into a different gender role through the costume, the make-up, a short blond wig, props, and also through facial expression and gaze. By triangulating the data, the interview data

demonstrates that June perceives herself as tom (butch lesbian or masculine women). She said that “I’m not sure what my gender is, but my perception is that I’m more attractive to females. My parents have asked me this question, and I said that my preference is a type of girl, lesbian, or dee, something like that. I’m so lucky that my parents don’t feel angry with my answer”. The evidence from triangulated data between the interview and social media data (IG posts – like Figures 13 and 14) indicates that the MC participants used Instagram as a space to perform their sexual fantasies, aspirations, and desires and as a platform to mount resistance against hetero-normative sexuality in Thai dominant culture. The followings are other pieces of supportive evidence from Puifai and Perth showing the same theme of argument.



Figure 15: Puifai also takes a selfie of herself in cosplay dressing showing her boyish character which is not in line with her biological sex.



Figure 16: A selfie picture posted by Perth, which follows a similar pattern in playing the cosplay activity to convey gender identity with diversity.

Figures 15 (Puifai) and 16 (Perth) are examples supporting the argument of how the MC participants engaged in cosplay activity to perform their non-binary gender. All things considered, I argue that the MC participants used social media (Instagram) to exercise their sexual autonomy and gender performance with diversity. As interpreted in the case of Natty above (Figure 12), she challenges hetero-normative practices by switching her gender roles through the cosplay activity on IG stories. To explain this in detail, the gaze, the facial expressions, and the position in Figure 12 demonstrate that Natty holds a more active and confident attitude while the other girl exhibits shyness and submissiveness. Although Natty's portrayal of confidence as a boy and the other girl's presentation

as a shy girl reproduce a gender stereotype and male normativity (confident and sturdy) and female inferiority (shy and submissive) in Thai dominant culture, I maintain that the cosplay activity still allows them to subvert heterosexuality or gender binary grounded in the biological attributes that comprise the male and female sexes. In other words, the boyishness that Natty performs still reproduces characteristics of gender roles of men, which does not contribute to the subversion of masculine gender stereotypes in Thai dominant culture. However, when she performs a boy gender identity through the cosplay activity, this is a kind of 'unconventional' practice for her biological sex. Furthermore, her performance exemplifies the narrative of non-binary gender allowing for diversity in terms of characters, mannerism and identities. In short, I argue that when the MC participants express their non-binary gender through cosplay activity on social media, they play with their diverse gender identities that may be neither male nor female – identities that are outside gender binaries – like in the case of Natty (Figure 12), June (Figures 13 and 14), Puifai (Figure 15), and Perth (Figure 16). This line of evidence supports the notion that the MC participants display the most diverse gender performance – compared with other social groups – and that they are active users striving for sexual autonomy.

To link my argument with previous a Thai scholar's findings, Boonmongkon et al. (2013) propose that social media is a novel social space offering opportunities for young Thai women to deal with their struggle for sexual autonomy. The autonomy term made by these scholars regards young Thai women as “active agents”: they

can use online sites to actively express love, responsibility, intimacy, and sexual desire (Boonmongkon et al, 2013). This finding is in line with Fongkeaw's study (2016), which suggests that young Thai women exert agency to negotiate their gender identities online. Moreover, these Thai scholars argue that since young Thai women are now more active agents who express their gender online, they achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy and can construct, negotiate, and maintain their gender identity and sexuality through their social media profile pages (Boonmongkon et al, 2013; Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). Even though what these scholars found is in line with my current findings, they did not address the question of social class, which I have discussed here in the context of social practices. I thus argue that the social group that uses social media to achieve their sexual autonomy and to exert agency in gender matters is the middle-class (MC) group. In other words, I narrow the scope of my finding to show that the MC participants are the active agents constituting the social group that negotiates their sexual autonomy and gender diversity.

In conclusion, the triangulated data point to the role of the MC participants as the active agents who mobilise sexual autonomy and negotiate the most diverse gender identities on social media. They communicated issues of gender politics such as autonomy, freedom, gender rights and quality through their spoken discourses (from the interview) and online interactions (the cosplay activity). In other words, the MC participants used social media to manifest the issues of gender politics, which are about female autonomy and freedom of sexual

expression. This argument is in accordance with the previous scholar's findings, but my current study expands the perspectives on the implications of social class. The case of the cosplay activity implies the resistance to hetero-normative practices such as the cultural enforcement of gender binary, as shown by their ability to switch their gender roles and play with diverse identities through their dresses, props, characters, and manners. Thus, such a cosplay activity online can be considered one of the explicit examples showing the process of women's adaptation and resistance to the traditional public discourse of femininity and other mainstream normative ideas about gender in Thai culture. However, I propose that to understand female sexual negotiations in both online and offline contexts, they need to be analysed in a more nuanced light. While the MC participants resisted hetero-normative practices in Thai dominant culture through many tactical ways on their social media profiles, this form of resistance can be observed as a route to pleasurability and playfulness. Although McRobbie notes that female empowerment and rights are an illusion in post-feminism (2009), I would put forward that McRobbie's argument perhaps denies pleasurable and playful dimensions of contemporary feminism. Hence, I argue in favour of the ambiguity of how the MC participants performed their diverse genders and mobilised their sexual autonomy in online sites. They were resisting dominant culture and, in the meantime, exercising power through their play with costumes, make-ups, and characters in the cosplay activity.

## ***Theme 2: Social media post challenges the 'common sense' of feminine discourses grounded in the state's ideology***

The previous section presents the MC participants as the social group making up the greatest diversity of gender and struggling to achieve sexual autonomy. To strengthen this argument, this section will interrogate how social media posting can challenge the 'common sense' of feminine discourses underlying the Thai state's ideology.

As discussed in the literature review, women discourses in Thai dominant culture have established the prevailing categorisation of 'good' and 'bad' women, which has become a 'common sense' in feminine conduct (Thaweessit, 2004). It is argued that ideological discourses concerning being 'good' women still reinforce the virtue, submissiveness, the need to marry men, and monogamous qualities (Thaweessit, 2004). Thai women are expected to marry men before they reach the age of thirty; importantly, they are also expected to tolerate marital problems for their children's sake and to remain married until death. Furthermore, they should avoid adultery and promiscuity: if women commit adultery, they are strongly condemned and are seen as 'bad women' (Thaweessit, 2004). These normative discourses become the 'common sense' of feminine conducts that are grounded in the Thai state's ideologies, which are enacted and perpetuated through institutions, schools, families, and mainstream media.



Figure 17: Gam (left) and Mook (right) post a couple picture on their IG profiles to show their (sexual) relationship.

Figure 17 shows two of the MC participants using social media to display their sexual relationship, a practice which challenges the 'common sense' of feminine conduct. To explain this, Gam and Mook showed their couple picture, tagged each other on this picture and posted it on each other's IG profiles. They also used a heart emoji (<3) as the caption to convey the feeling of love and/or the meaning of their (lesbian) relationship. When we interpret this picture through interactive metafunction, distance, contact, and point of view can be modes of communication that can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). In everyday interaction,



the norms of social relations determine the 'distance' we keep from each other (ibid). This translates into the 'size of frame' of shots: to see people together in a close-up picture is to see them in the way we are normally more intimately acquainted. In contrast, when we see people with whom we are less intimately acquainted, this refers to the 'distance' of the relationship. There are many intermediate degrees between a close-up and distance in everyday life, and many intermediate degrees between the most intimate relations and the total absence of a relation (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). Figure 17 uses a medium shot – cutting off the human figure somewhere between the waist and the knees. This suggests a social relationship which is not as far as intimate/personal relationships or an impersonal relationship. In terms of the 'contact', Figure 17 has no eye-contact to the viewers since both Gam (left) and Mook (right) do not look directly at the camera. In other words, there is no symbolic 'demand' of something to the viewers since they appear to have limited contact from inside the picture frame. This may be because they just wanted to show their hidden (lesbian) relationship through the social media post. Furthermore, their facial expression, gaze, and gestures in the image emphasise how they convey their hidden (lesbian) relationship. For example, their gaze is not of the one looking down on the viewers or even looking up at them, but the couple rather look at the phone's camera to take a selfie of themselves through the mirror. Also, they display their lesbian relationship to the viewers without an ingratiating smile; they rather choose to express this through the penetrating stare on the camera's lens

without making any contact and demand to the viewers. Overall, the image is an expression of their (mysterious) sexual relationship.

In terms of 'point of view', they communicate their sexual relationship through the 'eye-level' vertical angle in the image, which means the equality in symbolic power. Both Gam and Mook indicated in the focus group study that their parents knew about their relationship and felt unsatisfied with it; however, they continued with their lesbian relationship and made it public in the online space since they wanted to support gender diversity and equality. Gam said that:

Even my parents don't like the fact that I am in a lesbian relationship with my partner, I still do it because this is my life. I have the rights to decide what my preference is and what I can do.

Mook emphasised this idea that, "I rather make my lesbian relationship known online instead of the offline space since I don't want to fight with my parents". When Gam and Mook talked about these ideas, other participants (Mapang, View, and Bell) in the group seemed to agree. They pointed out that social media could offer them more spaces to talk about and express gender diversity, equality, and autonomy, because these topics are rarely raised and discussed in the offline-adult culture as a result of the restraints prescribed by the 'common sense' notion of feminine conducts in Thai state's ideologies. Returning to Figure 17, the eye-level projection in the vertical dimension can represent the meaning of symbolic

equality, which is in line with the issues of what they discussed through the spoken utterances in the focus group such as the issues of gender rights, diversity, equality, and autonomy.

Hence, based on what they said in the focus group and what they posted on social media (as in the case of Figure 17), the overall evidence suggests that even though they were still oppressed from expressing their gender identity by parents and family members who adopt the key ideologies of the Thai state, they took the opportunity to challenge the 'common sense' of feminine conducts through social media posts. This lends further support to the argument from the previous section that the MC participants are the most active users mobilising gender diversity, equality, and autonomy; at the same time, they are attempting to resist women discourses and traditional norms of gender in Thai society.

As discussed previously, the virtue, submissiveness, the need to marry men, and monogamous qualities are the 'common senses' of feminine conduct derived from the Thai state's ideologies (Thaweessit, 2004). How are gender roles and stereotypes in women such as motherhood, wifeness, and daughterhood or girlhood (re) produced through the state's ideologies? This can be further understood by Gramscian cultural hegemony (1971). Gramsci considers that the state and ruling capitalist class – called "the bourgeoisie", the term which is also used in Marxist theory – use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies (1971). This bourgeoisie's power maintenance produces social

constructions in society such as gender norms and values, which are produced and developed by the 'ideology' rather than by violence or command in hegemonic culture (Gramsci, 1971). In this view, traditional public discourses on women and other values in femininity are constructed through the state's ideology before becoming the common senses in Thai mainstream culture. Thus, it is argued that hegemonic culture generates its values and norms so that they become 'common sense' in gender norms (Gramsci, 1971).

In conclusion, I argue that the MC participants employ social media to challenge the common senses of (traditional) feminine discourses, which are normally derived from the state's ideology. They use these alternative sites via multimodal texts such as still pictures posted on IG profiles (as in the case of Figure 17), moving images on IG stories (as in the case of Figure 12), and other multimodal aspects on social media such as written captions, emoticons, and tagging of friends' profiles. Social media, in my interpretation, is therefore a multimodal space for the MC participants to negotiate their gender identity and sexual autonomy, since they can communicate the meanings of equality symbol, diversity, and self-independence through their posted pictures and other texts online. As discussed in the case of Gam and Mook in Figure 17, it can be understood that their selfie picture reveals their lesbian relationship to be in line with what they said in the interview that they came out as lesbians – even their parents disagreed with this. This underlines their decision to come out and reveal their relationship through a social media site rather than an offline site. The overall

multimodal texts in online interaction reinforce the theme of the MC participants' sexual autonomy, diversity, as well as multiple gender identities without the boundary imposed by the parents' (adult) culture.

Thereby, I am led to view social media as a metaphor: a city where parents, adults, teachers, or relatives are included and excluded. And this city is where children can find their tactics to express their sexual desires and autonomy through their manageable profiles. This metaphorical city of social media can be discussed by de Certeau's *Walking in the City* (2010). The "city" refers to institutions and structures of power in the country which are "producers" of cultural practices and social norms (de Certeau, 2010). In other words, the institutions (or producers) employ power by using "strategies" to establish such practices and norms in society. However, "walkers" at the street level – as a metaphor for the young generation – are never fully determined by the plans of the institution because they can "tactically" produce their shortcut ways to walk (de Certeau, 2010). Employing de Certeau's boundary concept, social media boundaries can be seen as the city that consists of the presence of mainstream cultural practices set by parents or adults. For example, young Thai women need to be neat, well-mannered, and modest without any vulgarity in content posted online since Thai parents see their children as victims of harmful social media usage. Nevertheless, this city can provide alternative spaces for young women to play in and express their intrinsic selves and identities. The underlying implication here is that even though social media is considered the 'city' where girls are directed by their

parents, teachers, or relatives, they can still 'tactically' manage their social media and express their gender without having to be fully constrained by the expectations of their parents and the adult culture. They are taking shortcuts despite the strategic grid of the streets in the controlled city (de Certeau, 2010). These generated tactics by young women can be seen as the negotiation and/or challenge to mainstream culture since they can express their diverse gender identities and alternative characters, from girly, lesbian, boyish, tomboy, to other LGBTQ+, which can leave them some room for ambiguity. Hence, I draw a conclusion of this theme by asserting that the MC participants use social media to exert a level of agency to struggle for sexual autonomy and diversity in order to challenge the common senses of feminine discourses grounded in the Thai state's ideologies.

**Theme 3: *'Rak nuan sa nguan tua'* (to maintain virginity) and *'ka la the sa'* (contextual sensitivity) discourses contested by social media post**

Do women discourses in Thailand still oppress gender performance in young women? How do they resist these? Which are the dominant discourses perceived as salient factors shaping gender performance in young women? In other words, are there any specific discourses perceived as fundamental devices in gender matters? These concrete questions will be used to draw the discussion of how the MC participants use their social media accounts to communicate and contest those dominant discourses of women – to reinforce the theme of the MC's argument in the study.

In Thailand, there are many feminine discourses: *'rak nuan sa nguan tua'* (to maintain virginity), *'ka la the sa'* (contextual sensitivity), *'kul la sa tree thai'* (Thai feminine qualities such as submissiveness and courtesy), *'ching suk kon ham'* (to preserve chastity until marriage), *'ying klong ruen'* (wifedom and motherhood such as women as housewife, women in the kitchen, and women's responsibility to take care of their children), and *'chai chang tao na ying chang tao lang'* (men are considered leaders, while women are followers or compliant members in the family). Since the existence of Thai traditional aristocracy and historical tradition, these women discourses have been viewed as salient factors that shape gender performance in young women (Cook and Jackson, 1999; Klausner, 2000). Thai

scholars such as Boonmongkon et al (2013), Songsamphan (2008), and Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo (2020) suggest that traditional feminine discourses put pressure on young women to accord with cultural dichotomy, where they are categorised as good (*kon-dee*) or bad (*kon-chua*).

From these, I asked some of the MC participants about how they perceived those women discourses in Thai society, and which are the most influential discourses to them? Mapang, View, and Bell, members in the focus group study, shared similar thoughts that:

I think we have been discussing women discourses for a very long time. I don't know where it came from, but I just remember that my parents, teachers, and my surrounding have always repeated it since I was young until now. – said Mapang.

I also don't know where it came from, but I guess it might originate from the way we talk in our society and we repeat it all the time in the school, the family, the media, and the surrounding environment. – said View.

I think education is the foundation of this issue. We learn something from what we read in books and what teachers say in class. I have heard many times about *rak nuan sa nguan tua*, *ka la the sa*, and *kul la sa tree thai* in



Thai textbooks and subjects in class, such as Thai history and social subjects. So, I don't think they will be gone from Thai society. – said Bell.

Following these pieces of evidence, I carried forward by asking the question about which specific discourses they thought are the most underlying ones shaping their gender performance. Their answers revealed two feminine discourses that are the most impactful for them: 1) '*rak nuan san guan tua*' (maintaining virginity), and 2) '*ka la the sa*' (contextual sensitivity). As Bell said in the focus group: "I think the most powerful discourse on women is *rak nuan san guan tua* because this covers everything that girls need to do such as having no relationships with men, maintaining their virginity, and/or preserving their chastity until marriage". Similarly, Top also agreed with Bell's expression, as shown by "I think *rak nuan san guan tua* is the most long-standing tradition. Because of its existence for a long time, I think that it is the most underlying one shaping our expression of gender". Their comments suggest that *rak nuan san guan tua* (to maintain virginity) is the most fundamental device that exerts influence over gender performance since it covers the things young girls need to do or not do – as indicated by the examples that Bell gave, that girls should have no relationships with men and should maintain their virginity until marriage.

At the same time, Natty said in the interview that: "*ka la the sa* is something my parents talk about a lot, and I think has a big impact. This is because it shapes us to perform everything according to the appropriateness as dictated by the

sensitivity of time and place in society”. Puifai gave an example that “if we want to dress whatever we like, but that situation is not appropriate for us to do so, we need to change our dress. Because of this, I think it prohibits us from doing what we want to do, and I think Thai society is too sensitive about dressing, expression and manners”. Bell explained further that, “some Thai virtues and cultural principles are such non-sense. For instance, why do we need to tie our hair back (or put our hair up) when we attend graduation ceremonies? Why do we need to change our hair colour to the original black colour when we are at school? Or why should we wear a skirt below the knee to enter the exam room? These show that adults are so sensitive about our dresses, bodies, and manners. I’m sure that adult people will say ‘this is because we have the *‘ka la the sa’* value in our society” **[spoken sarcastically]**.

The evidence obtained from the interview demonstrated to me that almost all of the MC participants shared the same view that *ka la the sa* (contextual sensitivity) is another major underlying discourse impacting how they dress, speak and act. For example, the extract from Natty’s interview, “*ka la the sa* is something...makes a big impact... it shapes us to perform everything according to the appropriateness as dictated by the sensitivity of time and place in society”, carries the implication of the contextual sensitivity concept in Thai conventional norms (Boonmongkon et al, 2013; Songsamphan, 2008). This is in line with Puifai’s remark that Thai society is too sensitive about people’s dresses,

expressions, and manners with reference to the sensitivity of time and place concept.

Crucially, when analysing their overall spoken utterance during the interview, I observed that the language they were using was relatively rhetorical. It is a kind of academic expression that is more sophisticated than the expression of the LC participants, whose language was rather simple and straightforward. For instance, Top said that, "I think *rak nuan san guan tua* is the most long-standing tradition. Because of its existence for a long time, I think that it is the most underlying one shaping our expression of gender". To me as a researcher, the language that the MC participants used in the interview and focus group reflects their ability to exhibit abstract thinking and express their understanding of society in a quite abstract way. This can be linked to their class background as the middle class in Thai society. Due to their academic achievements and a comparatively high socioeconomic status of their parents, they may be more comfortable with that kind of language because it is the kind of language that their parents use as teachers, academicians or those who have senior roles in industry-leading companies. Hence, speaking with that kind of language reflects their native dialect in a way that is determined by their sociocultural background, whereas the LC participants are less comfortable, confident, and more tentative even if some of them might be high academic achievers.

In the meantime, what Natty said, “it makes a big impact...it shapes us to perform everything according to the appropriateness as dictated by the sensitivity of time and place in society”, shows the relation of the active agent and the passive recipient. It can be inferred that she represents herself as lacking the agency or being the passive recipient of the conventional norms in society. It is suggested that the discursive forces by the active agency are shaping us to perform normative identities; thus, there is a kind of social power struggle going on when Natty represents herself as a victim or as being oppressed.

Furthermore, as they are the marker of the discourse, the language used by the MC participants sounds like a set of rhetorical questions. Many spoken utterances used by them signal that they tried to question society. They also seemed thankful to me for the opportunities to be able to express their opinions and articulate them as freely as they could. For example, Bell said, “why do we need to tie our hair back when we attend graduation ceremonies? Why do we need to change our hair colour to the original black colour when we are at school? Or why should we wear a skirt below the knee to enter the exam room?”. These interrogative expressions, such as “why do we need? why should we? suggest a form of rhetorical challenge to social norms: it is a kind of challenging expression that shows their emotional agitation caused by Thai society. However, it is also followed by phrases like “we need” or “we should”. These modal verbs are also examples of imperative expression. Therefore, there are two aspects of communication detected in their expressions. There is an imperative from the

forces of society, as seen in “we need to tie our hair back”, “we need to change our hair colour”, and “we should wear a skirt”. The modal auxiliary verbs of need and should are the social imperative showing that they are forced to do what society expects. Nevertheless, their use of language not only represents a kind of imperatives in society, but it also refers to the challenge by prefixing with the question, “why we need?”, “why we should?”. In short, the language they used in the interview and focus group data reflects a form of social imperatives that are forcing their performance of gender identity under normativity and simultaneously contains cues that convey challenging expression.

To triangulate the data, I will provide social media data from Bell to show how she contested these discourses through her posted picture.



Figure 18: Bell tags her boyfriend in the picture and posts it on her IG profile.

Through the compositional metafunction, framing, layout, placement, and other elements of relative salience of media texts can provide meaning potentials. In terms of 'framing', since the elements of the composition in Figure 18 represent a sense of belonging together, this produces the meaning of 'connection' between the elements in the picture, especially between the two participants (left and right). In other words, this kind of connection is achieved through similarities and rhymes of colour and form, through vectors that connect elements, and of course through the absence of frame lines or empty space between the elements (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). Figure 18 has no empty space between the two participants or other frontal objects in the picture; this means they rather connect together without boundaries. The similarities of colour – that is white to soft blue tone – are connecting the elements in the picture, ranging from the colour of shirts, the sky, to the river. Overall, it can be said that the mood and tone of colours and other forms of frame lines in Figure 18 are smooth, which allows for the connection of the elements. The term 'salience' is used by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to indicate that some elements can be made more eye-catching than others. This can be achieved in many different ways, through size or through colour contrasts. The two main participants (Bell and her boyfriend) are the most salient objects in the picture owing to their location in the centre while wearing salient white shirts and having no empty space or contrasts of colour that disconnect them in the

picture. These elements make them stand out from their surroundings. Furthermore, we can interpret a similar pattern of couple pictures from another social media post of Bell on her IG profile (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Bell posts (again) her couple picture with her boyfriend to show their sexual relationship on her IG profile.

When we interpret the participants through the interactive metafunction, their gaze, gesture, facial expression, and body movement in Figure 19 offer some sexual meanings. For example, through the frame size, Figure 19 uses a shot between a close-up and a medium shot, which appears to convey the intimate relationships between them. However, Bell is not staring directly at the viewers, while her boyfriend who is on the left gazes at the camera. This brings the boy in

more 'contact' to the viewers and can show more 'demand' compared with Bell's expression. In other words, the boy's stare at the camera with the confident smiling and the girl's gaze at the other direction to conceal her feelings render Bell a less demanding person with less eye contact with the viewers, meaning that she chooses to keep more distance in relation to her boyfriend. Plus, through Bell's facial expression and acting, she pushes out her lower lip (like kissing lips) in order to look sexually attractive and her face also inclines closely towards her boyfriend. Overall, Bell's expression through her gaze, facial expression, and movement in Figure 19 can reinforce the ways she expresses her (sexual) intimate relationship.

When we look at the interview data, Bell is the person who spoke explicitly about discourses of women in Thailand. For example, "*rak nuan san guan tua* covers everything that girls need to do such as having no relationships with men...and maintaining their chastity until marriage". This comment shows that Bell disagrees with such a traditional discourse and decides to challenge this through her actual action on social media, that is to show her relationship with her boyfriend online. This consideration is in line with Boonmongkon et al's study (2013), who argue that young Thai women can display their bodies and express their gender and sexual relationships with more freedom through the use of social media. Young women users can tactically create their profiles to post socially desirable images and to exert the level of agency in expressing their gender and sexual relationships (Boonmongkon et al., 2013).



Importantly, Bell was aware of the '*ka la the sa*' value in Thai society – she said that “adults are so sensitive about our dress, bodies, and manners. I’m sure that adult people will say ‘this is because we have the '*ka la the sa*' value in our society” **[spoken sarcastically]**. She contested this idea by not following it. Her action on social media is opposite to such a discourse, as evident in the way she dressed as she wanted, showed her romantic relationship with her boyfriend, wrote captions, used emoji, and tagged her boyfriend in a picture and posted it on the IG profile.

To sum up, the evidence obtained here suggests that the MC participants challenge Thai feminine discourses, particularly '*rak nuan sa nguan tua*' (to maintain virginity) and '*ka la the sa*' (contextual sensitivity), through their social media activities. When compared to other groups, the MC participants are the social group who display the most diverse gender identity and sexual autonomy. This again leads to my presentation of and emphasis on the argument that the MC participants manipulate social media platforms as alternative spaces for performing non-binary gender with diversity and for mobilising sexual autonomy in Thai culture. However, as I consistently assert, to understand girls' sexual negotiations in both online and offline contexts, we need to analyse them in a more nuanced light. While their use of social media in negotiating gender identity seems to confer resistance to public discourses in Thai dominant culture, the ways that they perform their gender are also suggested as a route to pleasurability

and playfulness. Although it is considered that girl's empowerment in post-feminism is the false impression (McRobbie, 2009), I still argue that girls in contemporary feminism can add pleasurable and playful dimensions to their performance of gender identity. Hence, despite the ambiguity surrounding how the MC participants perform their diverse genders and mobilise their sexual autonomy in online sites, what their practices have revealed is the act of resisting dominant culture by exercising power through their play with costumes, make-ups, and characters in the cosplay activity.

## Conclusion

According to the theme '**middle class, diversity in gender performance, and sexual autonomy**', I argue that gender performance and sexual autonomy are at their most diverse and most pronounced in the MC participants. For instance, there were cases of non-binary cosplays which are viewed as pleasurable resistance to hetero-normative discourses, such as in the cases of Natty (Figure 12), June (Figure 13 and 14), Puifai (Figure 15), and Perth (Figure 16). At the same time, social media posts were used to challenge the common sense of feminine discourses – like in the case of Gam and Mook's lesbian relationship picture (Figure 17), which represents a form of subversion of heterosexuality in Thailand. Lastly, there was the case of Bell (Figures 18 and 19) who seemed to contest Thai traditional feminine discourses, namely '*rak nuan sa nguan tua*' (remaining virginity) and '*ka la the sa*' (contextual sensitivity), by showing her romantic relationship on her IG posts.

The above-mentioned evidence lends support to the argument that the MC participants tactically deploy multimodal texts, such as profile pictures and still/moving pictures, to express their diversity of gender and to convey their (sexual) meanings. The ways in which they communicated their gender identities on social media are distinct from the ways they communicate in a face-to-face setting. This is because online sites can offer more alternative, flexible, or multiple spaces to perform gender diversity through various characters and identities. The

discussion is enriched by previous Thai scholar's findings. Boonmongkon et al. (2013) argue that even though the traditional discourse on women's chastity still influences women's gender performance, they can tactically create desirable images in terms of gender identity and can exert their autonomy in expressing their sexuality with more freedom on the manageable platforms. Similarly, the finding from Songsamphan's study (2008) also indicates that even if young Thai women still cannot escape the influences of conservative discourses in offline interaction, they have more opportunities to express themselves independently in gender respects through the use of social media.

To build on these previous scholars' findings, I emphasise social media's function as the city applied by de Certeau's framework (2010). I describe social media as a city in a country, a metaphor by which the Thai state or institutions strategically produce norms, values, and discourses in society. Specifically, social media still possess social norms and dominant cultures in Thai society due to the existence of multiple impacted audiences in the online space such as parents, teachers, relatives, school friends, close friends, strangers etc, all of whom play a part in reproducing and enforcing such norms. According to Marwick and Boyd, social media collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques online that they do to handle multiplicity in face-to-face conversation (2011). As a result, many young users need to struggle against their "imagined audiences" on each social media platform. Due to having different types of followers/friends on each platform, they have their techniques

of audience management, including targeting strategies for different audiences, concealing subjects, and maintaining authenticity in the presentation of their selves and identities (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Thus, I argue that social media (as a metaphorical city) is a place where young users need to struggle for their self-presentation due to the context collapse and multiple audiences as discussed. However, an interesting observation here is the MC participants could employ their own tactics through posting, sharing, linking, tagging, and hiding on social media in order to express their alternative identities. Specifically, although the city has a map that leads people in the country to perform everyday life activities, the walkers (young Thai participants) can create their shortcut routes to walk on, which are never fully determined by the plans of the state and institutions (de Certeau, 2010). In short, social media is imagined as a bounded city consisting of many discourses and norms strategically (re)produced by adults such as parents, family members, and teachers; young people as tactical walkers can have their own space to play with their gender identities and deal with sexual autonomy. Thereby, the use of social media by the MC participants is deemed to be a challenge to mainstream discourses in Thai dominant culture. The following is an example extract that demonstrates how the MC participants usually posted pictures to show their alternative identities and sexual relationships and preferences – a rare event in the offline context.

*I post many pictures about my everyday-life activities with my lesbian partner, and I also tag her in the profile. Even though some of my offline*

*friends (school friends) might not know about my relationship and my sexual preference, my online friends which are closer to me than my school friends seem to know and accept this. I think it is not wrong to post content related to our sexual activity or any other contents related to our preference because I am sure that my online friends definitely agree with this. However, I'm not sure if this can possibly happen in the offline context because we have so many sensitivities of time and place in the adult culture – spoke Mook.*

In conclusion, the above interview response substantiates the claim that the MC participants use social media to post their everyday-life activities including gender identities with diversity and sexual preferences and relationships, even though traditional forms of feminine conducts and sensitivities of the adult culture still exist in Thai society. To pursue the research question '**how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?**', I argue that social media offer alternative and/or flexible spaces in the process of adapting and resisting traditional public discourses regarding feminine values. To be precise, the MC participants use these alternative spaces for their everyday gender negotiation and everyday pleasurable resistance to Thai dominant culture. They use such online sites to deal with their sexual struggles, especially the oppression of feminine discourses such as the concept of 'good' and 'bad' women as well as the notion of the 'dutiful' daughter, which is highly valued in Thai families. Consequently, social media is considered a valuable

space for them to deal with such struggles in order to achieve sexual autonomy. Altogether, both the LC and MC participants are groups that resist mainstream discourses and common senses of femininity in Thai hegemonic culture, although the MC group's resistance is more confident and assertive. As I discussed in the theory chapter, the LC group is defined as corresponding to Marx's proletariat, and typically by default, they are resisting Thai dominant culture, while the MC group appears more like Marx's bourgeoisie who conform to such mainstream culture. However, it is the youths who are resisting, not their parents. According to Birmingham's school of cultural studies, the "youth" as a kind of class fragment resist the conventions of their parent group (Hall, 1993). Thus, similar to the LC group, the MC participants try to manage their social media profiles to subvert gender normativity in Thai hegemonic culture even though their parents are the bourgeoisie, the ruling class who own the power to enact the norms in society.

When discussed that youth is as another class fragment as Hall and Jefferson argued, I maintain that youth is the third structure that works crossing with social class and gender. To explain this, Crenshaw (1989) suggests that the oppression is intersecting with many layers of different forms of oppression, including many aspects of social identities such as race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, and religion. Importantly, even though MC participants are defined as Marx's bourgeoisie – it is their parents who comply their social values, not the youth class – as Hall and Jefferson argued. From this, I observe that class and gender connect each other – but youth is also a segment of society that plays a part in

the intersectionality. We can notice the evidence in this and previous chapter that both LC and MC resist parental norms and discourse through many concrete examples such as the cosplay activity, the *'Both'* role play activity, the specific hashtags used for flirting, the retweeting texts against Thai's ideology on Twitter

Accordingly, I suggest that the use of social media to negotiate gender identity between the LC and MC participants is similar: both groups use online sites to mount resistance against Thai hegemonic culture. This is due to the emergence of the newly middle class in urban social strata in Thailand. Funatsu and Kagoya (2003) propose that there is an emerging new urban middle class with a mixed social origin that is rooted in the urban lower class. The stereotype of the Thai middle class as a homogeneous elite class being at loggerheads with the lower strata is contradicted. In fact, the emerging middle class is seen as new rich social strata in Thailand who move up from the lower class. Thus, these two strata between the lower and middle classes are derived from a similar social background and socioeconomic status (SES). We can see that they have some ideas in common, especially sexual expectations, social norms, and gender values. Thereby, due to the overlap of these two social strata, I maintain that they are similar in terms of the social media use for the negotiation of their gender identity and resistance to hetero-normative discourses in Thai dominant culture. However, I argue that the MC group's resistance is more confident and assertive than that of the LC group. This can be explained by the finding from Funatsu and Kagoya (2003), who assert that the new emerging urban middle class in Thailand



possess more cultural and intellectual hegemony than they did in the past. They have managed to obtain higher education and secure industry-leading careers. These have enabled them to own more cultural hegemony, which has been successfully translated into political power in Thai society until now. Because of the increasing political power, improved education, and better opportunities in professional careers that they have acquired, they have become more confident in the resistance to Thai dominate culture than the LC group have.

Hence, I am firmly of the opinion that the LC and MC participants slightly differ in their use of social media to subvert conventional discourses; in particular, the LC participants seem to be more anonymous than the MC participants do. The LC participants would rather take tentative steps towards their resistance against traditional feminine discourses as we can notice from their furtive activities online, such as the *'Both'* activity and specific hashtags used in their Twitter community. They borrowed the original tweeted contents from other authors and most of the profile pictures used on their Twitter's accounts were anonymous like avatar profiles. There is no obvious evidence of the authors whom the LC participants borrowed their original tweeted contents from, since those authors also used avatar profiles. The LC participants still camouflaged themselves as they did not want to be identified online. This suggests that they were wearing a mask to hide themselves from others, but they would reveal their true identity to their social group only when they engaged with their subculture activities online. Also, the hidden agendas that the LC participants tried to express are involved with

domestic issues such as familial concerns, while the MC participants seemed to discuss more diverse and broader social issues in society such as topics about non-binary gender, fluid identity, LGBTQ+, and gender inequality. For example, Ploy, one of the LC participants said that *“this is because they don’t want me to have the same bad experience as my mother did when she was pregnant while studying in high school”*. This indicates that the oppressiveness in sexual matters is derived from the domestic setting in their LC’s family space. Thus, the constraints and oppressiveness in the LC’s sexual negotiations initially appeared in an offline environment (home setting). They then tactically challenged these through social media profiles which are rather anonymous. Meanwhile, the MC participants seemed to be more explicit than the LC girls did in their attempts to challenge Thai dominant culture, as seen from their spoken discourses and from the pictures posted on social media. These patterns of behaviour explicitly reflect unconventional practices of gender such as non-binary gender through the cosplay activity. Owing to the emerging new urban middle class, whose origin is in the urban lower class, there has been an overlap between the LC and MC groups in Thai social strata (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2003). We can see that to a certain degree, both the LC and MC participants share common experiences such as gender performances and the subversion of dominant discourses. In other words, both groups appear homogeneous in terms of resistance to public discourses and mainstream norms in femininity since they possess similar social backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses.

In short, my main argument is that the subversion of gender matters between the LC and MC groups is similar in pattern, as both socioeconomic groups are not far apart in terms of their social origin and background; nevertheless, the LC participants' expression was rather anonymous and strongly associated with domestic issues stemming from family-related conflicts, while the MC participants appeared to express themselves more explicitly and confidently, with the engagement in broader social issues as regards gender matters in society. As discussed in the self-reflexivity of the researcher in the Methodology chapter, I identify myself as a Thai middle-class woman who can implicate the process of data collection and analysis with each group of participants. Due to the nature of power imbalance, a potential recognition of my middle-class status by the LC participants could present an issue. Their awareness of my position (as the researcher) and educational background and social status could have a subconscious impact on the ways they said and what they said during the process of data collection and analysis. In other words, it might be a potential power imbalance that affected the LC participants, causing the lack of confidence to express their voices and attitudes in terms of gender in front of me as the researcher. On the other hand, being in the same class and similar background as I am in, the MC participants are considered here to be the most active agents in the contestation against the various oppressive norms of Thai society. I conclude this chapter by reiterating my argument that they are able to achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy through their diversity, alternative strategies, and dynamics of gender projected on and expressed through their use of social media.

## **Chapter 7: Social media as a space for the negotiation of social prestige by the upper class.**

As discussed in the previous chapters, the LC and the MC participants used social media as a site of resistance to conventional norms regarding gender in Thai dominant culture. They typically negotiated social media to defy and challenge traditional female values through many tactical ways such as creating subcultural activities online. In this UC chapter, I aimed to investigate whether the UC participants in this situation complied with the norms and values of their social group and of their parents? Or, similar to the LC and the MC participants, did they rebel against their social norms, parental discourses, and the Thai dominant culture?

According to Bourdieu, people with privileged backgrounds are generally considered the dominant group in society due to their high economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capital in society (1984). Specifically, in Thailand, they are viewed as those who work with symbols of high status, high professional occupations, high educational attainment, high income, and living in urban life, whereas the lower group has fewer prestigious occupations and less educational attainment as well as living in rural areas (Gullette, 2014). Significantly, it is argued that children's economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capital are partially determined by their parents (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu states that, while children have been conferred social capital by their families, they can also extend their

potential through education and other kinds of cultural assets, both tangible and intangible, such as abilities, skills, behaviours, and beliefs in any field. In short, it can be said that social capitals can be transferred from one generation to the next generation, and these capitals are considered “natural” assets that are accumulated over generations (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, Bourdieu’s framework can be applied to understand the case of UC Thai families. The central question is how UC parents’ cultural assets, such as education, manners, and tastes can entail a whole range of cultural behaviour for the UC participants, extending to non-academic features like gait, dress, or accent. These social capitals and cultural assets are linked to the ways the UC participants negotiate their gender identity both online and offline. Therefore, this chapter explores the question of whether or not the UC participants still accumulate such cultural assets from their parents. Or do they subvert these as the LC and MC groups did?

Even though Bourdieu’s framework applies to all classes in society, the high social capital as well as cultural resources possessed by the UC participants convey the notion that they might be the group who are typically concerned about these the most. It can be hypothesised that the UC participants may have explicit differences from the other two groups due to their dominant social status, position, social capital, and cultural resources that their parents have earned. They may be the group who adopts the position of social status and capital from their parents and still accumulate these through their display on social media. To briefly explain this, Bourdieu (1970) suggests the idea of cultural capital as a way to understand

how power in society circulates. While Marx believes that economic capital (money and assets) dictates your position in the social order, Bourdieu believes that cultural capital plays an important and subtle role in this positioning. Specifically, Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society”, what might be called “high culture” (1984). He considers that families pass on their cultural capital to their children by introducing them to dance and music, taking them to theatres, galleries, and historic sites, and talking about literature and art over the dinner table. This cultural capital concept of Bourdieu has a direct impact on the academic discourse about social class, which can help us understand the case of the UC participants using their social media to negotiate and/or accumulate their social prestige and cultural capital. In other words, how the UC participants negotiate their social prestige through social media may be a function of accumulating and/or maintaining their power in society. This accords with both Marx and Bourdieu's thinking, whose assertion is that the more capital you have the more powerful you are. In short, it can be hypothesised that social prestige and cultural capital are the key values that the UC participants desire to keep and negotiate to reinforce their status, authority, respect, and influence, not only in the offline setting but also in the online setting.

Here, the key theme is “**social media is as a space for the negotiation of social prestige by the upper class.**” In brief, social prestige is the relation to one's authority, respect, and influence on society. For instance, individuals want to be respected by others in the society we live in; in the same way, young people want

to influence their friends offline or online (Balleys and Coll, 2016). According to a behavioural development study, “social prestige stems from the human desire to gain respect within one’s social milieu and from the individual’s need for self-affirmation” (Marshall et al., 2005). In the twenty-first century, some scholars use the term “social prestige” instead of “social status” to represent an individual’s authority, respect, and influence in society; importantly, they assert that many young people want to express this kind of prestige (or capital) not only in the offline space but also in other alternative spaces such as online sites (Balleys and Coll, 2016). To sum up, in this chapter, I will pursue the questions of how the UC participants use social media to negotiate their social prestige and/or cultural capital and whether they resist or conform to their social group norms and values regarding gender? To do this, I suggest a close analysis of one participant, known under her pseudonym as ‘Mew’, with supportive evidence from other participants: Aily, Punch, Pam, Rainy, Jinny, Fang, Tammy, Pingpong, Tubtim, all of which are pseudonyms.

## **Theme 1: *Upper class, Privacy, and New Media Literacy***

The UC participants seem to be the social group concerned with their privacy and involved with many aspects of new media literacy such as networking and collaborating skills (Jenkins, 2009). How do they manage their social media privacy? How do they post any comments or information related to the gender matter? Is there any room for resistance in the UC participants? And, how can we explain the difference between the conformity group in the UC participants and the resistance of the LC and MC groups regarding gender online? These questions will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

### ***1.1 Upper class, the conformity and heterosexuality***

To provide a context of the UC participants by cross-referencing data, the UC participants are the group that appears less complex in terms of fluid-gender identity. They mostly perceive themselves as straight women (heterosexual), while other classes (LC and MC) show greater levels of diversity in terms of gender identity and performance. For example, according to the online ethnographic data, the LC participants have much involvement with same-sex orientation (lesbian) on Twitter as a form of cultural resistance by creating a subculture online. In the same way, the MC participants employ social media particularly on Instagram to perform their non-binary gender to explicitly exert their autonomy. For this reason, the LC and the MC participants have a tendency to advance the notion of gender diversity and autonomy in Thai society. By contrast,



the resistance to gender normativity in Thai dominant culture is not a feature found in the UC group. Rather, they follow patterns of gender conformity to the prevailing norms of parental discourse and adult culture by displaying a largely heterosexual affiliation.

As shown in the survey, the UC participants defined themselves as heterosexual (8 participants) and bisexual (2 participants). This numeric evidence demonstrates that the majority of the UC group complied with their parent's expectations as well as norms and values in Thai dominant culture. The other two participants were different from the main patterns in the UC group: they displayed their unconventional identities that contradicted those of the conformity group – I will discuss this in the last section. Overall, the UC participants seemed willing to conform to conventional female values and their gender performances were moderately in line with the social expectations in their social group. In contrast, the LC participants as the subordinate group felt uncomfortable with the parents' restrictions since they thought that it prevented the expression of their diverse gender identities; thus, they found alternative spaces – social media platforms – to rebel against these sexual restrictions by performing their non-normative and autonomous identities.

Based on the evidence from the focus group and the interview data, the UC participants said that they faced strict regulations of social media use in school,

where students were not allowed to use mobile phones during their study. Also, there was a limitation on social media use imposed by their parents. Furthermore, when I tried to access their social media profiles (to conduct online ethnography), I found that they strictly limited the access due to privacy concerns. This evidence implies that adult discourses – protecting young people against ‘bad’ media – influence and control how the UC participants use social media for their everyday gender negotiation. The fact that they limited the researcher’s access to their data showed that they were aware of privacy implications, which are connected to the aspect of new media literacy – I will discuss this in the next sub-section. It appeared that the UC participants were the group that operated under the strictest regimes in terms of social media use. For instance, they were subject to strict school regulation, parental surveillance, and privacy concern by themselves, whereas other classes of participants showed little adherence to these regulations both in the school and the family setting. One of the UC participants, Mew, stated in the interview that:

I don’t feel that using social media can help us express our attitudes, feelings, and desires in gender or sexual expression. This is because gender and sexuality can normally be expressed through the physical world with nothing to hide. It may be because I don’t have anything to hide; however, online spaces might be useful for someone who wants to express their secret information or negotiate something that their parents don’t like if they perform it at home.

A possible explanation for Mew's feeling that social media was a useless platform to negotiate gender identity is due to her heterosexual identity, which already conforms to normative values and practices in the Thai dominant culture. Her displayed identities actually comply to her social group norms and values, especially her parent's expectations as well as heterosexual norms in Thai society. Aily also revealed a similar thought that:

I think there is nothing to negotiate or hide our identity online: we can display it naturally in the offline context. Social media is just a space where I post my everyday activities in school. It contains nothing related to my gender. I only express myself as a female through my profile picture. Also, I have no boyfriend and nothing special to show in the online space.

Likewise, Punch provided a similar way of thinking in the interview:

I might have seen some of my friends use social media to share their sexual experiences such as stories when they are in a relationship with someone or even when they break up. Also, I have seen my friends alter their identities or personalities diversly in online space, for example they display their gay identities or post pictures of their gay relationship on their social media profiles which this might be difficult to happen in the offline context, especially with their parents at home, and also might be risky to display in school area. So, others might think using social media is useful

for them to alter or negotiate their gender identity, but I don't think so for myself since I have nothing to alter or hide my gender.

These spoken utterances revealed by the conformity group in the UC participants showed the collective pattern of disengagement from expressing or talking about gender issues on social media. They rather believed that the matter of gender can be expressed naturally in the offline context without hiding or using other tactics – for instance, Aily said, *“we can display it naturally in the offline context”* ... *“I have no boyfriend and nothing special to show in the online space”*, and Punch said, *“but I don't think so for myself since I have nothing to alter or hide my gender”*. Importantly, the spoken utterances from them suggest that sexuality terms are implicated in gender perception. It was noted that the perception of gender is involved with the aspect of sexuality – as Punch said, *“I have seen my friends alter their identities or personalities diversly in the online space. For example, they display their gay identities”*, and *“or post pictures of their gay relationship on their social media profiles”*. These excerpts suggest that gender is perceived as bodily appearances, personalities, and characteristics through dress, acting, and manners, while sexuality is known as inner expression such as thoughts, fantasies, desires, and relationships. I observe that these two terms are associated with and have implications on each other: when individuals express their gender identities, they also convey their sexual expression in some respects. To conclude, these pieces of spoken evidence suggest that the conformity group of the UC participants tended to view social media not as a place to negotiate

their gender since their displayed identities possess heterosexual and feminine qualities, which are already in line with gender normativity in Thai dominant culture. This is quite the reverse of how the LC and MC participants chose to display their unconventional identities and non-normative practices that contravene mainstream norms and culture – as discussed previously.

In short, it was observed that social media serves as an exhibition space for expressing social prestige and cultural capital rather than gender performance in the UC group. In particular, they used social media to show off their social and cultural capital in terms of educational and social prestige. They expressed their roles as dutiful daughters and successful students through their uses of social media. To explain this in detail, I will elaborate on how they used Facebook profiles as a space to maintain their social prestige in terms of ‘good’ daughters and ‘good’ students in the next heading. Thus, I will not only demonstrate how the UC participants used social media to negotiate their social prestige that was premised on family obligation educational values, but I will also show how they managed their privacy on social media and mobilised certain new media literacy skills when expressing their social prestige online.

## ***1.2 Upper Class and Privacy management***

As discussed previously, the UC participants used social media to negotiate and/or accumulate their social prestige in terms of family and educational values. This kind of negotiation can be viewed as the strategic management of social media privacy. At the same time, social media is a platform for the display of literacy levels in new media practices. Thus, it can be argued that the UC participants used social media to exhibit their social prestige by manipulating their knowledge of privacy management and new media literacy skills, the concept proposed by Jenkins (2009), and Burn and Durran (2007). I am going to start considering the nature of privacy management on social media, and then discuss new media literacy. The literature related to the nature of social media privacy supports the notion that young users manage their different audiences online due to the collapse of context on social media sites (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Also, the users can manipulate the privacy afforded by each social media platform in order to present their selves and their identities due to its affordances such as its networking, its features, and its technological functionality.

This view can be better understood by drawing on van Dijck (2013), who explores the performance of self on social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. He proposes the idea of “you have one identity” on Facebook, in that Facebook encourages the cohesiveness of “one” identity because Facebook embraces the increasingly public nature of its users, such as the archival narrative created

through sharing, and the collapse of audiences, practices, and identities on the site (van Dijck, 2013). He also believes that Facebook makes interactions more visible on the news feed while LinkedIn and Twitter are spaces to share more personal information in brief posts on a more regular basis. Thus, due to the culture of connectivity, the convergence of audiences, and the digital public nature on Facebook, teens have felt compelled to abandon Facebook, in favour of LinkedIn and Twitter, which can allow for expression of greater gender fluidity, divergent identities, and niche communities (van Dijck, 2013).

In the meantime, Vickery (2015) explores the Tumblr platform in non-dominant youth users – the working classes in Texas, US. It is suggested that these young users engage in more private practices on Tumblr. For instance, they are afforded anonymous, disconnected disclosure, and more private interactions. Importantly, Vickery (2015) highlights that Tumblr has similar privacy settings to Twitter. This lends support to the finding that the LC participants as the non-dominant group have similar practices to the working-class youth in the US in terms of usage of private social media. The LC participants use Twitter as a space for anonymous disclosure, identity negotiation, and the creation of niche and interest-driven communities, which echo Vickery's argument (2015) that the US working-class youth use Tumblr as their private space for their niche identities and communities. However, this differs from the case of the UC participants. While the LC participants use Twitter under anonymity to mobilise political gender issues such as gender right, autonomy, and diversity, the UC participants use anonymous

Twitter accounts to engage with the fan community online only rather than share their views on gender and political issues in society, as reflected by the limited number of comments related to criticism in the politics of gender and other discourses. This may be because it is too risky for them to speak out against these matters. It can be reliably assumed that the UC participants were not in the mode of resistance. Realizing the advantages of their class, they rather complied and followed the position of their parents. A better understanding can be achieved by applying Gramsci's class concept (1971). According to Gramsci, the dominant class possesses the power to enact the rules, norms, and 'common sense' through the ideology (1971). They are the group of people in society who typically take advantage of these enacted rules and norms, while the subordinate group is considered a disadvantaged group in society. There is no doubt that the LC participants or non-dominant group in society need to struggle against class oppression. This is a classical tension between structure and resistance that many theorists argue, from Marxist theorist (1859), to Bourdieu (1970), and Hall and Jefferson (2006). The theoretical frameworks of these scholars can help to explain why the UC participants typically do not critique or challenge what their parents have directed. Instead, they quite comply with what their parents have enacted since they are the group that sets rules and discourses and takes advantage of these in society. This is evident by the reluctance of the UC participants to mobilise and criticise matters in gender politics such as the idea of greater fluidity and diversity in society. In contrast, the LC and the MC participants dramatically mobilised and challenged these social politics on social media space.



Overall, the UC participants were rather more concerned with privacy on social media than other classes of participants were: they used Twitter for anonymous disclosure and anonymous identities, unlike their Facebook and Instagram profiles that are connected to their embodied public identities. The followings are the spoken utterances in the focus group setting indicating the UC participants' usage of Twitter as their anonymous platform out of privacy concerns.

The only place that I will not make contact with others is Twitter. I use this platform like a stranger – using an Avatar profile. I think it is because I view Twitter as my safe zone and I don't want anyone to know me there, so there is nothing in the profile that can identify me. – said Mew.

Similarly, Aily confirmed Mew's expression in the focus group that:

I use Twitter with an anonymous identity, I didn't follow anyone or accept followers, not even my school friends. I think it is important to have some space where we can keep our privacy. Also, it can protect ourselves from harmful things, like nowadays we have so many hackers and fake news.  
***[confident speaking with a clear and loud sound, without any interruption by others; other participants also nodded their faces in agreement with this idea]***

These spoken utterances by Mew and Aily demonstrated that they were concerned about their privacy on social media and they used Twitter as an anonymous platform. This can be reaffirmed by the interpretation of other non-verbal modes, such as facial expression, body movement, and tone and voice. They spoke about the notion of anonymity on Twitter with confidence and a clear voice without signs of disagreement from others in the room. For example, when one participant spoke about anonymity, Avatars, and privacy issues on Twitter, other participants agreed with this by nodding their heads ***[other participants nod their heads to give their assent to this idea]***. As discussed earlier, Twitter can allow users to participate as strangers, rather than as friends (Vickery, 2015). Thus, the UC participants used Twitter to keep their participation in different communities separated and disconnected; also, this platform allows them a greater sense of contextual privacy and control. In short, I suggest that the UC participants use Twitter chiefly to keep themselves anonymous: they do not use the platform for mobilising gender identity politics or expressing fluid identity due to privacy concerns. The supporting evidence will be provided in the next figure.

Through the online ethnography, a few numbers of the UC participants allowed me to access their Twitter profiles (only 4 out of 10 participants). I needed to return to ask them again for permission after the interviews were conducted for the first time. This restricted permission shows the strict consciousness of online privacy. Additionally, four participants who allowed me to access their profiles revealed relatively limited contents and limited posts related to their gender. Most of the

content shared on Twitter was related to the fan community of Korean pop artists. For example, they used images of Korean artists as their profile pictures, which represent the fan community culture online. Example Twitter profiles are as follows:

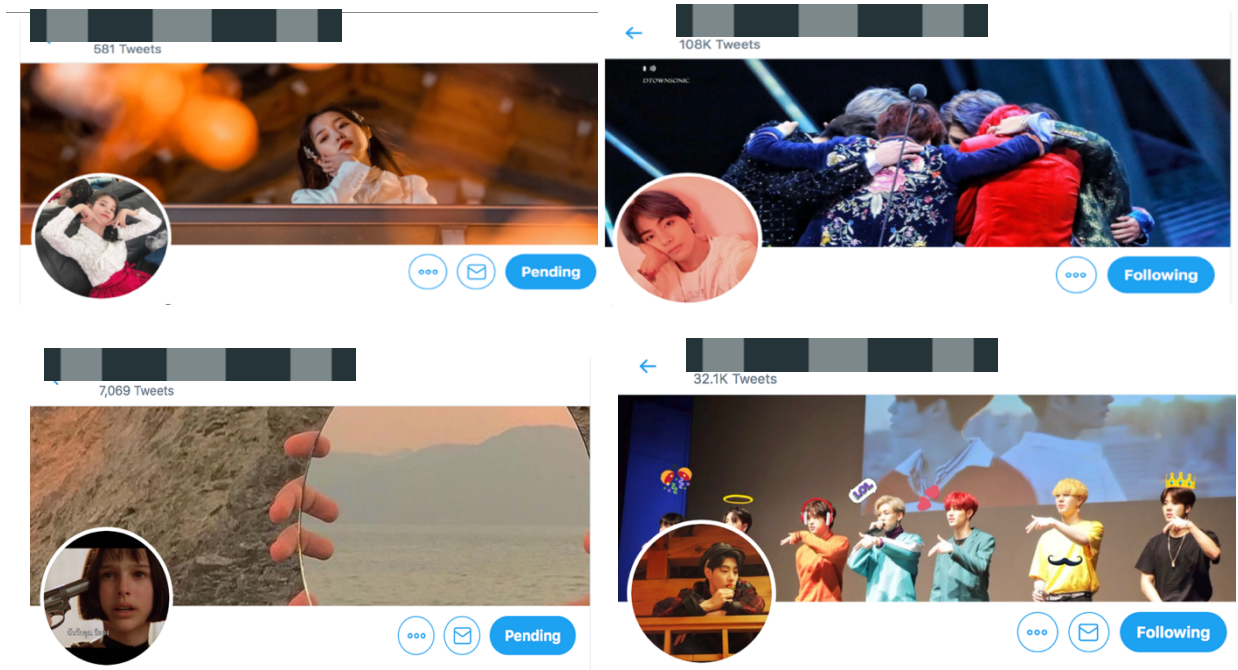


Figure 20: Twitter profiles by the conformity group show how they used Korean pop artists and other artists as their profile pictures to engage with their fan communities as usual; at the same time, they shared nothing related to their personal information; neither did they show their gender identity.

In the case of Figure 20, it can be seen that the UC participants might have some similar patterns with the LC participants when they expressed their gender

identities by using K-pop artist images as profile pictures owing to the fan community culture. Nevertheless, the difference is that the UC participants avoid using Twitter to retweet 'risky' and 'dangerous' contents, and there were hardly comments related to gender political issues shared through their profiles. Instead, they preferred to use Twitter as a space to engage with their fan communities online only in connection to the aspects of (new) media literacy, which I will discuss shortly.

By contrast, the LC participants used their Twitter accounts to criticise political social issues related to gender, such as gender inequality, rape, and sexual abstinence. For example, one of the LC participants retweeted that "*I do really hate the speech: as we are women, others will look at us badly*". This indicates that the LC group uses Twitter as the place for subverting public discourses, especially for criticising social and gender politics along with mobilising greater diversity and autonomy, whereas the UC group uses social media as a site to only engage with their fan communities and express their normative practices according to their parents' discourse. I thus argue that the UC participants use social media for keeping and accumulating their social prestige and cultural capital. Importantly, the overall impression was that the LC participants were more active at showing me, as a researcher, that they were unconventional and critical towards gender normativity, while the UC participants did not feel confident in sharing their positions on this with me.

Based on the findings above, I suggest that the relation of class difference and gender performance is about the classic struggle between the dominant and non-dominant groups in society. The “tactics/strategy” metaphor from de Certeau (1980) can be applied to better understand this. Thailand is a country that has complicated social hierarchy and class affiliations. An argument to be made is that girls with a privileged background are *strategically* deploying the resources of their social group in terms of education, gender, and power to realise the advantages of their class. At the same time, I propose that girls with an unprivileged background are *tactically* deploying resources to critique and oppose these dominant values.

The Birmingham Centre’s subculture and resistance study by Hall and Jefferson (2006) can be also applied to conceptualise this understanding. I argue that the LC participants, as the subordinate group in Thai society, respond to class oppression by operating resistance through their rituals – that are their subculture online. This kind of response is interpreted as symbolic resistance. For instance, the LC participants were more open to talk and critique risky and dangerous political gender issues on Twitter than the UC participants were. Plus, they tactically created their subculture in online sites, as in the case of the ‘*Both*’ role-playing activity on Twitter, representing resistance against gender normativity in contrast with the UC participants.

Gramsci's notions of cultural hegemony and ideology (1971) would be another theoretical framework to be applied to achieve a better understanding of this finding. Gramsci argues that the dominant class possesses the power to enact the rules, norms, and 'common sense' through the ideology of daily routines in people's practices (1971). Thus, mainstream discourses, gender normativity, and feminine values originate from the dominant class and have been adopted by the powerless class according to the cultural hegemony framework. Through Gramsci's argument, it is likely that it is needless for the UC participants to feel repressed with those normative values set by their parents or adult discourses since their parents are the dominant people who enact those 'common senses' through the ideology in hegemonic culture in Thai society. In other words, it can be said that the UC participants have been bestowed normative values and mainstream discourses by their parents, and these are perceived as the 'common sense' for practicing such activities habitually. Bourdieu's framework (1970) can be used to further explore this idea. He states that families pass on cultural capital to their children, and such cultural capital is considered a way of distributing power in society. Thus, cultural capital plays the role of positioning individuals in terms of class and status in society (Bourdieu, 1970). This statement suggests that the UC children adopt their position from their parents and accumulate their social prestige and cultural capital through social media display. The next section will show how they used Facebook to enhance their social prestige in terms of family and educational prestige. In short, I continue to advance the notion that the UC participants view normative values and mainstream discourse as 'common sense'

of practice, while deploying the cultural resources of their social group to realise the advantages of their class.

To demonstrate this in detail, there was evidence provided by Pam and Rainy, who alluded to common sense in gender. I asked Pam how she felt about sex education in school by the questions, “how do you think about sex education in Thai school? Does it help you to understand more about gender in broader issues or the other way around?”

I feel neutral with sex education in school. I do not extremely agree or disagree with it. I think that it is a common thing that people should know the best about themselves of how to behave gender-wise. So, teachers and lessons in school just serve to repeat what you should behave. – said Pam.

I think that Thai sex education is a little bit old school since it just repeats what and how we should manage ourselves in terms of gender. However, I am fine with this and I think there is nothing wrong with this. I feel that the matter of gender is what we already know when we are with family members since our parents always repeat this. – said Rainy.

In Pam's case, the excerpt expresses a ‘neutral’ position towards school as an institution and certainly indicates that she did not hold a critical position: she felt

so neutral with this, without agreeing or disagreeing with this. Similarly, Rainy's case also demonstrates that despite her thinking that sex education in Thai school was too traditional, she felt fine with this and thought that family was the foundation of gender-related matters instead. It can be reliably assumed that the reason of their expressions of a neutral position toward sex education in school was because they quite consented to this and viewed it as the 'common sense' feature of life that we usually follow and apply. For example, the excerpts from Pam's expression, "*people should know the best about themselves of how to behave gender-wise*" and "*teachers and lessons in school just serve to repeat what you should behave*", represents how she perceived gender performance as the common sense for everyone, and school was the place that reinforced those forms of behaviour, as most parents may agree.

Additionally, radically negative points of view toward sex education in school were a rarity among the UC participants, unlike the LC and MC participants who were against school teaching and culture. This can be explained by the status of school as the social and cultural institution where 'experts' produce the 'knowledge' or 'truth' through discourses – as argued by Foucault (1971). One of his main ideas is that state and/or social institutions construct norms and values becoming the 'truth' through the giving of 'knowledge' in society (Foucault, 1990). This argument is in line with Gramsci's cultural hegemony (1971), which states that the state and ruling capitalist classes, also known as the bourgeoisie, use cultural institutions to maintain power and set the norms in capitalist societies. Thus, the UC



participants are not only the social group that does not lose the advantage for these norm setting by their parents, but they are also a social class that agrees with the cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies as argued by Gramsci (1971). They thus feel the need to conform to these set norms – as habitual ‘common sense’ gender practices. Hence, the spoken evidence from the UC participants represents their thoughts that gender normativity is the ‘common sense’ positionality: young women should know how to perform gender properly to comply with the social context in Thailand.

To sum up, I propose that the conformity group of the UC participants view heteronormativity and conventional practices as the common sense to which they need to conform. However, their act of limiting the researcher’s access to their Twitter profiles reflected their significant privacy concerns that their Tweet activities may contravene gender normativity and they did not wish to reveal this to me, as a researcher. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand these observations with nuances and room for ambiguity. In this section, I attempt to show how the conformity group used their Twitter to engage with fan communities under privacy concerns. In other words, they negotiated their gender identity by expressing affiliations to K-pop fandoms by using images of artist boy bands as the profile pictures on Twitter. In the next section, I will show how they used Facebook as the main platform to display how they accumulate their social prestige and cultural capital in terms of family and educational values. Interestingly, they may try to have the best of both worlds – dutiful obedience to

parents and school and 'cool' allegiance to fan cultures. Lastly, I will provide a different pattern of social media practice to show the unconventional identities which contravene gender normativity in Thai dominant culture. In short, I maintain that the not only do the UC participants display themselves on social media profiles to perform their gender identities, but they also negotiate and accumulate their social prestige and culture capital, particularly in the form of family and educational values. Also, they used social media with significant privacy concerns – they prevented me from accessing their Twitter profiles. It is highly likely that this is linked to the aspects of new media literacy, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **1.3 (New) Media literacy**

The definition, concept, and framework of new media literacy will be applied to understand the extent to which the UC participants can be perceived as operating new literacy skills in their negotiations with social media and in the management of social prestige. This section places an emphasis on how the UC participants were competent and literate in some respects but lack these skills in some other areas. For a brief clarification, they may have practical skills and an understanding of privacy and danger issues. For example, they could manage their privacy setting, limit access, hide people, and have other strategic ways to negotiate their social and educational prestige online. However, they were less literate than the other groups in terms of critical, creative, dynamic, and playful skills. As these skills are considered the cornerstones of (new) media literacy (Jenkins, 2009; Burn and Durran, 2007; Cannon et al., 2018), the UC participants seemed lacking in terms of being able to mobilise critical social and political awareness.

The New Media Consortium (2005) defines twenty-first-century literacy as “the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms” (p. 8). Jenkins modifies this definition in two ways: firstly, textual literacy is still a central skill in the twenty-first century: before young students engage with the new participatory culture in online

sites, they should be able to read and write; secondly, new media literacies should be considered social skills (2009). This modified definition of new media literacies by Jenkins includes the traditional literacy that evolved with print culture and the newer forms of literacy within mass and digital media. In the meantime, new literacies include social skills through the emergence of participatory cultures (Jenkins, 2009). For example, blogs or websites pages offer young people opportunities to write, receive feedback, and gain experience in communicating with the larger public: when they write and read these online materials, they develop social skills through collaboration and networking. In short, new media literacies not only involve traditional skills, but also involve new social skills and cultural competencies.

This account suggests that new media literacies should be seen as social skills, as ways of interacting within a larger community, and not simply as an individualised skill to be used for personal expression (Jenkins, 2009). One obvious example of the case of young Thai women is their participation in fan communities. When young women participate in fan communities, they mobilise their social skills and cultural competencies (Jenkins, 2009). For instance, when they interact with members of the fan communities, they readily encounter people with different cultural backgrounds, sharing knowledge and working within a collective intelligence through social networks.

Due to cross-cultural differences in fan communities, they reconcile conflicting and complicated data to form a coherent picture of the world around them (ibid). Jenkins thus argues that fan communities through new participatory culture are related to new literacies: “they enable collaboration and knowledge-sharing with large-scale communities that may never personally interact” (2009, p. 21). The interpretation here is that new media literacy shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement, like the case of fan communities where young people engage in the digital environment through participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009).

As regards the literature review in terms of definition, concept, and framework of new literacy, I am of the opinion that, on the one hand, the UC participants were competent and literate in terms of networking skills in participatory culture; on the other hand, they were less literate than other groups of participants in terms of critical, creative, and playful skills as I critiqued at the beginning of the section. The following examples demonstrate how they engaged with the fandom and participatory culture on Twitter. They seemed to be engaging and collaborating with their fan community, which can in turn show the networking and social and cultural skills, but without the criticism from the angle of social and gender political issues in Thai dominant culture (Figures 21 and 22).



Figure 21: *“Please retweet this if you think that BTS (a Korean boy band artist) was accused of Fake news by other band’s fan groups. Now many journalists have shared this fake news and spread misunderstanding about BTS. No apologies have been made so far. I only see messages of mockery”* – Tweeted by Jinny.

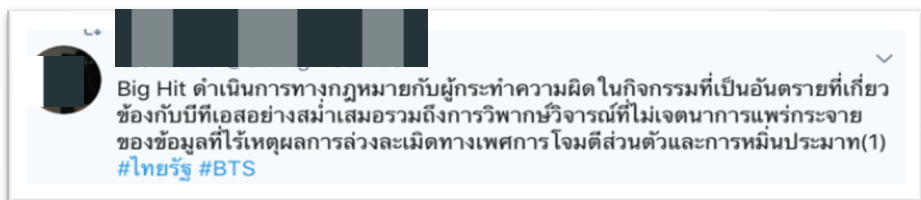


Figure 22: *“Big Hit consistently takes legal action against fake news of BTS including unfair criticisms, spread of misinformation, sexual harassment and slanders. #Thairat #BTS”* – Retweeted by Fang.

The tweeted and retweeted contents in Figures 21 and 22 were based on real events about fake news of BTS or Bangtan Boys, a seven-member South Korean boy band artist. According to 2019 international journalist reports, BTS was attacked by malicious posts and comments from internet users (Billboard, 2019). Not only did the malicious slanders become fake news and spread widely, but BTS was also attacked by sexual harassment and other personal attacks. In

detail, BBC News reported that BTS's record label sued for libel after a series of malicious posts: Big Hit Entertainment – a BTS agency company – took legal action against netizens who made malicious slanders, spread false rumors, as well as other harmful attacks (BBC, 2019). In a public statement, Big Hit explained that they routinely monitored social media and message boards for posts about the artists that contained ill-intentioned criticisms, the spreading of groundless information and personal attacks (BBC, 2019). Big Hit also established a hotline for fans to report offensive or defamatory content, as the company stated that “we ask that you make continued use of our hotline (protect@bighitcorp.com) to report any cases of abuse.” (The News International, 2020). Meanwhile, there have been many social media activists and reporters, such as The Report Army Twitter account, that helps BTS fans identify and report offensive content. The company stated that “we are always grateful for the affection and dedication shown by our fans to BTS. We will continue to work to ensure that the rights of our artists are fully protected” (The News International, 2020). This statement shows that BTS’s global fans enthusiastically support the protection of the K-pop boys by collecting information on malicious postings regarding BTS and reporting these to Big Hit, who can later report to the authorities and file criminal complaints. Likewise, the UC participants seriously work with their fan communities to fight for justice for their favourite boy band artist (BTS) by tweeting and retweeting content on their Twitter profiles.

When false rumors regarding BTS emerged, they heavily found the sources to catch up with the situation by reading news and following international reporters and journalists; they also discussed and shared the events with their international fan members. Given that BTS just successfully had massive world tours (Recording Academy, 2021), it is worth mentioning that BTS's fan members are worldwide, encompassing Asian and Western communities. As BTS's fans are universal, when fake news about BTS emerge, many global fan members can immediately share and retweet content to help and fight for justice for their boys. Likewise, the UC participants were among those fans who requested her followers to retweet the contents to share the information and fight for the issue together. In Figure 21, Jinny tweeted in her own words: *"Please retweet this if you think that BTS was accused of fake news by other band's fan groups. Now many journalists have shared this fake news and spread misunderstanding about BTS. No apologies have been made so far. I only see messages of mockery"*. In the same way, Fang also retweeted about BTS's progress of legal action (Figure 22) to update the fan community on this issue on Twitter. She retweeted that: *"Big Hit consistently takes legal action against fake news of BTS including unfair criticisms, spread of misinformation, sexual harassment and slanders. #Thairat #BTS"*.

These two pieces of evidence show how the UC participants collaborated with fan members on Twitter to fight for their favourite boy band, an action that constitutes the operation of new literacy skills. Since they robustly interact and participate



with international fan members who have different backgrounds, they are enabled to learn “new knowledge culture” (Jenkins, 2009). It is argued that participation with long-distance collaborations across different learning communities is the process of new literacy (ibid). In a detailed explanation, Jenkins (2009) describes the participatory culture of fan communities as new literacy skills of young people who believe that “they do collaboration and knowledge-sharing with large-scale communities that may never personally interact” (p. 21). When they interact and participate in the fan community, they readily encounter people with different cultural backgrounds, and they subsequently share knowledge and work within a collective intelligence through social networks. To apply this to the case of the UC participants, when they collaborated and gathered with global fan members of BTS to fight against netizens who made malicious slanders and spread false rumors, they were able to manage complicated data, to negotiate and communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds, and to reconcile conflicts that could potentially happen throughout the process. This fan participatory culture can enable young people to form a coherent picture of the world around them (Jenkins, 2009). Thus, by actively engaging in the global community of fans in the event of fake news about BTS, the UC participants were said to have adopted networking skills – one of the new features of new literacy suggested by Jenkins (2009).

Even though the UC participants were competent and literate in the respects of networking skills – as in the case of fan participatory culture – they seemed to

lack other social skills and cultural competencies. According to Burn and Durran, new media literacy implies cultural competence: it is about new kinds of cultural communicative practices (2007). It is something individuals use to claim membership of particular social groups – similar to the way Jenkins puts forward for the participatory culture in fan communities, with examples ranging from the Harry Potter fan club, and players of the online roleplaying game World of Warcraft (Burn and Durran, 2007). Also, Burn and Durran suggest the ‘3-Cs’ model, defining cultural, critical, and creative components as the three key features of the media literacy model which relates to social and cultural competencies. Similarly, Cannon et al., (2018) include the Cultural Studies paradigm, such as critical thinking in digital media practices, as a dimension of new media literacy. They expand the notion of literacy in the lived experience of digital culture into three themes: dynamic, playful, and productive themes as the new features of new literacy. For instance, how the LC participants produced media content, like textual hashtags *‘Re-Tweet-Fav’*, *‘Re-Tweet-DM’*, and *‘Re-Tweet-Follow’*, can be viewed as productive literacy.

The LC participants had the creativity to produce what they wanted to portray using a shortcut on the Twitter platform, thus they chose the hashtag feature as the creative way to do this. Likewise, how the MC participants played with their ‘cosplay’ activity on Instagram to perform their dynamic identities of gender indicates the level of productivity of new literacy. Not only did they play with costumes, make-up, and other props but they also engaged in with digital-making

practices, such as editing and framing the cosplay pictures and posting these on their social media profiles. Specifically, they had a critical perspective on how this kind of media text can help them to perform their desired images of selves and gender identities. Thus, it can be said that they engaged in critical thinking via the performance of their playful identities through digital media production. As Cannon et al., (2018) suggest, productive literacy is about the digital-making practices of young learners, I propose that both the LC and MC participants achieve such literacy through the production of those creative media texts, which are hashtag content, visually cosplay images, all of which are viewed as “media crafting, critique, and artistry”. Because new media literacy is highlighted as something cultural, critical, creative, dynamic, playful, and productive, these new dimensions of literacy cover skills related to social and cultural competencies. It seemed that the UC participants lacked some of these skills, especially playful, creative, and productive skills. While the LC participants engaged with the *‘Both’* activity on Twitter, and the MC participants also enjoyed their cosplay activity and the TikTok dances on Instagram, the UC participants seemed to avoid such playful and creative activities in the lived experience of digital culture. Importantly, when the LC and MC participants politically engaged in affairs related to gender politics, the UC participants withheld themselves from displaying these critical social and political dimensions. Specifically, the latter were less active in the cultural communicative practices related to gender and social politics, which focus on gender diversity, equality, fluidity whereas other groups of participants

dramatically engage with these, especially with the issue of sexual empowerment and girly feminism.

To support this argument, I will provide evidence from the focus group and interview data. Tammy, one of the UC participants, revealed her concern of her social images when she posted something on social media since it was spreadable and difficult to manage if it went viral.

My parents always teach me that any posts on social media can affect you in some ways. If others do not agree with what you have tweeted or posted, they might criticise you with negative words. Also, if you do share something personally, it will reflect on your images or reputation, which may impact you in the future. – said Tammy.

In the focus group setting, most of the UC participants largely agreed with Tammy's opinion.

Criticisms related to social and political issues are very risky. If someone is happy with your comments, that is fine. If they are not, you may get stressful. We need to be aware that we cannot make everyone agree with you, so it is all about individual judgements to believe or not believe in something. In my opinion, it is pointless to critique any matters of politics in Thai society – even I know that now the situation is so stressful. – said Fang.

These spoken utterances strengthen the argument that the UC participants willingly ignored social and political issues because they viewed these as something that could have harmful effects on their social images and/or reputation in the future. They were less inclined to believe that social movements in any matters such as social equality, gender diversity and fluidity could be accomplished on social media because it was about “*individual judgements to believe or not believe in something*” – Fang said. This demonstrates the opposite attitude that was adopted by the LC and MC participants, who were active agents in mobilising gender political issues on social media sites.

In the interview data, I found similar answers from Mew and Aily, who reinforced the concerns of social images, reputation, and benefits among the UC participants – this is an example of how they accumulated social prestige and capital as well as cultural resources in their social group.

I think that when we grow up as adults, social media posts can affect us in some ways, especially in the situation of job applications when we are first jobbers. My father told me that many companies nowadays monitor what you post online: they scan for posts that contain any negative points of view on any matters that might impact society or not. So, it is difficult to speak about social and political issues are difficult in the public space (and

social media are largely a public space to me) since we don't know who will dramatically agree or disagree with this. – said Mew.

For example, if we post something that is not in line with the attitude of an interviewer or a job trainer, or even your boss, this might lead to a terrible consequence. So, I think that adults keep an eye on us when we post something online. Also, I think it is useless to change someone's mind through tweets or online posts. For instance, if you believe that abortion is wrong and against Buddhism values, it might be hard for you to change your mind even though you see tweeted posts from someone who argues otherwise. – said Aily.

The spoken evidence supports the notion that the UC participants were concerned about their social images and benefits of work opportunities in the future, as negative comments might destroy their social prestige and cultural capital. Also, they seemed to obediently follow what their parents said, as shown in *“my father told me that many companies nowadays monitor what you post online”*, said Mew. Thus, the UC participants took this issue seriously and sought to protect themselves from negative comments and action that might spoil their reputation. It seemed that parental concerns of publicly online negative comments towards their children happen in all social groups, the LC, the MC, and the UC. I believe that social and political criticisms on the social media space of their children are the concerns felt by LC and MC parents as well. However, only the

UC participants expressed the highest level of concern on this issue and generally complied with what their parents said, while the other two groups showed some resistance to this. Overall, there could still be some room for the UC participants to contravene parental discourses and mainstream norms, but the level of this was less explicit than that of the LC group. This was due to the concern over social prestige that might affect their social benefits in the future. Crucially, it seemed that they were more likely involved with excessive anxiety than just a typical concern over their privacy and surveillance from parents. The heavy repetition of privacy concerns made it more likely that this was not just a cause of worry about the negative impacts of social media on their social life, but the UC participants were rather paranoid and anxious with their social images and reputation and the potential demise of their social and capital resources by online posts.

To sum up, the UC participants showed limited critical political engagement with social, cultural, and gender issues on their social media profiles, while the LC and MC participants expressed a real interest in social movements on social media by rebelling against social and cultural politics, particularly gender politics (i.e., sexual restriction and oppression). In terms of new media literacy, I argue that the UC participants were competent and literate in some respects. For instance, they developed their networking skills through collaborating and taking part in participatory culture of the fan communities. Also, they displayed sophistication in privacy management on social media to cultivate social and educational capital

very well. Nevertheless, in other areas of digital life, they were less literate than the other groups in terms of creative, critical, and playful features of new twenty-first-century literacy. For example, they seldom engaged in playful activities, critiqued any political issues, or scarcely produced creative media texts related to fancy gender identity in online sites.



**Theme 2: *Daughter obligations in UC families lead to the social display on Facebook.***

How do daughter obligations in UC families impact girl's social display on Facebook? Are there any strategic moves that the UC participants employ to negotiate this family value on social media? How do they use social media to cultivate their social and educational capital through the aspect of family obligations? These questions will be addressed by focusing on Facebook, which was the most frequently used social media platform by the UC participants. Based on the survey's outcome, Facebook was the main platform in which the UC participants engaged, which was explicitly different from the other two groups, who seldom used the site due to the presence of their parents on this platform. Since the UC parents were enthusiastically on Facebook, how do daughter obligations in UC family values impact on their children's social display on social media?

The term daughter obligations here refers to the notion of the need to be a dutiful daughter, which is highly valued in Thai family life, particularly in UC families. The latest study in Thailand argues that the quality of gratitude (i.e., being a dutiful/good daughter) is the most precious value in Thai families (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Similarly, Angeles and Sunanta (2009) suggest that family obligation is one of the influential norms in Thailand.

This is particularly true when female children need to satisfactorily fulfil their family obligations through many ways, but the very minimum obligation they must accomplish is to ease their parents' concerns over the daughter's well-being. In the Thai family's context, many parents pass on this prevailing norm as regards 'dutiful' quality to their children: thus, the norm of 'good' daughters continues to restrict young women's gender negotiation both in the online and offline contexts (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). A recent study suggests that the dutiful daughter concept includes the qualities of being submissive, docile, and teachable (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020), which are also associated with the concept of cultural dichotomy: 'good' (*kon-dee*) or 'bad' (*kon-chua*) women as previous scholars argued (Fongkeaw, 1995; Cook and Jackson; 1999). In order to investigate the implication of daughter's obligations in UC families, I start with one of the UC participants who talked about being a dutiful daughter when her parents became her online friends on Facebook.

On my Facebook's friend list, there are my mother, friends of my mother, my teachers, and my family members such as sister and relatives. They are all very active users, especially my mother! Because of these diverse audiences, I need to think more when posting something. – said Punch

This vocal evidence above is a reminder of the reviewed literature on the nature of "context collapse" of social media, which leads to the presence of multiple audiences in one site (Marwick and boyd, 2011). The main idea is that diverse-

multiple audiences on social media are difficult for users to manage their self-presentation on profiles. Due to the idea of collapsed context and diverse audiences online, the UC participants needed to be very careful when presenting themselves, as reflected by the excerpt from Punch: *“I need to think more when posting something”*. Even though having family members as friends on social media was the case in the other two groups of participants as well, there was a difference in terms of manipulation and strategy. To explain, the LC and MC participants decided to not use Facebook as the main platform to share their playful activities, secrets of their romantic (lesbian) relationships, and their sexual fantasies online, which are unconventional in the public discourses and gender normativity. Without the presence of family members, they opted for other platforms (Twitter and Instagram) to reveal their risky information and allow for more diversity, dynamics, and creativity. On Facebook, they might just keep their accounts intact, but have no updates on their profiles. In contrast, the UC participants seemed to continue using Facebook as the main platform and comply with their families’ values such as being obedient, teachable, and responsive. I will show example Facebook posts in the following section to how they used this site with the obligation to display conformity to the values of dutiful daughters and successful students.

Before showing that, the manipulation of diverse audiences on social media by the UC participants as discussed previously can be explained by *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by Goffman (1959). He states that

individuals operate techniques to control receivers' perceptions about their identity to manage the impression in social interaction. I would argue that social media platforms highly adhere to audience expectations, and these expectations potentially shape young women to perform and manage their desired identities, which need to be consistent with those audience expectations. As Punch revealed that her family members, teachers, and relatives were included in her Facebook friend list, it was normal for her to manage her desired identities in accordance with those audience expectations, which are to be I, dutiful, and teachable. Furthermore, the literature review contains controversies over the adoption of Goffman's front/backstage framework by many scholars. On the one hand, Facebook is considered to be a backstage related to the concept of privacy (Tufekci, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008). On the other hand, it is suggested that Facebook is a frontstage where users perform to their audience and present contents that can be viewed by all of them (Farquhar, 2009). I would debate that social media, especially Facebook can be viewed as both frontstage, where users can present their desired images of themselves through posting of different contents, participating in different activities, and backstage, where they can make contact and interact with their audiences online and retain their offline lives. Thus, in the case of the UC participants, they might be able to manage multiple faces on social media or be able to present their idealised selves on profiles by constructing different identities and creating purposeful specific audience zones to avoid any threat to their public image. Nevertheless, I argue that there is still a struggle of the link between online and offline interactions. The crux of the

argument is that although young women can manipulate multiple audiences to perform their desired images of identity in the online setting, they still cannot escape offline interaction and/or relationships in the online world. This is the reason why the UC participants were still concerned about their social prestige and images according to their social status and position derived from the parental generation.

Returning to Punch's expression, when I asked her again in the interview, she elaborated that even if there were no parents or teachers inside social media platforms, she would still refrain from posting anything risky pictures or unconventional contents. This implied that she had a higher level of awareness of possible risks of social media posting than the other participants. To avoid the diminishment of social and educational capital, she thus complied with what her parents said about the filial obligations of daughters in UC families. In the same way, another UC participant, Pam, expressed a similar thought in the interview that:

I think it is not beneficial to me and everybody to post contents linked to personal details. Even if my mom and dad were not there online, I would still not post anything since I think the posted content will impact on ourselves in some ways in the future, especially for work opportunities. – said Pam.

Although it was not a matter of risky and unconventional content, Pam's concerns over personal details shared on social media still indicated privacy concerns and the urge to preserve good public images as well as to secure future job prospects. Such a state of anxiety hardly happened in the other two groups of participants. It was relatively similar to what Mew and Aily said in the interview in the previous section: *"social media posts can affect us in some ways, especially in the situation of job applications when we are first jobbers"*, and *"if we post something that is not in line with the attitude of an interviewer or a job trainer, or even your boss, this might lead to a terrible consequence"*. As discussed previously, the emphatic repetition of privacy concerns and negative impacts of social media suggests not only their privacy concerns but also their senses of anxiety and paranoia. It appeared that they were not only excessively anxious, but they were also likely to imitate and/or echo their parent's discourse and culture. While the LC and MC participants viewed social media as a weapon or playground where they could enjoy themselves in any matter of social life, the UC participants seemed vice versa. They tended to echo their parents' discourse, which saw social media as a dangerous place. It can be speculated that their point of view on such dangerous media possibly arose from their parents' culture, not from their peers or even themselves. A reasonable assumption is that it is not the UC children but the adults who are more worried about this. Instead, they just paint a reflection of what their parents' discourse dictates due to the concern about social prestige and cultural capital. This can be further explained by Drotner's study on *Dangerous Media, Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity* (1999). It is

proposed that there are media panics owing to the appearance of new media, such as computer media (Drotner, 1999). It is argued that media panics are intrinsic and recurrent features of modernity and these represent a complex constellation of generational, cultural and existential power struggles that adults seek to negotiate and balance fundamental dilemmas of modernity (Drotner, 1999). Importantly, this argument is in line with the classical concept of moral panics, conceived by Stanley Cohen, who studied *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (2011). It is claimed that the discourses of violence, addiction, and danger of media such as video games and new technologies are the moral panics that adults have for their kids, whom they believe to be at risk from using these media.

Specifically, in Thailand, due to the “bad” social media discourse, if young women use social media to express their sexual interests or any related issues of social and sexual lives, they will be condemned by social institutions such as family and school (Songsamphan, 2008). The Thai state has continually tried to block access to some online spaces because of fears of sexual immorality (Chantong et al., 2009). Young women’s expression online is mostly controlled through the mass media and public policies which aim to criticise the negative consequences of such expression. Furthermore, there is the notion that men are trying to take advantage of women, rendering women victims in the online society (Chantong et al., 2009). In short, adults and parents believe that online spaces put their children at risk of being sexually violated, and they also believe that building sexual relationships in online spaces is not safe (Boonmongkon, et al., 2008). All

things considered, it is likely that the UC participants have adopted a form of adult discourse, that is the discourse of “bad” social media impacting negatively on the social life of young people (Chantong et al., 2009). They seemed to imitate the adult discourse, especially in relation to moral panics about the media. Therefore, I maintain that the UC participants’ view of social media was an echoing voice of their parents’. For example, Mew said, *“my father told me that many companies nowadays monitor what you post online: they scan for posts that contain any negative points of view on any matters that might impact society or not”*.

In short, the UC participants seemed to adopt not only their parents’ culture, but also their parents’ panics about the risks of social media: in their view, social media has a negative impact on their social life such as diminishing their public images and jeopardising work opportunities in the future. This provides a link to their social display on Facebook, which was regarded as a conformity to the values and norms of their social group’s and parents’ discourse. This might be also because they perceived the parental norms and family discourses as the ‘common senses’ to practise. Gramsci (1971) stated that dominant people who enact the rules and common sense through ideology want to accumulate their advantage, power, and cultural resources, they cultivate their social capital from one generation to the next generation; this certainly does not dwindle their cultural resources and capital. The UC participants have therefore received the social capital and status from their parents, and subsequently realised how to manage and accumulate their cultural capital and social prestige to maintain power and



cultural resources of their social group. Overall, the most reasonable interpretation is that the UC participants did not employ social media to show their defiance against the adult culture or parental norms, unlike the LC and MC girls, who challenged these both online and offline. Rather, the UC participants chose to adopt the position of their parents to continually cultivate their social and cultural capital on the social media space.

To show a more complete picture of this, the following image is a post that represents the value of daughter obligations in UC families (Figure 23).



Figure 23: Jinny was tagged in a picture (a cake with a birthday wish) on her Facebook profile. This picture was tagged by one of her mother's friends who also happened to be Jinny's friend on her Facebook.

In the case of Jinny's profile, Figure 23 is the picture tagged by one of her mother's friends. The tagged picture shows an image of a cake with a written caption that gives a blessing upon Jinny's birthday. How do this tagged picture and written caption represent meanings? Both the picture and the written text implicitly show the meaning of daughter obligations, which are a normative practice in Thai families. For example, the written caption in Figure 23 is: "HBD my dearest young girl. I wish you qualities of a good daughter to your father and mother as always".

These written comments are not only simple texts aimed at offering birthday wishes, but also messages that set the expectation of being good daughters in UC families. The adult and parents' expectation of their children represents normativity of family obligation that is highly valued in Thai UC families. To answer the question above: what are meanings represented in the tagged picture and written text? It symbolises the social value standards and practices regarding family discourse: parents expect their children to perform their selves according to the conventional practices in families. Similarly, there was another case of being a 'good' student and 'good' daughter on one of the Facebook profiles of one UC participant (Figure 24).

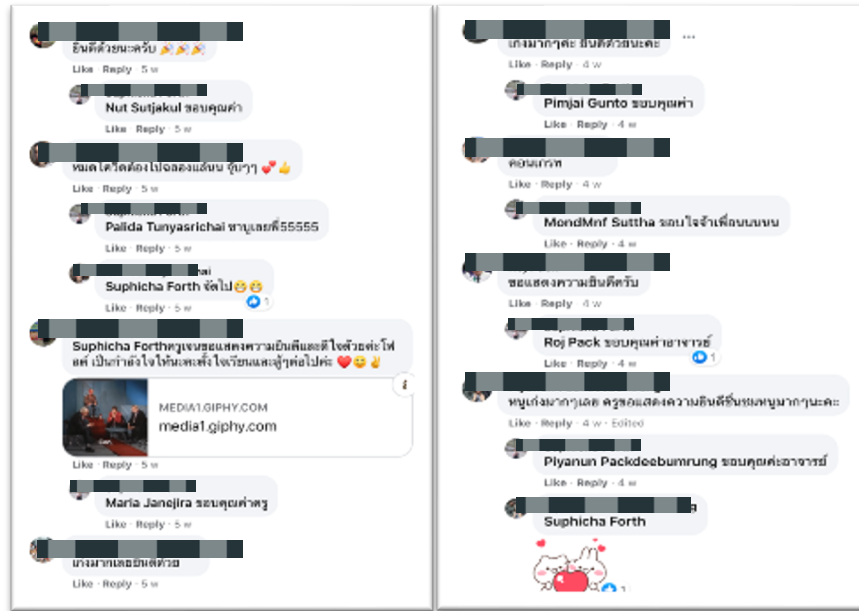


Figure 24: Written comments on Fang’s Facebook profile are about celebratory messages on the event of her academic achievement – with congratulatory comments from family members.

Figure 24 shows online interactions between Fang and her friends, family members, relatives, as well as school teachers through the comments on her Facebook profile. Most of the interactive comments featured congratulations, compliments, and blessings since she got an academic offer from a law school where she intended to enrol at. Messages of commendation were, for instances, “Congratulations, I wish you good luck and the diligence of hard working for your study in the coming future, and keep fighting”, and “You are so brilliant and hardworking, I’m so proud of you”. These comments are from teachers in her school who were also online friends on her Facebook. Likewise, other individuals

close to her such as friends, relatives, and family members also commented in the same way to compliment Fang's educational success. Moreover, along with the written communicative mode, stickers and emojis were used in the comments as well. These kinds of visual communicative symbols, which mostly featured stickers, emphasised the flowery language of the utterance. For example, the visual media texts such as pink, girly, and sweetheart cartoons or emojis represent the feminine qualities of euphemistic and amiable identities.

Again, what are the meaning potentials of these written comments and visual media texts? My observation is that educational values in Thai families resonated here: students will be commended if they demonstrate educational achievements such as academic success, gaining good grades, and having a good performance in education. Also, the performance of identities through the visual media texts can reflect expectations of society in the form of female values. Thus, I suggest that family obligation, here the quality of being dutiful daughter, and educational values, shown by academic achievements, were two key factors that determined how the UC participants displayed and interacted with audiences on their Facebook profiles. Specifically, adults or parents expected their children to obtain a graduate certificate and success, to fulfil the children's dutiful obligation in Thai families. These represented meanings embody the social prestige and cultural capital that the UC participants negotiated on social media as argued previously. Even though the values of daughter obligation and educational success are normative for all groups of participants, the UC appeared to have the highest

levels of awareness and compliance with these norms, and these practices were manifested and reproduced on Facebook.

To conclude, through the family discourse, the mother's voice on social and cultural norms, particularly in the matter of gender, is highly regarded and requires conformity to conventional expectations about a daughter's duty (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). This leads to the notion that a daughter's obligation in family circles curtails expression in gender among the UC participants. I argue that daughter obligations in UC families caused children to display their normative identities on Facebook, manifested in the qualities of being dutiful and successful in education. This notion was seemingly absent from the other two groups of participants, as the LC and the MC participants negotiated social media as alternative spaces to subvert normativity and conventional values by using online sites to disclose their same-sex identity, non-binary gender, as well as to resist against mainstream discourses in femininity.

**Theme 3: *Social media's role as a means of academic display rather than sexual curation.***

The data review from this social group suggested that the participant's performance of identity complied with the values of their dominant social group. I call this participant group the conformity, referring to the group that performed their normative identities in accordance with their parents' norms and values. Is such compliance uniformly typical of this social group, however? There is one example that seems to capture forms of cultural expression in a different nature. I will provide a thorough analysis of this anomalous example to illustrate 'cheeky, gorgeous, and fashionable' characters on the social media profile, which represent an unconventional and dissenting act against ideologies in parent's culture. Thus, I will start discussing the first heading: the UC's conformity as normativity. The last section will focus on the UC's different pattern of autonomy and dissension.

## ***1.1 The UC's conformity as normativity***

This section will discuss how the UC participants used social media as a means for academic display with Instagram being their main platform of exhibition. How did they use Instagram to display their academic performance, friendships in school, and other related school activities? This section will attempt to answer the questions above through a multimodal lens.

As shown throughout the chapter, the UC participants employed social media to cultivate their social prestige and educational capital. The UC participants abided by and wished to display family obligations and educational credentials more than the other groups of participants did. Again, when we consider social class and cultural capital, Bourdieu's (1970) thinking comes into play. As he suggests, cultural capital is how social class and power are maintained in society, cultural capital thus positions individuals in terms of their cultural tastes, values, and practices. Bourdieu's concept can be applied to understand the acquisition of social capital in the UC participants. My analysis is that the UC's cultural capital was built through their lifestyle choices, their education, and their orientation towards any fields. The following pictures demonstrate how they displayed educational performance on social media, as one of the ways to cultivate social prestige and educational capital.



Figure 25: Collection of pictures showing school activities and interactions with friends at school posted by the conformity group, which consisted of Mew, Aily, Punch, Pam, Rainy, Jinny, Fang, and Tammy.

Figure 25 illustrates the way the UC participants collected and arranged pictures and contents related to school activities, memories, and relationships with friends at school. They hardly posted any content related to their personal selves, which were different from the LC and MC participants, who expressed their niche and fluid identities to fight for their sexual autonomy. The UC participants were the only group of participants who consistently cultivated their social prestige and educational capital while avoiding posting any content related to the matter of gender on online sites. In short, a specific interpretation can be made for the UC's



conformity group, that they used social media as a school exhibition rather than sexual curation. They displayed various kinds of school activities, school meetings, and interactions with friends and teachers, all of which were located in the school setting. Although there might be an instance where the participants displayed their gender identity in some ways such as through their school uniform and dress, they seemed to use social media for the purpose of exhibiting school experiences rather than for any portrayal of sexuality. They mainly displayed it in a manner that was linked to educational or related school values. The following posts provide more sample cases of the exhibition of school values by the UC's conformity group.



Figure 26: IG stories posted by Rainy, who demonstrated the value of friendships in school.

Figure 26 shows how Rainy engaged in a similar pattern of using IG stories to collect, arrange, and catalogue school activities, memories, and friendships. In all of the pictures posted by Rainy, she was wearing a uniform that indicated explicitly the meaning of school moments and activities with friends. To be more specific, the left picture posted includes textual content, such as “thank you”, “I love youuuuuu”, and “keep in touch, my long-lasting friends”, and then she tagged this picture on her friend’s profile. Through the mode of textual communication, these written contents convey the meaning of intimate relationships between participants. In other respects, it can denote popularity by having many friends online. Previous studies suggest that teenagers want to show off their social capital by boasting online about having “many friends” (Balleys and Coll, 2016). Thus, the UC participant's display of a large number of friends online may suggest a kind of social capital accumulation; at the same time, they evidently showed off their cultural capital and educational prestige.



Figure 27: Jinny filmed her friends from behind, showing a school activity and friendships. She also shared the school location through her IG's stories.

Similarly, Figure 27 depicts the meaning of school engagement and interactions with friends at school. Through the compositional metafunction, the 'salience' of the picture is something that can make a given element in media text stand out from its surroundings (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Importantly, this 'salience' of the picture can operate to both representational and interactive metafiction. In the case of Figure 27, the salient element is the group of students which make up the main part of the image. In other words, due to its central position and the fact that they turn their backside to the image within the same direction, the group of

students in the image becomes the salient point. It can be seen that this salience in Figure 27 emphasises the (representational) meaning of 'obedient uniformed school students'; at the same time, it infers the (interactive) meaning of 'disengagement from the audience'. Thus, the salience in Figure 27 serves as the representational meaning of a crowd of uniformed and/or obedient children; simultaneously, this salience portrays the interactive meaning by disengaging those students from the audience.

Also, since Figure 27 shows the backside of students sitting down together at a school assembly, we cannot see their faces, identities, emotions, and facial expression. These undisclosed elements in the image lead to the 'distance' between sign-makers (participants) and viewers (us). This is a type of interactive metafunction showing how distance is created between the represented participants and the interactive participants – as Kress and van Leeuwen argue that resources in media text can bring people, places, and things close to the viewers, depending on the 'distance' in the picture (1996).

Moreover, it is suggested that the frame size of shots can represent meaning potentials. For example, seeing people in a long shot or from a distance indicates that they may be strangers to us or people with whom we are less intimately acquainted (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2004). In the case of Figure 27, it is a medium-to-long shot and there are no close-up details of visual elements in the

image, which plausibly represent little intimate relationships between the participants. This can be due to the issue of privacy, which was the most concerned issue among the UC participants as discussed previously. In Figure 27, as Jinny filmed the atmosphere of the school assembly by including her friends in the frame of the picture and recording the video from behind without showing real faces and identities, she was choosing a practical option of safeguarding privacy. When considering distance and frame size, the “contact” in the image is another crucial interpretation through the interactive metafunction. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that participants (i.e., people, places, and things) in the media text can make some “contact” with the viewers for meaning-making if they look at the camera (1996).

Figure 27 has limited demand since the participants are not looking directly at the camera; in this way, they do not make any contact with the viewers, and we thus cannot establish even an imaginary relationship with them. Also, the viewers are deprived of communicative modes that produce meanings in the picture such as facial expression, gazing, and body movement. It is therefore difficult to make contact with the viewers in terms of sexual command, in contrast with the demand for sexual autonomy of certain MC participants conveyed through the interaction and composition of images they shared.

However, the school uniforms worn in Figure 27 (also Figures 26 and 25) can be suggested as one mode of communication representing conventional identity and educational comportment. By wearing uniforms, the UC participants showed markers of conventional binary identities at work. For instance, wearing a blue skirt represents a female identity while wearing blue shorts reinforces a male identity. Furthermore, other accessories in school uniforms can also stress a conventional female identity, such as a blue or white bow tie, which represents a girlish or sweet identity. In short, these clothing and accessories in school uniforms are suggested as the dominant costumes which reinforce heteronormativity and other gender normativity, particularly the gender binary and normative femininity. These dominant costumes effaced markers of fluid sexual identities, unlike the case of the cosplay costumes worn by the MC girls on Instagram, which promoted non-binary expression as well as diverse identities (LGBTQ+).

To conclude, Figure 27 does not only demonstrate undisclosed identities due to the reduced contact with the viewer, limited demand, and long-distance frame shot in the picture, but it also implies the reinforcement of gender normativity as well as educational prowess. The elements of interaction and composition in Figure 27 offer obscure informational values and relative salience in the media text: it remains ambiguous as to which components, from people, places to things, or which specific elements are the salient parts within the frame. We can thus perceive their sexual meanings dimly through a nuanced lens. Importantly, since

they used social media as a means of academic display rather than sexual curation, they showed their vague identities by managing their privacy online. Therefore, the findings in this section support the idea that the UC participants strategically used digital features to curate their status at school rather than display gender identity or any activities related to sexuality and sexual orientation. This analysis reinforces the key theme that the UC participants manipulate social media to cultivate their social prestige and educational capital.

As I mentioned in the foreground of the section, while the majority of the UC participants were performing their identities in accordance with the values of the dominant social group, there was one example of a different form of cultural expression. 'Cheeky, gorgeous, fierce, and fashionable' were the characteristics presented on her profile which are the opposite of the ideologies of her parent's culture. What follows in the next section is an in-depth analysis of this anomalous case.

## ***1.2 The UC's different pattern of autonomy and dissension***

Discordant practices of the UC participants could emerge when they engaged with digital practices on social media. Despite being in the same social class with similar cultural backgrounds, they could have differences in gender expression.

Tubtim and Pingpong were the two participants who revealed themselves as bisexual – as mentioned in the early section. Their online posts and activities seemed different from those of the conformity group. They rather showed their lifestyles, tastes, and identities that their social group would view as unconventional. Pingpong revealed in the interview that:

I think the online space is our private zone. We can be ourselves even though I know that my parents are not happy with it. I believe that my parents already know that I am bisexual. They might not feel ok with it, but they will understand this later, I hope.

Tubtim said in the same way that:

Social media is my place of freedom. I use Instagram with many accounts due for different purposes such as to show my art pictures and to show my diet routine. My mother and I are friends on Instagram and I can post any activities. For example, I enjoy posting my beautiful dress in a beautiful



location. I know that others might think my look is so fierce, but I don't care, and I know that my mother accepts this.

These remarks reinforce the argument that social media plays a role as a place of freedom, a place for self-presentation with diversity as well as unconventional practices which challenge the conservative ones. The following series of pictures were posted by Tubtim, who deviated herself from the others' standard and normal expectations.

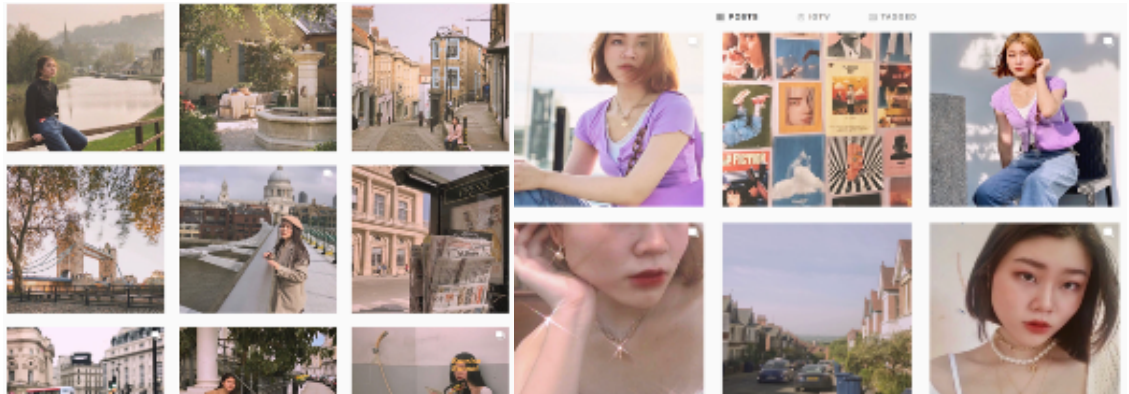


Figure 28: Tubtim's case shows a different pattern from the conformity group of the UC participants. Her pictures posted here in her IG profile illustrate 'cheeky, gorgeous, fierce, and fashionable' characters.

In Figure 28, Tubtim presented her IG profile with a collection of pictures as if they were images in an exhibition or an art gallery. She was described as 'cheeky,

gorgeous, and outspoken' through the collated pictures. She was the only one in the group who differentiated herself from social standards, norms, and practices. Specifically, Figure 28 represents the qualities of being cheeky, gorgeous, perky, or fierce, striking a marked contrast with her classmates who performed their selves according to the cultural homogeneity and social expectations in the society where girls should be submissive, girly, benign, and unfashionable.

Figure 28 shows a sophisticated and manicured appearance illustrated by the use of colours, mood and tone in the picture. She used a tone of warm winter and a creamy palette with glitter effects in both landscape and portrait points of view. Particularly, in the portrait picture, a close-up shot on her entire face represents a close distance between her and the viewers, and there are also a sexual connotation and a sense of fashion and aesthetics. Moreover, the props, which feature the earrings and necklace, her facial expression, and her gaze represent a confident, stylish, charming, wealthy and fashionable young woman. Other body movements and postings suggest a different kind of femininity. To illustrate, the way she used her hand to touch her ear implies a knowingly sexy and sensual identity.

All things considered, I suggest that Tubtim was presenting some kind of sexual insubordination. She was rebelling against societal norms by emulating the aesthetics of high-end fashion magazine covers and all the sexual baggage that

she possessed. Through the various multimodal texts in Figure 28, Tubtim displayed a sense of both performativity and rebellion against ideologies and cultural affiliations of the dominant group. For instance, she used social media in a manner that expressed a 'demand' for sexual recognition, which was relatively dissimilar to the key theme of the conformity group. She used online sites to express her identity to her audiences, UC peers who were the makers of UC's feminine identity. Above all, she strove to perform sexual insubordination countering mainstream normativity in society, but setting unconventional aspiration in her community.

Plus, we can see that there was an absence of pictures depicting school uniforms posted on her profile, which made her different from members of the conformity group. In other words, she differentiated herself from the group by posting pictures without wearing the dominant costumes (school uniforms). Alternatively, she posted pictures of herself on Instagram, showing contents related to travelling, lifestyle, and hobbies, with casual wearing or informal clothes. One of the most plausible explanations is that she used social media as a picture gallery for personal exhibitions. This kind of personal display implies many senses. Firstly, it is a sense of independence, autonomy, and agency, which supports the concept of gender performativity of Butler (1990). Secondly, it can infer a sense of dissension in ideologies and cultural affiliations of the dominant group.

In the first strand, according to Butler (1990), “gender is performative, which is produced through millions of individual actions” (1990, p.83). Butler argues that gender is best seen as a way of doing the body in performance. Through this argument, the framework of gender performativity can be applied in the ‘self-selected’ gender in the online space. In Tubtim’s case as the deviant in the UC group, she chose to present her identity through many performing actions, from the body movement to the body posting of the picture. A clear example was when she used her hand to touch her ear, which represented a sexy and sensual identity. The girl’s ability to self-consciously adopt and play with diverse gender identities can increase the choices involved in the production of gender, capable of supporting gender autonomy and agency of girls. However, if we apply McRobbie’s discussion in post-feminism to this issue (2009), girls’ choices, agency, and empowerment will become an illusion: the enjoyment of beauty products and girly materials such as wearing make-up, high heels, and thongs re-establish patriarchy, heterosexual norms, and normative femininity. McRobbie thus argues that new modern identity, also known as new girlie feminism, is a false identity that calls patriarchal values back in again. Girls in contemporary feminism are constrained by the old patriarchal forces due to the growth of consumerism in feminine products and the adoption of neoliberalism in post-feminism. From my perspective, McRobbie’s argument perhaps denies pleasurable and playful dimensions of contemporary feminism. In Tubtim’s case, whose pattern of gender expression was different from that of the dominant group, I shall describe her posts as globalised mainstream feminine aesthetics. This is

because while she enjoyed modern feminine aesthetics by playing with costumes and make-up, she was establishing a form of pleasurable resistance against patriarchy and conservative practices in society.

Conceivably, the uses of social media can promote girls' autonomy and agency in the negotiation of desired identities since the online platform allows users to interact and communicate without corporeal cues, such as appearance and voice. Marwick (2013) highlights this kind of disembodiment that young users – who are liberated from the limitations of the body – can optionally choose any gender images or identities to be presented. Hence, Tubtim's presentation of herself as cheeky, gorgeous, fashionable is a sense of performing autonomy and agency, which is in line with the idea of Butler's gender performance.

In the second angle of my analysis, Tubtim's case is also a reminder of a sense of dissension in the ideologies and cultural affiliations of the dominant group. According to Takashi, there has been an emergence and expansion of new urban middle classes in Southeast Asia, including Thailand, that are socially coherent, culturally and intellectually hegemonic, and politically ascendant (2004). The new urban middle classes have arisen by educational expansion and advancement of professional careers. These two developments enable them to possess more cultural and intellectual hegemony than they could in the past. Then this cultural hegemony of the new middle classes has been successfully translated into

political power in society until now (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2002). This leads to the overlap of social classes between the emerging new urban middle class and the upper class in contemporary Thailand. Importantly, it is hypothesised that the emerging new urban middle classes in Southeast Asia have been shaped by complex historical forces. Takashi (2004) asserts that they are a product of regional economic development, which has taken place in waves under Western and American culture. In other words, they are a product of developmental states, whether democratic or authoritarian; thus, their politics of economic growth and their lifestyles have been shaped in very complex ways by Americanisation, Japanisation, and Sinicisation. As a result, such new urban middle classes in Thailand have become consumers of the global commodity chains that include Italian earrings, American fragrance, English wool, a Swiss-made watch, Seiko, Sanyo, Toyota, Wacoal, or any other un-Thai commodities and sundries (Takashi, 2004; Kasian, 2001).

To link this analysis with the case of Tubtim, I consider her to be a younger generation of Bangkok's new urban middle-class family who had gained higher education and more professional opportunities than members of her parental generation had been. This is supported by the finding that the majority of the new urban middle class were Bangkok-born, had their roots in traditional middle-class parents, and achieved their middle-class positions, income, and status in one generation, thanks to their university education and career opportunities (Takashi, 2004). Also, Tubtim's lifestyle, taste, fashion, and dreams seemed to dissent from

the ideologies and cultural affiliations of her parents. It can be proposed that Tubtim's activities recorded on her social media profile were the consequences of Westernised and Americanised consumption, displayed through her taste and lifestyle. For example, Figure 28 illustrates a cover-like fashion and aesthetics of the commodified globe and items such as earrings, necklaces, a fur coat, as well as through the Western-style mood and tone of the picture. Evidently, she posted pictures by adding the locations of London and other landmarks of Western countries. Thus, since the newly ascendent urban middle class is rooted in the economic growth and the product of financial globalisation, shaped by very complex forces of Americanisation, westernization, Japanisation, and Sinicisation, the young generation's lifestyle, taste, fashion, and dreams are consequently incongruent with the ideologies and cultural norms, and values of their parents' generation. In short, I have presented the framework that ideologies and cultural affiliations of the dominant group can produce counterreactions and rebellion in some respects due to the emergence of the new urban middle class in contemporary Thailand.

In conclusion, if we return to the key theme of the UC group, the central argument is that the conformity group of the UC participants habitually adopted the position of their parents to cultivate their social prestige and educational capital. They used online sites as a means of negotiating social prestige and capital rather than for any explicit portrayal of gender identity play. However, while the academic display on social media as the dominant pattern was preferred by the conformity group,

there was a different behavioural pattern in the UC group that demonstrated two senses of identity: firstly, the performance of independence and autonomy and secondly, dissension against ideologies and cultural affiliations of the parents.

The first sense highlights the idea that individuals can perform their identities through millions of actions, supporting the framework of “gender performativity” by Butler (1990). Another sense takes into account the impact of the emergence and expansion of the new urban middle class in Thailand that enables the younger generation to possess different tastes and lifestyles from their parents. At the same time, this refers to a sense of dissension against ideologies and cultural affiliations of the parents. In this chapter, I have presented the overarching theme that the conformity group of the UC participants followed the position of their parents and they were not in the mode of resistance since they were aware of privacy concerns, public images, and prospective work opportunities in the future, which are a formula to accumulate social capital and cultural resources in their social group. However, the emergence and expansion of the new urban middle class in Thailand can help bring the discordant practices of the anomaly girl into perspective – she was understood to use social media to display her lifestyles, tastes, and identities in accordance with the globalised mainstream aesthetics rather than the conservative ones, which created discord between herself and her parents, whose lifestyle and norms were different.



## Conclusion

The UC participants chiefly employed social media as an alternative space to resist traditional female values. Specifically, digital practices on social media are considered a subversion of conventional norms, such as gender normativity, mainstream family values, and femininity discourses. However, something different seems to be on display in this UC section, where the UC participants used social media to negotiate and/or cultivate their social prestige and cultural capital. I observed that the social prestige negotiated by the UC participants was derived from two key domains of social discourses: family values that are being 'dutiful' or 'biddable' daughters, and educational values in school that are highlighted by being a 'submissive' or "successful' student. In brief, social prestige in the UC group was rooted in two powerful social institutions: the family and the formal educational institutions, which are the foundational institutions controlling and shaping the UC girl's beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding gender matters. According to Bourdieu, it can be argued that the conventional values, manners, behaviours, such as being dutiful and submissive daughters, have been passed on from parents to children in the form of social and cultural capital (1970). I have presented arguments that the UC families had transferred these normative manners and behaviours to their children; thus, it was likely that UC children realised their potentials to practise their gender behaviours by conforming to their parental discourse and norms. This view is affirmed by Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo's study (2020), who argue that being dutiful daughters is still one of

the family obligations that are highly valued in Thai families, and can impact young women's gender performance both online and offline. Specifically, daughter obligations in Thai families include the qualities of being obedient, teachable, and responsive to parent's wishes and desires, which are often about educational success.

Furthermore, living in the presence of patriarchal hegemonic culture, the daughter's obligations in Thai families have placed a limitation on gender performance: young women need to conform to heteronormativity, especially normative female identity, that is to be submissive and docile according to the 'good women' and the 'girlishness' of Thai feminine quality (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). This notion is supported by Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo (2020), who argued that young women perceive that the father's position commands the highest respect in the family owing to the patriarchal society, while the mother becomes the second person in the family as the subordinate, a person under the authority or control of the father. Entrenched motherhood roles influence how young women perceive, believe in, and practice their gender roles with reference to their mother's qualities of being subordinated, submissive, and docile. However, there is still no explicit evidence to show the extent to which family obligation, especially the dutiful daughter role, is practised among different classes. There remains an absence of studies exploring the class difference in terms of gender performance online, especially the lack of evidence of the relationship between the discourse of the dutiful daughter and the social class of

young women. To bridge this gap, I suggest that family values, expressed by being dutiful, and educational prestige, expressed by being successful students, are ubiquitous among the UC participants, whereas they were less evident in the LC and MC groups, who were the subordinate/disadvantaged groups rebelling against such dominant discourses. I am led to conclude that family obligation and educational value as well as other normative manners and values explained the way the UC participants displayed their Facebook profiles. To be precise, they used this site to maintain their social prestige and educational capital through different modes of communication, such as written captions, comments, and pictures posted and tagged on their profiles.

Based on the evidence provided, the UC participants used social media to cultivate their social and educational capital in strategic ways. For example, they posted pictures related to school activities, school meetings, peer relationships, and interactions with their teachers. Additionally, the written comments on participant's profiles were largely about congratulatory comments made on their academic achievements by family members, teachers, and friends. This reinforced the discourse of educational values in the Thai UC families. The following paragraphs will decipher the participant's social display of Facebook in the three themes:

The first theme revolves around the notion of privacy concerns and the new media literacy aspect of social media used by the UC participants. In my opinion, they sophisticatedly managed their privacy on social media due to the concerns about social and cultural capital. At the same time, in terms of new media literacy, they were competent and literate in some respects, such as networking and collaborating competencies through the fan community, but they lacked playfulness, creativity, criticality, and performativity in terms of counter-gender identity and other forms of diversity. For example, they chose to conform to their parents' discourse and adult culture, which lacked the critical stance towards political issues in gender matters. This was moderately in contrast to the other two groups, who explicitly showed their playfulness and creativity in negotiating their diversity and autonomy. Even though the UC participants may show their unconventional identities through their secret accounts, the information was unavailable for the substantiation of this claim since they strategically prevented my access through their manageable profiles. This suggested that they were literate and able to manipulate their privacy concerns on social media, but the evidence was not sufficient to claim that they were literate in the other aspects of new media literacy. A definitive characteristic of new media literacy in the twenty-first century is suggested to be a set of social skills and cultural competency such as being cultural, critical, playful, and productive (Burn and Durran, 2007; Jenkins, 2009; Cannon et al., 2018). New literacy is highlighted as a cultural function and a cultural communicative practice. The UC participants seemed to miss such a cultural aspect of new literacy, which was crucial for identity performance. Thus,

they were considered to be less literate in such aspects than the LC and the MC participants were.

In the second theme, Facebook was used by the UC participants to post pictures of being dutiful daughters according to family obligation values in the Thai UC families. The UC participants discussed that Facebook consisted of adult society: the friend list included parents, teachers, relatives, friends of the mothers. Due to the collapsed or merged audiences inside the platform, they were restricted from expressing selves and identities independently. Also, as the Facebook site was influenced by the parental discourse, young women needed to conform and cultivate their social prestige in terms of 'good' daughters. In short, it can be said that online interactions on Facebook involve family obligation, particularly the concept of 'dutiful' daughters. Young women are expected to perform their identities of being submissive, docile, or subservient according to typical feminine qualities in the Thai UC families. There seemed to be a limited expression and diversity of selves and identities among the UC participants, while the other groups of participants had more chances to perform these. For instance, the MC participants used Facebook as an alternative space to express gender diversity and to negotiate their sexual autonomy, as well as to empower the politics of gender in society, such as gender inequality, rape issues, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) inclusion.

The last theme concerns social media's role as a means of academic display rather than sexual curation. As argued thoroughly, family obligation and educational values were the dominant social discourses impacting, shaping, and limiting gender performance of the UC participants. The UC participants curated their academic display by collecting, cataloguing, arranging, and assembling pictures in a gallery to show their academic achievements. In short, the curation by the UC participants on social media was about school exhibitions, which range from school activities, meetings, interactions, to relationships with friends, rather than about expression of sexuality. For example, they posted a picture to celebrate a Teacher's Day ceremony and then tagged this picture on their teacher's profile.

Furthermore, as discussed previously that the UC participants had certain elements of new media literacy, they still had insufficient agency of self-performance since they were operating in spaces that were determined as a priori by the dominant structures. Even though the UC participants actively engaged and developed their digital skills by involving in producing, editing, and arranging materials on social media, they were still less able in the degree of agency due to the lack of cultural, creative, critical skills (Burn and Durran, 2007). In a causal explanation, Potter and Gilje (2015) assert that the degree of agency can lead an individual to become a literate person in a new digital practice. Thus, because gender negotiation in the UC conformity group was impacted by the parents'

hegemonic culture, they were limited to gain a certain degree of agency in performing their diverse gender identity.

However, the interpretation can be altered depending on the social context and other related social elements. A different pattern emerged to show the opposite meaning, resonating the emerging newly urban middle class and the social class overlap in contemporary Thailand. This different pattern found in the UC group demonstrated the meaning of autonomy, independence, and agency regarding gender. Tubtim in Figure 28 used her Instagram profile as an image gallery to show the qualities of being cheeky, gorgeous, and bumptious, which contrasted with the characteristics of the conformity group of the UC participants. Takashi (2004) argues that the emerging newly urban middle class possesses more political power by being "culturally hegemonic, and politically ascendant". This causes the younger generation to adopt Western consumerism, Americanisation, and Japanisation derived from the economic growth and the products of financial globalisation. Hence, this results in young girls enjoying globalised mainstream aesthetics rather than the conservative ones, putting their lifestyles, tastes, and fashions in contrast with those of their parents' generation. In short, a sensible interpretation is that a sense of dissension against the ideologies and cultural affiliations of the parents was due to the emergence of the new urban middle class leading to the overlap of the social classes in contemporary Thailand. Owing to this social class overlap, UC members of the younger generation have aligned themselves with different ideologies and cultural affiliations from those of their

parents. Such generational differences could be observed through the display on the UC participants' social media profiles, as in the case of Tubtim.

In conclusion, according to the research question: **How is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** I consistently argue that the UC participants appeared to be the group choosing to adopt the position and culture of their parents, who belonged to the dominant social class, to accumulate their social prestige and educational capital. They were less inclined to employ social media to challenge the prevailing norms of parents – in contrast to the ways in which the LC and the MC participants did. To sum up, the UC participants prioritised social media as a platform to negotiate their social prestige and cultural capital over a platform to mobilise and challenge the political issues in gender matters.



## Chapter 8: Discussion & Conclusion

### 8.1 Overview of the research context, aims, and questions.

This thesis aimed to address the overarching research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** The study explored how 18-year-old women from different class backgrounds in Bangkok used social media to negotiate their gender identity online. In my operational model of social class definition, the Thai elite group, called the upper class, seems to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class, which has effectively disappeared in the Western model. Due to the existence of traditional aristocracy in Thailand, it is likely that members of the upper class grow, live, and work in this aristocratic system in Thai society. At the same time, part of them is the bourgeoisie in Marx's term: the people who own the means of production and manage a distribution of economic opportunities and resources. The Thai middle class seems like Marx's bourgeoisie as well, but some of them might have mixed social origins due to the emergence of the new urban middle class, whose roots are found in the lower class. This newly urban Thai middle class has emerged by educational expansion and advancement of professional careers, which allow them to possess the cultural and intellectual hegemony and political power more than they could achieve in the past (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2002). Lastly, the lower class, or the so-called cosmopolitan/urban peasants in the Thai context (Keyes, 2014), can be

defined as a class corresponding to Marx's proletariat: the people who do not own the means of production, but sell their own labour power to then be compensated by the state and society— this is like the case of the LC participants who studied at the "opportunity expansion school", which is fully funded by the Thai government. Owing the subordination to the bourgeoisie and the youth culture and subculture on social media they have created, the lower class seems to resist the oppressive nature of the more powerful groups in society.

In short, it is likely that the Thai elite class and new emerging urban middle class comply with social norms enacted by their social groups, due to the fact that they posse economic resources, cultural hegemony, and political power in Thai capitalist society. Nevertheless, it is the parents who conform to these values, not the youth class. It is argued that the youth is a kind of class fragment who typically resist parents' discourse and culture (Hall, 1993). Thus, even though the Thai middle-class parents are perceived as bourgeoisie in Marx's terms and the elite class in the Thai aristocratic system seems to gain more economic opportunities and social and political power than other classes, their children have turned out to be another fragment of the class that tends to challenge their parents. However, since the newly emerging urban Thai middle class has mixed social origins rooted in the lower class and possesses greater wealth in economic terms and political power than they did in the past, I observe that the children of the middle class are likely to challenge Thai dominant discourses, while the children of the upper-class elite group largely conform to their parents' values and culture.

As discussed earlier, this newly urban Thai middle class has risen to prominence by educational expansion and advancement of professional careers, which allow them to possess the cultural and intellectual hegemony and political power more than they could accomplish in the past (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2002).

As my operational model of Thai social class has revealed, the class differentiation of young Thai women has implications for how they use social media to negotiate their gender identity. For Thailand in particular, there are prevailing cultures and various traditional public discourses on hetero-normative gender that still constrain young women's gender expression (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). As explained in the literature review, the '*rak nuan sanguan tua*' discourse (to preserve chastity), the '*kalathesa*' discourse (contextual sensitivity), the motherhood and wifehood discourses, the parental discourse, and the 'dutiful daughters' in Thai families are underlying discourses on girl's bodies and values shaping their gender performance and expression (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). Thai scholars assert that young women are living in a struggle dealing with those traditional forms of female values in Thai culture (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Dounghummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). For example, sex before marriage is the influential value resulting in the perception of women as 'bad'. By contrast, those who can maintain virginity until marriage will be seen as 'good' women (Songsamphan, 2008). This shows that the traditional form of female conduct is the battle between good (*kon-dee*) and bad (*kon-chua*) qualities (ibid). Moreover,

young Thai women have long harboured the idea that sexual matters must be kept private, and sex has become a strongly prohibited subject for open discussion due to the discourse of the inappropriate and distasteful nature of gender expression in public areas (Hodal, 2012). Plus, Thai cultural norms expect women to be naive and inexperienced in the matter of gender. Due to these restrictions, many Thai researchers take an interest in exploring the relationship between the traditional gender discourses and gender performance of young women both in the online and offline setting. For instance, Boonmongkon et al. (2008) explore how girls deal with and struggle in sexual matters to achieve their sexual autonomy. The finding shows that due to the difficulty of sexual struggle, young Thai women need to find alternative spaces to mount resistance against the traditional values to gain more degree of agency in sexual expression (Boonmongkon et al., 2008).

My current study was built on the themes of prior Thai research studies, with the aim to explore how young Thai women manipulate social media for negotiation, adaptation, and resistance in the context of gender relations. Here, I developed and filled in the research gap by incorporating the issue of social class that previous studies had omitted. The research gap was identified in terms of the ways in which gender identity was tactically managed and constructed by participants within different class structures. Even though there has been research into class difference and sexual attitudes of young Thai women, its implications are mainly for healthcare purposes, which are the prevention of

HIV/AIDS risks in Thailand. Thianthai's work (2004) is a notable example. However, there is still a lack of study exploring the new dimension of social media's role in the negotiation of gender identity of girls through the focus on the class differences in Thailand. To bridge this gap, I investigated young women who came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants were recruited from different social classes and different secondary school levels in Bangkok. The girls who came from high calibre private and well-known public high schools were considered the upper class (UC), while the middle class (MC) participants consisted of young women who attended other public high schools and/or public colleges. Lastly, the lower class (LC) participants were girls who studied in opportunity expansion schools, such as temple schools, which are financially supported by the government. These young women with different social backgrounds were classified based on the socioeconomic status (SES) of their parents: parent's income, education, and occupation. The research gap identified above helped to contextualise the research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** In other words, this research question aims to find out how young women from three different class backgrounds, LC, MC, UC, use social media sites to negotiate their gender identity.

To explore this, the study was conducted with an ethnographic research methodology that adopted qualitative methods to tackle the research question. The data were gathered through the triangulation: interviews, focus groups, and

online ethnographies – the multimodal texts on social media such as posted pictures, shared content, and comments on profiles. The data were categorised into the key themes by the thematic analysis, and then interpreted through a multimodal analysis that is grounded in a social semiotic lens to gain a deeper understanding of women's classed and gendered social media practices. In short, the multimodal metafunction framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) was used when deemed relevant to reinforce the findings of the study. Thus, the data were interpreted through the cross-referencing of three data types along with a discussion of theoretical frameworks within the three angles as discussed in the theory chapter; Relevant identity and gender theories that were applied are Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959), Butler's gender performativity (1990), and McRobbie's criticism of post-feminism (2009); Discourse and power theories were incorporated such as Foucault's discourse and power (1990), Birmingham's subculture and resistance through rituals (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). Social class and capital theories such as Bourdieu's class and capital (1970), and de Certeau's class struggle (1984) were also included. Plus, other cultural and media theories were applied as relevant to help to conceptualise the study's findings, such as Gramsci's cultural hegemony and ideology (1971), Marxist's class theory (1859), Marwick and boyd's context collapse and imagined audience on social media (2011), boyd's affordance and implication of social media (2010), and Jenkins's media literacy and participatory culture (2009, 2015).

*Social Media and the value of "context collapse" in the negotiation of gender*

To answer the research question of **how social media is used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds**, I first suggest that social media plays a significant role in offering an alternative space for both resisting the dominant culture and accumulating cultural capital and social prestige by young Thai women. The evidence obtained from this study confirms a previous finding that the power of the audience is significant in terms of determining what is socially acceptable to post (boyd, 2010). Marwick and boyd (2011) suggest that social media can be understood as channels contributing to a sense of "context collapse". This creates the difficulty for users to manage their self-presentation on profiles due to the diverse audiences collapsed in one site that assembles parents, teachers, colleagues, and friends. However, due to its networking functionality and its technological affordance, each social media platform allows different styles of privacy management for users to deal with multiple audiences as well as with the matter of social interaction on manageable profiles.

As consistently argued, the role of social media is to provide opportunities for the participants to both resist the prevailing culture and to accumulate capital and social prestige. I found that each class of them had their strategies of either

resisting the dominant culture or conforming to the values or cultural norms of their social group. Not only have I confirmed the findings from previous studies, but I have also aimed to advance the field from the perspective of social class implications related to gender performance online in youth culture. This will be discussed in detail in the next section to show how each social group has their method of using social media in negotiating their gender identity and manipulating their social interaction online.

As discussed in the data analysis chapter, social media is used by the participants as a site to resist the patriarchy, dominant culture, parental norm, and mainstream women discourses in Thai society. In other words, they use social media to negotiate their gender identities through different modes of communication. For example, they negotiate their lesbian identities through the play of cosplay, dress, acting, speech, body movement, and other gestures. However, through the cross-referencing of the emergent data, the argument has come to light now that they not only use social media as a form of resistance to negotiate their gender identity, but they also show specific resistance in sexuality terms. Even though the thesis aims to explore the negotiation of gender identity only in the context of young women, sexuality has emerged as a theme of interest in the data as well. Hence, it is worth highlighting that while the participants negotiate their gender identity online, they negotiate their sexual expression through their profiles as well. According to the concept of gender identity and sexuality, there is a link between the definitions of these two terms.



As mentioned in the introductory chapter, gender identity is viewed as each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, including the personal sense of the body, which may involve modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means, and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms. Meanwhile, the concept of sexuality is defined as sexual expression, desire, orientation, preference, and relation of individuals (Wongpanarak et al., 2010). In other words, sexuality is "the experience and expression in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, and relationships" (Wongpanarak et al., 2010). Songsamphan (2008) also explains further that sexuality is about when individuals attract or are attracted by someone for sexual desire romantically. Sexuality is more complicated than just being gay, straight, or other identities. Rather, it is a kind of sexual expression, building sexual relationships, having sexual fantasies, or actually having sex. In short, I conclude that the definition of gender identity refers to socially constructed characteristics and cultural representations in specific communities. For example, the MC participants display their diverse identities through their cosplay activity via dress, hairstyle, props, speech, and other manners in their specific fandoms or *yaoi* communities on Twitter. Sexuality is developed from the notion of bodily appearances or cultural performances of individuals into the notion of their sexual relationships, sexual desires, sexual fantasies, sexual preference, sexual orientation, as well as having actual sex. For instance, there are cases of the LC participants using Twitter as the place to find sexual fantasies through their own subculture – the '*Both*' role play. According to what I argued, I have found

sexuality to be an emerging theme of interest in the data as well. Thus, there is evidence showing the participants, especially the subordinate groups, the LC and the MC, using social media to negotiate both elements of gender identity and sexuality. While they display their gender identity through bodily characteristics such as their dress, manner, and speech, they use social media to engage in sexual relationships and aspirations. This will be discussed in detail in section 8.2.1: Safe Spaces for Playful Subversion.

In conclusion, Hall and Jefferson's theory, which is related to resistance through youth ritual (2006) can be applied to make sense of the observations of the participants who negotiate their gender identity online. These can be regarded as cultural forms of resistance through rituals, such as their costumes, their performance and hairstyle. Although they are showing such resistance in the form of bodily physical elements, it is likely that they carry this over into the realm of sexuality which is rather than just the appearances displayed. They seem to engage in social media to display their thoughts, desires, beliefs, and relationships with elements of sexuality on their profiles, as seen in the case of participants who build their sexual relationships, reveal their sexual preferences, and express their emotional, romantic or sexual attractions through their tweets or hashtags on Twitter profiles. Therefore, the next section is the discussion of each social group of participants, accompanied by the analysis that shows similarities and differentiation to reinforce this study's arguments.

## 8.2 Discussion for each social group

According to Bourdieu's class framework, each social group possesses its cultural norms, values, tastes, and practices based on its family's social and cultural capital (1970). I develop the arguments for each class of participants to answer the research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** The arguments are based on the themes that have emerged by cross-referencing the data from the triangulation: the interview, the focus groups, and online ethnographies, as shown in the data analysis chapter.

### 8.2.1 Safe Spaces for Playful Subversion

Subversion acts against the dominant culture in Thailand appear in the LC group. They seem to be the group that radically resists Thai popular culture by building their subcultures on online platforms using creative and productive strategies. I argue that the process of negotiation of their gender identity is illustrated by their non-normative practices in subculture online. For example, they produce creative hashtags on Twitter for their own in-group understanding, such as *'Re-Tweet-Fav'*, *'Re-Tweet-DM'*, and *'Re-Tweet-Follow'*, which are hashtags created for flirting purposes or finding sexual partners online. Cannon et al. (2018) provides an additional and useful concept to help understand that when the LC participants are involved with digital media practices, they are mobilising their new literacy

skills. Cannon et al. (2018) suggest three themes as the new features of new literacy: dynamic, playful, and productive literacies. The LC participants seem to possess these skills since they have the creativity to produce what they want to portray through the hashtags on the Twitter platform. They also organise their creative activity online called *'Both'* (a role-play sexual activity) on Twitter to negotiate their sexual orientation and to perform their fluid identity, especially for the LGBTQ+ users. Thus, it can be said that they have critical thinking skills to perform their playful identities through their practices on digital media. As it is argued that productive literacy is about the digital making practices of young learners, I observe that the LC participants are literate in producing those creative media texts, such as hashtag contents and visually role-play images in the *'Both'* activity – these are viewed as “media crafting, critique, and artistry” (Cannon et al., 2018). In short, I argue that they use social media to resist Thai popular culture by building their subcultures via such creative, productive, and playful methods online.

As discussed previously, sexuality is not just about people acting or performing their gender identities through their costume, furniture, speech, or expression of their physical appearance; rather, it implies individual's sexual relationships, sexual desires, sexual fantasies, sexual preferences, as well as having actual sex (Songsamphan, 2008). I highlight that there is explicit evidence showing that the LC participants use their Twitter accounts not only for negotiating gender identities, but also for negotiating elements of sexuality. For instance, Ploy, Yok,

Pawee, Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat, and Taew had the same experiences of using hashtags for flirting and/or building sexual relationships on their Twitter. Specifically, Ploy said in the interview that “**#Re-Tweet-Fav, #Re-Tweet-DM, and #Re-Tweet-Follow**’ are the hashtag patterns that we use to invite others for further interactions, and of course that those interactions are mainly for building a sexual relation”. Ploy gave some sample phrases that she used with the hashtags, “I’m friendly, please follow me back **#Re-Tweet-Follow**”, “I’m a lonely girl. If you are, please DM me **#Re-Tweet-DM**”, “I’m not a playgirl. If you like, please Fav me **#Re-Tweet-Fav**”. Even though these are just sexual fantasies in the online context, not in the offline physical world, it potentially infers to the ways in which they request those sexual relationships through their productive and creative ways (hashtags) for sexual purposes. In short, these hashtags can be deemed as a kind of sexual courtship in which the LC participants engage to build their sexual relationship and express their desires for sexual attraction online.

The ‘*Both*’ role-play activity on Twitter is another concrete example showing how they use social media to negotiate their sexual desires and aspirations. They use images of Korean artists as their profile pictures to negotiate not only their gender identity, but also their sexual orientation, particularly for lesbian users. The excerpt from Pawee’s interview reveals that “*Both* is created for fans’ online interaction: it is not only for updating, communicating, and engaging with artist’s works among fandom members, but it is also mainly for sexual purposes”. This implies that the ‘*Both*’ role-play activity on Twitter is used purposively as a sexual

courtship to build sexual relationships and fantasies online. Importantly, the LC participants revealed in the interview that it was possible to shift from sexual fantasies online, such as chatting or video calling, to sexual relations in the offline physical world, such as dating and having actual sex, if that relationship developed successfully.

As Pawee was one of the *'Both'* members in the Twitter community, the insight from her interview reveals that she seriously engages in this role-play activity to find her sexual partner, a quite successful attempt to develop the relationship in the offline physical context. Thereby, it can be assumed that while the LC participants negotiate their gender identities on their profiles, they have some tactical ways on Twitter to negotiate their sexuality as well. As sexuality is defined as being more complicated than gender identity, the LC group appears to use Twitter to express their sexual desires, sexual emotions, sexual fantasies, and sexual orientation through many creative ways as discussed. Particularly, the *'Both'* activity on Twitter is symbolised as a cultural form of playful subversion which mostly happen in lesbian relationships and other non-binary relations.

From this argument, a classical Marxist framework in terms of the ideological superstructure and economic base can be used to understand the LC participants' expression of gender and sexuality. In classical Marx's definition, the superstructure refers to the cultures, ideologies, norms, and identities that people inhabit, while the base implies to the production forces, the materials and

resources that generate the goods society needs (Marx, 1867). I suggest that the LC participants are challenging their parental norms and patriarchal norms, which can be referred to as a symbolic or ritual strategy that resists the ideological superstructure. Also, as supported by Birmingham Centre's theory and Gramsci's hegemony theory, they are simultaneously challenging their bodies and actual actions through forms of sexual expression, which may take place physically.

To explain this, based on what the LC participants revealed in the interview, the focus group, and posts on Twitter, it is likely that they are not just negotiating their gender identities through forms of symbols and rituals such as dress code, hairstyle, acting, props, and music, but they are also negotiating them one step further – that is sexuality through forms of sexual action and expression. The distinction of meaning-making between symbols (or rituals) and physical practice (or body action) must be explained. For example, their gender identities have been displayed through rituals such as the subculture of the *'Both'* role play, hashtag activity, and cosplay performance in the online environment, but they carry these sexual matters over into the offline world through their actual bodies, actions, and identities.

To sum up, I argue that the negotiation of both gender and sexuality on social media by the LC participants is a cultural form of playful subversion to the patriarchal values, norms, and ideologies in the superstructure of Thai society, manifested through their symbols and rituals. At the same time, they also

challenge these norms and ideologies through their real bodies, actions, and biological identities which may also in turn challenge their Monday morning feeling in the economic base in Thai society. Remember that, youth subcultures (rituals) are interpreted as a response (symbolic resistance) primarily to class oppression (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). In other words, even though the dominant classes possess the power to enact the rules and mobilise “common sense” through the ideology of daily routine in people practices as argued by Gramsci (1971), these rules and common sense can be resisted by subclasses and youth subcultures. This theoretical position is in line with what I argue for the LC participants’ resistance to gender normativity in Thai cultural hegemony even if they are subordinate to the bourgeoisie and the parental class. However, the findings in this thesis suggest that the ambiguity of the girls’ objectification is always my concern. I note that to understand their everyday life concerning gender and sexual negotiation within class differentiation, we need to conceptualise this through a more nuanced lens that allows room for ambiguity. As I discussed previously, it seems to me that McRobbie's theoretical position does take into account the ambiguity for girls' practices in the matter of gender online.

A more complex and nuanced lens is thus needed to understand girls’ represented identity, agency, and playful subversion in contemporary feminism. In my opinion, living in many contested definitions of postmodern aesthetics, we have seen opportunities for playful subversion in individuals’ everyday life practices, especially in youth culture. While subversion aims at a clear break with



power in society, playfulness seeks to transform this radical oppression into a space for individual freedom. We can see that it is not a fixed relationship between class and gender negotiation: the LC participants seem to use social media as the safe spaces to subvert gender normativity with playfulness, even though they are subordinate to the bourgeoisie class and ruling members of society.

## 8.2.2 Pleasure, empowerment and the negotiation of identity

The evidence derived from this study suggests that the MC participants are the social group making up the highest diversity of gender performance on social media. They are also active users who confront their struggles for sexual autonomy online. Social media is used to not only allow them to perform their diverse and/or alternative gender identities but is also used to resist gender normativity in Thai dominant culture. One of the explicit pieces of evidence is the popularity of cosplay activity showing how they perform their non-normative identities online.

As reviewed in the literature, cosplay originated from *manga* Japanese comics, cartoons, and animation and has become popular in Asian girls, including young Thai women (Keenapan, 2001). They can switch their gender identities, for example from female to male, male to female, or others, according to their preferences through many alternative ways, such as through costume, hairstyle, make-up, props, speech, and characters. A previous study's finding shows that cosplay activity, especially in queer performers, can be considered as "pleasurable resistance" (Joel, 2011). The author argues that cosplay can be seen as a sense of agency in expressing pleasure since cosplayers can play with dressing, make-up, and other props through the imitation of characters. While they are playing with these with pleasure and agency, they are resisting gender

normativity in the dominant culture. It can then be inferred that the MC participants engage with cosplay activity in the form of pleasurable resistance. They adopt cosplay costumes, manners, speeches, and characteristics to represent their dynamic and diverse gender identities, which are unconventional practices in Thai dominant culture

To support this argument, there is a detailed picture collected from the data showing how they represent their identities through multimodal texts of cosplay activity posted on social media. Through the cosplay displayed online, Natty represents herself as the “actor” who performs an action (kissing) in the picture, while the other girl to the right seems to be the “goal”, who is the receiver of the action (Figure 12). Especially, other modes of communication such as her eye contact with the viewers and her confidence with a smile on her face support the idea that she demands agreement from the audiences: she wants her audiences to believe and agree with her intimate relationship. Thus, these communicative modes, such as facial expression, gaze, eye contact, and left-right placement in Natty's picture can help to understand the meaning of resistance against gender normativity in Thai culture. Moreover, speech is one of the crucial resources to produce *intensity* in multimodal communication (Jewitt, et al., 2016), as reflected in the excerpt from Natty's interview that “gender is an individual's own judgment; we thus need to have the freedom to decide our gender because this is 2020!” ***[intensive expression by raising the volume suggesting strength and confidence]***. Natty seemed to emphasise her main point by raising her speaking

volume to show the confidence she had. Thus, the spoken utterance infers that she tried to challenge the state's ideology in terms of gender norms and the stigma to talking about gender in Thai culture.

Importantly, institutions' discourses are recognised as "experts" in producing "truth" in society according to Foucault's concept of power and knowledge (1990). It is argued that "discourses produce knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon of power, thus, power and knowledge are joined together to produce reality in society: it produces the 'truths' that people live" (Foucault, p. 318). This framework helps to understand that social constructions regarding gender norms and discourses in Thai society are internalised by the group of institutions in that society. Importantly, individuals' dynamic and unique subjectivities become more focused than forces of external discourse and power in society due to a shift in Foucault's consideration. Thus, individuals are increasingly able to negotiate lifestyle choices within diverse discourses and their own created discourses. This is in line with the cases of the MC participants, especially in the case of Natty, who performed diversity in gender through her own actions online and spoken discourses in the interview setting.

Even though the state's ideologies in gender values are constructed by the bourgeoisie, who is the ruling capitalist class and controls the state in Thai society, I maintain that it is the parents, not the youth class, who conform to this social type. Hall and Jefferson (1993) from Birmingham's CCCS argue that

“youth” is a kind of class fragment, resisting the conventions of their parental group. This can strengthen the argument that the MC participants are also another class separated from their parents and they subvert their parents' norms and culture, even though their parents are the bourgeoisie owning the power to enact the norms in the Thai ruling class. Crucially, through the use of social media, they have more choices to perform their alternative images of self and gender identity and, at the same time, to resist common sense in female values as well as gender normativity in Thai culture.

To sum up, I argue that the MC participants use social media as a form of pleasurable resistance to gender normativity in the Thai state's ideology. Even there is massive tension between different forces such as being subordinate to the elite class and to their parental class, they can balance this tension by creating pleasurable things online to negotiate their gender identity. Thus, the creative resistance on social media can be considered as pleasurable tension which potentially features characteristics of subversiveness, ambiguity, and pleasure. As discussed in the literature review, Boonmongkon et al. (2013) propose that social media can be seen as novel social spaces offering opportunities for young women as active users to deal with their struggles for sexual autonomy. They view autonomy in young women as “active agents”, implying that girls can express love, responsibility, intimacy, and sexual desire on social media with more freedom (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). This finding is in line with that of another Thai scholar, who argue that young women exert a level of agency in negotiating

the performance of gender identities online (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). In short, my study confirms these previous findings as well as advance the concept of class implications. I argue that the MC participants are the social group who achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy and diversity through their uses of social media when compared to the other social groups. Importantly, the emergence of the new urban middle class in Thailand leads to the overlap and shared common practices between the lower and the middle classes. This newly ascending Thai middle class seems to gain more cultural and intellectual hegemony and political power more than they did in the past. To sum up, although the new middle class appears to possess more power to set norms and rules in Thai society, at the same time, they are defined as the bourgeoisie who owns the means of production and manages a distribution of economic opportunities and resources in Marx's framework; the youth, on the other hand, is seen as another class fragment resisting the parental class and norms as argued by Hall and Jefferson.

### 8.2.3 The social uses of the online "masquerade"

While the LC and MC participants seem to use social media as a site for resistance against dominant structures, the UC participants appear to demonstrate a different pattern of usage. According to Gullette, the Thai upper class are those who work with symbols as exemplars of high status: high professional occupations, high educational attainment, high income, and living in urban life (2014). Vorng (2012) notes that they can be called "*hi-so*", or high-cultural standing, which draws from Western concepts of "high-society". Also, the social status of the UC group covers occupational prestige, lifestyle, education, family names, home location, privileges of attending private tutoring schools and/or universities, having exclusive condos, going to elite shopping malls, and having office buildings (Jackson, 2004).

Based on this information, as the UC participants are considered as the privileged group in Thai society, they seem to comply with values, norms, manners, and practices in accordance with their social group and their parents, when they engage in online activities and social interaction on social media. I argue that the UC participants adopt such a social position and capital from their parents, and still accumulate these through the status they display on social media rather than the display of gender-related matters. Especially, they considerably show off their social and cultural capital in terms of educational and social prestige in online sites. It should be reminded that social prestige is the relation to one's authority,

respect, and influence in society and individuals want to gain this kind of prestige to accumulate their social and cultural capital. Importantly, families pass cultural capital to their children and such cultural capital is a way of distributing power in society, as Bourdieu argued (1970). Thus, cultural capital plays the role of positioning individuals in terms of cultural tastes, manners, and practices in any field (Bourdieu,1970). It can therefore be understood that the UC participants' negotiation of their social prestige through social media is a function of accumulating and/or maintaining their power in society. This accords with both Marx and Bourdieu's frameworks asserting that the more capital you have, the more powerful you are. In short, I propose that social prestige and cultural capital are the key social values that the UC participants desire to keep and negotiate in the reinforcement of their status, authority, respect, and influence, not only in the offline setting but also in the online setting.

The UC participants use social media to negotiate their social prestige and cultural capital in the attempt to remain dutiful and obedient to their parents and to be academically successful students. This kind of negotiation is considered as the strategic management of social media privacy; at the same time, as they display and mobilise a certain level of literacy in new media practices. Thus, I suggest that the UC participants use social media as an exhibition of their social prestige by manipulating their knowledge of privacy management and new media literacy skills. In terms of privacy management, Twitter was the platform used by the UC participants, who control their privacy by using anonymous identities. This



is in contrast with this the LC participants, who use Twitter for political engagement and for speaking socially risky and dangerous issues. In addition to the notion that the UC participants manipulate social media to accumulate their social prestige and educational capital, they have little critique or involvement in gender politics and civic affairs on social media because it is harmful to or can diminish their prestige and advantages. This shows a lack of critical, social and cultural skills in the framework of new media literacy.

As reviewed, critical, cultural, creative, and playful skills are important features of new media literacy in the twenty-first century (Jenkins, 2009; Burn and Durran, 2007; Cannon et al., 2018). Jenkins (2009) asserts that new media literacy should be seen as social skills, as ways of interacting within a larger community. Similarly, Burn and Durran (2007) also suggest that new literacy implies cultural competence: it is about new kinds of cultural communicative practices. According to my analysis, both the LC and the MC participants are literate to produce creative media texts, such as hashtag texts, visually cosplay images, and the *'Both'* role-play activity online. On the other hand, the UC participants seem to lack this set of new literacy skills, since they have a limited level of productivity in digital making practices and the creativity to perform playful identities in the lived experience of digital culture. Interestingly, while the UC participants seem competent and literate in terms of networking skills in participatory culture, there is a concrete example showing that they show strong allegiance to the fan community in which they seriously engage. Specifically, they collaborate with the

global fan members of BTS to protect their artists on Twitter. For example, Jinny tweeted that “*please retweet this if you think that BTS was accused of Fake news by other bands’ fan groups. Now many journalists have shared this fake news which has spread a misunderstanding about BTS*”. On the flip side, they appear less literate than the other groups in terms of critical, creative, and playful skills which are the social skills and cultural competencies in new media literacy as I discussed above. Therefore, by placing the three groups of participants in comparison, the participants with underprivileged classes (the LC and the MC) have emerged as the groups with a serious and active engagement in politics and civic affairs. It is likely that they use social media with the critique, cultural, and creative skills to fight for their autonomy and rights. In contrast, the participants in the privileged class (the UC) appear to adopt the position and acquire advantages, and resources from their parents, continuing to accumulate their social prestige and cultural capital.

According to the De Certeau’s tactics/strategy metaphor in *Walking in the City* (2010), I offer an interpretation that the UC participants with the privileged background are *strategically* deploying the resources of their social group in terms of education, gender, and power to realise the advantages of their class, while the participants with underprivileged background are *tactically* deploying resources to critique and challenge the current societal structure and dominant values. There are many explicit cases where the LC and the MC participants build their subcultures in a creative and dynamic manner to rebel against

heteronormativity. These are shown in the *'Both'* role-plays, hashtags on Twitter, and the gender-switching cosplay activity on Instagram. In contrast, the UC participants use social media to communicate the embodiment of their social prestige and capital, as we can see in their use of social media in the sense of academic display rather than of sexual curation.

In conclusion, I have applied De Certeau's (2010) concept of tactics and strategy to three social groups of participants to explain that the LC and the MC participants are both being *tactical* in the negotiation of gender online, whereas the UC participants are deliberately *strategic* in using their cultural capital and power to negotiate their gender online. The distinction between the LC and the MC groups is that LC participants were less comfortable and confident during the interview than the MC participants were. Bourdieu's class framework (1979) can help understand this observation. It is argued that youth cultures are formed by the lived social world of families, neighborhoods, and schools. Schools and labour markets are the institutions that connect working-class families and communities to the larger society (ibid), and within these communities, the LC participants develop relationships to respond to power relations and the dominant culture. The LC participants seem to find it more challenging in dealing with power relations and dominance in Thai society, compared to the other classes. This is why they are the group that seems rather tentative and reluctant to write their own tweets or to express themselves by using their authentic points of view. Instead, they

make tactical use of borrowed resources such as retweeted texts from others to resist the dominant culture.

In contrast, based on the interview data, the language that the MC participants used suggests a confident and rhetorical tone. For example, Top said that “I think *rak nuan san guan tua* is the most long-standing tradition...I think that it is the underlying one shaping our expression of gender”. This excerpt shows the ability to think in abstract terms and express their understanding of society in an abstract way. Furthermore, the MC participants’ resistance to traditional forms of female values appears to be more explicit and their uses of language come across like a set of rhetorical questions, such as “why do we need? And why should we? It can be reliably assumed that due to their academic achievements and the status from their parents as the middle class in Thai society, they may be more comfortable with that kind of language because it is the kind of language that their parents, who might be teachers or academics, can teach to their children and might have some experience in senior roles in industry’s leading sectors. Thus, the LC participants seem to take more tentative steps towards their display of clandestine resistance against traditional discourses of gender as we can notice in their furtive activities online, such as the ‘*Both*’ activity and the specific hashtags used in their Twitter communities.

Moreover, due to the social class overlap in Southeast Asia, especially Thailand (Takashi, 2004), the participants of different class backgrounds partly have

common and shared experiences in the matter of gender online. In the literature review, it is argued that the Thai middle class has mixed social origins and a large number of them have been raised from the lower urban class (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2003). At the same time, the Thai upper class is rooted in the emergence and expansion of the new urban middle class in Southeast Asia (Takashi, 2004). This can be shown by Tubtim's case of different patterns of social display in the last section of the data analysis chapter. She represents herself as a cheeky, fierce, and fashionable girl who does not align with her social group. In short, I have come to a conclusion that the MC's social root is derived from LC social backgrounds, while the UC's social origin has evolved through the social climbing of the MC. Hence, this is why we see a commonality of gender-related experiences between the participants even if they have different class backgrounds, owing to the overlap of social classes in Thailand.

In addition, Butler's gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) can support the idea of gender autonomy and agency in Tubtim's case as a deviant social display within the UC group. Tubtim self-selected her performance of gender identity through many actions online, such as body movement and facial expression via pictures. For example, she used her hand to touch on her ear to give off a sexy and sensual identity and posted a picture of this. This interpretation is in line with the "doing gender" concept by West and Zimmerman (1987), who argue that the performative model conceptualises gender as an interactional achievement in society. Also, as Cameron (2003) argues that people perform

different gender identities through particular acts under the cultural norms. Therefore, Tubtim's exhibition of cheeky, fierce, and fashionable qualities seems to accord with the acceptance of diversity in Cameron's idea that gender is fluid and changeable.

In conclusion, it is likely that the UC participants realise values, manners, tastes, and behaviours regarding gender through their families' capitals that have been cultivated throughout generations. From an analytical point of view, they strategically keep the advantages of their social class through the adoption of social and cultural assets from their family in terms of education, gender, and power and display these on social media. In my operational model of Thai social class, I conclude that the UC group seems to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class. The youth (the UC participants) seem to accept the privileges of their parental group, rather than resist them – with the exception of one girl, whom I discussed earlier. However, it is an unexpected finding that the UC participants use social media to comply with their parents' norms and class, contradicting the practices of the other two groups of participants. As argued that the youth is another class segment that differs from the parental class, a reasonable assumption is that the UC participants could present their covert resistance through their symbols and rituals via their private accounts online. This kind of hidden resistance through subculture online can be found behind a metaphor of a masquerade ball where they wear masquerade masks to attend a posh event that is held with specific cultural preferences and identities. Even

though all classes of participants masquerade to some extent in terms of online performance and fluid digital representations of self, for the UC in particular, the metaphor is feasibly of more relevance, as there is a sense of the instrumental show of opulence – which is a specific characteristic of the carnival aesthetics. We perceive that masquerade masks are worn delicately by the prosperous class at balls which are held for members of the upper classes for entertainment and celebrations. Thus, my point of view is that the masquerade masks symbolise the strategy to hide one's identity. Meanwhile, they can use different colours to express their freedom of speech and voice their emotions and opinions without being subject to judgement. Social media is thus a place allowing everyone to hide their identity while affording them the freedom of self-presentation, like in the case of the UC participants who may show their conformity as well as covert resistance to their class.

All things considered, it can be argued that class and gender are not separate structures, but affect each other. According to intersectionality framework, women's oppression in society is intersecting with many layers of different forms of oppression, such as race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, religion, and body type (Crenshaw, 1989). In other words, intersectionality is used to denote how race, class, gender, and other systems combine to shape the experiences of many by making room for the privilege. This can be linked with the three classes of participants in this study. First, since the LC group of participants is defined as corresponding to Marx's proletariat, their class relates to how they resist Thai

dominant discourses due to the many layers of different forms of oppression, such as their low economic status, their limited skills, and their developing living areas. Importantly, as Hall and Jefferson argue that youth are subordinate to their parental group, it seems that the LC participants are doubly subordinate: they are not only subordinate to the bourgeois class in Thai society, but they are also subordinate to their parental group. These double layers of subordination have an impact on how the LC participants feel and act with regard to the resistance of Thai dominant culture – as we can see in many cases from the LC participants' profiles. Similarly, even though the MC group seems to be more like Marx's bourgeoisie, it is the parents who comply with social values and discourses, not the youth themselves. The youth operates as a kind of another structure, with its own subordinate characteristics as Hall and Jefferson argue. The Youth class is thus considered to be within the intersectionality argument, which is another significant factor in gender negotiation as well. Lastly, the UC group appears to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class in Thai society. They seem to accept the privileges of their parental group, rather than resisting them due to the social identities and advantages they possess such as wealth, education, skill, and residency in urban areas of Bangkok, the capital city. Although they might be deemed a separate group that differs from their parental group, their social class as the elite still confines them in various ways. Their education, their parents' work positions, and their occupational status intersect to influence how the UC participants feel obliged to comply with the educational capital and social prestige of their class. To sum up, class and gender are not



separate structures; they are related to each other, but the youth is also a third structure that has its own subordinate characteristics – I hence advance the argument that intersectionality works across these three structures. However, as I discussed the nuanced and ambiguous practices of the youth's everyday gender negotiation, we are faced with a kind of unstable equilibrium that cannot be understood in a clear-cut way. The intersectionality offers room for a dynamic and unstable gender performance. The youth seems to be doubly subordinate, especially the working-class youth, which is a form of disadvantage to them, but there is still room on social media to provide them with the opportunities to free themselves from the constraints imposed by their social class. Therefore, even there is compound oppression in one's class, there is still a place left for the operation to compensate for such oppression and to allow for dynamism and diversity. I draw a conclusion that class, gender, and the youth are not defined and bound by a fixed relationship between one another; it is rather about how each of them maintains the massive tension of their class and how they perform their subjectivity through their own discourses and subcultures online.

## **8.2.4 My contribution to the knowledge in the field of social media and identity play**

How do young Thai women use social media to negotiate their gender identity? What are the strategies and tactics that they employ? How does social class relate to their gender performance? How do they contradict, resist, or interact with traditional public discourses in Thai hegemonic culture? In my concrete view, these questions should be answered through a more nuanced lens of individual aesthetics, class, and cultural affiliations.

All things considered, the questions above involve the concepts of agency, resistance, playfulness, and pleasure of girls on social media. How young Thai women employ social media in the negotiation of their gender identity is based on their aesthetics, tastes, beliefs, and manners as Bourdieu argued. For example, the cosplay activity – a playful act orchestrated mostly by queer performers – is a complex pleasurable expression involving aesthetic taste and embodiment of cosplay characters. To understand them, we need to analyse not only the artificiality of animated bodies (cosplay's visual image) or their underlying aesthetics but also the performer's tastes and cultural affiliations. Thus, I propose that to study the relation of youth cultural identities and their gender performance, class affiliations should be analysed, as advanced by Bourdieu's framework of social class and capital (1970). As Bourdieusian understandings of capital address individual's tastes, beliefs, and behaviours in any field, class affiliations

of young women have significant implications on the conceptualisation of the ways they express their cultural identities.

For instance, the MC participants, on the one hand, may be very playful, creative, and productive in terms of engagement with cosplay activity online, which can be considered as a method to accumulate their social and cultural capital through everyday practices. On the other hand, while they are playing that cosplay, including costumes, props, and make-up, they seem to subvert dominant values of parents' ideology in Thai hegemonic culture. Due to these interpretations, I would argue that cosplay activity is one of the concrete examples of the complex pleasurable expression involving aesthetic taste and embodiment of cosplay characters as well as the performer's cultural and class affiliations. We need to interpret such performance through a more nuanced lens, not only through the cosplay's visual images or its aesthetics but also through the cultural affiliations and tastes of the individual cosplayers.

Consequently, to debate the concepts of pleasure and resistance, I suggest that we need to re-conceptualise the representation of girl's identities in the digital age with greater levels of nuance to leave room for ambiguity. This reminds us of the classical tension between structure and agency following the concept of hegemony drawing on Gramscian traditional theory (1971). Likewise, it is what Butler and McRobbie maintained that youth cultural practices are always enacted in a site of struggle. Both Butler and McRobbie were of the view that the way

young women express themselves in post-feminism culture seems like a form of agency, but they still negotiate gender expression within the constraints of patriarchy. The implication is that they can never completely win the battle against patriarchy, parental hegemony, and societal structure (McRobbie, 2009). Due to the ongoing battle between agency/pleasure and dominant structure, Connor (1992) suggests, in his classical work *Aesthetics, Pleasure and Value*, that it is just a paradox that certain actors have to inhabit. Hence, I would conclude that girls' represented identity regarding gender, whether in the online or the offline world, should be seen as nuanced and ambiguous conceptualisation, as occurring in a site of struggle. We need to theorise their sexual practices through the nexus of aesthetics, class affiliations, sociocultural differences, and the mutability of girl's subjectification.

Importantly, as I mentioned previously, it is not a fixed relationship between class and gender. The youth is another class segment separated from the parental class, and social media is symbolised as a safe space for them to compensate for the constraints of the parents' norms and culture. Thus, what the data obtained from this research shows to me is considerably in line with what I expected before I came to learn of their identities. According to the study's hypothesis, I expected that the participants would use social media as a place of negotiation, contradiction, and/or subversion to the Thai's ideologies and values in terms of gender. My speculation on the study's subject is that living in a paradoxical place, such as a big city like Bangkok, is to inhabit a place of massive tension where we

cannot win the struggle due to the presence of diversity, dynamics, as well as multiple layers of privilege and oppression both economic and social. Speaking as a Thai middle-class woman who lived in Bangkok, I believe that even there is a massive tension on young women, there is still a safe space for playful subversion to balance the pleasurable tension and deal with the parents' pressure and society. While the elite group owns the authority to manage the distribution of social resources in society such as the economy, education, welfares, human rights, and healthcare, the subordinate group seems to find a safe space to gain compensation for the oppression and disadvantages. Living with this ongoing social struggle, many Thai underprivileged classes come out and ask for their benefits and resources in any matters owing to the massive tension that they are under. Thus, the key finding of this research is consistent with what I initially expected that the participants within the underprivileged class might use social media to challenge Thai dominant values enacted by the ruling class. Surprisingly, Twitter is the playful site that the LC participants use to subvert the Thai dominant culture, which is rather an unexpected finding to me. My assumption is that Twitter is the place for mobilising social movement by the middle to the upper classes, such as the case of the #METOO feminism campaign, which was started in 2006 by celebrities' society in the US. Furthermore, I did not expect that the UC participants would be using social media to conform to their parents' norms and culture. Even though the UC participants do not show their playful identities and dynamics, I believe that we are just looking at the surface of social media sites where real and deeper details of their identities

lie beneath, but which they do not allow us to dig down to see. Due to divergent sites on each platform, I am still convinced that there might be covert resistance produced by the UC group. Hence, I argue that the participants' display of resistance through their own rituals or symbols online is just a form of hidden subcultural process. In the UC's case specifically, they might be resisting covertly or secretly on social media; I thus call this a sort of covert resistance through the rituals of subculture on social media. As I mentioned in the UC discussion previously, the masquerade ball can be viewed as a metaphor for the kind of hidden resistance through subculture online where the participants wear fancy masks to attend a posh event that represents cultural preference and identity. Although they seem to conform to their parent's culture and class, social media is a place like a masquerade ball event where users can hide their identity and, in the meantime, enjoy the freedom of expression and self-presentation without others' observation due to the disguise of the mask.

### **8.3 Research Limitation and Implications for Future Study**

Most of the limitations in this study concern the sample size and selection, as well as a lack of available data (Connelly, 2013). The study attempted to select an appropriate group of people (participants) who can provide access to the knowledge in the field of youth culture and social media studies. 18-year-old women in secondary schools with different socioeconomic backgrounds are worthy representatives of the findings in relation to the research question.

However, due to the limitation of some available data in the online ethnography conducted, there were some data that participants felt uncomfortable to disclose. Some of them were reluctant to allow me to access their social media profiles even though they gave their consent to be part of the online ethnographic data collection process. There were instances when some young women set their profile pages as private. I thus needed to make the request twice, or message them personally to request their permission again. Moreover, some of them had more than one or two accounts per one social media platform. I understand that they wanted to separate their private and public spheres of online interactions with their friends, family members, and teachers, as explained by Marwick and Boyd's argument that diverse-multiple audiences on social media are difficult to manage users' self-presentation due to the context collapse in online sites (2011).

Owing to this, it is therefore difficult to get all permission to access every participant's profile page. In my view, the major research limitation is the lack of some available online data that might contain insights and more in-depth personalities of the participants. It is noted that this kind of limitation often occurs when we deal with participants' personal spaces, especially online. There is an opportunity for future research to overcome this weakness. I suggest that future work should be scoped clearly as to how many or what kind of content on (which) social media platform that researchers aim to investigate. Also, the limitation can be minimised by other alternative approaches of data collection, such as the method of oral narrative by participants regarding their anonymous platform. Instead of online observation, we can ask them to narrate a story in the interview about their online activities and contents on a private platform. Key implications for future research also include testing of other sociocultural factors, particularly the differences between urban and rural living of young women. I suggest that future research should also prepare the way for a more nuanced and locally sensitive analysis of where and how patterns of consumption, tastes, and lifestyle regarding gender map onto structural experiences of class, gender, race, urban-rural differences and other related dimensions.

In conclusion, my thesis contributes to the knowledge in the area of gender studies and youth cultural studies by providing new ways of understanding the nature and significance of novel social phenomena related to young people's everyday gender negotiations. In particular, the study fills in the gap by



addressing social class differentials which have not been explored before in Thailand. Previous Thai scholars consider young Thai women to be constrained from performing their gender by mainstream discourses in Thai dominant culture even though social media offers more opportunities to break free of these (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). To fully understand this, I would argue that it depends on the complexity of class and cultural affiliations of a group of young women.

Arguably, groups with privileged backgrounds realise their cultural resources and advantages of their class in a range of ways: gender, power, and education. By contrast, the non-dominant groups, or the disadvantaged classes, potentially challenge or oppose these due to the nature of class oppression. Remarkably, social media plays a significant role in providing alternative spaces for the participants who come from a range of backgrounds to create and display their self-determined identities. The social class of the participants is an underlying factor that determines how they conform, interact, resist, or deal with mainstream public discourses and dominant cultures in contemporary Thailand. Consequently, a conclusion can be drawn that girls' represented identities regarding gender in both the online and offline contexts, should be understood in a nuanced and ambiguous conceptualisation, taking into account not only class difference and cultural affiliation, but also the mutability of girl's subjectification and their own constructed discourses.

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## **Appendix:**

### **Theme 1: To be courteous, neat, submissive, amiable, and benign is still the mainstream expectation in female gender identities in young Thais' perception**

In young Thai women's perception, the mainstream values in female gender identities require that they need to be courteous, neat, amiable, euphemistic, and benign, as indicated by many participants. The participants discussed that they grew up and became aware of gender identity with the perception of women as being gentle, polite, neat, and tidy, while men as being sturdy, rugged, robust, and powerful. They discussed how their parents guided them to be women when they were young. For example, the guidance was about wearing a pink dress, having long hair, playing a barbie doll, and saying the word 'Ka' – ค่ะ at the end of each sentence in the Thai language. In Thailand, the language is divided by gender difference, and some specific words are used for females only, such as 'Ka', which is used by women to make the conversation more polite, whereas 'Krub' is used by men only. From there, it can be seen that parental guidance plays a significant role in making young women know what gender they identify themselves with and how to perform their gender identities properly in society, such as how to speak, how to dress, how to behave, and how to express.

Thus, it can be considered that the participants' initial awareness of gender identity and the understanding of being women came into existence when they were young with the influence by their parents. After that, when they were around 11-14 years old, they developed their gender identities by observing people around them. For instance, they became aware of the norms that women should wear a skirt, accessories, and make-up, whereas men mostly do not do these. This awareness could further develop by learning in schools when they observed their friends, as the participants indicated that they learned many differences between being women and men and some other diversities in school. From this, it can be considered that the environmental society and parental guidance engender young women to become aware of, to understand, and to develop their gender identities since they were young. Particularly, to be courteous, neat, amiable, euphemistic, and benign is part of the young women's underlying perceptions of values of female gender identities promoted by parental influence.

Due to this parental influence, the framework of the discourse of familial obedience can be applied to better understand the relationship between family roles and gender expression of children, especially daughters. There is a previous study considering discourse analysis of spoken interaction in the family context that links to gender performance in daughters (Johnson, 2007). As gender is the crucial point of view of family roles, the spoken interaction in a family has a significant influence on how young women express their gender. The family discourse is co-constructed by family members and family roles are often based



on an individual's gender and position in the family. In this way, gender and the family discourse are therefore inextricably linked to one another (Johnson, 2007).

Furthermore, power has always been an underlying part of the family discourse because it is displayed through the discourse and interaction in the family. It is argued that within a particular family unit, the foundation of the family structure is the first thing that needs to be looked at, to understand the construction of individual identities, especially gender identities (Johnson, 2007). Specifically, young children have understood their roles within the family by participating in the co-construction of narratives (Fivush, 2002). From this, the family narrative telling and discourse influences and shapes the ways family members co-construct their own identities. Specifically, the mother is seen as the key figure in the creation of family identity, as well as gender identities in children, particularly in daughters. According to Holmes (1997), through the study of "discourse of femininity", women construct themselves in many feminine-based roles, including "good daughters" and "good mothers" (p.303). It can be seen that women are more focused on performing certain roles, and on demonstrating goodness, according to societal standards. This is in line with the concept of mother-daughter closeness by Henwood (1993). This mother-daughter closeness refers to the ability to confide in one another about personal things others would consider inconsequential, and the ability to rely on one another for aid (Henwood, 1993, p. 306).

This concept can be applied to understand parental influence in daughter's gender identities in Thai families. A previous Thai study proposes that middle-class mothers maintain a strict power hierarchy in the position of a mother (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). From this, it can be seen that in Thailand, there remains an imbalance in power that exists between parents and children, which can lead young women to be obedient due to the family discourse in any issues, particularly in sexual matters. Thereby, it can be argued that Thai traditional discourses of sexuality are mostly derived from the discourse of familial obedience between the parents and children, which forms the foundation in the Thai family structure.

In the study, the participants discussed that mainstream sexuality values could be derived from the cultural norms and practices not only in Thailand but also in other countries that influenced them. They considered that when they started using social media, this online site allowed them to understand, develop, and be more open about gender and sexuality with broader perspectives. At the same time, this online space can emphasise the traditional form of female conduct and mainstream values in femininity, such as the female norm that women should look more gracious, tidy, and compassionate than men. Importantly, the participants reported in the interview that they used social media for searching some specific questions about gender which schools cannot answer. According to this, it is referred that social media plays an impactful role in young women's perception regarding gender and sexuality. Particularly, social media could be seen as a

complicated platform by the participants because they sometimes saw it as a tool that helps to reproduce the mainstream values of female sexuality, or sometimes as a tool to achieve more openness by perceiving other values and practices from wider perspectives. To conclude, the perception regarding gender and sexuality of girls is developed through many social factors, such as the influence of school, friends at school, parental guidance, and the online environment of modern society.

**Theme 2: Both sex education and integral subjects in school repeat the same themes of traditional mainstream values in feminine sexuality**

The participants asserted that Thai sex education was still not an open subject that allows individuals to talk about sex, sexuality, as well as gender diversities. The discussion in the public area was still restricted, obligated, and limited, particularly in school. Importantly, the participants indicated that Thai sex education reproduced the binary concept of gender and the issues that they had been learning are limited, as in the topic of the traditional form of female identities (to be courteous, neat, and submissive, which is linked with the previous theme). There are no other issues related to diversity, autonomy, or equality in sexual matters. Educators or teachers in schools think that talking about gender and sexuality in public spaces is inappropriate for students, especially for young female students. As a participant said in the interview that “they will think that I am not a good girl if I ask something about sexuality in school”. This is because, in Thailand, there is the framework of ‘*ka la te sa*’ – กาลเทศะ, considering the proper times and places linked to self-performance in public and private spaces in society. For example, Thai people need to speak, behave, or express something at the right time and in the right place due to the concern about socially desirable images and appearances. These social images and appearances are the hallmarks of the ‘*ka la te sa*’ concept, which is the strictly social and cultural practice for everyone in society.

Thus, participants considered that sex education did not teach them adequately about the understanding of gender and sexuality. Most of the lessons in sex education are about sexual health and biological sex, such as body parts, fertility, sexual reproduction, and sexual protection. Also, sex education still restrains open discussions about sexual relations, sexual expression, and sexual preference. Therefore, it is implied that sex education plays a significant role in shaping young women's gender expression through the concept of female-well-behaved sexuality in society. This is one of the salient social regulations controlling how females should behave and express their gender and sexuality. Moreover, most of the classical textbook of Thai language subject includes the framework of how female should conduct their gender within the feminine sexuality norms. The contents of textbooks discuss the proper ways by which women should behave themselves when they face the opposite sex. For example, they should not go out with a man one by one, and they should not hold hands in the public area. It is shown that the contents of classical school textbooks reinforce the salient mainstream discourse in femininity, namely '*Kul la ta tree*' – กุลสตรี. It can be seen that sex education still influences young Thai women in terms of sexual constraints and repetition of the same theme of traditional mainstream discourses in femininity, which potentially shape and control how young women express and/or perform their gender identities offline or online.

Nevertheless, besides sex education, other integral subjects in the classroom also (re)produce these mainstream norms. These normative discourses in

femininity had been produced and reproduced through the integration of Thai education (textbooks, classroom, lessons, and activities) since the participants were from 4 to 19 years old, as they discussed in the interview. Specifically, the integration included textbooks in many disciplines, particularly in social science and sociology subjects, such as Thailand history in the political aspect, the system of government, the regime, the monarchy, the religion, and beliefs. All of these subjects in the classroom are the repetition of the same themes regarding feminine discourses, which remain significant until now. Particularly, the subject of the history of Thailand, for example the origin of Thai sociocultural norms and Thai language, including Thai proverbs, idioms, rhymes, and poetry, emphasises traditional public discourses regarding femininity such as the need to maintain virginity until marriage.

In addition, the participants indicated in the focus group that “in Thailand, normative discourses exist for feminine sexuality rather than for masculine sexuality”. They discussed that mainstream discourses in sexuality fell heavily on women rather than on men. Specifically, they implied that as gender discourses were initially derived from the political history and the monarchy in Thailand. This led to gender roles that enabled men to have more power than women in society. One of the participants said, “as you can see, the most powerful political person is the man who has military control, not a woman, and this norm has remained until now in Thailand”.

To sum up, the traditional mainstream discourses in feminine sexuality are repeated not only by sex education but also by the integration with other subjects in the classroom, as exemplified by the political history of Thailand and the origin of the Thai language. As the foundation of the social institution, the integration of many lessons of Thai education have still repeated, impacted, and/or controlled how young Thai women express their gender identities and sexuality since the early days until now.

### **Theme 3: The social norms and values in feminine sexuality empower gender stereotypes and roles in Thai society**

There are many social and cultural norms in sexuality in Thailand. Most of these norms are about gender stereotypes and roles which explicitly distinguish women from men. As a result, the participants viewed these norms as the underlying elements that influenced the ways they expressed their gender identity and sexuality. There were three mainstream social norms and values in feminine sexuality by which the participants certainly claimed to have been taught and influenced significantly. These three main norms of feminine sexuality were 1) '*Rak nuan sa nguan tua*' – รักนวลสงวนตัว, 2) '*Kul la sa tree thai*' – กุลสตรีไทย, and 3) '*Ching suk kon ham*' – ชิงสุกก่อนห้าม. Furthermore, the participants discussed that there were also other social norms and practices in femininity, expanding from those three mainstream norms. These were 1) '*Ying klong ruen*' – หญิงครองเรือน and 2) '*Chai chang tao na ying chang tao lang*' - ชายข้างเท้าหน้า หญิงข้างเท้าหลัง. These expanded norms discuss gender stereotypes that explicitly distinguish the roles of males and females in society. For example, the '*Chai chang tao na ying chang tao lang*' norm considers men to have the leading role in the family, while women, as wives or mothers, should follow men. Specifically, this norm is semantically divided into two sentences of opposite meanings. '*Chai chang tao na*' means that men are in the front, and '*Ying chang tao lang*' means that women are behind. From this, it is evident that this norm empowers the idea of male superiority in



power, by comparing 'the front' as the leader, while the one staying 'behind' as the follower.

In other examples, Thai traditional mainstream norms in sexuality consider that men are 'superior', and women are 'subordinate/inferior'. This conforms with the traditional mainstream norm of '*Ying klong ruen*', assuming that women should be in the kitchen and at home, while men should go to work outside. Besides, other mainstream sexuality discourses and norms expect women to appear more loosed/damaged/harmful than men if they have a sexual relationship or make love. This is in accordance with the norm of '*Ching suk kon ham*' considering that the role and burden of keeping virginity heavily falls on women; yet this does not apply to men. From these examples, it is clear that Thai traditional mainstream norms in sexuality mostly emphasise the gender role of women as inferior/followers and men as superior/leaders. This finally engenders the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, which see women as sensitive, gracious, and obedient, while men as sturdy, rugged, robust, and powerful.

This concept can be analysed by the postmodern theorist/ social constructionist Judith Butler (1990). Gender is currently conceptualised as being a socially constructed aspect of identity (Butler, 1990). Depending on cultural norms, people perform different gender identities in different contexts due to social practices and values. In Thai culture, young women have to publicly express their gender by

repeatedly performing particular acts under the traditional sexuality norms which define 'femininity' as submissive, sensitive, and obedient qualities.

The participants discussed how Thai traditional mainstream norms and values in feminine sexuality were produced and reproduced through every fundamental social institution and the state in Thailand. They indicated that family was seen as a starting point of everything, followed by the school, as one of the participants said, "From when I was little until now, my parents and teachers always repeated these feminine sexuality norms which have happened both at home and school". Not only do these norms impact their expression of gender identity in physical terms, such as how to dress, how to say, and how to behave, but these also influence how they perform their gender identities in inner terms, as in how to think, how to feel, and how to decide in sexual relationships and preferences. From this, it can be argued that the feminine sexuality norms and values are the implicit and explicit elements that empower the gender stereotypes and roles in Thai society.

#### **Theme 4: Different worlds of each social media platform facilitate different forms of realistic gender performativity**

*“I look at Twitter as the realistic world, and Facebook as the unrealistic world. Facebook is seen like the Fairly Ponies tale, which is a children’s cartoon with characteristics of being pretty, beautiful, amiable, and colourful, but is invented by someone, not a real one” – said participant C.*

The participants discussed that social media can facilitate the representation of their personality, characteristics, and identity, including gender identity on their profile pages. However, they believed that different social media platforms can offer different opportunities to present their selves and gender identities depending on the features, tools, characters, and aims of each platform. This can be considered through the identity theories by Goffman (1978) and Butler (1990). According to Goffman’s dramaturgical approach (1978), this is a metaphorical technique used to explain the identity performance, including gender identity. The metaphor considers life as a stage for activities that people can engage and perform. This performance is in line with Butler’s gender performativity (1990), which argues that gender is performative and produced by the actions rather than by something that comes naturally to men and women (1990, p.83). Both Butler’s and Goffman’s identity theories can be applied to suggest that social media activities of the participants are a public network for the performance of gender identity. Especially, Goffman’s theoretical framework can explain the construction

of gender identity on social media and conflict owing to the use of multiple fronts. According to Goffman's front/backstage concept (1978), social media platforms can be seen as the front stage for the public performance of self and gender. In other words, front-stage performance is "what people do when they know that others are watching or aware of them" (Goffman,1978). Therefore, social media users can perform the desired images of gender and selves within a variety of interconnected audiences, as well as present publicly an idealised version of the self on the sites. Goffman's and Butler's identity concepts provide a useful and extensive explanation for the understanding of gender performance in the online context as many researchers have applied in their works. boyd and Ellison (2007) argued that social media constitute an important research context for scholars investigating the process of gender performance, self-presentation, and impression management. This is because social media provide a variety of tools and features which potentially compromise and facilitate the desired images of self according to the social values (p. 10).

From this, in the study, the participants indicated that they mostly had more than one account in each platform for different uses. For example, one of the participants had two accounts on Instagram, two accounts on Twitter, and one account on Facebook. She thought that different platforms offered different capacities in self-representation of sexuality. Similarly, another participant demonstrated that "Twitter offers the most realistic representation of myself as there is no need to provide my personal information on the profile page such as

name, age, school, and the picture of the face, while people can see pictures of my face on Instagram and the personal activities there can indicate who I am. Facebook is the most unrealistic world for me as I think it needs the information of who I am, what my real name is, where my school is, and who in the list of my online friends are". Significantly, she said, "my Facebook account has diverse audiences, including my parents, my teachers, and my school friends. This could be the hardest thing I need to deal with".

It is implied that if someone wants to access the participants' Twitter and Instagram profiles, they need to request full permission. They cannot see any pictures on those sites, whereas, on the Facebook platform, he/she can still partly see participants' pages. From this, Facebook can be considered as a less controlled platform in terms of privacy. Due to this privacy issue, the participants thereby ranked their most realistic platforms as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, respectively. It can be argued that how young women express their real selves, gender identities, and sexuality depends on the capacity of privacy control of each social media platform. One of the participants said, "If I make the comparison between these platforms, Twitter is the realistic world, while Facebook is the Fairy Ponies world. The Fairly Ponies tale is a children cartoon featuring a pretty, beautiful, amiable, and colourful world which is invented by someone, not a real one". This shows that Twitter is the best place where the participants can be their (intrinsic) selves, while they might pretend to be someone else on profile pages of Facebook. For example, they might pretend to be pretty, amiable, neat, and

well-behaved on Facebook, showing characteristics that represent the socially desirable images of female gender identities in Thai society. Thus, when using Facebook, they need to perform their gender and sexuality according to these feminine mainstream values and practices in society.

Moreover, each social media platform has different features, functions, and special tools that serve different purposes. For instance, Instagram and Facebook have story tool functions, while Twitter does not have this. This famous IG stories tool is a new feature that lets users post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours; besides, the content shared through this tool will not appear on the profile grid or the main Instagram/Facebook feed. This stories tool is the most popular feature among young women who use social media for sharing their activities, while Instagram's stories tool is seen as more convenient and widespread than Facebook's tool. The participants discussed that they posted so many pictures and video contents through this feature with sufficient privacy control, since they could control who was going to see their posts, and these contents vanished after 24 hours without appearing on their main profiles. Because of the privacy control, the participants hence considered Instagram to be the most convenient platform to show their activities, including their sexual behaviours, sexual relationships with boyfriends, and other sexual matters. To conclude, it can be argued that different social media platforms facilitate different forms of realistic gender performativity depending on the features and tools, the capacities of privacy control, the aim of using, and the online friends that participants have in each platform.

## **Theme 5: Thai traditional mainstream sexuality norms still influence social media use in young women**

Although the participants discussed that social media could provide them an opportunity to express their personalities and identities, it still had a limited offering in the performance of gender identity and sexuality due to the overlapping relationships inside the platforms. As young women are constrained, shaped, and controlled by the traditional mainstream sexuality norms in the offline context, these normative public discourses still have their presence in the online context.

Thai traditional sexuality norms and practices are mostly derived from the basis of social institutions, such as family and school, which are linked to the previous theme. The feminine sexuality values are developed by the integration of education, the educators in school, parental guidance, and other social discourses which initially happen in the offline world. The participants indicated that they could not abandon these when they move from the offline world to the online world, as they said, “most of my offline relationships, such as my friends, my parents, and my teachers are entirely included in the list of my online friends on Facebook”. Other relatives and acquaintances were also adding them as friends and had some online activities together such as comments, likes, and tags of pictures on their Facebook profiles. Due to the connection and interaction between people living in the offline and the online worlds, it can be argued that

there is a significant link between these worlds that cannot dissociate from each other.

One of the participants said, “my father and mother are both my online friends. They requested to be my friends on Facebook, which I cannot reject. This is why I have to beware of posting something”. Similarly, another participant said, “I think my parents always observe what I share and post. When I post a picture with my boyfriend or a picture of myself, they think that it is not appropriate to do, and finally, those posted pictures are deleted since my parent say these are not the right thing to do in the public space. Because of this parental surveillance, it makes me think that the mainstream norms and traditional female values reinforced by people in the offline world still influence my activities on social media”.

Moreover, the participants considered that they always deleted or hid the posts from their parents on their profile pages due to the concern of socially desirable images in society. This presents supportive evidence that they cannot leave their parents, relatives, or teachers behind in the offline world and entirely move to the online world. Young women are still influenced by the traditional public discourses and mainstream values regarding sexuality because of they are bound to both offline and online interactions and/or relations on a daily basis.



In addition, I propose that the issue of different levels of impact that the audiences have on each social media platform is another factor determining why traditional/mainstream public discourses in sexuality still impact girls' social media usage. Each platform has different features and opportunities for expressing gender identity and sexuality. As discussed previously, the Facebook platform is the most unrealistic world because it contains lots of diverse audiences and adult people such as parents, relatives, and teachers in school, while Twitter is the most controlled and private platform where the participants can selectively share personal information and control how their online friends see their activities; in addition, their parents are mostly not active on this platform. From this, a reasonable assumption is that how young women express and negotiate their sexuality are dependent on what kind of relationship they have or the level of impact that their audiences have when interacting with them on each platform. In other words, the more girls interact with high-impact audiences online such as parents, teachers, and relatives, the more they obscure the true presentation of their intrinsic gender identity and sexuality. By contrast, the more girls interact with low-impact audiences online such as friends, close friends, school friends, and acquaintances, the more they show their real selves in terms of gender identity and sexual expression.

Hence, the overlap of high- and low- impact audiences online is seen as an underlying factor that influences how young women perform their gender identity and sexuality online. Because these online diverse audiences have direct

interactions with traditional mainstream practices and values in the offline context. Thus, it can be argued that the traditional public discourses are still significant and cannot be shaken off from the offline world when the youth move to the online world to engage in sexual negotiation.

This argument can be reinforced by Goffman's impression management concept (1978) to better understand why the social normativity and the significance of audiences online potentially impact the ways girls perform their selves. Goffman asserted that "people create an impression on others that will enable them to achieve their goals" (1978). Besides, he highlighted that life on the stage of performance is an "activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (1978, p. 22). These observers are also present on social media platforms, as one of the participants explicitly indicated that they could not escape their parents and teachers on the sites, "My parent always observe what I share and post. I cannot be myself on Facebook".

In addition, according to Goffman's impression management, people convey the impressions for the whole group as "they are part of broader collectives" (1978, p. 30). Goffman thus claimed that people work together to share impressions due to the desire to obtain a mutual agreement from a group member (1978, p.47). This can be linked to how young women use social media to negotiate their gender identity. Since social media is the publicly broader collective space and

young women desire to achieve the goal in mutual agreement with the social groups they live with both offline and online, they thus need to be concerned about the impact of the audiences, the peer culture, and the social norms regarding sexuality both on the offline and online sites.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the outcomes of the pilot study, there are five themes of argument that discussed girls' perception of gender matter both online and offline. Firstly, it can be argued that to be courteous, neat, submissive, amiable, and benign is still part of the strictly mainstream values of gender identities in young Thai females' perception. This argument highlights the girls' perception and awareness of traditional public discourses as well as the traditional forms of female conduct in Thai culture. For example, it was revealed that the awareness of these discourses and forms came into existence during childhood and was influenced by parental guidance, the environment, and schools.

Secondly, as a social institution is seen as the underlying factor in the creation of traditional mainstream discourses in feminine sexuality, the argument is that the integration of education in Thailand is both production and reproduction of the mainstream norms in sexuality. Specifically, this integral education does not only include the subject of sex education, but also other sociological subjects, such as the history of politics in Thailand, the Thai monarchy, the religion and beliefs. This kind of integration of education, from lessons to textbooks, class activities, and educators, potentially enables the repetition of the original themes of feminine discourses in society.

Thirdly, it can be argued that feminine sexuality norms and values empower gender stereotypes and roles in Thai society. These norms and values mostly emphasise the role of women as inferior and men as superior. This finally reinforces the stereotypes of women as weakened, sensitive, and obedient figures, while men are seen as being sturdy, rugged, and powerful.

Fourthly, due to the different capacities of privacy control, features, tools, and different levels of impact of the audiences on each social media platform, it can be safely assumed the different worlds of each platform facilitate different realistic forms of gender performativity. Particularly, this can be further discussed by the concept of the audience's power. As the power of the audience is significant in terms of young women's attempts to determine what is socially acceptable to post or what can be understood by the engaged readers (boyd, 2010), they tactically express salient and/or desired aspects of their gender identities for others to see and interpret on their profiles.

Lastly, Facebook is principally concerned with physical friendships and relationships that are initiated offline and then relocated online (Georgalou, 2015). This implies the connection and social interaction between people living offline and online who cannot leave each other. Thus, it can be argued that traditional mainstream norms and values in the offline interaction remain significant in the online interaction, and also impact how young women manipulate social media to negotiate their gender identity.