

## CHAPTER 2

### Schoolgirls' Life Stories

This Chapter primarily presents the brief life stories of all thirteen research participants of this study, as shared with me during informal conversations and participant observations employed during fieldwork. As mentioned, the emergence of the urban middle class and their economically consumerist and sexually conservative ideologies in modern northern Thai society established the ground for new social meanings, ideas and norms. The stories presented in this Chapter thus address each schoolgirl's experience being under the middle-class norms in modern northern Thai society focusing on their family conditions, their personalities, the ways they presented themselves throughout high school and universities, their media and popular culture consumption, sexual practices, as well as other related dimensions.

#### **The Story of Mary**

Mary was from an upper-middle class family. Her family ran an antique shop, pawnshop, and clothing store in the city. She grew up in a single-parent family because her parents divorced since she was very young. She lived with her mother, two older brothers and one older sister. Mary was one of the most cheerful and friendly research participants, always appearing with a smile on her face. She was very talkative.

A flight attendant was the desired occupation for Mary's mother and older sister. According to their beliefs, flight attendants were persons who could earn large incomes, could have a chance to travel around the world, could speak foreign languages, and could afford expensive cosmetics, fashionable dresses, brand name goods, or other accessories. In order that Mary could be well-prepared to be flight attendants, the mother asked me to assist with her education, especially to tutor them English. They also tried especially hard to encourage and pave Mary educational path as a future flight

attendant such as searching for extra English courses, training sessions or extracurricular training courses for a fight attendance.

At home, Mary had her own laptop and spent almost the entire day surfing the Internet, watching movies, and chatting with friends via chatting applications, especially those who were her friends from secondary school and her boyfriend. I also chatted with Mary quite often, especially after school until late at night. She was usually online all day long. Mary was a big fan of Korean popular culture, especially Korean boy bands. Unfortunately, she belonged to the group at school in which all members disliked Korean popular culture. They always insisted that Korean stars were too ‘fake’ and belonged to those lower-class youth. This contrasted with their idol Thai band, Bodyslam, which they considered to be ‘cooler’ and ‘real’. During the four years I knew her, Mary had three boyfriends. The last one was a student of the Faculty of Engineering in a public university in Chiang Mai. He was three years older than Mary. She confessed that both of them had never called each other ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’, merely instead brother and sister; even though their feelings for each other could be perceived to be romantic. Mary said that she *“invested so much in this guy.”* Unlike the previous boyfriends she had before, he was the first one with whom Mary had been the person to made the initial contact. As Mary told me:

*“It is always exciting when I’m the one who approaches a guy. It isn’t very easy to get him. I have to keep my fingers crossed whether or not he feels the same way I do about him. It’s worthless to get a guy easily; real love always comes from a tough situation.”*

Sometimes after school or at nighttime after I and Mary had dinner or spent time together, I found myself witnessing Mary and her boyfriend having conversations via their mobile phones. I could sense that her boyfriend tried to be ‘sweet’ to Mary. However, Mary pretended not to be sweet in return (but I noticed a look of satisfaction on her face and in the tone of voice). Before ending their conversation, they would always arrange an appointment for the next call, mostly around midnight of that same night. Mary would always end her conversation by saying that *“You are very cute, brother. Talk to you more soon.”* Mary was probably one of the group members to whom I felt closest, as she always spoke the most freely with me. After she broke up

with her boyfriend, she gave me a 450 page-long recorded conversation between her and him via a chatting application.

In high school, Mary had problems with school authorities due to her hairstyle. She had had very long hair that almost reached her hips when she was younger; however, that had to change due to the strict rules about student hairstyles at her new high school. One day, Mary was approached by a female teacher. Without any warning, that teacher told Mary to turn around and cut her hair to a shoulder level lengths. She cried and was shocked by the school regulations against the beauty of the students—especially towards hairstyles, cosmetics, bodily accessories, and school uniforms. Mary complained that some members of the girl group, as well as many other students, had various hair styles which were against the rules of the school, but these students had never been approached by the inspectors, because they had their own tactics on how to avoid the inspection.

After graduating from high school, she continued her studies at a public university in Chiang Mai. Although it took only twenty minutes from her home to university, she insisted on moving out of her parental home in order to stay with her friends at a private dormitory near the university. She justified this to her parents by claiming that it would be safer to stay at the dormitory than going back home after finishing class or extra-curricular activities at campus late at night. Her mother tried to keep in touch with her by learning how to use Skype instead of calling. She reasoned that chatting via Skype did not cost anything and could talk ‘face to face’ by using a camera. I learned from Mary’s mother later that the way she used Skype because she wanted to find out, using the Skype camera, whether Mary was really at the dormitory.

### **The Story of Jill**

Jill was from the lower-middle class. Her parents divorced when she was very young and she had a very bad impression of her father who was a government officer. After divorcing Jill’s mother, he had never been responsible to Jill or her mother. Her mother, as a single parent, worked very hard to take care of Jill after the divorce. She worked in a tour company during the day and had an extra job as an administrative officer in a nightclub in town. Due to her busy schedule, her mother thus did not have much time to

spend with Jill. However, Jill's mother seriously stressed on her daughter's education; she set Jill's education the first priority. She believed that if her daughter could enter the high school where was famous for its student monitoring system and educational provision – proved by the huge number of students who could pass the entrance examination to various top faculties such as medicine, engineer, dentistry, etc in leading public universities — her daughter's future would be better than hers. Then she encouraged Jill to move the school to the one that was considered as being 'up-graded' and more prestigious school compared to the school that Jill had studied. "Before the entrance examination to this school, Jill mother took her daughter to attend the expensive and intensive tutorial courses for months which guaranteed the result that all students could pass the exam.

Before moving to the high school, Jill had studied in a small secondary school located out of town and was infamous for having had working class student gangster friends. She admitted that she used to identify herself as a working class youth when she was in secondary school and had a great desire to appropriate a working class youth identity. She had practiced how to dance, dress and act as a working class. But in the period when she moved to her current 'higher-class' high school and got involved with a new society and people, Jill began to have a negative outlook towards her previous identity. She started to feel that lower class youth would have limited opportunities and resources such as money, social status, education, and taste. Associating with new people and a new society encouraged her to transform herself in various aspects. She had to learn how to dress, speak, and behave in different ways from the ways she had done before, and actively tried to conceal her former lower class background, among other ways by having girlfriends who were from a higher class. In the four years I knew her, Jill had many girlfriends, but she was only really serious about her relationships with two of them. The first one was a senior student while Jill was in high school. Her uncle was a celebrity in Chiang Mai and her parents owned a spa business. After breaking up with the first girlfriend, Jill started a new relationship, which was around the time when she moved to study in a private university. The second girlfriend was a high school student in an international school in Chiang Mai. She was half Thai-American and worked as a part-time model. By hanging out with higher-class people,

Jill experienced the lifestyle of the higher class and Jill managed to successfully transform herself into a 'higher-class' person.

Jill was very active on social media. She had more than two thousand five hundred online friends on her Facebook account. Her profile name, 'Little Finger(s)' (*New Noi*), represented a not-too-subtle female homoerotic sexual innuendo. Jill's profile picture was her face with her tongue out of her mouth, again projecting female homoerotic sexual meanings. The profile picture caption was taken from a song lyric, identifying herself as a man – *'I have a special heart which will bring you going through this night. I am just a man who is deeply falling in love with you.'* She added additional words under the picture, saying that *'my tongue is the highlight'* indicating she was skillful in orally satisfying her (female) partner(s) during sex. Everyone in the girl group knew that there were plenty of pornographic video clips—heterosexual, male-homosexual, and female-homosexual—in Jill's smart phone. Jill got them primarily from her friends via a Bluetooth connection, and her collection was frequently updated. Other members of the girl group would sometimes borrow Jill's smart phone to watch pornographic clips when they felt like it.

### **The Story of Tina**

Tina was from a middle class family. She said that her family was not rich, but had enough to get by (*por mee por kin*). Her father was a government officer while her mother was a housewife. I noticed that her family could afford her to buy anything she wanted, similar to other group members, and Tina had a smart phone, a laptop and sufficient money to shop or went out with friends during weekend. At home, the strict time management for her was set-up and enforced by parents to ensure that Tina would behave appropriately and devote their time and energy in studying. Tina parents also hired a shuttle taxi which parents in the same area hired to exclusively take their children to the schools in the morning around 7 a.m. and pick them up back home in late afternoon around 5 p.m. After coming back from the school in the evening, Tina was expected to arrive home on time in order to have dinner together with family members. As mentioned above, some of them were assigned to assist parents in preparing dinner. After the meal, she was allowed to go back to her bedroom to do homework and go to bed.

Having identified herself as *tom*, Tina expressed her masculine personality by wearing her hair short, by wearing men's clothes, and by having a girlfriend. The group members would admire Tina's stylish way of dressing. She always showed up wearing a shirt with shorts, trainers, and a hat. Tina flattened her breasts with a wristband, making her chest look like a male chest. This is commonly recognized as an aesthetic ideal for *toms*; and Tina was therefore considered good-looking among other *toms* in her school. During special occasions such as Valentine's Day or New Year, Tina was always given gifts or flowers from her female 'FC' (an abbreviation of 'fan club'). Tina rarely showed up in her female school uniform while at school but appeared mostly in the school sports uniform, which female students are allowed to wear pants. She would sometimes wear this sport uniform everyday for weeks.

Tina was the quietest and most self-preserved member of the girl group. She was the only one in the group who studied in the science class, so she had less time to spend with the other group members. This was especially true when Tina was in grade eleven. Tina told me later that her girlfriend did not want her to associate with the group because she was jealous of some of the beautiful members in the group. When she had a girlfriend, Tina would therefore mostly disappear when the other group members were gathering.

After graduating from high school, Tina enrolled in a public university in Chiang Mai. She chose to study in a faculty that had a masculine image. Studying in this faculty and being involved with mostly male classmates provided opportunities for her to comfortably express her *tom* personality through a uniform set which was designed exclusively for students to work in a lab and for fieldwork. She proudly and constantly posted her pictures on social media wearing a uniform, which made her look masculine. Drinking lots of alcohol was one of the distinct images of the students who studied in this faculty. Tina also appropriated this aspect of the masculine image of her faculty; she enjoyed drinking, smoking, and going out at night as a way to further express her masculine identity associating with the group in which she belonged.

## The Story of Nancy

Nancy was staying in a peri-urban area, and grew up in a gated community that was surrounded by middle and higher-class neighbors in professional occupations. Her father was a lawyer and her mother was a government officer. Many of her neighbors were foreigners, mostly from Western countries. The gated community offered its residents a wide range of facilities such as a spa, swimming pool, community mall, international restaurants as well as a well-known supermarket that sold imported and high-quality products.

As Nancy's father was originally from a poor family in upcountry areas and became successful in his career. He realized that education had paved the ways for him to gain such a better future like he was recently. He always taught this daughter about the importance of education and told Nancy to study hard like when he was her age. He always told Nancy that he expected Nancy to follow what he had done and be successful in her education to have a good occupation like him. Meanwhile, Nancy's mother tried hard to train her daughter to be skillful in household chores. She also taught her daughter the values of being abstinent and having a conventional type of family by trying her best to be a role model for her daughter in various ways.

In the first phase of my fieldwork, Nancy's family looked like other ordinary families that lived together happily. But during the middle part of my fieldwork, Nancy's parents began having problems and eventually were divorced. Nancy had a very feminine personality and she liked to spend time with *toms*. During the time I knew her, Nancy had serious relationships with two *toms*. Nancy's first lover, Boom, was studying in another school. Boom always came to meet Nancy after school. They liked to spend a lot of time with each other. Sometimes I invited Boom to accompany Nancy in my class. As a lesbian couple, they were comfortable touching, hugging, and expressing their intimacy in front of classmates and me. After graduating from high school, Nancy studied in a public university and broke up with Boom. In the changing environment of the university, Nancy had a chance to get to know more male friends and tried to have a relationship with a male. However, this relationship did not last very long. Nancy felt certain since then that she was not attracted to men and established a new relationship with another *tom* who was studying in a nearby faculty.

Since Nancy had tan skin, which was not in line with the beauty criteria of mainstream Thai society, she tried to constitute her own definition of beauty. Nancy was inspired by Beyonce Knowles, a black American singer, and she posted on her Facebook status that: *“Even I don’t have white skin. I’m beautiful the way I am.”* Nancy strongly believed that she was beautiful and tried her best to benefit from it. She told me that *“When I was still young and beautiful, beauty and youthfulness don’t last with me for so long. I have this chance so I have to do everything that makes a profit out of it as much as possible.”* She did this by entering into various competitions in Chiang Mai. In grade eleven, Nancy and other members of the girl group applied for the selection round of the national Miss Teen Thailand beauty contest, but the organizing committee did not select any of the group members. In grade twelve, Nancy joined a local young model contest held by a local fashion magazine. She won the first runner-up award and was consequently hired as a model for the magazine. Apart from some amount of money she gained from the competition, she had a chance to establish networks among those who worked as ‘pretty’ (a presenter for products at events or exhibition booths). From then, she worked as a part-time *pretty* within the northern region while she was studying in university.

### **The Story of Lisa**

Lisa’s parents got divorced when she was very young. Both parents remarried and had their own families. Lisa was raised by her grandparents. Her families ran a rental apartment business in down town Chiang Mai. Having been well-prepared to be a well-behaved woman, Lisa was well-trained from her grandmother in being responsible for household chores assigned. She was assigned to assist her grandmother with cooking and preparing meals, cleaning up afterwards, as well as other housework. Lisa was well-known among the group member as “Miss Laundry” since she was very neat for her clothes and was skillful in doing laundry and ironing. All of her clothes, especially school and university uniforms, even her pajamas, were well-laundered and ironed.

Like Nancy, Lisa had a very feminine personality. During high school, she kept a low-profile compared to other members of the girl group. She rarely was caught and punished for breaking school regulations. However, the way she acted as a proper student did not mean she never broke any of the school rules. Throughout high school

and university, Lisa had several relationships with both male and female partners; she constantly went out at entertainment places at night and drank alcohol. But her low-profiled daytime personality shielded her from the attention of the school authorities.

Lisa found it difficult to define her sexual identity. One evening when Lisa and I were chatting after school while her boyfriend showed up, I told Lisa that I had thought that she was a lesbian because I heard that she used to hang out with *tom*. She replied: “*I used to be a dee (a feminine lesbian). But now I like a guy.*” She confirmed that she had relationships with *toms* before, but her cousin of the same aged teased her that the girls who had relationships with *toms* were losers. Her cousin implied that no male was interested in her, so that she had relationships with *toms* instead. After that incident, she broke up with her *tom* partner and began spending time with a male.

In contrast to her neat and tidy personality, I saw that Lisa was very comfortable expressing intimacy with her lover(s) in public places. When she was with her boyfriend or *tom*boyfriend, I noticed that she tried to be close to them in various ways, such as moving her body beside them, touching their arms, holding hands, or fondling their legs under the table.

After graduating from high school and breaking up with her boyfriend, Lisa continued her studies at a public university. In the first year, she lived in a campus dormitory, where she eventually got into a relationship with her female roommate. But when she was in her second year and moved away from the campus dormitory, the relationship between her and her roommate ended. Lisa then began another relationship with a male student who was studying at the same university.

Lisa realized that she was very good looking and she knew how to utilize her beauty to attract both men and *toms*. She knew how to dress, behave, and present herself in a way that she would be center of their attention.

## The Story of Kim

Kim was one of the wealthiest members of the group. Her father was a high-ranking government officer who worked in another province and was moved around very often. Kim always complained that: “*My dad has never stayed in any province longer than five years.*” Her parents divorced when she was very young. Her father bought a downtown townhouse located not far from the school for Kim to stay. Kim mostly stayed alone in the house. Sometimes, her father’s secretary visited and stayed with her for few days. Due to her father’s absence, Kim’s townhouse became gathering place for the girls after school and during weekends. Before hanging out at night, the group members would gather there to prepare for the evening by dressing up, applying make-up, or planning the activities they would do together that night. After going out, some of them got too drunk to get back home and they would stay overnight at Kim’s place. When any group members wanted to spend private time with their boyfriends or girlfriends, Kim always offered the couple to come and stay at her bedroom.

Kim appropriated a masculine personality and identified as *tom*. Kim was one of the most-beloved of the group members. The group members named her ‘Fat Chinese Doll’ (*tuk ka ta dek som boon*), due to her big-boned body, round face, and wide cheeks. Kim was the one who always told dirty jokes and funny stories that made everyone laugh. I found out that the group members felt very comfortable expressing their friendships towards Kim by hugging her tightly, fondling her head (which is a sign of intimate friendship in Thailand), or kissing her fat cheeks.

After graduating from high school, Kim’s father invested in a coffee shop business in a department store for her to manage. Kim hired one barista working full-time in her coffee shop. This coffee shop then became another gathering place for group members while they were studying in their respective universities. The department store where the coffee shop was located was frequented mostly by working class youth. Apart from meeting and chatting, the girl group member enjoyed gossiping and making fun of these working class youth who walked past the coffee shop.

Since her house was located in town and not far from bars and nightclubs, going out at night became one of Kim’s favorite activities, also because it was a way in which she

could present her masculine characteristics. She did this by the way she dressed, acted, danced, drank, smoked, and fooled around with a girlfriend. In the last phase of fieldwork, she decided to undergo plastic surgery on her nose, hoping that it would make her look more masculine and handsome.

### **The Story of Amy**

Amy had a cheerful character and was beloved by other group members. Her family ran a pet food store. She had one older sister who was fifteen years older. Her parents got divorced when she was very young. She was bitter towards her father because he had left her mother to get married to his minor wife, whom he had been with throughout his marriage. Since then, he had never taken any responsibility for the well-being of Amy or her sister and mother. During the second year of university, Amy's older sister married and moved to stay with her husband's family in Bangkok. Therefore, after spending a year in the dormitory, Amy moved back into her parental home so that she could help with her mother's pet food business and so that her mother would not be alone.

While she was with the girl group in high school, she was one of the most beautiful in the group and had once been invited to be a freelance model for a professional photographer. Being afraid that it would ruin her focus on studying, Amy's mother then asked her to concentrate only on studying. She also realized that her mother had high expectations for her education because her sister had not succeeded in her studies. Amy therefore took her studies seriously in order to pass the admission examination for a top-rank department in a public university, in line with her mother's expectations.

Whenever the group members were gathered, Amy was always the spearhead in gossiping and making fun of working class youth or those who dressed or acted according to what she considered poor taste. She was one of the trendsetters of the group. Amy had a fine taste for fashion and often made suggestions to other people about how to dress in order to not look like the 'low' (class).

Amy insisted that she was strictly heterosexual. While most of her friends had homosexual relationships or experiences, Amy told me, "*It's disgusting when you touch*

*your partner who has everything like you do. Some toms have bigger breasts than mine.*” During my four-year fieldwork, she had three boyfriends. Amy had a first boyfriend when she was in grade eleven. He was studying in a well-known private school, but spent time with her almost every day after school. Both of them liked to go places together during weekend and they felt free to express their affection for each other in public places. In university, she began a relationship with a new boyfriend during the time when her older sister was getting a divorce. Due to the failure of the love lives of Amy’s parents and sister, her mother allowed Amy to bring her boyfriends to visit at home and was friendly with all of them. Her mother believed that Amy had learned from the family’s mistakes. She thought that if she would forbid her daughter from having a boyfriend, it would lead her to have boyfriends secretly, which would bring trouble in the future. Amy’s mother therefore chose to allow her daughter to have a relationship under her supervision.

### **The Story of Janet**

Janet’s parents were originally poor working class people from a rural area. Due to the limited education they received and the hardships they faced, they decided to move to Chiang Mai City in search of job opportunities. They worked hard and saved money until they managed to open their own small laundry shop, which ended up expanding rapidly. During my fieldwork, Janet’s family was running their downtown laundry shop with long-term laundry contracts for several hotels in Chiang Mai. The business also included a van rental service for tourists.

Despite her attractive appearance, Janet was the only member of the girl group who had never had any boyfriends. Janet said that her parents had told her not to have a boyfriend while studying. She had a straight-forward personality and always spoke bluntly. She told me that a male in the same class approached her one time, but after chatting for two days, the young man stopped moving forward on the relationship and had never returned. Janet also thought her blunt style of communication could be the reason she never had a boyfriend.

While in high school, Janet focused on studying, mostly because her parents had very high expectations for her education. When her older sister had been a teenager, her

family had still been poor. For that reason, her sister did not have the opportunity to pursue a higher education because she had to help with the family's business. Janet was very much aware of her parents and sister's expectations and she wanted to make them proud. Although the financial situation of her family had become much better than previously, Janet always realized that her parents and her sister had worked very hard to reach their current livelihoods. While she wanted something special for her own such as clothes, iPhone, or iPad, Janet always worked part-time jobs and saved money to purchase the items herself. Her parents always praised her for this.

Janet eventually passed the admission examination to study in a public university. In the first year she moved out to stay in a dormitory where she had a chance to meet more people. Gaining more freedom while studying in the university, she became romantically involved with a *tom* who was a senior student. Janet kept her relationship a secret from her family and sister, who expected her to focus on studying.

### **The Story of Robin**

Robin's father and mother were government officers. When she talked about her family, she did not have much positive to say about her parents. Robin did not want me to associate with her parents because they might ask me about some of Robin's behaviors which they did not know about. Robin always complained that her parents were very strict, especially her mother:

*“My mom is so boring. She strictly controls my life. She tries to know everything about me. When I go out during weekend, she always asks me why I have to go out? ‘Why don't I stay home and study?’ ‘Where I will be going?’ ‘Who I will be going with?’ ‘What time I will get back home?’ She complains a lot when I get back home late. She never listens to me, just complains and complains. She really makes me crazy!”*

While studying in high school, Robin did not talk much and was reserved with the group. She was one of the best-looking *toms* in the group. She had a Sino-Thai look and was tall, both of which were seen as aesthetically ideal. Many schoolgirls,

especially in the junior grades, tried to approach her. Like most of her fellow *toms*, Robin usually wore short hair and the sport uniform with pants at school. She was able to evade most of the monitoring by the school authorities with the assistance of the girl group members, who would alert her when teachers were about to approach.

Compared to other group members, Robin had the weakest academic performance. She tried to skip class as much as she could to spend time with her girlfriend. The group members complained about the way Robin did not take any responsibility for assigned group tasks and reports, again because she spent most of her time with her girlfriend, especially after school and during the weekend.

Robin graduated from high school with poor grades. She was therefore only admitted to a public university which was located out of town and quite far away from her house. It turned out that it had been her intention to study in that university, because her girlfriend also gained admission there. Although it was less prestigious, Robin had intended to apply to this university so she could move out of her house to live at a dormitory with her girlfriend.

### **The Story of Rose**

Rose was one of the most beautiful members of the group. Her father was a government officer and her mother was a businesswoman. I noticed through my involvement with Rose's family that her mother loved her and her younger sister very much; she used her two daughters' names to name the shop she had opened. From my observations, I realized that the more Rose's mother loved her daughters, the stricter she became. Rose's mother monitored her daughters' behaviors in every way possible. She searched for information about Rose from Rose's friends and sometimes she called me to get updates about her daughter. Rose's family lived in a government office area and the responsible officers monitored everyone who entered the area. On the way back home from hanging out with her friends and her boyfriend, Rose usually asked me to drive her back home in order to pretend that she was out with me and not with a boyfriend or her peers. Sometimes, when Rose stayed out late, her mother called her friends, including me, to ask the where her daughter was.

Rose was very confident about her appearance when she was in high school. She attended a young model competition and won some money. She used this prize money to undergo plastic surgery on her nose. Everyone disagreed with this decision, but her parents could not stop her because she had earned the money for the surgery herself.

After graduating from high school, Rose enrolled in a private university in Chiang Mai. She used this as a reason to move out of her parental home to stay with her friends in a dormitory. Her parents allowed her to move out, but secretly installed a GPS device in her car in order to be able to track her. Sometimes when she arrived at the dormitory, her parents showed up without prior warning. Once Rose's mother knocked on the door while Rose was being alone with her boyfriend in her room, he had to hide in the bathroom and was nearly caught.

In the last phase of my fieldwork, Rose got a new boyfriend who was a half Vietnamese-American international student. He was very fitness-oriented, had a muscular body, and dressed very classy. Rose used her boyfriends as a status symbol, as a mean to show that she was different from the other girls in their social group.

### **The Story of Cindy**

The parents of Cindy were divorced when she was very young. Afterwards, she stayed with her grandmother, who was a dog breeder. From the early phases of my fieldwork in the high school, I noticed that Cindy felt quite inferior to other group members. She had pimples on her face and was big-boned compared to her peers. One day in class, I noticed she had become quite a lot slimmer since I had last seen her. She expressed her satisfaction when I told her that she looked thinner; she told me that she had been taking diet pills for a while in order to lose weight. Other members in the group told me that she tried to be slim because she was trying to find a boyfriend.

After taking pills and her success in losing weight, Cindy became a pioneer in the girl's group. She was the first one in the group who decided to undergo plastic surgery on her nose during her school summer vacation. Before she decided to get her nose, she searched for information on the procedure from many sources, especially through social media. In the social media group, she found and shared experiences, pictures, and

information about plastic surgery procedures with others who had undergone similar procedures.

During university, she had two more major plastic surgeries. When she was in her junior year, she decided to do multiple operations on her nose and eyelids. It turned out that she was not satisfied with the new nose shape. The following year, she decided to do nose surgery for the third time. Before and after every surgery, Cindy took her own ‘selfies’ and constantly updated her experiences in the secret social media group that included only thirteen group members and me. Acknowledged as the plastic surgery guru among the group members, Cindy usually served as a consultant for those who also wished to undergo plastic surgery.

Since she had become more confident in her appearance, Cindy was also known as a party animal. She liked to go out at night with friends. She also got to know and established other networks among other teenagers in bars and nightclubs. While spending nighttime with Cindy, I was introduced to many of her acquaintances.

### **The Story of Emma**

Emma’s father was an engineer and her mother was a full-time housewife. Emma was the most photogenic girl in the group. She liked to set the background pictures of her friend’s mobile phones (including mine) using her ‘selfies’ that she took. While in high school, Emma loved to wear colored or big-eye contact lenses—which would go unnoticed by the teachers or school inspectors—believing that it made her look more attractive.

Her family was one of the strictest among all research participants. Emma’s parents revealed to me that they had become really strict with their daughter because she had been caught hanging out at night without asking for their permission. When Emma was in grade ten, her mother caught her again; this time she was contacting with a young man. Since then, Emma’s parents had closely monitored her. Her daily schedule was strictly regulated. When she was out during the weekend or after school, her parents always picked her up and she was expected to be on time. Once, she wanted to go out with friends at night and she lied to her parents that she was about to work on a report at

her friend's house. Her parents told her that they would allow her to go out only if they received an official letter issued by a teacher or school authority or if she could give them the teacher's phone number so that they could call the teacher to prove that she told them the truth.

Since her parents closely monitored her behavior (especially regarding her time table and relationships with the opposite gender), Emma tried to be obedient in front of her parents by acting according to what they expected her to do. She did not go out very often and mostly stayed at home as they wanted. However, she secretly associated with her peers through social media. In school, she had a homosexual relationship because it was easier to pursue than sexual affairs with male. Emma said that she was also sexual attracted to men. But within the context of her family and school, she preferred having relationships with the same gender to avoid social and familial problems. She did not consider having sexual relationships with the same sex as 'getting laid' (*sia tua*) because it could not result in pregnancy.

After graduating high school and continuing at a private university in Chiang Mai City, Emma took this opportunity to move out and stay in a dormitory with a friend from high school. Gaining a certain level of freedom paved ways for her to resume heterosexual relationships and she had a new boyfriend who was a student in the same university.

### **The Story of Vicki**

Vicki's father was a high-ranking government official and her mother was a full-time housewife. Vicki was one of the most beautiful girls in the group; she knew how to benefit from her female sexuality and beauty. She was the first person who made me realize that youth sexuality, especially among female teenagers, was a much more fluid and contested category than I had understood. During fieldwork, she was the group member who had relationships with several persons, both men and women. Like most members in the girl group, she preferred having homosexual relationships in the context of the school while spending time with men when she was outside the school. These men were referred to as '*gigs*' (friends with sexual benefits). She had a wide network established in social media with thousands of friends on her Facebook account.

While she was in grade twelve, she attended the local-level of a beauty queen contest and won the crown. Then, she was sponsored to compete in higher levels, which she also won. After being crowned, she went from being on the school black list and being closely monitored by the school authorities to become a well-known and appreciated student in her school. A huge billboard congratulating her on her success was displayed in front of the school. She was admired and frequently acknowledged by teachers who invited her to show up and represent the school in various school-organized events. On graduation day, she was presented with a certification for outstanding student who preserved the school's reputation. This was to the delight of the friends in her social group who teased her that they *"just saw [her] running away from being chased by the inspection, but now [she has] become an outstanding student."* While having the status of a beauty queen, she was hired by various organizations to show up at events, which resulted in a huge income for her and her family. This made that she gained more power to negotiate with her parents. She had a certain level of freedom to buy her own car, do her own shopping, and go out at night, as she wanted. After graduating from high school, she continued her studies at a private university in Chiang Mai. Being a former beauty queen, she was invited to be a presenter for the university and gained various other privileges.

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## Conclusion

Ethnographies since the 1980s are increasingly dominated by the voice of participants. The variation and distinctions among sexual and gendered identities are theorized and contextualized (Costa & Matzner, 2007). Therefore, this study paves extensive ways for schoolgirls to tell their life stories. According to Costa & Matzner, life stories of research participants provide a tale of the self, a story what mean to be 'me.' It also offers a public construction of self that can be encountered without invasive probing. Telling life stories emphasizes that each story is indeed told by a particular individual aiming to draw attention to the vantage point of situatedness and subjectivity from which the story is told. It also simultaneously provides the entry into the prevailing cultural norms and discourses that shape individual subjectivities, thus elucidating the interplay between structure and agency, or 'embedded agency.' Life stories of thirteen schoolgirls presented in this Chapter thus assist us to gain access to process of 'cultural contestation,' including how each schoolgirl sees herself as challenging and resisting dominant sexual control mechanisms, the interaction between the schoolgirl agencies and society in the construction and expression of their sexual subjectivities in everyday life

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