Queering Thai Identity and Sexuality:

A Digital Autoethnography

Chaturawit Thongmuang

Goldsmiths, University of London

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Sociology

October 2024

Declaration of Authorship

I, Chaturawit Thongmuang, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: *Chaturawit Thongmuang* Date: 30th October 2024

(Chaturawit Thongmuang)

Acknowledgements

I would like to use this page to say 'thank you' many times to the people who supported me until the last stage of my PhD journey. They have played integral roles in today's success. (1) My parents love me unconditionally and always tell me 'Don't overwork yourself. I'm worried about you!' Over the past four years, they have been patiently waiting for my success. (2) I am deeply grateful to my lovely and wonderful supervisors, Professor Marsha Rosengarten and Dr Brian Alleyne. Your feedback was invaluable for the thesis. It made the thesis develop in a better direction. Your kindness also made me feel relaxed. (3) Of course, the thesis could be completed without my research participants. They also contributed towards my learning about new perspectives related to Thai LGBTQI today. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of the thesis. (4) Thank you to my Thai friends and my partner who helped me in different ways and encouraged me in writing the thesis. (5) Thank you for the scholarship from the Thai government, the funding of which allows me to use the new knowledge I learned from the UK in developing our country in the future. (6) Thank you to Goldsmiths College, the Graduate School for granting me 'the Graduate School Fund' in 2019 and the Sociology Department for training me to be an academic from the MA in Digital Sociology to the PhD. I have learned many things over the past years.

Abstract

This thesis documents a study of the online-offline identity and sexuality of Thai Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgenders, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI). Using digital ethnography and autoethnography, the research focused on three issues; (1) the construction and presentation of the online identity of Thai LGBTQI on Facebook and Twitter, (2) the sexuality of Thai gay men through mobile dating apps and Twitter, and (3) the discrimination and prejudice against Thai transgenders and amongst LGBTQI people on digital media. The research process involved six months of offline fieldwork in Bangkok and online fieldwork on digital platforms, namely, web-forums, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Jack'd, Blued, and Hornet. This thesis hybridised traditional, digital and digitised methods for collecting and analysing in-depth data.

The research findings showed that the construction and presentation of the online identity of Thai LGBTQI participants on Twitter and Facebook were connected to offline identity. Online identity was created for presenting 'Who am I?' through usernames, profile pictures, and visual-textual information. Both online and offline interactions on digital platforms were important to maintain the online identities of participants. Some gay men have used Twitter as a tool in creating and presenting their sexual identities and performing sexuality online.

Although Thai gay men have been using gay mobile dating applications to find sexual partners, sexual matters are not limited to those online applications. Thai gay men also use Twitter to find sexual partners and express their sexuality online. Offline research revealed sexual issues that were investigated through Twitter, e.g., chemsex parties, online sex workers, online sex shops, and live sex shows. These sexual activities stand as challenges to the oppression of sex in Thai society. Gay men have been releasing their sexual desire through the use of digital platforms. Nonetheless, stories and experiences of sexual prejudice and discrimination against Thai trans people and amongst Thai LGBTQI were also revealed on social media platforms. The role of social media plays an important role in eliminating transphobia.

Table of Contents

List of Table

List of Figures

Chapter 1 Introduction

1. My experiences as a motivation for the thesis

Ten years ago, I was quite conservative and pious. I was ashamed to come out as a gay man. My experience as a gay man did not look like many other LGBTQI experiences. There was no discrimination against my sexual identity as a gay man. I lived in Bangkok for fifteen years. However, I finally came out as a gay man to my friends. I tried to learn about gay culture in various ways when I was in Bangkok. I went to gay bars, saunas, and pubs. I bought gay porn from sellers on a footpath. I dated some gay men whom I chatted with via MSN Messenger (an instant-messaging application). Luckily, I found my lover on a web forum. We have been lovers for more than fifteen years. My experience of being gay was the motivation and passion for the thesis. Were other gay men's experiences different from mine? What could I learn from their experiences? How could I reflect on their stories? These questions led me to investigate the relevance of western experiences and theories to the Thai cultural context.

In the thesis, I have multiple identities. The first is of a gay man who narrated, reflected, and wrote about my experiences in collaboration with my research participants as content for the thesis. The second is of a person who has been using social media in everyday life. From a young age, I came out online as a gay man who used digital media in performing a gay identity and in expressing sexuality. The third identity is that of a researcher who conducted fieldwork to write the digital autoethnography. According to Nina Wakeford (2002: 135), queer research usually includes a researcher's voice in the form of 'reflexive writing'. My experiences inspired me to explore in more detail and raise questions about Thai LGBTQI online and offline identity and sexuality.

The research was developed from my MA in Digital Sociology final project at Goldsmiths College. At that time, I participated in the social media platforms of Thai gay men, namely Camfrog and a gay web forum/website. In order to investigate Thai gay men's sexual lives in both online and offline contexts, I integrated digital autoethnography with these research methods in the form of face-to-face interviews, offline participant observations, online interviews, online observations, and digital archive collection. I found that for Thai gay men, the Internet plays an important role in their sexual

life. A prevailing insistence on heteronormativity in Thai society limits their presentation of sexuality in public. Therefore, Thai gay men find it difficult to express sexual intimacy, emotion, and desire in public physical spaces. Hence, they use digital spaces and social media, *Camfrog* (video-based chat room), *Jack'd* (mobile application), and *Twitter* to perform sexuality. Digital technology functions as social spaces for sexual performance and erotic practice as well as the construction of online identity. This thesis aims to explore and gain a better understanding and information related to these issues.

First, I used some datasets from previous fieldwork and developed them by re-entering the earlier field sites to provide more insights into knowledge about LGBTQI. Aside from gay men as research participants, this thesis also included trans people as research participants.

Secondly, I used observations of how Thai LGBTQI people use digital media for a presentation of identity and sexuality. The sub-topic of the observation included issues of construction and presentation of online identity, expressing and performing sexual matters online, and finding a sexual partner(s) on Twitter and hook-up apps.

Thirdly, I sought to uncover heterosexual norms that lead to sexual/gender discrimination and prejudice against Thai LGBTQI people by listening to, and learning from, different LGBTQI stories of discrimination.

2. Intersection of sexuality studies, queer studies, and digital social research

Sociologists have been interested in the relationship between sexuality, queer studies, and digital platforms since the beginning of the Internet. The generative and problematic aspects of sexuality's introduction into the virtual world have been studied by scholars of sexualities. Research from the present and contemporary era examines how technology is being used more and more to express sexual wants, view or expose sexual bodies, experience sexual pleasure, and investigate thoughts related to sex.

Online dating and sexual communities are the topic of more literature reviews on sexuality and digital platforms. Academics emphasise the significance of online and offline environments in the development of sexual identity. A large body of research on sexual

communities looks at internet platforms as safe havens for sexual minorities, like LGBTIQ. Whether and how identity functioned consistently or differently from what had long been seen in offline situations was the subject of early Internet research across a variety of fields. Digital platforms are viewed by early postmodernist ideas as utopian settings where identities might emerge free from the restrictions of social structural hierarchies and injustices. Moderner works, however, recognise that the social dynamics influencing its offline counterparts continue to influence and create digital projects pertaining to sexual selfhood. (Adams-Santos, 2020)

Adams-Santos (2020) suggests that research on digital sexualities typically falls into two categories: (1) studies that consider digital platforms to be crucial in presenting sexual identity, and (2) research that consider offline environments to be influential in shaping both online and digital sexual identities. The initial body of literature on this subject shows how people express their sexualities using data from internet sites. For instance, Ward (2008) describes the construction of white masculinities by white heterosexual males who have sex with men (MSM). The second body of this literature examines the structural and cultural frameworks that support sexual identity, shedding light on the ways in which digital platforms serve as conduits for people to create and express their sexual identities. The discursive and performative elements of six well-known barebacking websites that homosexual men use to pursue condom-free sex with other men are the subject of Dowsett et al.'s (2008) investigation. They discover that males can participate in an ongoing process of sexuality restoration thanks to these sites' constantly developing technological capabilities. In her 2015 study of a lesbian dating site, Hightower examines the various ways in which women shape their sexual identities through the use of digital affordances such as chat rooms, video chat, message boards, and free private messaging. The innovative ways people create and express their sexualities are demonstrated by Dowsett et al. (2008) and Hightower (2015), who concentrate on the technological affordances of digital platforms. On the basis of this

work, future investigations can examine the ways in which players' offline social and cultural environments impact these processes. Furthermore, researchers can look at how digital sexualities affect offline behaviours, answering issues like how homosexual men's offline sexualities are mediated by the process of barebacking on websites. It is exclusive to digital platforms and, in general, gay culture. We can better grasp how digital sexualities are influenced by the platforms from which they emerge, how larger social settings shape digital sexualities, and how digital sexualities affect sexual cultures in general by combining both sets of data.

Additional study employing a digital ethnographic approach examines how settings, both online and offline, impact sexual identity. By taking into account a variety of offline and online contexts and identities, this methodological approach seeks to develop comprehensive and situated studies from people's lived experiences with the Internet. Digital ethnography approaches are particularly well-suited to placing sexual identity in the online and offline environments from whence it originates. Burke (2014). Some anthropologists combine participant observations—both in-person and virtual—to provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary sexualities in both online and offline contexts. McGlotten (2013), for instance, looks into the ways queer subjectivities and intimacies appear on the internet, whereas Naezer (2018) uses focus groups, individual interviews, and both online and offline observations. Scholars study the impact of digital technologies on interpersonal behaviours in addition to sexual identity. Sociological research on intimacy and digitally mediated dating behaviours of attraction, desire, and dating. (2013) MacGlotten; (2018) Naezer. But they frequently fail to take into account how social characteristics like race and class affect these behaviours. People can now meet possible partners from a variety of racial and cultural origins by using mobile applications and online dating sites. Understanding the racially biassed dating behaviours that differ between offline and online settings is becoming more and more popular, nevertheless.

Studies have indicated that people from all backgrounds are more inclined to date members of their own racial or ethnic group, and that same-race preferences are displayed by both sexes. (Dong, 2017)

A body of research on choosing and attracting intimate partners concentrates on how people present themselves to potential romantic and sexual partners. Since they don't have to meet people in person, online daters may be able to regulate how they present themselves better since they can arrange their interactions more carefully. Users of the hook-up app Grindr, for instance, change their profile photos to express to possible partners what they want and expect from them. Academics frequently investigate the methods used by actors to choose intimate partners through online dating services. Users are able to evaluate and filter possible romantic and sexual partners thanks to the technical affordances of online dating sites and mobile dating applications, which Race (2015) refers to as intimate infrastructures. People use digital dating services as middlemen to do strategic acts in the hopes of finding love, sex, and intimacy (Blackwell et al., 2015; Race, 2015). For instance, Race (2015) emphasises how gay men can reduce risks associated with sexual health by using dating apps' intimate infrastructures to find out whether a potential partner is HIV-positive before having sensual interactions offline. As players traverse both digital and offline sexual terrains, this example eloquently illustrates the offline ramifications of online techniques (such as sexual health). (Adams-Santos, 2020)

The methods people employ to find and choose partners on online dating sites are the main focus of qualitative approaches to the study of intimacy and dating. Nonetheless, little is known about how social categories—such as gender and sexual orientation—interact with racial and socioeconomic factors to make certain people more or less desirable than others. This ignorance emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend the social positionalities of online daters. (Adams-Santos, 2020)

Racial inequality in private settings is perpetuated by digital technologies, which may potentially make it worse. More nuanced approaches to the study of digital intimate practices have been asked for by academics involved in the sex industry and pornography. There appears to be a backlash against the emergence of a sexualized culture in conservative discussions about the dangers and repercussions of sexuality in the digital age. Additionally, research on digital social media and sexuality studies also includes LGBTQI online sexual communities. Literature sets highlight the part that digital platforms play in the subculture of sexuality (Race and Jones, 2015; Adams-Santos, 2020).

Scholars are currently starting to theorise about the implications of queer people as non-normative sexualities and online networks and digital platforms. Fraser (2010), for instance, contends that a lesbian dating website functions as a closet in the development of queer subjectivities, defying popular perceptions of the closet as a restrictive, negative space where queer people are forced to conform to heteronormativity through creation and upkeep. Some academics draw a comparison between online communities and havens where people go to escape the difficulties they face in real life. (De Koster, 2010; Adams-Santos, 2020)

3. Research aims and research questions

I formulated research questions and research aims from my own experience as a Thai gay man who is a social media user. The research questions were also led by contemporary and current research on the intersection of sexualities studies, queer studies, and digital social research in which I reviewed above. I have used these to investigate my own experiences and that of Thai LGBTQI people in online and offline contexts. The thesis also employed digital ethnography, so the research questions and aims related to social media platforms as field sites. LGBT studies and queer theory provided a framework for the research. The research focuses on **(1) online identity, (2) sexuality online and offline, and (3) gender discrimination and prejudice**. Table 1 summarises the

relationship between research focus, research aims, research questions, field sites, and research participants.

Table 1: Relationship between sets of research focuses, research aims, research questions, field sites, and research participants

Research focuses	Research aims	Research questions	Field sites	Research participants	Findings and Analysis
1. **Online identity**	• To analyse the construction and presentation of online identity of Thai gay men and transgender people in online contexts.	• How do Thai gay men and transgender people use social media to construct and present themselves?	• Facebook • Twitter • Bangkok	• Gay men • Trans men • Trans women	Section 1 of Chapter 4
2. **Sexuality online and offline**	• To examine social media use of Thai gay men in finding sexual partner(s) • To explore the performance of Thai gay men sexualities in online and offline contexts.	• How do Thai gay men use social media platforms to find sexual partners? • How do Thai gay men perform sexual matters through social media? • What are the stories of Thai gay men sexualities which are presented through social media?	• Twitter • Gay dating mobile apps • Bangkok	• Gay men	Section 2 of Chapter 4
3. **Gender discrimination and prejudice**	• To narrate stories/experiences of Thai trans women and trans men about discrimination based on their sexual/gender identities and sexualities	• How do Thai trans women and trans men use social media to narrate stories/experiences of gender/sexual discrimination? • How do Thai trans women and trans men use social media to express gender/sexual identities in order to challenge heteronormativity?	• LGBTQI Facebook community • YouTube • Website • Web forum	• Trans women • Trans men	Section 3 of Chapter 4

3. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. In order to highlight the research focus and answer the research questions, the thesis is organised by introducing the social context, reviewing the theory and methodology, presenting and analysing the research findings, and drawing conclusions for the thesis.

Chapter One provides an overview of the entire thesis. This chapter presents the motivation and background for the research. It includes research questions and the aims of the thesis. The introductory chapter also discusses how the thesis contributes to the knowledge as well as the scope and limitations of the thesis.

Chapter Two reviews the context, relevant literature, and theories. In order to provide a background to readers, I review the social context of LGBTQI in Thailand before discussing the theoretical literature. The literature review intends to establish the social context of Thai LGBTQI gender and sexuality systems. In other words, it is a chapter about the social and cultural background related to the gender and sexuality of LGBTQI people in Thailand. Thai gender and sexuality system is unique and different from western societies. The last part of the chapter also includes a literature review about sexuality, LGBTQI, and digital technology. Chapter Two also presents the landscape of sexuality studies, a theoretical review, and a debate on sexuality. This chapter provides theoretical foundations, debates, and analysis of various frameworks in relation to the concept of sexuality: essentialism, social constructivism, LGBT studies and queer theory. LGBT studies and queer theory are the key frameworks for the thesis. The chapter consists of three sections. The first and second sections will begin with the foundation and development of sexuality studies in Sociology. The third section will offer a critique of the theories. The final section will evaluate and apply the key concepts of these theories to the thesis. It will explore the challenges and difficulties of applying the social theories that have been developed from western societies into the Thai social context. The chapter aims at focusing on sexuality as a social phenomenon, a political issue for LGBT studies.

Chapter Three aims to review the research methodologies and methods of digital ethnography and autoethnography. The chapter also explores a hybrid of digital ethnography and autoethnography. The second section details the research process and research methods used in the thesis. It will seek to explain how I conducted ethnographic research online. In summary, Chapter Three will draw on substantial background research on digital ethnography and autoethnography. Its goal will be to reflect on methodological issues and debates. The final section will be a discussion of online and offline research ethics.

Chapter Four aims to present the empirical data/ research findings and analysis. The findings are based on data collected from online and offline fieldwork. The first section of Chapter Four consists of data about the construction and presentation of the online identity of gay men and trans people on Facebook and Twitter. The second section of Chapter Four presents data about finding a sexual partner for Thai gay men on gay hook-up apps and Twitter. It also presents data about the mapping of sexual matters of Thai gay men on Twitter. The third section will narrate stories and experiences of Thai trans people about gender/sexual discrimination in Thailand. The written style of chapter Four is a narrative form. There are quotations/voices of research participants with a combination of my voice as a gay man. Each section produces theme-based topics in the form of storytelling in order to reflect LGBTQI experiences. A digital-visual writing style will be used in Chapter Four, for example, a Twitter sociogram, digital images, and screenshots of photos and videos. I draw on this style to convey the narrated stories of gay men on sexual matters.

Chapter Five aims to conclude, discuss and reflect on the thesis. The conclusion section will summarise the main points of the thesis. It will look back on research questions, LGBT studies/theory, methodological use and reflections. I will also restate my research findings more concisely. Discussion and reflection sections will interpret research findings in order to support the conclusion section with solid evidence from conducting fieldwork to support the main arguments of the thesis. This chapter will also discuss research findings through a queer theoretical lens, the reason for the word 'queering' in the thesis title. I will, for

example, discuss the questions of how queer theory and autoethnography can assist our understanding of the uses of digital technology among LGBTQI people. The last chapter therefore connects the first part and the second part. Furthermore, it will include a recommendation for social policy and the ambition for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

There are many ways to reject our binary thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality. This chapter aims to draw on relevant literature on LGBTQI and digital media. I also review the literature on the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality from a queer perspective in relation to the social context of LGBTQI in Thailand. The review begins with LGBTQI life in contemporary Thailand, followed by an exploration of the development of sexuality studies and theoretical debates related to the concept of sexuality: essentialism, social constructivism, lesbian and gay studies, and queer theory. It draws primarily on contributions from Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, as well as other significant theorists in queer studies. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the challenge posed by the Thai queer context to prevalent approaches to queer theory that have been developed from western cultures.

1. Contemporary LGBTQI Life in Thailand

This section is a contextual/regional review. It aims to contextualise LGBTQI life in Thailand. The main objective of the section is to review and discuss how sexuality, digital technologies, and LGBTQI people are connected in Thailand. The section also includes a discussion of the role of the Internet, concepts of online identity, online community, online activism, and sexuality online. It identifies a gap of knowledge on the Internet and in queer studies of the Thai social context.

Initially, I reviewed the concept of gender and sexualities in the Thai context. For example, homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender. There are other sexualities which do not conform to heteronormativity, but unlike the gender and sexual identities that are acknowledged in Thai society, they have been stigmatised as abnormal or deviant from the heterosexual norm. Amongst LGBTQI people, gay men were the first group to create their associations and specific social spaces. In 1965, the Thai press reported that there were a hundred Thai gay associations in Bangkok. After the 1980s, Bangkok was named a 'gay

paradise'[1] with a list of more than a hundred gay venues, bars, saunas, and discos in the country. It was the beginning of gay culture and the construction of gay social spaces in Thai society. Thailand has been considered a 'gay paradise' since 1980 by the international media. However, Thai gay culture and social spaces lead westerners to misunderstand that homosexuality is accepted in Thai society. Although Thai homosexuals are not subject to legal and religious prohibition, they are nevertheless subject to gossip and verbal discrimination.. The social construction of Thai homosexuality is different from some western contexts. In the globalisation era, the influence of western gay culture, for example, from new media (van Esterik: 2000), saw global or western culture interact with the Thai local context, which came to be seen as hybridised and transformed (Jackson, 2011).

> *'When I was around the age of 15, my friend came out as gay. At that time, all my classmates despised him, no one wanted to talk to him. More than 20 years have passed, all of us are in working age. A friend who was clearly disgusted with that friend, has also come out as gay. This is a heartbreaking story every time I think of the event. Misunderstanding, disgust, rejection of a friendship because he showed that he was not heterosexual. At that time, if everyone had understood that being LGBTQI was normal and was not uncommon, no one would be offended.'* (My childhood memory)

In comparison to some societies around the world, Thai society is viewed as generally open to LGBTQI. Currently, there is no record of official penalties for resistance and explicit violence against LGBTQI in Thailand. As a result, many Thai LGBTQI people are able to express their sexual identity and live freely in Thai society according to their sexuality. However, there are some social events that have shown bias, disgust, and discrimination against LGBTQI people due to the fact that Thai society has never had legislation that promotes and protects the rights of LGBTQI.

Many Thai LGBTQI people disagree with the premise that Thai society is a gay paradise or a paradise for Thai LGBTQI people. Between 2018 and 2022, the LGBTQI rights movement has attempted to legalise gay marriage, but to no avail.

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[1] The term 'gay paradise' will be discussed again in order to be connected to empirical data in Chapter Four.

Example of news on social media where Thai digital media press report on a YouTube channel:

Figure 1: Campaign for LGBTQI Marriage Equality in Bangkok, Thailand in June 2022

(*Source*: VOICE TV. (2022, February 13). *Look at the World, look at Thailand | Is Thailand is a paradise for LGBTQ people?* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSebiW7QFcU)

> *'Thailand, the country known for being an LGBTQI paradise, has even been promoted as such in tourism campaigns. But when it comes to legal rights, instead, we got a D+ rating in the LGBTQI Travel Index 2021, or a safe rank at 68 without laws that support LGBTQI rights, which means we are in the same group as the Philippines, Laos, India and Japan. There are currently 30 countries that legalise LGBTQI marriage, with the Netherlands being the first country to enact the law in 2001 before many other countries followed, while Thailand is still in the process of considering the draft law and has not yet been able to pass the law.'* (VOICE TV, 2022: online)

Thai society is a society that consists of people from different nationalities, races, ethnicities, languages, religions, customs, and cultures. This diversity has been studied by the Thai academic community. However, gender diversity is a concept that has been neglected in

Thai academic research since the 1990s. The literature on gender, sexuality and LGBTQI in Thailand is less extensive than in some western social contexts (Jackson, 2011). According to Jackson (2011), there have been some shreds of evidence showing that Thai society has long recognised the existence of LGBTQI identity and sexualities other than heterosexuality. Such evidence consists of passages from the Buddhist scriptures, regulations, historical records and documents, literature, and mural paintings, but Thai society has nonetheless created sexual/gender bias and prejudice against Thai LGBTQI. For this reason, there have been relatively few studies on LGBTQI in Thailand. The way of thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality in Thai society has a specific context The concept of the 'three sexes and four sexualities'. This concept claims that there are three biological sexes; man, woman, and *Kathoey* (hermaphrodite) (Jackson, 2011). The concept points out that sex, gender/sexual identities are diverse and fluid in the Thai context. Although LGBTQI have long existed in Thai society, they have been socially rejected and have faced social sanctions with anti-LGBTQI views and dominant heterosexual normativities. Gossip and verbal discrimination are examples of social sanction as opposed to the legal and religious prohibition in some other societies. (Jackson, 2011).

Jackson (2011) suggests that the Thai term '*phet*' is a broad and diverse concept of sex, gender, and sexuality; in other words, it can express the manner of sexgender in the Thai context, in which sex, gender, and sexuality are interconnected. The term 'gay' has been adopted from the western term to identify as male homosexualsHowever, the term 'gay' in the Thai context differs from the western gay concept. Jackson (2011) argues that although the Thai gay community uses the English term 'gay' to represent homosexuality, they have not borrowed the western gay concept and binary opposition of homosexuality-heterosexuality. It has been re-interpreted and incorporated with the unique Thai gender social system of 'man', 'woman' and '*kathoey'* (transgender/transsexual). In the western concept, gay is connected to masculinity and categorised as homosexuality, but the Thai gay concept also incorporates the feminine transgender and transsexual into the homosexual orientation category. Jackson

(2011), however, states that the social system of gender in Thai society differs from the West by showing in her empirical ethnographic study that it challenges the concept of western sexualities and the duality of sex. Morris suggests that the Thai traditional social system has three sexes: (*phet chai* (male), *phet ying* (female), and *kham phet/kathoey* (transgender/transsexual) with a modern four-sexuality system: female-heterosexual, female-homosexual, male-heterosexual, and male-homosexual. In the Thai context, *kathoey* (transgender/transsexual) is viewed as 'gender-bending'. Thai people are sometimes called '*soa-praphet-sorng'* (second-category women). *Kathoey* is viewed as a deviant in Thai sexual culture (Jackson, 2011). These studies show that the Thai sexgender social system is different from the West, and has established as a stereotype for social and public perceptions in the Thai social context. Western culture has been used to categorise transgender people as homosexual and to understand gay as a feminine male and transgender male. In addition, the Thai concept of gay and transgender are fluid, as some transgender males may become gay and vice versa. 'Although this could also be said of western cultures, in Thailand they follow historically different identities. For example, some transgender males and effeminate gays can be "penetrating girls", which refers to transgender or gay men who have a penetrative role during sexual intercourse. There are a lot of Thai terms, which describe Thai gays as effeminate individuals, for example, *tut* or *taeo* (sissy), *sao-sao* (girly). These terms suggest that in the Thai context, gender and sexuality are connected, can be differentiated, and sometimes are combined. Jackson (2011) suggest that the Thai term '*phet'* is viewed as a single concept and symbolises a broad social phenomena in the western contextual term of gender and sexuality.

Within western cultures, the sex/gender binary has led to disgust and discrimination in response to other sexed and gendered identities. In the context of Thai society, other sexualities and gender identities beyond man and woman, in particular, LGBTQI, are situated lower in the sexual hierarchy. This means that Thai LGBTQI may not be accepted in society due to the influence of religious belief, tradition and culture, but they still have space to express

their sexual/gender identities at some level without being pressured, punished or severely abused in comparison with some societies and cultures around the world (Jackson, 2011).

The concept of 'three sexes, four sexualities' in Thai society has been changed by the influence of western concepts, especially queer and LGBT studies. In the digital age, adopting the definition and concept of gender from Western societies, along with the presentation of LGBTQI people in media and public space, has changed the traditional concept of sexual/gender identity, e.g., the term '*kathoey*'. In the past, this term was used in a different sense compared to today. In the past, the term labelled a specific form of hermaphroditism (intersex), but it now means a person who is born with male genitalia but is mentally and emotionally feminine or has the desire to be female (trans woman). Currently, we have witnessed the emergence of sexual/ gender identities other than heterosexuals. Nowadays, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) are sexual/gender identities with which Thai society is familiar, but Thai society is not familiar with other identities such as intersex, queer, transman, and non-binary. In order to combine and address all of these gender identities in one phrase, the past ten years has seen the emergence of the phrase "people with gender/sexual diversity". This is used instead of using the abbreviation LGBTQI in Anglo contexts. It highlights the differences between "people with gender/sexual diversity". It is based on an assumption of gender fluidity and non-gender binary. In order to provide a clear social context, I will introduce several historical events marking the existence of LGBTQI identity in Thailand.

Gender and Sexuality in Globalised Thailand

There has been a controversy over the globalisation of queerness and cultural hybridisation. In 1969, the United States' Stonewall riots were symbolic of the global LGBTQI movement and liberation. It spread the concept of LGBTQI identity and culture through Americanisation around the world, and the LGBTQI social movement became widespread

through technology and communication. Altman (2002: 88) claims that the term 'homosexual' wasconceived in the United States in the late nineteenth century, and spread throughout the world, especially in developing countries after the Second World War. It positively influenced the traditional worldview of homosexuality which associated it with such terms as 'abnormal' or 'a disorder' by some physicians and 'a sin' in some religions (Jackson, 2011), resulting in a negative stereotype of gays in some countries. The significant role of western media has shaped an affirmative view of gay identity at a global level (Jackson, 2011). It therefore seems clear that the perception of LGBTQI identity is affected by global media.

The global concept of 'gay' presented in the media is spread by capitalism and consumerism and associated with the West, and Westernisation. The spread of western homosexual identity is also viewed as a form of homogeneity of queer identity and culture. Jackson (2011)) claimed and illustrated that non-western countries borrowed the term 'gay' from western countries to address people who are homosexuals. This term also encouraged many men who have sex with men in western and non-western countries to 'come out'[2]. The western media has also affected Thai society. Recently, Thai media covered news, that has also been taken up in other countries, about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States. In many ways, it can be argued that news media and the Internet connect Thai gays with international LGBTQI issues (Tan, 2013).

From a global perspective, it would be possible to assume that sexuality is the same everywhere and conforms to a western conception. During the colonial period, Westerners dominated cultural and economic contexts in many parts of the world. At that time, 'lesbians' and 'gay men' were western sexual identity labels exported as global sexual identities (Jackson, 2011).

It can be argued that sexual identity and culture are not only global but also local. For example, the influence of western gay life has an impact on Thai gay identity and culture, but it does not diminish traditional Thai LGBTQI identity. In the case of global gay identity and

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[2] Coming out is the process by which LGBTQI people accept their sexuality or gender identity and share it openly with others (GLAAD, 2022: online).

culture, they are not homogenous and unresisting. As stated earlier, Jackson (2001: 15) claims that Thailand has not completely accepted the global phenomenon of global/western queer. He suggests that they have been reconstructing their identities in western forms. However, there is a new form of identity which is different from western culture. It should be emphasised that although local forms of gay identity came from cultural borrowing from the West, the processes have transformed into new forms of sexual identity (Boellstorff, 2005: 282; Jackson, 2004: 205). There is now a hybrid form of LGBTQI sexual identity.

Jackson (2004: 215) presents the hybrid form of Thai gay identity. He states that Thai male homosexuals do not use the word 'gay' in the same way as in English usage. Furthermore, some of them reject words such as 'top' and 'bottom' (western gay sub-sexual orientation), which are used in English. They have created new words related to 'gay' in English: 'king' and 'queen' to pair partners, based on the western 'top-bottom'. These new words came from Thai Kings Cinema and Queens Cinema in Bangkok during the twentieth century (Jackson, 2004). The vocabulary borrowings show that Thai gays have accepted western gay words, while adapting and mixing them with the Thai cultural context. Jackson (2011) also adds a relevant historical example of the word 'gay'. He states that its usage spread in relation to male homosexuality in Bangkok after the Gay American Stonewall riots in the West. This is considered as American-centric identity. However, Thai gay identities emerged in Bangkok before the Americanization of the word 'gay'. (Jackson, 2011)

In my research, I take issue with the claim that LGBTQI identity began in the West and demonstrate that a counter form of sexuality to heterosexuality already existed in Thai queer culture. Thai gay culture and identity are also represent a mixture of the Thai and the Western. Thai gay identity is not the same as the western or global identity. As a result, in the Thai cultural context, the word 'gay' is used differently. It depends on the gay males who are associated with the gendered lifestyle of masculinity or femininity.

Western queer culture has influenced Thai queer culture since the 19th century. Thai queer culture has also been influenced by East Asian societies. Currently, Thai queer culture is a mixture of East Asian and Western influences. Moreover, Jackson (2001: 3) believes that

in the nineteenth century, Southeast Asian countries, especially Bangkok (Thailand was not colonised by the West as were its neighbours), became another new 'gay capital' comparable with New York. He claims that Bangkok is the new centre of gay culture as global economics and technology have spread the consumerism and capitalism of a gay lifestyle across boundaries. For example, gay tourism has boomed in Bangkok since the nineteenth century and today, many western gay males visit Thai gay bars (Waitt and Markwell, 2006: 159).

In summary, these examples reflect the fact that America and the West are not the only strong influencers on Asian queer culture. LGBTQI identity and sexual culture have been affected by both the West and the local context. In the case of Thai LGBTQI identity, the West is not always the origin of sexual identity. LGBTQI identity and culture have been emerging along with new identities and cultures. I propose that LGBTQI sexual identity and culture are simultaneously similar and different from western countries. They share some gendered characteristics and cultures with the West, but they also remain distinctl. In the case of Thai LGBTQI identity culture, gender identities and cultures are fluid, diverse and hybrid. The assumptions fit with the principle of social constructionism and Queer theory, which view gender and sexual identity based on their social contexts (Jackson, 2011).

2. Relevant Literature on LGBTQI Use of Digital Media

It is important to discuss some issues and possibilities of online sexuality for LGBTQI people through the literature review in order to understand sexuality, queerness, and the role of digital technology. The main objective of the section is to review and discuss how sexuality, digital technology, and LGBTQI people are connected, especially in the Thai social context. The section consists of two parts. The first part will explore some issues in internet studies and queer sexuality. This includes a discussion on the relevant themes: identity, community, activism, and sexuality, which have emerged from the review of literature about LGBTQI and digital platforms. The second part will focus on the lives of LGBTQI people in Thai online contexts. I believe that the review will help to convey the key issues concernkng LGBTQI

sexuality, queer studies, and digitalism in order to identify a gap of knowledge in online studies and queer studies within the Thai context. Overall, the section will provide a discussion of the intersection between digital society and LGBT studies within the context of queerness and digitalism.

Before Covid-19, there were about 20 million OnlyFans users, but by April 2021, this had increased to more than 120 million. OnlyFans is a digital platform for selling subscription content. It is best known for distributing sexual and nude content. Tumblr was a popular place where people shared and looked at sexual content (Sands, 2018; Hancock and Nilsson, 2021). These forms of social media have long played an important role in many people's sex lives. According to Katrin Tiidenberg and Emily van der Nagel (2020: 2), we rarely talk about how we use social media for sex outside of sexual contexts or in everyday conversation, but it is clear that people are talking about sex on social media. In their book, 'Sex and Social Media', Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020) look at how the use of social media in our daily lives affects our understanding of sexual practices and how sex and social media intersect. This also represents a key question in the thesis.

If we look back at sexuality in the media in the past, Nina Wakeford (2006) suggests that LGBT studies and queer theory usually explore some forms of cultural production, for example, film. But it is unusual to integrate internet technology into mainstream queer studies. There have been challenges and opportunities for many researchers, and it may be an exciting new field of research under the umbrella of queer studies. Since the 1990s, there has been some literature which intersects sexuality, LGBT/Queer studies, and digital technology. Thestudies of how computer-mediated communication challenged the traditional concept of gender identities which are masked and reinvented by Internet technology. People can reconstruct their 'real' identities through the use of digital technologies (Woolgar, 2002). Since the 2000s, there have been several works which deal with queer and digital convergences. For instance, Bell and Kennedy (2000: 391-467) provide essays on 'Cybersexual' to deal with sexuality in a digital society. They discuss the uses of virtual space to perform sexuality, for example, erotic practice or what is often termed 'cybersex'. Such articles give particular

attention to the relationships between body, identity and digital media. Wakeford (2002) explores the different types of queer communities in cyberspaces, ranging from newsgroups and chat rooms to websites, and notes that there are very diverse, fluid, and complex spaces where queer digital culture occurs, shaping the development of queer communities and sexual identities. She also develops these ideas in a later article , and addresses the study of the impact of new technologies on the social lives of LGBTQI people. In addition, in *The Cybercultures Reader* (Bell and Kennedy, 2000), Alexander (2002) offers a special collection on 'Queer web'. The collection focuses on the representation of LGBTQI on websites while using a variety of theoretical frameworks, especially queer theory, to understand queer lives and digital technology. We can categorise queer culture, the social life of digital technology for LGBTQI, from the relevant literature through the following sub-themes:

LGBTQI Online Identity

The increase in social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has affected social life. Undoubtedly, they have transformed many aspects of sexuality which have emerged in digital societies, extending the possibility for sexual practice and erotic performance. For some people, the Internet has become significant to their sexualities, and there are some important issues raised by its use

Firstly, the Internet provides sexual health information for LGBTQI people with instant access to information which is relevant to their sexualities. Besides being a vehicle for erotic matters, for example, cybersex, and online pornography, the Internet is also a medium for *sex education.* Websites and online resources can offer useful information for sexual health, for example, addressing questions about a person's sexual orientation, advising on sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex advice and services. This is especially valuable for LGBTQI who may experience sexual discrimination when they seek advice offline (Cooper, 2013). Online resources offer more suitable access to information and open opportunities for people,

especially young LGBTQI, to find relevant information (Hillier et al., 2001, Jones and Biddlecom, 2011).

Secondly, online dating sites and applications have become an integral part of queer sexual culture. If LGBTQI people want to meet others, including friends, lovers and partners, digital technologies can be a medium to enable people to interact. By communicating via the Internet, dating services also offer opportunities to develop relationships from online to offline life. Digital technologies in the form of chatrooms and web pages, can support a wide range of relationships for Thai LGBTQI, either for casual sex or for a life partner, as well as offering opportunities for them to construct and perform online sexual identities, such as posting nude photos or amateur sex porn videos on the Internet (Duangwiset, 2005).

Thirdly, sexual activities are considered a major factor in the development of the Internet (O'Brien and Shapiro, 2004). Some LGBTQI look for sexual explicitness online by visiting pornographic websites, for example, to become aroused and masturbate, or to play and interact through cybersex with others via webcam and mobile camera. Furthermore, they can experience sexual practices on a variety of digital platforms, for example, engaging in chatrooms and talking about their sexual fantasies via instant messaging and playing adult content in virtual games (Ross, 2005). The online sexual practices are often interchangeable with the term "*cybersex*" – the real-time sexual activities or erotic interaction on the Internet which usually occurr through synchronous communication in online communities with the purpose of sharing sexual fantasies, sometimes using masturbation in chat rooms via webcam, and occasionally continuing offline. Furthermore, with the current awareness of HIV infections, some users consider cybersex as safe sex, and some websites are mediums for promoting healthy sex (McGlotten, 2007, Race, 2010). Online communities and services provide an opportunity for cybersex and sexual practices, while some studies on online sexuality suggest that there is a connection between online and offline sexual behaviour. However, there are few substantial studies focussing on online erotic practices integrated into queer experiences (Wakeford, 2002: 133).

Recent research and academic works propose that gender and sexual identity categories and the meanings of gender and sexuality should be viewed in a broader context. Beyond the binary categories of female/male, gay/straight, and other sexual orientations, gender and sexuality are fluid. For instance, many LGBTQI people choose to use non-binary or pansexual identifiers in place of more conventional binary categories. For example, the recent book on LGBTQI identity, '*Emergent identities: New sexualities, genders, and relationships in a digital era'*. The 'new taxonomy' of gender and sexuality is the term Rob Cover (2019) uses to describe these new identity identifiers and the conceptualizations of gender and sexuality upon which they are constructed. Cover (2019) examines what specifically constitutes the new taxonomy and what role digital technologies play in its creation and dissemination by combining viewpoints from sociology with queer theory. He examines how these new conceptualisations affect queer views as well as conventional concepts of gender and sexuality.

LGBTQI Online Interaction

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer interactive functions and self-presentation. Rather than solely using online venues, some LGBTQI use the Internet to construct and present their identities in their offline lives. For example, a gay male can provide their personal information and express an erotic and sexual interest by using photos, texts, and videos, while they can join gay groups with other gay men who have similar interests or find lovers or partners via chat rooms or web boards before meeting in person. These examples show LGBTQI use of Internet technologies for their sexual intimacies and practices (Campbell, 2004). Interestingly, the sense of belonging to queer groups can create a sense of anti-homophobia. Someone who encounters, for instance, sexual discrimination in the real world may post a topic or story and express his feelings to the group for discussion (Meem et al., 2010: 374-376, McGlotten, 2007). Wakeford (2002) suggests that 'identity' is one of the key research issues in the investigation of LGBTQI cultures online. Queer online communities

and services provide LGBTQI people with an effective tool for the presentation of sexual identity, for coming out with their sexualities, and for the facilitation of strong social bonds. As Khoo (2003) suggests, , Asian queer communities in particular construct queer identities both in offline and online contexts, to meet other LGBTQI people and to create spaces for LGBTQI activism.

Online Dating

This section examines the role of sociology in understanding online dating. The review suggests that more sociological research on online dating is needed to learn more about the social conditions that make these activities possible, to find out if and how digital technologies help people make intimate connections, and to learn more about the nature of intimacy in a digital era. Taking John Edward Campbell's influential 2004 study, *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality*, *and Embodied Identity* as a starting point, Campbell (2004) looks at the history of queer male online spaces over the past 30 years through their relationships with different digital technologies. From the beginning of the World Wide Web to modern dating apps that work on mobile phones, the culture of queer men has been shaped by their changing roles in a wide range of social and technological groups. These groups have different effects on how different physical places have grown as queer male spaces. Digital technologies have not only changed queer male spaces in the past 30 years, but are also becoming more and more important to what these spaces are, how they are used, and who can access them. His work's main contribution is not merely demonstrating how digital technologies have changed sexualities over time, but in the way it shows how locative media, which is the latest version of a popular digital technology, mixes queer offline and online intimacy. In this hybrid scenario, queer spaces from the past are reconstructed for modern app users. People who use digital technology are rethinking old ways of doing things, such as male cruising in the queer community.

Campbell's (2004) ethnographic research on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) gay communities is based on a three-year study that took place between 1997 and 2000. It offers insights into three different online gay communities by focussing on gay male bodies and gay relationships. Campbell (2004) analyses how people interact in online spaces (Cambell, 2000: 10), drawing on a very sophisticated poststructural approach to discuss how discursive formations are created. He achieves this by following the ideas of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Campbell (2004) also makes good use of Donna Haraway's 'cyborg' trope, which is usually used to talk about posthumans through technological mediation. In doing this, his aim is to talk about how complex ideas of the body are created and negotiated in online communities in different ways.

The book is not only a key reference on the online dating of gay men but also an important work for this thesis. Campbell is a pioneer in the exploration of cyberspace for gay men, as a personal and secretive space. In other words, it is the public as well as secretive space that some gay men enter. His ethnographic study begins with the entry into a gay muscle chat room and interaction with gay muscle men. Campbell points out that the bodies in cyberspace are fantasy, but the joy and thrill they cause are quite real. As a result, the idea of the body is complicated. Campbells suggests that the concept of a body in space creates identity as well as LGBTQI identity and intimacy. I used Campbell's ethnographic method by accessing a gay dating app to chat with gay men. Campbell also accepts that, as an ethnographer-participant-observer, he never actually left the field and his conversations with gays in the web chat room were more sexually personal than with those he had offline.

This work of Campbell's suggests that sexuality and gender, both offline and online, change a person's sense of self in cyberspace. It is not clear yet how this will affect a person's functioning in the longterm. His research examines the significance of engaging with online subcultures understood as embodied forms of sociality closely linked to larger settings of queer world-making. Themes that are crucial to all research on modern life, in areas where internet access is largely ubiquitous, are addressed in Campbell's intellectually challenging project, such as (1) the role of artifacts and media in the negotiation of daily life and social

networks; (2) the significance of developing conceptually robust frames for thinking about relationships between the body and the screen; and (3) the nuanced ways in which contemporary life is mediated in geographical locations where internet access is relatively ubiquitous. The work has significantly contributed to anthropological and sociological knowledge in researching gay men and media in the digital age. An examination of these issues is important to the thesis, in particular, online identity, online community, and digital culture. Methodologically, Campbell goes beyond the usual binary ways of thinking about the role of the ethnographer, which is one of the work's most important features and contributions. In my view, digital platforms have given way to more embodied experiences for gay men in the form of hybridised online-offline spaces.

The connection between sexuality and space has been established for a long time, with queerness often taking up liminal physical spaces in societies. Early research on sexualities and space included mapping gay villages online. Urban space has been seen as a place where sexual dissidence and queerness can happen. However, the urban can also be hard to change away from heteronormativity. (Brown, 2016).

LGBTQI relationships are shaped by more assimilative forces today, and these forces are increasingly mediated by digital mobile technologies. It is easy to see why this became possible for the first time in the digital world when the Internet became popular in the early 1990s (Wakeford, 2002). The internet was able to host online spaces of fluidity and change in terms of sex and sexuality. As a result, the Internet is often seen as a safe place for queer people (Campbell, 2004). Shaka McGlotten (2007), in his evaluation of cyberqueer discourses of the 1990s, confirms that 'cyberspace promised infinite pleasures and freedoms, especially freedoms from the constraints of gender and sex,'.

In his book *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age*, Sharif Mowlabocus (2010) looks at the different ways gay men use digital media as a way to tell a story and find commonalities that both make up and define the culture of gay men today. Mowlabocus sets his work in the context of the British gay subculture, which is mostly urban,

claiming that this localisation has strong parallels in all Western cultures. Using a discursive analysis, he looks atspecific themes that run through and shape the culture of gay men.

Like Campbell, Mowlabocus also adopts a Foucauldian approach and analysis to explore the different ways in which power is mobilised and politicised within culture, beginning with a historical assessment of the British gay culture from 1984. Mowlabocus presents a critical paradigm for studying the digital culture of gay men based on this approach. He explores many case studies and issues, ranging from the nature of digital cruising and online dating services to 'barebacking' (unprotected sexual intercourse) culture among gay men.

Mowlabocus argues that 'cybercarnality' is a way to point out two tropes that have appeared in many digital spaces and practises made for gay men: 1) the pornographic remediation of the gay male body and 2) the articulation of gay men's self-being tied to technologies of surveillance. Methodologically, Mowlabocus also uses and analyses text and images in gay digital spaces and how they relate to pornography. His research findings suggest that gay identities are constructed by a culture. Of interest in the findings is the suggestion that most gay men only know what it means to be gay through digital spaces and highly visual representations of gay culture. Gay identities are changed depending on how visible they are, but they have always relied on self-reflection, such as through LGBTQI campaigns on the Internet. The work is valuable for the thesis as it questions how digital media affects and shapes culture, and the creation of LGBTQI identities online.

As for online dating, Race (2015), in the article *'Party and Play': Online hook-up devices and the emergence of PNP practices among gay men*, suggests that Party and Playcan be viewed as a practise that has arisen from a more prevalent perspective towards sex and its social role in gay online culture, specifically the framing of sex as 'play'. 'Play' is a key phrase that motivates and sustains a significant portion of the online sex arrangements between gay men. Race also proposes that PNP would not take the forms it does without this framing or the capabilities provided by online technology.

Race et al.'s engaging article *Data cultures of mobile dating and hook-up apps: emerging issues for critical social science research* (2017)*,* employs the digital method in

investigating online dating and introduces us to the concept of '*dating as data science*'. In this article, the authors argue that:

> 'Despite their wide adoption and economic importance, mobile dating apps have received little scholarly attention from this perspective – but they are intense sites of data generation, algorithmic processing, and cross-platform data-sharing; bound up with competing cultures of production, exploitation and use.' (Race et al., 2017: 1)

Race et al. (2017: 9) therefore use digital methods in exploring dating apps in order to involve users not only in the creation of data but also in growing, using, and living in the data cultures of mobile dating and hook-up apps. These novel approaches will be explored in this thesis to gain a deeper understanding of how the data cultures of dating apps affect intimacy and sexual pleasure through digital channels.

Politics of LGBTQI Identity and Sexuality on the Internet

In addition to the importance of social bonds, the potentiality of the Internet and digital technology also provides valuable support for political activism. Gay men use online communities to establish gay rights and social movements. In 1992, "Digital Queers" was the first gay and lesbian online organisation, which used the Internet to launch online activism and which subsequently evolved into the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). The organisation of gay and lesbian rights groups using Internet tools in an innovative way led to, among others, email updates and online news for LGBTQI activists. Since then, a plethora of Internet-based online tools for online activists and LGBTQI campaigns around the world have come into existence, including weblogs, websites and bulletin boards. For LGBTQI people, the Internet can be a tool for 'keyboard activists'. They can learn about current issues related to sexual politics in every part of the world (Brady, 2006: 306-308, Roy, 2003: 189). In a previous study (Thongmuang 2015), I observed that Thai gay men learnt about the legacy of same-sex marriage from American websites and social media, and certain individuals made

a statement for the gay social movement and for gender equality in Thailand based on the American concept and Western models.

3. Theoretical Review

Since the twentieth century, there have been debates about the most suitable theoretical approaches and frameworks for researching society, especially the challenge of postmodernism and poststructuralism to the classical social theory. These debates extend to the discipline of Sociology, which faces major challenges in the use of appropriate theories to study social life. Sexuality is an aspect of social life. Together with other scholars, some sociologists have played important roles in the initial development of the field of sexuality studies and of theories of sexuality, challenging in particular the essentialist view of sexuality and in doing so establishing the social constructionist view of sexuality. Some ideas of social constructionism have been developed by critical social theories, for example, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and queer theory.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies (LGBT Studies)

Rethinking sexuality as socially constructed has been key to the emergence of lesbian and gay studies in the West. LGBT studies have oriented sociological theories of sexuality to the politics of sexuality.   One such example is the gay and lesbian rights movement which began in the United States with the Stonewall gay riots in New York in 1969. After the 1970s, gay and lesbian activists fought successfully to remove 'homosexuality' as a category of mental illness as well as a stigma in relation to being homosexual. The action also weakened the sociology of deviant and labelling theory, which viewed homosexuality as an illness and stigmatised subculture group. One of the ultimate goals of the gay and lesbian movement is to remove prejudice and discrimination against them. This has connected with the main theoretical assumptions of LGBT studies (Lovaas, et al., 2006).

However, it is important to note that there were some external and internal tensions in the gay and lesbian movement which affected LGBT studies and, arguably, mobilised the need for queer studies. Firstly, the antigay movement violently attacked the gay movement and gay men during the early phase of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It pushed the movement into questions about the productivity of sexual politics of the minority group. In a manner, the HIV/AIDS crisis strengthened the need to create more gay and lesbian organisations to deal with the problem (Lovaas, et al., 2006).). Secondly, some gay activists lost faith in arguments for human rights, which assumed that gays and lesbians are fundamentally the same as heterosexuals and emphasised the need to remove barriers and sexual prejudice. Internal tensions surfaced, as LGBTQI seemed inadequate in terms of representing the different identities and, sometimes, different experiences which exist. Lesbian feminists, for instance, who were fighting discrimination against homosexuals were critical of male domination, which created tensions with gay men (Lovaas, et al., 2006).

Consequently, the categories of identity are problematic and lead to the question: is there a homosexual identity? The categories caused trouble for LGBT studies and their social movement. Bisexuals and transgender people declared that the term "homosexual" did not fit with their experiences and definition of identity. Some consequently preferred to use the term "queer".

Originally, the term 'queer' referred to strangeness and was a term of discrimination. Queer theorists reclaimed it and turned it into a positive word. Later, various categories have emerged (e.g. intersex, transsexual), so we may see the acronym of LGBTQI (people who are outside of a heterosexual norm), used as an umbrella term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (Stein, 2003). In addition, the term can be used to challenge mainstream LGBT studies, as well as gender and sexual norms, through various ways of thinking (Sullivan 2003). Judith Butler's (1993: 227) question: 'Who is represented by which use of the term 'queer'', and 'who is excluded?' has been important and will be a further area for exploration in this thesis.

The gay and lesbian rights movement and the internal contradictions forged new theories of sexuality. One of them was associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1978) and incorporated the philosophical idea of postmodernism and poststructuralism into sexuality. For some, this is considered as a reborn version of social constructionism in *queer theory*. However, queer theorists have disagreed with the frame of sexualities that constructionists put forward. Queer theorists believe that the theory does not need to define lesbian, gayness, bisexuality and transgender because doing so limits our understanding of sexuality.

The above concept shares some concerns with queer studies and LGBT studies, which are sometimes used interchangeably. However, their theoretical frameworks can be seen to disagree significantly. There is a misunderstanding that queer theory and LGBT studies are working under the same umbrella.

Queer Theory

Although, in Sedgwick's perspective, the term 'queer' is not synonymous with LGBTQI, I presume it may require clarification in the thesis. Firstly, 'queer' is a term referred to in queer theory as a theoretical framework. Secondly, it is a term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as researched informants. It would be clearer to identify people as LGBTQI for the purpose of this thesis. In this case, the sexual identity of LGBTQI is also intended to represent the LGBTQI community along with LGBTQI social movement in Thailand. Thirdly, it is used as a label to explain a complex set of sexualities and sexual desires of gay men, underscoring that the sexuality of gay men does not fit into social and cultural norms and standards. Examples would include a gay man who is attracted to multiple genders and may identify as queer, or gay men and bisexual gay with polygamous sexual behaviour. Fourthly, the word queer became an expression for gays in the last century. The term was originally a synonym for 'strange', so using the term 'queer' is also considered as anti-heteronormative and anti-discriminatory against LGBTQI people.

As mentioned already, queer theory emerged in the 1990s from the gay movement in the United States.   Queer theorists have attempted to move away from LGBT studies because of their desire to destabilise all identities and binary opposition, including homosexual identity and heterosexual-homosexual binary In *Genealogy of queer theory*, William Turner (2000: 417) reviews the emergence and development of queer thought over the past few decades. He identifies the importance of Foucault's work in queer theory. According to Turner, Foucault became the pioneer of queer theory with work that is core to the theory. As DavidHalperin (2004) suggest, to understand queer theory and sexuality studies, one needs to read Foucault and especially the following passage:

> *'As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle…Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'.* (Foucault, 1978: 43)

Not surprisingly, the contribution of Foucault to queer theory and his work, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), had a major impact on sexuality studies as well as the development of queer theory. Foucault showed that the concept of sexuality is problematic (Halperin, 2004) by investigating the emergence of the construction of sexuality. The book explores the discourse of sexuality from the nineteenth century and considers the ways in which power is exercised on sexualised bodies and pleasures. Importantly, according to Foucault, the concept of repression produces a notion of sexuality. He pointed out that sexuality comes together with discourse as a system which commands bodies and sexual pleasures into what we know about sex. Foucault (1972) suggested that the idea of sexuality was formed by repressive forces and the effect of discourse and power (Foucault, 1972 cited in Gamson and Moon, 2004). Foucault begins *The History of Sexuality* (1981) with a critique of '*repressive hypothesis'* This hypothesis is the traditional understanding of sexuality in the West. It refers

to the widely held view of the repressive nature of Victorian society that considered sexuality a taboo. It was something that should not be talked about and should be censored. In contrast, Foucault argued that sexuality was widely and frequently discussed in Victorian society. Sexuality is produced through discourse and the reality was that it was not repressed through censorship but actually incited (Foucault 1981: 15).

In summary, Foucault viewed sexuality as the effect of discourse as an exercise of interlinked power and knowledge. His contribution initiates a different angle and provides significant aspects to enable a rethinking and new understanding of sexuality. The discourse on sexuality leads to the category of 'the homosexual' and 'homosexuality' which is present in the taxonomic method of Sexology as a field of knowledge. Significantly, if there had not been a classification, there might not be 'homosexuals'. As he stated:

> *'There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified'.* (Foucault 1981: 101)

Foucault's elaboration and reconsideration of sexuality have also influenced some scholars who are interested in sexual politics and homosexuality, for example, queer theorists and scholars of LGBT study. From the late 1970s to the 1980s, a number of social studies on gay and lesbian sexuality focused on the emergence of homosexual identities.

Queer theory is an effort to think about the politics of sexuality. It extends the feminist theory's focus on the cultural construction of sexual or gender identity (Marinucci, 2010; Richardson et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, the original works on queer theory came from two feminist scholars: Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, both of whom discuss gender and sexual identity. Although Butler did not write *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) with Queer theory in mind, her book has been incorporated as a foundation of Queer theory. In the book, Butler criticised ideas of feminism about gender

equality which have been trying to create an opposition between women and men, while drawing attention to the idea of the social construction of gender in Sociology – masculinity-femininity, which also tended to fit into the binary pitfall. She used the term 'heterosexual matrix' as sex and gender are viewed as a biological binary. In addition, she advised feminists that they should attempt to avoid a universal assumption about sex. Queer theorists interpreted the idea that some cultures and societies have more than a two-sex system. In the same year, the work of Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the closet* (1990), was published, a straightforward manifestation of Queer theory that became one of the prominent works of Queer studies in heteronormativity. The concept originated with Rich (1980) and was first used by Michael Warner (1993), who described heterosexual privilege as embedded in social relations. The privileging of heterosexuality is derived from being heterosexual, a status which is refused to homosexuals and bisexuals. It also demotes homosexuals and bisexuals to a marginal position. As a result of this heterosexual privilege, there is a hegemony in social norms and practices that makes heterosexuality seem natural and universal, while other non-normative sexualities remain marginalised and unnatural. Heteronormativity is the main social system leading to discrimination against the LGBTQI community, especially forms of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Furthermore, sexual discrimination can be found in many social institutions (Robinson, 2016: 1257–1258).

Sedgwick also suggests the concept of the binary by proposing a 'homo-hetero binary'. In principle, Queer theorists proposed that identity is not fixed but a performance; and people can express and change gender and sexuality throughout their lives. Many queer theorists, such as Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler, argue that sex and gender concepts of masculinity- femininity and men- women are a social construction of binary opposition. In principle, one of the key theoretical assumptions of queer theory is the anti-sexual categories.

In a general sense, queer studies may resemble LGBT studies. Some scholars have used LGBT studies and queer studies interchangeably. However, LGBT studies and queer studies have different conceptual frameworks. They have also, at times, disagreed with each

other. Contrary to LGBT studies, and in order to resolve the problem of LGBT studies about identity, queer theorists reject a category of sexual identity, especially a category related to sexualities, for example, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. Understanding categories of sexualities from a queer perspective involves the exploration of sexual fluidity. Queer theorists have argued in the past that LGBT studies only focus on homosexuals as subjects, and therefore fall into one of the major theoretical pitfalls of binaries of sex and gender; that is, gay and lesbian people as opposed to straight people, or masculinity contrasted with femininity (Sullivan, 2003).

As a result, the key ideas of queer theory aim to avoid gender/sexual categories. Queer theorists also argue that sexual identity and sexuality are not fixed but fluid. The term queer is associated with a term of non-normative sexual orientation, which rejects a binary opposition; that is, a dichotomy between men and women, gay and straight, heterosexual and homosexual, and masculine and feminine. Queer studies also venture beyond this and claim that the object of study would be society, and include investigations, of sexual practices in order to portray society, for example, with the argument that sexuality is a part of social production and affects society. In conclusion, queer theorists believe that to examine and study a variety of sexualities, one needs to abandon the homosexual category. Categories of sexual identity lead to limitations and constraints. In Sociology, queer theory is an umbrella of poststructuralism because of the main principle associated with poststructuralists, principally Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. It contrasts with traditional sociological theories which are applied to study sexuality, for example, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. Although queer theory is prevalent in the humanities, such as literature and cultural studies, the theory can be useful and have implications in sociological studies of sexuality (Green, 2007).

The relationship between queer theory and sociology has emerged in sexualities research. In sociological theory, symbolic interactionism views identity as a complex subject, and it can be formed by social interaction. It means that symbolic interactionists attempt to treat identity as fluid and multiple in similar ways to queer theorists who theorise sexuality.

Symbolic interactionist approaches and some strains of feminism have introduced the idea that sexuality is socially constructed. However, queer theorists claim that sexuality is constructed through discourse. Also, the deconstructionist approach of queer theory is different from symbolic interactionism and some strains of feminism, as, in the most radical examples, queer theory refuses all existence of identity. Since the 1980s, the problematisation of identity has been discussed in sociological theory, and queer theory has been influenced by postmodernism. The analytical queer approach is the deconstruction of the self by race, class and gender sometimes called "anti-identity" (Green, 2007). In other words, it is impossible to divide sexuality by race, class, gender, and so on. There have been multiple and changing sexual identities. Gay men and lesbians are not only persons with sexual identities but also are raced and classed in relation to different social contexts.

Furthermore, queer theory has challenged the old-school sociological approach of functionalism. Functionalists focused on deviations from social norms. In the case of homosexuality, they marked homosexuals as deviants from the sexual norm. In contrast, queer theorists try to demolish the concept of deviance and re-conceptualise a new perspective on Sociology of Sexuality.

To apply queer theory to understand the sexuality of Thai LGBTQI people, I will move beyond traditional and mainstream sociological approaches to homosexual studies, for example, symbolic interactionism, LGBT studies which attempt to understand the construction of homosexual identity, and the social constructionist perspective which defines gay and lesbian identities in relation to nature. I will draw on queer theory as informed by poststructuralism—the school of thought that has emerged from the works of French thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jacque Derrida, and Michel Foucault. These poststructuralists denied the concept of a fixed and stable entity and any forms of essentialism. Post-structuralism prioritises language as a way of understanding individuals as social systems and believes that language organises human experiences and social reality. Post-structuralists suggest that individual experience and social life change over time, across cultures and societies. Gender and sexual identity are fluid and playful. They vary under different

circumstances, for example, in drag performances and in biological sex, as both men and women can dress up as the other gender (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004: 113; Lee, 2012: 287). This social theory represents anti-essentialism and social constructionism. Poststructuralists and queer theorists seek to critically analyse and deconstruct the sexual identity of LGBTQI people, resisting a heterosexual/non-heterosexual binary.

Furthermore, queer theory is useful because it plays a role between heterosexuality and homosexuality. It studies not only the cultural construction of homosexual identities but also how these are conceived at the intersection of homosexual identities and hetero-hegemony. As mentioned, queer theory originated from the French post-structural philosophers, such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The latter's deconstructionism is associated with the term 'Post-Structuralism' and is sometimes interchangeable. Jacque Derrida introduced the concept in his philosophical analysis. The concept has been widely used in the study of literature to reject the obvious meanings of text and to search for hidden meanings. Social science could be seen as a form of text or writing. It represented a social reality. The concept has been used to argue that society and social life could be seen as a text and be deconstructed in search for a logic of binary oppositions (e.g. nature/culture, masculine/feminine, individual/society). Adopting Derrida's thinking (Bruce and Yearley, 2006: 63, Crossley, 2005: 55-59), the thesis will accept the logic of both sides of binaries because social phenomena should be understood and considered in terms of what is included and, or, excluded in specific contexts. Postmodernists and poststructuralists resist "the universal truths" but accept historical and social ways of truths. Queer theorists, like Butler (1990), apply the ideas of postmodernism and poststructuralism and suggest that gender and sexuality are socially constructed. The concepts are not stable but fluid and can be changed throughout the life cycle of individuals by the effects of society and through individual experiences. Therefore, in the research, I narrow the concept of queer theory by focusing on the specific key concepts and applying them as a conceptual framework.

As mentioned, queer theorists resist fixed identities; in particular, radical queer theorists do not accept the existence of identities. This leads to the question: is there a homosexual identity? (Stein 2004). As a result of heteronormativity, a binary of fixed sexual identity – heterosexual identity and non-heterosexual identity – is created, which does not accept other forms of sexual identity beyond heterosexual identity to exist as normalised sexuality. The concept of a flexible or fluid sexual identity reflects a diversity of sexuality in society and accepts that sexual identity can evolve throughout the lives of individuals. Consequently, the concept of fluidity or fluid identity provides a framework for analysing the ways in which LGBTQI people perform sexual identity or sexuality in contrast to the concept of heteronormativity. In other words, queer theory can be used to resist the concept of fixed identities.

4. Theoretical Challenges

It is necessary to reflect on the weaknesses and limitations of Queer theory when applying it to frame sociological research in practice. Firstly, the utopian perspective of Queer theory may challenge the traditional view of identities by proposing a concept of fluid identity, which may change over time through lived experience. For some people, there is much evidence that their identities are rather fixed despite their experiential changes. In other words, whether the identity will be fixed or fluid depends on personal choice. Secondly, much of Queer theory has emerged from the field of literary studies; the theoretical construction is based on the interpretation of texts rather than research practice from social life. It has been criticised for 'textualism'; hence, the social analysis of 'real' life may be different from the textual analysis. As a sociological study, empirical research requires a queer lens.

Using multiple theoretical perspectives is more challenging and this difficulty applies to the thesis. One should be careful in terms of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of queer theory. According to Jackson (2000), applying queer theory and the Foucauldian approach in researching Thai discourses of gender and sexuality has its limitations. His

research shows that Thai homoeroticism does not meet the western theories, especially the model of the history of sexuality by Foucault and queer theory, as the Thai discourse of gender and sexuality does not conform to the western sexual categories and eroticism. He poses a question: Whether the theory/model of sexuality that emerged out of the Western social contexts could be applied in non-western contexts?

> *'Sexuality conceived in Foucauldian terms has no history in Thailand, remaining discursively bound to gender. Yet it would be Eurocentric to ascribe to the West a "true" history of sexuality and to Thai discourses only a "prehistory", with the implication that Thailand's inchoate sexuality may one day emerge into the light of global discursive history. A genealogical understanding of historical processes forces us to recognise that Thai discourses are not pre-destined to follow the same trajectory as those in the West, and hence the lack of a separation between gender and sexuality cannot be seen as an `underdeveloped' discursive state'.* (Jackson, 2000: 417)

This claim has challenged me when applying western approaches to the Thai social context. In the research, I shall endeavour to establish and justify my own theoretical position and apply the theories as a theoretical framework into the research context. In the earlier sections, I have discussed some theories, such as LGBT studies, each of which offers an appropriate perspective to delve into the sexuality studies I have developed for analysing Thai LGBTQI sexual identity and sexuality. I believe that the theories work together to explain sexual identity and culture. Multiple theories will be used, in preference to a single theoretical framework, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of Thai queer sexuality. To illustrate, queer theory may suggest analysing a specific society and history. LGBT studies can be applied to analyse the human rights of LGBTQI people, as well as the discrimination against them and to analyse those sexual identities and culture. Queer theory raises the issue of sexual diversity and identity beyond the dichotomy of the gender system. Queer analysis does not try to categorise gender and sexuality but widens them. Analysis of 'real' life may be different from textual analysis. The challenge of the research is to apply queer queer into ethnographic research, in order to study LGBTQI people as objects of study while resisting the attempt to categorise and thus limit sexual identities and boundaries.

In summary, the chapter has presented Queer studies and LGBT studies, which have developed from debates between essentialism and social constructionism. In this conclusion, I will point out how to apply key concepts of LGBT studies and Queer theory/studies into the research – 'LGBT studies. Queer theory and LGBT studies gathered in the chapter are intended to establish and justify my own theoretical standpoint. I applied the theories to the Thai social context. Many academics are split between LGBT studies and queer studies/theory. However, I have attempted to blend the two fields into LGBT studies as a theoretical framework for the research. My empirical research is on LGBT studies, but I have used queer theory as a lens when analysing, discussing and criticising social phenomena, for example, the construction of identities and sexualities of Thai LGBTQI. LGBT studies has been used to analyse the social structure which shapes Thai LGBTQI identities. The Queer theoretical approach has been used to explore how LGBTQI identities and sexualities connect to the social structure of LGBTQI experiences. In other words, the thesis explores the interconnection between social structure (macro level) and agency/individuals (micro level). However, both approaches are adopted in my analysis. Queer theory offers an in-depth analysis of LGBTQI identities and sexualities. For example, in contrast to LGBT studies, sexuality through the lens of Foucault and queer theorists does not come from a human drive but a specific historical and social-cultural system (as I reviewed in Chapter 1). In order to apply LGBT studies to the research in Thailand, there are many LGBTQI groups and LGBTQI communities, such as the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand, which represent and work for LGBTQI rights and liberation.

Queer theory is useful in analysing the concept of power and its practice on a micro level (LGBTQI individuals). For Foucault, disciplinary power is embedded in social institutions. I will use the concept to analyse data about discrimination against Thai trans people in Chapter 6. Butler's theory of performativity can be used to identify where the construction of stereotypes and thus sites of resistance exist, i.e., stereotyping in which some Thais perceive gays as having an effeminate manner and categorise transgenders as being homosexual. The research intends to reveal the stereotyping of Thai queer sexualities and

explore a diversity of gender and sexualities. There are a variety of sexual identities, for example, drag queen/king, male-to-female (and vice versa) transgender, men who have sex with men (MSM) but who do not identify as gay men, and some sexualities which have emerged in the Thai context, such as *Tom-Dee* (Butch-Femme), *Kathoey* (transgender).

Chapter 3 Research Methodologies and Methods

This chapter is a methodological review and explanation of the research methods used. I will address these key questions regarding research methodologies and associated research methods for the thesis; (1) What is digital ethnography and autoethnography? (2) What can digital ethnography and autoethnography offer to my fieldwork? (3) How can I use digital methods in researching Thai LGBTQI identity and sexuality online? The first part will provide a detailed discussion on the background research on digital ethnography both in terms of concept and methods. The second part aims to reflect on methodological uses for conducting digital autoethnography. An important exploration of esearch methods and techniques is found in the second section due to the application of a variety of research methods in the fieldwork. The final section aims to discuss online research ethics.

1. Digital Ethnography

The birth of communities, social interaction and social networking sites on the internet has led to digital ethnography being used as a research methodology for sociologists to study digital society and social media. Digital ethnography has been developed for decades by social scientists to gather and explore social life online (Hine 2000).. In the field of Sociology and Anthropology, digital ethnography has developed methods to understand online societies since the 1990s, when tools were developed to gain an understanding of social worlds (both offline and online) in studies (Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Murthy 2008; Garcia et al. 2009). Social researchers only applied ethnographic traditions to study social interaction in virtual spaces such as web boards which were divided from physical spaces. Ethnographers practised in face-to-face settings in order to engage with different online settings. Subsequently, ethnographers found that online communities vary depending on the mode of social interactions. Digital ethnography has therefore been transformed to grasp complex social phenomena on the internet as well as the continuum between online-offline social lives

(Hine 2008: 257). Lyman and Wakeford (2002) suggest that this kind of virtual field research has been growing in social science and other disciplines. In this thesis, digital ethnography is an adapted approach to help sociologists to study not only classical online communities such as forums but as emerging with digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

There are different terms related to 'digital ethnography'. Examples include 'online ethnography' (Kendall 2004; Gatson 2011),'netnography' (Kozinets 2010), and 'virtual ethnography' (Hine, 2000). However, the term 'digital ethnography' stems from an article by Murthy (2008) and a book by Pink et al. (2015) that amended and emphasised the ethnographic approach when using social media/digital platforms.

Although Kozinet (2010: 5) suggests that the prefix (with digital, online, cyber, virtual) is optional, the main differences between virtual ethnography and digital ethnography lie in the distinction between the ethnographic techniques of 'Virtual Methods' and 'Digital Methods'. In order to expand on these differences, I will compare the works of Christine Hine (2005) and Richard Rogers (2009). In Hine's (2000) books, '*Virtual Ethnography*' and *Virtual Methods* (Hine, 2005), she states that traditional social research techniques can be used on the Internet, and the Internet itself can be viewed as an object of study. For example, an interview can be transformed into an online interview. In the works of Rogers (2009), *'The End of the Virtual: Digital Methods'* and *'Digital Methods'* (Rogers, 2013)*,* he argues that traditional research techniques cannot be transferred directly. It is necessary to combine them with the Internet in order to enable a deeper, more dynamic, and better understanding of the digital context.

> *'The digital context has become such an additional and integrated social participatory place of people"s daily life where the researchers take account not only of the web as the object of study, but the role they play in relation with it as well.'* (Rogers, 2013: 14)

The approach of Rogers (2009; 2013) focuses on using the data existing on digital platforms, for example, the web-scraping technique, and online network analysis. In my view, the more important point to note is that sociologists have been challenging traditional social

research by conducting digital ethnography as well as creating opportunities to develop new research methods and methodologies for the digital era. Murthy (2008) suggests that digital ethnography can fully use digital methods in order to examine digital social life. In other words, digital ethnography is the term for the ethnographic approach developed from digital methods.

However, a myth has persisted that digital ethnography is a 'new' emergent method in digital social research. In fact, it is rather a 'renewed' method, which has adopted methods from anthropological research. As I mentioned earlier, in the twentieth century, scholars used ethnographic research to study online communities. There were some ethnographic research projects, and researchers found that online communities can make sense of communities as well as geographic communities (for example, Baym, 2000).

Kozinet (2010) suggests that the classical concept of 'virtual community' is still used as a key conceptual framework when ethnographers choose digital ethnography as their main methodological approach.

According to Rheingold (1993), the online community can be a field site and a platform to conduct ethnography by investigating social life and social interaction in digital spaces, observing and participating in online communities over a long time period, stretching social relations with members of online communities, immersing and engaging in the community both in digital and real life contexts (if it is necessary to conduct through a hybrid platform). To accomplish this, there are five stages of conducting digital ethnography in the online community. First, the selection of a topic, field sites, and defining of a research question. Second, the identification and selection of a community. Third, entry to the field site by participating, observing and collecting data in a selected community with careful consideration of research ethics. Fourth, the analysis and interpretation of findings. Lastly, write, present and report on findings by looking at policy implications as well as looking back on theories for verification (Kozinets, 2010).

From the mid-1990s, there has been a flourish of online ethnographic research projects (Baym 2000), and ethnographic techniques that have been applied to the study of interactions

in online communities. Mirroring traditional ethnography, virtual/digital ethnography is a methodological approach which requires participant observation as well as the use of a variety of social research methods such as online interviews on social network websites and blogs in conducting fieldwork. Moreover, virtual/digital ethnography needs to use digital technologies and the internet as a data source to understand the social phenomenon (Murthy 2008: 839). In conducting digital ethnography, ethnographers need to complete methodological accomplishments: (1) to present themselves as a researcher in online communities, (2) to access and participate in a virtual space, (3) to make informants aware of the research objectives, and (4) to experience field sites with other informants (Kozinets 2010: 59-60).

Significantly, digital ethnography is an appropriate and powerful qualitative method to understand my thesis topic: online identity and sexualities. In my field work, I used a variety of 'digitised methods' to collect digital archives, to participate as an observer in LGBTQI Facebook communities, and to interview members of communities in an online environment through Facebook messenger (Hine, 2008; Garcia et al. 2009). Furthermore, digital ethnographers can employ 'digital methods' to conduct online fieldwork. For example, I collected and analysed digital data from social media platforms and applied web 2.0 technologies and social networking sites as a research setting by using software/digital tools to gather data online. I also plan to use a blog as a site for dissemination of research results (Murthy, 2008; Coleman, 2010; Hsu, 2014).

Methodological Debates in Digital Ethnography

After the emergence of recent digital technologies such as multimedia web 2.0 technologies, research toolkits in digital social research have been applied to social science (Helene et al., 2015). The binary opposition in research, (qualitative/qualitative research, digital/digitised methods, real/virtual field setting, insider/outsider perspective), has been eliminated This means that the binaries in question have become merged into a continuum. Digital data and platforms have changed purely disciplinary paradigms into interdisciplinary ones, especially in the social sciences as seen in recent new fields such as 'digital

anthropology' (Horst and Miller, 2012) and 'digital sociology' (Orton-Johnson and Prior, 2013; Lupton, 2014). Moreover, the epistemology and ontology of research methods have been reconstructed in innovative and creative ways (Rogers, 2013; Helene et al., 2015). The current issues and debates related to the use of digital ethnography are explored below.

Digital, Digitised, and *Traditional Methods*

One concern in digital ethnography is the use of appropriate research methods. Different digital ethnographers have their own approaches for conducting fieldwork. There are three groups of online ethnographic approaches (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010). The first group of ethnographers prefer to use digital social research methods such as online participant observation and online interviews but they sometimes use conventional methods (Murthy 2008). The second group of ethnographers tend to mix digital with traditional methods such as using face-to-face interviews combined with online participant observation (Garcia et al. 2009; Kozinets 2010). Despite their study of online social phenomenon, the last group of ethnographers have remained bound to classical ethnography. They rely solely on face-to-face research methods claiming that it is not necessary to collect ethnographic objects in online environments (Miller and Slater 2000). Additionally, emerging technologies and web developers or programmers can quickly change types of online communities. Ethnographers are therefore expected to adapt and change methods and approaches constantly in their study of online communities (Brown, 2013: 199). There is, therefore, a methodological debate surrounding digital ethnography. One of the arguments between researchers revolves around the use of digital or digitised methods to collect data for carrying out digital ethnography. Both digital and digitised methods are approaches which involve the collection of data from digital or online environments, for example, through online participant observation, or gathering data from a website of online communities. In fact, digital ethnography is an approach which uses and consists of digital-based methods, and there is no need to conduct digital ethnography in a physical or offline field. However, I choose, with my own research, to go one steo further

than this by applying traditional ethnographic methods or offline methods in digital ethnography. Critically, from my experience, there is always a connection between physical and online communities. Because of the connection between offline life and online life, members of online communities sometimes interact with others in a real communityI suggest that traditional ethnographic methods, for example, face-to-face participation and interviews can be used to collect data in combination with digitised and digital methods. This blended method and approach is no doubt an advantage when it comes to research results.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Although ethnography is associated with qualitative methods, researchers may also mix it with quantitative data. In my previous research project, I collected quantitative data by using an online survey, embedded in an online forum. I asked the forum's moderator to post my link (URL) survey as "a sticky post" at the top of the forum. I also used quantitative data, collected by other researchers as secondary resources and mixed this with my primary data. At the data analysis stage, I analysed ethnographic data and assembled descriptive statistics of demographic data of the community's members, gathered from an online questionnaire. This highlights the fact that we can break down the barrier between quantitative and qualitative research by conducting ethnography. The mixture of quantitative data and qualitative data is important for research because qualitative research itself cannot explain broad trends and the wider context, while quantitative data can. Quantitative data is used to enhance the understanding of online communities. To illustrate this claim, I collected data which showed that the peak time most members were online in the forum was between approximately 7-8 PM. That statistical data proved to be useful and allowed me to observe and participate in a forum at that time to obtian more insightful data about the community. We can therefore conclude that using quantitative methods can play an important role in some ethnographies. However, it does not mean that the application of a quantitative method to ethnographic research is an effective way to tackle 'all' research projects. Researchers should experiment

case-by-case by using a pilot study prior to entry into the field site and, of course, in the PhD project as well.

Big Data Needs Thick Data

As I mentioned above, the quantitative approach together with the digital method can unearth a large scale of data patterns and trends while the qualitative approach can be useful in contextualising and understanding data in greater detail (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). Often, for digital research, its computational approaches are involved in the production of big data. However, digital ethnography is one of its methods, and produces a rich data frequently referred to as 'thick data' (Geertz, 1973) constructed through an inductive approach. Therefore, it should be necessary to combine thick data with big data in order to illuminate both large and deep social life data (Boellstorff and Maurer, 2015). This means that large datasets can benefit from deep datasets gathered from the ethnographic approach. Gaps in the computational approach to big data can be filled by small datasets, insights we have gained from the holistic approach of ethnography (Lohmeier, 2014; boyd and Crawford, 2012). Therefore, for digital research in practice, we can link big data with digital ethnography.

Online and Offline Field Sites

One of the controversial methodological paradigms of digital ethnography is the 'field site' or 'real location' where ethnographers 'need to be'. In comparison to traditional ethnography, the virtual field may not be the real thing in the eyes of some ethnographers. Additionally, the lack of physical presence can be a barrier to understanding individual respondents (Brown 2013: 199). However, Hine (2000: 65) claims that '[it] is adequate for the practical purpose of exploring the relations of mediated interaction, even if not quite the real thing in methodologically purist terms. It is adaptive ethnography which sets out to suit itself

to the conditions in which it finds itself.' Nowadays, the question about location or field site arguably remains between ethnographers.

2. Autoethnography

Hughes and Penningtion (2017) state that reflection is one of the ways in which people think and write, allowing for deep learning and a clearer understanding of the meaning of culture, as well as being able to see the connections and relationships of causes and factors. In this way, for example, the relationship between what has been learned, and what is related, becomes clearly visible. Self-reflection requires experience and learning from many situations. The autoethnographic approach includes more reflection than other kinds of ethnography in order for the researcher to understand his or her self.

However, self-reflection is not a systematic process like a research process that relies on scientific principles. Autoethnography is therefore one research process that combines various methods. Autoethnography may use narratives and life experiences in order to understand social phenomena with a critical reflection. Autoethnography uses critical social theory as a theoretical framework. The research approach is therefore critical social research. Autoethnographic research, for example, uses feminist ideas in understanding the concept of gender. Autoethnography also goes deeper into the level of self-transformation of researchers into new identities. Autoethnographers point out the importance of critical theoretical concepts in serving as the basis for questioning research and data analysis as well as providing guidance for applying critical theoretical concepts to social issues (Hughes and and Penningtion, 2017).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to write according to their own style. It is a qualitative research approach geared towards change by bringing back stories from the past to create new ideas in the present. It encourages researchers to reveal their own thoughts in an honest manner. Autoethnography is an outstanding research process that draws on personal experience as a tool for constructing

knowledge and giving meaning to social phenomena in relation to the researcher's personal experiences. Is is therefore a form of research that can reveal a range of feelings in the researcher's body, such as joy, suffering, excitement and acceptance (Anderson, 2006; Custer, 2014; Wall, 2006). These dimensions are clearly depicted in this thesis, especially in the introduction, research findings, and concluding chapter.

Ethnography, within the field of anthropology, was born in the nineteenth century at a time when anthropologists studied primitive culture or non-Western societies and cultures. It is a methodological approach which has been used in many social sciences and in many different forms. In the thesis, in addition to digital ethnography, autoethnography represents another research methodology. In order to be able to draw on a new methodology, I combined the two types of ethnography, autoethnography and digital ethnography, into *'digital autoethnography'* , a methodology which would contribute to a new way of conducting ethnographic fieldwork as well as challenge traditional ethnography. Digital ethnography challenges face-to-face methods by investigating data through online interaction and digital technology (Hine, 2000; Boellstorff et al., 2012; Pink et al., 2016). Autoethnography both reveals and refers to my life experiences as a gay man and as a researcher in reflecting and studying Thai social contexts. It challenges the traditional way of conducting ethnography in other cultures by shifting the focus to a study of researchers' selves and of their own cultures (Reed-Danahay, 2021; Adams, Holman, Jones, and Ellis, 2016).

Definition of Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a study of self-subjects in which researchers are intermediaries in the transmission of self-knowledge, giving this kind of research a mix of self-study approaches and interpretive approaches.

Similarly to traditional ethnography, autoethnography was originally used in anthropological research. Anthropologists have used autoethnography to study their own cultures as natives and researcher's life experiences since the 1980s. However, Bochner and Ellis (2016) comment that autoethnography has moved beyond anthropology as it has begun

to focus on autoethnographic writing rather than "the ethnography of one's own group" or life history of an individual (Curtis and Curtis, 2011).   From the 1900s, autoethnography has moved itself into the field of sociology as well as that of the social sciences and humanities (Reed-Danahay, 2021). There are several names and genres associated with the method, such as 'interpretive autoethnography' (Denzin, 2013), however, my purpose is to review autoethnography in general. According to some scholars, for example, Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2016), Hughes and Pennington (2016), autoethnography is a research methodology and method that:

> *'[1] Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences. [2] Acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others. [3] Uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as "reflexivity"—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political. [4] Shows "people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles." [5] Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity. [6] Strives for social justice and to make life better.'* (Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, 2016: 1-2)

> *'Autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography.'* (Reed-Danahay, 2021: 9)

> *'Autoethnography involves a critical study of yourself in relation to one or more cultural context(s).'* (Hughes and Pennington, 2016: 9).

These definitions above reveal that autoethnography inspects a sociocultural context through the personal experiences of researchers in order to understand social and cultural settings through the immersion of researchers in fieldwork. Autoethnography is considered an autobiographical genre of academic writing. It analyses and interprets the researchers' lived experiences and identities in a specific social and cultural context. However, Holman Jones (2016) comments that 'autoethnography is slippery to define because a majority of its practitioners are committed to a social constructivist epistemology.' One way to understand the autoethnographic approach is to examine its aims (Curtis and Curtis, 2011: 11).

Aims of Autoethnography

According to Curtis and Curtis (2011), autoethnography has four main aims;

1) Autoethnography as self-examination: The aim of the autoethnographic approach is the most personal aim. It is an autobiographical genre, and the voice of the author is primarily heard. For example, the introduction to Carolyn Ellis' (2020), *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*, states that autoethnography is part of her life work. It aims to be a personal project.

2) Autoethnography as post-structural and postmodern ethnography: Without consideration of its autobiographical nature, the aim of the autoethnographic approach remains a form of ethnography. Autoethnographic texts are the same as ethnographic texts. Roth (2005) states that autoethnography generates a concrete and unique material which cannot be created in general. He argues that the approach applies social constructivist and post-structuralist principles, for example, in the ways of interpretation of texts. Each text is unique, but all texts are linked through deep structure in the language (Reed-Danahay, 2021).

3) Autoethnography as witnessing trauma, loss and marginalisation: The aim of the approach engages in the political activity of witnessing. In other words, autoethnography has been used to give witness to trauma, loss, and marginalization. It also focuses on autobiography and personal narratives of witnessing (Ellis, 2020; Bochner and Ellis, 2016). According to Sparkes (2002: 221), 'autoethnographies become a call to witness for both the author and the reader. The witness offers testimony to a truth that is generally unrecognised or suppressed.'

4) Autoethnography as praxis: The aim of the approach has been used in some disciplines, for example, teaching, nursing, and social work. It is a self-centred approach to examining the theory and practice. The autoethnographic approach gives an insight into the practice of practitioners by reflecting on and sharing their insights with others. They also use autoethnography as an exemplar (Ellis, 2020).

In the thesis, I have used autoethnography as a self-examination and to witness the marginalisation of sexuality. It is a form of research in which I use my own experiences as a gay man to develop insights. As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, I have positioned myself by starting with my personal experiences as a gay man who used gay dating apps and websites to find my partner. It constituted reflexive writing to analyse myself in online-offline environments. In addition, as a method, the autoethnographic research was combined with digital ethnographic methods.

Approaches and Genres of Autoethnography

The section aims to understand the concept, different approaches, components, and forms of autoethnography. The literature review shows the reader a wide range of autoethnographic works from the points of view of different authors.

According to Reed-Danahay (2021), autoethnography is an approach of postmodern research that is focused on self, society, and social science. Instead of the study of groups, autoethnography begins with study of the self. In other words, it focuses on social aspects of personal experiences before moving to social and cultural interpretations of the whole society (e.g., social structure). In reflecting on personal experiences, autoethnography is usually written in the first-person (e.g., using 'I') as well as using many forms of personal narratives (e.g., short stories, journals, photography) (Ellis, 2020). Autoethnography is also a multifaceted concept. It appeals to researchers and authors in a variety of professions who are looking for ways to contextualise personal experiences in larger social contexts.

> *'The concept of autoethnography… reflects a changing conception of both self and society… It synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has an ethnographic interest.'* (Reed-Danahay, 2021: 2)

Autoethnographic approaches can be seen in different ways. According to Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), autoethnography is viewed as a research tool that emphasizes the researcher's personal experience while Reed-Danahay (2021) has used autoethnography as a research resource for ethnographic understanding. It is perceived as a form of native and indigenous ethnography, which can be practised by ethnographers who interact with key informants in ethnographic sources in order to understand their identities and societies.

> *'When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture.'* (Ellis. 2011: 1)

Althou Reed-Danahay (2021) argued that it is difficult to make broad generalizations about the meaning of autoethnography and autoethnographic research implications as a research method, autoethnography is frequently viewed as a research method and technique among academic ethnographers. From this point of view, autoethnography incorporates emotional components and personal experience into participant observation research.

According to Reed-Danahay (2021), there are four genres of autoethnography: indigenous ethnography, autoethnographic memoir, fieldwork autoethnography, and autoethnography 'at home.'

1) **Indigenous Ethnography.** This genre originates from the traditional anthropological research method—'life history' which studies indigenous lived experience. The expression of indigenous experience can be incorporated as a form of autoethnographic research. Autoethnography formed by indigenous people provides ways in which it can be used in a variety of cultural representation, reproduction, and resistance.

2) **Autoethnographic Memoir.** This genre of autoethnography uses researchers' own lived experiences in specific social and cultural contexts. Usually, this genre of autoethnography is written by academic ethnographers. They use memoirs to address experiences in their professional and personal life. Autoethnographic memoirs are different to, and broader than, fieldwork autoethnography (to be elaborated in the next point) because ethnographers emphasize their biographies and lived experiences rather than only focusing on fieldwork experiences. An example of this type of autoethnography is the work of Ellis (2020) who published ethnographic writings focusing on her life stories from childhood. She

drew on her research experiences, and perspectives from her personal life, as a way of connecting researchers to readers. In sum, the autoethnographic memoir is a blend of researchers' memoirs, ethnographic accounts, and autobiographies to produce autoethnography.

3) Fieldwork Autoethnography. This genre of autoethnography focuses on the fieldwork experiences of researchers' lives. Fieldwork autoethnography combines participant observations and autobiographic writings during fieldwork. Since the 1980s, ethnographers have paid attention to self-reflexivity in producing ethnographic writings, implying that all ethnographies include some element of autoethnographic narrative. Fieldwork autoethnography contributes to the field of gender and sexuality studies, from feminist anthropology to LGBT and queer studies. This type of autoethnographic research views the gendered and sexual position of researchers in those fields of studies as essential to ethnographic production. The recent work of Adams (2016) is an example of ethnographic fieldwork in gender and sexuality studies which fully uses autoethnography as a research approach to study LGBTQI people. He incorporates his personal experiences in and out of the closet in his ethnographic fieldwork. Adam's autoethnographic work contributes to the understanding of sexuality studies and serves as a good example of the use of autoethnography in understanding LGBTQI sexual culture.

4) Autoethnography at Home. This genre of autoethnography can be used interchangeably with "Native Ethnography". It refers to ethnography conducted in a setting or in a group in which the ethnographer identifies himself or herself as native. Traditionally, ethnographers travel abroad in order to conduct ethnography in exotic societies. However, Ruby (2016) views this strand of ethnography as "reflexive ethnography" that is "based on travel within the social, political, and national space the ethnographer grew up in and continuously inhabits". This type of autoethnography is anthropological fieldwork conducted in the ethnographer's own society or ethnography conducted in the ethnographer's own country.

Autoethnography and Queer Research

According to Browne and Nash (2010: 4), queer research can be "any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations". Queer methodologies and methods are mainly used in sexuality research and concern sexual orientation, but they are not necessary (Boellstorff, 2010). Queer methodology has some unique methods, for example, reflexivity, subjectivity,

intersectionality, and participatory. It also challenges conventional social research method (Hammers and Brown, 2004).

In the thesis, autoethnography can be viewed as a queer methodology because they share the concept of fluidity and intersubjectivity (Adams and Jones, 2010). Autoethnography is both a method and form of writing. It is a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and others in a social context. Autoethnography is the use of personal experience and personal writing to (1) purposefully comment on/critique cultural practices; (2) make contributions to existing research; (3) embrace vulnerability with purpose; and (4) create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response (Adams and Ellis, 2016). Throughout the thesis I used my personal experiences to narrate the stories, to reflect on my feelings as a gay man and to learn how participants feel in relation to their vulnerable experiences. In particular, I used autoethnography as a researcher and gay dating app user in Chapter Four.

The queer research challenges the fundamental aspects of identities as normative sexual and gender identities along with heteronormativity and the heterosexual-homosexual binary. Clearly, queer research is political in its challenge to the binary concept related to gender and sexuality as well as in the way it works to destabilise the normative understanding of the social system and power relations of normalisation. Queer theory is able to redefine research design, leading to the nature of the data gathered in traditional social research as being challenged as well. For example, using the queer methodological approach, we would be able to reimage the research design, and the subjectivities of research participants may not represent fixed identity just as the field of research may be an unstable area (Browne and Nash 2010: 16). In my perspective, digital society would be a good exemplar for queer research. Research informants can play their (online) identities, such as gender-swapping and the virtual field has multiple social spaces in terms of both online and offline contexts.

The queer approach is interdisciplinary research; it has borrowed methodologies and a mixture of methods from lesbian and gay studies, feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism as it reflects on the work of significant scholars including Michel Foucault,

Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick (Corber and Valocchi, 2003). It is important that the real world research today is an interdisciplinary science. However, the development and application of queer methodologies have been mainly taking place in North American and the United Kingdom. In other words, queer methodologies have their intellectual and historical roots in the West. Furthermore, queer methods are frequently used in the humanities, for example, textual analysis. In contrast, social sciences rarely apply queer methods as a methodological implication into research although there has been a substantial amount of writings on queer theory (Browne and Nash 2010); (Giffney and Hird, 2008). The challenge for the thesis is using the queer methodological approach to explore queer sexualities in Asian society drawing on sociological research.

Queer methodologies have also challenged the conventional social research method by questioning research reliability and generalisation. Quantitative research is mainly criticised by the queer method for its lack of complexities and diversities. From the queer perspective, it is impossible to use a quantitative method, as its quantified approach depends on fixed categories. Queer methodologies claim that the fixation is problematic and believe the categorisation to be normative and representative of a stable identity. It is also perceived to create a binary opposition of male-female or heterosexual-homosexual for example, which is rejected outrightly by the queer methodologies as a tick box survey method based on categories (Browne 2008). Essentially, queer methodology should integrate with a qualitative inquiry. This is not because it criticises quantitative approaches, as I mentioned previously. Qualitative approaches suit the way in which a queer researcher immerses himself into the lives of queer informants (Gamson, 2000). In my case it allows me to speak directly with my informants in order to gather "queer voices", especially their voices and experiences of sexual oppression, discrimination, and sexualities.

The application of queer research in the data analysis draws on a queer theoretical lens to address and examine issues concerning heteronormativity. The mode of analysis of the queer is not only related to gender and sexualities but also anti-normativity and anti-normative analyses. Laskar, Ambjörnsson and Steorn (2010) point out that originally, the

method of queer analysis was discourse and textual analysis. Specifically, in the humanities, queer analysis uses a variety of cultural products that are derived from the past to the present, for example, novels, visual and audio-based materials. The type of analyses emphasises normative systems and meaning in the production of knowledge and power relations. However, the techniques of analysis have been criticised for being largely ignorant of the lived experiences of queer people as well as for presenting scarce evidence for LGBTQI social movement and activism. Certainly, the critique of texts is practical in terms of revealing the inequalities of queer people, but the queer method does not bring about a social and political change for the queer group. In the humanities, queer researchers do not use their queer analyses to engage with queer people who live with sexual discrimination and inequality (Liinason and Kulpa, 2008).

Queer methods in social research would be an alternative approach to resolve the problem because it tends to engage with people's lives. Since some sociologists have deployed and developed queer thought into the discipline, the traditions of sociological methodologies, particularly, qualitative methods, have been applied to explore the social life of queer people (Browne and Nash, 2010). In this way, queer theory and social research have established a mutual relationship. In terms of the relation between theory and methods, queer theory can affect and challenge some principles of social research methods. Browne and Nash (2010) give some examples of the challenges for queer research.

> *'If, as queer thinking argues, subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming, how can we gather 'data' from those tenuous and fleeting subjects using the standard methods of data collection such as interviews or questionnaires? What meanings can we draw from, and what use can we make of, such data when it is only momentarily fixed and certain?'*
> (Browne and Nash 2010: 1)

From the quotation above, if identities/subjectivities have been understood as unstable and fluid, how can we define a research sampling? Ideally, queer research should stop adding the letters of sexual categories which represent 'LGBTQI' research. While the concept of identity is unclear, identity categories in research pose a problem; how can we reach informants who use their gender and sexual labels/identities? In these cases, some research

techniques, for example, interviews and questionnaires, have been questioned. Browne and Nash (2010) suggest that the existence of sexual categories would be acceptable in queer research. It should investigate why and where the sexual/gender categories come from. Queer method could represent an understanding of performative identity. Secondly, in queer research, if contradictions between the theoretical frameworks, analytical approaches, and data collection techniques arise, the challenge may be transformed into a tension between theories and methodologies. Boellstorff (2010) suggests that ethnography should be a methodology and method for queer research because of its fluid and complex nature, and interactive approach. Ideally, an ethnographic approach is able to interactively engage with people, groups, and communities which often redefine and reimage research subjects as well as the research design. Rooke (2009) also suggests that ethnography itself is not only a method, but also a principle based on the concept of participant observation. This means that it offers possibilities of criticising and reconstructing theory as well as approaching unclear boundaries of the fieldwork. The field is subjectively constructed by an ethnographer and ethnography uses reflexive writing (methodological reflections), by highlighting the fluidity and identities of ethnographers in multiple contexts both in and out of the field.

Autoethnography and Reflexivity

Autoethnography is one of the methodologies used in the thesis. It is important to examine the literature on autoethnography and reflexivity in order to explain the selection of the methodological approach indicated in the title of the thesis. This section is a discussion about autoethnography, reflexivity and queer research. The section begins with the definitions, approaches, and debates concerning the use of autoethnographic research. The following section demonstrates the definition of reflexivity and the application of reflexivity to ethnographic research.

A researcher's autoethnographic writings incorporate both data collection and analysis. The research process is based on '*reflexivity*' which requires an investigation of the

self or reflexive approach. Apart from personal/lived experiences, reflexive writing is also a main element to position the researcher as a subject of autoethnographic research (Haynes, 2018: 18). Curtis and Curtis (2011: 264) suggest that "reflexivity should be pursued by autoethnographers as the integral part of data collection and analysis. In other words, data is collected and analyzed as a part of the researcher's own autobiographic writing." As a research process, reflexivity represents a state of self-reflection as well as a form of autoethnographic texts. Self-reflexivity is considered as a way of opening up researchers' experiences and worldviews in a research setting (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). Reflexivists such as Ashmore (1989: 26, 30-32) explore reflexivity by focusing on multiple views of the discourse of the sociology of scientific knowledge. Ashmore suggests that the term 'reflexivity' is used in various ways. He also explores the term by differentiating the two main forms – 'reflect' and 'reflex'. He provides three features for reflexivity.

1) Reflexivity as self-reference: This is found in psychology, literary study, and mathematics.

2) Reflexivity as self-awareness: This is a 'benign introspection' and problematic.

3) Reflexivity as the constitution of the circularity of accounts: In this sense, reflexivity is a technical term in ethnomethodology. It refers to the general and universal features of accounting procedures. He describes the feature as a going 'back-and-forth'".

Furthermore, an autoethnographic approach may combine autobiography and reflexivity through a reflexive process of writing. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) claim that reflexive writing is a core of data collection and analysis in autoethnographic research. They provide four practices for reflexivity or "reflexive practices" in autoethnography.

1) Reflexivity as multiple-perspective practices: The reflexive writer may use the contestation between a multitude of theories and perspectives as a resource to look for what is shared by perspectives. It aims to expose different ways of understanding a phenomenon and to open up new ways of producing different knowledge.

2) Reflexivity as multiple-voicing practices: The reflexive writers or autoethnographers have to treat their voice in the form of personal narrative by exposing their motivations, assumptions, and limitations.

3) Reflexivity as positioning practices: The reflexive practices attempt to situate the relationship between the reflexive writer's existing claims and their own claims to authority.

4) Reflexivity as destabilizing practices: The reflexive practices view reflexivity as an element of the postmodern critique in social science. The reflexive practices aim to question and challenge the construction of theory and knowledge or theoretical and epistemological assumptions because of a lack of a reflexive voice.

3. Digital Autoethnography

While most scholars from certain disciplines are interested in general issues of cyberculture studies, there are few who focus on and explore the issue of sexuality online (Silver 2000: 27). For LGBT and Queer studies, Wakeford (2002) points out a scarcity of studies, contributions and explored challenges in digital queer studies:

> *'[Cyberqueer] studies are often small scale or exploratory studies and not widely read amongst lesbian and gay scholars. More extensive research in this area should be supported, and the emphasis put on the integration of cyberqueer research into a wide range of perspectives as the discipline of lesbian and gay studies continues to develop… the most significant contribution of cyberqueer studies has been to highlight a new domain of lesbian and gay practice, and new spaces which may be queered. The Internet can be characterised, at least in part, as a new media form, and similar questions may be asked of the Internet as have been asked of television, film or radio…to develop the research directions that are underway in cyberqueer studies, as well as to find means to consolidate the field. Meanwhile researchers elsewhere in lesbian and gay studies should be encouraged to engage with the topics that have already been raised, whether it is to challenge the use of theory, debate the importance of the findings, or to draw upon the data about emerging queer practices.'* (Wakeford 2002: 137-139)

Since the 1990s some queer Internet/digital media research has been undertaken in western societies, but there has been a lack of comprehensive studies in Asian societies, especially Thailand. This thesis seeks to address this absence.   Although a social phenomenon has taken place regarding the use of internet technology in the sexual lives of

LGBTQI, there has been a severe lack of studies which intersect queer perspectives, sexuality, and digital media, and in particular a lack of ethnographic fieldwork to understand their sexuality in specific contexts (Campbell, 2004). Ultimately, this thesis seeks to make a contribution to the knowledge of LGBT studies, queer studies, and digital media studies within non-western social contexts. Certainly, historical and local contexts of Asian societies are quite distinct from the west which challenge perspectives on global queer and digital media. I hope to challenge and reconstruct the traditional assumptions and stereotypes about how the Internet integrates with Thai LGBTQI lives by exploring their sexualities in digital media.

According to the methodological review, it may be possible to investigate more contemporary issues through digital studies. In addition to substantial research on queer and Internet studies in western contexts, further research on the intersection between digital studies and sexuality in the Asian contexts are encouraged. Hopefully, digital media can be a platform to understand queer sexuality and culture. Queer theorists think beyond binary thinking of gender and sexuality, and digitalism might be a good partner for queering sexuality and deconstructing categories of identities due to the messy and radical nature of digital spaces. The coupling may create a fascinating site to analyse LGBTQI lives in digital societies.

4. Research Methods

As mentioned, the research was designed to use digital ethnography as a methodological approach. The research was a combination of various qualitative research methods and techniques, namely online interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation (online and offline). In addition to a variety of techniques, the research was designed as 'blended methods' by connecting with hybrid fieldwork between online-offline research methods. In other words, a traditional ethnographic method was mixed with online methods, the data of which was collected in both offline and online social contexts, for example, in the LGBTQI community in Bangkok and Thai LGBTQI social media pages/online communities. Based on extended ethnographic research, rather than "a research setting" or "a field", I participated in

"multiple fields" on the online platforms of Thai LGBTQI people, namely social media, chat rooms, mobile applications, and websites. All mixed qualitative methods were cross-checked and verified as a methodological triangulation. In brief, the online methods were prioritized as fieldwork for the research, but due to the connections between online and offline lives, I extended this to conduct a traditional ethnography within LGBTQI groups and communities in Bangkok. Therefore, online-offline platforms were researched settings to conduct the ethnography by investigating the Thai LGBTQI sexual identity and culture in both online and offline contexts.

In the thesis, I used mixed methods and hybrid approaches for carrying out digital ethnography. Ironically, contrasting with the methodological controversy, in practice, there are many different approaches to exploring digital social data. Digital ethnography is one of the alternative approaches which can generate rich data for data analysis by using mixed methods and hybrid fieldwork. The different methods and approaches depend on research questions, informants, the research setting and data analysis. To reflect this, I conducted digital ethnography forum-based online communities of Thai lesbians, transgenders, and gay men. When designing my research I intended to use pure digital social research methods to generate online data. However, when I entered the field sites, some informants asked me to arrange face-to-face interviews because they were comfortable to talk to me with their real voices' rather than typing via 'textual' messaging. As a result of the informants' request, I subsequently changed the methodological approach to incorporate both online and offline research methods. Moreover, my multi-sites ethnography frequently and consistently shifted between online life and real life. Informants used a bulletin board system to interact online as well as using physical social spaces, for example, pubs and bars, to participate in face-to-face interaction. I needed therefore to use both online and offline participant observation. I realised that informants and social behaviour in research settings are the most important primary data sources in field research. This is a result of the adaptability of ethnography as opposed to a fixed approach, leading to the accessing of insightful data from informants. Most importantly, I think 'online' and 'real' communities are not divided but connected. Using the research

techniques and analytical methods, I followed the steps below in conducting ethnographic research online (Kozinets, 2010, 2015):

1) Choosing field sites. I chose traditional online platforms (web sites and forums) and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, gay mobile dating apps). At first, I explored some Thai LGBTQI websites and web boards to locate the research setting. For offline field sites, I chose to interview LGBTQI who live in Bangkok. I contacted the individual informants through social media platforms before their acceptance to become research informants. I interviewed and gained permission to participate in their rooms to observe their behaviour, for example, observing while they are sitting in front of the computer accessing LGBTQI social media or chatting through gay mobile dating applications. To protect their privacy in, for example, talking about their sexualities, I understand "home'' to be the most private, safest and best space to talk openly about their lives and sexual experiences.

2) Entry to the chosen field sites. Kozinets (2015: 165-166) suggests that, in principle, there are three forms of ethnographic online data: (1) *archival data:* data that researchers find and collect from online communities where they are already recorded and stored, for example, web page screenshots, digital images, (2) *elicited data or co-created data*: data that is created by interactions between the researcher and member of online community or human-computer interaction, for example, chatlogs of interview, text replying on webboards, an output of software applications (3) *fieldnote or reflexive data*: researcher's notes/reflections about participating in the online community.

In order to enter into digital societies, there are many research methods for doing so. As I mentioned above, the research is hybrid fieldwork. Hence, I entered into research settings and collected data online-offline by using participant observation and interview techniques. For the sub-step of entering into the field, first, I explained my research purposes and asked permission to a webmaster to enter the web board. However, entering the websites, web board, and chat room were different in terms of anonymity. I collected data anonymously in a

public access web board. Other than public access to the selected websites, and after becoming a member of the web board by registering to the web forum, for the process of collecting data, I checked new postings/threads/feeds and read them to collect some relevant data. For this, I used screen capture and recording software. I also participated or "immersed" in the web forum by replying to contested topics, for example, the possibility of same-sex marriage in Thailand. I personally chatted with other LGBTQI members to ask additional questions of topics in which I was interested. I stored the collected data on my computer and imported it into the qualitative data analysis software. The data sources were various. They included text-based replying to discussions of visual data from the web pages and chat rooms like photos, and videos. Meanwhile, the boundaries between online and offline sites shifted. For example, on leaving the computer screen and logging out from the web forum, I would interview, participate in and observe LGBTQI sexual life and activities situated in physical field sites in Bangkok where I took field notes, recorded the interviews, and then used some transcriptions as data sources to analyse.

3) Analysis, interpretation, and verification of data. Not only the process of data collection, but the process of data analysis was also connected between offline and online social contexts. During the fieldwork stages, I collected data and did a preliminary analysis of the data. I expected that it would require me to go back to collecting further data online and offline again. After transcribing interview recordings, if I found data gaps, which needed to be followed up, I re-entered the online field and re-generated some textual postings to fill these data gaps. I analysed the textual and visual data by applying ethnographic content analysis, which produced text-based and visual data in the research results. I subseqently followed the five steps for analysing ethnographic data (Grbich, 2013: 195-215): (1) Locating all relevant documents (2) Identifying the units to be analysed. (3) Developing and testing a protocol from the intensive analysis of documents (4) Revising and furthering refining the protocol as the analysis proceeds (5) Interpreting meaning within content and culture.

4) Presentation of research findings and dissemination of results. The ethnographic content analysis is a method of analysis, which was used to analyse and produce likely data outcomes as text-based and story-telling data and presented in comparative ways, for example, through the comparison of textual and visual of illustrations on selected topics. The presentation of data in the thesis was through a combination of images (screen capture) and polyvocals (for example, quoting from transcriptions, text postings) of Thai LGBTQI in a narrative style of queer research. In 2019, I received a grant from the Goldsmiths Graduate School in order to disseminate my PhD research findings. I presented a paper at the 13th Anthropological Conference on *'Human in Digital Era'* in my home country, Thailand between the 4th and 6th of July 2019 at Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropological Centre (Public Organisation). My paper was entitled '*Digital Ethnography: Concepts, Methods, Debates, and Challenges for Research in Thai Society.'*

Field Sites

'Social media platforms [as Web 2.0 technologies] allow more communicative interactivity, flexibility, social connectivity, user-generated content, and creativity, facilitating more democratic participation than did previous digital platforms.' (Coleman, 2010: 489).

'[Cyberqueer] studies are often small scale or exploratory studies and not widely read amongst lesbian and gay scholars. More extensive research in this area should be supported, and the emphasis put on the integration of cyberqueer research into a wide range of perspectives as the discipline of lesbian and gay studies continues to develop.' (Wakeford, 2002: 137).

The thesis intends to contribute new knowledge to cyberqueer studies in Thailand by studying Thai queerness on different social media platforms. Nowadays, LGBTQI can easily access the Internet, and they can create their accounts, groups, communities and construct culture through social media platforms. LGBTQI people have been creating online representations through photos, videos, social networking postings and textual narration. These platforms are now part of LGBTQI lives and can be social spaces for expressing queer identity and for constructing their culture.

Research in digital culture and sexuality has developed various approaches and aspects to engage with social media platforms. Sexual culture and sexualities have been mediated in various ways on social media. LGBTQI people have found social support via social networking sites. They have experienced the entanglement of online embodiments of sexuality and faced challenges of heteronormativity (Campbell, 2004; Cooper and Dzara, 2010; DeNardis and Hackl, 2016). The recent work of Shaw and Sender (2017), '*Queer Technologies: Affordances, Affect, Ambivalence*', is an example of a study that has spoken to the issue of queer media technologies by examining possibilities and limitations for sexual expression and sexual identities.
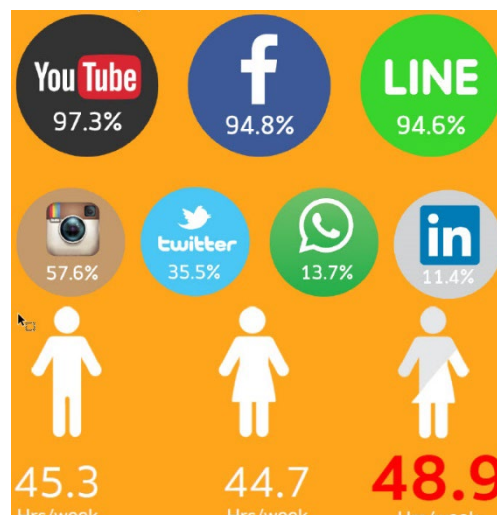
Figure 2: The use of social media platforms by gender in Thailand

(Source: Nattapot, A. (2016, August 24). *ETDA reveals Thai internet user behavior in 2016.* atimesNEWS. http://www.atimedesign.com/webdesign/infographic-behavior-2559)

In a survey conducted by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society and Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA, 2016), Figure 1 shows the use of various types of social media platforms by gender in Thailand. The first reason for selecting the online platforms for the research is based on these statistics. I believe the statistics can generalise the use of social media platforms among Thai LGBTQI. In order to find out the answers to

research questions, I set up and review the appropriate social media platforms for the ethnographic study and address the question of why these platforms have been chosen in relation to queer identity, sexuality, and culture. To gain insight, different types of social media platforms were chosen because of the connectivity of social media platforms, physical spaces, and mode of communications that individuals and groups use in their everyday lives (Madianou and Miller, 2013). The criteria for choosing social media as ethnographic sites for the study was as follows: (1) relevance to research focus and questions; (2) high number of postings/interactions; (3) large number of posters/users; (4) lively and ongoing; (5) more conversational data and interaction between users (Kozinets, 2015). Furthermore, social media platforms (field sites) can be a scope for specific research questions. Digital platforms enable social research to intervene and feed back into social life in real time (Back and Puwar, 2012; Lury, 2012).

YouTube

YouTube is a web-based platform for video storing and sharing. It can be an online community as it has the ability to link users to be friends and to share videos. Besides being a platform for storage and sharing personal videos, it is a platform for social expression and for creating a participatory culture (Burgess and Green, 2013). The key features of YouTube; commenting, replying, rating, and sharing information, make the online video community become an emotional space. We may find some controversial issues, for example, a debate over homophobia and sexism sometimes emerges on the platform as most of the contents are open to the public (provided users have Google accounts) (Kosut, 2012). It can be a site for ethnographic research and a part of the lived experiences of research participants, as can be seen in Lange (2007)'s ethnographic study on YouTube..

Facebook

Facebook is an online social networking platform that has now become a part of everyday lives. Users can create profiles by adding their information and uploading personal photographs. It also allows users to interact with other users through online communication. Facebook can be used to develop a relationship, being a space for discussion and sharing interests. The functionality of Facebook is driven by user profiles. The key features of the platform are 'friend', 'status', 'profile', 'like', and 'comment'. Facebook's status and its options allow a researcher to collect qualitative data, such as the sharing of feelings, ideas and thoughts with others. In this case, texts and photos from status, the Like button, and comment features can be objects of study. Users can reflect feedback and attraction to status updates and posted photos. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) examine Facebook's Like and Share buttons that create data flow/connections between the platforms, external websites, Like and Share, and users' activities. The Hits and Links functiond also measure the engagement and participation of users. Facebook offers features for users' participation and external connection to other websites. Social buttons allow users to share, post and recommend web content from across various social media platforms or external websites. Furthermore, 'liking' can be performed as a social activity. The 'Like button does not only capture actual likes but also aggregates all activities performed…as the Like is set up as a composite metric' (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013: 1352). However, the absence of a 'Dislike' button on the platform that would represent a negative sentiment is a limitation.

The narrative accounts of Miller (2011) offer an ethnographic study of Facebook use in Trinidad and the presentation of self in virtual public spaces. He argues that the use of Facebook and the concept of self in Trinidad is different from that of the west. Miller's work is an example of howFacebook can act as a field site for ethnographic work to explore the issue of identity online. Miller's (2011) work led me to think that although Facebook is created in the United States and experiencing popularity in Thailand, the use of social media may be different depending on the social context and on the specific group users. Gerlitz and Helmond's article inspired me to investigate key features of Facebook such as social buttons in exploring

LGBTQI identity and sexuality. Unrestricted to only the platform, users often share links about LGBTQI issues from other websites/platforms on Facebook pages/groups. Thus, we can follow their sharing and links to investigate social activities and to analyse website contents from the posting/sharing. The counting of 'likes' can provide a primary measure of the level of interest in the LGBTQI issues and identify significant themes in the Facebook online community.

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging platform and social networking site that allows users to send and receive text messages or 'tweets'. Tweets permit users to post 140-character status updates. Users can subscribe to other users by clicking the 'following' button. They can comment by clicking the 'retweeted' button to any users they are following (Murthy, 2013). Besides a big data approach to study the platform, Twitter is also useful for digital qualitative research. A researcher can collect and analyse data from 'tweets' and 'retweeted'. Twitter can be a field site for ethnographic research as well as coding qualitative data (Murthy, 2011).

> *'Tweet codification systems are similarly affected from what metadata is selected for study to how text, links, or hashtags are categorised…Twitter data is best served by closed coding systems, wherein attributes of tweet data (e.g. links, mentions, hashtags and text) are given pre-defined coded categories. These types of closed coding systems set categories to be studied and research method(s) is/are applied.' (Murthy, 2017: 560-561).*

Gay Dating Apps

Grindr, Jack'd, Blued, and Hornet are popular mobile dating applications used by Thai gay men. These apps operate on mobile platforms, iOS and Android. Users can find other users based on their locations and distance. The apps also enable the connectivity of social networking sites and the location services of smartphones. These mobile platforms can be an ethnographic site for exploring gay online sexuality. The applications use the Global Positioning System (GPS) abilities to identify other users and sort users by current proximity

to facilitate sexual partnering. The ethnographic research of Atienza (2017) explores the entanglements between materiality, gay men's bodies and intimacies on mobile dating apps where class, sexuality, and gender are performed through online connections on digital platforms. Bartone (2018) studies what gay men do in terms of gender performance on Jack'd in the United States. He presents his discovery of the idea of '*effeminophobia*', discrimination against effeminate subjects and positions among gay men. Gay users who perform effeminacy on the app profiles are usually excluded from participating in the mobile social networking application. Gay men use Jack'd for many purposes, ranging from making friends and finding sexual partners to selling sex, sex toys and personal training services. There is a lack of research on gay men and the use of mobile dating applications in Thailand. It is of particular interest therefore to explore further how Thai gay men use these applications and how Thai gay men perceive the idea of effeminophobia.

5. Research Process

Social researchers use different methodological approaches and digital methods to study social media platforms. Marres (2017) explores the digital methods debate between the 'natively digital' method and digital method – the methods that are inscribed into digital infrastructures and devices, and the 'digitalisation' of methods or digitised method – the established methods that are translated into digital forms and take advantage of features of digital technologies and practice. It is important to justify at the beginning that the thesis adopts the latter approach. The ethnographic research takes 'digitalisation' as a methodological framework and implements existing social research methods. According to Coleman (2010: 488), some ethnographers strive to research in terms of emergent digital media. Ethnographers have explored the relationship between local contexts, lived experiences, and implications of digital technologies. An ethnographic approach to digital media is divided into three broad categories with an overlap between the categories.

> *'The first explores the relationship between digital media and cultural politics. This category examines how identities, representations, and imaginaries are*

circulated through collective and individual engagement with digital technologies. The second category explores the vernacular cultures of digital media that are revealed by social phenomena, digital genres, and groups. The final category is the prosaic of digital media that examines how digital media feed into, reflect, and shape other kinds of social practices.' (Coleman (2010: 488)

Clearly, social media can be platforms and objects of study for the issue of identity and representation. The research produced in-depth understandings into digital culture and online presentations of queer identity, in order to understand the ways in which Thai LGBTQI construct and present their identities in the chosen social media platforms. Selecting various social media platforms can strengthen and broaden the comprehension of online social experiences. The reasons why I chose these social media platforms are due to the following factors: (1) they have developed from my previous fieldwork (in this case gay mobile apps) (2) they stem from my interest, my own background, daily observations, and informal conversations with my Thai LGBTQI friends. The research proposed digital ethnography as a methodological approach and produced 'a digital autoethnography of Thai queer identity and sexuality'. This part focuses on research methods and methods of analysis on selected social media platforms. The research was designed to combine traditional and digitised methods in order to explore queer lives in multi-sited ethnographic research (Hine, 2007).
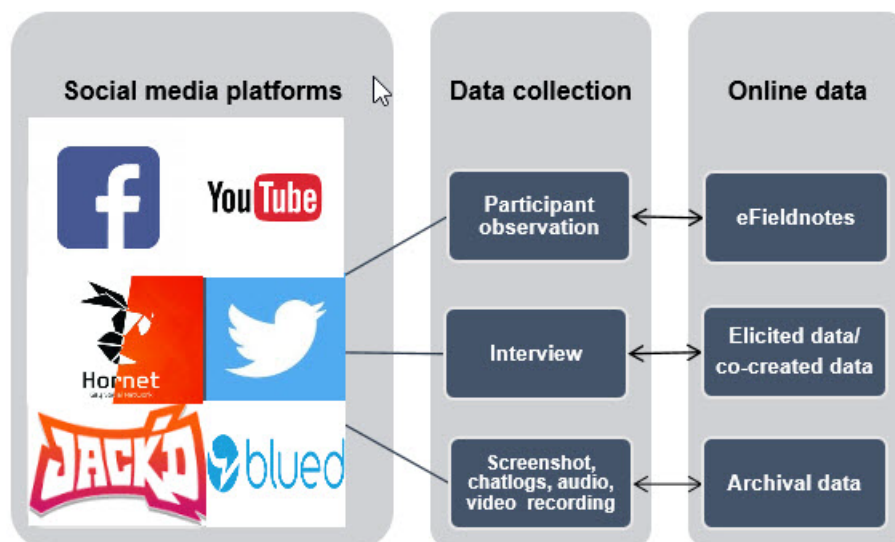

Figure 3: Ethnographic research on social media platforms

(*Source*: Design the image by the author on 5th December 2015)

1) Data collection. The data was from the ethnographic method, mainly 'online' on chosen field sites/social media platforms, however, it was also extended to offline. Figure 3.2 shows and describes how online data was collected by specific research methods.

- *Participant observation*. This method is a core component of ethnography. I immersed in field sites to interact and observe the social activities of LGBTQI people on social media platforms where their features enabled me to do so, for example, chat on mobile apps, commenting on Facebook group, replying on YouTube, observing tweets and retweets on the twitter of gay men.

- *Interview.* Some LGBTQI users on social media had been closely tracked and engaged to be key informants. After completing the informed consent process, online and offline, I began my interviews.

- *Screenshots, chatlogs, audio-video recordings.* These methods are about saving and capturing digital data by using specific software. The method came from copying and pasting to recording live video/screenshots of informant interactions on social media platforms. The textual messages, visuals, audios and videos can be online materials for analysis in ethnographic research. Kozinets (2015: 165-166) notes about online ethnographic data:

- *Fieldnotes.* These enabled me to reflect on participating in social media discussion/interaction and notes from taking part in a member's activity. Taking 'efieldnote' in the digital world may come from only observation and download materials without writing (Sanjek and Tratner, 2015).

- *Elicited data or co-created data.* Data was created through personal interactions between the ethnographer and users of social media, for example, chatlogs of the interview, textual replying/commenting on Facebook and YouTube.

- *Digital archive data.* Data that was found and collected from social media (digital texts and visual-audio) where they are already recorded and stored, for example, archives of web pages, screenshots, digital images and videos on YouTube.

    There was a mixing of methods while conducting fieldwork. For example, I planned to check new postings/threads/feeds and read them to collect some relevant data to research questions by using screen capture and recording software. I used social media platforms to interact with informants and collect data. Away from the computer screen, I switched to offline sites to interview, participate in, and observe, LGBTQI activities/events in physical field sites.

2) Data analysis. The thesis used digital tools to establish content analysis methods. Online data collected on social media platforms was analysed using *ethnographic content analysis*. In ethnographic research, the process of data collection and data analysis may overlap. An ethnographer often initially analyses data while doing fieldwork. In principle, the process of data analysis began after leaving fieldwork and saturation of data in which the researcher did not see new emerging patterns. An ethnographer is able to generate the key themes from collected data in order to write a narrative account around these themes and patterns (Boellstorff et al., 2012).

    The purpose of analysing data from participant observation and interviews is to search for patterns that are relevant to research questions and to look for new emerging themes and insightful understandings. Archival data of images/screenshots, videos, and digital texts was used to support and illustrate emerging themes from fieldnotes and interview transcriptions. In this case, NVivo (a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)) was used to manage and code data. The content analysis program assisted me in analysing and in coding a variety of data including field notes, digital texts, visual data and audio files. The materials were coded in broad themes and categories. Field notes, chatlogs/interview transcriptions and screenshots were prepared and stored in NVivo. The data sources were executed by the software and interpreted by me. The process of data coding began with using

an emerging theme which was focused on research questions and guided by a theoretical framework and the literature review. I also added other issues/themes, which emerged in the fieldwork. In order to verify data, I used 'methodological triangulation' – using a variety of research techniques to re-check data and the interpretation of meanings. Using NVivo is valuable for ethnographic research because data is derived from the variety of sources from preparing to data storing and coding.

NVivo is able to store and organise various types of qualitative data in 'one place'. Field notes, transcriptions of interview from a member of community, audio and video recordings, screenshots, photographs from fieldwork are imported from encrypted external hard drive and server in preparation for analysis. NVivo was able to assist me in the analysis of a full set of digital data, and chatlogs/transcriptions. Besides textual coding, NVivo was also able to code images and videos.

6. Research Ethics[3]

The Internet opens up opportunities to collect data without notifications as well as to observe the online community without a researcher's influence and presence (Sveningsson, 2004). However, this introduces specific ethical questions as set out by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2017):

> *'…what constitutes 'privacy' in an online environment? How easy is it to get informed consent from the participants in the community being researched? What does informed consent entail in that context? How certain can the researcher be that they can establish the 'real' identity of the participants? When is deception or covert observation justifiable?'* (ESRC, 2017: online)

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Ethics Working Committee reports that there are 'no official guidance or answers, if necessary, Internet research ethics have been adopted at any national or international level' (AoIR, 2012). However, I followed the ethical guidelines for digital research developed by BSA (British Sociological Association) and AoIR

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[3] The thesis passed ethical approval from the Goldsmiths Department of Sociology Ethics Committee.

in consultation with Goldsmiths Sociology Department Ethics Committee. These guidelines and the textbook: AoIR (2002); AoIR (2012); BSA (2017) Hargittai and Sandvig (2015) address ethical issues for digital research that may arise in various ways.

Informed consent

Informing subjects about the purpose of the study and gaining informed consent from them is a recommendation and foundation of conducting ethical ethnographic online (Kozinets, 2015, Boellstorff et al., 2012). For sociological research, BSA (2017: 7) suggest that 'as far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants.'

I endeavoured to use informed consent procedures, whenever and wherever possible. First, I identified myself as a researcher and informed my informants about the research. I then asked their permission. If I was to interview informants, I would aske them if they were willing to participate in the research. If I needed to interact on social media platforms with gatekeepers, I would ask group moderators/web administrators before accessing relevant groups. I would then seek consent from informants and make clear that they could withdraw from the research prior to its writing up without providing a reason for doing so.

The practice of seeking consent involved an electronic form. The informants, group moderators/administrators were able to consent by digitally signing (digital signature), and by clicking or ticking on an 'accept' button on a hyperlink to a web page that I had created on online consent form for the research. I provided a variety of ways for sending and returning the form, for example via e-mail, attaching it via instant messaging, or posting it on social media.

Multiple online identities

In an online community, there is a possibility of undisclosed behavior by the researcher.. However, covert methods in an ethnographic investigation and social research are generally regarded as unethical. Indeed, a researcher may face serious ethical and legal issues

(Boellstorff et al., 2012, BSA, 2017). According to Boellstorff et al. (2012: 142-144), ethnographers need to build an honest relationship with research informants while doing fieldwork. He states:

> *'Deception is antithetical to participant observation, which presupposes trust and rapport, both predicted on openness and honesty. Deceptive practices…that might support a covert approach are outside ethnical ethnographic practice…Deceptive practice thus bears potential consequences not only for individual ethnographers, but for colleagues as well…ethical ethnographic investigation avoids deception. Ethnographic work is grounded in sustaining relations of honesty, openness, respect, and consideration: this is a source of methodological strength'.* (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 142-144)

In order to avoid any form of deception, as noted above, I declared my research status and research aims at the beginning of each stage of data collection. I did not use my personal social media account to collect data. Instead, I created a new account for the research purpose so that all the informants could identify me as a researcher.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Kozinets (2010) claims that the nature of digital ethnography consists of (1) the investigation of social life, social interaction in online platforms/communities; (2) the observation and participation in online platform/communities over an extended period; (3) the stretch of social relations with members of online platforms/communities; (4) the immersion and engagement with online-offline lives. Due to its focus on mainly interacting with participants and participating in people's lives and social activities over an extended period, ethnographic research may pose an additional potential risk to informants, in particular in revealing their identities and confidential information. In order to avoid risk, it is necessary that the identity of research informants be protected throughout the research process and up to publication. Sensitive information related to informants such as personal social profiles and usernames must be treated with care. The information and identities of informants need to be protected because there may be unforeseen consequences to not doing so. For example, some of their comments and conversations with an ethnographer during fieldwork might lead to negative outcomes such as social sanction, rejection as a community member or social

awkwardness. As an ethnographer, one way to protect informants' identity and privacy is to use anonymous names (in the case of it not being a public profile) to avoid any harm to members, groups and online communities (Sveningsson, 2004, Kozinets, 2010). Some experienced digital ethnographers suggest protecting informants' identity and privacy from the beginning of research to the final research report. In these instances, researchers change 'all' informants' names/usernames to be anonymous (Sveningsson, 2004, Boellstorff et al., 2012, Kozinets, 2015). For example, some Facebook users may use real names. In order to protect the privacy of research informants on Facebook, I used anonymous names (even though some users use pseudonyms) because other users may otherwise know their identities. For LGBTQI online communities and groups, identifying a group name often leads to being able to identify individuals in the group. I consequently also anonymised group names (where necessary).

In the digital age, several methods can be used to link and trace to an informant's offline identity, through search engines, cookies, and API links, for example (Bruckman, 2002, Markham, 2012). In order to further address the concern with privacy, to protect any harm to informants and confidential information, the following ethical practices were applied: (1) I used Virtual Private Network (VPN) services to navigate the Internet anonymously and to make data untraceable; (2) The screenshots and video materials were useful as illustratations in the publishing and presenting of the thesis. It might be difficult to exclude in published work but visual and video materials such as screenshots and video recordings can easily reveal informants' identities. To deal with the difficulty, I asked informants who appeared in images and videos for their permission by signing a consent form or by blurring photos.

Repositories and data security

Collected data, confidential information of research informants and all digitally archived data were stored on an encrypted external hard drive. They were also kept confidential on a secure server at Goldsmiths College's cloud storage (OneDrive), a securely protected drive with password and data security technology. These data storage methods provided security

for my field notes, archival data, and interview records. Ethically, this method of data protection can block any types of searchable and traceable digital technologies, especially hacking.

Legal risk, Terms of Service and agreement

The Thai government regulates the law through the Computer-related Crime Act B.E. 2550 (2007), later amended to the Computer-related Crime Act (No. 2) B.E. 2560 (2017), that may affect the conduct of the research. Furthermore, using a social media platform for a research purpose might go against the Terms of Service (ToS) and agreement in using social media. I needed to be aware of relevant laws and contractual matters. I was concerned about what I might observe in the field. I read the law and ToS and did not conduct the research and use online data in ways that violated the law and ToS. In fieldwork, I had to collect data that may incriminate an informant, for example, selling sex toys in Thailand is illegal, but there are some users who have been selling them on Twitter. Furthermore, there are other violations of ToS by some users. For example, on Twitter, we can see some Thai gay users posting photos of their naked bodies or photos of their penises and sex clips. These activities violate both Thai law and Twitter ToS. In this case, any collected data and filed notes (that were relevant to the issue) needed to be destroyed as soon as possible. Some materials presented in the thesis needed be redacted in the online version of the thesis.

Research ethics are an important issue that I could not ignore before entering field sites. This section deals with the ethical commitments, the anticipated ethical issues, the ethical considerations and reflections in order to 'ethically' proceed with the research. However, there may be certain circumstances where this is exempted. As BSA (2017: 11) noted, 'each research situation is unique, and it was possible simply to apply a standard template in order to guarantee ethical practice'.

In this chapter, I demonstrate a new methodological approach for the study by hybridising digital ethnography and autoethnography – '*digital autoethnography'*. This is based on using my personal experiences to narrate stories and conduct digital ethnography with LGBTQI people. In short, it incorporates a queer methodology with digital methods. Digital

technology opens opportunities and challenges for digital social research. Digital technology has obviously transformed conventional ways of research into new methods and practices. The thesis focused on a digital ethnographic approach and reflected on it by considering how to use digital ethnography as an informative and ethical research process in relation to my research questions. In the previous chapter, I referred to Queer theory as a theoretical framework in the thesis. Queer theory also informed the research and can be used with social research methods. Queer theory guided the research on Thai sexualities by focusing on "queer lives/experiences" of Thai LGBTQI as material for queer analysis.

Chapter 4 Research Findings and Analysis

1. Construction and Presentation of Online Identity

In Section One, I describe my use of social media, and of creating and presenting myself online, to pursue the issue of *online identity*. This follows from the question of how Thai gay men and transgenders use social media to construct and present themselves on Facebook and Twitter. The chapter presents the findings from digital ethnographic research related to the construction of the online identity of Thai gay men and trans people on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. The objective of the chapter is to analyse the construction and presentation of the online identity of Thai gay men and transgenders on Facebook and Twitter. Participants' quotes will mainly be presented in order to narrate participants' stories and illustrate research findings. The approach has enabled me to engage with my participants to tell stories in a more interactive way.

The Internet is a space in which people can present themselves. It is also a space where they can be who they want to be because of anonymity. We can assume from the work of Turkle that people differentiate between online and offline self-experiences. Online and offline life are separated from each other.

However, I question her claim about the idea of anonymity and separation of identity online-offline. The idea sits in contrast to the ethnography of Internet use in Trinidad by Miller and Slater (2000) and the research results in the chapter. The ethnographic research of Miller and Slater (2000) and mine found that offline and online life are connected rather than being separated. We may be able to look at the offline context as well as the online context. Therefore, the idea of anonymity online and the debate between the online/offline identity construction and presentation is taken up in this chapter as the basis for the research question, and drives this chapter. However, I did not intend to prove which one is right or wrong in my research. In the same vein as Boellstorff (2008) and his colleagues (Boellstorff et al. 2012) explore humans in a virtual world such as a second life, I similarly follow his online

ethnographic approach. It is worth investigating each assumption in order to illustrate and describe examples of the offline and online life of my research participants.

Later, Turkle (2009; 2011) claims that there is a fragmented identity and multiple identity (Kennedy, 2014). According to Kendall (2004), in some cases, online identity is not fragmented but stable. It may depend on specific online platforms. The type of online identity may be presented differently in each online environment (Kennedy, 2014). For example, Wakeford (2002) suggests that 'a basic feature of identity (re)creation which elsewhere structures the negotiations of risk and trust, and much of the performance of gender, is at present absent for most Web users. Nevertheless, there has been considerable conceptual leakage of the construction of gendered risk from one area to the other in popular discourse.'

Web 3.0 technology has facilitated social media users in representing and maintaining online identities (Cover, 2016). One way of conceptualising online identity is to understand the concept of self. Although 'Who are you?' is a general question about self, the question proved powerful when I asked how participants constructed and presented themselves on social media and what stories they tell their Facebook friends or Twitter followers online.

The literature above supports the key research finding that participants' online identities are connected to offline identity. Unlike offline identity, online identity does not consist of the physical body, such as appearance and personality. Online identity is created for a presentation of identity, the 'who am I?,' through online interaction in social media platforms. Social interaction online is an important key to maintain the online identities of participants. I also found that some participants create multiple online identities. For some participants, online identities are the same as offline identities, but some participants create their online identity 'out of offline life'.

I have also applied the concept of connectivity between 'offline' and 'online' to the research. After an initial analysis throuugh fieldwork, I devised the concept of 'dualism of identity online and offline' by answering the key research questions: (1) Do users create identities that can be different from their offline embodied identities on social media platforms?

(2) Do users create identities that can be linked to their offline embodied identities and personalities on social media platforms?

The term 'identity' is first referred to by essentialists such as Sigmund Freud. In the essentialist perspective, identity is considered an instinct from inside our bodies, either due to genetics or Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Cover, 2016: xi). I am not an essentialist. I believe that identity is not fixed and static, so I do not review the essentialist theory here. As Stuart Hall (1990) suggested, identity is a complex matter and it is always in process and fluid. These works have led me to frame the chapter using symbolic interactionism and social constructionist theory. Most sociological work employing these approaches on the issue of online identity have cited and applied Goffman's (1959) concept of 'dramaturgy' as a conceptual framework. Hence, I also applied the concept in the thesis in order to understand how LGBTQI construct, present and maintain online identities on Facebook and Twitter. The concept was useful for examining the presentation and construction of identity through online interaction. Goffman (1959) analysed interpersonal interaction and performance of human behaviour in society by comparing it to acting in a theatre. People are actors in performing and interacting with others. People perform their lives on stages, for example, frontstage and backstage. The acting on stages is a process of impression management. However, Goffman's dramaturgy concept only offers a framework for analysing an expression of online identity (Cover, 2016:11)

Cover (2014; 2016) suggests an alternative approach to understanding online identity. He claims that identity is fluid as well as performative in the context of social networking sites such as Facebook. He uses and applies Butler's (1990) theories of identity performativity in order to study how identity can be seen to be 'performed' on online platforms (Cover: 2016: 1). He adds:

> *'A Butlerian approach to identity as performative helps us to understand how identities and practices of using online communication in everyday life are interwoven and concretive, rather than to take the more simple approach of assuming that we have a fixed identity which we express and represent (perhaps truthfully, perhaps fraudulently) through our activities online.'* (Cover, 2016: 2)

The theory is valuable for understanding the use of user profile functions in social networking, maintaining contact and interacting with others on social networking sites. Butler's theory is based on the poststructuralist view, so the idea of identity construction is considered a process and fluid. Online identity is performed as real life behind a user profile. Acts of profile creating, updating, and networked interaction on social media are the performance of one's self. The theory was applied in the chapter in order to explore the construction of self and of expressing social media profiles, learning about self through user profiles and social interaction as acts of everyday performance. Butler's theories of identity performativity can destabilise the problem of the binary between real/offline and virtual/online identity (Cover: 2016).

In this section, I review data collected from the digitised method, namely, online observation on Facebook and Twitter and online interviews via direct messages on Twitter and Facebook messenger. However, some participants preferred to talk face-to-face. In this case, the offline interview, such as an in-depth interview, was combined with online sessions. The research participants consisted of five Thai gay men and five transgender women. As I was concerned about the experience of social media use, the selected research participants needed to have already been users of Facebook or Twitter for between 3-6 years. I asked about their history of use before beginning the interview. In the case of interviews that began online, I copied and pasted the text chats into word processing software and exported them to store in Nvivo for analysis. I recorded the face-to-face interviews and transcribed them. Most of the interview transcriptions were translated from Thai to English in order to present quotations in this chapter. I also collected and analysed participants' social media profiles, namely, usernames, profile pictures, and some textual information on Facebook and Twitter. I also used a mix of research methods and analysis in order to grasp insightful data, for example through interviews and observation.

User Profile: a Basic Element of Online Identity

Danah Boyd (2011) states that:

'profiles are not unique to social network sites, but they are central to them. Profiles both represent the individual and serve as the locus of interaction. Because of the inherent social—and often public or semi-public—nature of profiles, participants actively and consciously craft their profiles to be seen by others. Profile generation is an explicit act of writing oneself into being in a digital environment and participants must determine how they want to present themselves to those who may view their self-representation or those who they wish might. Because of this, issues of fashion and style play a central role in participants' approach to their profiles.' (Boyd, 2011: 43).

I agree with his statement; in an analysis of participants' social media profiles, I found that usernames and profile pictures are the basic components of online identity. They are important elements which are needed to share with other people and to interact in social media. It can enable comparisons of physical appearances in offline identity such as the face and body. To register on Facebook and Twitter, users need to create usernames to communicate and interact through social network sites, such as commenting, replying, tagging and sending messages. It is also necessary to identify who they are. Some research participants use their real names, nicknames and surnames to reveal their offline selves online. Some participants stated that using a real name on social media shows sincerity to others. However, some participants preferred to create usernames which are not real names and nicknames, such as 'pseudonyms'. This type of username still reflects their selves, namely, character, sexuality, ideology, personal desires and liking.

Profile pictures also present research participants' online identities. These can be an important element of identity for recognising users' Facebook friends or other members of the Facebook LGBTQI community easily. Some participants use photos of themselves, but others prefer to use other pictures, such as those of an admired celebrity or a cartoon character. Profile pictures interconnect and relate to usernames. They cannot be separated from usernames as an important element of identity on Facebook and Twitter. While a username is a presentation of self through text, a profile picture presents a visual image. Participants said that they often recognise and attract other people through profile pictures rather than

usernames, especially gay men seeking sexual partners. Some participants use photo-editing

applications, for example, Adobe Photoshop, to edit and adjust their photos before publishing

them for the public. Editing to create a good-looking profile picture can make an impression

and achieve interaction with others. By using photos of themselves on Twitter and on a

Facebook public group,gay men and transgender women show pride in coming out.

Photos of themselves

'I use a photo of myself because I want to reveal my 'real' self to others. I try to select photos that look good. I do not care if someone told me that my profile picture is better looking than my 'flesh.' (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

'I have selected my photos that were taken at different times and situations. I do not conceal my offline identity [like some gay men] and other gay men on Twitter can see me and know that it is me. It is a 'real' me in both online and offline world. Also, the real photos of mine can confirm my identity as a gay man. I am proud as gay and dare to come out. Coming out online does not affect my job and family.' (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, May 4, 2016)

'I usually select my profile picture to reflect my personality. I am a friendly person, so I use my photo where I am smiling. I am a trans, so my profile picture must reflect that I am a woman.' (Bob, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 1, 2016)

Matching profile picture with username

'I do not use a photo of mine, but I use a profile picture to match my username. In my case, my username is [name of a model], so I use her photo. I google her photo and always use her photo as my profile picture to create uniqueness. Her pictures in different poses are my profile picture. Even though my profile picture has been changed and updated many times, her pictures in different poses are always my profile pictures.' (Sand, a 30-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 20, 2016)

Updating profile picture

'I often change my profile picture because of a change in my feelings, mood, and situations in my real life like a change of seasons. When I feel good, I often change to a picture that reflects a good feeling like the sun and nature. When I want to cry or feel despair about something, my profile picture changes to reflect that sense. (Ohm, a 36-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 30, 2016)

Construction and Presentation of Online Identity on Facebook and Twitter

Creating and updating profiles are performative acts. The analysis of the construction of online identity can be separated into the following steps:

1) Creating online identity.

2) Presenting online identity.

3) Maintaining online identity.

4) Making social interaction online.

It can be useful to know why participants want to go online by asking them about the motivation and reasons for creating identities online. Some gay men have different personal reasons for joining social network sites. Participants use Twitter as the main account with the reason that they want to see online sexually explicit materials and search for gay friends and partners. In 'real' life, they do not know who gay males or straight men are because of their biological sex and similar appearance. Making friends and maintaining a social network was a reason given for the construction and presentation of online identity through social interaction online and offline with other gay men.

'The first reason is to find gay friends to talk with. Especially gay groups [on Twitter] should have something to talk about gayness openly. We know most members in our group are gay, and I am comfortable to open myself [as a gay man] on the platform.' (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, May 4, 2016))

'I want new gay friends who are ready to listen to my problems and difficulty as a gay man. In my real life, I have only a gay friend.' (Bob, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 1, 2016)

'I want to come out and to know more about other gay men's life and meet new friends in the [Facebook] gay group.' (Ohm, a 36-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 30, 2016)

'My first tweet was on Valentines' day. 'Are you lonely on Valentines' night? I am alone now.' That day, my heart was broken, and I wanted to begin a new relationship with someone. I wanted a partner and love, so I decided to join Twitter for that reason.' (Ruk, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 15, 2016))

For transgender women, reasons and motivations for creating an identity online in a transgender group on Facebook were similar to gay men who reported that they were searching for friends. However, transgender women participants suggested that identifying as transgender did not necessarily mean that their aims were to find partners like gay men. Having transgender women friends can lead to the exchange of information (through postings and news feeds) on how to be transgender women, for example, how to transform one's body image from male to female, how to take care of sexual health, and how to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Therefore, there are few transgender friends in real life, and an exchange of information between Facebook friends is an important reason why transgender women decided to join the transgender Facebook group.

'I want to come out as a transgender woman. I am a woman, even if I was born in a male body. I want to have a female body as my mind and feelings are telling me that I am a woman, NOT a man. I have searched for information about how to have a female body image, and I found the group. This is an interesting group for transgender. Members post and discuss how to become a woman like a sex reassignment, how to take medicines to transform from a male body to a female body. Also, it is a group for expressing our feelings as [male-to-female] transgenders.' (Baifern, a 42-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 30, 2016)

Connection between Online and Offline Identity in Social Networking Sites

As I mentioned in reference to my research questions in the introduction, most participants present identities online to link to their offline identities. Their online identities are related to their embodiments and personalities of the offline world. In addition, a participant reported that his identity in the online world is more expressive than his identity offline. He can express his attitude and presentation of himself on social media at any time, while there can be some limitations in real life. The transcriptions from the interviews revealed:

Identities of gay men

'My online and offline self is similar, you know, my online self is almost like my real self. I think some people do not know and feel with some parts of me in physical space, but they know more on online space, particularly on Facebook; they can sense me and touch me through the online world.' (Nine, a 33-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 12, 2016)

'Sure! they are connected…I told my 'real' name to them a thousand times. They still call me by my Twitter name even though we go to pubs together. (Bob, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 1, 2016)

'It is no different. To be honest, online activities may come from a deep part of ourselves that we cannot perform or express in our real lives.' (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, May 4, 2016)

'My online and real self is almost the same. On social media, I have tried to talk more about my real life, and I think it is a space of expression.' (Ohm, a 36-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 30, 2016)

'I think they [online and offline identity] are linked and the same. We should not separate them. There is no boundary between the 'offline' and 'online'. We exist in both social worlds. People know we are online through a green dot above the profile picture, or there are three dots to show that we are commenting on their postings. In the offline world, we know that this is him, that is her when we meet somewhere.' (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

'There is no difference. In real life, I cannot tell stories of life to every friend, but we can do it on Facebook, by posting, adding stories, and sharing on my timeline. The Internet is a space of freedom to unleash myself through texts and photos we post.' (Toy, a 41-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25, 2016)

'I do not come out as a gay man in the offline world. No one knows I am gay. I decided to come out in the online world as a gay and learn gay culture on the net.' (Ruk, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 15, 2016)

Identities of transgender women

'No different, myself is the same on both social media and the real world.' (Yarda, a 43-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25, 2016)

'My online life relates to my real life so much. I have got more friends, especially a close friend, and I got a job from the Facebook group.' (Nara, a 35-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 3, 2016)

'I still am I…the same as my real life. In the digital world and the real world, every part of me is the same.' (Natha, a 28-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 6, 2016)

'It is like my real life because most commenting, posting, and replying are taken from my real life. When someone posts something on the group, I give comments based on my 'real' experiences.' (Jeab, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 4, 2016)

'My online and offline selves are the same, but there is only a slight difference in the ways we communicate, typing on keyboard or talking face-to-face. While we sit and type on a computer or mobile phone keyboard, we can stop to think before sending a message to others. It can be deleted and edited after sending if we think it is not OK. In real life, the speech we use cannot be deleted.' (Nada, a 40-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 1, 2016)

'Oftentimes, I am online as an anonymous person, so I can express anything I want, for example, hate speech or rude words. No one knows me…so what? Who cares? Online space can be a space to express and present another side of ourselves. Like a mirror has two faces, a human is the same. They can express a dark side of human beings' (Nampung, a 39-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 7, 2016)

'It is the same; however, it is different as well. In offline life, I cannot tell my stories to others. On Facebook, I can tell what I think and what I did yesterday to my friends. They know me from my posting and status updates. I can share my good or sad moments online…I cannot do these offline. In other words, we do not need to do activities as speedy as offline life. If we want to do, we just

log in, post and find someone to talk to easily. We can do anything anytime, anywhere online. (Dear, a 38-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 7, 2016)

Based on the above quotations, it can be summarised that online and offline identities of LGBTIQ participants are connected. Although some participants mentioned there are minor differences, the differences are matters of how to communicate rather than matters of creating identities to be different from their real selves. The data supports Steve Woolgar's (2002) proposal on the *'Five rules of virtuality'*. The third rule of virtuality proposes that virtual technologies support real activities rather than replace them. The fourth rule of virtuality – 'the more virtual the more real' - serves as a reminder that the usage of virtual technology can actually stimulate more real activities (Woolgar, 2002: 16-19; 2002: 208). The rules also support the findings in Section 2 of this chapter that selling sex online, buying pornography online, and trading sex toys on Twitter are all viewed as offline rather than online activities.

Social Media Platform: the Stage of Presentation and Construction of Identity Online

Participants present themselves on Facebook and Twitter as if they are entering the frontstage. As mentioned, after creating online identities (usernames and profile pictures), their identities are performed on social media platforms through modes of online interaction. Commenting and liking buttons on Facebook's postings and Retweets and likes on Twitter's tweets are important interactions on social media platforms. Online interaction through social media features is a presentation of individual identity to group identity. In other words, when a user comments and replies to a posting on Facebook or retweets a tweet on Twitter, it means each user can learn 'who is (are) he/her (they)?' or 'what is (are) his/her (their) character (s)?' Online interactions on social media platforms can represent a person's identity. Participants presenting themselves on Facebook and Twitter can be categorised into two patterns.

Pattern 1: Presenting through an element of online identity. Participants' identities are presented through usernames and profile pictures, for example, an unusual name or an attractive profile picture.

'My username [he mentions his username] has been used for a long time since the beginning of the Facebook group. It is a strange name, so other users often recognise me.' (Dear, a 38-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 7, 2016)

From observation, there is a difference between a Facebook group and Twitter regarding the presentation of gay identity online. For some gay participants (who do not come out in real life), rather than presenting one's self through their profile pictures which show their faces, they choose to present 'no show face' profile pictures. Some participants only show their bodies (for example, head-cut photos) and photos showing the back part of body. In contrast, in the case of male-to-female transgender people, they usually use photos of themselves to present feminine identities because they think they are women.

Pattern 2: Presenting through online interaction and social plugins. Participants' identities are presented through commenting, replying, tweeting, retweeting, and using the Facebook/Twitter Like button. Participants shared that online identity might disappear if there is no social interaction. Online interaction makes identity flow and remain alive.

'Posting is a part of me. Many group members think that I am a woman [he is gay in real life] because my username is a woman's name and my replies and commenting style often end with 'Ka'[4] (Jeab, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 4, 2016)

'Showing myself through commenting. I am a rational and serious person. Of course, I will comment rationally and not be nonsense.' (Bob, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 1, 2016)

'I am a person who usually writes a story of my everyday life, and it is sometimes a long textual posting. I organise and tell my stories so that they are

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[4] In Thai culture, *'ka'* is an ending particle used by women at the end of their spoken sentences to show politeness, i.e*., khob-khun ka* for a polite lady to say 'thank you'.

easy to follow. I love to write amusing stories, and I have often gotten a lot of 'Likes'. (Toy, a 41-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25,)

'It is important to keep in touch with the group, for example, by commenting, replying and liking. Interaction with other members in the group is needed.' (Baifern, a 42-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 30, 2016)

'Tweeting, liking, particularly, retweeting will lead to an increase of Twitter followers…Meeting on Twitter is like meeting with strangers. We continue to keep a relationship and be friends.' (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages, May 4, 2016)

The review in Chapter Two is consistent with the results of the above analysis. Digital technology plays an important role in constructing and presenting both the online and offline identity of LGBTQI (Campbell, 2004; Mowlabocus, 2010; Race et al, 2015). In theory, the construction and presentation of online identity usually draw on Goffman's theory of dramaturgy in analysing data, for example, backstage and front stage. However, I found that their approach lacked an analysis of the process of the construction and presentation of online identity. I analysed my fieldwork data to explore the steps participants followed to construct online identity. First, online identity is created from various reasons and motivations for going 'online'. Secondly, deciding to register or sign up on social media platforms allows the creation of a profile. Thirdly, usernames and profile pictures are initially created and uploaded to present themselves as embodiments online. The change of elements of online identity occurs and depends on users' emotions in different times and situations. In the case of my research participants, offline identity and online identity were all interconnected and not discrete. The finding conceptualises an approach to online identity and digital culture as a continuum between 'real' and 'online' identity on social network sites. There is no dichotomy between the real world and the digital world on social network sites. It concerns matter of online performances of identity and fluidity to maintain an offline identity or real life. However, this is

not applicable in all cases. There are some cases of performance of online identity that play out in the context of online communication and representation of sexual identity.

Coming out and Learning Gay and Transgender Identity Online

The finding suggests that interaction on social media platforms is not only a social space for the construction of gay men and transgender selves online, but also a presentation of themselves through online interaction. In addition, it is an online group for coming out, learning about gayness, trans life, and escaping from the prejudice and discrimination of the heteronormative [offline] world. Posting, commenting, replying, liking, tweeting and retweeting are not merely normal online activities. They also open up new perspectives on gay men and transgender people living in the digital age.

> *'The Facebook group offers the opportunity to learn about LGBTQI issues, for example, the issue of LGBTQI marriage. Joining the group made me accept the gayness inside myself and opened up my eyes to learn the stories of other gay men.'* (Toy, a 41-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25, 2016)

> *'Reading and commenting on Facebook postings on the group made me more confident about gayness…It is pride!... It made me realise that men walking hand in hand in a public space is not embarrassing.'* (Nine, a 33-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 12, 2016)

> *'I read and comment about gayness that I want. It is a gay group, and we are all gay men. It has been created for understanding and learning about gayness. Of course, there is no homophobia, such as hate speech against gay men that we often find on the other groups on social media.'* (Bob, a 31-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 1, 2016)

> *'In the past, I did not come out and I was confused whether I was gay or trans. After I joined the group and learned about transgenderism and transgender stories, it made me clearer about myself that I am trans, not gay…The group opens my heart to cross a gender transition. After learning about transgender [on the group], I decided to have sex reassignment surgery from male to female.'* (Baifern, a 42-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 30, 2016)

> *'I joined the LGBTQI Facebook group to make networks. I am working on LGBTQI human rights in Thailand. The community made me learn about other LGBTQI experiences (through postings). It also made me realise that there are*

some trans women who have suffered from gender discrimination.' (Yarda, a 43-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25, 2016)

Social Interaction and Online Identity in Online-Offline Contexts

In a qualitative analysis of online interaction and identity, my research revealed that participants' identities were also connected with social relationships and intimacy on social media platforms. When participants present themselves and are willing to engage with other people in the group or on social media, there are two types of group interactivity – online and offline interaction. The first type of social interaction is 'online only.' Data from my interview and observation suggests that some research participants interact online but not offline. Posting, commenting, replying, tweeting, retweeting, and liking are types of 'public' online interaction. Online interaction depends on individual interests and lifestyles. Direct messages on Twitter and Facebook messenger are also considered online interactions but 'private' and 'secret'. Private social interaction depends on the level of interpersonal intimacy, desire and purpose of using social media. In some cases, interacting online will be followed by face-to-face interaction, for example, meetings and dining. This is the second type of social interaction – online-to-offline.

> *'I connect with other people online, only tweet something and retweet on some tweets I want…there are many people who DM [direct messages] to me and say they want to have sex with me; in this case, I read messages but do not reply back. It is not my purpose to use Twitter as a medium to have sex with someone.'* (Ohm, a 36-year-old, online interview via direct messages, June 30, 2016)

> *'I screen to chat with someone I want to continue a relationship with him and ignore people I am not attracted to.'* (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages on May 4, 2016)

> *'To talk [chat] with someone privately, I will consider his attitude and lifestyle. It is important to match with me. If there is someone who matches me, especially the same lifestyle and interests, I usually add him to chat on the LINE friend list. It is not necessary that he will be my future partner, but he can be one of my friends.'* (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

> *'Replying makes us intimate and will often follow with a meeting and dinner.'* (Toy, a 41-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 25, 2016)

However, most participants informed that they interact with other people on Facebook and Twitter and interact offline by voice and video calling only, for example, using LINE app call and FaceTime. Participants use social networking sites to interact in three ways.

1) **Online interaction only.** Most participants in the group are gay men who only use Twitter as a platform for viewing sexually explicit materials online, for example, video clips and photos. Furthermore, some gay participants informed me that they have not come out as gay men in real life, so it is impossible to meet other people offline. The only way they interact with other people is through text-based communication, such as chatting (via messenger apps/features), tweeting, retweeting and liking.

2) **Online interaction to offline interaction (by voice and video calling) but not interacting face-to-face.** The participants in the group said that they would like to meet other people face-to-face, but there are some limitations. For example, they stay in a rural area while meetings usually take place in Bangkok. Therefore, the methods through which they interact with other people are voice and video calls through LINE and Facetime.

3) **Online interaction and face-to-face.** Most participants in the group are LGBTQI activists. They post about LGBTQI issues on the Facebook group, for example, news and agenda for formulating the same-sex marriage law in Thailand, so they use Facebook as a platform for online activism. They often meet (face-to-face) the other activists in LGBTQI social activities. Other participants in the group are gay men and sex workers who use Twitter as an online dating platform, for finding sexual partners online and meeting offline for sexual purposes.

Presentation of Online Identity

Participants stated that they could manage themselves and produce identity through fluid and changeable practices. Users are free to change usernames and profile pictures

through digital technology. The reason why participants decided to change usernames and profile pictures were related to their feelings and from situations arising in their everyday lives. However, some participants change their profile pictures, but they do not change or try to retain usernames. One participant explains the reason as follows:

> *'I will decide to change my profile picture if there is something that happens in my life. It also depends on my mood and feeling on that day or at that time. There may be a good day or a bad day…I do not change my username because other people in the group will not recognise me under the new name. I changed my username once, and I decided to change it back. No one replied or commented on my posts. [Dear's username] is memorised in the group.'* (Dear, a 38-year-old, online interview via Facebook messenger, June 7, 2016

The findings from the online interview and observation method also reveal that there are four forms of online performance depending on the ways of participation online. However, it can be changed by feeling, time, social connection, interpersonal relationship and intimacy.

'Posters/Tweeters' only post or tweet, but do not reply, comment, retweet, or click Like. Some participants use Facebook and Twitter to post and tweet about their stories and topics they are interested in. Participants in the group sometimes use social media to broadcast themselves. For example, on Twitter, some tweeters use Twitter to tweet about sexually explicit materials and 'home-made' sex video clips. Sex workers and traders who sell sexual materials are included in this form of online identity. It is interesting to note that these posters/tweeters have a lot of friends and followers.

In contrast to the first form of online posting, **'commentators/retweeters'** are interactive users. They interact with other users through comments, sharing, and retweets. They have many friends and follow many users. They have a close relationship with Posters/Tweeters. The level of participation online from 'commentator/retweeters' makes Twitter and Facebook more 'social and interactive platforms through their engagement.'

'Likers' use social plugins are functional for them. Likers act as supporters of Posters/Tweeters and commentators/retweeters. They inspire Posters/Tweeters to post/tweet. Oftentimes, posters/tweeters say 'please like my posts,' 'please follow me,' and

'please retweet'. Likers make Posters/Tweeters proud of a high number of 'Likes' or upset because no one 'likes' their posts/tweets. Likers are also considered active social media users because they 'read' social feeds and 'click' like even though they do not write anything on a post/tweet, but they notice when a Like button turns 'blue', and a small heart icon turns 'red'.

Some participants who chatted (via direct message) with me used pseudonyms and anonymous usernames, and profile pictures. An anonymous culture on the Internet creates the form of online performance called *'Lurkers'.* In comparison to Facebook, the Twitter account is more public; each user can click the follow button on other users' profile pages without sending a friend request. A lurker is essentially a follower, but he/she only reads or observes Twitter feeds and notifications without tweeting, retweeting, or liking. Lurkers usually conceal their identity and often interact with other users by sending a text privately through a direct message inbox. This participant provides us with the reasons why he lurks;

> *'I just join Twitter to see pornographic video clips and photos and to find a sexual partner. I do not need to offer personal information to anyone. I am concerned for privacy...'* (Phudin, a 45-year-old, online interview via direct messages on May 4, 2016)

Whenever tweets are retweeted, and Facebook postings are commented on and shared, the boundaries between private and public become blurred. On Facebook group and Twitter, a participant interacts with other people through features of the social networking sites by sharing, liking, commenting and retweeting on Facebook's postings and Twitter's tweets. Shared discussion on postings/tweets and notification functionalities on mobile applications affect the level of participation and forms of performance online.

The research findings of this section showed that gay men and trans women participants created, presented, and maintained their online identities through social media user profiles, namely, usernames and profile pictures. A user profile is a core element of online identity which is created to present on social media platforms. The user profile has all the semblance of an offline identity. A user profile is important because it represents 'who I am'. It is used to judge in making a relationship and in interacting with others on social networking sites, in the case of Facebook friends, or followers on Twitter. The construction of online

identity follows three steps: (1) the creation of online identity through a user profile; (2) the presentation of online identity by interacting with others on social networking sites; (3) the maintenance of online identity by updating/editing the user profile and frequently communicating with others.

The findings also supported an argument of the chapter and research hypotheses. Online and offline identities are sometimes connected, but they s are also, at times, separated. It was not surprising to find that gay men and transgender women constructed online identities in presenting their offline identities. Most participants are able to create online identities in order to present their offline lives. They may not treat or see their online identities as *online* but as *real*. However, some gay men participants created online identities separately from their offline lives/identities. They called this type of identity the '***secret self.*** For example, some gay men created multiple Twitter accounts to present their secretselves online. What is the 'secret self' in my research participants' views? Secret self refers to an online self that represents and, is related to, their sexual activities, such as showing the sex act online, showing their penis, and making masturbation videos. The secret self is created and found on Twitter to express gay sexual desire, which they could not express in their offline lives. In Thai social contexts, sexual matters are viewed as private and secret expressions in the offline world.

2. Sexuality of Thai Gay Men on Mobile Dating Apps and Twitter

In Section Two, I will present my research findings on the sexual identity and sexuality of Thai gay men on mobile dating apps and Twitter. In the first part, I briefly review the research of Thai academics regarding Thai LGBTQI and queer studies on digital platforms. The research question that shapes this chapter is: How do gay men represent their sexuality and lived experiences of gay dating applications and Twitter? The style of visual/digital data presentation in the chapter will focus on 'stories' and 'interaction' which occurred in natural digital settings between myself and research participants and their sexual partners. Quoting

participants' voices is a queer written style that empowers the voices of informants in the ethnography and offers readers an independent and subjective understanding of written texts and the ethnographic context. It shares the storytelling of Thai gay men's sexuality on digital platforms.

Digital technology and the Internet have made it possible for an individual to communicate with others easily and rapidly without the limitation of physical boundaries, for example through email, text and video chat. For gay men, the Internet plays an important role in their social and cultural life. However, unlike some western societies, heteronormativity in Thai society limits their presentation of sexuality in the public space. In other words, their sexual life, sexual intimacy and desire cannot be openly expressed in offline societies. Some Thai gay online communities have been constructed to resist the heterosexual norm and have been used as a social space to represent their sexuality via Internet services.

In the twenty-first century, rapid economic growth in Southeast Asia has led to the growth of digital media. Digital media can claim to have a role in contributing to the development of Thai queer sexual culture (Samakkeekarom and Boonmongkon 2011). Researching the issue of queer digital culture in Asia began in 2003. Khoo (2003) studied new media and queer Asia and highlighted that the new forms of media had consequences for the lives of queer Asian people. Some researchers also investigated the cultural and political production of place/space and identities of LGBTQI in new media. With the digitisation of Asia beginning in 1994, information on the Internet related to global queerness crossed national boundaries, enabling and forming the queer culture in Asia. For example, the news of the Stonewall Riots in the USA circulated from the West, thus affecting the revelations of Asian gay and lesbian communities. This demonstrates how the Internet has played an important role in the emergence of lesbian and gay identities in Asia. There are now online resources for Asian gays and lesbians, as well as the use of new media to challenge the sexualisation of Asian gay male and lesbian self-identification (Boswell 2011).

Furthermore, there is a relationship between globalisation and sexualities in various forms in new media in Asia. Khoo (2003) examines the identification of Malaysian lesbians

who respond to the religious law on sodomy. He claims that there is a conflict between western lesbian culture and local sexual cultures. In contrast, Berry and Martin (2003) explore queer internet culture and point out that the cultural hybridisation compromises western sexuality and Asian contexts of sexual categories in Taiwanese and South Korean lesbian and gay men. Thai LGBTQI media culture has developed from old media, such as gay magazines, before the emergence of digital media and gay and lesbian websites. Significantly, the new media technology differs from old media technologies as it can facilitate collaboration and instant communication among LGBTQI people (Mullaly, 2003).

Since 2000, some scholars have begun to research the topic of Thai LGBTQI and the Internet, but most of their work is written in Thai. There are only eight relevant articles (including two of mine) that deal with the issue of Thai queer and the Internet. They address three issues, namely, community, sexuality, and sexual identity. Thitiwararak (2001) studies the issues of sexual representation and gender ideology on Thai websites. His study reveals that the sexual representation of Thai gayness on websites reflects a negative stereotype that the mainstream media has constructed. He interviewed webmasters and claimed that webmasters play an important role in constructing the content of websites. They have the power to discern and distribute ideas to gay members that can transfer certain beliefs about gayness; for example, the idea that gayness is not an illness. Furthermore, Thai gay web-based online communities can be a space for sexual presentation for some gay men who do not come out in their offline life for various reasons. In the same year, Wanichayachart (2001) studied the Thai lesbian group (Anjaree.com). Her study applies the concept of the public sphere as a way to analyse lesbian online activity and social movement. This researcher participated in the website and found that Anjaree.com was designed to discuss the topic of Thai lesbian rights and social movements. However, most lesbian users used web forums to speak about other topics instead, for example, general news which is not relevant to the objective of the website. She notes that the original meaning of Habermas's concept about the 'public sphere' is limited and cannot be applied to Thai online society as some users do not use the forum as a space to discuss sexual politics for LGBTQI.

In contrast to this applying of a modern sociological concept as seen in these works, interestingly, a paper by Duangwiset (2002) applies postmodern concepts and narrative analysis to study Thai gay men's experiences in urban contexts on websites. The study confirms the result of Thitiwararak (2001) that Thai gay men use their websites to come out, learn and perform gay sexuality. Furthermore, Thai gay websites are communities for socialising the sexual culture of Thai gay men. A few years later, Duangwiset (2005) released an article which focused on the issue of Thai gay men's sexuality by questioning the sexual relationships on Thai gay web boards. He found that Thai gay web boards are social spaces used as channels for gay men to communicate with others in order to find lovers and sexual partners. Sex, love, and the friendship of Thai gay men on web boards are similar to arenas for presenting sexuality and identity. The most interesting aspect of his work is that Thai gay web boards may hide some aspects of the another side of human nature.. He claims that the relationship of Thai gay men in cyberspace is short and very changeable. The result of his study is similar to my work elsewhere (Thongmuang, 2015) and that of Soontravaravit (2010) on sexual identity on the Internet. In addition, my pilot study suggests that LGBTQI sexualities are judged, and controlled by, the heteronormativity of Thai society. Research on queer sexuality has continued while some scholars have expanded their focus to research on digital platforms beyond websites. Samakkeekarom and Boonmongkon (2011) explore the sexual identities and pleasures of 'Thai Men Who Have Sex with Men' (MSM) in Internet chat rooms. These chat rooms provide opportunities for these men to express their sexual desires freely, in contrast to offline spaces where social norms have the power to control their sexual expression, such as the sexual expression of LGBTQI in public spaces.

The issue of online sexual identity is popular in LGBT studies in Thailand, and explored from various perspectives. Mullaly (2003) is a pioneering researcher on the issue. He studied one of the first Thai gay men's web site, xq28.net and explored the question and belief discussed on the website of how and why gay men are different from heterosexuals and the idea of the existence of a 'gay gene'. Thitiwararak (2001) integrates the concept of discourse on Thai gayness with online identity. These studies reveal some attributes of Thai

gay men's online identities connected with 'real' identity and discourse, which are, in turn, constructed by Thai social institutions and the heterosexual system. My previous study also reveals that Thai LGBTQI people connect online identities with real identities, constructed through social interaction with others in online communities, for example, those involving discussion and exchange of information, as well as asking for advice about sexual matters related to queerness (Thongmuang, 2015).

Clearly, most of the relevant literature focuses on issues related to online community and identity. Some works also assemble all the issues mentioned above. But here, it is possible to identify a gap in the knowledge on Thai digital queer studies. Much of the literature available on Thai LGBTQI on the Internet is not based on extensive empirical research, and there is a tendency to categorise sexual identity by labelling research subjects without the acknowledgement that sexuality can be fluid. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on bisexual, transgender and other research subjects who identify themselves as 'queer'. Those that identify with Gay and Lesbian Studies do not necessarily share the thinking that informs Queer Studies and thus rarely use queer theory as a theoretical lens. My literature review also shows that the work of Duangwiset (2005) is the only research undertaking that uses queer theory as a theoretical context. Most of the early work uses the term 'homosexual' to identify research subjects, and they do not further the discussion or provide an explanation of the term. The term has been criticised by many queer theorists for the way in which it creates a binary of sex and sexualities. This means Thai academia as a whole betrays a lack of knowledge about 'queerness'.

The literature I have outlined has assisted the thesis by enabling me to identify the lack of queer research in the Thai social context but also to explore the sexual lives of Thai LGBTQI as connected to social spaces. In this case, virtual spaces have been constructed to resist heteronormativity, which has prevented sexual minorities from expressing their identities and sexuality in the real world. As a result, LGBTQI people who experience a range of situations use online platforms to perform and present their sexualities and identities.

My literature review has identified a gap of knowledge in LGBTQI and Queer Studies on the Internet in Thai academia. Applying queer theory, which was constructed in 'western' social contexts, to study sexuality in Thailand, a 'non-western' society, where social life and cultural backgrounds are different, raises theoretical concerns . It is also important to revisit theories and re-question the diversity of gender and sexuality .The research on queerness shows some sexual aspects of Thai LGBTQI echo those found in LGBTQI studies in the West, for example, the representation of erotic practices in the gay men community on the Internet (Campbell 2004). Therefore, some aspects of Thai and western gay sexual life can be considered as 'global gay'. However, there has been a gap of knowledge in the research issue about sexuality online, and that requires further research to insightfully study perspectives on LGBTQI sexuality in Thai society as little is known about the social phenomenon (Döring 2009).

The specific methods adopted in this chapter are: (1) online and face-to-face interviews and online interviews via dating apps and Twitter direct messenger; and (2) collecting digital narratives that gay men tweeted and posted on dating apps. Interview transcriptions, text chat recordings, and stories from collecting digital archives were analysed by thematic analysis. Textual-visual data of postings were collected by digital capture tools and were analysed by narrative and visual analysis. Twitter sociograms were collected by NCapture and analysed by NVivo.

My Reflection on Gay men and Digital Technology

'For me, the Internet is a utopian society. Unlike a physical homophobic society, where I frequently face sexual prejudice and gender bias from some straights. As a Thai gay man, the Internet greatly facilitates me. For example, joining a web board encouraged me to come out, learn and understand gay sexual life, and make friendships with new gay friends. I also found my lover in a gay online forum-based community ten years ago, and I think it is hard to find him in an offline society. My partner and I would thank the gay web forum. I thought I might not know if he was gay or not from his appearance and biological sex like a 'straight man' in an offline world'. (My self-reflection on fieldwork between June and July 2016)

Digital technology and the Internet offer new opportunities for gay identity and sexuality. The pattern of identity and sexuality has been transformed into online-offline communities. It

shapes and constructs digital queer culture and societies for LGBTQI people in performing sexual identity and sexuality in online/offline spaces. Sexual identity and sexuality are interconnected concepts. People use the term 'sexual identity' to describe and categorise themselves and others; in other words, they self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. However, the concept may be used differently in different contexts. Some scholars may use sexual identity to mean sexual orientation. Queer theorists criticise the concept of social categorisation and the fixation on sexual orientation, preferring sexual fluidity—sexual identity can change over time and context (Stief et al. 2016).

Personally, I feel better when I present myself as a gay man on dating apps rather than in offline spaces. I have learned about gayness and gay sexuality from gay dating apps and LGBTQI social media platforms.

The dating and discovery of sex partners for Thai gay men began in specific spaces, for example, gay bars, clubs, and saunas. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Internet communication has played an important role in social life. Gay men were among the first social groups to use internet technology to find sexual partners. Web board and Internet Relay Chatting applications, such as Pirch98 and MSN Messenger, used to be popular computer applications which Thai gay men turned to in order to engage in sexual relationships and to find sexual partners, as one research informant mentioned:

> *'Looking back to my teenage life when I studied at university, I used MSN messenger as a dating application and to find a sexual partner. There was a Thai gay web board, Dek-D.com, that was an online space to post an e-mail to find new friends for Thai gay men. I added their e-mails and chatted with other gay men, hung out and had dinner with them, but the hidden reason was to have sex with them. I have used mobile dating applications such as Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued in the past five years, but the purpose of using these applications are similar. However, dating mobile applications are much more developed than the old technologies. I can see their faces and bodies via mobile phone camera before deciding to date with them offline.'* (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

Gay print media has been replaced by globalisation and digital/online media and digitalisation. Gay content and information have been moved to digital platforms, such as mobile dating applications and mainstream social media. Gayness has been reformatted into

new forms, in the form of online videos/clips and online dating, for example. Thai gay culture is not only influenced by the West but also by East Asia. The influences of East Asian countries are reflected in the popular use, amongst Thai gay men, of a Chinese gay mobile dating application called *Blued*.

Live Sex show on Blued: The Digital Space of Sexual Performance

One of the purposes the dating app was developed as an online platform was for gay users to be able to chat and meet new friends and life partners via their mobile phones. However, in practice, it has been used as 'live sex shows', an expression of sexual freedom and performance, as well as being a gay online community for sexual desire in Thailand.

Blued is a digital technology, in the form of video chat and instant messaging on the Internet, which has experienced considerable popularity amongst Thai gay men. From the perspective of some Thais, Blued is considered a virtual space of deviant sexual behaviour, catering for exhibitionists, for example. In contrast, for some gay men, it is a social space to communicate and interact with other gay men, a social space for finding a new gay friend, partner, and lover. Additionally, the online platform is a public space, but it is transformed into a private space for gay men only. It can be observed by the name of the video chat room, which represents words expressing masculinity, for example, "**guy**", "**man**", "**army**", "**police**", and "**secret straight men**" instead of "**gay**".

Data from interviewees revealed that Thai gay men use Blued to find sexual partners, to see a sexual intercourse show and to masturbate. On Blued, each video chat room has a moderator. Moderators encourage some users to show their sexual activities via a mobile camera to other users in the chat room that they join. From some religious perspectives, such sexual behaviour is considered 'immoral'. Therefore, as with some gay websites, many chat rooms on Blued have been blocked and closed according to the censorship policy of the Thai Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (an anonymous informant, face-to-face interview). As a result of this policy, some rooms have been renamed and administrators'

rooms will create a spare room, with the name of the new room usually similar to the old room. For example, "**DICK DICK DICK**" was renamed to "**DICK DICK DICK SHOW**" (an anonymous informant, informal chat interview). My observations revealed that the sexual performances began after working hours, around 9pm to midnight. However, this does not imply that all gay video chat rooms are used to perform live sex.
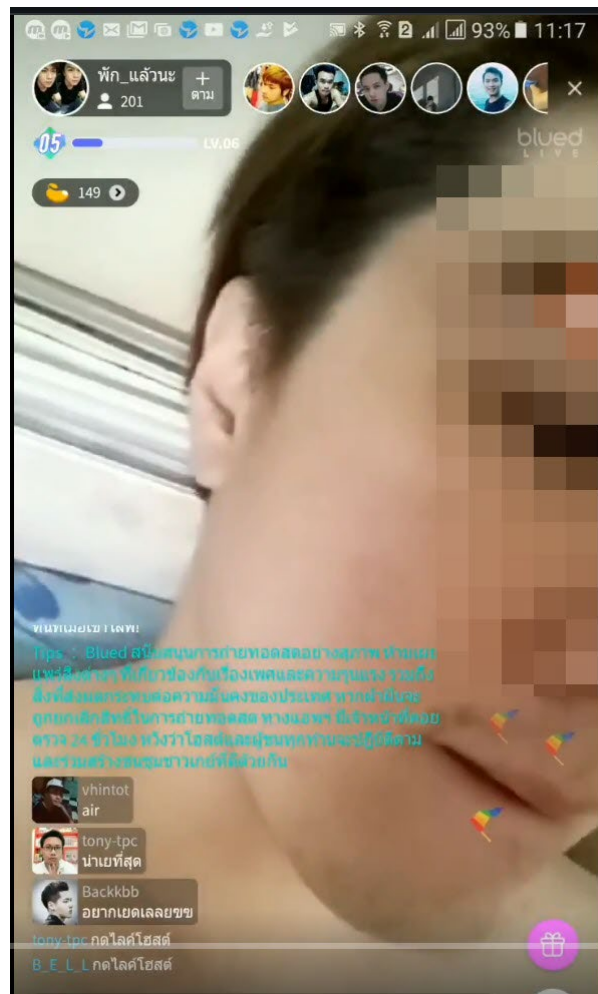

Figure 4: Blued Live screenshot

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016)

One of the features of the app is 'Live', which offers users the option to live stream on their mobile phones and to express themselves in various forms to their followers and friends. The app developers use 'beans' instead of the Like button on some social media apps. Users are able to earn 'beans' (the cryptocurrency of the app) while they are streaming a live video.

Beans can also be exchanged for money by transferring to a bank account. As a result, the collection of beans motivates users to broadcast their live shows. I participated in many live shows and found that some Thai gay men users show live sex. The live sex shows occurred from approximately 22:00 to 02:00. There were sexual intercourse and masturbation shows in bedrooms or private spaces. While they were performing the activity, some Thai gay men users donned a mask to hide their faces, other users disclosed their faces, and some users used cameras to focus and zoom only on their bodies and penises. I observed and noted that the live shows of Thai gay men who were handsome and possessed masculine bodies received many beans. In other words, gay men earned more money. If the live sex shows involved sexual intercourse and gay men users showed their faces, the number of beans increased more. There are many groups' names on the app which relate to 'sex matters', for example, 'secret of bi gay men' and 'outdoor sex shows.' One research informant commented that the live sex shows were a part of his everyday life. He accepted that a strong driver for using the app and joining live sex shows was his sexual desire.

In offline society, sexual matters are controlled by sexual norms through social rules and morality. The sexual expression of Thai gay men is limited to private and gay spaces. On Blued, Thai gay men have distorted the original purpose of the app by using it as a public online space to express sexual identities. Blued is not only an online community of Thai gay friends, but also a community of sexual desire and intimacy. The live sex shows imply expressions to experience liberation from sexual repression and to challenge the power of sexual normativity through digital technology. Furthermore, the live sex show is a form of presentation through the performance of gay bodies. It is the power of digital technology which is able to reveal ideal gay bodies in relation to masculinity.

Hornet and Jack'd: Mobile Dating Apps for Erotic Practices

During the fieldwork, I observed the behaviour of an informant (my close friend) who frequently looked at his iPhone screen, which showed a grid of photos of men, and sometimes

chatted with someone via the application. I wondered and asked him what he was doing. He then showed me gay mobile dating applications such as 'Jack'd' and 'Hornet' that are popular for hooking up.

> '*If you look at the smartphone screen of a gay man, I am sure that you may see the app is installed. This app has been developed and facilitated for gay dating. I always use it to see handsome men. If I find someone I like, I will say "hi" to him, meet him, and may have sex with him. … Nowadays, gay dating and sexual practice are not limited to specific places, like a [gay] sauna and bar. The app is one of these examples*'. (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

Let me include a conversation about hooking up on a gay dating application to introduce this section. It is a conversation between my friend (an informant) and a foreign gay man.

> **A visitor:** *Hey! [and he sent his picture]*
> **My friend:** *What's up, man?*
> **A visitor:** *You look hot 😊 .*
> **My friend:** *Thanks, let me see more of your picture, dude.*
> **A visitor:** *[he sent a photo of his penis]*
> **My friend:** *Where are you?*
> **A visitor:** *Wittayu Road.*
> **My friend:** *OK*
> **A visitor:** *You live near Asok?*
> **My friend:** *I work at Rajamri road. You stay alone?*
> **A visitor:** *Cool! Friends staying with me now. You are top, versatile, or bottom?*
> **My friend:** *Vers top [he lied; actually,he is bottom]. It means you cannot host?*
> **A visitor:** *Vers. Can host during the date.*
> **My friend:** *OK.*
> **A visitor:** *Any other pics?*
> **My friend:** *I have no naked pic. [and he sent his pic with a muscular body]*
> **A visitor:** *Wow, nice. Don't need a naked pic.*
> **My friend:** *Thanks. I wanna see your picture more, no need to be naked too.*
> **A visitor:** *[He sent a photo]*
> **My friend:** *Thanks.*
> **A visitor:** *Love kissing,*
> **My friend:** *Me too. Your cock is so big!*
> **A visitor:** *You can handle it 😊*
> **My friend:** *Come on! I have never been fucked by that size at all.*
> **A visitor:** *Where are you from?*
> **My friend:** *I'm a local guy. You?*
> **A visitor:** *USA*
> **My friend:** *So this evening I cannot visit you?*
> **A visitor:** *I have work calls tonight.*
> **My friend:** *Ahh, I see.*
> **A visitor:** *Tomorrow during the day?*

> ***My friend:*** *What time are you available?*
> ***A visitor:*** *12?*
> ***My friend:*** *OK. Let's trade in a toilet somewhere.*

The mobile phone has become a crucial digital device in our social lives. For gay men, it can be used as a tool for expressing sexuality, such as playing with sexual fantasy, and interaction for sexual desire. There are mobile applications which have become very popular for Thai gay men to make gay friends and to find sexual partners. With the ability to find gay men on applications, gay men can use them to explore the nearby locations of gay men who are online and using the application. The app also shows the photos of gay men and their profile details, such as age, weight, and height. A gay man can interact with others by chatting in a private room (inbox); the application will also find a "matching guy" if users set the option. This is a chat and dating application similar to Blued. However, users seldom use it to have cybersex. It is used as a medium for finding a sexual partner, making an appointment and then meeting face-to-face. It usually ends up with sexual intercourse.

I engaged in the application by installing it to my smartphone and registering as a user. Using my real photos in the user profile, I provided my information, chatted with other gay men, exchanged photos and so on. One day, a businessman from Taiwan showed an interest in me. We made contact via the application for a week. He told me that he was seeking a one-night stand partner. He insisted we could meet at his hotel. Another day, I met a Thai gay man after we chatted for just ten minutes. In his room, he tried to have sex with me, but I told him I had a boyfriend and wanted to make a friend rather than have sex. My informant's stories and my fieldwork experiences reveal that most gay men have used the application to find a sexual partner instead of a friend and lover. In addition, if we consider the photos profile, which displays on the application, some users represent, and focus on, their bodies to physically attract others.

Intimacy Online and Sexual Pleasure on Mobile Dating Apps

With the integration of autoethnography into the research, I also reflected on and shared my lived experiences with my close friends who were research participants. Before narrating the experience of my friends and myself on the issue of gay relationships online, I need to reflect and discuss the potential impact on myresearch of intimate relationships with research participants and the analysis of sensitive topics.

The role of friendship in mainstream ethnography has been extensively concerned. Some traditional anthropologists warn against making friends with participants because of the potential conflict of roles. Forming close friends as research participants may pose a dilemma for the fieldwork.

However, the thesis is not a mainstream ethnographic research. Autoethnographic research has been a research approach since the postmodern turn in social science in the 1980s. As mentioned in Chapter Three, reflexivity is important in writing autoethnographic fieldwork. One of the main points of reflexivity is the openness, trust and rapport of research participants so that participants who are friends of a researcher improve the reflexivity aspect. Moreover, as Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2013) propose, the 'collaborative autoethnography' research approach can accept a form of collaboration between participant and researcher. One of the core perspectives of field experience is the nature of the relationship between researchers and participants. Some researchers have claimed that this relationship is very special in that it makes any ethnographic work different, even if research is conducted on the same topic.

According to Bochner and Ellis (2016), autoethnography is 'a reflexive approach to research, writing, and storytelling that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political'. Close relationships of autoethnography, for example, friends' shared experiences, can be used as a part of the method and autographic methodology. The autoethnographic work of Bochner and Ellis (2016: 209-210) is known as post-positivist research approach, and represents reflexive and intimate methods of autoethnography.

Autoethnography does this by incorporating the researcher and his or her participants' experiences as an integral component of the research by emphasising personal narrative and ethnographic storytelling. In this study, I aim to provide readers access to ethnographic insights and analysis on an intimate level. I will investigate a personal connection to the thesis and engage in a narrative that provokes emotional experiences about the sensitive topic, in Thai society, of sexual matters .

From the citations above, as an ethnographic research, an intimate relationship between myself (as an ethnographer) and my friends (as research participants) renders the thesis unique and insightful. During fieldwork, I talked about, and shared my online love experiences with a friend, and he added and reflected on his experiences.

> *'Every time, when I feel sad and lonely, I will find a gay friend to chat with him [via the Internet service and application]. I begin to say "hi" and we talk a lot like we have known each other for ten years, I do not know why that is. On the Internet, especially a gay website makes me know that I am not the only gay man in my town; there are others. For some gay men, they may use the Internet for sexual purposes, but not me. … I have only a gay friend [in real life] when I joined the gay web forum and chat room, it made me know from some postings that there are other gay men who wanted to meet others and make friends. I frequently posted my desire to find friends on a gay web board. Someone added me as a friend on his Facebook; we have become friends. Finally, we met in real life, and sometimes hang out in pubs, journey together and so on… when you have fallen in love online, please bear in mind that you only know each other on the computer screen, a set of text messaging, which says "I love you, I miss you" passionately; it differs from body touching and hugging. It would be important to develop a relationship offline and try to understand someone you love in real-life situations.'* (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

This experience shows that the Internet functions as a medium for finding a gay friend and, indeed, any kind of friend. However, some Thai gay men still believe that love online and friendship on the Internet between gay men is only connected to sexual matters and dishonest relationships. The following tweets of a Thai gay man reflect on why Thai gay men use mobile dating apps. It is a frustrating feeling, but it makes sense. I agreed with him.

> *'Some people call gay men who use mobile dating apps bitches. I think some gay men use these apps to find friends and partners indeed. In our offline lives, there is no one who walks in and says 'Hey you! I am gay and want to flirt with you.' In*

some circumstances, we may not flirt with a guy who we are not sure is gay or not, but we know he is on the apps.' (@MeChinjung's tweet, March 14, 2018)

The process of finding a sexual partner begins after reading the profile text and seeing the profile pictureI If a gay man is interested in other guys for a relationship, he usually contacts them via a chat room by using the instant messaging application on the computer or on the mobile phone. Afterwards, he makes an appointment to meet in person. In many cases, they continue to be lovers. However, in some cases, they feel that love on the Internet is like an illusion, as one gay man told me.

'*Love online is an illusion. The Internet is only a channel to communicate and facilitate a relationship. Facebook, a gay chat application, and a web board are just media for gay men. …Why do gay men find love on the net? I think there are a few spaces for us. Gay bars and pubs have been our spaces to find a lover. Now, everyone can access the Internet from their bedrooms, on the road via a computer and a mobile phone. It is easy and convenient! Especially, finding and dating someone who will be the best for us*' (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

I agreed with him and replied that there are other reasons for the popularity of gay online dating over the past ten years. In my perspective, because of the similarity of our biological sex, some gays have a strong masculine personality. Also, an effeminate gay man, for example, so-called 'sissy' men, do not indicate that they are gay men because of their lack of masculinity, and, for example, gay muscle.

Sexual Identity Online

In an online context, users can construct multiple identities, which may differ from anoffline identity (Boellstorff, 2015). I consider this type of self in my thesis as a "*multiple online identities*". I would like to reflect on my experiences about finding a lover online (before finding my current partner) here. One day I wrote a posting on a gay web board. Some gay men contacted me to meet them in their homes. I selected to meet some of them. I found that some gay men perform multiples online identities. Their information and profile on the Internet are

different from their real identities. For example, someone told me via chat that he was tall with an athletic body, so I requested him to send his photo, but he refused. Finally, when I met him in person, he looked like a bear, short and fat.

I raised this question about multiple online identites during my fieldwork. It reminds me of the experiences mentioned above. I found that some gay men have used Twitter accounts as a 'dark' self'. The findings in this section contradict the research question in Chapter Four. My experiences match the story of a research participant.

'I chatted with a gay man for several months. We texted, exchanged photos, made a telephone call and so on, except for meeting in person because of the distance. I was in Bangkok, but he was in the Northeast. I missed him so much. I wanted to meet him. I decided to book a ticket and flew to his hometown. Finally, I met him. Gosh!! His appearance was very different from the photos that he sent me. In the photos, he was so sexy and looked like a top model. Although he told me that these were his real photos, I did not believe him. I was shocked and disappointed with his cheating. I suddenly flew back. It was a horrible experience!' (Art, a 35-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 16, 2016)

Software and computer applications allow for the adjustment and refinementof an offline identity to an 'ideal' identity, which is habitually used to present online. There is a low to high level function for the retouching of a photo to present smooth skin using image-editing software or mobile apps. One of my research participants told me that he had adjusted his photo in order to attract others. It is a matter of impression management.

Dominance of Gay Masculinity

I also observed that the prominent presentation of gay sexual identities on mobile dating apps through profile pictures is focused on masculinity; muscular body images and youthful faces. This reflects the ideal body images of Thai gay masculine culture in the offline world. Furthermore, some gay men present their profile pictures to attract others with photo editing applications, by adjusting the white balance and correcting their skin colour. Many profile pictures focus only on muscular bodies without showing faces. My observation mirrors that of the interview data collected from this research informant;

> *'On gay dating apps, I used a profile picture showing only my muscular body with a sixpack. Every time I uploaded my pictures and wrote something on the profile page, they must reflect a masculine version of myself, although my characteristics are more feminine in offline life. I think most gay men find masculine traits on apps. I usually delete and block girly-like gay men who say 'hi' to me!"* (Jamika, a 37-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 14, 2016)

As a Thai gay man, I believe that masculinity is influential in Thai gay culture. In particular, for finding a partner, a feminine personality is perceived to be unpleasant; in contrast, possessing an athletic performance, a muscular body, and a masculine appearance is an important characteristic of an ideal partner and lover for love finders on the net. As observed on a web forum, some keywords of the postings for dating represented the idea of effeminacy, for example, the Thai terms "*oek saaw*" (sissy man) or "*man-man*" (effeminate man). A gay participant told me that he defines his sexual identity as an effeminate gay in the offline world with a preferred sexual position as a 'bottom'. In contrast, on the web board, for a sexual purpose, he redefines his gender identity and sexual position as a masculine gay and versatile. If he expressed a sexual identity as a 'bottom', most gay men would likely connect this to an effeminate gay, resulting in nobody showing an interest in him. A versatile man can match with both a top and a bottom when he chats and strikes up a relationship with someone who tells him that he is a top gay man. Therefore, because of an ability to construct an ideal identity, sometimes, the sexual identity presented on the Internet may differ from an "actual" sexual identity.

In addition, because of the difficulty of coming out in the physical world, some of the sexual positions, which are rarely expressed in the physical world and may be discriminated against as deviant sexual behaviour, for example, she-male, bisexual men, can be seen more openly in the virtual world. On the one hand, as a social arena, by privileging a masculine gay performance, a gay app conceals femininity. On the other hand, it reveals sexual diversity by expressing and representing some sexual positions and categories outside mainstream gay sexuality, such as top, bottom, and versatile.

Hook-up on Twitter

Twitter is another digital platform which Thai gay men use in order to find a sexual partner. In contrast to gay men dating apps, it is interesting how Thai gay men use Twitter to find a sexual partner. Although Twitter is not an online platform for finding a sexual partner, after conducting fieldwork for a while, I found that many research informants told me that they had been using Twitter to find a sexual partner as well as gay dating apps. I decided to include Twitter as an online field site. During fieldwork, I was taken aback by how many gay Twitter accounts had been created for a sexual purpose, such as finding sexual partners or for sex work. I followed some gay Twitter accounts, collected their Twitter profiles and tweets in order to analyse data. Examples of Twitter profiles, Twitter sociograms and data summaries tell the stories of informants (see the figures of research participants' Twitter profiles and sociogram following the case studies description). In a Twitter sociogram, vertices represent Twitter users while edges represent an interaction between Twitter users which are connected by tweets, retweets, and mentions. Twitter sociograms show that there are many connections between Twitter users, followers, and followings. The density of each sociogram shows the number of participants' relationships in their online social networks. Greater density means Twitter users have more connections and interactions; for example, case number 3 has the most connections.

Case 1: @Torzeed18 (626 tweets and retweets)

@Torzeed18 uses Twitter as a platform for selling sex and hooking up with other gay men. He is an online sex worker. He told me that he prefers cybersex, for example, masturbation together via video call more than having sex offline. However, if he has to have sex offline, he has often recorded video clips while he has sex with someone. After having sexual activity, he uploaded sex clips and posted them on his Twitter account. He loves to have sex with someone who is in a stylish dress, looks masculine and is not fat. The appearances have simulated his sexual need.

Case 2: @dew_petcharat (1,399 tweets and retweets)

@dew_petcharat is an online sex toy seller. He is a top-versatile gay man. He posted his sex clips, for example, masturbation, oral sex, and sexual intercourse on his account. He sold sex toys, poppers, and underwear. He also has a LINE account for posting sex clips on his 'secret group online'. He is an exhibitionist who loves to show his penis in public, for example, in a public toilet or in a park, and usually takes photos or records video clips. He told me that sexual activities in public are exciting. He thinks he often feels good when other gay men tweet, retweet, and like his penis photos. His qualified sexual partner must look like a straight man. The most important thing is not to look like an effeminate gay man.

Case 3: **@godofx4** (3,208 tweets and retweets)

@godofx4 is a bisexual gay man. He is a very active twitter user with many followers. He makes an appointment to have sex with straight women and bottom gay men. He told me that before recording sex clip videos, he always asks permission from sexual partners. He tells his sexual partners that any video clips will not show faces or that faces will be blurred. Any videos only show bodies, penis, vagina or anal sex. He sells his sex clip videos from 100-500 THB. He chooses sexual partners carefully. He uses condoms when he has sex. He said his Twitter profile is very important in order to find a sexual partner. His profile provides his biography and conditions for hooking up with him. He told me that he likes a gay sexual partner who looks like an effeminate gay because he is a bisexual gay. When he has sex with a gay man, he will think that his sexual partner is a woman.

Case 4: @pt113311 (1,884 tweets and retweets)

@pt113311 is both a bottom gay man and a bisexual man who has not come out in public yet. If he finds someone who is very handsome, he will have sex in a hotel or sexual partner's

condominium or dorm. His tweets about sexual desire or finding someone to hook up with usually specify a place around the area where he lives and a picture. After tweets, a gay man will chat with him via direct messenger. The chat usually asks about his penis size, a photo with his face, age, weight, and height. He also said he is on Prep (pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent acquiring HIV), so he does not often use a condom. He likes a gay man who looks clean and cute. The skin colour of his sexual partner must be fair.
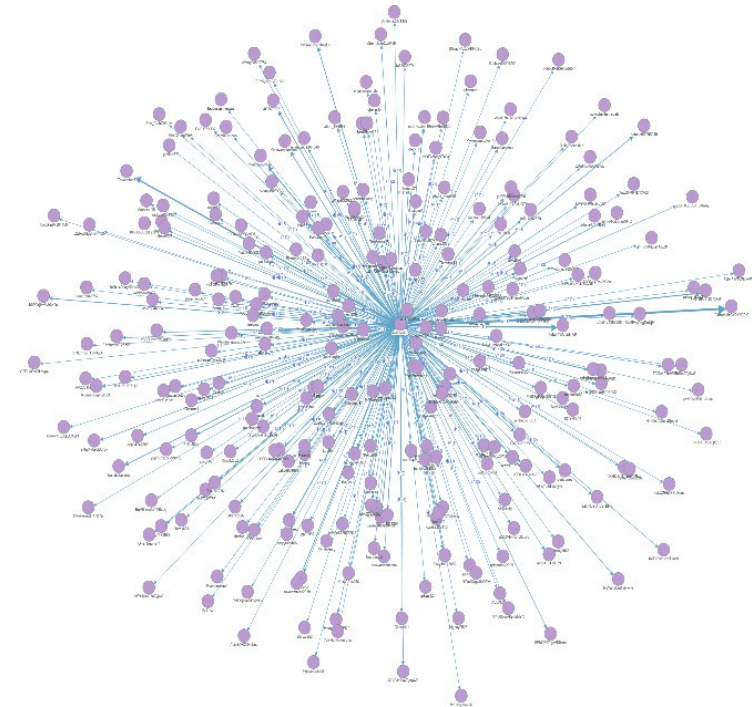
Figure 5: @Torzeed18 screenshot Twitter profile and sociogram (Retrieved from *https://twitter.com/Torzeed18*)

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016
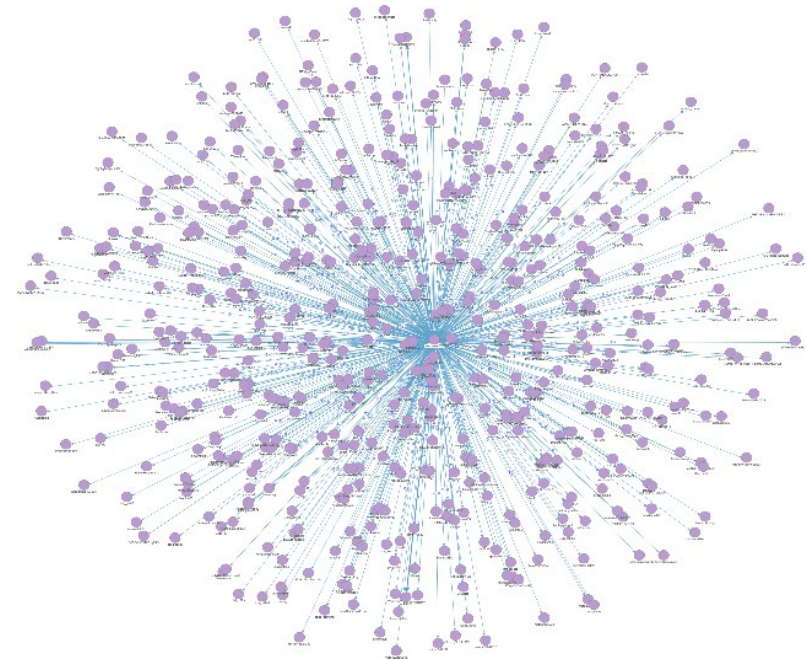
Figure 6: @dew_petcharat screenshot Twitter profile and sociogram (Retrieved from *https://twitter.com/dew_petcharat*)

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Figure 7: @godofx4 screenshot Twitter profile and sociogram (Retrieved from *https://twitter.com/godofx4*)

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Figure 8: An example of @godofx4 sex video clip on Twitter

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016
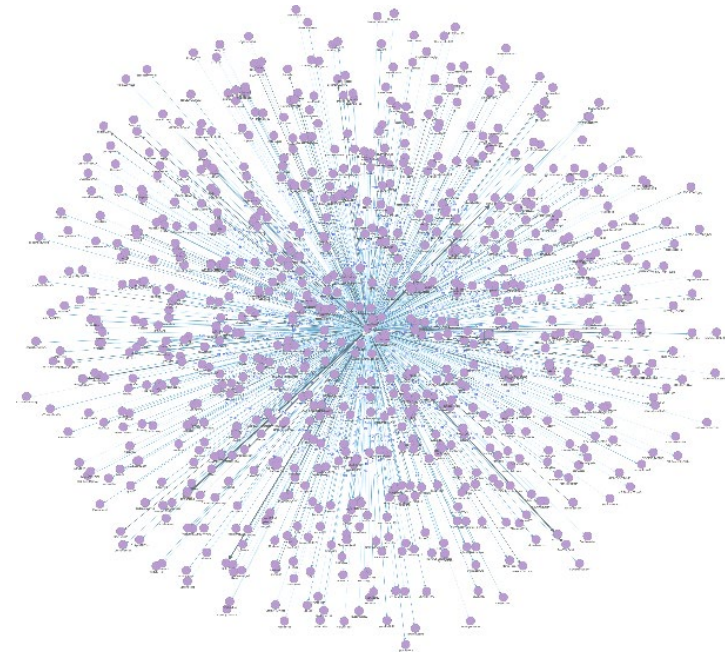
Figure 9: @pt113311 screenshot Twitter profile and sociogram (Retrieved from *https://twitter.com/pt113311*)

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Thai gay men define their Twitter accounts for finding a sexual partner and expressing sexual desire as *'secret self'*— *referring to sexual matters that are concealed and repressed in offline society. Another interpretation of this meaning is 'secret' as in the case of some gay men who are in the closet and do not wish to have their sexual orientation revealed.* Twitter as a digital platform is considered a free space away from the repression of sex that exists in Thai society. Twitter is also a space and community for gay men. It is a space for performance and expression of sex, ranging from tweeting about sexual desire and showing a penis, to the display of masturbation and sexual intercourse. Some informants told me that they are unable to express themselves offline. It is illegal and immoral in Thailand. Using Twitter as an erotic practice of Thai gay men also represents a gay community – '*a community of sexual desire'*. I agreed:

> *'As a Twitter user, I have two Twitter accounts. The first one is for my everyday life. The second one is my dark side account in order to respond to my sexual desire, for example, seeing pornographic materials. I may differ from my informants that I do not use Twitter to find a sexual partner. However, after many years of using a 'dark' Twitter, I feel that I am a part of the Thai gay twitter community. I have learned about the diversity of gay sexuality through tweets. I understand gayness and think sexual matters are normal. In contrast to other online communities, we know each other by our faces. However, I observed that in the (dark) Twitter community, gay men remember the others from their bodies and penises! Hmm...yes... I got a Twitter account from his big dick and attractive body.* (Self-reflection as an autoethnography on fieldwork between June to July 2016)

Visualising The Sexuality of Thai Gay Men from Online to Offline on Twitter

In the last section of the chapter, I intend to use visual data, e.g., photo and video screenshot, which was collected on Twitter during my fieldwork, to narrate the sexual matters of Thai gay men. It is a short series of photos/video snapshots with text tweets for telling gay stories in relation to sexuality by answering the question: What were the sexual matters of Thai gay men presented on Tweets and Twitter profiles? These photos are worth a thousand words. These emerging themes were analysed from more than hundreds of Twitter screenshots I collected from my fieldnotes and observations.
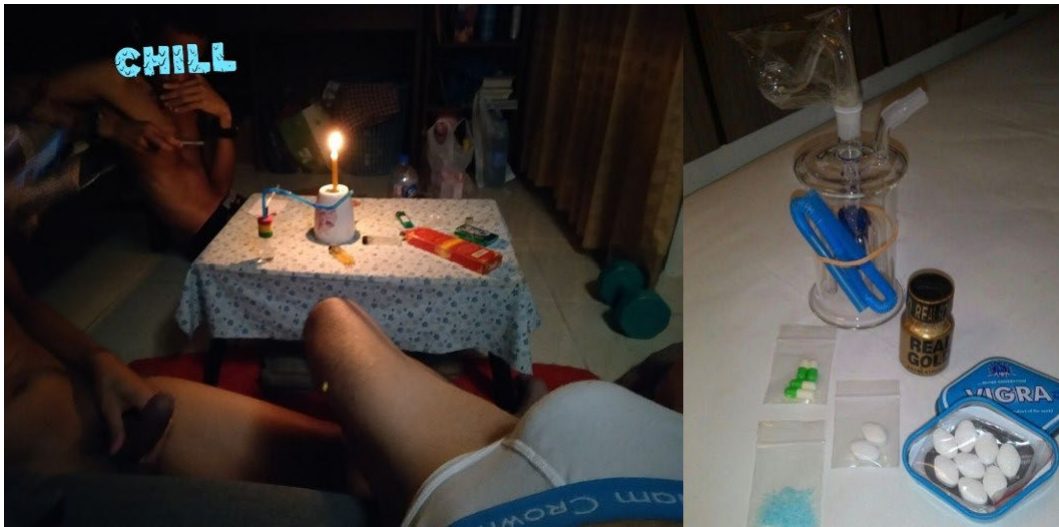
Figure 10: 'Chemsex'. usually comes with these hashtags: #hi #hicool #flyhigh and the emoticons

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December

2016

Figure 11: 'Group sex'. A gay man tweeted that 'Yesterday orgy, two tops, two bottoms. Trying to open live football on TV to drown out our voices while we were fucking, but it might not help'.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Figure 12: 'Outdoor sex'. A gay man tweeted that 'We were very horny, so we fucked at a wayside'.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December

2016

Figure 13: 'No condom' A behaviour on a sex clip. Tweets often come with the hashtag: #เย็ดสด #ยส ตน (translation: bareback sex and cumming inside an ass hole)

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December

2016

Figure 14: Concealing faces but showing dicks. Penises and body images are more important than faces in Thai gay men (dark) twitter communities.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December
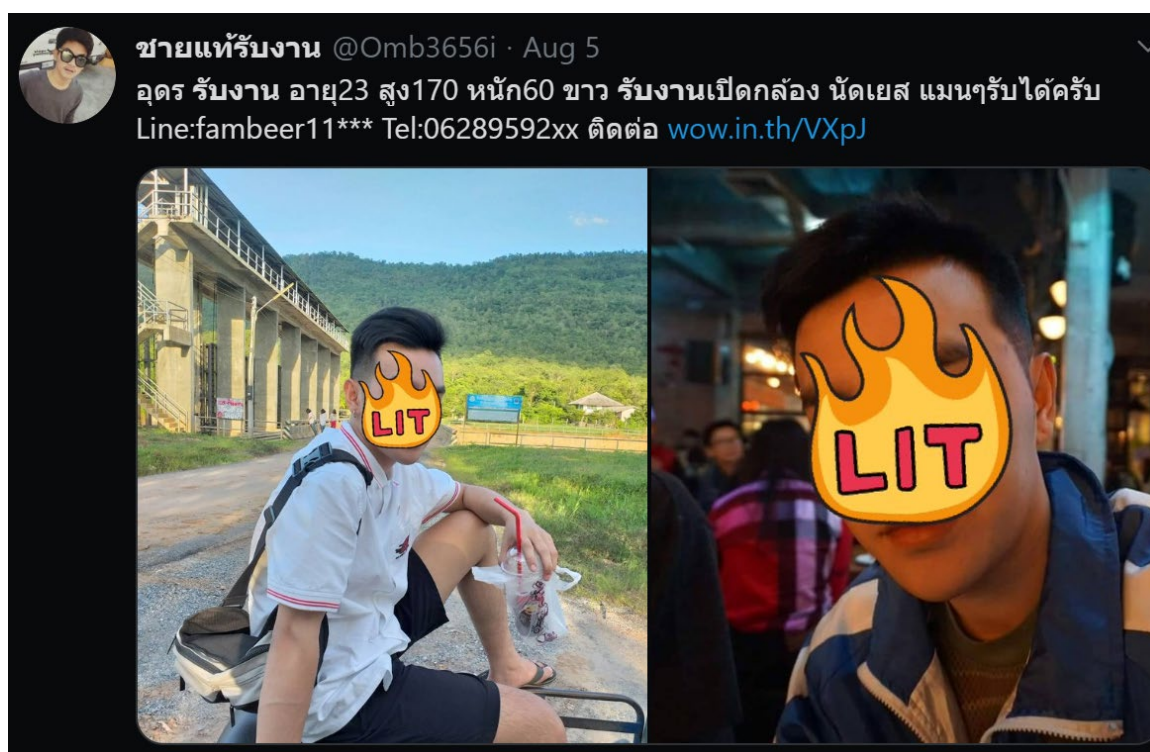
2016

Figure 15: #รับงาน (translation: 'get a job'.) Getting a job in the Twitter context means working as a sex worker. In the picture, a gay man was selling sex on Twitter.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Figure 16: 'Online sex shops.' Although selling sex toys and sexual materials is illegal in Thailand, many gay men's Twitter accounts break the law.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016
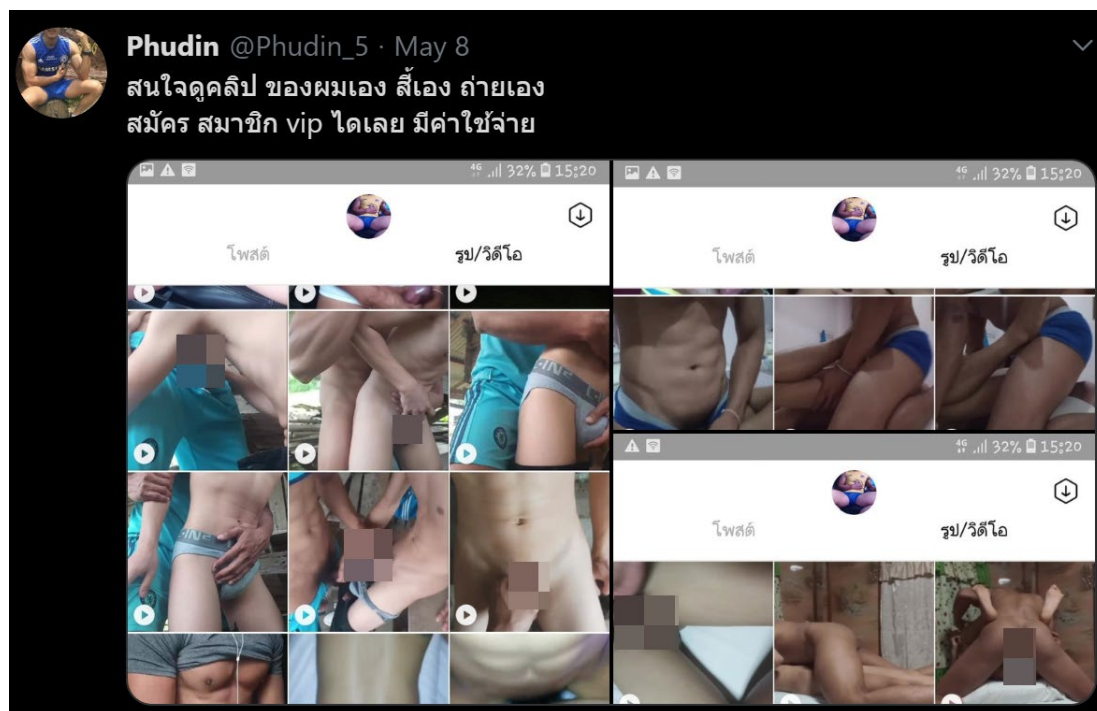
Figure 17: 'Selling sex video clips.' A gay man tweeted, 'If you are interested in these video clips, just sign up for VIP member on LINE apps. There is a fee for VIP members'.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December
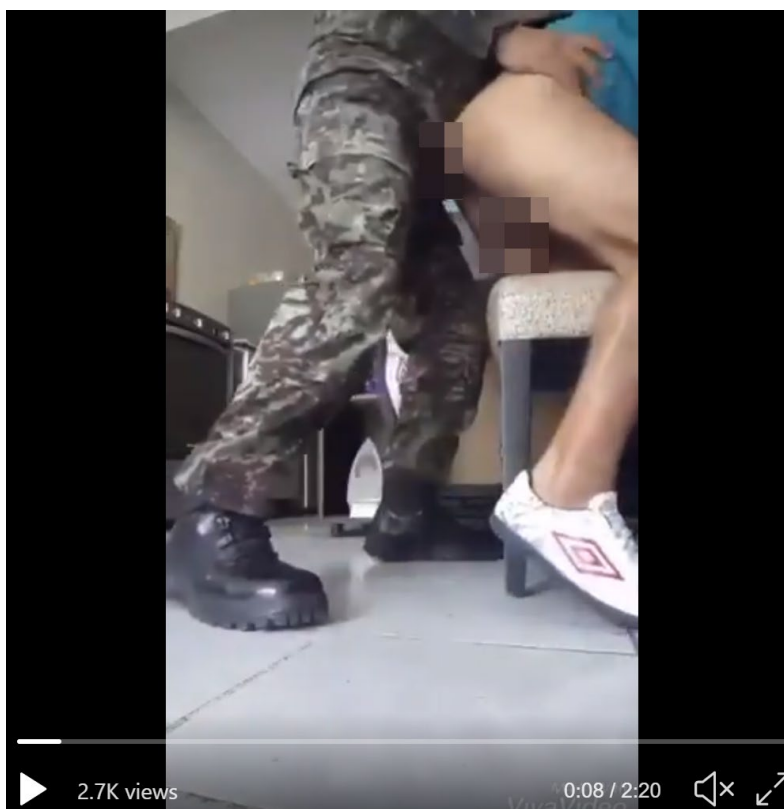
2016

Figure 18: 'A policeman was fucking a gay teenager'. On Twitter, police is a representation of a gay masculine career.

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

Some of the findings in this chapter are consistent with Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020). In order to create online sexual communities, Twitter and App-based communities serve vital societal purposes, including preventing social isolation, promoting wellbeing, boosting self-confidence, challenging restrictive and stigmatising sexual norms and customs, and ultimately bringing about social change (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel, 2020).

In summary, the section illustrates the online sexualities of Thai gay men on gay mobile dating applications and Twitter. The research findings have provided insights into the use of online platforms amongst Thai gay men and bisexual men for finding sexual partners and expressing sexual matters. The research finding shows that the Internet has been empowering Thai gay men and their sexualities, especially the power of the Internet in concealing their sexual identity and performing sexuality. The stories in the chapter present how Thai gay men find sex partners and gay friends.

However, some unpleasant experiences of gay men have been reflected in the chapter showing unfulfilled sexual desire.

The multiple online identities on Twitter and gay dating apps show a hegemony of masculinity in Thai gay sexual culture. It is not surprising that Thai gay men use gay dating applications to find sexual partners. However, it is surprising and interesting that Twitter has become an instrument for finding sexual partners and performing sexual matters. I found that some Thai gay men create a 'dark' self on Twitter for this purpose only. The term 'dark' may refer to 'sexual matters', 'hidden', or 'secret'. Sexual issues are still taboo in Thai society. On the one hand, some Thai gay men believe that the creation of dark selves online enables them to release sexual desire which is unable to be expressed in their offline life. Interestingly, most of them do not come out as gay men offline but use digital platforms as a new social space for coming out and performing gay sexuality.

3. Exploring Heteronormativity Online: Discrimination and Prejudice against Thai Trans People (and amongst Thai LGBQI) in the Digital Media

Section Three aims to uncover stories of sexual discrimination against Thai trans people on digital platforms and social media. It focuses on the research issue of LGBTQI sexual/gender identity and the politics of sexuality. The chapter will present research findings of various kinds of prejudices and discrimination against Thai transgender identity. The structure of the section consists of two parts. It will begin with a short review of incidences of discrimination against Thai trans people from research reports. The review aims to provide a social analysis of social institutions and systems. The remaining part will investigate experiences of discrimination and the voices of Thai transgenders in online contexts. Research findings will analyse and discuss the issue of transgender sexual identity and heteronormativity through a queer lens and the sociological perspective of a social researcher as a gay man. Experiences of discrimination and stories from the digital world will be shown to argue that Thailand is not an 'LGBTQI-friendly' country, and that LGBTQI people are still being discriminated against through institutional practices. Stories of sexual prejudices and discrimination have been widely revealed online. I revised the section in June 2019, the LGBTQI Pride month. There were many stories of discrimination against Thai LGBTQI, which were posted on Thai LGBTQI social media groups. In ethnographic research on social media, the fieldwork does not end until the

ethnographer decides to end it. Therefore, I added some emerging and interesting stories to the section.

A key concept in the section is 'heteronormativity'. According to Foucault (1981: 95), "there is power, there is resistance… and this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power", so queer theory can use as a framework for understanding resistance to heteronormativity. In other words, heteronormativity will be used to analyse discrimination, prejudice, and violence against LGBTQI people. Heteronormativity means heterosexuality is the only norm for understanding sexuality. As queer theorists criticised the social construction of sexuality, they pointed out that heteronormativity creates a binary opposition between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. The binary identifies non-heterosexuality as an abnormal group due to the difference with heterosexuality and may lead to gender discrimination. As a result, heteronormativity has galvanised non-heterosexual groups into strong units, for example, the LGBTQI liberation movement and LGBTQI rights organisations, which have been building the LGBTQI community to fight against transphobia.

Thailand is a country known to the world as 'The Gay Paradise' and 'The Land of Ladyboys'. It is considered one of the most welcoming countries for LGBTQI. Superficially, it seems that there is less homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in the country. However, there are many hidden incidences that have shown high levels of violence and discrimination against LGBTQI people. Although there are no laws in place today to support same-sex marriage, Thailand does not have laws prohibiting same-sex love. Thai people also have a high tolerance for gender diversity. LGBTQI, however, is seen as sick because of the '*Karma*', the idea that an individual's actions determine his fate in each successive existence in Buddhism. In the early 21st century, Thailand was described as an LGBTQI friendly country because gay tourism grew rapidly, and because of the role the Internet plays in helping LGBTQI people to network easily. A gay paradise is just a myth that continues to hide the problem of sexual violence, gender inequality and gender discrimination against LGBTQI people (Yodhong, 2018: online).

In the current social context, some literature and LGBTQI associations agree that Thai lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender still have to face gender bias, prejudices and discrimination against their sexual identities, i.e., LGBTQI lives and identities are viewed as abnormal/disorders

(The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association - ILGA, 2014). From my perspective as a Thai gay man, I concur that LGBTQI people continue to be subject to prejudice and discrimination. In my view as a native ethnographer, I would reflect that:

> *'that The view many Westerners have of Thailand as a gay paradise is a misconception. Thai society may have opened up space for LGBT people to have good job duties, but on the other hand, there's something that's really pressing against the group of people, like gays or transgenders can be teachers, but cannot dress as women, if you're in a Thai university, you can dress as a woman, but when it comes to graduation ceremony, you cannot dress as a woman. In the Thai cultural context, even though the media has opened up spaces for gays, they still group gay men as clowns. Looking from a human rights perspective, Thailand does not yet have the Civil Partnership Act and the Gender Equality law, so I have a question whether Thailand really is a LGBTQI or gay paradise'.* (Extracted from my fieldnote as an autoethnography on fieldwork between June and July 2016)

The data below also supports my point of view. Various forms of discrimination have been embedded in the practice of the following social institutions and systems:

Religion. In Thai society, religion plays an important role in attitudes toward sexuality and gender identity. Most of the Thai population are Buddhists, with approximately five per cent Muslim, Christian, and Hindu. The principle of Buddhism regards LGBTQI who do not conform to social norms as sinners from their past lives. Jackson's writing (2002) on Buddhist attitudes to homosexuality reveals that Buddhism believes sexual misconduct, such as being a prostitute or committing adultery in a past life, can lead a person to engage in LGBTQI behaviour in their current life. This belief has stigmatised Thai LGBTQI people. In addition, some fundamentalists of Islam hold negative attitudes toward LGBTQI identities. Expressing deviation and being LGBTQI in the Muslim community is difficult. Clearly, Buddhism and Islam stigmatise LGBTQI people as deviants from the heterosexual norm.

Family. Thai families can accept the LGBTQI identities of their children. If an LGBTQI individual acts as a 'good' son/daughter, they can gain acceptance from their families. However, if they do not conform to the role, they may face discrimination from their families. In some cases, the family may condemn their 'bad' son/daughter for their LGBTQI identity.

Employment. In a workplace setting, LGBTQI people have faced discrimination and stigma, so some gay men have to choose to hide their sexual identity in order to avoid this experience. Some LGBTQI people who are open about their identity/sexual orientation as LGBTQI are usually denied jobs, especially Thai transgenders who openly demonstrate their gender identities. They are likely to experience the most hostile reactions. As a result of job rejection, some Thai transgenders are limited to work in some sectors, for example, the entertainment and sex industry. In addition, if we compare them to married straight couples, the LGBT's inequality of social status leads to the inaccessibility of social services and welfare. Same-sex partners are not granted a right of spousal and, for example, are denied being able to apply for joint bank loans.

Healthcare. In some heterosexuals' attitudes toward LGBTQI people, there is a negative stereotype relating to Thai transgender women and gay men as having HIV and being promiscuous. Although there are numerous HIV-related organisations/health programs/social services for gay men, LGBTQI people have still faced discrimination. When they use a health service system, for example, making medical decisions, especially to sign medical consent on behalf of the partner, being denied health service and life insurance due to HIV-positive status, and enduring the gossip that may ensue as a result of living with HIV. For transsexuals, although sexual reassignment surgery is not offered free of charge, transsexual people are willing to pay for its cost. The vaginoplasty operation is popular amongst Thai male-to-female transsexuals because it is less expensive and can be accessed at some hospitals. In contrast, sexual reassignment surgery of female-to-male transsexuals is more expensive because metoidioplasty (penile reconstructions) operations are complex. (Chokrungvaranont et al. 2014). However, Thai transgender individuals who have completed their sexual reassignment surgery are still not allowed to change their gender labelling on some legal documents.

Education. In the education system, the issue of sexual identity and sexuality are not integrated into the national curriculum. Some sex education textbooks have labelled LGBTQI as deviants. Furthermore, in schools and universities, some transgender students have suffered from uniform regulation, which forces students to wear uniforms based on their 'sex' assignment at birth and not their identified 'gender'. They are not allowed to wear uniforms which would match their gender identities.

Mass Media. Western media has also affected Thai media, which has adopted a western attitude towards homosexuality through global media. Thai media has presented many news items reporting the western concept of homosexuality. There has been a great deal of reports on discrimination against LGBTQI in social media, but mass media rarely report about violence and discrimination against LGBTQI people.

The data presented in this section was collected from the ethnographic method that mainly involved researching 'online' on social media platforms. The collection of digital archives consisted of multimedia, digital texts and narratives. These forms of data were collected from postings on Facebook, tweets, threads and archives from web forums and websites, and downloaded videos from YouTube (see Appendices B and C for a list of social media platforms and websites). I selected the digital platforms by purposive sampling method. The digital archives I collected were from LGBTQI social media pages. I read social media feeds that I followed and collected data, including posts and tweets that were relevant to my research question. Participant observation and non-participant observation were the methods that I became immersed in at field sites to interact and observe the social activities of LGBTQI communities on selected social media platforms where their features and functions reside. For example, 'save to collection' on Facebook and 'add to bookmark' on Twitter enabled me to collect and capture data. Screenshot captures and audio-video recordings were used as methods for saving and capturing digital data by using specific software. These methods came from copying and pasting texts to recorded videos and screenshots. Ethnographic content analysis was used to analyse and identify key emerging themes from collected data in order to write a narrative account around these themes (Boellstorff et al., 2012) within the initial analysis framework, which emerged from a literature review.

In Thai society today, discrimination against LGBTQI people is a major issue. The movement for LGBTQI rights in Thailand has applied the Yogyakarta Principles, which states:

> '*Violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatisation and prejudice are directed against persons in all regions of the world because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, that these experiences are compounded by discrimination on grounds including gender…and that such violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatisation and prejudice undermine the integrity and dignity of those subjected to these abuses, may weaken their sense of self-worth and belonging to their community, and lead many to conceal or suppress their identity and to live lives of fear and invisibility…[we] aware that historically people have experienced these human rights*

violations because they are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, because of their consensual sexual conduct with persons of the same gender or because they are or are perceived to be transsexual, transgender or intersex or belong to social groups identified in particular societies by sexual orientation or gender identity. Everyone is entitled to enjoy all human rights without discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity includes any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity may be, and commonly is, compounded by discrimination on other grounds including gender, race, age, religion, disability, health and economic status'. (Gender Diversity Network of Thailand, 2011: 92, 94, 100)

Heteronormativity creates and privileges a social world for heterosexual people but marginalises Thai LGBTQI people and discriminates against them. Experiences of discrimination have become a topic of great focus on the sharing and posting of social media pages. During fieldwork, the issues below were posted and discussed on social media. Furthermore, it is advantageous to look back beyond the fieldwork at digital archives and online clip videos.

The following voices of Thai transgender from a video clip on YouTube (We Are APTN, 2016: online) reflect how trans people have been discriminated against from a young age in Thai society. They are discriminated against more than gay men and lesbians because their biological sexes do not match gender expression and performance. For instance:

'It would be ridiculous to say I do not know what discrimination is. I feel I have known discrimination all too well. It is like a childhood friend I have grown up with.' (We Are APTN, 2016: online)

'Discrimination is unequal treatment of other human beings. Based on differences in gender, race or religion, I was forced to act like a boy. I was repeatedly told. 'You are not a girl, so act like a boy.' (We Are APTN, 2016: online)

Problem of Gender Labelling and Sexual Identity Category

Experiences of gender discrimination also occur in transgender's everyday lives. Postings and web archives showed that trans women experience discrimination and barriers to accessing government services because of the problem of gender markers and name titles exclusively used on official documents. The problem comes from the name title indicating gender. '*Nai'* (Mister) is a name-title prefix that indicates Thai people who are 'male'. Because the name is based on sex assigned at birth and indicates transgender identification as a 'man' (not a woman) on official documents, it usually causes problems for Thai transgender women. Legally, it is not permitted to

remove or omit the name title from official documents. It is also impossible to change from a male title to a female one. For example, in the case of issuing a Thai national identification card and passport, the Thai law requires LGBTQI people to use a gender marker from their biological sex (either male or female). There is gender diversity, and transgenders in particular are people who express gender identity opposite to their sex at birth. There is evidence of this problem in transgender's everyday lives. For example, a trans woman posted that her name title on a national ID card and Thai passport might cause stigma and discrimination because the 'Mr' title does not match their gender identity and performance;

> *'Yesterday, I went to issue a National ID card. At first sight, an officer thought I was a woman. After that, when he knew [from the government database] that I am a trans woman, he shouted. Oh…you are a man! He then called the others in the room to see me. He claimed that in the women's appearance, he could not accept and issue a national ID card to me. In order to issue my national ID card, I needed to change my gender appearance from a female outfit to wearing a man's shirt and tying up my hair to look like a man'* (Nada, a 40-year-old, Face-to-face interview, June 1, 2016)

Figure 19: Photos of a trans woman's passport and her female graduation gown

Source: Tang, A. (2017, January, 18). *FEATURE-In LGBT "paradise", Thai transgender activist breaks barriers to education.* Thomson Reuters Foundation News.

https://news.trust.org/item/20170118000557-b8ug4/

'In the case of travelling to some Southeast Asian countries, because my passport identify sex is Male, my name title is Mr (figure 19) and my photo and gender performance look like a female, an immigration officer may refuse me, as a transgender, to enter the country, for example, Brunei, a country known for its transphobia and homophobia. (Nada, a 40-year-old, Face-to-face interview, June 1, 2016)

During fieldwork, I participated in a Thai LGBTQI network conference. I also noted the following cases relevant to gender markers causing difficulties for Thai trans people:

1) In the case of losing their passport and national ID card, a Thai transgender may face a more complex problem in practice. A trans person cannot use a copy of a national ID card and passport in order to prove his/her identity. An officer may not be confident that he/she is the same person on the copy. In practice, a trans person needs to show other documents in order to identify her/his biological sex, for example, a birth certificate.

2) The gender performance of trans people contradicts their gender at birth. In the case of contacting a bank, transgenders' identities are verified strictly before conducting financial transactions. This may cause feelings of shame.

3) The gender marker is used before the name and surname of the physician's position. In the Thai language, a male physician is called '*Nai Pat*'. A female physician is called '*Pat Ying*'. '*Pat*' means physician. '*Nai*' means mister, while 'Ying' means female. Clearly, they are vocabularies used for the categorization of sexual identity. These vocabularies may make it difficult for some physicians who are trans people. For example, a trans (man/woman) physician may be embarrassed to identify himself/herself in a manner that does not relate to his/her sex at birth. In practice, the vocabulary may make patients confused about the gender identity of trans physicians.

Discrimination against Trans People in Employment

When trans people need to apply for a job, they have often been refused because of their gender marker. Such incidents have forced LGBTQI activists to challenge the Thai law on gender recognition. One story of a trans woman on a YouTube video (Thai Transgender Alliance ThaiTGA,

2019) showed the difficulty a trans woman faced. She had been forced to be enlisted as a male soldier because of her title as Mister, which prevented her from volunteering to be a female soldier despite her being female. She was eventually declined on the recruiting day by the head of recruitment, with the reason that '**it could possibly cause disturbance within the organisation**'.

> *A trans woman*: You…does it [breast] look flatter now? [she tied her breast with a chest binding]
> *Her boyfriend*: Yeah, maybe…but your boobs are not that big anyway, right..[he laughed]
> *A trans woman*: I think it is still not flat enough.
> *Her boyfriend*: You still have to take off your shirt for them to check anyway.
> *A trans woman*: I still prefer it to look flat. I can just take it off when I am there.
> *Her boyfriend*: Trust me, they will still know.
> *A trans woman*: If you do not help, just stop interfering and complaining.
> *Her boyfriend*: I just do not understand why you make a big deal about it.
> *A trans woman*: It is my business! Everyone has their own passion for doing something or being something.
> *Her boyfriend*: By the way, have you prepared the documents?
> *A trans woman*: Yes, I did.
> *Her boyfriend*: By the way, how do you look on your ID card?
> *A trans woman*: Oh shit! I still look like a girl on the card.
> *Her boyfriend*: What would you do next then?
> *A trans woman*: I do not know. Help me think. Shit! People who want to volunteer to be, are not allowed to be. But people, who do not want to be, are forced to draw a ballot. I am eligible for the required certificates and all that.
> *Her boyfriend*: Why do you not volunteer to be a female soldier then?
> *A trans woman*: If I was allowed to do so, I would have done that already. Why would I have to waste my time being concerned about my boobs now? All I need is that, as Miss.
> *Her boyfriend*: So… use a correction pen to remove your title on the ID card copy and change it to Miss.
> *A trans woman*: Are you crazy? Just leave it like that. I do not give a shit. I will go now [she is wearing men's clothes]. Can you think of other ways to solve this problem, then? I could be more hopeful than this if my title could be changed to Miss.
> *Her boyfriend*: Oh shit…all the guys will be scared of being fooled, right? It is not easy to do that. It is hard to spot the difference.
> *A trans woman*: You cannot spot me? Fuck!
> *Her boyfriend*: I'm just saying in general. Are you angry?
> *A trans woman*: This is nonsense. Have I ever fooled you?

According to a World Bank report (2018: 2), Thai transgenders are the most discriminated group among LGBTQI people at the workplace. Sixty per cent of transgender people report discrimination in employment. The information reflects the number of postings and topics in digital media that I collected during the fieldwork. They show that transgender women have frequently facedjob discrimination. Most trans people who applied for jobs were rejected. The story of a transgender woman who posted her experience of job rejection on a Facebook page reflects the

gender bias and discrimination against trans people. The case studies below all reveal job discrimination against trans women.

Case 1: an anonymous trans woman

'I am narrating an experience of a job interview at a company…A female officer brought me and those who were candidates to sit in front of an interview room. The female officer called a woman and me into an interview room. She told the woman to sit down but told me to stand. She asked me with an unfriendly voice to introduce my name but softly asked the woman. After the interview ended, I waited outside the room, and there was a telephone call. I heard them mention me to others (on the phone line) that they did not accept and recruit transgender in the job position. They also said trans people made the organisation's image bad! Everyone in the room was puzzled. Of course, I was rejected to be an officer. It was clear in that situation that the job rejection was based on my transgender identity.'

Case 2 Phakjira

Phakjira applied and was hired for a sales administrative officer position with a laboratory equipment company Sartorius (Thailand) Co. Ltd., on 5 June 2007. The employment contract was drawn on the same day, indicating 9 July 2007 as the starting date of employment and THB 18,000 as the monthly salary. On 5 July 2007, Phakjira received a telephone call from a Sartorius (Thailand) employee informing her that the company would like to cancel the employment contract because the regional office in Hong Kong had disapproved of the hiring because Phakjira cross-dressed as a woman. (Extracted from: Suriyasarn 2014: 54)

The stories of these trans women were similar to the story of *Kath*, a transgender story about employment discrimination which topped the posting and sharing during my fieldwork period. Kath is a transgender woman who was rejected from becoming a lecturer at a university. The faculty

approved her academic qualifications, but a university committee refused to hire her because of her inappropriate posting of a photo of a penis-shaped tube lipstick on her Instagram. The university claimed that the posting might affect the university's image and indicated that she would not be a 'good' lecturer. However, she suspected that the real reason was based on her trans identity. She vowed to take her case to court. Although the court said the case was not about gender bias and sexuality, it overruled the university's decision in March 2018 and ordered the university to hire her as a lecturer.

Discrimination against Trans People in Education

As introduction to this section, here is a conversation between a Thai trans woman and her mother in a YouTube video (Thai Transgender Alliance ThaiTGA, 2019);

> ***A trans woman was making a voice call****: The photo I submitted for declaring the completion of my graduation has been disapproved. They told me that I must have a short haircut if I am in a graduation gown. But I am not the one who chooses to be in the clothes.*
> ***A mom****: How is your work? How many months have you worked there?*
> ***A trans woman:*** *Four months already, mom. I think it is quite OK. It is just tiring sometimes.*
> ***A mom****: Good. Have you informed them yet that you will take leave to join the graduation ceremony?*
> ***A trans woman****: … [she silenced]*
> ***A mom****: So…did you forget to tell them?*
> ***A trans woman****: I am quite busy at the moment, mom.*
> ***A mom****: About the leave, I think it will be good if you let them know in advance. You know? One more thing, did you rent a gown? I do not see you doing anything yet. I think if your dad was still here, he would probably prepare a nice suit for taking a photo with you at the ceremony by now already.*
> ***A trans woman****: Mom, why do you want me to join the graduation ceremony?*
> ***A mom****: Hmm…or you do not want to join the graduation ceremony?*
> ***A trans woman****: No, mom. Everyone wants to join the ceremony.*
> ***A mom****: I think it depends on your decision.*
> ***A trans woman****: Actually, I wish I could make a decision for this…*

> *'I am regular, but I have to find someone to tell that I am irregular for wearing clothes that suit me. I decided not to join the graduation ceremony because I do not want to be judged by a doctor as having a '**gender identity disorder**' condition.*

Gender markers and name titles do not only affect a transgender's employment opportunities and experiences, but also represent barriers for transgender students. Here I recount the story of a

transgender research participant who suffered from heterosexual normative practices in the education system.

In August 2016, this student was due to graduate with a bachelor's degree. However, the university could not issue her certificate because she submitted a photo in which she resembled a woman, while her national ID card and passport indicated that her sex is 'male' and her name title is 'Mr'. She refused to take a new photo in a male graduation gown and gave the reason that her gender identity is 'female', requesting the university to issue her a certificate on the basis of her 'real' gender identity. In December 2016, her university finally approved her request. Nada's case is an example of discrimination in the Thai education system, and she was fortunate that her experience of discrimination was successfully resolved.

However, there are some Thai trans women who are still suffering from the problem. There is a recent case of Thai trans students who faced transphobic comments and were discriminated against by a lecturer at the Faculty of Education at a university. Students in the class collected and recorded the verbal sexual discrimination against gay men and transgender by the lecturer in the classroom, and these were communicated in an article on a website (Nisit Review 2019). The story was shared and widely criticised in the online world. These are some examples of the lecturer's anti-trans attitude shared in the classroom;:

> *'Being transgender is like being an insane person.'*
>
> *'It is good enough that the Faculty of Education's committee allowed trans students to study instead of sending them to an asylum.'*
>
> *'Feminine gay men and trans women students should not study at the university; they have to improve themselves [by not being gay or trans people].'*
>
> *'Transgenderism is madness and insanity.'*
>
> *'The faculty aims to produce teachers, but trans students should not be a teacher. If a student learns and is taught by a trans teacher, he/she will copy a trans teacher's personality as his/her role model. Finally, he/she will become a [sexual] deviant.'*
>
> *'A teacher in school must be a role model. Trans people and gay men are unable to be teachers because they are abnormal and have mental illnesses. They need to be treated in a mental hospital.'*

Clearly, the influence of an 'old school' psychological concept – the view of homosexuality and transgender as a mental disorder - is reflected in the lecturer's attitude. It also creates a practice

of gender discrimination against trans students (Jiraphat). In 2018, the Board of Administration at the faculty rejected a student's request to wear a female student uniform in class and examinations as a result of her gender identity and ordered her to wear a male student uniform that complied with her sex at birth. The cases of Jiraphat and Nada echo transphobia in Thai society and the discrimination and struggles in daily life that many Thai trans have faced. These trans stories stand in stark contrast to the touristic image of the country — 'Thailand: The Land of the Ladyboy.'

Discrimination against Trans People in Healthcare

When trans women use healthcare services, such as public health facilities and private and government hospitals, they have different experiences from straight men and women. They are treated quite differently and not of the same standard. There have been experiences of discrimination against transgender in healthcare settings. Trans people reflected on their experiences of discrimination on YouTube (We Are APTN, 2016):

> *'When I walk into hospitals, I was greeted with a curious stare from nurses and fellow patients. I feel embarrassed and ashamed whenever they call me, starting with 'Mr'. Medical professionals also ask questions which are personal, such as 'Do you like men or women?' 'When did you realise that you are a trans woman?' 'What operations have you done?' (We Are APTN, 2016:online)*

> *'When I seek medical service, especially HIV testing, the discrimination from health providers is not usually explicitly stated, but through subtle expressions of judgement and disapproval'. As a result, we are not allowed to donate blood, even though it is voluntary.' (We Are APTN, 2016:online)*

> *'A doctor suspected that I could have a uterus anomaly, so I was required to have an ultrasound scan. When I went for the scan, the nurse in charge looked at my patient file and ordered me to use the women's changing room.' (We Are APTN, 2016: online)*

> *'I had a fever and needed hospitalisation, but there were only two wards, male and female. My mother and I had to opt for a single inpatient single room because I would feel very uncomfortable in the male ward, and I was not allowed to stay in the female ward. (We Are APTN, 2016: online)*

The transgender experiences above show binary thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality. The two-sex system has been framed based on biological sex or genitals — male and female – and in Thai society this remains the main factor for incidences of discrimination in the healthcare service. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding on the part of healthcare providers with regards to transgender needs in the healthcare system. Gender labelling, sexual categorisation and

stereotyping are problems and barriers for trans people in terms of accessing medical care and services. Discrimination against trans people in healthcare services may make trans people feel uncomfortable and helpless because, when they are in a medical facility, it is difficult to negotiate with the power held by doctors and the medical industry.

Verbal Prejudice and Discrimination against Trans People

Bullying against LGBTQI people forms another part of homophobia and transphobia. Most LGBTQI people have experienced physical and verbal bullying, especially in their childhood. The following life experiences of trans women and a trans man reveal how they have suffered from verbal and physical bullying.

<u>**Trans women's experiences**</u>

'When I studied in high school, there were a few male classmates. I was ordered by a teacher to sit separately from other students in the classroom. A teacher then said she/he did not want to have a trans student in her/his class. She/he thought that separating me from female students could change my transgender identity [to be a 'normal' male student]. I sat and studied separately from my female classmates during a 3-year period of study. I was so stressed and started to miss many classes. I had never questioned my trans identity, but that situation made me question myself: 'Am I abnormal?' Thailand is not a society where physical violence is carried out against LGBTQI people, but violence takes various forms. It is concealed and is embedded in our [LGBTQI people] everyday life. For instance, a bullying experience in my childhood reflected verbal violence and prejudice against transgender in Thai society. Its effect can make trans people vulnerable and marginalise them.' (Face-to-face informal conversation)

'I wanted to join in a girl's activity, but girls would not let me in because it is a 'girl-only' play. So, I tried to mingle with the boys, but they would not let me in either. They called me names like 'sissy'. (Nada, a 40-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 1, 2016)

<u>**A trans man's experience**</u>

'When I was in a unisex school, some male friends asked me 'you are a girl; why do you want to be a boy?' Someone also said, 'if you are flirted with by a boy, you will love him and can surely change from a tomboy to a girl.' A boy hit me hard and then said repeatedly, 'Do you want to be a boy?' At that time, I thought, was it OK that someone used a violent act against me? …My everyday life has been monitored by masculinity. Whenever I act manly, I have been blamed that I was so rude. I did not know what the reason was. At that moment, I was in trouble with my gender identity. It made me sad, cry, and asked myself why I had to behave within the framework of masculinity. Being a trans man does not mean that I have to perform as a man does.

My childhood experience reflected discrimination and prejudice against a trans man. It is both verbal and physical bullying. Bullying is considered a funny and normal matter, but it should not be like that.' (Tom, a 42-year-old, face-to-face interview, June 18, 2016)

Internet technology supports LGBTQI communities in expressing their identity. In contrast, it may also be harmful to LGBTQI people who have been confronted with a new type of bullying and violence in online contexts. The emergence of social media has given birth to the term '**cyberbullying**'. It is aggressive behaviour using digital devices on the Internet and mobile phone. Offline and online bullying are linked, but cyberbullying is unique and different from traditional bullying because of anonymity, free access, and rapid spreading. The type of bullying also may include and refer to hate speech against trans people through social media.

Facebook postings and comments

Figure 20: Verbal harassment against a trans woman on a Facebook posting

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

During fieldwork between June to July 2016, I observed social media and found that there were many incidences of hate speech, online harassment, and negative comments in which members posted, shared and commented on topics/experiences on LGBTQI social media communities and different social media platforms. The anti-trans people hate speech and negative comments have mostly relied on fundamentals of religions, social norms and a stereotype about transgender on non-Thai LGBTQI Facebook pages. For instance:

'Being trans violates the principle of Islam and may destroy Islamic morals. We will curse trans people who pretend to be male and female'.

'A person was born to be a third sex [trans people]. She/he is considered as being a consequence of misdeeds and sin in her/his previous life [Buddhist concept of karma]. (A YouTube Chanel)

'I do not want to discriminate…but if you want to be a transgender, you need to be beautiful and pass the operation of sex reassignment surgery. I think you also need to have breasts and a vagina. It is horrible to see an ugly trans woman with a beard!' (A YouTube Chanel)

YouTube videos

Figure 21: YouTube video screenshots about Transgender from the Buddhist perspective

Source: The image was collected by the author during fieldwork between June and December 2016

These examples of social media postings and comments are a kind of transphobia and discrimination against LGBTQI communities. Online verbal abuse has the potential to provoke violence against trans people in the physical world. Transphobia has been learned from, and embedded in, religious beliefs.

The stories above reflect discrimination based on trans women's identity. Another case still relates to trans people, but it is the case of a trans identity or in Thai a term called '*Tom*'. The term is adapted from the English word 'tomboy'. *Tom* was assigned as a female at birth, but he identifies himself as a man in a female body. However, the fluidity of gender can be applied to *Tom*; he sometimes identifies himself as a lesbian. He usually dresses up in a man's suit and acts in a masculine manner. The story of a *Tom* is similar to cases of transgender women because they also were refused employment because of their gender performance.

Heteronormativity also creates a male-dominated society or patriarchy and reinforces gender binary and sexism in the social system. We can examine the gender oppression caused by heteronormativity through online platforms, especially hate speech online. From the feminist perspective, men do not only oppress women, but men also oppress and resist trans identity. The example of the thread (pantip.com, 2015: online) reflected that men believe in the gender binary, create stereotypes and discriminate against *Tom,* as shown in an interactive argument between a *Tom* and a man on a web forum.

> **A man wrote**: *If you cannot get a woman pregnant, how could you call yourself a man? Tom is a man in a female body. He is so aggressive and acts rudely. He tries to be a man, but he has not got a penis. He uses a sex toy to arouse Dee [Tom's sexual partner]. It is not a natural way like a straight man does with a woman. In his childhood, he resisted and hated men; when he grew up, the resistance increased. It reflected in his action. He spoke loudly without a polite tone of voice to make him masculine. The rich Tom usually thinks he is more powerful than anyone in the world. In middle-age, he acts softer and does not act aggressive anymore because he was broken hearted because of a woman who married a straight man...The world has only two sexes.*

> **A Tom replied**: *This is an example of transphobia, bias, and stereotype about Tom. You had a prejudice against us and misunderstood Tom. You are a narrow-minded person and need to open your mind. You should accept gender diversity in the world. There are more than male and female. Toms are lesbian. They do not try to be a straight man even though they dress up like a man.*

Discrimination against LGBTQI people in Thai mass media

Some Thai mass media have presented LGBTQI news concerning gender discrimination and prejudice. Spectrum, a digital media for Thai LGBTQI, mentioned that most Thai mass media had presented news and information about LGBTQI people without knowledge and understanding. Thai mass media have not developed sensitivity to gender/sexual issues. LGBTQI people have been represented in the news as looking like strangers and abnormal in Thai society. Headlines of news have represented LGBTQI as stigmatised people. LGBTQI have been mentioned as a second-class sex after straight men and women. From my observation, many headlines in Thai mass media have often showed prejudice against LGBTQI. For example, recent news mentioned in a headline that the 'Ministry of education ordered to observe the behaviour of teachers who are **sexual deviants**.' The headline and news create a gender stereotype of LGBTQI people as abnormal compared to the sexual norm. Gay news usually represents gays as erotic persons in Thai society, for example, a story of a gay man with HIV who had **sex without a condom**, and who recorded and **sold sex video** clips on Twitter. Thai mass media have often used LGBTQI sexual identity in connection with social problems, such as crime. Furthermore, Thai mass media have also used LGBTQI sexual issues with the aim of selling news, and increasing the number of likings and sharing on social media.

Discrimination amongst Thai LGBTQI People

Since I have addressed a research question about gender and sexual orientation discrimination, I have been focused on narratives and stories about discrimination against LGBTQI. However, one day during fieldwork, I found a controversial issue related to a winner of Mr Gay World Thailand 2018, an effeminate gay in the LGBTQI Facebook community. LGBTQI communities criticised his effeminate performance and claimed that he would not win the contest because of his effeminacy. From an outsider's perspective, LGBTQI is usually discriminated against by straights; however, on the basis of my fieldwork data and this event, I realised that there has also been discrimination amongst Thai LGBTQI. This form of discrimination would be called '**double discrimination**'. It is a critical issue when straights discriminate against and display prejudice against LGBTQI; at the same time, LGBTQI communities have also been involved in discriminating

against LGBTQI individuals. The following finding reveals that double discrimination is based on an intersection of gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and gender performance.

As I mentioned above, effeminate gay men may be discriminated against by some Thai gay men who represent more masculine characteristics. I still believe that masculinity is influential in Thai gay culture. Especially, for finding a partner, a feminine personality is unpleasant; in contrast, having an athletic performance, a muscular body, and a masculine appearance are important characteristics of an ideal partner and lover for seekers of love on the Internet. As observed on a Twitter profile and collected tweets, some keywords of tweets for dating or finding a sexual partner represented the idea of an intersection of gender, sexuality, and gender performance; for example, the Thai terms '*Oek Saaw*' (look like a girly gay) and '*Man-man'* (more masculine look). As a research participant said, in the physical world, he defines his sexual identity as an effeminate gay but prefers the sexual position as a bottom. On dating apps, for a sexual purpose, he redefines his gender identity and sexual position as a masculine gay and a versatile gay. If he expresses a sexual identity as a bottom, most gay men may associate him with being an effeminate gay; the result would be that nobody becomes interested in him. Versatility can match with both a top and a bottom. However, when he chatted and struck up a relationship with someone he told them that he was a top gay man. Therefore, because of an ability to construct an ideal identity, sometimes, the sexual identity presented on the Internet may differ from an "actual" sexual identity. In addition, because of the difficulty of coming out in the physical world, some of the sexual positions are rarely expressed in the physical world because of the risk of being discriminated against (such as she-male or bisexual men). On the one hand, the social arena privileges masculine gay performances, and the power of digital technology can conceal femininity. On the other hand, it reveals a diversity of sexual orientations by expressing and representing some sexual positions and categories outside mainstream gay sexuality – top, bottom, and versatile.

In conclusion, I would argue that being LGBTQI in Thailand is a struggle and challenge. An image of an LGBTQI-friendly country should be reconsidered in light of the LGBTQI experiences and stories shared in this chapter. Transgender stories here also challenge the western biological concept and theory of gender identity and the binary categories of gender and sexuality by showing

that trans people are not included in the biological opposition of male-female. Thai society has viewed gender and sexuality as a biological binary – male and female. This is clear in the case of *Tom*, *Kathoey* and trans people who perform in opposition to their sex at birth. Thai society opens some spaces for the existence of transgender, but the society is still a 'two-sex system' which has been created by the hegemony of heterosexual norms and binary ideology over LGBTQI people. LGBTQI people in Thailand have still faced discrimination in every aspect of life.

In conclusion, the experiences and stories of LGBTQI presented in the chapter are empirical incidents which confirm the argument I put forward at the beginning of the chapter – Thailand is not an LGBTQI paradise nor is it the land of transgender beauty queens. Actually, the country's image is a false representation of LGBTQI in Thailand. It is still full of discrimination and prejudice based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Furthermore, sexual matters and sexuality discussions are still limited and sometimes considered as taboo in terms of public discussion. Although being transgender and LGBTQI are socially accepted, gender and sexual discrimination occur within social structures, such as education and the country's economy. Trans students face bullying and discrimination at school and university. Trans people and Tomboy experience discrimination in employment. They are denied being hired for a job at the workplace because their gender performances do not match gender norms and sex at birth. Heteronormativity in the form of transphobia is the main reason for the creation of prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQI. In other words, gender and sexual discrimination are the practice of heteronormativity which is embedded in Thai social institutions.

My fieldwork experiences based on reading and listening to Thai trans people's voices have led me to reflect on my own experience. As a Thai gay man, I have never faced difficulty based on sexual identity. Contrary to transgender, gay men perform and express themselves in accordance with their biological sex. I have never faced a problem with gender markers. The data from fieldwork has proven to me that transgenders are more discriminated against than lesbians, bisexuals and gays. Before I learnt about transgenders' experiences, I was not aware of the problem of being transgender in Thailand. I now understand that heteronormativity, sexual category and gender binary have established gender/sexual prejudice and discrimination in trans people's lives. Although I am

not a trans person myself who has faced this problem, I always support any positive changes for my trans friends and for gender equality.

Chapter 5 Reflections, Discussion, and Conclusion

The thesis has combined digital ethnography and autoethnography as research methodologies. The research focused on **online identity, sexual identity, sexuality online, gender discrimination, and lived experiences** of Thai gay men and trans people. The online field sites of the research were mainstream social media platforms, and popular gay mobile dating apps, namely, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Grindr, Jack'd, Blued and Hornet. In this final chapter, I will discuss the issues raised in each of the chapters and reflect on my experience as an autoethnographer.

The key research questions that the thesis sought to address were: (1) How do Thai gay men and transgender people use social media to construct and present themselves? (2) How do Thai gay men use social media and mobile apps in finding sexual partners and performing sexual matters? (3) How do Thai transgender people use social media to express gender identity and narrate experiences of gender discrimination? In order to answer each of these questions, I organized the research findings into three chapters: (1) the construction and presentation of online identity of Thai gay men and transgenders on Facebook and Twitter; (2) sexuality and sexual identity of Thai gay men on gay dating apps and Twitter; (3) stories of prejudice and discrimination against Thai transgenders through digital platforms. In addition to a summary and discussion, the chapters also include reflections on the relevant theoretical and methodological approach, significant research findings and my presence in the research.

1. Reflection on Theoretical Approach and Relevant Literature

In Chapters One and Two, I began with what motivated the research, including my own experiences and, thus, provided a rationale for the choice of topic and the mix of autoethnography with digital ethnography. Chapter One also included the social and cultural

context of gender, sexuality and queerness in Thailand based on a review of relevant literature. The aim of this introduction was to provide a social background for readers who are not familiar with LGBT studies in Thailand. The literature review revealed that the gender and sexual system in Thailand have been diverse and fluid. I argued that sexual identity and sexuality in the Thai context are different from the western concept. I provided examples of gay and transgender identity in Thailand in order to support my argument on the uniqueness of Thai LGBTQI identity. There are three-sexes (male, female and transgender) and four-sexualities (female-heterosexual, female-homosexual, male-heterosexual, and male-homosexual) in the Thai social context. The sexual and gender system is problematic for the social life of Thai transgenders because transgender and feminine gay men are positioned on the lowest rung of the sexual hierarchy, and referred to asthe '*third sex/gender*'. The chapter also explored the globalisation of sexuality. I have agreed that globalisation has affected LGBTQI identity and sexuality in Thailand, but it has not influended the whole of the LGBTQI sexual system.

Community, identity, sexuality, and LGBTQI activism are research areas in digital and queer studies. There have been studies on these issues since 1990. The landscape of research areas has not changed much, but online platforms of digital queer studies have experienced change because of the development of digital technology, for example, the shift from web 1.0 to web 3.0. As mobile technology has influenced people's daily lives, LGBTQI introduced mobile technology, especially smartphone and mobile applications, which have now become an integral part of their daily lives. The most recent research on queer and digital technology has focused on this use.   However, these studies have usually been conducted in Australia and Western societies. Only a few such studies have been conducted in South East Asian society, especially in Thailand. This research is intended to fill the gaps in the knowledge and discuss the similarities and differences of digital queerness in the

west, Australia, and Asia. However, my research found that Thai LGBTQI identity and sexuality are unique and differs from Western and Australian LGBTQI.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed various theories, to provide a theoretical context for the thesis. I used LGBT studies and queer theory as the theoretical framework of the thesis and with these situated myself in the research. Mostly these theories are drawn from sexuality studies in Sociology. In short, I reviewed debates on essentialism and social constructionism before going into the details of LGBT studies and queer theory. In order to support and strengthen LGBT and queer studies, the theoretical review and debate aim to point out an outdated aspect and weakness of using classical social theory and the essentialist view on sexuality studies. The essentialist's view on gender and sexuality has mostly influenced Thai academics since the 1990s, especially Thais' LGBT studies on sexual identity. The influence has also expanded to Thais' views about LGBTQI people; for example, some Thai people still call LGBTQI people 'homosexual' instead of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans. I discussed the link between essentialism and social constructionism in Chapter Two; for example, Thai people's perspective on transgender identity. As many scholars write about queer theory, I focused on queer theory influenced by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Sedgwick and used the key concept: heteronormativity.

As mentioned already, LGBTQI studies and queer theory are the selected theoretical approaches for the thesis. However, my theoretical review points out that there are some conceptual tensions and incompatibilities between LGBTQI studies and queer studies, especially in the category of sexual identity. LGBTQI studies have attempted to categorise gender and sexual identity; in contrast, queer studies has rejected the categorisation of gender and sexual identity. Queer theorists claim that sexual identity is not stable but fluid. The category of identity is problematic and may create a binary opposition on sex and gender. In the thesis, prior to the fieldwork, I used only queer theory as a theoretical framework for the thesis. However, after completing the fieldwork, I could not resist the

sexual/gender categories which are embedded in the Thai LGBTQI social context. There were many examples from fieldwork data that make me reflect on the fact that queer theory may not be applicable to researching Thai LGBTQI identity and sexuality.

Firstly, most of the participants identified themselves as gay men, bisexual men, and trans women. None of my participants identified themselves as 'queer'. Secondly, when I participated in the ILGA world conference 2016 which was organised in Bangkok, I noted that many topics in the conference were aimed at constructing sexual taxonomies. Thirdly, in my perspective and based on observations from the empirical research, the Thai LGBTQI social movement for LGBTQI rights is now a part of reproducing the heterosexual norm, for example, the attempt to formulate the law for same-sex marriage in Thailand. Fourthly, binary thinking of sex, gender, and sexuality have influenced Thai LGBTQI life.

Using gay dating apps and listening to my informants' stories has taught me a great deal. Due to the changing role of the Internet and the way it is used, it is possible to talk on the Internet through mobile phones today. In particular, using apps to chat and get to know each other is much faster than before. Gay lovers and partners are more open about their feelings and thoughts. Mobile applications bring gay men together and gay dating applications are fully recognised as digital/new media that exist on the Internet. This has come to be seen as an option in everyday life. It is also a way to communicate in private and public places. It has content and space for communication. As an online chatting application, it can satisfy one's sexual and emotional needs. However, the use of gay dating applications is seen as inappropriate. It is the source of considerable hatred in society. As a result, related organisations try to control, manipulate, and keep an eye on it, but the number of gay dating apps users is still likely to increase regardless of these efforts.

This is the "new digital society for gay guys," in my opinion. Having a specialised chat application is a technology that satisfies societal needs, which is acceptable. Dating has existed for centuries. But in this digital age, dating apps have helped gay men to overcome

their loneliness, making them so popular. It can be observed that the dating applications that I researched have been developed into several forms and multi-purposes.

In the past, it was quite difficult to determine which individuals shared the same sexual orientation. However, as a result of the emergence of dating apps and the goal of locating gay friends with whom to converse, it has become increasingly difficult to locate gay friends. Instead, the findings revealed that the application was utilised for dating and sex, rather than establishing friends. Having sex for one night, which was once uncommon in Thai culture, is now a common matter. Swipe the screen and tap the heart icon to transmit if your opponent also taps the heart icon. It is also considered common to finish with mutual attraction and overnight sex . Apps for dating have normalised sexuality in society. Many of my informants told me that dating applications enable them to find another world that accepts their LGBTQI identity because not all LGBTQI are acceptable, even though society is becoming more accepting of them. Today, however, LGBTQI identification is revealed through "intermediaries" in the form of mobile applications.

From my fieldwork experiences, one of the first few questions gay men asked me was '*Are you top or bottom?*' In Thai gay culture, top is identified as a man and bottom is identified as a woman. Although I answered that 'I am versatile', they often followed this with the question : '*Are you versatile bottom or versatile top?*' In this sense, arguably, the Thai gay sexual position is still connected to binary thinking of sexuality, sex and gender, sexual categories, and the heterosexual concept.

Moreover, there are subcategories of transgender which identify as trans 'men' and trans 'women'. Clearly, Thai LGBTQI culture is not 'queer' enough. These examples made me realise that queer theory is limited. Queer theory may be useful in terms of a critique of some social theories and social phenomenon but, at the same time, it might be a utopian ideology for Thai LGBTQI culture. By this I mean that Thai LGBTQI people still identify themselves as gay men, lesbian, trans women and trans men in order to tell other people

about their sexual/gender identity and sexuality. In other words, LGBTQI people try to understand what their gender/sexual identities and sexualities are. In summary, this part of my ethnographic research underscores how gay men and trans people are thinking when it comes to sexual categories and, notably, the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman among Thai LGBTQI communities which remain in tension with the key aims of queer theory. Later, I decided to add LGBT studies as a theoretical approach with queer theory – LGBT studies and queer theory.

2. Reflection on Methodological Approach, Ethical Issues, and Fieldwork Experiences

In Chapter Three, I addressed key issues and debates on methodological use: digital ethnography and autoethnography. Apart from focusing on research issues, the title of the thesis also reflects the methodological use. I call the combination of autoethnographic research and using digital methods as '*digital autoethnography*'. In other words, it is a combination of the computational approach and ethnographic approach in digital social research. The thesis drew on digital methods, digitised methods, and conventional research methods in order to gain insights.

The queer theoretical concept of binary opposition has also influenced the methodological use. I have argued that the binary thinking in social research should be reconsidered, for example, the online-offline method and the physical-online field site. I have proposed 'blended' methods rather than using only digital or traditional methods in researching social life online. My fieldwork experiences and research findings suggest that there are blurred boundaries between the online and offline. It is therefore not helpful to distinguish between using only the online method, the digital method, and the offline research method to collect data on social media platforms, but rather to ensure that all research methods can be seamlessly integrated.

Autoethnography shares key concepts of queer theory, for example, reflexivity and fluidity. I wrote the thesis in a reflexive form of writing, using my own personal experience and participants' experiences as materials in order to present the research findings. I attempted to use many quotes to reflect LGBTQI participants' voices rather than rewriting or paraphrasing. The use of quotations, for example, was better than summarising data in the case of Thai trans people' vulnerabilities to gender discrimination in Chapter Six. It is an effective style of data presentation in queer autoethnography. In my view, ethnographic research can be a useful methodology to support a queer theoretical perspective, especially autoethnography. The research areas of the thesis are the use of queer theory, queer methods and digital studies.

Here, I would like to reflect on the methodological approach, ethical issues, and fieldwork experiences. Firstly, I am of the opinion that applying a digital autoethnographic approach with my experiences as a social media user and gay dating apps user might open up a new research approach in digital social research and queer studies. I hope the thesis would fulfil and contribute to the fiekd of study.

Secondly, I feel that the use of autoethnography as a queer methodology challenges conventional social research and the form of traditional ethnographic writing. In principle, the queer method rejects fixed sexual identity and definitions of sexual identity. Queer thinking can be understood to argue against identifying research participants as gay, lesbian and transgender. However, I feel that we may have to identify the sexual identity of research participants. My fieldwork data revealed that each research participant identified themselves according to sexual/gender categories, for example, being gay men, bisexual men, and trans women. If I had applied the idea of unidentified research participants' gender/sexual identity, it would have been problematic for my research.

Thirdly, using the digital ethnographic approach challenges traditional ethnography. It creates an opportunity to carry out research in multi-field sites rather than remaining fixed

to a single field, for example, a remote village, as traditional ethnographers often do. It can be a 'fieldwork conducted from home/workplace/café' where an ethnographer is able to access to the Internet and be 'online'. However, carrying out digital research has limitations, for example, the risk of losing research participants as well as online data. I lost some gay men research participants on Twitter. This was because they created accounts for posting adult content/live sexual videos and these activities violated Twitter rules and policy. Hence, the accounts were suspended by Twitter administrators. Where possible, I resolved this by contacting them through other online communication channels such as using other messenger applications instead of Twitter direct messages only. Moreover, for online data (e.g. tweets, posts), there was a possibility that the data might be deleted by users or social media administrators. I resolved this problem by collecting and backing up data as soon as I saw any tweets or posts on social media feeds I followed.

Fourthly, throughout the research period, I was questioned about online research ethics by Thai academics and, on one occasion, by a Thai PhD student. When I presented a paper about digital ethnography at a Thai national academic conference in July 2019, one Thai academic claimed my research was unethical because I used some data without permission from digital platforms. I replied that I did the best I could to gain permission to use data, but I could not do so in all cases[5]. There is a debate on ethics in digital research that if the digital data are available in the public domain (e.g. public posts/tweets, public profiles), a researcher can use the data without notification or gaining permission (Sveningsson, 2004) . Public accessibility of any digital platforms can be used as a confirmation that users agree to the use of their postings. This could apply to some digital methods because it is impossible to gain permissions from 'all' accounts we scrap. In my case, as well as scraping twitter sociograms, I sent messages through direct messages to Twitter users in order to gain their permissions to be able to use their tweets in my thesis.

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[5] For more details, please see research ethics section in Chapter Three.

However, some of them did not reply to me. At times, I was able to apply the offline ethical principles to the digital research. In practice, we are unable to apply and comply with the offline research ethics in the digital context. In this case, this would constitute an exception from the general ethical guidelines.

3. Reflections on Significant Research Findings

In Chapter Five, I addressed the question: how do Thai gay men and trans people use Facebook and Twitter to construct and present themselves? I introduced the chapter with a research hypotheses about the connection between online and offline identity. I put forward an argument based on my empirical research that there is no separation between real/offline and virtual/digital identity in the age of social media. My ethnographic research suggests that Thai gay men and transgender participants created online identities on social media platforms in order to present their offline identities. The most important part of the presentation of online identity is 'social interaction' through online communication, for example, reading social feeds, commenting, liking, and retweeting. Online interaction in LGBTQI groups on social media platforms is not only a regular activity, but it also opens up the opportunity to learn new perspectives about LGBTQI in the digital age.

The research findings also revealed that there are different forms of online identity in different types of social media. It depends on the features and functions of specific social media platforms. In my cases, the online identity created and presented on Facebook is quite different from Twitter. On Facebook, research participants presented themselves online in ways that were similar to offline identity, for example, stories from their everyday lives. In addition to their offline identity, some Thai gay men created and presented online identities that they were not able to express clearly in offline life, especially sexual matters.

In a similar manner to body image and physical appearances of our offline identity, in an online context, a user profile is a fundamental element of online identity. Most research

participants had 'single' online identities and used their real names on Facebook and Twitter in order to present their offline identities and authenticities. However, some gay men created 'multiple' online identities on Twitter to engage in sexual activities. In this case, in order to be able to express themselves freely, they created anonymous twitter profiles which were not able to be linked to their real names and real life. In summary, research results propose that, at least for now, it is not helpful to debate the separation of online and offline identity. Online and offline identity is a continuum, a performance, and fluid. My study does suggest, however, that there were some cases of online performances involving 'identity play.' This kind of identity is refereed to as the *'secret self'*.

For the data about the 'secret self', the term Thai gay men use for a form of sexual identity and to perform sexuality online, I followed the twitter accounts of Thai gay men in which they identify these accounts as 'secret selves'. I discovered that this type of online identity is created to present sexual matters which are suppressed by Thai society. As mentioned in Chapter Two, according to Foucault's concept of sexual repression, the creation of this type of online identity on Twitter is the 'explosion' of suppression which is created and controlled by Thai social morality and law. Some forms of sexual matters are illegal and are considered as immoral in Thai society. Smartphone and gay dating mobile applications have become technological tools for Thai gay men in finding a sexual partner and expressing sexual desire instead of using gay physical spaces. Some of the popular gay dating applications are used and installed on gay men's smartphones. Research findings of the thesis indicates that gay men use multiple gay dating apps in order to find sexual partners because specific applications have their own unique features. However, the most popular gay dating app for Thai gay men is Hornet which is a social media and social networking application among LGBTQI people, including gay men and lesbian women, Transgender and non-binary, which uses messaging conversations, photos, videos, and news about the LGBTQI community.

Additionally, I observed that there are multiple online identities because of the domination of masculine culture on gay dating apps and Twitter. It is also interesting to note that some gay men participants have been using dating apps for straights, for example Tinder, to find sexual partners. This suggests the need for more research on gay men's use of mobile dating applications for straight people. My empirical research findings also surprised me in that Thai gay men have used Twitter to find sexual partners and perform sexual matters even though it is not explicitly intended for this purpose. The representation of textual/digital/visual materials which were posted by some Thai gay men on Twitter can be mapped as issues of Thai gay sexual culture and sexuality offline, for example, chemsex, barebacking, promiscuous sexual behaviour, group sex, and online sex workers. These sexual matters are challenging Thai sexual norms and morality.

Thai transgender people use social media platforms to express gender identity and narrate live experiences about gender discrimination. Heteronormativity is a cause of gender discrimination and bias against transgender people. It is embedded in Thai social structure and institutions. Heteronormativity is also often connected to transphobia. While gay men, lesbian and bisexual individuals have faced sexual/gender discrimination, for example through religion and employment, Thai transgenders have suffered the most overt forms of discrimination from heterosexual attitudes. Gender discrimination often comes together with oppression, marginalisation and stigmatisation of transgenders. Stories of discrimination can be witnessed in a range of social institutions and settings, from employment and education, to healthcare and mass media. Online stories about the gender discrimination of Thai trans women clearly revealed such incidents. The research findings pointed out that the 'categorisation of sex/gender' and 'gender labelling' or 'gender marker' as 'Mister' represent major challenges in the lives of trans people, posing severe difficulties as well as discrimination/bias against Thai trans women. The name title Mister or '*Nai'* (in the Thai language) identifies them as men, not women and is required on official documents such as

national ID card and passport. Currently, Thai citizens are not allowed to remove or change it.

4. Self-Reflection

Instead of merely telling the stories of my personal experiences in the form of a conventional autobiography, the autoethnographic approach has allowed me to incorporate what I have learned from research participants and research findings. Ethnography aims to understand other cultures; while in contrast, the goal of autoethnography is to understand the researcher's own culture through 'self-reflection,' a dimension that queer methodology also supports. At the end of the research process, I have learned the following about the sexuality of gay men, LGBTQI identity, and queer culture in Thailand:

1) **Thai sexual culture and gay sexuality**. From the reported experiences of my Thai gay men participants, conversations with my gay friends, and data from fieldwork, I have gained new understandings and perspectives related to Thai gay culture andThai gayness in the digital era. In conversation with my close friends who have been using gay dating apps for finding sexual partners, unlike myself, they do not believe in monogamy and do not think that having multiple sexual partners is immoral. Nonetheless, religious taboos in Thai society stigmatise some gay men who do not conform to the rules and morality as 'a bad person' and 'deviant'. Sexual morality plays an important role in determining 'good sex' or 'bad sex', 'normal' or 'abnormal'. I have learned from them that we may not need to take sexual morality into account in order to reflect on sexual behaviours which differ from social norms.

Thai society has attempted to control and eliminate sexual behaviours which deviate from sexual norms. Sexual matters, such asonline sex workers or showing sexual intercourse, masturbation and pornography on Twitter and gay dating apps have been censored by the Thai government through Thailand's Computer-related Crime Act 2017.

Sexual content posted on social media is illegal. Although the sexual content I collected from Twitter was illegal, I have learned from my research participants' views that some gay men simply wanted to express and show their sexual desires online. There are limited physical gay spaces in Thailand such as gay saunas which allow the opportunity to express sexual desire.

      2) Thai transgender identity, gender bias and discrimination. Before emarking on the thesis, I used to think that Thai society has accepted transgender people. This is based on the reputation of Thailand in the world due to beauty pageant for transgender women. However, my thoughts on this matter have changed since I learned the stories of Thai transgenders which demonstrated such gender prejudice and discrimination. Unlike gays and lesbians, because their gender performances are contrasted with their sex at birth, they face various forms of gender bias and discrimination, for example, job discrimination, and the bullying of trans students in school and higher education. The research findings of Chapter Six recommended that Thai society should undertake practical actions such as formulating a law for Thai trans people to be able to change their name title with the goal of preventing discrimination and violence based on transgender identity.

5. Contribution to Knowledge and Society

In this section, I reflect on the broad contribution of my research to sociology and related fields. I hope the thesis will contribute to the knowledge across disciplines theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, the interdisciplinary approach demonstrates new ways of understanding the social phenomena across the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, sexuality studies, and digital media studies. Methodologically, I hope that the hybridisation between autoethnography (as a queer methodology) and 'digital autoethnography' serves as a new way of researching society.

More specifically, I would hope my research can serve as a foundation for understanding online identity and sexual matters of Thai LGBTQI. It draws attention to experiences of discrimination against Thai trans people. The collecting of LGBTQI experiences by using digital methods may challenge conventional social theory and method as well as criticise LGBT studies in Thailand. More importantly, I have found that using autoethnography is a powerful way to narrate my gay experiences while learning about other modes of LGBTQI identity and sexuality. Most LGBT studies have worked to highlight participants' worldviews, but they often ignore the researcher's self/voices in the research. The thesis is an attempt to construct and contribute knowledge based on my experiences as a member of the Thai LGBTQI community.

Queer research tends to incorporate LGBTQI voices/data into political issues for LGBTQI people and LGBTQI social movements. One of the goals of the thesis is to reveal stories and incidents of discrimination against Thai trans people, as featured in Chapter Six, which may support the LGBTQI rights and gender equality movement in Thailand. I hope that the thesis can assist in forging social changes to the Thai gender and sexuality system. Chapter Six also attempted to tackle, and thus contribute towards the elimination of, transphobia. Furthermore, another potential impact and outcome of the thesis would be the contribution of this data towards formulating social policy for LGBTQI in Thailand, in the form of, for example, the Gender Equality law and Civil Parnership Act.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

1) Digital queer studies in Thailand. Some LGBT/Queer studies have investigated the issue on traditional online media, such as websites and web forums. However, there is a scarcity of studies on Thai LGBTQI and popular social media platforms, for example, Twitter, Facebook, and dating apps. There is a need for more research on these areas and

exploration of other social media platforms, for example, the virtual world and online games in order to fill this gap in the knowledge.

2) **Understanding of other gender/sexual identities and sexualities.** The literature review on Thai LGBT studies suggests that there is ample knowledge from lesbian, gay and trans women studies but a lack of knowledge about bisexuality, intersex trans men, non-binary, and other alternative sexualities, for example, shemales and asexuality.

3) **Variety of issues on digital media and Thai LGBT/Queer studies.** Aside from issues of identity and sexuality online, more studies are needed on other issues which relate to digital studies, for example, online community, digital surveillance, digital culture and digital intimacy.

4) **Queer theory/methodology and digital social research.** There is a lack of usage of the queer theory and of the employing of queer methods in Thai LGBT/Queer studies on social media platforms. Using queer theory and methods on digital research could open new perspectives for a new area of research.

7. Scope and Limitations of the Thesis

1) **Research participants and content.** The research focused on Thai Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans experiences in the online identity and sexuality of Thai gay men. However, I discovered key insights from data collected from fieldwork. I subsequently refined the research questions and included the emerging issues/themes in Chapters Four to Six.

2) **Field site/research setting.** The thesis was based on multi-site online fieldwork. Online field sites included mainstream social media platforms and LGBTQI online communities, namely, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The gay dating applications were Grindr, Jack'd, Hornet, and Blued. The offline field site was Bangkok.

3) Timing. Due to the limitations of the Thai scholarship regulation, I needed to conduct six-month offline fieldwork between December 2017 to May 2018. However, I extended my focus to online fieldwork on social media platforms until July 2019. I was able to collect online data anywhere and anytime. For me, the online data has never ended (in comparison to offline fieldwork which requires us 'to be there'). Data from social media postings/tweets may continue to be collected, analysed, and written until the final draft of the thesis. I shall refer to this as **'never-ending fieldwork'.**

4) Generalisation. The thesis drew on qualitative research and avoided the problem of seeking to generalise the findings to the 'entire' population of Thai LGBTQI. In the thesis, the collected data and stories relate only to research participants involved in the thesis.

8. LGBT Studies and Queer Studies in Thailand

The final section of the thesis aims to use the queer theoretical perspective as a critical theory in order to discuss the research findings of LGBTQI identity and sexuality in Thai society. Queer theory has helped me to broadly analyse and open new perspectives in order to understand the politics of identity, social construction of identity and sexuality of Thai LGBTQI people and communities. However, some key ideas of queer theory are contrary to LGBTQI practice in Thailand.

In the thesis, I used the word 'queer' for several reasons. Firstly, it is used to refer to LGBTQI people. Secondly, it is used to challenge heterosexual thought and norms which lead to discrimination and prejudice against LGBTQI people. Thirdly, it is used as a verb in order to reflect and rethink about the usage of the term 'queer' in Thailand. Using a queer theoretical lens enables me to reveal the domination of heterosexual norms which are embedded in Thai social institutions and structure. Homophobia, transphobia, and effeminophobia stand at the core of gender discrimination and bias. The stories of gender discrimination against Thai transgenders and among the LGBTQI group in Chapter Five and

Chapter Six have led me to rethink how Thai society treats the identity of transgender people and effeminate gay men differently. The discrimination that exists between straight and LGBTQI people is a matter that may already be known, but a suprising empirical finding in Chapter Five revealed discrimination amongst the Thai LGBTQI group. The image we have, therefore, of the social movement for Thai LGBTQI groups may be more complicated than what it may seem. Thai LGBTQI groups are not as unified as we may think they are.

It is important to point out in the last section that the term 'queer' is used differently in the Thai social context. It is quite distorted from the original meaning in queer ideology. As I mentioned earlier, no individual research participants identified themselves as queer. Most participants also did not even know the word 'queer'. From my perspective and experience, the word 'queer' is limited to Thai academia.

Thai LGBTQI activists, familiar with the term, believe that some queer concepts are counterproductive for the LGBTQI social movement in Thailand because they fall into the category of the anti-sexual. In the work of LGBTQI activists, the categorisation of sexual and gender identity is seen to be important. Identifying a person as a gay man, lesbian, and transgender is more concrete for Thai LGBTQI in order to formulate social policy. Queer in the Thai context is translated as a synonym of 'sexual diversity.' There are more than twenty words that can be used to refer to LGBTQI identity in Thailand.

Moreover, Thai trans people and gay men still find themselves stuck in the '*pitfall of sexual binary'*. Interestingly, these social practices, found in my research findings and observation about Thai LGBTQI identity and sexuality, are contrary to the queer's position on gender and sexual categories as well as the rejection of the gender/sexual binary. Thai LGBTQI culture remains unable to escape from these heterosexual norms. Heterosexual culture, exemplified by monogamy and marriage equality, has been constructed and merged with Thai LGBTQI culture and individual identity.

This research reflects LGBT studies and queer studies in Thailand. It raises the question of how the academics who conduct the studies can apply that, and how to understand the word 'queer' as follows:

1) The fact that academics use the queer studies that occurred in Western society outside of Western society leads to controversies. We have to realise that the context of queer has different in societies. In Thai society, it is necessary to apply and interpret queer in Thai context as well.

2) This research demonstrates that Queer studies in Thailand have enabled us to understand the out-of-the-gender status of men and women and to conceive of sexual identity that is fluid, non-immortal, and can be modified according to context and situation.

3) In Thai society, queer studies are considered to be the same as LGBT studies, in which differ in terms of the view of sexual identity. LGBT Identity still considers that gender cannot be changed. However, this understanding makes me feel that it is a Thai-specific Queer contexy. Queer studies in Thailand have brought a queer idea from Western scholars to describe the identity and sexual expression of a group of people who are out of the heterosexual norms.

4) The term 'queer' in Thai society is translated as 'gender/sexual diversity'. In principle, queer scholars suggests that it is not able to be translated. The word queer, and the real meaning does not refer solely to gender/sexual diversity. However, the use of the term queer refers to sexual variation in Thailand, reflecting an attempt to question and challenge the heterosexual norms. Therefore, using this translated term, gender/sexual diversity, is challenging heteronormativity. It also reflect that Thai society is realising on gender/sexual equality because Thai society has the diverse culture. Hence, it generates new knowledge about gender/sexual identity in the specific context of Thai society.

I would like to conclude the thesis with one last question, based on my observations, about using the term 'queer' in Thailand: '*Have Thai LGBTQI been using the word 'queer' in order to adapt to their social context or have they been using the word without possessing enough 'queer'?* This question, along with many other pertinent questions arising from this research, may require further research on queer studies and a vibrant discussion between Thai academics, LGBTQI activists and LGBTQI people on the use of queer theory within the Thai social context.

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Appendix A: Table of Interviewee and Social Media User Profiles

Research Participants	Gender/sexual identity	Age	Research method	Use of social media platform[2]
Anonymous name	Gay man	37	Face-to-face interview Informal communication	• Facebook • Twitter • Grindr • Jack'd
Anonymous name	Gay man	31	Online interview via Twitter direct messenger	• Facebook • Twitter • Hornet • Blued
Anonymous name	Trans woman	42	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook
Anonymous name	Gay man	43	Online interview via Twitter direct messenger	• Twitter • Facebook
Anonymous name	Gay man	39	Online interview via Twitter direct messenger	• Twitter • Facebook • Grindr • Hornet
Anonymous name	Gay man	40	Online interview via Twitter direct messenger	• Twitter
Anonymous name	Gay man	28	Face-to-face interview Informal communication	• Twitter • Hornet • Grindr • Jack'd • Blued
Anonymous name	Gay man	23	Online interview via Twitter direct messenger	• Twitter • Hornet • Grindr • Blued
Anonymous name	Gay man	40	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook • Twitter • Hornet
Anonymous name	Trans woman	37	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook
Anonymous name	Trans woman	42	Face-to-face interview	• Facebook

Social media username[1]	Gender/sexual identity	Age	Research method	Use of social media platform
Anonymous name	Trans woman	39	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook
Anonymous name	Trans woman	40	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook
Anonymous name	Trans woman	36	Online interview via Facebook messenger, Face-to-face interview Informal communication	• Facebook • Web forum • Twitter
Anonymous name	Trans woman	41	Online interview via Facebook messenger	• Facebook
Anonymous name	Trans men	36	Informal communication	• Facebook
@ChinjungCNX	Gay man	25	Capture tweet form Twitter feeds	• Twitter
@Torzeed18	Gay man	18	Informal chatting via Twitter direct messenger Twitter scrapping	• Twitter • Grindr
@dew_petcharat	Gay man	27	Informal chatting via Twitter direct messenger Twitter data scrapping	• Twitter • Hornet • Jack'd • Blued • Grindr
@godofx4	Bisexual man	31	Informal chatting via Twitter direct messenger Twitter data scraping	• Twitter • Hornet • Grindr
@pt113311	Gay man	22	Informal chatting via Twitter direct messenger Twitter data scraping	• Twitter • Hornet

Note:

1. In the content of thesis, all research participants' real name and social media usernames are anonymised or assigned pseudonymous name. Social media usernames showing in the thesis were granted permission from participants or social media users open their profiles publicly, e.g. twitter profile.

2. The use of social media platforms in the table above means the name of social media platforms which participants mentioned while being asked.

Appendix B: List of Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms	The use of the platforms for Thai LGBT (in case of the research)	Number of posts/tweets/screenshots captures and videos downloaded[1]
Facebook	Using as a news posts abut LGBT in Thailand and the world. Some LGBT facebook pages have been used to post about discriminated stories There are a lot of Facebook LGBT groups in Thailand, e.g. Thai transgender alliance group, sexual diversity information and news for Thai LGBT, Stories of our rainbow people	318
Twitter	Although violated the terms and conditions of Twitter, some Thai gay men have been Twitter as a platform for expressing sexual matters, e.g. tweeting pornographic photos and video, posting 'home made' sex clips. It is also a platform for sex worker and finding sexual partners in Thailand.	351
YouTube	YouTube became a channel for expression of Thai transgender identity and storify gender discrimination against Thai transgender. It has also been used as an instrument for posting a video and event about Thai LGBT gender/sexual rights.	7
Grindr, Jack'd, Blued and Hornet	Thai gay men have used these platforms to find sexual parners, lovers, gay men and bisexual men friends. Hornet is the most popular mobile application for Thai gay men and bisexul men. Thai gay men install multiple gay dating apps on their smartphone because these application have specific features. The use of mutiple dating apps makes more likely to find sexual partner. Blued has the feature of live video but most of gay men are the feature for showing masterbation and fucking.	103

Appendix C: List of websites and web forums

• https://spectrumth.com/	The website is created for presenting on Thai LGBT issue.
• https://pantip.com/	It is the oldest web forum in Thailand. It consists of many topics including Thai LGBT.
• https://themomentum.co/	Thai online new media have supported LGBT rights and often presented about LGBT rights in events/issues.
• http://ftm-thailand.com/	The web site is created for Thai trans men information.
• https://postjung.com/index.php	The website/web forum is the oldest forum for Thai gay men who want to have a lover.
• http://www.thaipbsradio.com/program/24/ พิกัดเพศ	The sub-website of a Thai mass media, *Prachathai*. It archives videos about LGBT and gender/sexual matters in Thailand