

PART III

Schoolgirls' Tactics and Social Practices



Figure 6.1 Schoolgirls' tactics and social practices

CHAPTER 6

My Body, My Self, and My Sexuality: Schoolgirl's Tactical Practices Towards Sexual Autonomy

While the previous Chapter focused on various control mechanisms which strategically operated through families, school, universities and media to shape the hegemonic sexual identity among schoolgirls, this Chapter exclusively explores a wide range of tactical practices done by the research participants in order to compromise, evade, negotiate or contest those control powers for reaching a certain level of sexual autonomy in particular context. The first part investigates the research participants' domestic contestations against their parental controls. Applying the concept of "bedroom culture," it was found that, in a modern Northern Thai society, online social media was systematically used as part of the bedroom culture which paved ways for youth to come up with various tactical practices in order to construct and express their sexual selves within the strictly controlled domestic territories. The second part draws on the ways schoolgirls' everyday life negotiating practices within the school compound. When they were under the strict regulations in high school, they employed tactics for achieving a certain level of sexual autonomy such as the uses of language, their reactions to time restrictions and inspected territory of the school, homosexual practices, friendships, consumptions of cultural commodities, technological advancements, and other cultural practices. The third part focuses on the negotiating practices when the research participants continued their studies in various universities in Chiang Mai. The girls could make use of the transitional period from high school to university life to temporarily cast away from the strict control from their parents and senior students, for instance the flexible-nature of university study schedule arrangement, homosexual relationship, drinking, dormitory climbing and making fun of the senior students against a strictly controlled campus dormitory. Although a wide range of negotiating practices were done, while facing with the control power in certain contexts – especially in cases

that they realized the positive consequences or were not able to evade – the research participants could come up with their own ways to compromise with those repressions. As Goffman (1959) states that individuals are able to modify their behaviors in different social contexts, while encountering with the governing power, the girls would compromise by being obedient if they perceived they could comfortably accept the rules or regulations rather than subvert them. Moreover, subverting meaning of their encounter with governing powers as a humor was found the way they could compromise those repressions in everyday life that they could not resist.

6.1 My Private (Sexual) Space: Domestic and Social Network Contestations against Parental Control Mechanisms

As mentioned in the previous Chapter, schoolgirls' parents employed various mechanisms to control and shape their daughters to become such an ideal type of young women according to the *kunlasatree* model, which highly valued virginity. This meant that schoolgirls should avoid relationships with the opposite gender or other types of 'inappropriate' behaviors that could lead to immature sexual relationships or unexpected pregnancies. Moreover, a high level of education was also prioritized in order to guarantee a better future. During ethnographic fieldwork, several schoolgirls' tactics emerged that negotiated, contested, or resisted this model and the control mechanisms that it employed. These girls sought to achieve a certain level of their sexual autonomy from the strict family rules and regulations enforced by parents.

To understand female youth culture, the concept of a "bedroom culture" was introduced from McRobbie in the 1970s as her response to the traditional youth research of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. This concept was developed to address alternative ways in which girls organized their cultural lives that were different to boys. Offering this concept, she pushed against the focus on males in youth cultural studies. According to McRobbie, girl's culture could be critical and central to alternative spheres, especially within the domestic spaces within their homes. McRobbie then added the dimension of gender and sexuality as a way of enhancing and enriching the theory already in existence (McRobbie, 1991; McRobbie & Garber, 1976). From my fieldwork among schoolgirls, their sexual practices were prevalent in their bedrooms—their own spaces. The bedroom was one of the central spheres for these young women

to devise various tactical practices in order to construct and express their sexual selves within the strictly controlled territories of the domestic household. Their negotiating practices were deployed in diverse forms and levels depending on the particular circumstances of their living environments.

As mentioned, Kim was one of the wealthiest members of the group. She stayed alone in a downtown townhouse her father had bought for her that was located not far from the school. Kim's father hardly stayed with her at the house because he was always on the move. Therefore, Kim's place became the gathering place for the girl group members after school and during weekends. Especially prior to going out, the group members always came together at Kim's place in the evening to prepare for the night. They would dress up, apply make-up, as well as stay overnight if they were too drunk and could not go back home. Kim's bedroom thus became a place for the group members to enjoy a certain level of freedom. During free times, any of Kim's friends could visit and spend time at her house. Sometimes when I visited her place, I would meet her old friends from secondary school. Her old friends brought their friends from other schools to join at the place. Since the house was located at the center of Chiang Mai downtown, they could walk to buy food and drinks at nearby convenient stores, shops, and restaurants. Kim's place, therefore, became a center among teenagers from various high schools and vocational schools to come, get to know each other, as well as establish relationships with young people from various institutions. One day, Kim had a relationship with a schoolgirl from a private high school who was a friend of her friends from secondary school. She followed her friends to visit Kim's place, where they drank, spent time together, and eventually became Kim's girlfriend few weeks later. She then decided to move in with Kim's for several months. Once, I asked Kim if her father knew that her girlfriend had moved into the house. Kim replied that her father knew that she was *tom*. According to Kim, she believed that being *tom* was the reason why her father could leave her to stay alone in the house. Because of being *tom*, she could prove to her father that she could stay alone and not get involved with sexual relationships with the opposite gender. Kim's father knew that she brought her girlfriend to stay with her. Kim merely introduced the girlfriend to her father as her friend. Kim believed that her father knew that they were in a relationship, but he did not say a word. For Kim, her father's reaction implied that he was fine with their relationship; Kim said:

“He’s never strict about anything with me. He’s always busy and moves very often. We’ve never stayed together, but he relies on me. The only one thing he wants me to do is study. Aside from that, I can do anything I want. He’s never criticized me when I hang out at night and got very drunk. He also knows I smoke. He realizes I’m tom and I can take care of myself. That’s why he bought me this house and lets me stay alone.”

Moreover, Kim’s place also served as the freedom zone for any group members who wanted to spend “private time” with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Kim always offered the couples to come and utilize the place whenever they needed it.

Kim was the only case that was provided a high level of autonomy from her parent. In contrast, the rest of the research participants were under various levels of parental control as mentioned in Chapter 4. In their daily lives, the girls were required to act and behave according to family rules in front of their parents within the household spaces by doing things such as helping mothers cook and prepare meals in a kitchen or being responsible to household chores. While being in the living room, their parents could monitor what they watched on the television or what they saw on the Internet. However, these girls attempted to negotiate the temporal and spatial control within in their house by spending time in their own bedroom. The time in their own bedroom would be their own space. Rose said that her bedroom was: *“My own world, my territory. When I lock the door, no one can invade. I have my own rights to do whatever I want in my own room as long as I don’t make anyone to get in trouble”* (mai dai tum hai kraai duerd rone). Meanwhile, parents revealed that it was normal for teenage girls to spend a great deal of time in their bedrooms because they need their own privacy. Nancy’s mother mentioned to me that:

“Nancy mostly spends her time in her own bedroom. She has everything in her room: Internet, laptop computer, television, everything... When she finished her assigned household chores, she goes up and locks herself up in the room. She doesn’t get out until the next morning, except if she’s hungry late at night. Sometimes, she cooks instant noodles and eats in her room. I think if she could have a

refrigerator in her room, she definitely would... I understand that a teenage girl her age prefers spending her time in her bedroom. When I was her age, I myself also spent a lot of time in my bedroom too, mostly for studying. I also constantly tell her that she should not spend too much time with those “nonsense” (rai sa ra) activities such as watching television or Facebook. They could waste her time and bring a negative effect on her grade.”

All research participants in this study were born in middle-class families. They had their own houses and allocated private bedrooms for their daughters. Nancy's bedroom was on the second floor of the house and was located in a different area from the parents' bedroom. The air conditioner was installed and the room was well-designed for being silent. Nancy also padded the gap of the door to further prevent outside noise from entering the room. When Nancy locked the door and turned on the air-conditioner, she was casting away from the parental regulations. Nancy described her room that: “*My room is my freedom. When I'm in my room, it's like I'm living in my own world. You see my mother is very methodical. Everything in the house has to be in order. But my room is very messed up. I don't care.*” When she was in her last year in high school, Nancy's girlfriend lived with her at her place for months. At that time, her parents allowed her girlfriend to stay with her believing that they were good close friends. Nancy was the one who invited her girlfriend to stay at her place because her girlfriend's house was far away from the school. Having stayed for awhile, it turned out that Nancy's parents, especially mother, praised Nancy's girlfriend. She was very helpful with household chores and always assisted Nancy's parents. This contrasted with Nancy who was usually complained for being irresponsible. Nancy's parents treated her girlfriend like their own daughter. Both Nancy's parents and her girlfriend's parents also get to know each other and kept in touch with updates on their children. When Nancy stayed at her girlfriend's place, the girlfriend's mother called to inform Nancy's parents that Nancy was staying overnight at their place. When Nancy's girlfriend stayed at Nancy's house, Nancy's mother would call to inform the girlfriend's mother as well.

Nancy and her girlfriend acted like good friends in front of parents. However, when they were alone in Nancy's bedroom, their relationship was transformed from friends to

lovers. According to Nancy, when she was alone with her girlfriend in the bedroom, she said: *“I can say whatever I want. I can do whatever I need. It’s about me and her.”* Nancy and her girlfriend treated each other like a couple within the bedroom. Nancy called herself ‘wife’ (*mea / pun ra ya*) while calling her girlfriend ‘husband’ (*pua / sa mii*). I was quite close to Nancy’s girlfriend and we went out at night together often. One night while drinking, I asked her how she felt staying at Nancy’s place. She replied that she felt good staying there with Nancy’s parents. They were really nice to her. She also called them ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ as they were her own parents. She really liked the privacy of Nancy’s bedroom. Any voice inside the room would not leak outside so that they could do and talk whatever they want. They could call each other husband and wife, tease each other, or even have a fight without fearing that Nancy’s parents would know what they were saying or doing. Once while having a fight, Nancy threw things toward her girlfriend and it accidentally hit the door. Nancy’s parents rushed upstairs and knocked on the door to find out what was happening. Nancy and her girlfriend then pretended it was a fight between friends.

When I asked further about their sexual practices, Nancy’s girlfriend freely revealed that: *“We do what other lovers do. I like to hold her and we fall asleep together. Nancy has a very nice body that I really like. She’s got a curvy waist. In a middle of the night when she was sleeping, I hug her waist from the back side; it really turns me on.”*

In contrast to Nancy’s private bedroom, Amy’s bedroom was made out of wood and her mother’s bedroom was next to hers. She was aware that the thin wooden wall meant that what she did or said would likely be leaked to her mother’s bedroom. Amy was very careful with her conversations with everyone on the phone, especially with her boyfriend. Even though Amy’s mother allowed her to have a boyfriend, their relationship was closely monitored. Therefore, Amy tried to avoid talking about any ‘risky’ topics such as going out at night or drinking, or even saying *‘I love you’* to her boyfriend. Amy was aware that her mother could hear her through the wall anytime. When she was talking on the phone with friends or boyfriends in her bedroom, she usually chatted about general topics that were ‘acceptable’ to her mother. To avoid eavesdropping, she chose to have any ‘risky’ conversations via texting messages and chatting room applications where her mother could not monitor.

Once I asked Amy's mother whether she knew what her daughter was doing when she was in her bedroom, she replied that:

“For me, I think I have to follow my daughter closely. Other parents don't know that their children tell them lies. For me, I usually listen in when Amy talks to her friends and boyfriends on the phone. When she is making a phone call at the shop or at home, I pretend not to be interested in their conversation, but I'm carefully listening to what they were talking about. At night, after she helps me close the shop in the evening, we come back home and she goes up to her room around 8 p.m. My room is next to hers; I always eavesdrop on her conversation through the wall. I find out that they are talking to each other in an appropriate manner. That makes me entrust that their relationship will not lead them to act inappropriately. Honestly, every time when Amy friends or boyfriends speak with her on the phone, I always listen in on their conversation whether Amy is in front of me or when she is in her bedroom. I always try to hear it. I just want to know what they are talking about.”

Online communication, especially through chatting rooms and social networking, was used to negotiate the strict controls of their parents. As mentioned in Chapter 4, most of the research participants' parents tried their best to insert themselves into their daughters' social networks by learning how to use Facebook and several chatting applications to keep up with their daughters' social behavior and friends. In the meantime, the girls came up with various tactical practices to evade or contest their parental surveillance as well. Emma was one of the research participants who used social media to negotiate her mother's strict control mechanisms on her mobile phone usage in a daily life. She had been caught by her mother for having a relationship with a male because of her smart phone conversation history. After that situation, her parents increased the level of surveillance since she had eroded their trust. She spent a long time trying to prove to her parents that she became an obedient daughter and that she would never do anything like that anymore. The only effective means of accomplishing this goal was by doing exactly as her parents expected. She focused more on studying and

improved her grades in the next semester. She also stayed at home most of the time after school and during the weekends after finishing tutorial classes. When I visited her family again during Emma's final year of high school, her parents highly praised their daughter who behaved much better than before, she focused more on studying, and spent most of her time at home with her parents. Even though she was mostly in her bedroom, at least the parents knew their daughter was in the household where she was much safer than outside of their monitoring. Emma's mother actually complemented the Internet because Emma rarely went out after her parents installed a Wi-Fi Internet connection at home.

Yet, the Internet connection paved ways for Emma to associate with other young men outside the house. She had her second Facebook account her parents did not know about which I will discuss in detail later. Continually increasing, over a thousand other teenagers were being 'friends' with her on Facebook. Since Emma was good-looking as her pictures showed on Facebook, many young males and *toms* left her messages expressing their attractions towards her. Emma really enjoyed getting to know new young men and *toms*. Eventually, she had an online relationship with one young man who was one of her friends on Facebook. Due to a strict parental control and the previous lesson learned of getting caught, Emma tried to avoid talking to him via mobile phone. Emma saved his number in her contacts as a name associated with a girl and constantly changed. After their phone conversations, receiving text messages, and even conversations in any chatting applications, Emma always deleted the phone or chatting history and signed out to prevent them from being viewed by her parents. When I asked Emma why she did not lock her mobile phone with a password, she replied: *"If I do that, my parents would doubt that I've got something I don't want them to know."*

Online social network and chatting applications also helped research participants facilitate their sexual relationships with their boyfriends in their bedrooms. Rose was one of the girl group members who were comfortable with her sexuality. She had relationships with several young men. It was understood within the group that if she introduced them any male as her 'boyfriend', she had already had a sexual relationship with that particular person. When Rose was in high school, Kim's bedroom was

frequently visited by Rose and her boyfriend since Kim's place was one of the safest place for them to 'spend time alone together.' Once, the group and I had an appointment to hang out at night together. In the evening, every group member came to gather at Kim's place as usual. Mostly when I visited, the members usually were in Kim's bedroom to dress and help each other with make-up. But this time everyone was at the basement instead of Kim's bedroom located on the second floor. Kim told me, while chuckling, not go up to her room yet because Rose and her boyfriend were '*sa wee wee wee*' (spending their time alone together) in the room. Rose assured me that she always practiced safe sex by using condoms appropriately every time she had a sexual relationship with her boyfriends. Being asked about her attitude towards sexual practices, she replied that it was fine because she liked her boyfriends and she believed she could have sex as long as she properly protected herself. When she was in her bedroom and could not meet her boyfriend, they were always online and chatted with a web camera via chatting applications. According to Rose, she said that: "*It makes us stay together all the time.*" Since the girl group had formed the 'secret groups' initially in Facebook and then moved to Line to constantly keep in touch with each other, Rose was comfortable sharing pictures of her boyfriend being naked while they were chatting via Skype with the girl group members. Rose told the group: "*He's always naked while chatting with me on cam.*" The group members were comfortable teasing Rose by asking how professional her boyfriend was in bed, his penis size, etc. Apart from Rose, other girl group members were also comfortable sharing their sexual fantasies with their friends in secret groups because they were considered the safe spheres for them. They usually posted pictures and stories that reflected their sexual fantasies towards particular people. For example, Vicki was once approached by an attractive young man who she really liked. She captured half-naked pictures and video clips showing his muscular body exercising at the gym in the secret groups to show the group members and ask for their opinion. In the online secret groups, everyone was very active sharing their sexual fantasies via constantly posting pictures and video clips or stories related to sexual and other 'risky' topics they could not share in public.

Mary was one of the most interesting cases because of the ways she utilized her bedroom and social media as a negotiating spaces against her family domestic control. Mary spent a lot of her time chatting with her boyfriend via chatting applications since

she tried to avoid talking to him on mobile phone that was more likely to be spied upon from other family members. While turning on a camera chatting application, they rarely talked to each other, but typed instead. As Mary was one of the research participants I was closest to, during the middle of my fieldwork she gave me 450 pages of the recorded conversations between her and her ex-boyfriend while she was in high school. According to Mary, the reason she and her boyfriend used online video chatting all the time while she was in her bedroom because she and her boyfriend did not have any chance to meet each other during daytime. The only times they could meet were in the evening and nighttime when she got back home from the school. Due to the strict parental regulations in Mary's family, it was very difficult for them to meet in person or even talk to each other via mobile phone. Therefore, camera chatting and texting were solutions for them to keep in touch with each other underneath the strict domestic control power. When they turned on cameras and saw each other, it made them feeling like they were together all the time. When Mary was feeling lazy when reading her textbook or doing her homework, her boyfriend would encourage her to do so. When the male felt asleep while he was studying, Mary could wake him up to continue reading. They could see what each other were doing. When they finished showering, they rubbed their bodies dry in front of the cameras and gave suggestions to each other about how to dress. Sometimes Mary and her boyfriend brought their meals to eat together in front of the cameras imagining that they were dining together. They shared their everyday life activities together while being in distant bedrooms.

By analyzing their recorded conversations, one interesting thing was the way they named themselves in the chat room, which reflected the status of their relationship at a particular period of time. During the beginning of their relationship, Mary used the name "*Somebody*" which could possibly imply "I Want Somebody" while the young man named himself "*I am Just a Little Insect That Wants to Smell a Flower* ^^ [an smiling face icon]" which implied himself as a small insect and Mary as a flower. After that, Mary changed her name to "*I Want to Find my Soul Mate*" which meant she tended to accept being in a relationship with the male. While being in a relationship, when they had an argument or any little conflict, the young man changed his name to "*I've Never Been Important to Her* *>: ([an angry face icon]" and Mary changed hers to "*Why Are You so Bad Ass?*" and then to "*I'm Always Overly Overpowered* *>: ([an angry face

icon].” After that, the young man changed his name again into a sarcastic way “*Yeah of Course, I’m Always Aggressive Towards You* ; ([a sad face icon],” and then changed to “*Is There Anyone Who Loves Me Just the Way I am!!* *>: ([an angry face icon].” But once they finally reconciled, the man changed his name to “*One Day I Will be a Better Man* *>;([a determined face icon],” and then he changed back to this usual name “*I am Just a Little Insect That Wants to Smell a Flower* ^^ [a smiling face icon].”

In the beginning of their relationship, Mary was having a conflict with her father’s minor wife (*mia noi*). Mary went to ask for extra money from her father, but her father’s minor wife insulted her as being ‘prostitute’ begging money from her husband. Mary shared her anger with her boyfriend and he tried to give her his moral support:

(19:50)) っ 'o')づ [this icon was created by Mary’s boyfriend which implied his opened arms]

: *If I were you, I would be very angry too! Could I do anything for you? Do you know her number?*

(19:50) **Mary** : *I don’t know.*

(19:50)) っ 'o')づ : *I’d never forgive her for insulting my hun! I’m wanna blame your dad too!*

(19:51) **Mary** : *They deserve each other. He fucks the prostitute.*

(19:51)) っ 'o')づ : *Ummmm.. Clam down hun..*

(19:51) **Mary** : *They were born in the same hell.*

(19:51)) っ 'o')づ : *Everything will be ok. At least you have me beside you ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

(19:51) **Mary** : *I know ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

(19:51)) っ 'o')づ : *I will never let you down. I promise ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

(20:03) **Mary** : *LOL [Laugh Out Loud]*

(20:03) (っ 'o')づ : *Don’t think about it too much. I’m really worried about you.*

(20:03) **Mary** : *How could I stop thinking about it!*

(20:03) (っ'ο')づ : *Do you want me to go to see you?*

(20:04) **Mary** : *I just have no mood to do anything now. That's fine ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

(20:25) (っ'ο')づ : *What are you thinking now? I'm really worried about you.*

(20:25) **Mary** : *I'm thinking of you!*

(20:25) (っ'ο')づ : *Heehee.. You're so pretty. Here is your reward.*

(20:25) (っ'ο')づ : *Jubz Jubz [Kiss Kiss] ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

(20:25) **Mary** : *Get back to studying!*

(20:26) (っ'ο')づ : *I've never given this reward to anyone, I tell ya! *: D [an overly smiling face icon].*

In order to tighten the relationship, sometimes the young man pretended to be sarcastic to attract Mary's attention as the conversation below shows:

(23:35) (っ'ο')づ : *Go to bed! You haven't paid attention to me today *:) [the icon of a sad face].*

(23:35) **Mary** : *Me? Not pay attention to you? What are you talking about? LOL?*

(23:36) (っ'ο')づ : *You talked about another guy T_T [a sad face icon].*

(23:36) **Mary** : *I was just kidding! Don't be an asshole.*

(23:36) (っ'ο')づ : *You turned a blind eye to me.*

(23:36) **Mary** : *LOL! You are always in my heart ;) [a smiling face with blinked eye icon].*

(23:36) (っ'ο')づ : *T_T [a hopeless face icon] Just go to bed.*

(23:36) **Mary** : *?? You want me to call you?*

(23:37) **Mary** : *Silence... Maybe not?*

- (23:37)) っ 'o')づ : *If you don't want [to talk to me], you don't have to. I can't drag you to do so. I have no right to force you to do what you don't want to.*
- (23:37)) っ 'o')づ : *: ([a sad face icon].
- (23:38) **Mary** : *LOL! You are such a sarcastic guy!*
- (23:39)) っ 'o')づ : *I will never force you anymore. I promise. So far, I might have been too forceful towards you.*
- (23:39) **Mary** : *LOL*
- (23:40)) っ 'o')づ : *I was wrong *:) [a sad face icon].*
- (23:40) **Mary** : *You are really sarcastic!*
- (16:55)) っ 'o')づ : *I know you just can't wait to meet a new guy.*
- (16:55) **Mary** : *I will never leave you.*
- (16:55)) っ 'o')づ : *>: ([an angry face icon].
- (16:55) **Mary** : *No wayyyyyyyyyy ^^ [a smiling face icon].*
- (16:56)) っ 'o')づ : *You will meet a new guy for sure! I will keep an eye out for that!*
- (16:56) **Mary** : *No way! No one could be more important than you. No wayyyyy!*
- (16:57)) っ 'o')づ : *I won't let you to have a new guy. I never will.*
- (16:57) **Mary** : *You can see. So far I don't have anybody but you.*
- (16:57) **Mary** : *And never will^^ [an smiling face icon].*
- (16:57)) っ 'o')づ : *What if I were the less important one for you. What if I were the last one you see. What would I do? *>: ([an angry face icon].*
- (16:58) **Mary** : *Don't say that!*
- (16:58)) っ 'o')づ : *I'm serious. I'm jealous of you!*
- (16:58) **Mary** : *You asshole! I'm jealous of you too!*

- (16:58) (っ'。)づ : *>:) [a happy face icon].
- (16:58) **Mary** : ^^ [a smiling face icon].
- (16:58) (っ'。)づ : *I'm jealous of you!* *>: ([an angry face icon].
- (16:59) **Mary** : *LOL! You're scary. I really am too!*

When they reached the peak of their relationship, their affections were expressed to each other much more bluntly than the previous period of time:

- (20:30) (っ'。)づ : *I really miss you!*
- (20:30) (っ'。)づ : *>:) [a smiling face icon].
- (20:30) **Mary** : *Yeah!*
- (20:30) (っ'。)づ : *>: D [an overly smiling face icon]. *You see how much you are important for me hun?!*
- (20:30) **Mary** : *what?--* [a feeling meh icon].
- (20:30) (っ'。)づ : *Just for a second. Could I come see you?*>: (*
[a determined face icon].
- (20:31) **Mary** : ; p [a face with tongue out icon].
- (20:31) (っ'。)づ : *I miss you soooo much! I just can't stand this feeling. So I have to turn on my laptop *>: D*
[an overly smiling face icon].
- (20:31) **Mary** : *You said you would go to see movie with friends. Why are you still at home and online?*
- (20:32) (っ'。)づ : *I just let them go. I want to see you *>:)* [a smiling face icon].
- (20:32) **Mary** : *Then go read your textbook!*
- (20:32) (っ'。)づ : *Just wanna say I miss you miss you miss you miss you miss you miss you miss you miss you miss you.*
- (20:32) **Mary** : *I miss you tootootootootootootootootoo.*
- (20:33) (っ'。)づ : *I miss you more than you do a million times.*
- (20:33) (っ'。)づ : *If you miss me more than I do a million times, I will miss you more than you do a million*

million million million million million times.

From now on....>:) [a smiling face icon].*

After this conversation, Mary's boyfriend changed his name to "*More and More!! *>: D [an overly smiling face icon],*" while Mary also changed hers "*Much More than You Do ; p [a face with a tongue out icon].*"

As previously mentioned, Mary lived under the strict family control. Her mother and her older sister valued her education and expected her to study hard in order to be a flight attendant. Sometimes, her mother came in to check if Mary was studying late at night because her mother noticed light in Mary's bedroom when she was online a camera with her boyfriend. However, Mary had her ways to conceal that she was chatting with her boyfriend as a following conversation:

- (0:30) **Mary** : *My mom just attacked! So frightened! LOL*
- (0:30) (っ'。)づ : *Did she? LOL! You will be hit for sure!*
- (0:30) **Mary** : *I told her this isn't her business! LOL!*
- (0:31)(っ'。)づ : *Did you?*
- (0:31) **Mary** : *Just kidding. If I did, she would kill me.*
- (0:33) **Mary** : *You see, I immediately turn off the cam! LOL! Look at my eyes. They look so sleepy. LOL (so that Mary's mother left the room because she thought that Mary was asleep.)*
- (0:33) (っ'。)づ : *So you go shower now. That's it for tonight. Your mom comes in too oftennnnnn! LOL*
- (0:43) **Mary** : *LOL*
- (0:43) (っ'。)づ : *If she found out!*
- (0:43) **Mary** : *I would be deaaaaaaaaaaaaa dead for sure.*
- (0:43) (っ'。)づ : *I wouldn't be able to see my beautiful girl then! *>: ([an angry face icon]*
- (0:43) **Mary** : *?? What??*
- (0:43) (っ'。)づ : *You're my beautiful girl. LOL*

- (0:43) **Mary** : *You asshole. I've gotta go now.*
- (0:46) (っ'お')づ : *OK hun !! Could I love you forever?*
- (0:46) **Mary** : *Oh?*
- (0:46) (っ'お')づ : *It's ok if you don't want me to do so *>: ([an angry face icon].*
- (0:46) **Mary** : *I would never know if you didn't tell me. LOL.*
- (0:46) (っ'お')づ : *So I tell you now. Could I love you forever?*
- (0:47) **Mary** : *I did tell you. I love you too.*

While they were deeply falling in love, Mary and her boyfriend were online using camera chatting application most of the time—even when they were sleeping—because it made them feel together all the time.

- (0:35) (っ'お')づ : *You can go to bed if you are sleepy. I want to see you while you were sleeping.*
- (0:36) **Mary** : *I'm loading a file. It takes time.*
- (0:36) (っ'お')づ : *I'm sure I will hear you snore. LOL.*
- (0:36) **Mary** : *You're so bad!*
- (0:36) (っ'お')づ : *LOL*
- (0:36) **Mary** : *I've never snored!*
- (0:36) (っ'お')づ : *Really?*
- (0:37) (っ'お')づ : *Look at me. I'm the one who studies seriously.*
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- (0:54) **Mary** : *I finished loading a file.*
- (0:54) (っ'お')づ : *OK, you can go to bed. But don't turn off a camera and a sound volume. I want to hear you snore. LOL.*
- (0:54) **Mary** : *You bad guy!*

At certain parts of the conversation, I found out that Mary was comfortable to reveal some private parts of her body with her boyfriend. Certain words in their conversation were also found referring to sexual innuendos.

- (1:09) (っ'。)づ : *Your boxer is so uncool tonight. The Ultra Man! LOL.*
- (1:09) **Mary** : *Are you going to do homework together with me tonight?*
- (1:28) (っ'。)づ : *Your face is so begging me tonight. I just can't resist.*
- (1:28) **Mary** : ; p [a face with a tongue out icon].
- (1:29) (っ'。)づ : *Yeah.. Like that...*
- (1:29) **Mary** : *You bad guy.*
- (1:29) (っ'。)づ : *Thank you very much for being beside me. From now on I will never love anyone but you ^^ [a smiling face icon].*

The relationship between Mary and her first boyfriend lasted over a year. When her boyfriend continued his studies abroad, the relationship became distant. Meanwhile, Mary graduated high school and was in her transition period to university. They communicated less and less until Mary knew that he was starting a new relationship with another young woman.

Apart from her sexually negotiating practices, Mary was one of the most interesting research participants who also utilized her bedroom as a contested space against the hegemonic power. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Mary was a big fan of Korean boybands, especially Dongbankshinki and Super Junior. Unfortunately, at school she belonged to the girl group in which all the other members were anti-Korean popular culture. They always insulted that Korean celebrities were too 'fake'. They believed Korean popular culture belonged to those immature, working class youth, unlike their favorite Thai and Western celebrities who were 'cooler' and 'more real'. Therefore, Mary had her ways to secretly exchanged and updated information about her Korean idols with her old friends from secondary school and in the Dongbankshinki and Super Junior fan pages in Facebook. Mary decorated her room with posters of Dongbankshinki and Super Junior. She listened to these boybands's songs and followed their movements. When I asked her whether or not she was afraid that other members of the girl group would find out

that she was a fan of Korean boybands, Mary replied that group members rarely came to visit her place and bedroom because her house was located in a peri-urban area far from the city. The girl group members preferred gathering at Kim's place in downtown. Most of the time after school or during weekend, they were usually in touch with each other via online secret groups in Facebook and chatting applications. Meanwhile, when Mary was with the girl group in school, she pretended that she was also crazy about those Thai and Western celebrities like every other group members in order to fit in with the rest of the girl group members.

Apart from the temporal and spatial control within in the household, parents also tried to catch up and control their children by inserting themselves into their daughters' friend networks. Those parents applied various strategies to get to know their daughters' friends and keep contact with them in order to get updated information and track their movements. For example, Mary's mother learned to use Facebook, signed up her own Facebook account, and tried to be a friend with teenagers from her daughter's Facebook friend list. In doing so, apart from being informed about what kind of persons her daughter was associating with, she could also constantly spy where they were going and what they were doing by looking at the posted pictures, statuses, or checking-ins at particular places and times. Meanwhile, Rose's mother collected as many as possible of her daughter's friends' phone numbers, so that she could call to triangulate Rose's position and follow her daughter from them. During the meantime, research participants implemented a range of tactical practices to evade, negotiate, or resist the control mechanisms of their parents.

While their parents were trying to insert themselves into and get to know their friend networks, the 'secret groups' in online social media chatting applications and Facebook message box were set up among research participants that were only accessible among members of their own group. It was found that secret groups were the important channels that revolutionized the way that teenage girls communicated within their own group. According to the study on the utilization of online social networks among American youth, it found out that apart from providing teens with a space to work out identity and status, online social networks also assisted them with making sense of cultural cues and negotiable public life (Boyd, 2007). From my fieldwork among

research participants in urban Chiang Mai, the organized online secret groups in online social network sites also effectively paved ways for the girls to plan and do anything without the knowledge of their parents. Even though the girl group members were at different places, the secret groups in chatting applications provided an online platform where they could instantly interact and have conversations. Through online secret groups, they could inform other members in the group to coordinate their stories whether a group member's parent contacted another member.

When I was in the process of my fieldwork and was very close to the research participants, I was usually the first one who most of the girls told their parents that they would go out with when they asked for the parents' permission to go out. Then, they asked their parents to drop them off at shopping malls or the school claiming that they had an appointment with me at those particular places. In reality, the girls spent time with other persons, especially their boyfriends or girlfriends. Most of the time, they informed me in advance in case their parents would contact me so that I could reply the same answers as the girls had told their parents before. On the way back, their boyfriend or girlfriend usually dropped them off along the way and the girls asked me to pick them up and send them back home to show their parents that they really went out with me. One day in the middle of my fieldwork when the research participants were in high school, Rose posted a Facebook message in the secret group message box informing every group member that if anyone(s) in the group was/were contacted by her mother, they were required to answer that she was out to with me in order to be tutored the English subject preparing for the forthcoming examination. But, Rose actually went out with her boyfriend to a waterfall. It turned out that she was drunk. She jumped out from the cliff and her leg was broken. On the way back, I drove Rose back home and found out that her mother was mad at me. Late at night, the mother called to blame me that after tutoring I should not have brought her to the waterfall. I was the most mature person in the group, but I did not take care of her daughter well. I pretended to accept that it was my fault after I remembered that Rose had messaged me that she had told her parents that she would go out with me.

Having multiple Facebook accounts was another tactical practice that was done by the schoolgirls, while the parents were closely monitoring and keeping up with their

daughters' Facebook accounts. Certain girl group members had more than one Facebook account. Being aware that their parents kept an eye on what they and those people in their friend lists posted on Facebook timelines, a "proper" Facebook account was created in order to socialize with parents, cousins, and friends they were not close to. Through this Facebook account, any topics and pictures which were considered "proper" such as studying, dining, or creative activities which the girls wanted to show their good image would be set up as 'public' before posting and sharing because they wanted everyone to view. Certain research participants also expressed their feelings towards their parents through this account. Mary conveyed her dissatisfaction with the ways her mother and her older sister had been forcing her to study hard expecting her to be a flight attendant. Meanwhile, another additional Facebook account was created to communicate among close friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, or acquaintances. Vicki, Emma, and Nancy's alternative Facebook accounts were used for collecting *toms* and males they had met. When they found any attractive young men or *toms* in schools, universities, or when they went out at night— apart from exchanging Line IDs—they usually asked to be added to the alternate Facebook accounts. Sometimes when the girls were taking a look at their friends' Facebook friend lists and found anyone attractive, they usually sent requests to be friends of those persons. This practice was widely done among research participants in order to have their own "good looking boys/girls collections." Especially Vicki, Emma, and Nancy, some of their boyfriends and girlfriends were found through these collections. The girls could express themselves freely through their alternative Facebook accounts, especially sexual issues and any topics considered 'inappropriate' among adults. For privacy reasons, any risky statuses or pictures posted in an alternative Facebook account were usually set up as 'private' in which only friends in a friend list or particular persons were allowed to view. Regarding the high level of risky issues especially sexual experiences, research participants preferred sharing in the secret groups in which only the girl group members were able to access.

The results show that the bedroom culture remains very essential to social lives as well as sexual self-construction and expression among the girls. Nonetheless, the previous studies of the girl's bedroom culture have been drawn on the cultural interests of teenage girl's identity construction merely in relation to the physical, social, and

intimate spaces of the bedroom. Since McRobbie whose studies were published in the 1970s, the original approach to understanding teenage girl's bedroom culture has never been challenged (Lincoln, 2004). The findings of this study among the girls in Chiang Mai City argues that the conventional concept of bedroom culture cannot simply be understood in terms of zoning and physical arrangement of the bedroom culture; the physical arrangement of the bedroom can be merely shaped by the activities that take place within the space (Bloustien, 2003; Lincoln, 2004). The findings of this part offer a new approach to understand the girl's bedroom culture in modern northern Thai society. Online social networks played an important role by providing the alternative cyber space for the girls to gather through online social networks instead of the conventional physical gathering places. It also provided them with a high level of freedom and various tactics in which they could creatively adapt practices to contest the strict parental controls.



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6.2 Beware of the Giant Monster and its Minions: Schoolgirls' Negotiating Practices within the School Compound

Opposed to the school's strategies stated in Chapter 4, the schoolgirls employed several tactics to achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy. Their tactical practices lacked a specific location of action and were carried out through improvisation utilizing the advantages of subordinated groups (de Certeau, 1988). Even though SAD (Student Activity Division), VSI (Volunteer Student Inspectors), and other working partners had the power and authority to enforce school regulations, the girls could resist without there being any form of overt protest. The group of schoolgirls came up with various tactical practices in order to compromise, negotiate, or challenge those powers in one way or another.

The first tactic through which the girls subverted the school's authority and control powers was the use of language. Since the SAD was feared among students, the girls avoided direct confrontation with it. The SAD apparatus of control, including the office and its mechanisms of surveillance were described as the '*Giant Monster*' by the schoolgirls. The students who worked as volunteers for the SAD were called '*Giant Monster Minions*.' Teachers and officials who were related to SAD were also described according to certain characteristics or their physical similarity to characters in popular series or movies. For instance, a particularly short teacher was called '*hobbit*' after a character from *The Lord of the Rings* movie. '*Giant buffalo faggot*' was the name given to a big-boned teacher who was considered by research participants as being gay. '*Bad Breath*' was named to a male teacher who the schoolgirls felt that had bad breath while teaching in front of the classroom.

Spoonerisms were made among the schoolgirls by switching the first sound of two or more words in order to intentionally and systematically make a speech error. For example, the girls called one teacher "*Male-chit*" instead of her real name "*Michelle*." The research participants usually utilized spoonerism to announce and raise the alarm to other girl group members about approaching SAD teachers or VSI members. Mostly, the full words or sentence were further shorten into only one word to be more difficult for other people especially the targeted persons to understand, except for the group members. For example, the girls would say "*Said*" to give a warning to the group

member that a SAD teacher whose name “*Sam*” was approaching. The word “*Said*” was shortened from the full phrase of “*Said Dick Ham*” which could be twisted into the actual meaning of “*Sam Dick Head.*”

The schoolgirls also created various kinds of abbreviations in order to be mutually comprehensive regarding SAD teachers or VSI members, names of the group members, or any “risky” words which could not be spoken openly in public, especially regarding sexual issues. Abbreviations such as “*BFCI*” was derived from “*Bare Fuck and Cum Inside.*” Like the use of spoonerisms, this group of letters taken out from word(s) or phrase would usually be systematically shortened into one or few letters that was only understood within the group member. Mostly the first letter of targeted persons’ first names or last names or both were used, such as the abbreviations to call a teacher name “*Michael Jackson*” could be “*M*” (the first letter of his first name), “*J*” (the first letter of his last name), “*MJ*” (the combination of first letters of both of his first name and last name). Moreover, for certain persons who were feared among the girls, their abbreviations were derived out of the designations or spoonerisms that had been previously made such as “*G*” or “*GM*” were called instead of ‘*Giant Monster,*’ “*B*” or “*BB*” referred to ‘*Bad Breath,*’ or “*S,*” “*SD,*” “*SH*” either “*SDH*” stood for “*Sam Dick Head.*” They also used abbreviations to refer each member of the girl group. In order to make it more complicated, the original nicknames of the group members were changed to other non-related names before taking the first letter of those particular re-assigned names. For example, one of the group member whose her actual nickname was “*Lisa*” had been transformed to “*Apple*”. Then, the letter “*A*” derived from “*Apple*” was used as an abbreviation instead of “*Lisa.*”

Jargons or slangs were consisted of uncommon words, vocabulary, or expressions used exclusively by the girl group members and/or among youth in general. According to the research participants, the jargons they usually utilized were both made up by themselves and picked up from other youth groups when those jargons were widely used during a particular period of time. During fieldwork in the school, the use of jargon was continually changed according to the social trends in that particular period of time. From my observations among research participants, jargons could be categorized into three groups. The first group was jargons that were widely used among youth in

general. This kind of jargons was the product of socio-cultural context of each particular period of time such as appropriated from popular song lyrics or keywords said by main characters in television soap-operas and movies. The second group of jargons consisted of vocabulary widely used in online social media. Young users usually omitted certain letters or adapted those particular words to be easier to type that made it looked 'cool' and be different from conventional language usage. The last category of jargons was the words or phrases exclusively made up by the girl group. The group members created their own style of jargon to make their language use distinctive from other youth groups. They also systematically used designations, spoonerisms, and abbreviations shortening of the full form of jargon into only one or few words in order to communicate within the group.

Telling joking stories about teachers and school authorities were another popularly tactical practice for producing the contested meanings of the school control mechanisms. The schoolgirls came up with various funny stories of SAD teachers or school administrative who were feared among research participants. This practice was called "*Piek*" or "*Mouth*" (gossiping) among the girls. Kim, Jill, and Amy mostly initiated and shared the group members diverse hilarious stories to make fun of teachers who they "*Jung*" (hate or unlike). For example, Kim told the group members the story about one female SAD teacher that while she was very disciplined with the students in the school, she pathetically failed raising her own son to behave according to the very rules she forced her students to strictly follow. Her son used to study in a junior high school level in the school. Due to his very poor behaviors and study performance, he could not continue his study in high school level in this school even though his mother was one of the high-level teachers at the school. Her son had to move to study in a low-ranked vocational school that was notorious for having low-class and trouble-making students. From this story, the girl group members laughed out loud at the targeted teacher while she was nearby unknowing that the girls were making fun of her. Another one of the funniest stories was told by Jill. Once, there was a high school student who accidentally fallen from the second floor. After he was brought to a hospital, the school administrative rushed to the scene to investigate the situation. Jill said that she heard the school administrative spoke in the central Thai that: "*The boy was very unfortunate. He fell on the 'style' floor.*" The way school administrative said was very funny among the

girl group members because *'style'* is the northern Thai term of *'cement.'* That meant the school administrator unconsciously used a northern Thai term while he was speaking the central Thai language. This story was told to make fun of the school administrator who—according to the girls—was categorized to be from local or working class group of people. Apart from this story, various joking stories often contained anecdotes of the ways the school administrator contaminated northern Thai terms while he was speaking the official central Thai language or about the way he was speaking the central Thai being tainted by the northern Thai accent in various circumstances were constantly told and circulated among the group members.

In sum, designations, spoonerisms, abbreviations, jargons, and a wide range of joking stories about school authorities were systematically used in order to facilitate communication and understanding within the schoolgirls' group, as well as to avoid comprehension by outsiders (James, 1995); especially those belonged to or linked to SAD. These language tricks and joke stories were used when the group referred to issues related to sex or while gossiping about someone nearby, providing their friends with warnings when approaching SAD teachers, or communicating in public social media websites. A range of funny stories to make fun of the teachers they feared thus was considered the way to show defiance towards the school authority. Although the girls could not liberate themselves from the repression of the school authority, the loud laughter was understood as being subversive and a sign of insubordination (Khosravi, 2008).

Regarding schoolgirls' responses to time restrictions imposed by the school, the group members usually gathered at a convenience store next to the school instead of entering school on time every morning. They spent time having breakfast, chatting about general topics such as television series they had watched the night before, or making fun of vocational school students from nearby institutions considered as working-class youth (more detail in Chapter 8). They also assembled in order to enter the school as a group so that SAD or responsible teachers who were monitoring students at the school entrance would not notice the group members who were in breach of school regulations. This tactic was especially effective when covering for someone with a *'wrong'* hairstyle or who had a problem with or a forbidden enhancement to her uniform.

At the beginning period of the preliminary fieldwork at the school, late comers were, apart from being reported, physically hit by one of the SAD teachers upon entering the school. This kind of punishment was later abolished; it was noticed that foreign tourists, especially those from western countries, took photographs of this practice and criticized this morning penalty. Therefore, if research participants arrived at school late and had to record their arrival time in a computer, they planned to enter as a pair. When being monitored closely by a VSI, one of them would distract the VSI while the other girl intentionally put the student ID numbers of other students into the computer rather than their own avoiding subtracting of behavioral marks. On student check-up days, they intentionally entered school after the morning national anthem ritual or around 9 a.m. because there was only one school security guard or teacher on duty. The reduced number of staff ensured that the schoolgirls would likely escape punishment.

Within the strictly controlled and thoroughly inspected territory of the school, the research participants came up with a range of tactics to express their sexual subjectivity in ways that shielded them from the eyes of SAD and its working partners. Homosexual relationships among female students were easier to pursue than sexual affairs with boys; as a result, female students expressed intimacy with other girls widely, particularly within the school compound. Eight out of the 13 research participants reported having homosexual experiences in the school setting. This phenomenon reminds that youth sexuality, especially among female teenagers, is fluid and membership of sexual or gender categories often temporal and contested. In contrast to conventional characteristics, certain female students who identified themselves as '*toms*,' did not perform or regard themselves as a full-time masculine identity. At the same time, female students who had sexual relationships with *toms* did not consider themselves to be '*dees*.' They engaged in intimate relationships with other female students without consequences for their gendered or sexual identity. Their sexual identities thus constantly shifted according to particular context (Sinnott, 2004). Some of the research participants identified themselves simply as women. While they may have had relationships with *toms* in school, when they were out of the school setting some research participants also established additional, more casual relationships with male teenagers who were called '*gig*' (often translated as 'friends with sexual benefits').

Emma, one of the research participants who was raised under very strict parental control in her family and practiced homosexual relationships in school compound, revealed that she also had sexual attraction towards men. But, within the context of their families and school she preferred having relationships with members of the same gender at this particular time in order to avoid social and familial problems. Kim explained the advantages of having same-sex relationships; to her knowledge, despite some teachers being aware of this kind of sexual relationships, homosexual relationships, especially among female, had never been caught or punished by the school authorities. It is likely that they did not take such relationships seriously. Some of the girls also did not consider sex with a fellow female as losing a virginity (*sia tua*) because it could not result in pregnancy. Another advantage was that they could go out with their lovers as 'close friends' without any suspicion from parents and teachers. While in school, a couple could express certain forms of intimacy such as touching, hugging, and holding hands without being suspect. As mention previously that Nancy used to bring her girlfriend to stay at her place for months while her parents believed that they were only friends. Another benefit of having female homosexual relationships was that women understood each other's needs better. Lisa explained that when she had a boyfriend, he did not care about her feelings and did not pay sufficient attention to her. But once she turned to having a romantic relationship with a woman, she was taken care of much better. Her girlfriend took care of every little detail of their relationship, which was totally opposite to her previous male lover. Her girlfriend accompanied her while shopping and could go into the fitting room with her. After fights, big or little, her girlfriend was always the first one to initiate reconciliation no matter who was wrong. During special occasions such as Valentine's Day or birthdays, she would always get flowers and presents with sweet words while her ex-boyfriend had mostly ignored these duties.

The consumption of cultural commodities also played an important role to resist and subvert the school's conservative sexual regime. Cultural consumption is a form of agency, in that consumption constitutes choice in using, buying, wearing, and expressing sexual or gendered identity in order to actively negotiate or resist dominant sexual discourses (Fiske, 1989). In a study among schoolgirls in Canada, Amit-Talai found that schoolgirls with similar sexual identities tended to express a joint youth style

through the consumption of particular clothes, shoes, cosmetics, hairstyles, etc as significant ingredients of their self-expression (Amit-Talai, 1995). Indeed, popular culture consumption amongst the schoolgirls in this study expressed and promoted a sexual identity that they desired, but which contested the *kunlasatree* norms defined and pushed by the school. Kim, Robin, Tina, and Jill—four out of 13 research participants who identified themselves as *toms*—expressed their masculinity by wearing elastic wristbands that tightly fastened and flattened their breasts in order to resemble a male chest. Dissatisfied with the school rule forcing them to wear skirts, they wore the school sport uniform with sport pants. Some wore the sport uniform almost every school day. Initially, some teachers admonished the *toms* for always wearing the sport uniform while most of their classmates showed up in skirts. But once all *toms* in the class started to unite by only wearing the sport uniform, the teachers became tolerant of the practice.

Hairstyle was another of the identifying icons of being *tom*. Most *toms* preferred to wear their hair short to resemble a boy. Although short hair and hair trimming was forbidden for female students, all *tom* research participants still maintained their short haircut. Initially, they were caught and punished by SAD teachers; but after a while, they came up with a solution. They started wearing a longhaired wig to avoid punishment, especially when they had to attend in special school events, such as monthly homeroom sessions or graduation day ritual that they could not escape. Even though teachers were aware that they were wearing the sport uniforms and wigs, no penalty was given. Technically, the fact that they had long hair by using a wig and wore the school uniform, even though it was a sports outfit, they were considered to be in line with school policy. As one female SAD teacher reported:

“I can see that sexually deviant female students wear sport uniforms everyday while others wear skirts...sometimes I can’t stand the way they behave but I don’t know what to do [because the sport uniform is also considered a school uniform]. They have their short haircuts that are inappropriate, but they wear wigs. I know because their friends told me.”

Regarding research participants who identified themselves as *dees* and heterosexual females, popular culture consumption also paved ways for them to contest various

school regulations in order to create their own gendered and sexual positions. Influenced by well-known American series “Gossip Girl” and “Glee”, these research participants viewed their school uniforms as old-fashioned and uncool; and wondered why American high schools were much less strict concerning a student’s uniform compared to Thai high schools. The girls applied tactics to make their school uniform looked ‘cooler’ such as shortening their skirts, wearing necklaces, earrings, colored contact lenses, as well as clipping or coloring their hair. The schoolgirls were fully aware that these practices were against the school rules and that they could be caught and punished by SAD or VSI.

Amit-Talai, mentioned above, found that young people use friendships to constitute their social identity through accommodation, confrontation, or evasion of adults (Amit-Talai, 1995). Friendships among research participants were indeed a key factor that assisted them in escaping the scrutiny of school authorities in various ways. When they were together in the school, the ones who wore their uniforms in an “appropriate” manner—mostly Lisa, Amy and Mary—would be on the lookout for SAD teachers or VSI who might be approaching. If they found that any SAD teachers or VSI were coming near, the rest of the group members, especially those whose uniform was against the school’s regulations would be warned. As stated above, designations, spoonerisms, abbreviations, or jargons were systematically used in order to prevent the comprehension of the targeted persons. They also helped each other escape inspection and punishment from SAD or VSI members by consulting with each other. They would discuss how to choose those colored contact lenses that looked most natural or how to apply make-up that was not too obvious. When any of the group members dyed strings of their hair, they helped each other to come up with various tricks to tie their hair in order to hide the colored portion of their hair.

Technology, especially mobile phones and online social network, was also used as a tool to avoid and subvert the school’s sexual and gendered regime. School authorities found it difficult to reach into their students’ online worlds because students used their own Internet network via personal smart phones instead of the computers that were monitored at the school. Being aware of online monitoring, mainly by SAD and VSI, secret groups were created on social media applications and Facebook, as mentioned

earlier. In the last year of their high school, they created and recreated their secret groups in Facebook three times; the names of the groups were also changed in order to evade the online surveillance. Coming up with nicknames for particular persons, spoonerism, and abbreviations were also used in these forums for safety reasons. Social networks, therefore, provided the girls with space for a certain level of freedom for them to share secret stories, including sexual fantasies and sexual experiences in the school area.

On particular occasions, certain types of social activities and forms of cultural consumption were practiced in order to tactically make do of certain exceptions of the school ideological power. Schoolgirls could gain a certain level of freedom during the school anniversary celebration, sports day, or New Year celebration. During the prom at the end of their high school, all grade twelve students threw a big party at a convention center. They took these occasions as opportunities to dress as they wished, apply make-up, have their nails painted, and act in ways that were usually forbidden. After the party, they went to nightclubs to get drunk which they were not allowed to do while they were in the school. The three-month summer school vacation from the end of March to beginning of June was another big opportunity for them to make use of the pause of the school's regime and regulations. They would, for example, get ear piercings at the beginning of the holidays since they knew that the piercings would be healed before the next semester. Similarly, some girls did 'forbidden' hairstyles and dyed their hair in the colors they desired at the beginning of the school holidays. Cindy underwent plastic surgery on her noses during school vacation as she would have sufficient time to recover, enabling her to enter the next semester with a newly shaped nose. At the final year of their high school year, Rose and Nancy attended local supermodel contests. Although Rose did not win the competitions, she did win some money and their participation resulted in some modeling work. Vicki won a local beauty contest. After being crowned a beauty queen, she became a well-known student in school, and a huge billboard congratulating her on her success was displayed in front of the school. Subsequently, Vicki was frequently acknowledged by teachers and invited to show up and represent the school in various school-organized events. On the graduation day, she was presented with a certification for 'outstanding student who preserves the school's reputation', to the delight of the friends in her social group who teased her that they

“just saw [her] running away from being chased by SAD, but now [she has] become an outstanding student” (more details about, modeling work, beauty queen and plastic surgeries in Chapter 7).

One of the parts of the school uniform was a white ribbon that the schoolgirls had to wear in their hair. After their graduation ritual, all research participants lampooned this practice by tying their hair with overly huge ribbons in an act to make fun of this school regulation.

6.3 From Schoolgirls to University Students: The Making Use of Transitional Period

After the research participants graduated from high school and continued their studies in various private and public universities in Chiang Mai province, the first thing they mentioned was the transitional period from high school to university life. This time period paved ways for them to temporarily cast aside the strict parental control at home. According to them, the flexible class schedule in universities was very different from the strictly controlled and arranged study timetable in high school. During high school, they were required to study from early morning until almost 4 p.m. in the afternoon as mentioned in Chapter 4. In contrast, the university class schedule provided them the opportunity to arrange their own timetable and thus provided them more freedom, especially when they became senior students. There was no need for them to stick with the family pattern of daily life like when they were in high school where they were required to get up early to go to school and come back home before 6 p.m. in the evening.

Regarding the university study schedule arrangement, most research participants preferred enrolling in afternoon or evening classes so that they could get up late and stay at the university until evening or late at night. Nancy had evening classes which usually meant finishing the day in the evening, sometimes until late at night. This made her daily life in university totally different from high school. In the second year, she moved out from the campus dormitory and moved back home to stay with her parents. For this reason, she was allowed to have her own car because she normally studied until late at night. Having a car and studying in evening classes allowed Nancy to arrange her

life to have a certain level of freedom from parental control. Nancy's father said that even though she moved to stay at home, he did not meet his daughter very often because she mostly studied until late at night. She came back home when her parents had already gone to bed. In the morning, she woke up late after her parents had left for work. In the evening, Nancy left home before the parents arrived. Nancy chose this schedule in order to maximize her autonomy. After class at night, she could go out with friends at nightlife spots. In the morning, she sometimes had a hangover from the night before. She did not have to get up early because her parents did not know that she went out after class and they had no idea what time she came back because they had already went to bed.

Apart from evening classes, various special or extra-curricular activities were also used as their excuses to be free from parental control. Vicki and Emma studied in a communication arts faculty in which, according to what they told their parents, had a lot of assigned works to do. For example, when they were assigned to produce short films, they had to shoot all day until late at night. When they were responsible for organizing an annual play for the faculty, they were required to work at the university with friends. Since their timetable could not be fixed, when they continued to the second year, they moved out from the campus dormitories that were strictly controlled—especially the way they closed the gate at 10 p.m.—to stay in private dormitories off the campus. They told their parents not to worry about them because they stayed with female friends. These excuses thus provided them chances to live their lives in the way they wanted.

Emma stayed at a private dormitory with her female roommate. It turned out that she told her parents that she had a lot of assigned works to be done. Her schedule was impossible to predict and sometimes she had to work overnight with friends. From the second year onwards, she did not go back home during the weekend for weeks. During that time, she spent time with the girl group less and less and I also did not contact Emma very often, unlike when she was in high school or the first year in university. I was told from the group members that Emma had a relationship with a male who was a senior student in the same faculty. He was from a wealthy family and he had his own house located in the same area of his parents' houses. While claiming that she had a lot of assigned works to be done and gradually contacting me and other girl group members

less and less, Emma mostly spent her time at her boyfriend's house. In contrast, instead of staying at her boyfriend's place, Rose usually brought her boyfriend to spend time together at her dormitory. Unlike a campus dormitory, most private dormitories allowed both males and females to enter as long as they had a keycard issued to each resident. The only monitoring Rose and her boyfriend had to be aware of was the CCTV cameras which were installed at the main gate. She came up with a solution to give her boyfriend an additional key card. They did not enter together. Normally, Rose entered the gate first and her boyfriend would follow after for a while. Rose told that: *"No one has asked to check the CCTV history so far, but we don't enter the gate together because there is a need for safety first"* (prod pai wai kone). When she was spending time with her boyfriend in her room, Rose sent a message to her roommate that her boyfriend was being with her in the room.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, although Rose parents were very strict towards their daughter, they allowed Rose to stay at a private dormitory. However, they had secretly installed GPS in her car to track her movements. Rose told me that she just wondered how her parents always knew where she was. When Rose was at the dormitory, her mother called her and she said something like she knew that Rose was at the dormitory. When Rose went out at night, her mother called her and asked series of questions with an angry tone such as where was she?; what was she doing?; who was she with? The way her mother did made Rose wonder how she knew that Rose was not at the dormitory. Rose was certain that she did not check-in on Facebook or did anything that indicated the place she was at that time. As stated earlier, the worst situation for Rose was when her mother showed up knocking the door at her room without any prior notification while Rose was being alone with her boyfriend. She said: *"So lucky that we weren't doing anything (having sex) at that time."* She had to drag her boyfriend to hide in a toilet. They were very fortunate that Rose's mother did not go to a toilet. After she found out that the GPS had been secretly installed in her car, she came up with negotiating practices to evade being tracked. During the daytime, when she went to any places that she did not want her parents to know such as going to shopping malls during the study hours or her boyfriend's place, she would park her car at the university so that her parents would think that she was at the university as indicated by GPS. Meanwhile, Rose also posted a status or check-in on her Facebook to indicate that she was being at

the university such as ‘studying’ or ‘working hard with friends’ since she realized that her parents would secretly check her Facebook in addition to GPS. At night, when she was hanging out at nightlife spots, she parked the car at a dormitory and used friends’ or boyfriend’s car instead. In the meantime, Rose also posted a status or check-in on her Facebook to indicate that she was being at the dormitory and was about to go to bed.

Moreover, the transition of loosening regulations compared to high school and their families, the girls had more opportunities to meet and get involved with many new people. This applied particularly to the opposite gender, especially when the research participants were in the second year. From practicing a homosexual relationship while they were in high school and while staying in campus dormitories (more detail about homosexuality in campus dormitories below), research participants who had a homosexual relationship took this chance to explore new types of sexual practices by having relationships with male students such as Emma as explained above.

As mentioned previously, research participants had to face various repressions from the senior students in a year-long *rub nong* tradition and the controlling system of campus dormitories. The girls implemented negotiating practices to evade, negotiate, or resist those powers in various manners and contexts. Regarding the violence they encountered and the strict control of uniforms during the first year, although they could not directly oppose the enforcement of rules, the girl group members complained and shared their experiences with each other in the online secret groups. When they continued as second year students, the uniform rules were less strictly enforced. They had more freedom to modify their uniforms to be in “sexy” styles as they wanted, as long as they were not provided a notice from instructors for being ‘inappropriate.’ They could apply make-up; create any trendy hair styles or colors; polish their nails; wear their favorite accessories such as earrings, rings, necklace, or high-heel shoes; as well as wear a ‘fashionable’ style of uniform according to their wishes. For those research participants who identified themselves as *toms*, they had a chance to dress in ways that would express their masculinity, mostly a shirt or t-shirt with jeans instead of a uniform with skirt.

Research participants evaded and negotiated the senior students’ strict surveillance on sexual practices in the universities, especially in campus dormitories while they were in the first year. ‘Not being alone with the opposite sex’ and ‘no relationship’ rules were

strictly enforced, especially in the female campus dormitories. Just like high school, some research participants chose to have sexual relationships while staying in the campus dormitory without the knowledge of dormitory managers and senior students. Lisa was staying in the campus dormitory under the strict surveillance of the senior students; however, she had a secret homosexual relationship with her roommate and they were living as a couple in the room. While their relationship was unknown by the dormitory managers and dormitory committees, Lisa took pictures and video clips of her and her girlfriend and posted in the online secret groups to update her life in the campus dormitory and introduce her new girlfriend to the girl group members. This practice might be considered as a way to create her own negotiating space in her bedroom by having a girlfriend despite the total repression power by senior students.

Since any addictive substances were totally prohibited in campus dormitories, Kim used to get caught and received warning for smoking from the dormitory committees; therefore, she quit smoking in the dormitory and started drinking instead. According to Kim, bringing alcohol into the campus dormitory was very easy. She usually carried beers, or whiskies and mixers in her backpack. All items were properly wrapped with papers and put in order between books or clothes to prevent making noise that could attract the attention of the security or dormitory committees. After drinking, Kim and her roommate collected their empty bottles, especially whisky bottles in the room as souvenirs of their courage in evading authorities and posted on her their Facebook accounts. To fool the dormitory manager or dormitory committees, Kim reused the bottles by filling them with drinking water and putting them on the shelf. In case of inspections, which could happen at any time, she would claim that those bottles were for drinking water.

Regarding tactical practices against the rule of closing the dormitory main gate at 10 p.m., climbing in and out of the dormitory (*peen hor*) was widely practiced among female dormitory residents. Each female dormitory had particular spots known by the residents as safe places to climb in and out after 10 p.m. without being detected by the dormitory manager, maids, dormitory committees, and the surveillance of CCTV cameras. Tina shared her dormitory climbing experience that she used when she went

out at night and could not come back to the dormitory before the main gate closed at 10 p.m. If she knew that she could not get back to the dormitory at 10 p.m., Tina explained:

“I continued hanging out until after midnight because at that time all maids already went to bed and the dormitory committees were usually on their duty at the main gate until around midnight. My dormitory was very easy to climb. The back fence was low; I climbed up to the water tank and then the balcony of my friend’s room on the second floor.”

Tina and Kim, two research participants who identified themselves as *toms* moved to private dormitory outside the campus during their second year. Due to not being residents anymore, they still climbed into the campus dormitories to stay overnight with their girlfriends. When I asked about whether they were worried about getting caught by dormitory authorities, Kim replied, *“I climb after midnight after the maids and dormitory committees already went to bed. Also, CCTV is not a problem. No one has checked the recorded history so far and I’m also a woman like other residents so that it’s not that obvious.”*

The campus dormitory gave priority to the freshmen than to senior students. The dormitory managers would select senior students who behaved, volunteered in assisting dormitory-organized activities, or made contributions to the dormitory to stay the following year. All of research participants thus had to move out from the campus dormitories because they did not do any volunteered work for the dormitory during their stay. Some of them moved to private dormitories outside the campuses, while some of them decided to go back to stay at home with parents. While I was chatting with the group members after they moved out from the campus dormitories, Kim was sarcastically made fun of the dormitory committees for being poor. Kim said that only those poor people would pretend to be volunteered just for a place to live; they did everything such as pretending to be well-behaved students and controlling other younger students just for their own benefit. For Kim, she would never beg to stay in the campus university in the second year because she and the girl group members could afford private dormitories outside the university.

6.4 We Just Can't Run Away: Compromising with the Control Powers

Goffman offers his concept of perceived symbolic “frame” that modifies an individual’s behavior in different social contexts. The individual’s practices are therefore essential for the testing and pushing out of symbolic boundaries and the practice itself has to be understood to be socially permitted within a particular cultural context (Goffman, 1959). This concept can be employed to understand the tactical practices of the research participants under the governing powers. While various negotiating practices were systematically implemented, diverse compromising practices were also found when they encountered the control powers. Those practices were more about accommodation, an embedded evaluation of where the girls perceived they could comfortably accept the rules or regulations rather than subvert them (Bloustien 2003 p. 117).

The research participants compromised by being obedient with some of their parents’ expectations, especially regarding the way they valued education. Since they realized that having the highest level of education as possible could pave ways for them to have better future, most of research participants focused on their schoolwork. While preparing for the admission examination, all of them asked me to tutor them in English and they were really enthusiastic to learn. Due to their educational ambitions, all of them thus could continue their studies in universities. Some of them could enter in top-ranked faculties that required very high scores and some also searched for opportunities to study abroad. For example, Nancy always asked me about scholarships to continue higher study in a university in Western country. She constantly consulted me about ways to improve her English skills to gain higher scores on the English test. While having various negotiating practices in their family, school, and university settings, most research participants always kept their grades at a high standard expecting honors after they graduated. This would have advantages for higher education attainment or when applying for jobs in the future.

When the research participants were at home with their parents, they were also responsible for household chores assigned by parents. Some of them might not be as good as their parents expected, but at least they were responsible for certain common domestic chores. They would assist their parents with cooking and preparing meals, cleaning up afterwards, and occasionally cleaning the house. At least every one of them

could be responsible for their own belongings such as doing laundry; Lisa was well-known among the group member as “Miss Laundry” since she was very neat for her clothes and spent a lot of time in doing laundry and ironing. All of her clothes, especially school and university uniforms, even her pajamas, were well-laundered and ironed. According to Lisa, she said:

“I’m so thankful that my grandma taught me to be responsible for my own laundry and other household chores. I never had any trouble when I was staying in a dorm because I could do everything. Unlike my roommate, she was so messed up. She had to hire someone to do laundry for her and rarely cleaned her side of the room. She pushed everything in her clothes closet. Once I opened her closet I almost puked!”

Janet and Mary received high praises from their parents for spending money wisely. For Janet, her parents constantly reminded her about the root of her family which had been from a working class. Although the financial situation of her family had improved when she was a little girl, Janet always realized that her parents and her older sister had worked very hard for her. When she wanted to buy something special for her own not related to her study, Janet searched for part-time jobs and saved money to purchase the items herself. Once, she worked as a part-time cashier in a convenient store throughout her three-month summer school vacation until she saved enough to buy herself a new iPhone as she wished. Her parents expressed pride of their daughter to me saying that she applied the lessons they had taught her. Meanwhile, Mary’s mother also showed satisfaction about her daughter’s thriftiness. While studying in university, Mary earned extra income from a part-time job as a waitress at a bakery shop next to her dormitory. Later, she worked at her brother’s clothes shop in downtown. From her work, she was able to purchase anything she wanted and was able to pay her monthly mobile phone and Internet bills. The only expenses the mother paid were tuition fees and monthly expenses.

While they faced controlling power, the research participants came up with various ways to compromise. At times, they were punished for resisting the controlling power and breaking the rules. When they were in high school, they implemented a diverse

range of tactics to evade or contest the SAD's and VSI's surveillance as mentioned above. Sometimes, these measures were not enough. One time, I joined the group members while they gathered in the school cafeteria applying make-up, wearing earrings, and other accessories after they finished the last class of the day. From out of nowhere, one SAD teacher suddenly approached the group members and sarcastically asked them whether they were "women with a special career" (prostitutes) or students. According to the teacher, well-behaved students should not apply make-up and wear accessories like they did. That SAD teacher continued insulting them by claiming that the group members would ruin the great reputation of the school. When outsiders saw them with make-up and wearing fashionable accessories with their school uniform, this would bring a negative image to the school for not instilling the 'appropriate' characteristics to its students. Having no chance of negotiation or evasion, the group members encountered by laughing, pretending that they were not serious, and claiming the event was humorous. They told the teacher that they just did it for fun among friends and not to take it seriously. Then they wiped off the make-up and took off their accessories as ordered by the SAD teacher.

The way schoolgirls joked about their encounters with control mechanisms in their everyday life was a coping mechanism for the governing powers they could not resist. Playing cards in school was totally prohibited since this activity was considered a gambling. Once, the group members were caught by a SAD teacher for playing cards in a school compound. All of them were brought to the SAD office where they were told they broke school regulations. As their punishment, they were whipped with a lash. While each group member was being whipped, Amy secretly took a video clip and posted it in the secret social media group. This event became one memory for the group member to laugh at together. According to them, this experience became a bonding experience that further strengthened their friendships. During the last year of high school, I asked them where their friendships were from. They replied:

"Our friendships come from the way we see through each other. We meet each other every day, eat together, laugh together, cry together, argue and fight with each other, share each other's stories, and run away from the Giant Monster together."

Conclusion

Having been involved with the girl group members, I have learned and understood their lifestyle, as well as their cultural and sexual practices in various contexts. After I went native by transforming myself to be one of the group members and emphasizing the here-and-now of their experiences, the research participants showed their capability as ‘cultural agents.’ Through various cultural and sexual practices they gave certain meanings to shape their own worlds despite being under powerful governing controls. This Chapter illustrates the ways they encountered, conformed, negotiated, or resisted diverse parental and educational institution powers. When the research participants faced a strict parental control at home, their bedrooms and the use of online social media served as their negotiating spaces where they could transcend parental control boundaries and explore their sexual selves. By employing McRobbie’s concept of “bedroom culture,” this part argues that this concept should not focus merely the activities that take place within the physical arrangement. In modern northern Thai society, online social network also provides another space for the research participants to gather through online social networks instead of the conventional physical gathering places. These online social networks provided them with a certain level of freedom and various tactics to contest the strict parental controls.

While facing various school and university control apparatuses, research participants showed a wide range of their tactical practices against those governing powers that aimed to shape the hegemonic sexual identity of their students. According to de Certeau (1988), the tactical practices lacked a specific location of action and were carried out through improvisation and utilized the advantages of subordinated groups. Therefore, without any form of overt protest, the research participants came up with various practices to negotiate or contest the governing powers in their own ways. Moreover, various forms of compromises were tactically employed if they believed they could comfortably accept or could not evade the governing power rather than subvert them.

De Certeau (1998) also notes that while ordinary people are constrained by a dominant cultural order, through creative ways of operating, they have the ability to adapt it to their negotiated and diverse ends. This Chapter used ethnographic data and

multi-sited ethnography to highlight the ways schoolgirls struggled for their sexual autonomy in the realms of families, school and universities. The results show the importance of the schoolgirls' agencies. The next Chapters will explore their sexual and cultural practices and will illuminate the ways their sexual identity formation emerges while, simultaneously, creatively combining the elements of local culture and global capitalism through the use of media, popular culture, urban spaces, and consumerism.



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