

Thai Celebrity Culture and The Bangkok Teenage Audience

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by

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Abstract

Title

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This study explores the media reception patterns and impact of celebrity culture on identity construction of Bangkok teenagers.

The hypothesis is that audiences do not necessarily decode identical media messages in the same way as encoded. Bangkok teenagers with different ages and genders are likely to read texts regarding celebrities differently. Celebrities may not influence all teenage audiences to a significant degree and, for affected teenagers, the degree of influence may differ. Celebrities may act as good or as bad role models.

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods including (1) preliminary survey, (2) analysis of media content from quantitative and qualitative points of view, and (3) focus group discussions with different categories of Bangkok teenagers. These evolved around a selection of media items related to issues of fashion, substance abuse, and sexuality.

The findings provided evidence that the meanings the young audiences derived from the celebrity coverage did not always coincide with those encoded by the media and that often alternative readings were generated alongside the preferred reading. Cultural ideologies and social environment were found to be the most significant factors impacting the text decoding.

This investigation did not corroborate the popular belief that Bangkok teenagers were uncritical victims of media coverage. Data confirmed that they are critical and active media users and the extent to which their behavior is shaped by the media is relatively limited. Celebrity culture did not seem to influence Bangkok youth to an extent that can be regarded as socially harmful or culturally detrimental. On the contrary, it had certain positive effects in areas such as education, music, sports, and lifestyles. Peer groups were found to be more influential than celebrities in areas such as substance abuse and sexuality.

This project makes contributions to the area of mass communication; audience reception and media effects in particular, and celebrity and youth culture studies.

For my parents, the best people in my life

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Introduction

This study examines how Bangkok teenagers interpret media representations of celebrities. It combines audience reception with an investigation of the potential impact of celebrity culture coverage over the young citizens of Bangkok. The study is interdisciplinary in that it draws from the fields of mass communication, sociology, and psychology. This introduction provides an overview of the significance of the study, the conceptual framework and the research questions and design. I will then outline the structure of the thesis.

Unlike the US, the UK or Western Europe, little research has been carried out in Thailand specifically on audience reception or on young audiences' reading of media texts concerning celebrities. Beginning with the assumption that mass media play an important role in modifying human behavior (Korzenny & Schiff, 1992), my aim is to examine the phenomenon of Bangkok's celebrity culture and its teenage admirers and to make a strong case for the importance of understanding the impact of celebrity culture on young people. My goal is also to study the reactions of Bangkok teenagers to celebrity culture and to look into the way in which they interpret and understand media texts regarding the famous, as well as how their readings translate into actual behavior and impact on identity construction.

It is important to note here that the sample group in this study are teenage students who live and study in Bangkok, the capital. There are several reasons for using Bangkok adolescents as a purposive sample. Bangkok is the power center for the nation's regional expansion (Lewis, 1998, p. 239). Bangkok is also the center for the nation's finance, trading, government, media and communications businesses (p. 240). Historically, it has been the center for media culture and consumerism. Lewis also makes the important observation that, in a sense, Bangkok is a 'village society,' where everyone knows the latest celebrity gossip (p. 247). Japanese fashion invasions apart, American popular culture remains dominant in Bangkok (p. 251).

As I will provide evidence of the significance of celebrity culture and its impact on the media shaped behavior of Bangkok youth, I intend to look closely into a variety of factors that influence the processes of identity building. The results of my investigation will fill a substantial gap in Thai scholarship on audience reception and media effects on adolescents. My work will also be of use for mass communication and sociology

scholars, media professionals, parents and teachers, and to members of the general public who are interested in understanding the role of mass media and celebrity culture on young people.

Mass Media and Teenagers in Modern Thai Society

In recent decades, due to modernization, Thailand has dramatically changed, in terms of economy, social life and information technology (e.g. Jantarsroj, 1998; Sukprasert, 1997; Teachataveewat, 1997), affecting different sectors of society (Suthisakorn, 2001). Mass media have increasingly played a major role in the processes of changing and developing cultural identity (e.g. Holstein-Beck, 1995; Lewis, 1998). Young people are among the most avid consumers of media content, thus media play a vital part within the system of youth culture (Palladino, 1996).

Debates about the role of celebrity culture in both local and foreign media, have been part of social commentaries and arguments in Thai society (e.g. Amornsuksiri, 2000; the Committee on Children, Youth, Women and the Aged (CCYWA), 1996; Kurtchuchuen et al., 2001; “Psychiatrists claim,” 2002; Srivalo, 2000; “Uncover Thai teens’ values,” 2001). The CCYWA (1996) has claimed that images in the mass media, especially television and magazines, stimulate the audience to fantasize and may result in imitation of learned behavior. Over several years, Thai researchers and scholars have claimed that media and celebrity cultures have greatly influenced Thai youth’s attitudes and behavior in negative ways. Their cultural beliefs are significantly different than those of older generations.

In particular, the CCYWA has argued that although mass media are an important institution in helping the country develop they have a significantly adverse impact on Thai children and youth in many different ways. In their view, a range of adverse social problems pertaining to sex, violence and uncritical imitation of foreign cultures have been enhanced by the prominent media coverage given to them (1996, p. 2). These include unwanted effects such as sexual assaults, uncommon sexual orientations, imitated fashions, nightlife, use of inappropriate language and changes in social values (p. 2). Additionally, social problems affecting Thai teenagers include the abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, delinquency, premarital sex, aggression, inappropriate fashion, lavish lifestyle, and low moral standards (e.g. CCYWA, 1996; Jantarsroj, 1998; Liamoa, 1997;

Pattaravanich, 1997; Pornchaiwattanakorn, 1997; Teachataveerat, 1997). These claims are further detailed in Chapter 1.

It has been claimed that Thai adolescents gain knowledge about unsuitable fashions, abuse of drugs and alcohol, unwanted sexual behavior, and excessive materialism mostly through the media coverage of celebrities (see Amornsuksiri, 2000; “Psychiatrists claim,” 2002; “University students,” 2003). As a result, a significant proportion of Thai scholars and the general public have come to see Thai youth as vulnerable media victims who are susceptible to undesirable influences. As teenagers are regularly exposed to examples of excessive lifestyles in the context of media coverage of celebrity culture, it is believed that they are bound to engage in uncritical imitation. There is social concern that such imitation may aggravate a range of social problems, particularly in the areas of substance abuse and various other kinds of socially adverse behavior and crime.

It is true that many Thai youngsters greatly value celebrities due to their popularity and high income (“Uncover Thai teens’ values,” 2001). In general, adolescence is the stage where young people find a sense of their own identity and seek out role models (Lindon, 1996). Studies carried out in Thailand and other countries (e.g. James, 1993; Liamao, 1997; Real, 1996; “Uncover Thai teens’ values,” 2001) have shown that media personalities, especially those involved in advertising, have a great impact on the teenage audience.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the majority of studies into media effects have suggested that media messages and images can lead to both negative and positive effects and that no conclusive evidence is available one way or another (e.g. Jo & Berkowitz, 1994).

Further studies in the areas of psychology and sociology have also revealed that adolescents rely on popular cultural aspects, such as entertainment, music, film and television, and that it is celebrity coverage from where teenagers acquire information about everything ranging from preferred dress-style to desired values (Brown & Handee, 1989; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992, cited in Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv & Ben-Horin, 1996, p. 635). Generally, youngsters perceive such famous individuals as ‘role models’ and ‘heroes’ (e.g. Cole & Cole, 1996; Larson, 1995) and tend to emulate them.

My work was carried out in the context of the discrepancy between the prevailing social perception in Thailand (which sees teenagers as vulnerable copycat victims of media) and the existing scholarship pertaining to media effects and adolescent

psychology. I thought that these issues were to be approached with the respective critical scrutiny that social science allows us to exercise.

I took off from the hypothesis that young people were critical media users and that they might not necessarily read the media messages uniformly. I assumed that their readings could differ due to a variety of interpretive strategies that teenagers might use in reading media texts. And even though, admittedly, these readings would probably determine attitudes and behavior, I also hypothesized that media coverage of celebrities would not affect all Thai teenagers equally, as individuals were different in terms of demographic factors, background, ideologies, etc. Additionally, I also assumed that celebrity culture might positively influence the young.

As the following extensive discussion will show, the findings of my study did not confirm the popular belief that Bangkok teenagers were uncritical victims of media coverage. On the contrary, my research provided abundant evidence to support the view that Bangkok teenagers are, in fact, very critical and active media users. They did not always agree with the dominant readings, rather they rejected or negotiated with the encoded messages by creating their own interpretations. They used different construal strategies in processing media messages, the most obvious of which were defined by their awareness of the specific Thai cultural ideology and their personal background.

Although Bangkok youth were active and *media educated*, the results also suggested that interpretations and media shaped behavior are in close correlation in terms of identity construction. The degree of influence of mediated behavior, however, differs from one individual to another. The findings of this study came close to the findings of media effects scholarship which has established that media can promote positive and desirable forms of behavior (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994; Watkins, Huston-Stein & Wright, 1981; Rushton, 1982; Feshbach, 1988; Gunter & AcAleer, 1990, cited in Guantlett, 1995; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987; Garramone & Atkin, 1986, cited in Arnett, 1995). In addition, peer groups were found to have more negative impacts on the young than celebrities. There was conclusive evidence to claim that while celebrity culture indeed influences Bangkok adolescents, this influence is not necessarily only negative but also results in positive pursuits such in education, music, sports, and general lifestyle choices.

Conceptual Framework

This thesis looks into how Bangkok youth read media texts about celebrities. It also examines the influences of celebrity culture over young audiences. As an interdisciplinary work, this thesis draws not only from a variety of theories of mass communications but also from other disciplines such as psychology and sociology.

- First and foremost, the study deals with audience reception. Unlike the traditional media effects studies, this thesis also aims to explore what the audience notice and the meanings they construct out of what they see or read in their favorite media (MacDonald, 1983, cited in Hansen, 1988). It is important to remember that texts are subject to multiple readings depending on the perspectives and subject positions of the reader (Kellner, 1995a) as suggested also by Hall's (1980) classic encoding/decoding model. Equally essential, studies into representation have shown that meaning is produced and understood between members of the same cultural environment (Hall, 1997). The study of representation also enables us to understand either the real or imaginary world of objects, people, and events (Bernstein, 2002; Hall, 1997). By 'representation' I am referring to images, roles, and meanings of celebrities. Although identical mass media messages reach all young consumers, they by no means decode such messages and images in the same way as the messages were encoded. Teenage media users construct their readings differently, depending upon social, psychological and cultural factors such as age, gender, education, class, prejudices, previous experience, and family upbringing (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Hall, 1994; Höijer, 1998; Jensen, 1991; Morley, 1985; Real, 1996). In addition, in audience research, it is important to understand how audiences actually interact with cultural texts (Kellner, 1995a). According to uses and gratifications theory, each individual, as an audience, seems to interact with media in different ways and, as a result, the nature and degree of effect is likely to be different from one individual to another. This concept, focusing mainly on social and psychological perspectives, best explains *what* media active audiences use, *why* and *how* they use them as well as *what they attain* from their use (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Arnett, Larson, Offer, 1995; Jeffres, 1994; Larson, 1995; Steel & Brown, 1995).
- Secondly, this study relies on theories from the media effects range. As the intention of the study is to investigate how celebrity culture affects adolescents, central to the

theoretical framework are media effects theories. Social learning and modeling theories explain how individuals observe other people's actions and how they come to adapt those patterns of actions as personal models of response to problems, conditions, or events in their own lives (Bandura, 1994; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Newly learned behavior from mass media may be imitated or tried out by observers. Additionally the concept of international cultivation is particularly helpful in my study in order to explore how Bangkok youth perceive celebrities from other countries and cultures as well as their lifestyles and behavior.

- As this study deals exclusively with young audiences, the psychology of adolescence and youth culture come into play as a third major component in my investigation. These two frameworks play significant roles in understanding people in this complex stage of development. Adolescent psychology sheds light on the unique physiological and psychological characteristics of young members of society. The study of youth culture and subculture provides insights into what is meaningful to young individuals, with the emphasis on cultural expressions and social activities which contribute to the identity construction.
- Last but not least, as this study is set to explore the significance of media figures and their impact on Bangkok teenagers, it is necessary to understand the culture of celebrity. How Thai and international celebrities are perceived and understood may differ according to differences in culture. As stars are often used in advertising to draw consumers' attention, it is also important to comprehend the relationship between mass media and celebrities since they depend on one another.

Research Questions and Design

Research Questions

In order to explore both the aspects of audience reception and media effects, two main research questions have been formulated:

- How do Bangkok youth read media image of celebrities and how do they make sense of them? What is the interpretive framework they use to read the media texts? Do they read the same media texts and messages in the same way as the texts were encoded?
- In terms of media-influenced behavior, do these readings impact their identity construction?

In the process of answering these questions, it is necessary to be aware of the specific media to which the young audiences are exposed on a daily basis. It is also essential to examine the content of such media in order to understand the representations of both Thai and international celebrities. According to various studies on audience reception and media effects, age and gender are significant determinants in using and decoding media texts. They also affect the way individuals understand the world around them. Younger people tend to be more susceptible and sensitive to various influences (Strasburger, 1995). The young are searching for role models in order to construct their own identities (e.g. Arnett, 1991, 1995; Cole & Cole, 1996; Larson, 1995; Steel & Brown, 1995). This helps explain how celebrities play an important part in young people's lives. I therefore hypothesize the following:

- The same media texts and messages are not always decoded by audiences in the same way as they were encoded.
- Bangkok teenagers with different social factors (in this study age and gender), are likely to decode media texts regarding celebrities in different ways. The degree of difference in reception patterns depends on specific interpretative strategies.
- Celebrities may not influence all teenage audiences to a significant degree. However, for those who are affected, the degree of influence may be different and media figures may affect identity construction in a variety of ways. It would be wrong to claim that celebrity culture has only negative consequences. Celebrities may act as good role models to young people in a number of instances.

- Apart from celebrity culture, there may also be other equally important pressures or sources of influence.

Research Design

This study uses reception analysis approach for a detailed exploration of the way in which young audiences use, interpret, and make sense of media messages about celebrities (Hansen, 1988). It also draws from social learning and modeling theories to examine the process by which individuals acquire modeled information and enact modeled behavior (Perloff, 1997).

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in this thesis provides a broadened view of audience reception and media influence. In order to achieve my goals, the study has three main components: (1) a preliminary survey, (2) analysis of media content, and (3) focus group discussion analysis.

- Before studying the audience aspect, it was necessary to be aware of what media Bangkok teens actually use regularly. A preliminary pilot survey was used to collect data on media consumption patterns of Bangkok teenagers upon which the analysis of media content was to be based. The survey instrument was a one-page questionnaire distributed to teenagers from Bangkok high schools and universities who represented two different age groups. The intention was to gather information on their regular usage of different media. The most frequently used media were selected for further analysis.
- After having obtained the initial data on media consumption, the next step was to explore the representation of celebrities in the specific media. Analysis of media content, both quantitative and qualitative, is an essential prerequisite for the further investigation (Liebes & Katz, 1990). The media output of June 2000, covering two newspapers, five magazines, and two television programs, was thoroughly examined. The goal was to identify the media frameworks of representation of celebrities and the themes that dominated the media coverage in both print and broadcast media. This analysis also helped explain how texts function to produce meaning (Kellner, 1995a, p. 10). The qualitative aspect yielded more details of media representations of

celebrities, relating to social issues. Quantitative and qualitative aspects of the analysis were correlated thus allowing the identification of dominant themes and an examination of the media construction of celebrity representations.

- Finally, focus group discussions were used to gain in depth understanding of the ways in which Bangkok youth interpret and decode media texts about celebrities, provided that each text is revealed to audiences as multilayered (Hall, 1980) or polysemic (Real, 1996). This final approach dealt mainly with audience reception of media texts in contemporary culture (Corner, Schlesinger & Silverstone, 1997). Focus group discussions were conducted with Bangkok students in middle and late adolescence, aged 15-18 and over 18 respectively. They were divided into four different gender-age categories: Male Middle, Female Middle, Male Late, and Female Late. The main goal of this was to examine how Bangkok youngsters of different age and gender strata interpret, make sense of, use, interact with and create meaning out of media messages and images about media personalities (Hansen, 1998a, p. 283) and how, through interaction, members of such groups resist or conform to dominance (Swanson, 1992, p. 322, cited in Livingstone, 1997, p. 31). Certain media stories, representing different prominent categories are to be selected and used in focus group discussions to encourage the participants to express their opinions and attitudes.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into two general parts. The first part discusses respectively the background, the theoretical framework, and the methodology. The second part reports on the results of the study, as revealed in the preliminary survey, the analysis of media content, and specifically focusing on how Bangkok youngsters decode media texts about celebrities and media influenced behavior in these young audiences.

Part One comprises of three chapters. Chapter 1 covers background information on Thailand, with respect to the mass media system, celebrity culture, youth culture, and other socio-cultural parameters. Chapter 2 presents an overview of literature and clarifies the conceptual framework for the study. Theories of mass media effects, audience reception, media representation, youth culture, psychology of adolescence and celebrity culture are discussed. Chapter 3 discusses the choices made in the process of designing

the research and elaborates the considerations regarding the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies that were used in this project.

Part Two is divided into five chapters. It discusses the concrete results of fieldwork, which took place in Thailand between February 2000 and December 2000. Chapter 4 reports on the results of the preliminary survey, aiming to supply initial data on media consumption of Bangkok teenagers; there is also a discussion of those media that are particularly popular with young audiences (those media were then selected for analysis of media content in the next chapter). Chapter 5 examines selected media content in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The quantitative part of the analysis establishes the frameworks of media representations of celebrities (frequency, approach, qualitative specifics of the coverage). The qualitative analysis builds upon the quantitative findings and looks in more detail into a range of items that were selected to represent the main themes of celebrity coverage (these themes were used further in the research with the focus groups). Chapter 6 uses reception analysis in the context of focus group discussions; the endeavor here is to identify the interpretive framework used by Bangkok teenagers in decoding media texts. The emphasis in Chapter 7 is placed on estimating the degree of media impact over Bangkok teenagers. It concludes the study by examining the evidence of the relationship between media text readings and teenage identity construction in Bangkok youth. It confirms the hypothesis that the extent to which their behavior is shaped by the media is relatively limited. Last but not least, Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the project providing critical reflections on the research. Here I discuss what and how I have learnt from conducting the research, especially the significance of group discussions. Most importantly, I assess the contribution of this study to communication scholarship, especially in the context of audience research, media effects, and celebrity and youth culture studies.

PART ONE

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

AND

FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Adolescents are active media users and are more likely to be affected by mass media than other groups. Generally, the young search for 'role models' with whom they can identify and they use mass media as a resource to provide them with information. This study will examine the influence of mass media and celebrity culture on Bangkok teenagers. The emphasis is placed on how these teens decode media texts about celebrities and how they are affected by these famous people's behavior.

The study divided is in two parts. Part One is composed of three chapters, providing detailed discussions of the research background, theoretical framework, and the related methodological considerations respectively. It is outlined as follows:

Chapter 1 supplies background information on Thailand and is divided into four sections. Debates and issues in the context of Thai and international scholarhip on the Thai culture and identity are discussed, followed by a profile of Thai teenagers. The Thai mass media system is depicted and how it presents celebrity culture, both foreign and Thai, is explained.

Chapter 2 deals with conceptual framework of the study, emphasizing on audience reception and mass media effects theories. An overview of the literature is given and the theoretical framework of the study is described.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodological considerations used in this project and portrays the research techniques employed in this study. Three techniques used in the study will be described: the preliminary survey, the analysis of media content, and the focus group discussions.

CHAPTER 1

Thailand in Related Aspects

Introduction

This chapter details various characteristics of Thai culture that are essential to understanding the study. The discussion is divided into four parts:

- Firstly, Thai culture is described to present the country's dominant characteristics. Discussion on Thai cultural norms, beliefs, values, and attitudes is important to place the study in a social context. Understanding traditional ways of thinking in the light of cultural change is significant.
- Secondly, a profile of Thai youth details sociological facts on youth culture and lifestyles. This also includes a discussion of the various factors that have led to the current social problems of Thai youngsters, including the influences of media.
- Thirdly, the Thai mass media system is discussed with regard to its history, development and regulation. Media popular with Thai youth are introduced.
- Finally, there is a discussion of celebrity culture especially the relationships between media figures, mass media and Thai teenagers.

Section I Thailand and Thai Culture

The Kingdom of Thailand

Located in Southeast Asia, Thailand, formally known as *Siam* until 1939, covers approximately 514,000 square kilometers of the Indochinese Peninsula, with a population of 62.5 million. With its 76 provinces, the country is divided into four natural regions: the North, the Central Plain, the Northeast, and the South. Established in 1782,

Krungthep (city of angels) is the actual official name of the capital, although best known as *Bangkok* by most foreigners. Bangkok's population is 6.3 million.

The kingdom has a blend of Chinese, Malays, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Burmese, Indian, Mon, Karen, and other people (Chareonwongsak, 1998; Wongtes, 2000). *Bhumibol Adulyadej*, the ninth king of the *Chakri* dynasty is the current monarch who exercises legislative power through a bicameral National Assembly, executive power through a cabinet headed by the prime minister and judicial power through the courts (Ekachai, 2000).

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has remained independent throughout the colonial period. This allowed Thai culture and identity to remain essentially intact (Chirapravati, 1996). 'Nation', 'religion' and 'monarchy' are the three pillars of Thai cultural identity that act as the spiritual center of all Thais (Chirapravati, 1996; Keyes, 1987; Lewis, 1998; Wisadavet, 1996; Wongtes, 2000).

The next part discusses Thailand in terms of identity, culture, values and society. I will report on the main debates and issues in the context of domestic and international scholarship on Thai culture and identity. Discussions deal mainly with national identity; culture, values and society in general and Thailand in the age of modernization in particular.

National Identity

Thai Identity, Culture, Values and Society

Dr. Suntaree Komin (1991), a well-known psychologist of Research Centre, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) presented her over ten years of empirical research in 'Psychology of the Thai people: values and behavioral patterns.' From the discipline of social and cross-cultural psychology, her study provides an analysis of Thai behavior and social systems from the human value perspective.

Komin started off by giving different interpretations of Thai social systems and behavior. The best known seems to be the 'loose structure' interpretation, which was first introduced by Embree in 1950. Embree (1950) has characterized Thailand as a culture with a "loosely structured" social system. Referring to her observation, Komin has theorized that Thais tolerate considerable variations in individual behavior, are concerned less in observing reciprocal rights and duties, have no long-term obligation or no strong

sense of duty and obligation and finally lack regularity, discipline and regimentation in life. This view was later studied and reinforced by other scholars (i.e. Hank, 1972; Phillips, 1965, 1969; Wilson, 1962, cited in Komin, 1991 and more recently by Mulder, 1992).

Over the next chapters, Komin focuses on the conceptual frame of values and value systems, and the construction of the Thai value measurement instrument. Further, she reports on the study of value systems of different segments in Thai society. Among others, evidence suggests that men and women express their sex-roles with significant differences (p. 40). She then discusses relations between values and political attitudes, and values and religious behavior and provides a discussion on Thai and American value systems in terms of overall world-views.

The highlight of her work is the chapter on 'National character in the nine value clusters', which would enable us to understand the Thai and on which I would like to focus. Komin has emphasized that Thai social system is first and foremost a hierarchically structured society where individuals and interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance (pp. 132-3). These nine clusters include (1) ego orientation, (2) grateful relationship orientation, (3) Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation, (4) flexibility and adjustment orientation, (5) religio-psychical orientation, (6) education and competence orientation, (7) independence orientation, (8) fun and pleasure orientation, and (9) achievement-task orientation. However, other scholars have disagreed with some of these.

The second and the fifth clusters have a great deal to do with Buddhism. Thais are taught to be grateful and bound by sincere and deep reciprocal relationships, especially to their parents, (also observed by Bechstedt, 2002). Thais perform merit-making activities in the hope of a better life in the next re-incarnation – the more they do, the better their next life will be (i.e. Fieg, 1989; Keyes, 1987; Wongtes, 2000). Komin further discusses that Thais always use the concept of 'karma' in situations to attribute to someone else's success, fortune, high status, promotion, or having a good family and so on (p. 177).

Consistent with the third, fourth and eighth clusters, many scholars would describe Thais as non-assertive, polite, humble, friendly, flexible, adjustable, and fun/pleasure oriented while face-to-face or open criticism and conflicts are always avoided (i.e. Chareonwongsak, 1998; Fieg, 1989; Komin, 1990; Wongtes, 2000). Komin

has also pointed out that a popular phrase is 'Do whatever is called for at the moment to survive' (p. 164).

With regard to the sixth cluster 'education and competence orientation,' it is particularly true that in Thailand education has always been an essential 'means' to climb up the social ladder in terms of high prestige and high pay, rather than an end value in itself. Supportably, an anthropologist Charles Keyes (1987) views that class distinctions in Thai society as a whole are perhaps most clearly drawn through the system of nation education. Komin has also criticized that Thais value and give importance to form more than content or substances (p. 186). I would agree with this view as such values are more applicable to Thais nowadays.

'Achievement-task orientation' is the last cluster characterized by the achievement motivation need emphasizing internal drive towards achievement through hard work (p. 197). This value focuses on the inherent value of work itself and work related attitudes for that matter, striving to attain professional excellence. However, Komin has noted that the data showed that the achievement value of being ambitious and hard working to attain one's goals has been consistently ranked as the least important value (p. 197). As Komin has referred to in her other work, to be successful and to achieve in Thai society does not depend so much on one's competence as on one's ability to perceive and choose the right means and opportunity that lead to success in the society (1985, p. 179-180). As Brummelhuis (1984) has argued, when individuals explore what their horoscopes reveal, as with other forms of self-examination, their 'preoccupation is not so much with self-realization and autonomy as with adaptation to the social or cosmological environment' (cited in Cook, 1999). However, Bechstedt (2002) has stated that Komin relies on crude, evolutionist concepts based on Western rationality, and therefore, ends up attesting that Thais lack an achievement motive, revert to stoic fatalism, individualism and are obsessed by joyful *sanuk* (fun) behavior (p. 257).

Komin finishes her work by discussing organizational behavior in the last chapter where she provides cross-cultural implications for understanding and management of Thai organizational behavior.

Her two large-scale national samples of Thai people presenting different segments of Thai society, have yielded highly consistent and culturally meaningful data. This therefore enables Komin to further identify the nine value clusters, depicting the Thai national character in terms of value orientation. The author has claimed that it is the first systematic study of value systems ever conducted in Thailand. Her work has contributed

to Thai psychology scholarship as she has discussed what social and cultural forces influence Thai social behavior to the extent that they constitute persistent behavioral patterns. The resulting behavioral patterns that are illustrative of the behavior and personality of the Thai, makes a systematic understanding of the Thai people possible. Komin has also managed to show that the value systems serve as the “collective mental programming” or “cognitive blue prints” for the understanding of Thai behavioral patterns in general and organizational, cultural and work-related behavior in particular. Her work has also been recognized by other scholars such as Bechstedt (2002), and Rachel Harrison, (1999). In considering this work, I think that it would have been helpful if the author had provided a conclusion for each chapter and for the whole project.

I feel it would be helpful to present some discussions on Thai culture from a western perspective. Craig J. Reynolds, an Australian expert in Asian Studies has compiled a collection of considerable essays on Thai national identity mostly by Western and Thai scholars in ‘National identity and its defenders: Thailand, 1939-1989,’ and ‘National identity and its defenders: Thailand today’ published in 1991 and 2002 respectively. The latter additionally has a new chapter written by Reynolds himself while the rest remains unchanged. I will only discuss those that are most relevant to my project due to space limitation in the thesis. In his own essay, Reynolds (2002) has discussed the importance of national culture policies – ‘Thai Culture Magazine’ began publishing in order to preserve the national culture and Thailand established the National Cultural Council in 1943. He has also cited Prince Damrong Rajanubhab’s (1975) statement that ‘what distinguished the Thai people from Burmese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Malays was ‘love of national independence, toleration, and power of assimilation’ (p. 12).

Reynolds’s discussion on Thai identity also focuses on military aspects: the integrity of the territory needs to be maintained, the people require protection, independence and sovereignty need to be defended, administration and government must be stable for efficient rule, and national pride and respect for religion need policing. According to him, Thai culture and its subtext, ‘the Thai way of life’, has become as sacred an object as the monarchy (p. 22). He further emphasized the military involvement of preserving ‘Thainess.’ To Reynolds, the meaning of Thai identity are given consciousness by those in power, by ruling elites, and by state managers. However, he has criticized it as a false consciousness (p. 26).

Hans-Dieter Bechstedt (2002), a social scientist specializing in Thailand, has pointed out that compared with most of their neighbors, Thai seem to have a strong and

clear picture of what is needed to be a Thai. This maintains in popular culture and religious activities and passes on through the values and standards of parental and formal education (p. 239). However, due to rapid economic growth, questions in current debate are ‘Who are Thais?’ ‘What establishes Thai national and Thai cultural identity?’ Bechstedt has argued that the answers may differ widely, depending on who the respondent is – a Thai politician, a Buddhist monk or a non-governmental official (p. 240).

Instead of Thai ‘collective identities,’ Bechstedt emphasizes his discussion on ‘individual identity’ through the process of interaction. With regard to the perception of authority, it has long been said that regardless of the situation all Thais are fully aware of their own as well as everyone else’s position in the social hierarchy, and will reinforce this by appropriate manners and speech (p. 242). Generally, a superior is met with gestures of respect and deference (p. 250). He has found that a position of power is viewed in its emotional essence and in its significance for the ego, and much less in terms of its functional or instrumental implications (p. 251). This is particularly obvious in the Thai language (p. 247). This view has also been observed by other Western scholars. According to Cook and Jackson, “to speak Thai is to position oneself within a complex hierarchy ” (1999, p. 18). It is important for two parties to quickly determine the other’s proper status in order to use a suitable pronoun and treat each other accordingly (Mulder, 1992). Additionally, Fieg (1989) has made an interesting point in that the incredible complexity of the Thai hierarchy is reflected in the elaborate system of pronouns which exists in the Thai language to enable a person in any situation to show just the right amount of respect, deference, and intimacy. For instance, a variety of personal pronouns can be used for *I* (e.g. *kapachao*, *pom*, *dichan*, *chan*, *pi*, *nuu*, *ua*, *ku*) and *you* (e.g. *than*, *khun*, *ter*, *eng*, *kae*, *mung*), depending on the relationship of the two speakers.

In Thai society, an ideal child is expected to be obedient, docile and submissive towards its parents, showing signs of loyalty and compliance at an early age. Thai children are raised in a spirit of moral obligation giving the impression that their upbringing creates a kind of debt which the children have to repay by taking care of their elderly parents. Most importantly, respectful submission to the authority of elders (parents, teachers, the Buddha, the king and the Thai government) – all considered to be essential to Thai identity or ‘Thainess’ is first instilled to the children by family and later by education (pp. 234-5). Such Thai traits have been well-known and discussed by other scholars (i.e. Chareonwongsak, 1998; Fieg, 1989; Wongtes, 2000).

In his second edition, written about ten years later, Reynolds (2002) reflects the way older concepts of Thai identity were transformed by the economic growth. He has noted in the age of globalization, a new notion of identity has emerged that is populist, pluralist and protean in its formation (p. 328). This new notion is called *phum panya*, best translated as local knowledge, indigenous knowledge, native wisdom, local genius, ingenuity and knack for doing something or figuring things out (p. 328). The *phum panya* concept emphasizes 'knowing' and sometimes 'knowledge.' However, Reynolds himself does not think that *phum panya* exists without Western interference. Rather he sees that the notion of local or indigenous knowledge is something learned at the global level (p. 330). Local knowledge is seen to be the key to empowerment of the disenfranchized and dispossessed and as fundamental to proposals for 'alternative development.' It is called into existence by the very global processes that threaten it (p. 330). Reynolds has also suggested that *phum panya* needs to avail itself of foreign knowledge (p. 333).

Overall, the essays in this volume offer insights into the construction of Thai identity from the perspectives of history, political science, anthropology, linguistics, social psychology, etc. The volume raises interesting questions on the discursive relationship between Thai identity, the state and nationhood. Additionally, in his new chapter, Reynolds' discussions include the debates among public intellectuals in terms of globalization and the relationship between local and global knowledge.

Buddhism

Buddhism is another important Thai characteristic and the national religion professed by 95% of the population. In "Thailand: Buddhist kingdom as modern nation-state," Charles F. Keyes (1987), along with other scholars, have argued that Buddhism teaches that one's life does not begin with birth and end with death but is a link in a chain of lives, each conditioned by volitional acts [karma] committed in previous existences. The concept of *karma*, the law of cause and effect, suggests that selfishness and craving result in suffering. Conversely, compassion and love bring happiness and well-being. Consequently, he has maintained that one's position in life is fixed to some degree by the consequences of *karma* inherited from a previous life (p. 122). Buddhist doctrine also makes each individual morally responsible for his or her own destiny (p. 151). Hence, Thais believe in a good *karma* and making merits in the hope of a better life in the next

life. Keyes has later discussed changes due to an open economy and transformation of Thai society that have already affected Buddhism (detailed later).

It has been quite clear that Thais are seen as friendly and flexible people who appreciate fun and pleasant lives and who often avoid confrontation and face-to-face conflicts. It has also been agreed by both Thai and foreign scholars that Buddhism has influenced Thai attitudes and social values (i.e. Keyes, 1987; Pongsapich, 1996; Wongtes, 2000). As Dr. Wit Wisadavet (1996) of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Philosophy has put it, Buddhism is a force that culturally binds the hearts and the thoughts of the Thai people together. Consequently, some people even equate 'Thainess' with Buddhism. However, it is essential to bear in mind that due to globalization and economic growth, many Thais, especially those in younger generations have significantly changed in their attitudes and worldviews in various aspects of life (discussed later).

Thai Sexual Culture

In general, it has been known that in Thailand sexual matters are not directly discussed because sex is seen as private and embarrassing. Not only do most Thai parents not give their children information about sex but there is also little sex education conducted in school. However, in recent years there have been plenty of studies as well as polls conducted and debates written in Thai on attitudes and behavior toward sexuality of both Thai youngsters and adults. Contrarily, there has been a limited scholarly research in English in this area. 'Genders and sexualities in modern Thailand' edited by Peter Jackson, a sociologist expert in Southeast Asian history and Nerida Cook (1999), a social anthropologist, is a rare collection by different scholars from around the world and across social disciplines. This volume is a significant contribution that provides insightful information on different aspects of gender and sexuality in Thai society. It would be possible to assume then that precisely because sexuality in Thailand is surrounded by silence and is considered so awkward it is something that has also been of predominant interest to foreign researchers.

In the introductory chapter, Cook and Jackson (1999) have defined the concept of gender and sexuality in Thailand. 'Gender' concerns culturally and socially mediated understanding of femininity and masculinity and the way these impact other categories. 'Sexuality' is a variable element in relation to gender identities. This denotes the role of eroticism in reinforcing a sense of self-understanding and contributing to and articulating

one's place within hierarchies of power and status (p. 3). They have pointed out that in both popular and formal Thai discourses men and women are consistently portrayed as being essentially different in both gender and sexual characteristics, and this difference is used to justify applying distinct criteria for judging men's and women's behavior (p. 15). This view has obviously been observed and discussed by almost all other researchers in this book as well as Komin (1991).

In their essay, Knodel, Saengtienchai, VanLandingham and Lucas (1999) have studied the perceptions on Thai married couples, prostitution and extramarital sex of Thais in the central part of Thailand. Like many others, the authors have observed that Thai men have traditionally enjoyed a high degree of sexual freedom in which they are encouraged as well as expected to express their sexuality. Historically, polygamous relationships as well as commercial sex patronage were widely practiced by upper-class men (also by various kings) and were viewed as prerogatives of position and economic success. In contrast, women's sexuality has traditionally been far more restricted with chastity prior to marriage and subdued sexual expression being valued. Women's extramarital sexuality is regarded as unconscionable. Most discussions on female sexuality stressed the importance for wives to satisfy their husband's sexual needs, reflecting an acceptance of the subordinate nature of a woman's sexual desires to those of a male partner (p. 111). Another similar study shows that although married Thai women are not content with their husbands' commercial sex patronage, they are more likely to accept it than their husbands' non-commercial sex relationships (Saengtienchai, Knodel, VanLandingham & Pramualratana, 1999, p. 90). Speaking of the concepts of monogamy and chastity, it is worth noting a mass communication academic of Thammasart University, Ruj Komolabut's (2001) argument reacting to numerous Thai academic debates in mainstream media. He has argued that, in deed Thailand embraced the concept of 'monogamy' from the West during the reign of King Rama IV to demonstrate its civilization while the concept of 'chastity' was originally derived from India.

In another study of sexuality in the north of Thailand, an anthropologist Nicola Tannenbaum (1999) found that in *Shan* village, sexual relations establish marriages, and female virginity is not an issue. I would however agree with her remark that it would not be appropriate to "generalize from *Shan* peasants to all *Shan* or all Thai. But this is just the point – that different classes and different varieties of Tai/Thai in different regions at different times follow different practices. The question would be when, where and why female virginity is an issue" (p. 249).

In his own essay, Jackson (1999) has discussed the perception of homosexuality and bisexuality in Thailand. He aims to unravel the contradiction between the common perception of a Thai gay paradise and the actual antipathetic character of Thai discourse on male homoeroticism and transgenderism (p. 227). It was believed that Thai culture as expressing liberal, even accepting attitude toward male transgenderism and masculine-identified male homosexuality. In fact, Jackson comes to understand that although sanctions against male homosexuality and transgenderism are much less severe in Thailand than in the Western societies, and homosexuality is neither illegal under Thai law nor immoral according to Buddhist teaching, if homophobia can be conceived loosely as intolerance combined with lack of acceptance, then Thai views can be described as tolerant yet unaccepting (p. 227).

Jackson is one of the first foreign scholars to conduct detailed research on male homosexuality in Thailand (1989, 1995, 1999), which only a decade ago was considered too embarrassing to mention and as being outside the scope of state policy and “proper” academic interest. Jackson has elaborated this observation very well. He views that it is extremely difficult for Thai scholars to conduct research openly on homosexuality. Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, several polls conducted by some well-known academics involved attitudes toward such concepts. Some show that people are more likely to accept homosexuals. However, it is important to note that to Jackson, accepting and tolerating are two different things. Additionally, I would agree with Eric Allyn’s remark that if a person is respected, the private deviance, once known, is not regarded with any great opprobrium. In contrast, if one is not respected, the discovery of such deviance may become another reason why he is disliked (cited in Jackson, 1995).

We have now come to understand that each society has its own cultural characteristics. However, in the era of technology, one society has been connected with another through mass media. People have learnt about each others cultures and gradually adapted them one way or another. The next part discusses how modernization has changed Thai cultural characteristics in various aspects.

Thailand in the Age of Modernization

The primary purpose of this part is to discuss the key changes in the social structure and values of Thai society during the rapid industrialization, modernization and globalization

of the past decades. The issue has interested both Thai and foreign scholars. Among others, Dr Kriengsak Chareonwongsak (1998), a Thai economist, has made a strong criticism, “On the surface our society seems calm but in fact many factors exist which cause conflict, dissatisfaction, violence, and unfair judgments between individuals. Our society is in fact anything but peaceful”. Robert J. Muscat (1994), an expert on the Thai economy, has observed the growth of ‘mass consumption’ values, decline of traditional religious practices and large-scale prostitution and sex-based tourism. Others have noted large numbers of youth adopting Bangkok’s secularism, an increase in the number of divorces initiated by women, and the rising disinclination among educated middle-class women to marry.

However, building upon her earlier work, Komin (1995) has observed not only negative but also positive changes. The good social consequences of changes are: remarkable increases in productivity, improvement in the standard of living of the average individual, the possibility of affluent and abundant lifestyles, widespread educational and employment opportunities, improved health care, and modern transportation and communication systems. In contrast, the unpleasant ones are a weakening of kinship and family ties, a reduction in the size and function of families, a growing emphasis on self-indulgence, and a higher incidence of drug abuses, alcoholism, and crime.

Dr. Kasian Tejapira (1996), a Thai political scientist of Thammasart University has noted that the future of Thailand is ambivalent and unclear and has suggested that Thailand should change and modernize while maintaining its old essence. In other words, Thai people should continue to behave according to traditional norms of social relationship in a new social context (p. 248). Supportably, Dr. Wit Wisadavet’s (1996) essay on ‘Cultural identity and development process in Thailand’ has suggested that as both cultural identity and material well-being are good things, Thais should take the middle way – they should prepare for some cultural changes while not being too obsessed with the material process. It seems that most Thai academics strongly believe that today’s Thai people can be modernized and have a better life while still being able to remain *Thai* and preserving Thai identities.

Despite such optimistic views, most academic polls and articles reported in Thai in mainstream media indicate diversity and modernization are detrimental to traditional Thai values. This in part led me to conducting my own research on the use of mass media

of young people and their own identity construction. In the following part I will discuss the key issues that relate to Thai teenagers as the subject of my study.

Global vs. Local Values

In his second edition, Reynolds (2002) has presented debates about globalization by different intellectuals – academics, authors, professionals. For instance, Tejapira has characterized the protagonists in debates as ‘globalizers’ and ‘communitarians.’ The former advocates the internationalizing of the economy while the latter supports NGO workers and their academic supporters struggling with the unfortunate by-products of globalization (pp. 318-9). Charoenwongsak was concerned that Thailand was overtly dependent on foreign technology and was destined to become an ‘intellectual colony of the more developed countries if action were not taken immediately to address the weaknesses in science and technology (p. 323). Similarly, Phitthaya Wongkun has argued that Thai society is becoming so thoroughly Westernized that it is losing its own identity. Thai people are attracted to Western ways of life and culture (p. 325). Additionally, to a Thai anthropologist, Yos Santasombat (1998), everything modern and western is presented as good and desirable. Morality is judged by the varying degrees of purchasing power. Since unrestrained consumption is seen as a success for both individual and society, traditional values give way to the new colonial mentality (p. 251).

Inherently, young people appreciate novelty. Mainly through mass media, young Thais have been introduced to other cultures – the ‘global culture.’ The advancement of technology has allowed them the opportunity for unlimited learning almost about anything. Foreign influences, particularly from the west and Japan have been significant in creating a taste for new fashions and new life-styles for young Thais. Celebrities both local and overseas, especially pop stars and athletes, have impacts on these young people in various aspects (i.e. Kasian, 1996; Lewis, 1998; Lewis & Hirano, 2001). Therefore, there has been a mixture of global and local values. Some teens absorb what they have learned and tried to adopt it. Unfortunately, certain aspects of foreign cultures and values contradict those of their own. Such patterns of behavior as: dress styles, hairstyles, use of language, sexual attitudes, individualism, etc. which are considered inappropriate and/or unacceptable to those in older generations.

To some Thai adults, young people become increasingly more disobedient, independent, assertive, opinionated and less religious, and show less respect to their elders. Generally, young people like to challenge authority. Nowadays, many Thai

teenagers want to be able express their opinions and share thoughts, seen improper, blunt and out of place by those in older generations.

Materialism

Among many others, Komin's (1990, 1991) studies found that Thai people have placed a high value on form (over content) and material possessions that are instrumental in preserving face, status and social relations. Supportably, according to Tejapira (1996), modern Thais are prone to attach greater importance to form rather than essence. Similarly, with his strong criticism, Chareonwongsak (1998) has pointed out that it is necessary to appear rich in order to attain any kind of help or service in this materialistic Thai society, which is weakened when those unable to appear important or rich are ignored and oppressed. This is because some follow material rather than moral values.

Komin (1995) has also noted that Thai people tend to buy things they do not need in order to show that they possess them and living beyond one's means is commonplace. I would like to point out that this is not only happening to Thai adults who have their own income but also to youngsters who are still in schools/universities and financially dependent on their parents. However, I agree with Tejapira's (1996) comment about this issue. "Thai kids are not to blame because they are simply copying their consumerist grown-up fellows whose insatiable desire to consume un-Thai commodities have made a name for Thais as "shopping machines" or "professional shoppers" in various shopping venues both local and overseas" (pp. 242-3).

Buddhism

According to Muscut (1994), there has been a decline of traditional religious practices such as the formerly universal practice of young men entering the monkhood for a period of several months. Consequently, young men miss an opportunity to learn more about religion and be close to Buddhist teaching in actual sanctuary. Additionally, many young people in general, especially those in urban cities, increasingly fail to attend various religious activities. As a result of advancement in many aspects, new ways of thinking have often shaken traditional beliefs, which members of industrialized societies see as alien or obsolete (Komin, 1995). Consequently, people became selfish, self-oriented, and concerned with personal happiness, material comforts, pleasure and social recognition, with a drastic reduction in religious values (Komin, 1995). This altogether results in what she calls 'the increasing trend toward secularization.'

In contrast, Amara Pongsapich of Chulalongkorn University's Social Research Institute positively believes that in modernized Thailand although it is clear that the Buddhist ideology has been replaced by the ideology of capitalistic development, Buddhist values and world views are still being observed at community and individual levels. Yet they may be manifested in different forms but the underlying concepts will remain (1996, p. 264). I would argue that despite tremendous changes in society, some people still feel attached to their religion and continue to practice religious activities.

Gender and Sexuality – Changing Roles, Attitudes and Beliefs

Komin (1995) correctly observed that as more women work outside the home, their former functions in the home are taken over by specialist organizations such as nurseries, child-care centers, catering services, cleaning and laundry services, and so on. Further, almost all kinds of education (academic, religious, moral and social) are being left to teachers, peers and television (p. 260). Consequently, peer groups and mass media have undoubtedly become much more powerful and influential than families for many youngsters. This also results in the reduced interactions of husbands, wives and children, has enlarged a generation gap between parents and children and a gap between husbands and wives. There have also been an increasing number of family breakdowns and divorces, which can psychologically affect children.

Moreover, changes inevitably reflect Thai family-oriented moral values of filial piety and respect for the elderly. Against the softer and subtle texture of Thai life, today's Thai youngsters start to act in an exaggeratedly western way in terms of outspokenness, or to display a few western mannerisms, which would disturb some older Thais as bold initiative is generally unfitting (Fieg, 1989). In his work on 'Cultural forces and counter-forces in contemporary Thailand' Dr. Tejapira (1996) has explained a range of situations; for instance, Thais started to speak Thai improperly – using a hotch-potch of Thai and non-Thai words.

Increasingly, men are no longer the only breadwinner within the family. Separation and divorce, formerly frowned upon, have started to become common in Bangkok. Komin (1995) has pointed out that one cause of such divorce problems has been the changing role of women as opposed to the unchanged role and values/attitudes of men. Similarly, William J. Klausner (1993), an anthropologist, specializing in the Thai rural northeast, has observed that as Thai women have become more assertive, they begin to demand equal rights and equal pay of their work.

According to Jackson (1995), rapid urbanization, socio-economic transformation, the impact of both western and Japanese ideas through mass media, the opening of discussions of sexuality, mass tourism and increasing numbers of Thai men and women traveling and studying overseas, are together leading to major changes in Thai sexual attitudes. These changes are apparent in increasing freedom in partner selection, lessened importance of woman's virginity at the time of marriage, a decrease in the age of first sexual intercourse for both men and women, and more open discussion of sexual matters, especially among the young, educated and urban sections of the population. His observation is particularly true as nowadays many Thai teenagers, both in rural and urban areas regard premarital-sex and cohabitation as commonplace. They often describe such behavior as 'consensual' and more female youngsters regard chastity as unimportant or less important.

However, it is important to note that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has heightened concern regarding premarital and extramarital sex in Thailand. (i.e. Knodel, Saengtienchai, VanLandingham & Lucas, 1999). With an evidently increasing number of HIV/STD cases, unmarried Thai men, including teenagers start to have sexual relations with their girlfriends because they believe that these women are safer than prostitutes while married men now prefer to patronize student prostitutes. Therefore, more people throughout the country seek sex outside a commercial context (Lyttleton, 1999). This also results in a sharp increase of student prostitutes as men conveniently assume that these girls are free from any STD while these female students try to earn extra money to pay for their tuition fees or luxury goods.

I find Cook and Jackson's (1999) views on Thai and Western discourses noteworthy. They have argued that it is essential to be conscious of the different interests and motivations of Thai and English language research in Thailand. According to them, there are three main categories. First, Thai language discourse by Thai researchers for Thai readers in an effort at self-knowledge and self-representation. Second, English language discourse by non-Thai researchers is part of a process of representing an "other, and only indirectly serves as a form of self-reflection. Third, English language discourse by Thai researchers for an "international" readership variously represents efforts to insert Thai voices into foreign-dominated debates about the country and to project Thai issues and concerns to the world (pp. 4-5)

Almost all the works presented here fall under the second and third categories. The main reason is that research in English (or any other foreign) language is produced for or used almost entirely in an academic sphere by intellectuals and graduate students. Consequently, such work from these two classifications unfortunately remains confined to academic circles both locally and internationally. Quite similarly, however, most studies falling under the first category are often those conducted to obtain masters' degrees (or doctoral degrees in some cases) and only few of which become public. On the contrary, it is those in the form of academic polls that are often covered in the media, particularly in newspapers and on television and that go beyond the academic sphere reaching the general public. Only one debate here on the concepts of monogamy and chastity by Ruj Komolabut (2001) was written in Thai. This mass communication scholar has argued that in Thailand these much-discussed concepts were not originated in Thailand but were embraced from others. It is however important to note that this critical essay was reported in a quality newspaper.

Furthermore, I would agree with Cook and Jackson's (1999) observation in that Western (or other foreign) scholars with funding from their own societies are often free to indulge a wide range of interests and speculations. These researchers are also comparatively free of the need to demonstrate the immediate social relevance of their work to Thai society and to be more adventurous than their Thai counterparts. Contrarily, Thai academics can find themselves limited to research on policy issues as a consequence of state-determined economic and social priorities, and restricted to working in an intellectual environment devoted to Thai issues. On the other hand, foreign researchers may engage in Thai material for any personal or intellectual reasons (pp. 5-6). Additionally, due to a limited funding sources available to Thai scholars, examination of social issues is often oriented to the state's perceived needs for social improvement, frequently involving the study of social groups defined either as disadvantaged or as constituting a social problem to be solved (p. 6).

In summary, it has been recognized throughout that modernization and industrialization have not only occurred in the capital but have also expanded into the rural areas of Thailand. The main lines of scholarly debates lie in such social problems as materialism, a decline of traditional religious practices, changing traditional values and beliefs, increasing trends toward secularization, a growing emphasis on self-indulgence, changing attitudes and behavior towards sexuality, and a higher incidence of alcohol and

substance abuse and crime. However, I would like to argue that it ultimately depends on the Thais themselves to decide in which direction the society as a whole should be heading. Young people are also those who can determine the future of the society. More details on these areas and others will be provided extensively when I discuss 'the profile of Thai youth' in the next section.

Section II Profile of Thai Youth

This second section examines the sociological context of Thai youth culture and lifestyle that result in social problems which the country has not experienced before. Over the past decades, Thailand has significantly changed in terms of economics and technology.

Family

Thais consider family as the most important social institution within which an individual learns to obey and respect his elders and betters (Cooper & Cooper, 1991, p. 82). In general, the young depend upon full financial support from their parents or guardians until they become adults and are able to work and be financially self-sufficient. Unlike westerners, most Thai youngsters live with their parents until they graduate from universities and/or get married. In many cases even married couples live with their parents. Thai children are expected to take care of their aging parents to show their gratitude. Ignoring or abrogating responsibility for taking care of parents would be considered ungrateful.

Today, however, the younger generation is not only less disciplined but also gives less respect to the older (Jantasaroj, 1998). Due to the increased cost of living and the economic crisis in the country, in 2001, the number of the poor was reportedly 8.2 M. (13% of the whole population) (Tanchainan, 2003). Increasingly, both parents work outside the home to increase their household income¹. Consequently, this has increasingly widened the gap between Thai parents and children. In many cases, some busy parents seem to shower their children with money rather than time, love, care or understanding (Kungsawanichu, 2001). For many Thai youths who are spending a great deal of time with friends, peers have become the group of reference during the period of

¹ In 2001, the family income was 25,242 Bahts (£ 371) per Bangkok household while the expenditure was 19,852 Bahts (£ 291) (The National Statistical Office).

adolescence (e.g. Liamoa, 1997). They are also less attached to religion (“New slogan,” 2003).

Education

Despite being engaged in various activities, many Thai teenagers still regard education as important and essential (Heng, 1999). Under the law, all Thai children must attend a compulsory minimum of six years in elementary school and three years in junior high school, approximately until 15 years old (equivalent to Years 1-9). It is well known that a number of Thai high school students, especially in Bangkok, spend hours on extracurricular classes after school and on the weekend. Like Japanese counterparts (“Teenage Japanese Killers,” 2002), Thai children are pressured to succeed in education.

Due to competitive education, some parents have claimed that their children have too much pressure in and outside school. However, others expect their children to do well in school and to be successful on examinations-most importantly to get into good institutions at higher level. This pressure peaks for Thai students when they reach Mathayomsuksa 5 and 6 (Years 11-12) as they prepare for the country’s only matriculation examination.

Each year, only about 20% (40,000 out of 200,000) of the applicants across the country manage to enter their chosen public institutions (Chiangkul, 2003). In the past, students reportedly committed suicide due to their failure in such examinations. In 2000, the number of new enrollments for bachelors degrees was 327,398 (276,237 in public and 51,161 in private institutions)². Although some Thai parents and students still consider institutions’ recognition the most important factor, there is a change in parents’ attitude toward school reputation. In March 2001, a study conducted on 1,227 families revealed that the top three priorities for the selection of a school for their children: good society, good environment, and “white” or drug free surroundings. Reputation, once very important for parents, came fifth, after “nearby location” (“Survey shows change,” 2001).

During school breaks, Thai teenagers usually go on holidays, domestically or abroad. Wealthy parents often send their teen children to the USA, the UK, Australia or New Zealand to take English language courses overseas while learning western culture. Although Thailand has its own official language – Thai, it is compulsory for all Thai

² The data are from *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific*, New York: United Nations, 2002.

students to learn English as a second language. More Thai youths see the English language as a big asset to give them opportunities for better jobs ("Thai teens," 1999). Other languages such as Japanese, French, and German are also of interest. Nowadays, more parents send their children to international or bilingual schools in order for the children to be fluent with English, seen as an essential asset when they grow up.

Appearance

As Coleman and Hendry put it, "Being physically attractive is important to popularity during adolescence" (1999, p. 145). This remark also applies to Thai youngsters. Being thin for girls and looking athletic but lean for boys seems to be the most favorable appearance among the young ("Thai teens," 1999). Celebrity models have influenced both male and female teenagers on the way they look. Especially thin female models have a great impact on girls (e.g. Martin & Gentry, 1997). As Pipher puts it, "Girls compared their own bodies to our cultural ideals and find them wanting (1994, cited in Duke, 2000). Like many teenage girls around the world, many Thai girls want to look as thin as professional models, seen in both local and international media. Bhatiasavi (2001) reports that Thai youth fall victim to the lure of illegal diet pills containing amferpramone and phentermine which, if taken unwisely, could cause mental problems, heart disease, and even death. In 2000, the British government asked mass media, especially fashion magazines, not to portray abnormally thin female models.

Fashion

Youth fashions are often seen as different from those of other groups. Hall and Whannel note that dress has become a kind of minor popular art, and is used to express certain contemporary attitudes (1990, p. 33). Fashion, in terms of clothing, seems more noticeable in girls than in boys. *Outlook* has conducted a mini-survey on Thai teens and summarized their trends (Otaganonta, 1999). Apart from revealing clothes, other unusual fashions such as dyed hair, piercing and tattooing have become more common. This is also obvious among young actors, models, singers, musicians, and athletes. Due to

school restrictions,³ dyed hair is more noticeable during school break. Other popular fashions among girls are nail painting, little backpacks, bead necklaces, and colorful hair clips. For boys, wet-looking and spiky hairdos are seen as cool. Earrings are increasingly worn by boys and T-shirts and baggy, dark colored pants make them feel confident. Hi-tech items such as mobile phones and computers are highly valued for both boys and girls. When off the academic restrictions, many Thai youngsters very closely follow fashion trends. Unsurprisingly, teens who as an important group of consumers, are very interested in fashion and clothes (Ganetz, 1995, p. 89). They are also easily influenced by the lifestyle of teens from the west and Japan in particular (e.g. 108 Mongkut & Jakkajan, 2000; Amornsuksiri, 2000; Esagtawski, 2000; Lewis, 1998; Panritdam, 2001).

Abuse of Drugs, Tobacco and Alcohol

Although it is illegal to sell cigarettes and alcohol to people under 18, smoking and drinking in adolescence have been long-time problems in Thai society. Nowadays, deadly drugs such as ecstasy, methamphetamine, amphetamine and ketamine have widely been used among Thai teenagers (e.g. Suthisakorn, 2001⁴). In 2002, there were as many as 600,000 Thai youth caught using drugs (Tangkananurak, 2003), especially in pubs and discotheques where they hang out (Buasomboon et al., 2000). According to a recent report, 300,000 university and vocational students were reported to have used drugs ("Teachers to keep an eye," 2001). In addition, several news reports show that teenage celebrities are involved in using and selling drugs (e.g. Phusitranusorn, 1998; "The Ten Strict Rules," 2000; "Teenagers' perceptions of celebrity," 1997). The Thai government and private sectors have tried to resolve this crisis over the past decades, however, it has not been easy as some authorities are reportedly involved in and have some profit from the drugs trade (Kasemtak, 2001; Supachai, 2001).

In addition to drugs, alcohol consumption by youth has long been another issue. Since the young go out to pubs and discotheques the tendency to engage in drinking alcohol is relatively high although some go there just to dance (Kungsawanichu, 2001).

³ In Thailand, it is compulsory for all high school and most university students to wear uniforms. Most primary and high schoolgirls, in public institutions in particular, are not allowed to have long hair. The length of skirts and shorts (for boys) also needs to meet strict requirements.

⁴ Orasom Suthisakorn is the author of *The new species called X-Gen*. The book deals exclusively with problem behavior of Thai adolescents. The data were gathered by participant observation and individual interviews. Suthisakorn has observed major teens' hangouts as well as schools and four universities. The author also interviewed more than 90 Thai teenagers, aged 13 – 23 years, representing all three stages of adolescence, from diverse classes and guidance counselors of both private and public institutions.

A study conducted by Chulalongkorn University's Medical Science Institute and Mental Health Department found that 7% of Thai children have started drinking before the age of ten and 46.9 % of Thais begin drinking during their teens (Srivalo, 2000). Not only do they spend money on alcohol, they could also put themselves and others' at risk especially by drink-driving which claims thousands of casualties from road accidents each year (Sukrung, 2000).

Like the abuse of drugs and alcohol, cigarette smoking in adolescents has become an issue. *Bangkok University* is the first university to completely ban cigarette smoking on campus (Bai-ngern, 2000a). Although selling cigarettes to minors (aged under 18) is illegal, a number of high school students, aged 13-17, have already become smokers.

Evidence shows that for the young, major factors in deciding to experiment with drugs and alcohol include curiosity (Srivalo, 2000), sociability, relaxation, companionship (Coleman & Hendry, 1999), family problems ("Teachers to share," 2000), euphoric effects (Patiyasevi, 2000), peer pressures (Sukrung, 2000), proof of maturity (Pruksananon, 2003), and a necessary addition to a stylish image (Lindon, 1996).

Being well aware of the issues of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol among the young population for several years, the government and private sector have cooperated in various ways. The most obvious strategy has been the use of famous celebrities, especially pop singers, in campaigns against drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Recently this raised the question of whether the government offices properly awarded anti-drug celebrity presenters ("Presenters dominated society," 2003; "Psychiatrists claim," 2002).

Sexuality

As Harris notes, 'sexual issues are at the heart of several major social problems in the world today' (1994, p. 247). Thailand faces the same problem. As far as sexuality is concerned, Thai women are taught not to express their sexual desires and most importantly not to have sexual relation before marriage. Nowadays, however, Thai teenagers' attitudes and behavior toward sexuality have remarkably changed in both genders (e.g. "Goodbye Year 2000," 2000; "Our children," 2000; PI VEE, 2000; Suthisakorn, 2001; "Thai teens' attitudes," 2001).

In recent years, more Thai youngsters have engaged in premarital and premature sex, although premarital sex (for women) is considered taboo in Thai culture. As one school counselor puts it, "the old value of boys honoring girls and girls keeping their

virginity has disappeared” (Bunnag, 2000). In 1997, Assumption University held a seminar on premarital sex and teenagers and conducted a survey with 4,789 male university students from five different provinces, including Bangkok. It reported that 46.2% of male respondents had had sex with a female classmate and 44.8% with a female student from another university. Almost 40% of the respondents engaged in one night stands with someone they met at a nighttime entertainment setting. In addition they found that 48.9% did not use condoms with non-prostitute partners. One survey found that 35.6 % considered premarital sex commonplace. One factor that has changed sexual behavior could be an increase in freedom (“Sexual relations in school age,” 1999). Many students who attend colleges/universities in Bangkok or else where live freely in private accommodations. This therefore gives them opportunities to spend time alone with their girl/boyfriends. Many who live outside of a family setting may be tempted into “unbecoming” activities such as sex, drugs, gambling, prostitution and hanging out at nightspots (“Teachers to keep an eye,” 2001). Another similar survey (“Public opinion towards sexual relations,” 1999), conducted with Bangkok teens, aged 14-23 years, found that 20.9% have had sexual relations with their girlfriends/boyfriends. In addition, many youngsters are quite optimistic about cohabitation (e.g. Ninpat, 1997). Other evidence suggests that Thai high school students are experiencing their first sexual intercourse at increasingly younger ages (e.g. “Concern about sexual relations,” 2001; “Our children,” 2000; “Thai teens’ attitudes,” 2001). In addition, 380,000 university and vocational students were thought to have had premature-sex, while up to 60,000 may have engaged in prostitution (“Teachers to keep an eye,” 2001). The most recent evidence shows that on average Bangkok youth have experienced their first sexual intercourse at the age of 16 (“Thai youth,” 2003). According to the Director of Emergency Homes for Children and Women, the problem of unwanted pregnancy is the most difficult to deal with and it is rapidly increasing. Unintentionally pregnant women can be as young as 11 years old (Matichon, June 6, 2000). Additionally, unsafe sex can lead to sexually transmitted diseases and abortions. In 2000, Thailand had 350,000 children, born to mothers who have AIDS (Achakulwisut, 2000).

Experts and teachers agree that many of these problems are the result of lack of information and knowledge about appropriate or safe sex, and relationships (e.g. Suthisakorn, 2001; Tanchaisawat, 2001). Bunnag (2000) reports an emergency need of sex education programs at a high school in Bangkok, where each year at least four schoolgirls get pregnant and schoolboys masturbate in class. Insufficient sex education in

Thailand has been debated for many decades and schools have been urgently improving sex education (e.g. Bunnag, 2000, 2002; Chupaka, 2002; Ekachai, 2002; Nontharit, 2002).

In Thai society, homosexuality and bisexuality are acceptable to some but not all. However, a recent survey ("The third gender," 1999) showed that 70.2% of the polled perceived homosexuality commonplace. Many believe that dating people of the same sex is just a *teen fashion*, particularly for high schoolgirls and boys. These young will no longer do so when they get mature enough to understand appropriate gender roles.

It is widely argued that media are responsible for disseminating information about sex (e.g. Amornsuksiri, 2000; "Thai youth," 2003; "University students," 2003). The Thai government has also persuaded the media to reduce the amount of homosexual portrayal ("Get real," 1999). In contrast, the Interior Minister stirred heated debate in early 2001 when he considered legalizing same-sex relations (Assavanonda, 2001; Chaisri, 2001), however, the bill still has not been approved.

Prostitution

In Thailand, as elsewhere in the world, young people of both sexes become engaged in prostitution. Two main reasons are family financial difficulties and lavish lifestyles. Some have been forced into prostitution by parents to help support household expenses while others willingly prostitute themselves to make money to support an extravagant lifestyle. Such sex trade is available in many places where youngsters hang out: pubs, discotheques, shopping centers and even through agents and on the Internet (e.g. Charoensutthipan, 2001).

In February 2001, *Joh Jai*, a famous television talk show program, interviewed Somprasong Prasujantip⁵, who conducted a case study on 'Behind the scenes of student prostitutes'. This program showed that Thai teenagers first had sexual intercourse as young as 13 and many prostitute themselves to fund extravagant lifestyles. *Rajabhat Institute Suan Dusit* organized a seminar where student prostitutes, customers and sex service operators were invited to participate. The findings show that many student prostitutes who faced financial difficulties and could not get student loans, turned to the

⁵ Somprasong Prasujantip is a government official of the Committee of Religion, Art and Culture, Ministry of Education. He and his team have conducted a case study with student prostitutes. As fake customers, his team and camera crews secretly video recorded discussions with the prostitutes. The tapes of conversations were played during the talk show program. However, the identity of the students remained concealed.

sex industry to earn money to pay for their tuition fees and household expenses. A recent survey reveals that about 39% of 3,197 respondents said students needed money for their education while 28% said they needed cash to support their luxurious lifestyles (Charoensutthipan, 2001). In 1999, it was estimated that there were 12,468 Thai children prostitutes (aged under 18) (Achawanichkul, 1999).

Extravagance

Evidence shows that many school and university students, are in favor of extravagant, imported and brand-named products as must-have fashion apparels (e.g. “Public Opinion towards teenagers’ spending behavior,” 1999; Liamoa, 1997; Tanchainan, 2003; Teachataveewat, 1997). They consider such items a way to acceptance and the perception of them as superior and classy (e.g. Amornsuksiri, 2000). Such attitudes can make teens become more materialistic. As Suoninen says:

Children and teenagers are very well aware of the status values connected to certain goods: that it is important to own certain objects because everyone else has them, too, or that having certain items that are not so common but highly valued can gain one appreciation from peers (2001, p. 214).

Academics in various fields and affluent parents have debated the wisdom of providing expensive fashion items to youngsters. The parents argue that there should be no problem since they can afford to buy such items for their teenage children while academics, such as economists are concerned more about trading imbalances, and the way teens value things, Teachers, as well as child activists, also see potential problems (described below). Teachataveewat’s (1997) study shows that some students skip meals, which could lead to health problems, in order to save up money to buy costly fashion products that their peers already own. There are even shops where those who are not able to afford to buy such expensive items, can hire them on agreed terms. In extreme cases, girls prostitute themselves in order to earn extra money to satisfy their luxurious lifestyles (e.g. Charoensutthipan, 2001; “Junior high school,” 2001; “Sex and school girl,” 2001; Suthisakorn, 2001).

A personal mobile phone is highly valued among young people in many countries (Suoninen, 2001, p. 215). This is particularly true in Thailand. A study revealed that

mobile phones (22%) were the Bangkok teenagers' most wanted item, followed by computer games (14%) (Wattana, 2002). Text messaging is also popular among Thai youth. Automobiles are another costly accessory (Tanchainan, 2003). Young people drive to school or university, in many cases, without licenses. Media representations of celebrities preferring luxury cars could reinforce young people's attitudes toward extravagant lifestyles and tastes (Jullayothin, 2002a, 2002b; "*Paradorn* got *Bee* a *Louis Vuitton* bag," 2002; "*Bee* denies," 2002). In addition, celebrity endorsers appear in advertising of automobiles, mobile phones, etc. further increasing the allure of consumer goods.

Interests

Young people spend more time with friends than with adults. In the age of technology, younger people tend to be engaged in more activities, especially media-related ones, than those of the older generation. Nightlife has increasingly become a part of many young people's lives (e.g. Suthisakorn, 2001). Pubs and discotheques have become their hangouts. Although it is illegal for those who are under 18 to enter such venues, most pub owners fail to check visitors' identification cards. In March 2001, the Ministry of Education and the Metropolitan Police Bureau launched a campaign aimed at deterring those under 20 years old from visiting entertainment venues. In addition, during the school break police invoked a curfew banning unaccompanied teens under 18 from attending entertainment spots after 10 p.m. ("Bid to deter," 2001). Celebrities also joined the campaign.

As an antidote to nightlife, sport is important to most youngsters. Apart from their own potential, many young people are greatly inspired by both Thai and international successful athletes. Their achievement and popularity encourage the young to engage in sport activities. Football, tennis, and golf are their most popular sports.

Thai adolescents like going to the movies with friends. Consequently, theatres have become meeting points. Most are located in popular shopping centers where the young go shopping. Many college/university students go to the movies and shop to kill time between their classes.

Music is all-important for the young in every society (e.g. Connell, Brigley & Edwards, 1996). However, different teenagers appreciate different kinds of music both

Thai and international, especially from the USA, the UK and Japan. Concert attendance by Thai youth is common.

Like their foreign counterparts, Thai adolescents pursue different activities during their leisure time. Teenage girls spend their free time listening to music, shopping, and surfing the Internet while boys play sports or listen to music ("Thai teens," 1999). Apart from Thai magazines, Japanese magazines and comics (in Thai) are very popular among them. As mentioned above, the Internet has been hit among Thai people. Thai teens use the Internet for different purposes but mostly for chatting, making friends, emailing, etc. Additionally, according to a survey, 65 % of students in early secondary schools play video games daily (Paengnoy, 2000).

Less Thai but More Modernized

Mass media play an important role in advancing globalization where West meets East. Inevitably, Western culture, lifestyles, and ideas have gradually penetrated into conservative Thailand over time. As Muzaffar (1997) notes, Asians themselves believe in the superiority of Western culture (p. 2). Thailand is not an exception in this respect. Many argue that Thai teenagers are greatly open to western cultures (e.g. Assavanonda, 2002; Esagtawski, 2000; Jiamboon et al., 2000; PI VEE, 2000; Suthisakorn, 2001). As Ketudat puts it, "The Thai people have the long history of openness toward other cultures, tolerance of cultural differences, and willingness to learn from the outside world (1990, cited in Chirapravati, 1996). However, there have been debates about how foreign media and western-style consumerism may harm Thai cultural identity (Lewis, 1998). Through various kinds of hi-tech communication networks, Thai adolescents receive an enormous-almost unlimited- amount of information on foreign popular music, movies, sport, fashion, and anything they want to find out in order to educate and entertain themselves. Like their foreign counterparts, Thai teenagers, are seen as an most important media consumer group because they frequently buy magazines, watch television programs, listen to radio, go to the movies, purchase CDs and videos and so on. Teenagers have their favorite stars, singers, musicians, actors/actresses, and athletes. Because of frequent media exposure, Western and European fashion and lifestyles have had a great impact on Thai youth (e.g. Esagtawski, 2000; Lewis, 1998; PI VEE, 2000; "Uraiwan and the art." 2002).

Thai teenagers have also been influenced by western culture in many other aspects of their lives, including special occasions. 'Valentine's Day', for example, is regarded by many teenage Thais as an important holiday when they exchange gifts and flowers. Adults, on the other hand, see it as "non-Thai custom." Thai adults often claim that Thai youth consider such days important while they ignore or even forget Thai religious-related days. Nowadays, teens are less attached to Buddhism and practice less religious activities ("New slogan," 2003). The West has also influenced Thai eating habits. Fast food has been introduced in Thailand for several decades and particularly targeted towards young consumers. American fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and KFC have become very popular among many Thais.

In addition to Western cultures, Japanese style apparently has great impact on Thai teens' fashion and activities. For years, Japanese lifestyles have influenced Thai teenagers through the media, particularly in terms of music and fashion (e.g Lewis, 1998; Parintdam, 2001; Sawangchoke, 1997; Singhara, 2001; "Uraiwan and the art." 2002). Japanese singers are very popular among Thai youth, especially high school students. Thai teens have followed Japanese fashion mainly through magazines and music videos (Singhara, 2001). Additionally, Japanese cartoon characters and related products such as *Hello Kitty*, described as *cute*, *cool* and *camp* (McVeigh, 2000) have been widely admired, especially by Thai schoolgirls (Amornsuksiri, 2000; "Thai teens," 1999; Nakamura, 1996).

Section III Mass Media System

This third section discusses the major media of Thailand in terms of historical background, developments, and regulations. The term *Thai* means 'independence' or 'freedom.' In Thailand, 'freedom of expression' is guaranteed, with the exception of the threatening of public order, good morals, public safety or the security of the state (Chirapravati, 1996). According to Section 39 of Thailand's current 1997 Constitution, "Every person has the right to freedom of expression" (cited in Ekachai, 2000).

In Thailand, the National Police Office controls print media while the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) controls broadcast media. Thailand has placed restrictions on the advertising of alcohol and cigarettes. The advertising of beer and wine is allowed for all types of media, however, advertising of hard liquor is only permitted after 10:00 p.m. for broadcast media (Chirapravati, 1996). In all kinds of media, any

promotion or advertising of cigarettes is strictly prohibited by law (Chirapravati, 1996). Although Thailand is a developing country, media technologies have grown efficiently and effectively. The parts that follow describe how different media, from television to the Internet, and how they have dramatically improved their ability to serve the Thai population.

Television

Thailand was the first country in continental Asia to start regular television broadcasting (Ekachai, 2000). The first television station, Television Station Channel 4 at *Bang Khunphrom*, began black and white broadcasts on June 24, 1955 (Wongtes, 2000). Color transmission began in 1967 (Ekachai, 2000). Thailand has six national stations: Channels 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and ITV, available to the public at no cost (Netpokaew, 2002). The first five are state-owned and supervised by various government agencies: Bangkok Entertainment company, the Royal Thai Army, the Bangkok Television Company, the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand and the Public Relations Department respectively (Ekachai, 2000). While ITV, established in 1996 is the country's first privately owned independent television station and was taken over by the *Chinawattra* family⁶ in 2000. Channel 11 is a commercial free channel and exclusively broadcasts news and educational and cultural programs.

Technologically, in 1997, Army TV Channel 5 became the first station to broadcast live on the Internet (Ekachai, 2000, p. 449). A year later, it commenced 24-hour broadcasting via the THAICOM-3 satellite to Eastern and Western Australia, the US and Europe (Lewis & Hirano, 2001, p. 189). In Thailand, advertising is limited to ten minutes per hour on all commercial television (Chirapravati, 1996). It is compulsory that all television commercials be submitted for pre- and post-censorship to committees consisting of representatives from both the four national commercial television stations (Channels 3, 5, 7 and 9) and the Advertising Association of Thailand (Chirapravati, 1996, p. 225).

Having served as a source of knowledge and entertainment for Thai people for almost five decades, television has become part of their lives. As Wongtes notes, "In the year 2000 it could be said that no home can be without television" (2000, p.117).

⁶ *Chinawattra* is the wealthy family of *Taksin Chinawattra*, currently Thailand's Prime Minister.

According to academic surveys (e.g “The most remarkable news,” 1999; “Public reference”1999), the most popular television programs for young people are music, game and quiz shows, variety talk shows, and serial dramas.

There are numerous game or quiz shows. Unlike those in England or other countries the majority of participants are celebrities. Like game shows, variety talk shows are very competitive. Program producers often try to create new programs to improve their ratings, frequently by inviting celebrities to their shows. In addition to music programs, there are also a number of concert programs, broadcast live on television.

As Connell et al. (1996) point out sport is a key area for the age group 14-24. Nowadays, the amount and significance of sport on television has dramatically increased. Television organizations compete for the television audience very fiercely. There is more sport on television than ever before because the ratings for sport are so high. Television coverage also affects the timing and organization of sport events (Connell et al., 1996). Although it is costly to cover events like sport live, television stations can sell space for advertising at a premium. Live coverage reaches and attracts large audiences which advertisers seek to access. Sport has increasingly dominated the schedules of Thai television organizations.

In the age of high technology all Thai television channels have created their own web sites. The web sites of channels 3, 5, 7 and ITV have become a useful vehicle to promote celebrities and their own channels’ soap operas as well as to provide program details such as highlights, show schedule, etc.

Cable Television

Cable television emerged in Thailand in 1980s. In addition to regular television channels, there are up to 39 more cable channels, available to subscribers 24 hours a day. Currently, there is only one cable television operator in Bangkok⁷: the United Broadcasting Corporation (UBC). Subscription fees vary, depending upon the type of broadcasting system and number of television sets in the household. For example, a monthly fee for *Silver Plan* is approximately £ 15 for 10 channels and *Gold Plan* £ 23 for 39 channels. Due to relatively high fees, cable television service serves those with decent income and

⁷ As of May 2003, there are 77 provincial cable operators (The Public Relations Department).

expatriates living in the country. The number of subscribers is less than 1 % of the whole population (Netpokaew, 2002).

The main advantage of UBC has been a variety of Western produced programs such as Discovery Channel, CNN, MTV, ESPN (sports), HBO (movies), Cartoon Network, and National Geographic Channel. Broadcasting live coverage of news, sports, and entertainment programs is another reason that people subscribe to cable television. Most programs are available in both Thai and English languages. The growth in this industry is due mainly to two factors: better quality programs and reception, and no commercial interruptions.

Radio

The first Thai radio station broadcast experimentally in 1928. Two years later, the country's first public radio station was officially launched when King Rama VII delivered an inaugural speech to the Thai people (Ekachai, 2000). In mid 1999, Thailand had 523 radio stations (Ekachai 2000). Like television, all national and local radio stations in Thailand are owned by governmental agencies: Public Relations Department, the Ministry of Defense and the Mass Communications Organization of Thailand (Ekachai, 2000). Additionally, Thailand is host to three international relay stations: Voice of America (VOA), BBC East Asian and Radio France Internationale (Ekachai, 2000).

According to government policy, all radio stations are required to broadcast local and international newscasts by National Broadcasting Services of Thailand (NBT), daily at 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. (Ekachai, 2000). Diversification of types of programs has been important in maintaining the audience (Connell et al., 1996, p. 47). Thai radio programs vary from traffic report to help lines. Popular music is one of the most listened to radio programs, especially among teenagers and young adults, therefore, age is an important factor in musical programming (Connell et al., 1996, p. 47). In addition to the young audience, a growing number of radio programs such as health, traffic, business reports and news have captured a number of educated listeners (Mahaphant, 1995, cited in Chatrapravati, 1996).

Music programs on radio usually target young people. Today, young listeners have many different stations available to them with contemporary music in a wide range of styles (Connell et al., 1996, p. 46). Anglo-American pop/rock music and three other Thai traditional genres are broadcast on the FM bands, and only some on AM stations

(Siriyuvasak, 1998), while *Luk toong* music as well as soap opera programs are only located on the AM stations.

Newspapers

Thailand's first weekly newspaper, *The Bangkok Recorder* was published in both Thai and English languages on July 4, 1844 (Ekachai, 2000; Satawetin, 1996). In 1968, *The Siam Daily Advertiser*, the first foreign-owned daily newspaper was introduced (Satawetin, 1996). The first Thai-owned daily newspaper was *Court*, first published in 1875 (Satawetin, 1996). Unlike television or radio stations, newspapers are owned by the private sector. According to the Reporters Association of Thailand, in June 1999, Thailand had 25 daily newspapers: 15 in Thai, two in English, five in Chinese and three in Japanese (Ekachai, 2000). Although Bangkok is the center of dailies, almost all 76 provinces produce local newspapers (Ekachai, 2000). Thai newspapers serve the whole population and all classes while English papers mainly serve the educated and expatriates.

As in many countries, there are two main types of newspaper: quality and tabloid. The former contain more serious coverage and analytical reports on current affairs while the latter tend to concentrate on more popular news, like human interest stories (Connell et al., 1996). All newspapers in Thailand, regardless of quality, appear in broadsheet form. *Siam Rath* (Siamese Government) and *Matichon* (Public Opinion) are considered quality newspapers, read by the educated elite (Ekachai, 2000). These papers concentrate mainly on covering politics, social, economic, culture, and education. They contain significantly smaller amounts of entertainment coverage, compared to tabloids. Two English language newspapers, *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* are also quality dailies, with a small amount of soft news and purposely serve well-educated and influential members of Thai society (Ekachai, 2000) as well as expatriates.

In contrast, *Thai Rath* (Thai Government) and *Daily News*, are the top two tabloids. They have similar characteristics in terms of using brash headlines and color, and unabashedly sensational reporting (Vanden & Dennis, 1993, cited in Ekachai, 2000). Both contain a supplements devoted exclusively to sports and entertainment news. Like in magazines, celebrity gossip and critiques on stars, films, songs, etc. are very common in tabloids. They also devote a great deal of space to daily excerpts of popular series – currently broadcast on television. *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* have the largest circulation, more than one million and 750,000 copies respectively (Chirapravati, 1996; Ekachai,

2000). A big part of their readership is likely to be television soap fans. However, due to high competition, a quality paper, *Matichon* started to add more soft news to attract a wider audience while a tabloid *Thai Rath* has been forced to report more hard news (Tasker, 1998, cited in Ekachai (2000). In addition, there are specific subject newspapers such as *Siam Keelah* (Siam Sport), *Sport Pool*, and *Soccer*. In addition to hard copies, most newspapers⁸ have launched their online edition to serve Internet users both local and overseas.

Magazines

In Thailand magazines can be broadly divided into two main categories: subject specific magazines (e.g. computer, automobile, sport), and variety magazines which contain a range of articles and features such as: fashion, automobile, business, travel, music, movies, computer, home decoration and so on. There are also a number of teen magazines. Like other media, different types of magazine serve different readers with different interests and tastes. Apart from Thai established magazines, there are several foreign magazines published in Thai language editions, namely *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Readers Digest*, *G. M.*, etc.

Magazines from overseas are also available, particularly from Japan, containing a great deal of information on current fashion and music. Japanese illustrated pocket books have been very popular among young audience. The content of such comics can be divided into two groups, one aimed at girls and the other at boys ("For the girls and boys," 2000). For girls the focus is on love stories, taking place in schools. Nude scenes are also included. The ones aimed at boys depict such manly matters as fights, sci-fi and amazing adventures. Like other media, some popular magazines have launched their web sites: *Tergubchan*, www.tergabchan; *The Boy*, www.theboy.ksc.net; *Image*, www.i-am-image.com; *Elle*, www.elle.com and *Cleo*, www.cleo.com.

Film

Film was introduced in Thailand in 1897 (Satawetin, 1996; Wongtes, 2000). In their early years, all movies were imported and the first Thai movie, *Chok Song Chan* (Double

⁸ For instance, Thai Rath has launched www.thairath.co.th, Daily News, www.dailynews.co.th, Matichon, www.matichon.co.th, Bangkok Post, www.bangkokpost.com, The Nation, www.nationmultimedia.com.

Luck), was made in 1927 by a Thai family, *Wasuwat* (Satawetin, 1996; Wongtes, 2000). At the end of World War II, Hollywood distributors set up offices in Thailand, resulting in an influx of Hollywood films into the country (Wongtes, 2000) notes that. To emphasize how highly the King is respected film audiences must stand up to attention for the royal anthem with the image of the King and the royal family members at the start of each movie (Lewis & Hirano, 2001). It is hard to imagine that happening in the UK.

The major target audience for film production companies is believed to be adolescents and young adults. In general, everyone has favorite film stars. Thus, the selection of stars is an important aspect of the way a film is marketed. However, budgets for making Thai films are limited. Consequently, for decades, a small number of Thai films has been produced each year. Thai audience seem to be much more interested in imported films, especially from America, than in domestic ones. Due to a small amount of domestically-made movies, almost all films showed in the country are imported, mostly from the USA. One could then argue that film is one of the most powerful sources through which Thai teenagers receive American messages. Hollywood movie stars have become as popular in Thailand as they are in their own country.

According to *Wisit Sasanatieng*, a film director, for the past two decades Thai film-makers have been influenced by Hollywood and Hong Kong films, adopting a subtle, understated style (Pornpitagpan, 2000). He further argues that Thai people regard Thai films as unfashionable and distasteful. Consequently, Thai movies have lost their identity while Japanese and Chinese filmmakers manage to maintain their characteristics in their movies. However, Thai filmmakers have tried to improve the quality of film in order to encourage Thai people to see more domestic films and to compete with the international film business. After languishing in the doldrums for two decades, Thai film industry has become alive again after both the local and international success of two Thai movies: *Nang Nak* (Mrs. Naak) and *Satree Lek* (An Iron woman) (Towira, 2000). The Thai equivalent of the Oscars and British Film Awards, *Took ka ta tong* (Golden Doll Award), is held each year.

In May 2000, www.bangkokcinema.com, a new web site focusing specifically on Thai films, was launched. It is to feature several elements of local films such as new releases, interviews with actors, and movie reviews (Towira, 2000). With the development of more advanced technologies, three-dimensional cinemas and ones using simulator systems are now available in the country (Wongtes, 2000).

Unlike the USA or the UK, Thailand does not use the Movie Rating System. However, the National Broadcasting Commission must inspect every film. The Board is responsible for removing any inappropriate scenes that contain violence, nudity, sex, and improper language. Nevertheless, it is known that movies containing such graphic scenes are illegally shown in what Thais call *the second class cinemas*⁹. Young audience are one of the main consumer groups (Jiamboon et al., 2000).

The Internet

The Internet is the most important and powerful medium in the information age. Internet access was first introduced in Thailand in 1987 when *Prince of Songkla University* and *Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)* started the Thai Computer Science Network (TCSNet) via an electronic mail connection with the University of Melbourne (Ekachai (2000). In 1993, Thai Social/Scientific, Academic and Research Network (ThaiSarn) established the country's first World Wide Web server (www.nectec.or.th) (Ekachai, 2000).

Today, there are 18 Internet Service Providers (ISP) in Thailand. Well-known providers are KSC, ComNet and Loxinfo (Ekachai, 2000). Unlike UK students, registered Thai university students who own a PC at home are able to access the Internet via institutions' network at no cost, except for a telephone connection fee. The SchoolNet Thailand (SchoolNet@1509) was established to enable secondary schools nationwide to connect to the Internet free of charge, simply by using the local access number 1509 (Ekachai, 2000). The Education Ministry's plan is to have all 2,500 secondary schools in the nation online by 2004 and the country's 30,000 elementary schools will have Internet access in 2006 ("Computing a plan," 2001).

Like elsewhere, surfing the internet has become a very popular pastime among young people and many businesses have used this technology in their marketing. Entertainment is one of the most popular topics on Thai web sites. One of the most well-known Thai entertainment web sites is www.sanook.com (Bai-ngern, 2000b), believed to be one of the most visited web sites, particularly young people, living in the country and overseas. Internet cafés are available throughout major cities. For young people,

⁹ This term refers to cinemas where R- and X- rated movies (mostly Thai and Chinese ones) are shown and where admission fees are usually cheaper than those of regular cinemas.

however, some Internet shops have become their favorite hangouts, mostly to play games (“Internet café,” 2001; Janviroj, 2000).

Like other media, the Internet has caused problems in Thai society. Parents and guardians are urged to pay closer attention to how their young children use the Internet in order to prevent them from being exposed to unsuitable messages. Mongkokporn (2000) reports that many teens aged 13 to 17 spend as much as three hours a day using interactive chat services. Thai youngsters use chat rooms to meet new people and talk to friends. With so much time spent online, there are times where they come across or intentionally search for inappropriate messages and images. It is, therefore, difficult for parents and guardians to control their children’s Internet use. However, a parental control feature, available from ISPs helps protect the young from such unsuitable information. *LoxInfo* has launched new software to limit Internet access to children (“LoxInfo launches software,” 2000). Software called “Internet Police program” has been also used to help protect the young from viewing inappropriate media content.

This section has detailed mass media systems in Thailand, from television to the Internet. As this study deals greatly with the effects of media on Thai adolescents as active media users it is necessary to understand how each medium is regulated and controlled in the country. Most importantly, this section has discussed how Thai teenagers use and interact with each major medium. It has shown that Thai teenagers have extensive access to Western and Japanese media and appear to be influenced by its content. Further it has been argued that such influences have and are continuing to change traditional Thai societal structures. The next chapter addresses the celebrity culture believed to have an impact on young people.

Section IV Celebrity Culture

This last section discusses celebrity culture and its role in media consumerism. In terms of advertising, celebrities help mass media by acting as vehicles of consumer products, especially to the young. However the relationship between celebrity and youth cultures goes beyond selling products as I will illustrate. Celebrity culture in different societies is shaped by various factors: cultural, economic, social, and political. The following parts detail Thai celebrity culture and its various aspects.

Once considered indecent by some Thais, an entertainment career has now attracted a large number of young people. Recently, an academic research center has revealed that many youngsters paid greater attention to becoming stars than concentrating on their studies (“Uncover Thai teens’ values,” 2001). They wanted to get in the entertainment business, especially modeling and acting. Having been influenced by famous individuals through the mass media, students interviewed believed that acting and modeling would easily provide them with not only recognition but also wealth. In a swing away from traditional values some parents themselves sought to profit and encouraged their children to get involved in such careers (“Uncover Thai teens’ values,” 2001; Kurtchuchuen et al., 2001).

Typology

In Thailand many types of people can be perceived as celebrities: actors, singers, athletes, models fashion designers, politicians, businesspeople, as well as those who are what Thais call *high-so* (ciety) individuals. *High-so* people are popular due mainly to their lavish lifestyle. However, like Hollywood, Thai pop culture has its own version of celebrity nepotism (Lewis, 1998, p. 247) in that many celebrities have famous parents. Unlike England, the King, the Queen, and other royal family members are not considered celebrities in Thailand (detailed in Chapter 2). Singing, modeling, and beauty contests are the starting point of a number of celebrities.

Like famous individuals in many countries, most Thai celebrities are engaged in more than one aspect of entertainment. As Lewis puts it, “Thai media stars may move between modeling in fashion, TV ads, and large or small parts in Thai TV serials and movies” (1998, p. 247). Many famous actors began their entertainment career with modeling. Several models have appeared in movies and soap operas after they are well recognized. Likewise, several singers have become actors and vice versa. Most film stars appear in television dramas but only some series actors work in the film industry. One explanation could be that the film industry in Thailand is much smaller than that of television dramas which can be produced more often than films.

About a decade ago an acceptance of *hybridity* and *métissage* within the more traditionalist Thai context emerged. Nowadays, a number of celebrities, especially models, actors, and pop singers are of mixed parentage. Once considered social outcasts, today these mixed race individuals are fashionable and hip as Thai concepts of beauty

have changed due to Western influence through mass media (Suwannasak, 2002; Wongpaithoon, 1996). These individuals are called, in Thai *luk-krueng* (literally half children) – meaning half Thai and half foreign. Some do not even have Thai blood but they were born and/or grew up in Thailand. Some can hardly read or speak Thai. Luk-krueng celebrities have appeared in all kind of media: from music videos and programs to films, television dramas, and advertisements (Lewis & Hirano 2001, p. 199). As Wongpaithoon (1996) puts it, “*Luk krueng* celebrities are among the country's most popular models, TV actors and pop singers.” They are also ubiquitous in advertisements, pitching soap, toothpaste, film, coffee, and tea (Wongpaithoon, 1996). With their exotic yet good-looking appearance, they always attract advertising and modeling agencies (Pornpitagpan, 2000; Wongpaithoon, 1996). Some famous Luk-krueng celebrities are: *Willy* and *Cathaleeya McIntosh* (Thai-British brother and sister) *Thongchai McIntyre* (Thai-Swiss), *Marsha Wattanapanit* (Thai-German), and *Nicole Theriault* (Thai-American-French). These celebrity *luk-kruengs* have become what Lewis terms, the media emblems of a new, urban youth culture in a globalized Thailand (1998).

Media coverage of sport is enormous, especially on television and in newspapers. It is true that sports stars make the front pages nearly as often as other kinds of stars (Connell et al., 1996, p. 56). However, it is worth noting that not all athletes are well known. Only those who have significant accomplishments nationally or internationally, (such as the Olympic Games, Asian Games, South East Asia Games (SEA Game)) are famous. For example *Kaosai Galaxy*, a 19-time champion boxer became well known nationally and internationally and later became a singer and actor. More recently, *Wicharn Polrit* has become a star after he won a gold medal in boxing in the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Boxing, football and tennis seem to create more celebrity athletes than do other kinds of sport. *Paradorn Srichapan*, a tennis player who had played *Tim Henmann*, the British champion in various tournaments, has become very famous. *Kiatissak Senamueng*, better known as *Zico*, appears in *Pan* commercials (sport shoes). Once bought by the English football club *Huddersfield*, he is currently with *Hoang Anh Gia Lai*, a Vietnamese football club. Like other types of stars once well recognized these athletes become marketable. They are often used as presenters for sport products to draw consumer's attention-especially young sport fans. Undoubtedly, what sport stars wear and use becomes fashionable.

As mentioned earlier, some new and young stars developed an entertainment career due to being offspring of those who are well known in social, political, or

economic circles. In addition to such relationships, they are frequently good looking and have talent. Individual stand-up comedians and comedians in groups are famous as well. Many of them co-host different game shows.

In addition to Thai popular music, two other traditional music categories: *luktoong* and *lukkroong*, the names literally contrasting the country (*toong*) with the city (*kroong*) (Siriyuvasak, 1998, p. 206) are very popular among Thai people especially those who come from or live in the country. Using simple words in the lyrics is the most significant character of this type of music. However, due to its joyful and distinct style, *luktoong*, once considered low taste by some elite, is more acceptable among the ‘Bangkokians.’ *Soon tra porn* is another kind of traditional music whose singers tend to be older and very well known among people in the same generation.

Apart from young and adult celebrities, there are some children stars, aged from 5 to 13 years old. Most of them won some talent contests and later entered the entertainment business. However, such child celebrities seem to have no effects on the older audience, although they could inspire children of their age. Similar to what Connell et al. have noted, some movie stars have changed their names (1996, p. 51). As Thai people do not call others by family names, Thai celebrities are usually called by their nicknames, most of the times followed by the their first name, either real or fake.

Image and Popularity

The physical appearance of stars is all-important (Connell et al. 1996). Fashion designers and make-up artists are important professionals who help celebrities not only create but also sustain good images. In return, designers and their work have increasingly become recognized due to celebrities’ use of their brand name products (“Spend it like Posh and Becks,” 2003). Fashion stylists can also play a major role in building star images.

Kanjana Prawit Na Ayuttaya, Head of Stylist of *R. S. Promotion Co.*, admitted that fashion styles of Thai singers have been adapted from those from overseas. *Bow and Joyce* of the *Triumph Kingdom*, a girl duo, first appeared in shorts and provocative tank tops, considered “inappropriate,” by most adults. Due to such controversy, *Hatairat Chareonchaichanna*, a stylist, sought to change their look, however, such revealing dress style has still been popular among Thai teen girls for many years.

Popularity, however, can fade. Some celebrities appeared in the media for a short period and have been forgotten. This is due in part to the fact that there are so many new

stars that some of them are unlikely to get much work. Nonetheless, many stars have been in the entertainment world for decades. Two popular pop singers are *Thongchai McIntyre*, best known as *Bird* and *Anchalee Chongkadeekit*, best known as *Pooh*. For decades, Thongchai has performed his yearly famous concert called *Concert Baeb Bird Bird* (Bird Styled Concert). Anchalee, titled as “the Queen of Rock” over a decade ago, was in a Pepsi commercial with *Tina Turner*, an American superstar. Despite both of these Thai icons having been claimed homosexuals, their popularity has never dropped. Other celebrities who have stayed famous for decades are actor, *Sombat Metanee* and actress *Pisamai Wilaisak* who are now in their 60s.

As seen elsewhere celebrities can sustain or destroy their own popularity with admirable or deviant actions. A number of media figures are involved in soft porn style fashion shooting for lucrative money and public attention. Nonetheless, such art is not socially accepted in the Thai society. Celebrities involved in these activities usually receive criticism from both the media and public. A newspaper has even warned female stars not to engage in swimwear or graphic shooting (“Ten strict rules,” 2000, p. 13).

Supporters and Benefits

Like modeling firms, recording companies continuously create new talented singers who will have to sign a contract with the companies that support them. However in many cases such companies, group together some good-looking teenagers who can not sing properly to create new bands. Haward (1998) has made a strong remark that in many cases their image, rather than musical talent, was implanted in the mind of the young. Obviously such firms focus on teen target audience.

A number of recording companies operate in Thailand. Two of the leading firms are *GMM Grammy PLC* (best known as *Grammy*) and *R. S. Promotion PLC* (best known as *R. S.*)¹⁰. Despite being recognized, some artists are more successful than others. Their contracted singers perform different music styles: pop, contemporary, rock, alternative, etc., to meet different tastes and different target audience. These two firms also have similar promotional strategies. The relationship between pop artists and the recording industry is necessarily symbiotic. The music business makes a tremendous amount of

¹⁰ Both companies provide a variety of services: music, radio programs, television programs, film and magazines. *Grammy* claims to be the most successful entertainment content provider and integrated media services in the industry. It has over 300 artists and produces ten music labels (www.grammy.co.th, May 22, 2003).

money not only for singers but also for itself. This is why popular music stars are a big asset to record companies. The recording companies are eager sign exclusive contracts with those who show talent and success (Connell, 1996, p. 55) and their potential to earn money explains why the company will invest in their marketing and promotion.

Other celebrities too can enter into mutually beneficial arrangements with commercial enterprises. A number of actors have signed contracts with drama production companies and engage in similar reciprocal marketing activities to those of musicians discussed above. Similarly, sport production companies often wish to support celebrity athletes. Celebrities often appear in sport advertising. Famous athletes can improve the sales and services as well as the product image. Not only can their appearances make a fortune but frequently such sport celebrities are supplied with sport equipment.

Celebrities have claimed that working in the entertainment field cannot guarantee their future. Over the last decade, many of them have started sideline businesses; some run restaurants, others invest in beauty salons, boutiques, etc. Many of these businesses are doing well with the support of fans and media, even though some failed. Some other celebrities have turned to politics.

Various Use of Celebrities

In addition to their regular work, celebrities are used for different purposes in Thailand. They have been used in political campaigns to encourage young people to vote and to be more concerned about politics (Tongpiam, 2002). Several political parties use celebrities when meeting people and visiting electoral areas to gain their votes. Some parties also welcome celebrities to join (Suksamran, 2000). Well known individuals such as academics or social workers who have appeared on TV and in the press have already proved an effective tool in some elections (Pouaree, 2000).

Outside of politics celebrities can be used for social purposes as well. Popular singers and actors are often exploited in anti-drug campaigns to encourage teenagers not to get involved in drugs. Economically, stars are also used to encourage people to buy domestically made products (Thapanachai, 1996) in order to reform the country's economic crisis and support homemade goods. Additionally, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has created tourism campaigns, using the famous in order to help introduce tourist attractions and to encourage Thai people to spend their holidays domestically as well as to draw foreign tourists (Intarakomalyasut, 2002).

Non-Thai celebrities

As mentioned previously, international celebrities, especially those from the west, are widely welcomed by and exert influence upon Thai audiences. Technology makes it easier for Thai media consumers to catch up with what is going on the other side of the world. Programs such as the Oscars, Grammys, and MTV Awards are broadcast on Thai television. Newspapers and magazines also cover such events. Apart from Hollywood stars, Japanese and Hong Kong celebrities are well known to Thai audiences. Japanese singers and musicians have had impacts on Thai singers in their musical styles and clothing and on audience for extreme fashions (e.g. Singhara, 2001). Thai consumers obtain information and news about Japanese music and fashion mainly through CDs, magazines and music videos. For instance, over a decade ago, after the movie “Ghost” was out in the theaters, many Thai women had their hair cut short, just like *Demi Moore*.

International sports stars, especially football and tennis players, are well known among Thai people. Premier League football matches from the U.K, Italy, Germany and France are broadcast either live or taped and have long been popular among Thai audience. Thais are very familiar with and adore talented sport stars. A survey (“The most remarkable sport,” 1999) showed that *David Beckham* and *Martina Hingis*, a Swiss tennis player were voted the most popular international athletes among Thai people. A Thai temple, named *Pariwas*, is famous for its unique bizarre statues of politicians and celebrities, including *David Beckham*.

Mass Media and Celebrities: Mutual Profit

Celebrities and mass media are dependent on one another (Phusitranusorn, 1998). Mass media need to provide their audience with images of celebrities for economic proposes while the latter also want to be supported publicly. However, mass media can be either friends who support and promote celebrities or enemies who destroy these media figures. This depends mainly upon the morals of media professionals and the celebrities’ own conducts and personal interactions.

Being famous also predisposes celebrities to being a ‘media target.’ Once individuals become famous, their private matters such as love affairs, parties, and

relationships become news (Connell et al., 1996). In Thailand, celebrities are not only concerned about their privacy but they also fear that they could lose popularity. In many cases, they try hard to hide their private lives. *Jatrin Wattanasin* a famous model/singer, had arranged for his ex-girlfriend, a former *Miss Thailand*, to give birth to their daughter in the USA. Another example is a relationship between actor, *Saranyoo Wongkrajang* and a DJ, *Hattaya Katesang* who secretly dated each other for years before they officially and publicly married.

However, when it comes to rumors or gossip the audience have no way to verify them. Such news about stars always appears in entertainment columns in newspapers and magazines less so on television and radio. The worst nightmare for female stars can be scandals about them being mistresses to the rich. Unsurprisingly, both Thai and foreign celebrities are big targets of the Thai media. However, different media may use different strategies in reporting stories and news about celebrities. The following part discusses how each Thai medium covers the famous:

Television and Cable Television

Celebrities get a great deal of coverage on television in such programs as, music, sport, variety talk shows, game shows and advertising. When singers, for instance, have their new releases or when actors play in new soap operas, they usually appear in game shows and/or talk shows. Some studies show that audience can get tired of game shows having all celebrity contestants ("Public preference," 1999). However, program producers believe that such media figures can effectively draw an audience's attention in order to maintain and improve the ratings. Financially, doing so helps them get support from sponsors and advertisers. Although there are many different television talk shows, they are run in somewhat similar fashion. The hosts often ask celebrity guests personal questions about love affairs, relationships and such. The most popular talk show programs are *Tee Sip* (At Ten O'Clock) *Twilight Show* and *Dao Laan Duang* (A Million Stars).

Television music programs are essential tools for singers and their music. *Bang Bang Bang*, produced by *Grammy*, is very popular among Thai teenagers. The program is dedicated to music videos, behind-the-scene stories and interviews of the company's contracted singers. Apart from Thai singers covered on television music programs, international singers and musicians are also popular among Thai audience. Popular music

channels are: Channel V (Thailand) and MTV. Thai fans, particularly the young, easily get information on the artists and their work, new releases, concerts and so on. With the capability to disseminate both music and strong images, television is an important media outlet for covering musical celebrities.

Radio

Radio is one of the most effective tools for pop singers to make the public familiar with them and their songs. It provides a medium where songs can be played frequently increasing listener recognition. There are also reviews and live or taped interviews of artists. Their work is often commented upon by DJs and composers can be criticized or given credit. Many often claim that some record companies pay some radio stations to play their artists' songs.

Magazines

Magazines are another prolific outlet for the promotion of celebrities. As Haward (1998) observes, 'apart from the articles, photographs and letters devoted exclusively to pop stars, their pictures appear on the fashion pages and on the problem-letter page' (p.30). It is particularly true in Thailand where magazines are a medium in which stars are covered in interviews, fashion, and gossip columns; film and song critiques also appear. In many magazines, a great deal of space is devoted to celebrities. Increasing their impact is the fact that magazines are printed papers which an audience can keep, share and re-read at their convenience. Magazine covers are important as well. Celebrities pictured on the cover can make a big difference in sales. This is particularly true when supermodels are presented in swimming suits for summer issues.

Newspapers

When it comes to gossip and rumors, newspapers could be the most harmful medium for celebrities and frequently the most unreliable medium for the public, as columnists can be biased and write anything without knowing the truth. Personal and private matters, such as love affairs, parties and relationships, often end up in newspaper columns (Connell et al., 1996, p. 90). The public are often interested in reading about famous people,

particularly if they have done something wrong (gossipy stories) (Connell et al. 1996, p. 127). Newspapers are the fastest medium through which rumors about celebrities spread out. They often are in the form of quotes, direct or indirect interviews, reviews and critiques, Q & A, etc. Such fast moving but often unreliable coverage can have significant impact upon celebrities careers

Film

Most Thai films target adolescents and young adults. Film is the most important medium through which international movie stars become recognized by the Thai audience. Although most American films come out to the theaters a few months later in Thailand than in the US, they are often successful. As in many countries, James Cameron's *Titanic* made a huge amount of money and was shown for a very long period. As a consequence *Leonardo DiCaprio* has become a superstar among young Thais. *DiCaprio* became even more popular when he starred in *The Beach* which was filmed in Thailand. However, unlike other media, films do not portray celebrities the way they actually are in real life. Nevertheless, they can be a significant source of information for young audiences who learn a great deal about other cultures and lifestyles through imported films.

Internet

The most modern medium where information about Thai and international stars is available is the Internet. Innumerable web sites feature celebrities' profiles with pictures, bibliographies and interviews. Many devoted fans have built homepages featuring stars whom they adore, and where they can send letters to their favorites and talk to other fans.

The Internet has become an effective commercial tool. In mid 2000, *Grammy* launched its homepage, called *www.eotoday.com* (*eo* is short for entertainment online), as a new e-commerce strategy to sell tapes, records and related products online. Since the target group is teenagers, the company also invites singers and celebrities to lead the online chats thus incorporating marketing and promoting simultaneously.

Celebrity and Youth Cultures

Mass media provides audience with information about celebrities and their activities while young people search for role models during adolescence. Apart from family, the young generally observe and learn new behavior from mass media used on a daily basis. In general, adolescents are easily influenced and susceptible to media influences (detailed in Chapter 2).

Evidence shows that in general adolescents tend to have ‘ideal people’ in mind and use them in their own identity construction as they want to look like and act like their idols (e.g. Ganetz, 1995, Raviv et al., 1996). This is particularly obvious in the case of music and fashion. There are various types of imitative behavior, such as: violence, abuse of drugs and alcohol, unsuitable sexual practices, provocative dress style, unusual hairstyle and body adornments. Most media shaped behaviors are seen as inappropriate and unacceptable by adults.

This section has suggested that mass media and celebrities share a mutually exploitative relationship. Different types of media have specialized presentation strategies with regard to the way they cover and report on the famous. Coverage of celebrities on television is usually in form of news reports, game and talk show programs, music videos, etc. Due to its limited capability which contains neither still nor moving images, radio covers mainly, if not exclusively, musicians. Magazines and newspapers have the advantage of being in form of hard copy that can be read at audiences’ convenience. All of these media presentations share the symbiotic quality that they simultaneously increase media revenues while also increasing celebrities fame-thus also their income.

More importantly, it has been suggested that there is a close link between celebrity and youth cultures. In this stage of their lives, adolescents often use media to identify with others. Raviv et al. (1996) have stated that musicians can be especially influential in adolescent identity construction, and they want to look like and perform like their idols (Ganetz, 1995, p. 90).

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed important background information on Thailand. The following four main aspects were discussed:

- The first section presented information about Thailand. It described Thai culture as an important determinant of norms, beliefs, customs and traditional ways of thinking. It argued that the dominant characteristics of Thai culture, history, religion and social status influence the way Thais think and behave. This suggests that culture is a significant factor in determining social meanings.
- The second section discussed the profile of Thai youth and their media-related activities. It also covered various factors such as family, sexual practices, substance abuse and globalization that have caused current social disruptions in the young Thai population.
- The third section focused on the mass media system in Thailand. It provided detailed discussions on each main medium with regard to its history, development and regulation. The most popular teenage programs were also discussed.
- The last section discussed celebrity culture in the Thai context. It provided various examples of celebrities relationships to mass media and their mutually beneficial aspects. It also discussed how these media figures were targeted by each medium to reach young audience and the relationship between celebrity and youth cultures. It also pointed out that media shaped behavior is often considered inappropriate and unacceptable in Thai society.

As stated in the beginning, information on Thailand and its young population is essential in providing an overall picture of the current situation, and in understanding how Thai society perceives and approaches its issues. Moving forward from this understanding, the next chapter discusses the conceptual framework for the study.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptual Framework

Introduction

This chapter is divided in two main parts: (1) literature overview and (2) theoretical framework.

The literature review discusses the theories that provide the wider theoretical framework to this study. It is divided into four sections:

- The first section discusses the concepts of audience reception and media representation. Reception theory explores the way in which audiences read and interpret the texts of media culture (Real, 1996). Studies into representation have suggested that meaning is produced and negotiated between the members of a culture (Hall, 1997). Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model suggests the possibility of different readings. To understand how audiences actually interact with cultural texts, the discussion draws on the concept that different individuals use different media for different purposes. Uses and gratifications theory, focusing mainly on social and psychological perspectives, comes into use to explain what media are used by the active audience, why, how, and to what effect.
- The second section addresses media effects theories. The discussion focuses on social learning and modeling theories, which help explain how individuals observe other people's actions and how they come to adapt those patterns of action as personal models of response to problems, conditions, or events in their own lives (Bandura, 1994; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Cultivation theory is also useful; it states that perceptions of social reality are based upon long-term, cumulative consequences of exposure to repetitive and stable systems of messages, not short-term responses or individual interpretation of content (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994; Perry, 1996). The focus here is on the concept of international cultivation, namely on the changing perceptions of international celebrities among Bangkok teenagers.

- The third section discusses youth culture and psychology of adolescence. As this study deals exclusively with young people, it is essential to understand the unique physiological and psychological characteristics of teenagers. Equally important, youth culture contains its own cultural expressions and social structure which helps to understand the process of identity construction.
- The last section provides a discussion of celebrity culture studies. It is important to be aware of how the culture of celebrity works in Thai society. Discussion of the way in which famous figures are treated by the mass media and audience in the society is essential here.

After having reviewed these theories, in the second part of this chapter, I will discuss main studies that informed the theoretical framework of the study.

Part One Overview of Literature

Part One reviews the literature highlighting various theories relating to this study and is composed of four sections. Discussed extensively are theories on media effects and audience reception as well as other related disciplines such as psychology and sociology. The history and development of the theories is addressed.

Section I Meaning Construction, Audience Reception and Use of Media Culture

Media Representation and Meaning Construction

As this study concerns media representation of celebrities, it is essential to understand the process of representation and production of meaning. Before I discuss Stuart Hall's (1997) concept of representation it is important to note that in this study, by 'representations,' I refer to images, roles, and meanings of celebrities as these appear in mass media.

"Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture," writes Hall. "It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things" (1997, p. 15). He further notes that representation enables us to understand either the real or the imaginary

world of objects, people, and events. Similarly, representation is the process by which signs and symbols are made to convey meanings of objects, people, groups, places, events, social norms, cultural identities and so on (Bernstein, 2002, p. 260).

Representation, an essential part of social life, is a media construct which allows us to communicate and make sense of our surroundings (Hall, 1997). The same image or text could have multiple meanings to people from different cultures or even those from the same culture. As young people have their own sub-culture, the way adolescents perceive and understand media representations of celebrities may differ from that of other groups, adults in particular. At the same time, however, representations are selective, limited or framed, and mediated (Grossberg, Wartella & Whitney, 1998; McQueen, 1998). That is, media seek to mold what is represented.

Take the example of one of the main interests of the young, the concept of fashion (Ganetz, 1995). According to semiotics, clothes not only have a physical function – to cover body and protect it from the weather but they also serve as signs (Hall, 1997). Clothes construct different meanings and convey different messages (p.37) and serve as a personal expression (Ganetz, 1995). An evening dress, for instance, may signify ‘elegance’ while jeans and trainers imply ‘casual’ (Barthes, 1967, cited in Hall, 1997). Adolescents generally use fashion and music to construct their own sense of identity (discussed later). They usually pick up styles of fashion from their idols and role models (e.g. Ganetz, 1995, p. 91). Celebrities such as actors, models, athletes and musicians always represent fashions and styles through the mass media, especially through print and broadcast advertisements. However, as Hall argues, not everyone reads fashion in the same way due to differences in gender, age, class and race (1997, p. 38). This is why adults often find teens’ lifestyles disturbing: Those from the older generations rarely appreciate young people’s fashions and styles and what they mean to them. Only adolescents who share the same fashion code will interpret the signs in almost the same way (Hall, 1997, p. 38). This view links to the next discussion of audience reception focusing on how audience read media texts and what interpretive strategies they use in decoding such texts.

Audience Reception

Reception theory explores the way in which audiences perceive and interpret the texts of media culture (Real, 1996, p. 92) and helps explain how and why diverse audiences

interpret texts differently (Kellner, 1995a). This study focuses mainly on Bangkok adolescent reception of media representations of celebrities. Understanding the way in which the young audiences perceive and make sense of such media texts is necessary. In the earliest years, 'hypodermic' or 'bullet' theory traditionally suggested that audiences were passive and directly influenced by the powerful media. A number of media scholars, however, found this view inadequate and exaggerated. DeFleur, in particular, has argued that media messages enter a differential interaction with personality characteristics and audience responses vary systematically according to social categories like age, occupation, lifestyle, gender, etc. (1970, p. 122). Yet, with the benefits of reception theory, we are able to comprehend the complex and varied ways in which audience members read media messages (Real, 1996, p. 94). Thus, 'reception approach' gives a much better understanding than the traditional 'bullet transmission' theory and the notion of an all-powerful text or message. It also explains how the audiences receive media texts. The approach is to locate the attribution and construction of meaning (derived from media) with the receiver (McQuail, 2000, p. 56).

For decades now it has been accepted that audiences are no longer passive, rather they very actively respond to media messages. In spite of differences in terminology, the concept of reception in audience studies signals an interest in audience's interpretations: decodings, readings, meaning productions, perceptions or comprehension of media texts (Höijer 1990; 1998). However, social psychology in individuals plays a vital role in individuals' perception of their world (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, cited in Höijer 1998). Similarly, cognitive theory also suggests that meaning is produced in the interaction between external life/social activity and mental life/cognitive activity (Höijer 1998, p. 169).

Today, it is believed that meaning is not fixed but is rather dynamic, polysemic, multireferential (Hall, 1994) and constituted in the interaction between the text and its audience (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1980; Jhally, 1994). Media messages are always open and interpreted according to the context and the culture of the receivers (McQuail, 2000, p. 56). Individual characteristics and socio-cultural factors affect the way audiences perceive and give meaning to media texts (Höijer 1998, p. 7). Different audiences, thus, may attribute different meanings to the same text (Jhally, 1994; Real, 1996). In addition, the cultural and political disposition, the relationship to wider framework of power, the access to mass-produced technology (Stevenson, 1995, p. 42), as well as the individual's cultural and personal experiences (Shore, 1996, p. 46) can

significantly influence the media reception. Consistent with Jhally's notion, people will make sense of the media story in terms of their background and experience (1994, p. 164).

Initiated by Stuart Hall in the early 1970s while at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the encoding/decoding model has greatly been discussed in the context of audience reception. The central theme of the model is its situating structures of production, text and audience within a framework where each can be analysed in relation to each other. For Hall, the communication process has to be taken as a whole, with the moment of text making at one end and the moment of audience reception at the other (Phiphitkul, 2001). In his 'Encoding/Decoding', Hall (1980) has identified three hypothetical positions from which decodings of a televisual discourse may be constructed. This encoding/decoding model can also be appropriated for work with written texts (Poole, 1999). It is this model on which my analysis of how young audiences read media texts about celebrities will be drawn in the following chapters.

The *preferred reading* accepts fully the message as given in the text (Lacey, 1998, p. 88; Real, 1996, 107). This is the situation where the reader understands the texts as encoded by the producer that reflects the dominant ideology (Real, 1996). The *negotiated reading* consists of a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements. That is when the reader understands the dominant position but chooses to apply it to his/her own social context (Lacey, 1998, p. 88). In other words, it usually accepts the larger frame provided by the dominant code but makes exceptions to it (Real, 1996). The *oppositional reading* refers to the situation where the reader understands the dominant and intended meaning but interprets the message in a totally contrary way (Real, 1996).

The encoding/decoding model frees the audience from the absolute bonds of media determinism (Tudor, 1999, p. 130). It also seeks to combine semiotic and sociological concerns – connecting up approaches to the study of meaning construction with perspectives on cultural power and social relations (Morres, 1993, p. 16). The model, however, is not immune to criticisms for its limited range of 'overtly political decoding positions; the 'premature closure of the text' with its 'preferred reading' and its lack of context (Cruz & Lewis, 1994; Wren-Lewis, 1983, cited in Poole, 1999). Wren-Lewis has also argued that the fact that many decoders will arrive at the same reading does not make that meaning an essential part of the text (1983). In the 'critical postscript' to his *Nationwide* study, Morley also recognizes these limitations (Moore, 1993; Tudor,

1999). I, however, believe that the model gives a useful framework from which a variety of text interpretations can be studied.

Hall's encoding/decoding model has been successfully used in audience reception studies. I now would like to specifically discuss studies on the *Madonna* phenomenon that have used this model and suggested that her texts proliferate polysemic meanings. As defined by Kellner, Madonna is a highly influential pop culture icon, frequently at the center of a controversy (1995b, p. 263). Among others, Fiske (1989a, 1989b), Lewis (1993), Kellner (1995b), Real (1996), and Brown and Schultz (1990/1995) have focused on the interpretations of Madonna's image. Fiske (1989a, 1989b) found that teenage girls used Madonna as a resource to inspire demonstrations of independence and fashion rebellion, which allowed them to express themselves. He sees Madonna 'not as a model meaning for young girls in patriarchy, but a site of semiotic struggle between the forces of patriarchal control and feminine resistance, of capitalism and the subordinate, of the adult and the young' (p. 97). Kellner's (1995b) textual analysis focused on Madonna's images, and cultural production, their impact on their audiences and her cultural effects.

According to Kellner, "Madonna allows many, even contradictory, readings which are grounded in her polysemic and modernist texts and her contradictory culture effects" (p. 292). He has concluded that how one evaluates the superstar depends on one's specific politics and morality and that one who cultivates an aesthetic of shock and excess is certain to offend and to become a target of criticism (p. 291). Real (1996) conducted a series of classroom surveys by using *Madonna* as a case study with debates over her sexual representation and pop star role to examine what the star meant to university students. Consistently with Hall's remark that negotiated readings are probably what most of us do most of the time (1994, p. 265), many studies indicate that the *negotiated* reading that accepts some and rejects other aspects is the most common one in the case of Madonna (Real, 1996, p. 109). Real's other findings also support Hall's notion of different text readings. The responses and judgement to Madonna are either negative, positive or ambivalent. His study revealed that more women (30%) than men (21%) were most impressed with her 'individuality' while more men (38%) than women (24%) described Madonna as a bad girl who creates a bad popular culture. Obviously, gender made difference in interpretation. Real, therefore, maintains that differences in gender, economic class, racial self-identity, and other social positions significantly influence audience's decoding of media texts (p. 96). In his study, Jhally found some aberrant decodings – the participants read the references in his videotape in an opposite way

(1994, p. 162). In Brown and Schultz's (1990/1995) study of interpretations of Madonna's music videos by college students, race and gender were important interpretative strategies. Looking at the 'Papa Don't Preach' video, white students saw a story about an anti-teen-pregnancy while Black participants saw a message of difficult male-female relationships (pp. 513-517). Ultimately, the study shows that not all adolescents see the same thing in such media.

Interpretive communities, another essential aspect in reception studies, refers to social and institutional contexts within which practices of reading are placed, each of which possesses some unique possibilities for attributing meaning (McQuail, 2000, p. 328). As Hall (1994) clearly notes, "your readings arise from the family in which you were brought up, the places of work, the institutions you belong to, the other practices you do" (p. 270). Similarly, as Jensen has argued earlier, "interpretive communities and their members are defined both by their social placement and functions and by the cultural traditions, conventions and meanings that unite them" (1987, p. 29). In short, interpretive communities often direct audience's reading of media culture (Real, 1996, p. 113). Consequently, they are influential in reading media messages. Media consumers holding different personal and cultural ideologies are more likely to interpret media texts differently. For instance, studies of Madonna by Patton (1993), Henderson (1993) and Schwichtenberg (1993) read her images and messages from within the interpretative communities of gay and lesbian culture (cited in Real, 1996, p. 113).

In relation to interpretive communities, peer groups play a major role. It is peer groups that determine how young individuals will read and understand media texts to which they are exposed on a daily basis (e.g. Livingstone & Bovil, 1999; Suoninen, 2001). Members of the communities are more likely to read the same type of texts, this distinction in media consumption determining the further internal division of the audience into *subgroups* (similar to Fish's (1980) concept of *interpretive communities*) (Duke, 2000, p. 371). Nevertheless, like other social groups, not all adolescents interpret media texts and messages in the same way.

Using a combination of in-depth interviews and focus groups, Duke (2000) studied black and white teen female readers of the three most popular teen magazines: *Teen*, *Seventeen* and *YM* for their interpretations of feminine ideals. The focus of her exploration was on the ways race affected the differences in girls' interpretations of magazines and found that the way black and white girls read the magazines is significantly different. Most African-American girls were uninterested in striving for or

achieving the ideal feminine physique, as portrayed in these magazines. They tended to evaluate themselves and others on character and personality rather than appearance. In contrast, most white girls maintained their interest in cosmetics from early adolescence and considered makeup as necessity. Unlike their black counterparts, white girls seemed unaware of the bias in the magazines until asked to consider the material in the light of racial representation (Duke, 2000, pp. 382-383). It is clear that despite their interpretive community each young individual may read media text differently, depending upon such factors as sex, race, peer groups, economics and religion. As Hall puts it, each individual has his/her own preferred interpretive community (1994, p. 270) however what level of influence that has upon their media decodings is not always predictable.

Understanding audience reception patterns is essential for this thesis as it helps to see Bangkok teenagers as active users and interpreters of media texts. It also enables us to understand the relationship between media readings and the effects media have over these young people.

Use of Media Culture: Uses and Gratifications

The uses and gratifications approach enables us to understand the process of media usage of young audience and gratifications they receive from the use. Duke notes that the uses and gratifications approach is frequently suggested as the most appropriate for study of adolescents and the media. It is particularly suitable as a framework for her study of girls' interpretations of the feminine ideal in teen magazines because it posits an active audience that uses media with varying degrees of satisfaction (2000, p. 371).

More specifically, Arnett (1995) has summarized five purposes of adolescents' media usage: entertainment, high sensation, coping, identity formation, and youth culture identification. Uses and gratifications theory is helpful in explaining how and why young people use mass media as well as the relation between their media usage and their identity construction. This approach also explains how age and gender differences play an important role in media usage by youngsters. Further, uses and gratifications provides background and informative value for my thesis on Thai adolescents' patterns of media use and identity construction.

Although my focus is mainly on how young people use media, it is important to briefly discuss the evolution of uses and gratifications. As early as 1940, studies focused

on people's usage of certain media content (e.g. Berelson, 1949; Herzog, 1940; Lazarsfeld, 1940 cited in Rubin, 1994). In the early 70's the approach turned to emphasize the social and psychological perspectives (e.g. Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974; Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass, 1973). Media consumers have now been seen as "an active audience" who deliberately use the media to achieve specific goals (Tan, 1985). The uses and gratifications approach involves a shift of focus from the purposes of the communicator to the purposes of the receiver, that is, the audience. It also attempts to determine what functions mass communications are serving for audience members (Severin & Tankard, 1997). The main question is no longer how the media are changing people's attitudes and behavior, rather how the media are meeting their social and individual needs.

Uses and gratifications recognizes that (1) people differ in ways that lead them to make different choices about media usage, and (2) even people consuming the same media product will respond to it in a variety of ways, depending on individual characteristics (Rubin, 1994). Rubin's view is consistent with other scholars' that put the emphasis on social and psychological perspectives (such as Arnett et al., 1995). That is, differences in individuals' characters result in different choices and interpretations of media. The approach now examines media behavior from the view of the active audience member: it seeks to examine the ways people use media and the gratifications that they derive from media use (Jeffres, 1994).

This study focuses upon identity construction of adolescents and youth culture. Identity formation is the cultivation of a conception of one's values, abilities and hopes for the future (Arnett, 1995). Swidler (1986) suggests that media provide adolescents with materials that they use toward the construction of an identity. Several studies (e.g. Brown & Handee, 1989, cited in Raviv, 1996; Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993, cited in Arnett, 1995; Steele & Brown, 1995) show that gender role identity is one of the most important aspects of identity formation that adolescents learn from the mass media. Through music, movies (Greenberg, Siemicki & Dorfman 1986), television (Brown, Childers & Waszak, 1990) and magazines (Evans et al., 1991, cited in Arnett, 1995), young people acquire both physical and behavioral gender ideals in images. Ward (1995) argues that gender, sexuality, and relationships are central to the kind of identity exploration and construction for which adolescents of both genders use the mass media. Additionally, media can also contribute to the formation of occupational aspirations of the young people. With earlier studies, more recent research found that media messages play an important role in the construction of identity both femininity (e.g. Currie, 1997;

Lemish, 1998; Mazzerella & Pecora, 1999) and masculinity (Maigret, 1999, cited in Lemish, Liebes & Seidmann, 2001).

With regard to youth culture and sub-culture identification, Arnett (1995) suggests that media consumption may give young people a sense of being connected to a larger peer network, united by certain specific values and interests. Music provides a way of defining and uniting the numbers of a youth culture/subculture as well as expressing a shared world-view (Roe, 1987; Willis, 1978, cited in Arnett, 1995). Larson (1995) has argued that young people use media to explore numerous possible selves and adolescents' solitary music listening helps explore the private self and to engage with issues of identity. Music provides the security of identification with other like-minded peers (Larson, 1995). More specifically, in relation to the idolization of pop singers, Bennett and Ferrell argue that the media actually perpetuate the idolization process by presenting singers as celebrities, following closely every detail of their lives, and informing adolescents about the feelings and thoughts of their peers (1987, cited in Raviv et al., 1996, p. 645).

An interesting long-term study of adolescent rooms by Steel and Brown (1995) looks closely at how young people draw from the media as they construct their identities and personal worlds. Their study emphasizes the connections between adolescents' identities and media selections, interaction, and application. Their data derive from in-depth interviews and from questionnaires and teen participants' personal journals. The study concludes that adolescents are active in their media use by selecting which media they will attend to. They also choose favorite characters and models to imitate. Adolescents' sense of who they are and who they would like to become play a central role in their media usage. This does not only affect what media they use, how intensely and to what effect but also feeds forward and changes the sense of self in the process (Steel & Brown, 1995, p. 572). There is evidence that indicates that young people use the media to learn about sexuality. Television in particular is likely to be a prominent source of sexual scripts and information for young viewers (Arnett, 1995; Brown, Childers & Waszak, 1990; Wattleton, 1983, cited in Ward, 1995).

With rapid change in high technology there are more diverse media (Arnett, 1995) available to consumers. Johnsson-Smaragdi notes that with more media to choose among, with more diversified content, and of where and when to use them, individual preferences and lifestyles are becoming more important (2001, p. 114). Media consumers have more opportunities to adopt a specific style of media use to suit their preferences,

circumstances (Arnett, 1995; Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1994) and personalities (Arnett, 1995). In a more recent study, Johnsson-Smaragdi found that instances of simple media displacement are rare, rather distinct user styles are developing as new media become available and differentially accepted by European children and young people (2001, p. 138). It is, therefore, essential not only to make media available but also desirable for the consumers (Johnsson-Smaragdi, 2001). Consequently, mass media increasingly depend upon the audience who are no longer 'passive' users but make active media choices (Arnett et al, 1995).

Peer group is regarded as having an important role in both media choices and media reception process (e.g. Buckingham, 1993; Suoninen, 2001). Using interviews, Suoninen studied how media were connected to interaction with friends – both inside and outside home – in the lives of European children (aged 6-10) and teenagers (aged 12-16) (2001, p. 201). The focus was on four themes: the use of media with friends, media-related common topics for interaction, media equipment and products as status symbols and the role of media in (re) creating youth culture (pp. 201-202). When individuals grow up, they become more peer-oriented and start to use media with their friends (p. 217). However, differences in family culture and child-rearing practices may determine the use of media with friends. That is, youngsters in more peer-oriented culture are more likely to use media with friends than do those in traditional family-oriented culture. By spreading knowledge of innovation and fashion and providing role models, young people use media to build up their individual identity and style (pp. 216-218). Therefore, their media choices and preferences play a significant role in this identity construction.

Gender difference has also emerged as one of the major factors that makes a significant difference in young audience's media use and choices (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995) as well as the meanings they construct (Slater et al., 1997). Gender differences are assumed to be constructed through complex process such as socialization, cultivation, and psychological development (Lemish et al., 2001, p. 263). Previous studies, carried out within Europe and the US, also reveal substantial gender differences in patterns of media usage in young people. For example, in a US study on identification with television characters, Hoffner (1996, cited in Lemish et al., 2001) found that physical strength of role models influences boys while physical attractiveness affects girls more than boys. In fact, attractiveness is the only determinant of girls' identification with female characters. A study on adolescent idolization of pop singers reveals that idolization of pop star is more prevailing among girls (Raviv et al., 1996, p. 644). Roe's

(1998) study of Flemish children suggests that boys spend more time using electronic games, while girls read more and listen more to music. The researcher notes that boys and girls increasingly inhabit different media worlds during adolescence (p. 23). Unlike previous studies, Lemish et al.'s (2001) study of gendered media meaning and media uses of children and teenagers from 12 different European countries employing discussions to determine patterns of use and content preferences has arrived at two different conclusions. On the one hand, the findings largely support the gender preferences that Roe reported. Concerning content preferences, the data show that boys prefer genres of action/adventure and sports, whereas girls prefer human relationships and romance. On the other hand, many girls as well as boys play outdoors and many boys as well as girls read books. Like their counterparts, some girls are interested in computer technologies, like sport and play electronic games. Boys are now spending more time in their bedroom, once seen as a female territory, to play games with friends and siblings (pp. 227-278).

Like urban youth around the world, Bangkok youngsters use various media to satisfy their needs. Studies reveal that Thai youngsters listen to radio (Chahtrimongkol, 1994; Meelaxana, 1995), watch television series and cable television for entertainment, variety and game shows for escapism ("Public preference," 1999; Wiriya-pol, 1995), and read newspaper and magazines for information and knowledge (Meelaxana, 1995). Other Thai studies examine satisfaction and utilization of different media: magazines (Phanchan, 1997; Promsa-ard, 2000; Sanjit, 2000), television programs (Kochek, 1998; Sittiruthai, 1998; Tadaanuaychai, 1997; Werasukho, 1998), radio (Punnahitanond, 1997) and computer games (Phuang-sawan, 1997). However, the number of studies on the relationship between adolescents' media, their interpretations of mediated messages and identity construction is quite limited. In this study, uses and gratifications is an essential approach enabling us to understand (1) what media young audience use, (2) how they use, interpret and interact with them, (3) the purposes and what satisfactions they receive from the media usage.

This first section discussed how meaning is produced and how individuals use media to interpret media texts and images. The next section provides a discussion on a range of theories that explore how media readings shape teenagers' attitudes, actual behavior and identity construction.

Section II Media Effects

Mass Media and Youth

According to McQuail (2000), ‘media effects’ are simply the consequences of what the mass media do, whether intended or not (p. 423). Yet, what effects media have on the audience is not always as simple and straightforward to comprehend. As Buckingham (1993) puts it, the relationship between young people and the media has been defined by mainstream academic research as a *psychological* issue (p. 9). This has to do with what the media do to young people’s minds – or, more recently, what their minds do with the media (Buckingham, 1993, p. 9). He further argues that young people are implicitly regarded as somehow asocial – or perhaps pre-social – beings (p. 9). Due to their specific physiology and psychology (discussed later), teenagers may be uniquely susceptible to the influence of television and other media (Strasburger, 1995, p. 12).

For several decades, media and communication technology have developed significantly. Buckingham has estimated that over seven thousand accounts of research on children and television have been published since the introduction of the medium in the 1950s, ranging from brief reports to extensive and lavishly funded surveys (1998, p. 131). In addition, a great number of studies have dealt with various other media and their effects on young people, suggesting that this type of research has been significant around the world.

Over the past decades there have also been a number of media effects studies on the Thai youth, focusing on different types of media, from television, radio, magazines, newspapers to cable television and the Internet (e.g. Chahtrimonkol, 1994; Chinhongsa, 1992; Korpaiboon, 1993; Meelaxana, 1996; Taitilanon, 1998; “Teenagers’ attitudes towards,” 1998; Teerawanich & Khumpairote, 1984; Visavateeranon, 1997; Wiriya-pol, 1995). A number of studies (e.g. Korpaiboon, 1993; Sukprasert, 1997) and academic surveys (e.g. “Teenagers’ perceptions,” 1997; “The third gender,” 1999) in Thailand reveal that mass media have influenced the way the young think and behave. More specifically, however, media have also played an important role in shaping and changing young people’s attitudes and behavior (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999).

Individual differences are significant factors in the study of mass media effects. Jeffres (1997) points out that individual differences could alter media effects in several ways. First, they can motivate particular behavior. Education, for instance, could make

people prefer print media that subsequently leads to a better knowledge of public affairs. It is then common that educated people tend to be more aware of serious social issues than people with little or no education who prefer broadcast media, entertainment in particular. Secondly, differences between individuals may serve as filters that affect how audience process media messages (Jeffres, 1997, p. 50).

Youngsters naturally tend to learn from and imitate individuals whom they admire and see as 'role models' (detailed later), in this case, 'celebrities'. Therefore, how young people perceive and interpret media representations of public personalities is a key in this study. Sherman, Judd and Park (1989) argue that differences in interpretation are due largely to differences in the structure, content and accessibility of prior knowledge. As Jeffres (1997) also mentions, there is a variety of ways in which we can characterize how audience behavior change or are altered because of the media. The mere presence of mass media has a potential displacement effect on individuals; each medium is an alternative that displaces other activities (p. 20).

Theories of social learning and modeling are important for this study; cultivation approach is also useful, and these will be discussed next.

Social Learning and Modeling Theories

A great many studies have found that behavior observed in the mass media could affect audience's attitudes and actual behavior (e.g. DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). It is fundamentally important for this thesis to examine the psychosocial mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thought, affect and action (Bandura, 1994). According to Stanford University psychologist Albert Bandura, social cognitive theory provides a conceptual framework within which to examine the determinants and mechanisms of such effects (p. 1994, 61). It enables us to understand why Thai adolescents behave in some particular ways. The theory suggests that behavior learned from the media may be imitated or tried out by observers (e.g. Bandura, 1973, 1994; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Strasburger, 1995). DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach clearly explain, 'the actors who portray real people in visual or auditory media, or whose actions are described in print, can serve as models for others to imitate' (1989, p. 213). The focus is therefore, centered on the acquisition of knowledge, cognitive skills and new styles of behavior through observational learning (Bandura, 1994, pp. 70-71).

Jeffres (1997) notes that people learn how to act, how to do things, or how to behave from television and other media. Social cognitive theory provides explanations for the processes by which individuals acquire modeled information and successfully enact modeled behavior. Closely associated with social learning, *modeling* theory allows us to understand how young Thai consumers learn and behave from observed models. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach point out that media are a readily and attractive source of models because they provide audience with *symbolic modeling* of almost every conceivable form of behavior (1989, p. 216). As Bandura puts it, symbolic modeling is central to full understanding of the effects of mass communication (1994, p. 67).

According to Bandura, there are two major aspects of symbolic modeling: (1) multiplicative power, and (2) psychological and social impact. The former refers to 'observational learning', where a single model can transmit innovations to widely dispersed areas. In other words, it acts as conveyer of innovative ways of thinking and behaving. The latter has to do with people having limited direct contact with physical and social environment. They then learn from vicarious experiences, without direct experiential correctives and tend to act on their images of reality (Bandura, 1994, p. 66). Consequently, the more their images of reality depend on the media's symbolic environment, the greater is its social impact (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, cited in Bandura, 1994, p. 67).

Bandura has argued that influential persons pick up new ideas from the media and pass them to their followers through personal influence, offering new ways of thinking and behaving by informative demonstration or description (1994, pp. 78-79). Relating such concept to my study, *influential persons* are celebrities and popular individuals among peers. These people often act as models or opinion leaders who then affect the media consumers and turn them into *followers*, particularly obviously in the case of fashion. Audiences learn new patterns of behavior not only from the mass media but also from close individuals such as friends and family, as well as through interpersonal contacts.

According to Bandura's theories of learning and imitative behavior, there are two types of modeling: *imitation* and *identification* (Kaewtape, 2000, pp. 183-184). Imitation concerns direct mechanical response of behavior, which is overt and superficial whereas identification is a more psychological (Gunter, 1994) and deeper process. Kaewtape has claimed that most scholars have been more interested in imitation than in identification. This is mainly because imitation is observable and obvious whereas identification is

hidden and subtle. However, she argues that identification could have deeper psychological impacts on actors, which could later on lead to deviance, such as copycat serial killers (p. 184).

Two important effects of modeling are the so-called inhibitory and disinhibitory effects. Bandura has argued that modeling influences can strengthen or weaken restraints over behavior that has been previously learned. These effects on restraints rely greatly on the information conveyed about the conducts and potential outcomes of modeled behavior (1994, p. 71). Having obtained such information, the observers use their own judgement as to whether or not they will pursue the modeled behavior by considering possible favorable and unfavorable consequences. Inhibitory effect refers to a situation where media exposure lowers an observer's tendency to copy the modeled behavior which would result in punishment or adverse consequences. For example, a violent film could decrease the likelihood of rape if the actor involved does not seem to enjoy it or if he faces punishment (Check & Malamuth, 1986). On the contrary, disinhibitory effects may occur if the observer sees favorable or desirable consequences, expectedly derived from performing learned conduct. From the same example, the viewer may rape someone if he observes in a film, that the actor enjoys raping someone, or if the victim reacts favorably to the rape (Perry, 1996, p. 175). Similarly, Harris (1994) observes that watching TV's treatment of premarital sex may disinhibit viewers to be engaged in such behavior. One could then argue that disinhibitory effects occur due partly to the way certain misconduct is portrayed by mass media. Although transgressive behavior is regulated by two major sources of sanctions: social and internalized sanctions, media portrayals can alter perceived social sanctions by the way in which the consequences of different styles of conduct are portrayed (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). Physical aggression, as perceived negative in general, is often exemplified as a preferred solution to interpersonal conflicts in the media. For example, heroes triumph aggressively over evil (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). Television, a powerful medium, has widely been a main focus for media effect research on social learning. This could be due mainly to the fact that television is one of the most pervasive media in modern societies (Real, 1996) and young people are uniquely susceptible to it (Strasburger, 1995, p. 7). In relation to the concept of disinhibitory effects, it is almost impossible that a healthy observer will not realize that committing a crime, like rape, is illegal, immoral and inhumane. In fact, it is most likely that only individuals with either weak characters or mental problems will face disinhibitory effects.

I would argue that laboratory based studies asserting that a series of newly learned or modeled behavior from the mass media may be imitated or tried out by observers are open to criticism (e.g. Perloff, 1997). Studies such as Bobo doll and Rocky, were conducted with children who have been exposed to anti-social/aggressive behavior (e.g. Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1991, 1963, cited in Jeffres, 1997). What the scholars measured was not aggression but some form of play behavior (Leibert & Sprafkin, 1988, cited in Jeffres, 1997) and children were placed in bizarre and confusing situations and acted to please the experimenters (Gauntlett, 1995). I would agree with these comments as children are generally the most vulnerable. Compared to any other group, these audience groups are more likely to be influenced by and tend to copy what they have observed and learned from mass media. These audiences are not mature enough to realize what should and should not be imitated and they may be even too young to distinguish right from wrong and good from bad. Moreover, young individuals are in the stage of learning that is crucial in life. Therefore, learning and observing novelties is significantly important for these people. Eventually, the older the audience, the less influenced by the media they may be.

On television, portrayals of attractive adult role models for children and teenagers are abundant and children may imitate behavior they observe and learn from television, which may influence their beliefs about the world (Strasburger, 1995, p. 8). Adolescents tend to appreciate novelty; modeling could be a crucial factor in their decisions about when and how to begin consuming alcohol (Strasburger, 1995, p. 8). Celebrities such as sports and rock stars frequently appear in beer and wine ads. Some underlying messages say “Real men” drink beer; beer drinkers have more fun, more friends and are sexier; and consuming alcohol is the norm rather than the exception” (Strasburger, 1993, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 8). In a similar case, *Lalita Panyopas*, a Thai famous actress/model, has appeared in an alcoholic drink television commercial, which reportedly led a 15-year old teen to try the advertised drink. In response to the teen imitation, the star suggested that the audience should use their own judgment as to whether to pursue behavior observed from the media (“*Mew influences teens*,” 2001).

Strasburger notes that imitation of media-displayed behavior may be direct and immediate, or it may be delayed and more subtle (1995, p. 8). When imitation is in the former case, it often makes headlines. For example, several teenagers were killed after imitating a scene from *Stand By Me*, a movie in which the main characters successfully dodge an oncoming train by jumping off a bridge. In another imitative case, three

teenagers were killed and two injured after imitating a similar scene in the 1993 Disney film, *The Program*, in which a depressed and drunken college football player lay down in the middle of a highway (James, 1993, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 9). Consequently, the scene was removed from later prints of the film (Real, 1996, p. 98). Similarly to those American cases, in 2000, two Thai female students attempted suicides (in separate incidents) by jumping off buildings, imitating *Hide*, the late famous Japanese singer of *X-Japan* who took his own life on April 4, 1998 (ryu, 2000). *Matichon* ("Goodbye," 2000) reported that one of the victims had spent her leisure time watching a music video of the Japanese artist. This incident generates a concern in Thai society about copycat suicides in the young. Apart from close attention from parents and educators, the Thai government believes that another way to minimize such imitation is that the media should reduce coverage of suicides, especially by celebrities (Nontharit, 1998).

In respect to imitation of fashion, in the late 1990's, a famous young Thai-American singer, *Amita Tata Young*, better known as *Tata* made a great impact on Thai teenagers. In her very first album, reportedly sold more than one million copies, *Tata* always appeared in a tight and undersized T-shirt and baggy pants. Shortly, her clothing style became extremely trendy among young girls (Wongpaithoon, 1996). Trying to look like role models or admired individuals is particularly common for adolescents. As media critic Ken Auletta (1993) claims in the *New Yorker*:

I'd be lying if I said that people don't imitate what they see on the screen. I would be a moron to say they don't, because look how their dress styles change. We have people who want to look like *Julia Roberts*, *Michelle Pfeiffer* and *Madonna*. Of course we imitate. It would be impossible for me to think they would imitate our dress, our music, our look, but not imitate any of our violence or our other actions (cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 32).

There have been extensive debates and studies on adolescent sexuality in Thailand. According to the *Bangkok Post*, the media portrayal of transvestites and the presence of gay characters in television dramas misleads young children ("Get real," 1999). Consistent with Bandura's notion, there is no evidence to support the assumption that young persons suddenly decide to be gay after watching such people on television. However, most respondents agreed that program producers should act more responsibly in their portrayal of gay people. According to a survey on '*The third gender*

(homosexuality) and mass media' (1999), 57.5% of the sample agreed that the presentation of the third gender in the media had a significant impact on Thai teens. The respondents reported confusion gender role perceptions, imitation of gay behavior and gender deviation. Nonetheless, this is not conclusive as it represents public opinion only and such opinion may be groundless or misinformed. It is worth noting that less than 40% of the sample in this study were teenagers. In addition, the report did not clarify as to in what age range were the 57.5% who made such statements.

Strasburger observes that teenagers sometimes imitate actors and actresses as they experiment with different facets of their newly forming identities and try on different social "masks" (1995, p. 42). They often see themselves egocentrically as actors in their own "personal fable" (Elkind, 1993, cited in Strasburger, 1995), in which the normal rules (e.g., having unprotected sexual intercourse may lead to pregnancy) are suspended - exactly as on television. According to Myerowitz (1982), adolescents' attitudes are malleable and TV can give teenagers their first real glimpse into the secretive adult world of sex, drugs, and success long before they are able to learn about it firsthand (cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 7). Studies have shown that television can affect older adolescents' views on sexual attractiveness (Kenrick & Gutierrez, 1980, cited in Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1994, p. 398) and the frequency and acceptability of sexual conducts.

In fact, in Thailand, morality standards about sex are quite strict. As Lewis observes, there is rarely any sex or nudity on Thai television (Lewis, 1998, p. 243). Compared to western countries, there is far less sexual media content in indigenous media such as dramas and movies. When such content exists it is subtle or implied. However, sexual behavior portrayed in foreign media may or may not be tried out or imitated. Similarly to the above scholars' observations, Cole and Hendry note that:

In the adult world extra-marital sex has become widely accepted, divorce has become commonplace, there is much greater tolerance of different types of sexual behavior, homosexuality no longer needs to be invisible, advertisements, films and television bombard us all with sexual information (1990, p. 141).

These shifts in attitude, in some respects, seen as almost revolutionary, are more likely to have had an effect on young people (Cole & Hendry, 1990, p. 141). Children growing up in any society take notice of what has happened and changed in their parents'

generation. Nonetheless, I would argue that some factors may restrain such shifts in young people. These could be familial upbringing, education, and personal ideologies.

In addition to the effects caused by broadcast media described above, Klein et al.'s (1993, cited in Strasburger, 1995) study of teen magazines, showed that *Seventeen*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Teen*, *Time*, *Ebony*, *Young Miss*, *Jet*, *Newsweek* and *Vogue* accounted for more than half of all reported reading (the survey was conducted before Sassy was introduced). Strasburger reports that adolescents who read sports or music magazines were more likely to report engaging in risky behavior (1995, p. 46). Marntree (1995) conducted a survey on slum dwelling Thai teenagers and their reading of crime magazines and found that the relationship within the family was one of important factors, resulting in teens' usage of such print material.

Social learning and modeling theories help explain how young people learn new forms of behavior and how they come to adopt those patterns of actions as personal modes of response in their own lives (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 212). As mentioned earlier, Bangkok teenagers learn a great deal from the media of other countries. Cultivation theory is useful to explain how these youngsters perceive celebrities from other cultures.

Cultivation

Cultivation analysis suggests that media exposure shapes and sustains perceptions, and that through mass media, one learns about one's culture and society. It is useful for my study for two reasons. First, it helps explain how young audience understand and see the social reality and what factors are involved in this process. Second, the concept of international cultivation is particularly essential for this thesis in order to explore how Thai teenagers perceive celebrities from other countries and cultures as well as their lifestyles and behavior.

Cultivation focuses greatly on one's perceptions of social reality (Gerbner et al., 1994). The task of cultivation analysis is to determine the extent to which a dominant message system – such as television– makes an independent contribution to conceptions of social reality. The analysis examines if a viewers perception is congruent with the most stable and recurrent values and images expressed in those messages (Morgan & Shanahan, 1992; Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). In short, the approach deals with the

consequences of exposure to its recurrent patterns of stories, images, and messages (Gerbner et al., 1994).

Cultivation also puts an emphasis on long-term impact of media contents on audience perceptions of the world (Perry, 1996). However, there are variables involved in this process: demographics, social characteristics, ideology and personal interaction/experiences (Sotirovic, 2001). Cultivation analysis asserts that media present reality in distorted ways. That is because certain things are presented more frequently in the media than they occur in the real world. In turn, this discrepancy between media presentations and reality is the source of distorted perceptions among audience members (p. 757). For example, some Thai academics argue that mass media have to some extent exaggerated issues such as the social problems of Thai teenagers (Heng, 2000; Sajipa, 2000). Media representations of the Thai youth are not, therefore an accurate picture of these youngsters (cited in Heng, 2000, p. 54).

In a recent study on how German talk shows cultivate adolescents' worldview, Rössler and Brosius (2001) found that the content of German daily talk shows had cultivation effects on adolescent viewers. The findings revealed that the respondents who watched five consecutive episodes of talk shows featuring homosexuality, transsexuality and body adornment, tended to overestimate the percentage of gay people, transsexuals and people with tattoos or body piercing more than those in a control group. In a similar study, Davis and Mares (1998) investigated the effects of talk show viewing on social reality beliefs of 282 high school students. They conclude that although all teen students overestimated the frequency of teen sex, teen pregnancy, and running away from home, heavy viewers gave the highest estimates of such problems (p. 84). In respect to the concept of trivialization, heavy viewers rated teen issues as more problematic than light viewers. The relationship between the amount of viewing time and the magnitude of effects maintains the traditional notion of cultivation. However, they also found that heavy talk show viewers were not more tolerant of the sorts of antisocial teen behavior than were light viewers which was in opposition to the concept of desensitization. This particular finding is in contrast to that of Bryant and Rockwell's (1994) study. They argued that adolescents, exposed to fictional prime-time television programming about non-marital sex, subsequently rated sexual indiscretions as significantly less morally wrong than did those who saw less of such content.

For the purposes of this thesis, one of the most important developments has been the extension of cultivation approach to other countries and cultures (Morgan, 1990, p.

225). International cultivation analysis is particularly important and useful in understanding the process of how people from one country perceive people from another. This is because it is a promising theoretical framework from which to view media contributions to the socialization of attitudes about other countries (Harris & Karafa, 1999). Media scholars and concerned adults frequently point out that the young Thai population learns about uncommon and unacceptable behavior from overseas media especially from the US, the UK and Japan (e.g. Lewis, 1998; PI VEE, 2000). Such programs present values, lifestyles and ideologies that are contrary to those of the host culture and that are in conflict with those presented in the host country's programming (Morgan, 1990).

Although there have been great number of studies carried out on media effects, there have been few by Thai scholars. However, the few cultivation studies on Thai audiences yielded quite significant findings. Tan and Suarchavarat's (1988) study of Thai students in Bangkok showed that even though they had almost no personal contact with Americans, most teen respondents felt that U.S. television programs accurately depicted Americans as pleasure-loving, athletic, individualistic, sensual, efficient, musical, scientifically minded, artistic, intelligent and materialistic (p. 319). Over a decade later, another similar study was conducted by Ekachai, Hinchcliff-Pelias and Komolsevin (1999). The study examined the relationships between Thai college students' exposure to U.S. media and the perception they hold of Americans. The aim was also to extend the understanding of the complex relationship between media cultivation and its effects on social reality among the Thais. These scholars focused on both movies and television and also used other variables such as direct contact with Americans and visits to the US. Similar to Tan and Suarchavarat, they concluded that U.S. media exposure had an impact on the shaping of Americans' image among the Thai respondents, being an influential source of image formation of Americans among Thais (p. 277). Similarly, in the Philippines, a Thailand's neighboring country, where 60% of programs come from the USA, Tan, Tan and Tan (1987) found that heavy viewers of U.S. television were more likely to rate "pleasure" as an important value, and to de-emphasize "salvation" and "wisdom."

While most studies argue that the amount of time spent on viewing television, or using other media, is related to audience' perceptions of social reality, Tamborini and Choi's (1988) study of Korean college students in the U. S. failed to support such traditional concepts of cultivation. They reported that those who viewed more crime-

related television programs were less afraid of walking alone at night and that heavy viewers of crime-related news tended to perceive Americans as friendly and caring about others. The researchers also suggest that 'direct experience' is more important than television viewing in predicting social perceptions (cited in Tamborini & Choi, 1990). The scholars have argued that the indication that experience and exposure motivation influence social perceptions, and that amount of contact with a host nation can mediate the relations between television viewing and perception. They have also claimed that cultural diversity is important for understanding this relationship (1990, p. 163). These findings are supported by the study of Ekachai et al. (1999) who reported that Thais' direct experience of travel to the U.S. is found to influence their perceptions of Americans. Ekachai et al. also suggest that the higher level of direct contact with Americans Thai people hold, the more positive perceptions of the Americans Thais have.

Several studies have shown that media content about sexuality could influence audience's perceptions and attitudes toward relationships (e.g. Harris, 1994; Perry, 1996; Zillmann & Bryant, 1982, 1986, 1988a, 1988b). As mentioned earlier, Thai media consumers have access to overseas media, especially American movies, series, and situation comedies available on cable channels. Despite non-sexually explicit content, these programs often include short-term and casual relationships, adultery and the like (Strasburger, 1995, p. 50). Young people who expose themselves to such media contents, may perceive sex and relationships less seriously. Consequently, these cognitive effects could lead the young to actually practice some of those sexual activities, ranging from underage and premarital sexuality to promiscuity, and seen by adults as inappropriate, immoral, and detrimental to Thai social and cultural norms. It is suggested that many Thai teenagers nowadays see premarital/premature sex as commonplace (e.g. 108 Mongkut & Jakkajan, 2000; PI VEE, 2000; Sutisakorn, 2001). They seem to place less value on relationships and see them as something they are expected, by peers in many cases, to experiment with. Similarly, heavy viewers of such media content may feel that everyone is involved in casual relationships except them and may want to try it (Braverman & Strasburger, 1993, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 44). However, there is no evidence that shows that all viewers perceive social reality as portrayed in the mass media.

As this thesis deals largely with the effects of mass media on Thai adolescents, I believe that the international cultivation concept helps understand factors in determining how young people perceive what imported media content they have been exposed to, and

what impact, if any, this exposure has had on the young audience. More specifically, as the focus is on a long-term impact of media content on audiences' worldview, it is helpful to explain how young audience view celebrities of other cultures and their ideologies and lifestyles.

Section III Youth Culture & Psychology of Adolescence

How media affect audiences depends on various factors. Age has been found to be one of the most significant elements. This section discusses the significance of youth culture and the psychology of adolescence.

Youth Culture as a Sub-culture

Youth culture, as a sub-culture, has long been in the focus of mass communication research. Austin and Willard (1998) have defined youth culture as “socially constructed and multiple identity whose relations to other social formations are constantly in flux” (cited in Durham, 1999, p. 195). According to a Thai researcher, Nakamura, youth culture is a sub-culture whose main characteristic is a freedom from the original values and customs of a given society (1996, p. 36). Youth culture values are significantly different from those of other groups, namely: excitement, glamour, having a good time, distinctive language, clothing, music, lifestyles, etc. (e.g. Nakamura, 1996; Ngernbamroong, 1998). Goodman notes that youth is the only subculture that behaves as if it were as class (cited in Hall and Whannel, 1990, p. 28).

Hall and Whannel have defined teenage culture as a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and ‘a lush grazing pasture’ for the commercial providers (1990, p. 29).

The Youth and Mass Media

The role of mass media in young people's everyday life is significant. In general, youth are diligent media consumers (Reimer, 1995). The mass media open up a larger world for young people than their local environment (p. 67). Commercial pop culture mirrors adolescent attitudes and sentiments while providing them with an expressive field through which emotions can be projected. It also allows adolescents to demonstrate their energy,

their corporate fashions and style which are, on the surface, quite different from adults' (Coleman & Hendry, 1990, p. 139). Pop culture can consist of dancing, music, teenage magazines, fashion and aspects of the mass media and cinema. According to Coleman and Hendry, the social aspects of adolescence are perhaps most evident in pop culture, courting and sexual activity, peer activities that can occur conjointly (139). Additionally, examining how peer group activity and social context affected adolescent girls' interactions with mass media, Durham (1999) concluded that the peer context was one in which emergent gender identity was consolidated via constant reference to acceptable socio-cultural standards of femininity and sexuality.

Lifestyles and Identity

Youth culture also deals greatly with the construction of identity. Identity construction is a process of meaning making whereby individual identities are formed as a result of social interaction based on or making use of cultural sources of meaning production (Hermes, 1999). As Johansson and Miegel (1992) put it, lifestyles are expressions of individuals' ambition to create their own specific, personal, social and cultural identities (p. 23). Particular forms of cultural expression (for example, fashion, music and 'style') and the social activities offer opportunities for young people actively and collectively to construct their own identities (Buckingham, 1993, p. 12). Young people are often assumed to be a major target for consumer promotions, especially in the areas of fashion and lifestyles. However, how fashion is used to create one's own style varies from person to person (Ganetz, 1995, p. 72). Christensen points out that fashion provides and possibly satisfies an individuals desire to identify with others and through personal style, to distinguish oneself, to be unique (1986, cited in Ganetz, 1995).

Sex role identity is very important during adolescence and body shape and fashion styles are linked to popularity and social acceptance. Ganetz (1995) notes that mass media play a significant role in style production – rock and pop stars, in the US and most of Europe, reach their fans through the music video channel, MTV. Likewise, in Thailand, music video is one of the most important means through which messages and images of celebrity singers and musicians are disseminated. Similar to most westernized youth cultures (Raviv et al., 1996, p. 632), the idolized figures in Thai youth culture come from sports, entertainment and music (actors, models, athletes, and pop singers). Specifically, Ganetz (1995) points out that the idol as *love object* usually becomes the

focus of the media, particularly in the case of popular male bands with exclusively young female fans (p. 90). Ganetz further argues that idols are not only love objects but also *identification objects* that the young tend to use to create their own identity (1995, p. 90). Lewis (1990) notes that imitating a female star's style indicates something about young girls' dreams: success, power, and money (cited in Ganetz, 1995, p. 90). For instance, *Avril Lavigne*, a Canadian pop singer's T-shirt worn in her music video 'Sk8er Boi' has become a hit ("*Avril Lavigne's* hit T-shirt," 2003). Young fans are likely to dress and try to look like their idols. Consequently, many young people are often identically dressed (Ganetz, 1995, p. 90). In addition to electronic means, magazines are another important medium that features female stars and their clothes and encourages readers to follow their examples, particularly in fashion articles (Ganetz, 1995, p. 93). Mass media are also educators to the young. According to Thorne, many teenage girls enter into heterosexualized femininity through popular culture (music, teen magazines and fiction, movies, soap operas) and through interaction with their peers (1993, p. 170). Spending a great deal of time together both at and outside schools, peer groups play a significant role in the young's life. Supported by Coleman and Hendry's point of view, as individual adolescent begins to grow more independent of his or her family, the peer group becomes an important point of reference (1990, p. 138). Young people do not want to differ from their peers, rather they want to be a part of a group (Pattaraphongmanee, 1994). According to Connell, Brigley and Edwards they tend to copy each other's behavior in order to be accepted in a given group:

Teenagers have to wear the right kind of trainers, drink the right kind of cola and listen to the right kind of music; otherwise they will not fit in with their peers. This creates a kind of pressure: a pressure to conform, to be part of crowd. If you buy the right products, you will be a popular member of the crowd (1996, p. 153).

This observation also applies to teenagers elsewhere, including Thailand. Nakamura (1996) reveals that Thai teenagers tend to express themselves in the process of both imitation and distinction and that the consumption style of the young show self-identity as a characteristic of youth culture. Similarly, Gillard, Wale and Bow (1995) have clearly remarked that teenagers use media consumption 'literally as a ticket into peer group culture.' Arnett (1995) views that changes in cultural environment as a new and important source of socialization for adolescents, since, to a large extent, they select their

own media materials and programs. Unsurprisingly, adolescents have become massive consumers of media products and materials – films, television programs, CDs, tapes, records, computer games, comics, magazines, newspapers and the Internet (Palladino, 1996). Boëthius's (1995) discussion of the youth's aesthetic activities suggests that young people in Sweden use more mass media to satisfy their aesthetic needs than other groups. However, their use of mass media, especially reading, differs due to age, gender family, and class (p. 152). He claims that music and the visual arts have gradually come to dominate young people's media consumption (p. 151). Young people are seen as 'pioneers of consumption' in modern society (Drotner, 1992, cited in Boëthius, 1995). Through mass media, adolescents learn all aspects of life long before they experience them for themselves (Boëthius, 1995). Consequently, mass media are essentially important for identity construction during adolescence.

Psychology of Adolescence

As mentioned in the preceding sections, text readings differ due to various factors such as culture, experiences and individual psychology (Real, 1996). It is important, therefore, to discuss psychology of adolescence, which pre-determines young peoples' reactions to media messages.

Generally, boys and girls are not developing identically in this stage. Physical development of girls is about two years ahead than that of boys. Two psychiatrists, Arnold Gesell and Luella Cole have classified adolescence into three periods (1) early adolescence, girls: 11 – 13 years, boys: 13 – 15 years; (2) middle adolescence, girls: 13 – 17 years, boys: 15 – 19 years and (3) late adolescence, girls: 17 – 21 years, boys: 19 – 21 years (cited in Visavateeranon, 1997). Cole and Cole (1996) also suggest that in the United States and other modern societies one can distinguish three sub-stages: early adolescence (11 to 14 years), middle adolescence (15 to 18 years), and late adolescence (18 to 21 years) (p. 710).

As this study is carried out exclusively with Thai teenagers, it is important to look specifically at the age range of Thai adolescence. As defined by the Thai Juvenile Court, Thai youths are those who are older than 14 years old but under 18 (cited in Liamoa,

1997, p. 8). In Thai educational system, junior high school students (M. 1 – M. 3)¹ age between 12 and 15 years old, senior high school students (M. 4 – M. 6) and college students, 15 – 18 and over 18 years old respectively (Office of National Education Committee, 1992). According to Erikson (1959), teenagers are in the stage of identity development and identity diffusion (cited in Visavateeranon, 1997). Development in adolescence deals with four different domains, namely, physical, psychological, social and intellectual (Visavateeranon, 1997, pp. 14-16). Being neither big children nor small adults, Strasburger (1995) also claims that adolescents have their own unique physiology and psychology (p. 12). Likewise, Fornäs notes that on the one hand, youth is a physiological development phase, commencing in puberty and ending when the body has more or less finished growing. On the other hand, it is a psychological life phase extending through the different phases of adolescence and post-adolescence (1995, p. 3).

There is limited research focused specifically on psychology of Thai adolescence. However, several studies (e.g. “New values,” 2000; “Stick to pure love,” 2000) show that Thai teenagers lack their own ‘self’. Evidence shows a decline in overall self-esteem in early adolescence followed by a steady increase after the age of 14 or 15 (Harter, 1993, cited in Cole & Cole, 1996, p. 698). Early decline in self-esteem is due in part to the transition from elementary school to junior high school, which confronts children with increased academic demands (Cole & Cole, 1996, p. 698). Similarly, Thai teenage students are under educational pressure whenever they move onto a higher level of education: the last years in elementary school, junior and senior high school. These pressures are derived from studying hard to get good grades in order to get into popular and reputable institutions for higher education. Differences in culture form different attitudes, resulting in different worldviews. Most Thai youngsters direct their lives according to Thai norms, which may be different from those of their foreign counterparts. For example, Western cultures tend to value speaking up in a group, asking questions, being confident and even differing in opinion from adults (Lindon, 1996). On the contrary, most Thai adults disapprove of such assertiveness and confrontation. Such behavior is considered impolite and culturally unacceptable. Adolescence is a turning point of life (Jantarsroj, 1998) – that is, it is a period of big transition. Inevitably, teenagers have to deal with changes both physically and psychologically. All these

¹ In Thailand, after six years in elementary school, Thai children spend six years in high school: three years in junior high school level, consisting of Mattayomsuksa 1 to 3 (M.1 to M. 3 – equivalent to Years 7-9) and three years in senior high school level, comprising M. 4 to M. 6 (Years 10-12).

changes could possibly confuse the teens about themselves (Lindon, 1996) and their surroundings. The young are often seen as “troubled, misled and mixed-up people” due to their various potential problems in social, cultural, physical and especially psychological aspects. As Thai society is changing and developing in terms of ‘materialism,’ rapid changes in society have a great impact on teenagers. Jantarsroj notes that adolescents sometimes feel uncertain and confused about how to live their lives or even how to behave (1998, p. 3). Similar to Soares’ (2000) view, that is, changes in the environment have an impact on young people’s sense of self and future prospects (p. 212).

Psychology of adolescence suggests that young people are struggling for independence. One of the most prominent characteristics of the adolescence is this search for one’s own place, free from authorities’ and parents’ control (e.g. Coleman & Hendry, 1990; Ganetz, 1995). Liamoa (1997) notes that the young tend to have strong needs which they seek to fulfill and satisfy (1997 p. 2).

Peer pressure is significantly influential in adolescence. According to Bradford Brown (1990), high school students spend twice as much time with their peers outside of school as they do with their parents or other adults (cited in Cole & Cole, 1996, p. 623). Consequently, they have become closer to and pay more attention to their friends than to their parents or educators (e.g. Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Jantarsroj, 1998; Liamoa, 1997). Cole and Cole (1996) also report that younger adolescents are more susceptible to peer pressure than older adolescents. More importantly, peers are seen as an influential group of reference (Liamoa, 1997). Similarly to what Raviv et al. argue, “peer groups construct themselves around their own interests, values and goals as distinct from those of adults” (1996, p. 645). At the same time, however, young people also want adults to understand them and accept them for who they are (Jantaroj, 1998). Additionally, as appearance is an important factor in shaping self-identity during adolescence (Raviv et al., 1996), physical attractiveness is considerably valued (Cole & Cole, 1996; Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Popularity among peers in such period is also highly appreciated (Coleman & Hendry, 1999).

More importantly for this thesis, the concept of idol in adolescence is crucial. Most adolescents usually have in mind ‘role models’, someone whom they particularly admire, and would like to be like. Searching for *role models* or *heroes* with whom young people can identify is one of the key characteristics of adolescence (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Cole & Cole, 1996; Ganetz, 1995; Larson, 1995; Lemish, 1998; Strasburger, 1995, p. 82). In general, adolescents seek out heroes to worship and imitate (Cole & Cole; 1996; Raviv

et al., 1996). As they observe, American adolescents find many of the heroes they identify with among popular musicians. Sunanta Yamdaeng, the Head of Educational Guidance Office of a reputable high school in Bangkok, revealed her satisfaction with the results of the school survey of *ideal people*. The finding shows that the top ten 'ideal people' of the student samples were respected and decent people in Thai society. These people included politicians, academics, and athletes. Yamdaeng admittedly added that she would have been concerned if the students voted for media entertainers on the top of the list of their ideal people (personal communication, February 17, 2001).

In such a vital period in their lives, the young begin to understand their surroundings (Jantaroj, 1998, p. 3). Curiosity and a tendency to learn and to experiment with novelties are major characteristics of adolescents. Consequently, there are times where the young deliberately, or accidentally in some cases, are involved in inappropriate and unhealthy activities. These range from unsafe sex to drinking, smoking, and use of drugs. In addition, Buckingham points out that due to their 'tender minds' that can be easily molded, teenagers are often seen to be most at risk (1993, p.4). Coleman and Hendry (1990) note that teenagers are exposed to a variety of conflicting agents of socialization, with educational institutions, the peer group, the mass media and political institutions all pulling in different directions. The young are also often seen as reflecting divisions within society itself (Coleman & Hendry, 1990, p. 200). Several kinds of problematic behavior thought to be on the increase over the adolescent period.

Some researchers point to the significant issues of generation gap (Hall & Whannel, 1990, p. 28) and the decline of the family as socialization agent, resulting in an increase in young people's independence (Arnett, 1995, pp. 529-530). A broad difference in values and attitudes between one generation and another, especially between young people and their parents is common in every society. Adults often find it difficult to understand people in newer generations. This is what Arnett calls a lack of *integration* (1995, p. 530). At some times and for some adolescents, the contradictions among messages received from diverse sources especially parents/teachers and mass media may be confusing (Arnett, 1995, p. 530).

Based upon an examination of youth culture and adolescent psychology it is clear that youth culture and mass media are closely related. Young people use media to identify with others and to express their identity. The process of identity construction including sexual and behavioral choices is media and peer group influenced. Mass media also, for better or worse, helps adolescents deal with the physical and psychological

changes occurring during this period. Peer groups are also important in adolescents' selection and interpretation of mass media.

Section IV Celebrity Culture

In order to examine the relationship between the influence of media figures on Bangkok teenagers' behavior and their identity, it is important to understand the ways in which famous figures are treated by the mass media and audience in this society. I now address the significance and importance of celebrity culture and celebrities themselves.

Who is a *celebrity*? As concisely defined in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, "celebrity" is a famous person. Celebrity is also "a media phenomenon" because media construct celebrity images. Consistently, Connell et al. (1996) see stars as being created and constructed for the media and by the media. These individuals only exist in the media. Different societies, however, define celebrities differently due mainly to cultural and social differences. Taitilanon (1998) defines 'celebrities' as well-known people such as actors/actresses, singers, athletes, and those who have gained prominence through personal success, (academic recognition, money, good work). In this study, celebrities include actors/actresses, singers/musicians, athletes, models, comedians, television hosts, disc jockeys, dancers, fashion designers, stylists and make-up artists. I also include individuals such as businesspeople and academics. Foreign celebrities are also included.

It is very clear that celebrities and the media are inseparable. As McQuail notes:

Dealing in celebrity is generally a matter of mutual self-interest, since the media themselves need to provide their audience with images of celebrity. Fame and celebrity usually depend on a wider system of meaning which has developed over time and which the mass media did not create nor completely control. It also depends on social networks and hierarchies in the society and on interpersonal processes of discourse, rumor and gossip. In some circles, media recognition is not a necessary condition of celebrity. But the range of media control is extending and leading to a collapsing of different categories of fame for specific achievements and to the rise of the notion of 'the fame of being famous' (2000, p. 488).

The two parties obviously need each other. Celebrities are often used for promoting products and services and for drawing consumers' attention in print and broadcast media. Mass media, in turn, support the celebrities' career. McQuail has also pointed out the interdependence between the two: while the famous may increasingly need the media, the media constantly need the famous in order to attract attention and certify their own importance. However, apart from supporting or establishing good images for celebrities, mass media can also devastate celebrities' reputation, especially by reporting such affairs as bad relationships and drug abuse (Pornchaiwattanakorn, 1997, p. 83).

The strength of celebrity influence is clearly felt when it comes to dealing with young people. The young usually have favorite celebrities whom they admire and see as role models (e.g. Cole & Cole, 1996; Ganetz, 1995; Larson, 1995; "The most remarkable," 1999; Strasburger, 1995). An academic survey on "Public expectancy towards singers and actors/actresses" (1999) shows that celebrities could cause changes in the attitudes and behavior of Thai teenagers. Because of the pervasiveness of modern young audience members learn more about international celebrities who may influence them (Haward 1998). Interestingly, not only may celebrities influence the audience, they may also have impact on one another. Some Thai pop singers have imitated their foreign counterparts, in terms of fashion, music techniques, lifestyles and such (e.g. "Raw fish fever," 2001).

Celebrities often appear in advertising, in both broadcast and print media, and thus serve as vehicles for the promotion of various brands. The main purpose of advertising is to intentionally persuade and then produce specific behavioral effects, i.e. purchasing (Buckingham, 1998, p. 134). Chinhongsa (1992) has argued that advertising plays a significant role in and has a great impact on people's everyday life. Many studies have focused on how advertising affects attitudes because of the close relationship between attitude and behavior and a belief that advertising first must change attitudes to change behavior (Jeffres, 1997, p. 250). Clearly, celebrities with their prominence are effective salespeople and can influence purchasing behavior.

In general, young people are seen as more sensitive and more malleable than others (Boëthius, 1995, p. 48). Strasburger (1995) observes that various studies have explored the impact of advertising on children and adolescents. Interestingly, nearly all have shown the extreme effectiveness of advertising in increasing youngsters' awareness of and emotional responses to products, their recognition of certain brands, their desire to

own or use the products advertised and their recognition of the advertisements themselves (Strasburger, 1995, p. 61). As Hall and Whannel, (1990) observe, commercial providers know that fashion and style play a key role in governing teenage purchasing. MacVean's 1993 study showed that young people represent a lucrative market for advertisers (cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 61). Korphaiboon's (1993) and Chinhongsa's (1992) studies also showed that advertising has a great impact on purchasing behavior of college student consumers. They both claimed that television was also reported being the most effective and influential medium. Atkin and Block (1983) point that celebrity endorsers are commonly used and older children and teenagers may be particularly vulnerable to such ads (cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 61).

Liamoa (1997) reported that Thai students received information on extravagant and imported products mainly from advertising on television and in magazines. Further, Visavateeranon (1997) studied Thai high school students' food consumption behavior and found that students were influenced by messages in advertising. However, Korphaiboon's (1993) study confirmed that there appeared to be other factors that influenced consumers' purchasing behavior. These included the presenter, the music and packaging of the products. One could, then, claim that presenters in advertising also play an important role in changing purchasing attitudes and behavior. Schiffman and Kanuk (1991) classified presenters in advertising into three categories: common people, celebrities and experts (pp. 320-325). Undoubtedly, celebrities play a significant role.

Studying celebrity endorsement has long been interesting to researchers and marketers. Celebrity endorsers would help increase product awareness and sales revenue (Phusitranusorn, 1998; Taitalanon, 1998). Ohanian (1991) reports that in the United States more than 10% of sport products use celebrity athletes as presenters. Some superstars are regarded as carrying particular popular brand names, others with their own brand name products such as *Michael Jordan* (Phusitranusorn, 1998, p. 5). According to Mintel (2002), a marketing research firm, in addition to fashion and sport products, the use of celebrity endorsement as an effective marketing tool is growing in the promotion of kitchen utensils, electrical appliances, food products and the like. Some significant are Victoria Beckham's endorsement of Walkers Sensations crisps and Jamie Oliver's of Sainsbury.

The usage of the famous is not always effective, however. According to Rossiter and Percy (1997, cited in Taitalanon, 1998), there are two great disadvantages of using celebrities in advertising: cost and the changing fortunes of such media personalities.

Advertising is undoubtedly costly, especially when presented by a celebrity. Production values are extraordinary: costs for a single 30-second commercial may easily exceed those for an entire half an hour of regular programming (Straburger, 1995, p. 61). For instance, Thai-Swiss actress/*model Lalita Panyopas* and Thai-British actor/*model Willy McIntosh* each received five million Bahts (approximately £ 73,530) for their appearance together in *Honda City* car television commercial (Taitalanon, 1998). The more popular the celebrities, the more costly advertising and the advertised products could be.

In addition, popularity of celebrities could fade. Marconi (1996) observes that the risk of using those who later become less famous, as product presenters could possibly degrade and damage products' image. For instance, *Pepsi* used *Mike Tyson*, *Michael Jackson*, and *Madonna* all of whom came in for media criticism of their private lives. In a similar Thai case, *Lux* soap television commercial, presented by a famous singer/actress who was later reported involved in drugs and pornography, was banned (Taitalanon, 1998). Thus, using celebrity endorsers in advertising deserves a careful consideration.

According to Mintel, endorsement can also occur only through mention of a product (2000, 2002). Mintel reports that *Delia Smith's*, a British celebrity chef has been declared to have been responsible for various leaps in sales, especially omelette pans, Normandy sunblush tomatoes, and eggs (2002, p. 12). Due to her popularity and influence on consumerism, Delia Smith has been immortalized in the Collins English Dictionary by the words such as 'doing a Delia,' 'a Delia Dish,' and 'Delia power.' It is the first time in the dictionary's 100-year history that a person's name has been listed as virtually a brand name. According to the publishers, few other people are so well known that their first name alone merits a place in the dictionary (Mintel, 2002, p. 10).

Some celebrities are more influential than others, depending upon their popularity. At the same time, some individuals might be affected by some media figures but not by others, depending upon individuals' attitudes towards particular celebrities endorsed in advertising. Phusitranusorn (1998) has pointed to two determining factors that affect popular longevity of celebrities: (1) ability to improve one's skills and (2) ability to sustain their positive images. More interestingly, he has argued that media can only help support celebrities' existence but popularity comes from their own capabilities, rather than from excessive amount of negative news, which would only accelerate the end of stardom (Phusitranusorn, 1998). It is important to keep in mind that media use of celebrities is a mutual benefit. The famous figures help mass media sell and increase

circulation (newspapers and magazines) and the media help celebrities become and remain famous.

Part Two Theoretical Framework

It is the studies discussed in this chapter so far, dealing with media effects, audience reception, meaning construction, adolescent psychology and the impact of celebrity culture on the youth that my study draws on. Here I will try to bring these studies together by integrating the concepts of audience reception and media effects in relation to youth culture.

As far as audience reception research is concerned, this thesis aims to discover how Bangkok teenagers use and decode texts, in an attempt to determine how texts affect these young audiences and shape their beliefs and behavior (Kellner, 1995a, p. 12). Media texts are subject to multiple readings, i.e. audiences which belong to distinct gender, age, class, cultural and political ideologies tend to read texts differently. It is, therefore, crucial to understand how audience actually interacts with media texts, in this case, with texts about celebrities. With the background of studies on audience reception, emphasizing that people make media choices and that they differ in their interpretations of media content (Arnett, Larson & Offer, 1995, p. 511), I would like to highlight the following studies that most influenced my framework.

Madonna, an American superstar was widely studied in the context of audience reception. Audience reception studies exploring the *Madonna* phenomenon have consistently suggested that audiences read her texts (i.e. images, performances) differently. It is established that various factors such as age, gender, race, experience, social allegiances and cultural ideology reflect in their readings (Brown & Schulze, 1990/1995; Kellner, 1995b; Real, 1996). In relation to uses and gratification and youth culture, young girls used Madonna as a resource to inspire demonstrations of independence and fashion rebellion, which allowed them to express themselves (Fiske, 1989a, 1989b). They regarded her 'not as a model meaning for young girls in patriarchy, but a site of semiotic struggle between the forces of patriarchal control and feminine resistance, of capitalism and the subordinate, of the adult and the young' (p. 97). In short, her messages can influence audiences but their interpretation of the messages takes many forms (Real, 1996).

These studies have influenced my framework in that the text is only meaningful in its interaction with an audience (Morley, 1992, p. 21). This implies that in accounting for media audience analysis, rather than focusing on 'What is being read', it is more useful to investigate 'How texts are read' (Phiphitkul, 2001). Furthermore, it is recognised that audiences play an active part in constructing meaning and a position for themselves within the text, and that they need not adopt the position ideologically structured by the text. In addition, the studies revealed that youngsters used media for youth culture identification and self-expressions.

In addition to studies on Madonna, Duke (2000) based her study on uses and gratifications perspective to examine black and white teenage girls' interpretation of feminine ideals in the three most popular teen magazines: *Teen*, *Seventeen* and *YM*. Her findings showed that race was an important interpretive factor – the way in which black and white girls read the magazines was significantly different. According to McRobbie, it should not be assumed that the 'text-as-produced' is identical to the 'text-as-read' (Johnson, 1986/1987, cited in Duke, 2000, p. 370). Arnett (1995) has specifically identified five purposes of media use of young people: entertainment, high sensation, coping, identity formation, and youth culture identification. In this context, uses and gratifications theory is significantly helpful in explaining how and why adolescents use media and the relation between their media use and their identity construction. Steel and Brown (1995) also found the connections between adolescents' identities and media selections, interaction, and application. They have argued that adolescents are active in their media use by selecting which media they will attend to. More specifically, the young choose favorite characters and models to imitate. Adolescents' sense of who they are and who they would like to become play a central role in their media usage. This does not only affect what media they use, how intensely and to what effect but also feeds forward and changes the sense of self in the process (p. 572). As peer group is significantly important in adolescence, Durham's (1999) study also influenced my project in that it examined how peer group activity and social context affected adolescent girls' interactions with mass media. It also suggested that the peer context was one in which emergent gender identity was consolidated via constant reference to acceptable socio-cultural standards of femininity and sexuality (p. 193).

My approach has been most influenced and informed by the above audience studies, focusing on the concept that individuals differ in their decoding of media text, based upon certain influences of thoughts and behavior. Differences in interpretation

derive from various factors, such as age, gender, race, cultural ideologies and experience, resulting in how they are affected by the mass media. I approach my thesis within this context, aiming to investigate how Bangkok youth actually interact with cultural texts and what sort of effects they are having on everyday life (Kellner, 1995a, p. 12).

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the theories on which I draw in my work. In the context of audience reception, it is suggested that media texts are subject to different readings and can be decoded differently from the encoding as texts may invite audience to construct their own alternative meanings. Individuals differ in their interpretations of the texts due to various socio-cultural factors such as age, gender, background and experience.

In the context of media effects, discussed in detail were social learning and modeling theories as well as international cultivation concept. Social learning and modeling theories suggest that young people learn new forms of behavior from mass media and they may copy such modeled behavior. However, it is important to keep in mind that not everybody is influenced by learned behavior or will necessarily try out what they have learned. There are factors, which inhibit the young from imitating certain behavior. International cultivation suggests how Bangkok teenagers perceive people from overseas as well as their cultures, styles, etc.

Equally important were discussions on youth culture and the psychology of adolescence. Youth culture and adolescent psychology enable us to understand the importance of the sub-culture of young people and the prominent characteristics of these individuals. Celebrity culture was discussed, indicating the significance of media personalities to young people in popular media culture. I then discussed the theoretical framework, suggesting how I approach my thesis in order to explore how Bangkok teenagers use, decode the media texts about celebrities, and how such messages have impact on their attitudes and behavior.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

For the purposes of this study it was necessary to identify which mass media Bangkok teenagers are exposed to on a daily basis; in order to do this I conducted a preliminary survey. Equally essential was to understand the framework of coverage of celebrities and the meanings of these individuals produced in the media – for this part of the study I analyzed the content of media most frequently used by teenagers both from quantitative and qualitative points of view. Further, focus group discussions were found particularly useful for this study because, on the one hand such discussions enabled me to use reception analysis to examine how Bangkok adolescents read and interpret media texts and, on the other, they helped investigate the relationship between media interpretation and media shaped behavior.

Here I will elaborate the various aspects of the methodology I used. My decisions on research design were closely dependent on the key research questions, namely:

- How do Bangkok youth receive media texts about celebrities? What is the interpretive framework they use to read the media texts?
- In terms of media-influenced behavior, do these readings impact their identity construction?

These questions were formulated with the awareness that although mass media direct most of audience interpretations of media messages (Poole, 1999), audiences may not always read texts as they are intended (Lacey, 1998). Different readings are dependent upon various social and psychological factors such as age, gender, class, ethnicity, and educational and cultural background. Media effects studies suggest that adolescents are more likely than other groups to be influenced by media messages (e.g. Strasburger, 1995). Consequently, to some extent, their interpretation of celebrities portrayed in mass media may have impact on their identity construction. Before

discussing in detail the research design, it would be useful to briefly summarize the literature on audience reception and media effects in terms of different methodological approaches.

As media scholars are aware, there is not a single perfect research technique in mass communication or any other field. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have advantages and disadvantages. According to Hansen (1998a),

Discovering *how* audiences make sense of media message is not easily done through survey research. Survey research is good at providing a snapshot of audience beliefs, attitudes and behavior – the *what* of audience – media relationships – but is much less suited for telling us about the *why* or *how* of such relationships. For examining the dynamics of what experiential knowledge and frames of interpretation audience bring to bear in their use of media content, what role media use has in the everyday life of audiences or how audiences use the media as a resource in their everyday lives, it is necessary to turn to more qualitative methods which allow us to observe in a more “natural” setting than that of the survey or the laboratory experiment how audiences relate to media (p.257).

Many of the studies that influenced my approach combined an array of qualitative and quantitative methods in their exploration of media consumption among teenagers. Here is an overview of some of these studies.

A special issue of *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, titled “Adolescents Uses of Media,” reports on various studies which take the uses and gratifications approach, emphasizing that members of the audience make media choices and that they differ in their interpretations of media content (Arnett et al., 1995). The diverse methodological approaches that were deployed all shared an effort to combine quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as a sensibility to the interaction between adolescents’ media uses and the other aspects of their lives (p. 517).

Steele and Brown (1995) studied adolescents’ bedrooms to learn more about the relationship between teens and the media. The authors employed a combination of research techniques. They first asked their samples to record personal journals on ‘sex and relationships’ heard and seen in the media. Prior to an interview in his/her bedroom where each described on tape the items (often media related) that have special meaning

for him/her, each completed a short, self-administered questionnaire. The researchers then used the journals of media use as a catalyst for a qualitative open-ended interview about media consumption. In Ward's (1995) study of content of the most popular prime-time television programs among adolescents, both quantitative and qualitative data from the content analysis were reported.

In her study of media representations and social meaning of British Islam, Poole (1999) analyzed content of newspaper coverage both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to her methodological consideration, in order to ascertain audience interpretations of the coverage Poole employed a focus group method using reception analysis. In her approach, "the multiple methods complement each other, dealing with the inadequacies and problems that occur when only one method is employed" (1999, p. 7).

Closer to my thesis aim, in their reception study, Brown and Schulze (1990/1995) examined how gender, race and fandom of two groups of college students mitigated interpretations of *Madonna's* 'Papa Don't Preach' and 'Open Your Heart' music videos. The sample viewed the videos and then completed a series of questions assessing how they understood the video's narrative. Brown and Schulze found that viewers dramatically differed in how they interpreted the two videos. Real (1996) also employed *Madonna* as a case study with debates over her sexual representation and pop star role, to explore how university students read the star and what she meant to them. Approaching his work differently Real conducted a series of open-ended classroom surveys over a three-year period. Real provides evidence suggesting that Madonna can influence audience but their interpretation of the messages take many forms (p. 114). This would be more interesting and significant to actually ask the respondents about their feelings, concerns and interpretations (Gauntlett, 1995).

Another productive approach is to use participant observation as it allows for the observation of teenagers' actual behaviour in the context of everyday life. Such ethnographic approach allows for the assessment of the dynamics between teenagers' mediated attitudes and actual behavior, shaped by celebrity culture. Yet there are certain practical limitations. Ethnographies are based on long-term and in-depth fieldwork (Seiter, 1996). It is difficult to conduct an ethnographic study by only using qualitative interview techniques and brief periods of contact (Seiter, 1996). Gillespie (1995), among others, has complained that the term ethnography has been misused to gain credibility for audience research (1995 cited in Seiter, p. 105). In fact, most audience research has been

based on brief periods of contact, in some cases less than one hour, with the informants (Seiter, p. 91). This very limited time is insufficient to properly observe these young people's activities and behavior.

It is clear that qualitative research methods tend to answer questions such as *why* and *how*, rather than *what*, which quantitative research can only provide. However, it by no means suggests that one research method is superior over the other. Rather the multiple research techniques reinforce another in order to yield greater reliability.

Having considered a range of advantages, disadvantages and practicalities, it appeared most suitable to use a combination of three different approaches.

- Firstly, a preliminary survey was conducted to gather initial data on day-to-day media consumption of Bangkok teenagers. The results provided details on their favorite media which are also the main source of information about celebrities.
- Secondly, selected media content was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative aspect of the analysis provided information on the framework of celebrity coverage in the Thai context. The qualitative aspect looked into the specifics of selected texts, allowing for the identification of leading themes, issues and treatments of celebrity-related material.
- The context of audience reception came into play after having completed the first two steps as another yet vitally important aspect. Focus group technique was employed to gain more in depth understanding of how young audiences read and make sense of such media texts. More importantly, it allowed for the investigation of media influenced behavior in terms of the relationship between the young's media interpretations and their own identity building.

• Thus, the preliminary survey yielded information on Bangkok adolescents' favorite media, the analysis of media content explored various aspects of the representation of celebrities, and the focus groups investigated the interpretations given to these texts by Bangkok teenagers. In addition, through interaction, the group discussions provided evidence of mediated behavior of these young people.

The following sections discuss the methods employed in the study in more detail.

I Preliminary Survey

Objective

- To gather broad but yet primary data on media consumption by Bangkok teenagers

In order to study the Bangkok teens' interpretations of media representations of celebrities, it was necessary to be aware of what media they use on a regular basis. To obtain primary important data on the use of mass media of Bangkok adolescents, an initial survey was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand in February 2000.

Advantages

This research technique provides “researchers with the facility to get a considerable amount of information from many people quickly and at a relatively low cost per person” (Negrine & Newbold, 1998, p. 229). This applied to this study where it only cost a small amount to photocopy questionnaires. The survey was an appropriate quantitative approach to gather required information due to its ability to reach and be understood by a large number of teenagers.

Sample Selection

I intentionally focused on two different groups: senior high school and university students. High school students represent middle adolescence and university students late adolescence. All students lived and attended schools or universities in Bangkok. Therefore, I used a purposive sample method. It is important to note here that this is not representative of the general population.

Survey Instrument

Questionnaire design, the basic tool of survey research (Negrine & Newbold, 1998) depends on the choice of data collection technique (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). The

design must reflect the basic purpose of the research. As the intent of this primary survey was mainly to determine teenagers favorite media it was not necessary to go in as many details as a more complex research (such as media consumption during a political campaign would require, for example, see Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).

Generally, young people tend to use more than one medium. Thus, the questionnaire was designed to cover as many different types of media as possible, including television, radio, magazine, newspaper, and film. It did not include Internet use¹ although a great number of Thai teenagers had access to the Internet, either at schools, universities, home or Internet shops. The one-page questionnaire in Thai (see Appendix A for an English version) contained two open-ended questions and one closed-ended question. The first fill-in-the-blank question asked the respondents to name their five favorite programs/names of four different media: television programs, radio programs, newspapers and magazines and rank them in order of preference. Second, the students were asked the number of movies they attended in a typical month. The last question asked the respondents to rank five different media in order of frequent use. Demographic data such as gender and age were also gathered.

Data Collection and Analysis

With the cooperation of schools and universities, I managed to utilize both group administration and personal interview (also known as one-to-one interview) techniques. The former took place when groups of students were gathered together and asked to fill in individual copies of a questionnaire (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). The interviews involved only myself and one respondent at a time.

Three hundred and thirteen questionnaires were distributed to high school, and first and second year college students, in their classrooms by me and some other academics who had been briefed of the purpose of the study. Instructions to complete the questionnaire were also given to students by both well-informed teachers and myself. In addition, I visited one university in order to hand out questionnaires to purposive samples. I received a high response rate since I was able to collect all questionnaires right after the students had finished completing them. The total number of completed and usable

¹ The reason was that I believed that it would be difficult to use media items from the Internet during the focus groups discussions. However, information on Internet use was obtained from the questionnaires given before and from media diaries given after the discussions.

questionnaires was 303 (96.8%). Since I was also available to answer questions about how the questionnaire was to be filled in the number of usable surveys was relatively high.

I was also confident that because they yielded consistent information 303 usable questionnaires would be sufficient to provide the necessary data on regular media consumption of Bangkok teenagers. The findings of this preliminary survey were the data upon which the selection of media for both content analysis and qualitative analysis were based (described below). For questions one and three, each media item ranked first gained five points, the second received four, and so on. The total values were summed up. For question two, the frequency of movie attendance was expressed in percentage (see Chapter 4 for full survey findings).

Actual Limitations

- Due to the period of school final examinations, the survey failed to obtain an equal number of samples of both genders or both stages of adolescence as planned.
- Although expenses caused no problem in this process, many students did not wish to commit the time necessary to give a personal interview. Not all students I approached were willing to complete the questionnaire. Some students probably felt uncomfortable talking to a stranger. Therefore the number of personal interviews was very small.

How it fits in the study

As noted above, the intention was to gather initial data on patterns of media use to enable further examination of media representations of celebrities and mediated behavior. In such a context, survey research seemed particularly well suited for collecting information on audiences and readership (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). However, by its nature, a survey could not provide data that could be used to answer how the audiences make sense of media message. Therefore, other techniques: analysis of media content and focus groups were employed.

II Analysis of Media Content

While the preliminary survey provided a picture of media consumption patterns, analysis of media content was used to explore media content in more detail. The purpose of this quantitative analysis is to provide a picture of the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts. The analysis of qualitative aspects, on the other hand, helps explain the substance of the messages, images, and representations of the texts and their wider social significance (Hansen, 1998b, p. 95).

As this thesis examines audience reception of media texts, it was also essential to analyze the media content in order to relate Bangkok teens' interpretations of celebrity representations to the media content and structure (Höijer, 1999).

Quantitative Aspects

Objectives

- To examine media coverage of celebrities in both selected print and broadcast media to provide media frameworks within which celebrities are covered in the media, by using a category system

Advantages & Drawbacks

Analysis of media content can help provide some indication of relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media texts. However, the inferences that can be drawn from such indications depend entirely on the context and framework of interpretation by which the text analyses are circumscribed. The main issue is to what degree the quantitative indicators are read or interpreted in relation to questions about text meanings, social impact, or the relationship between the text and the realities which they reflect (Hansen, 1998b, p. 95).

Apart from being time consuming, content analysis cannot serve as basis for making statements about the effects of content on the audience (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). Another limitation is that the findings are limited to the framework of the categories and definitions used in that analysis (p. 115).

Selection of Media Samples

Being aware that individuals may prefer some media over others, (they may use more television than radio, more magazine than newspaper, or vice versa), and that the different media may cover some social issues more than others, I decided to cover a diverse selection of media. For further analysis, I chose print media: newspaper and magazine, and one broadcast medium: television.

Table 3.1 Selected Media for Analysis of Media Representations of Celebrities

Print Media		Broadcast Media
Magazine	Newspaper	Television
1. The Boy	1. Thai Rath	1. Twilight Show (Ch. 3)
2. Tergubchan (You & I)	2. Daily News	2. Teen Talk Inter (Ch. 5)
3. Image		
4. Cleo		
5. Elle		

Table 3.1 illustrates media samples, purposively selected based on the data obtained from the preliminary survey (see Chapter 4 for full details). Both broadcast and print media, printed in Thai language, were the media products of the month of June 2000.

Print media

Magazines: One issue from each of five magazines were analyzed. I chose the three most popular Thai magazines as voted by the teenage respondents. They included *The Boy*, *Tergubchan* and *Image*. Thai studies show that Thai teenagers were also exposed to media from other countries. Thus, it was worthwhile to include international magazines, so I included two foreign magazines: *Cleo* and *Elle* in Thai language versions. There were two reasons for this choice. They were the two foreign magazines that received the highest scores (see Appendix B) and they contained a great deal of coverage of international celebrities.

Newspapers: To ensure diversity in the sample, I believed that it would be significant to include another important print medium: newspaper. Two national daily newspapers:

Thai Rath (Thai Government) and *Daily News*, ranked first and second respectively, were chosen for analysis due to their popularity and characteristics.

Thai Rath and *Daily News* have held the biggest circulation in the country (Chirapravati, 1996; Ekachai, 2000). Due to the large amount of media coverage of celebrities in each issue; two issues each week, one weekday and one weekend per paper in June 2000, would be adequate for content analysis. I chose to cover these two days of the week because newspapers tend to have extra reports on the weekend issues and it would be worthwhile to examine two different days in order to get a variety of representations.

Broadcast media

Although *Channel 3 drama* served the first rank, I decided to choose two other television programs: *Twilight Show* and *Teen Talk Inter*, ranked second and third respectively, for analysis of broadcast media. Since my intention was to study media representations of celebrities as much in real life as possible, the first popular television program, *Channel 3 drama*, was not selected. Due to its genre I believed it would be less appropriate for analysis, for it did not represent celebrities in real life. *Teen Talk Inter* is a 30-minute long documentary, divided into three different parts while *Twilight Show* is a three-hour variety show program, sectioned into 12 different parts (see details on each program in Chapter 4). Both programs are broadcast once a week, the former on Saturdays, the latter on Sundays. Four episodes, broadcast in June 2000, from each program yielded eight episodes altogether.

Unit of Analysis

Unit of analysis was each complete newspaper article and television part. It was, however, important to clearly define *who* celebrities are in this particular study.

Who is considered 'a celebrity' and who is not?

The terms: *celebrities*, *the famous* and *media personalities/figures* will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to mean popular/well known individuals only in the following categories: actors, actresses, models, singers, musicians, athletes, television hosts, radio/video disc jockeys, comedians, non-Thai royals, and fashion designers and

stylists. Excluded were politicians, business people, media directors and producers, and Thai royalty.

What is considered media representations of celebrities?

- Any individual piece of an article, column or television part (of episode) about people, meeting any of the characteristics mentioned above.
- Any interviews, comments, critiques, or photograph of these people
- Celebrities' own quotations

Exceptions

For selected newspapers, only separate supplements² and the front pages were studied. This was because all sport and entertainment news were covered in a separate section of both selected newspapers and only included on the front page when they were especially newsworthy. With no exceptions, the whole magazine issues and the whole television programs were studied.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Analytical categories as themes were designed. A coding sheet and coding instructions (see Appendix C and D) were developed to quantify the media content about celebrities according to analytical categories. The data from the completed coding schedules were transferred into a computer data-file, using Microsoft Excel. I decided not to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program in this analysis since I did not anticipate any complex results deserving such advanced analytical tools as ANOVA and T-test. Rather, the main focus was to examine the media content; the most prominent themes of media coverage of celebrities

This quantitative approach was expected to provide media framework of representations of celebrities. From five magazines (five issues), two newspapers (16 issues) and two television programs (54 parts), I initially classified media texts concerning celebrities into ten dominant topics: (1) love affairs/sex/relationships, (2)

² The selected papers have two separate parts: main section, and a sport supplement. The former features general news: nation, international, economics, politics, education, and so on. The latter predominantly contain sport coverage, entertainment and social news.

aspects of fashion, (3) lifestyle, (4) career activities, (5) hobbies, (6) bad/anti-social behavior, (7) politics, (8) education, (9) drugs and alcohol, and (10) other. To some extent the third, and the fifth categories overlapped, and the sixth, the seventh and the eighth each did not yield much coverage; therefore, I grouped them into the tenth category – ‘other’. After re-grouping, the five revised main themes then were (1) fashion, (2) drugs and alcohol, (3) relationships and sexuality, (4) work-related activities, and (5) other. ‘Fashion’ refers to the way of dressing or behaving that is usual or popular at the time of study. Issues of ‘drugs and alcohol’ refer to abuse of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. ‘Relationships and sexuality’ includes any intimate relationships and sexual behavior and orientation. ‘Work-related activities’ category concerns any activities of the celebrities, which were related to their entertainment career but not related to any of the above topics. The last label, ‘other’ refers to any media texts, which did not fit into any of the four other topics: for example: accidents, hobbies, education, anti-social behavior, etc.

Actual Limitations

- The major problem I encountered when placing each media coverage into prominent themes was appropriate categorization. This was due to ambiguity of the content. As a result, they could be classified into more than one theme. I tried to place them into themes by considering the headlines or the most dominant concept of the coverage.
- The quantitative approach could only provide quantitative data on how much selected media cover celebrities. It failed to capture the *context* within which a media text becomes meaningful (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994, cited in Van den Bulck, 2002). Therefore, qualitative analysis was required to explore the meanings of texts about celebrities.

Qualitative Aspects

Objective

- To elaborate on quantitative findings by exploring the dominant themes, related to social issues and by examining the meanings of media texts and images about celebrities

The qualitative analysis is aimed at the reconstruction of what could be termed the ‘meaning structure’ of the text or content (Van den Bulck, 2002). With the objective of obtaining additional in-depth analysis of media texts, I used it to examine selected media articles and episodes in order to identify the various meanings that were given to celebrities in their media representations.

Sample Selection and Data Analysis

Based on the five dominant themes, derived from quantitative analysis, I chose the first three themes: (1) fashion, (2) drugs and alcohol, and (3) relationships and sexuality, for further analysis as they were most closely related to Bangkok teenagers’ mediated behavior and would reveal more important results than the remaining two categories. They were also categories in which I was most interested.

Even though the fourth category – ‘work-related activities’– yielded the biggest numbers from all types of media examined, I opted not to include it in the group of main categories for further analysis. The coverage that belonged here dealt mainly with entertainment career of celebrities such as behind-the-scenes of music, film, drama series productions, the reviews and criticisms of such works, interviews of celebrities about new projects, etc. I decided not to include this category for two reasons. Despite unexpectedly high scores derived from all media studied, I believed that such coverage only represented the entertainment work processes and productions of famous figures in various areas, which would not allow me to examine their behavior and attitudes that could potentially be imitated and influential. I also did not include the fifth category - ‘other’ as the coverage varied and was not sufficiently focused. Further, due to limited time, it was also impossible to examine every theme that had emerged. If I had unlimited time and funding I would have considered looking into these two categories as well, as such an investigation would probably have produced additional interesting (but not radically different) results. I will come back to this discussion in more detail in the last chapter where I will focus on possible areas for further research.

This qualitative approach was carried out in three steps. Firstly, all media items representing the first three categories were thoroughly examined in order to study how celebrities were represented. Secondly, I chose 16 most prominent media items (see Table 5.10) and classified them into different sub-categories, representing the whole

concept of each theme (see Table 5.9). Lastly, I examined how the meaning was produced structurally within the texts, an approach that enabled me to identify the ‘preferred meanings’ of the texts.

Actual Limitations

As in the quantitative dimension, sub-categories within each category of analysis were occasionally overlapping. Some selected media examples could fit into more than one place. I determined the most dominant concept in each item and categorized them as appropriately as possible.

The survey provided quantitative data on media consumption by Bangkok teenagers and analysis of media content provided examples of the issues addressed in the media they most frequently used.

The next section describes the third and main stage of my study, which involved audience research with focus groups.

III Audience Research

The main part of my fieldwork focused on audience reception issues. I approached it with these objectives in mind:

- To examine how Bangkok youth read and make sense of media representations of celebrities with regard to social issues
- To explore various socio-cultural and psychological factors important for the reading and understanding media texts. That is, to examine the interpretive strategies deployed by the young audience.
- To investigate the relationship between youth’s interpretations of such media texts and their own identity construction and in the process of this to look for evidence of media influence.

Data Collection – Focus Group Discussions

This research technique has been used as a method for studying how interpretations of media products are collectively constructed through social interaction (Livingstone, 1990; Morley, 1980; Richardson & Corner, 1986, cited in Höijer, 1990). Höijer notes that audiences tend to talk about media when they get together, that discussions are often elaborate and could manifest a variety of interpretation (p. 35). I decided to use focus group discussions for the reception analysis as my aim was to obtain a deeper understanding of how Bangkok adolescents interpreted and made sense of media texts representing celebrities. This research technique would also allow me to validate the findings of the previously conducted qualitative analysis of media texts in terms of the identified 'preferred meaning' (Poole, 1999).

To achieve the goals, I conducted a series of focus group sessions with Bangkok teenage students. This technique was employed as a principal method in the study due to the following considerations:

- According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), an individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum. In this context, teenage Bangkokians listened to their peers' opinions and understanding to form their own. In some cases, discussion of drugs and sex, for example, revelation of intimate information from one informant encourages others to disclose (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995, cited in Poole, 1999). This technique was used in this study to determine whether young audience with different socio-demographic positions, through conversations and social interaction, shared, modified or rejected the ways in which media messages about celebrities had been encoded (Morley, 1980, p. 23).
- It is easy for researchers to follow-up on important points raised in the group (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). During the interview sessions, unexpected and additional questions were often posed. I was able to clarify confusing responses from the teenage participants, especially when they used slang. Probing techniques for further eliciting information were also employed a great deal during discussions, especially with younger teenage participants, in order to encourage them to provide more substantial information. Focus groups also allowed me to observe how the teenagers made sense of media through conversations and interaction with each other (Hansen, 1998a, p. 258).

- Focus groups have the advantage of being: inexpensive, data rich, flexible (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Poole, 1999), having high face validity (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), and eliciting, stimulating, and elaborating audience interpretations (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Poole (1999) notes that the nature of interaction should encourage participants to dig more deeply into their own perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Negotiation within the group also generates an awareness of others' thoughts, resulting in expression of latent thoughts (Hansen, 1998a). Therefore, a dynamic environment yields richer data.
- With teachers' and participants' consent, all discussions were audio tape-recorded. This allowed me to repeatedly access the discussions while analyzing the interviews.

Drawbacks

Like every other research technique, focus group interview has its weaknesses, described in a variety of studies (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Van den Bulck, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). The following limitations are possible:

- Due to the small number of individuals, qualitative research is often criticized for its lack of generalizability (Höijer, 1990, p. 50; Poole, 1999, p. 76). Although qualitative interviews yield deeper understanding of reception, they only provide limited possibilities for generalizing the results (Höijer, 1990, p. 50).
- Although it is important to obtain responses from the entire group to ensure the fullest possible coverage of the topic (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365), in practice, it is difficult to achieve that. One major disadvantage is *group dynamics* (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Fontana & Frey, 1994). That is, opinion and participation are not equally weighted (Liebes & Katz, 1990) – some participants would dominate the discussion and impose a particular point of view on more timid informants (Van den Bulck, 2002).
- Conforming to the peer group norms can be a particular problem with teenagers (Smith, 1977, cited in Poole, 1999, p. 62), especially when there is a high expectation of conformity among peers (Poole, 1999, p. 62). Issues such as drugs and sex in particular could restrain individuals from exposing their private views partly because

they may fear that their opinions or feelings might deviate from mainstream culture (Poole, 1999).

- Where discussions take place can affect the nature of participants' responses (Hansen, 1998a, p. 272).
- In their everyday lives, individuals do not discuss media in the guided fashion of a focus group (Morrison, 1998, p. 154). Consequently, participation is unnatural and constrained (McQuarie, 1989, cited in Morrison, 1998).
- Discussions that are only audio-tape recorded make it complicated to identify the different participants by voice (Van den Bulck, 2002).
- Gender and age of the moderator will be important where groups of teenagers are brought together to discuss some sensitive issues such as sexual behavior (Hansen, 1998a, p. 273).

Sample Selection and Recruitment of Focus Groups Participants

In the analysis of numerous audience reception studies, I came to understand that various background factors lead to different interpretations of media texts. Age, gender, race, class and the viewers' previous experience with and attitudes toward the topic have all been found to affect interpretations of ambiguous stimuli (as seen in the work of Brown & Schulze, 1990/1995; Walsh-Childers, 1990).

To produce a valid study I was particularly conscious of the importance of a representative sample. It was, however, difficult to make the sample for this project fully representative. For example, my initial plan was to conduct my research among young populations selected from all four regions of the country thus covering the whole territory of Thailand. Yet, I only had limited time and funding, which constrained my initial plans. I had no choice but to limit the project to my home city of Bangkok where I was certain that I would be able to achieve a diversity of young people. Therefore, I decided to conduct my group discussions with students who attended schools/universities in Bangkok regardless of their origins.

To conduct my focus group discussions, I approached the same high schools and universities whose students completed questionnaires for the preliminary survey. I chose the same four institutions (two high schools and two universities) in order to gain as diverse a base of informants as possible.

My choices were also dictated by practical considerations. I was aware how uncooperative Thai people could be when it came to research and surveys. Unlike in the west, when approaching Thai academic or business institutions for assistance researchers here are routinely treated with reservation or even suspicion (as also noted by Cook & Jackson, 1999; Phiphitkul, 2001 in the course of their research in Thailand). It would be fair to say that in Thailand it is essential to have some kind of ‘internal’ connection – knowing someone who could assist, in particular recruit, an appropriate sample. In a hierarchical Thai society, class has a great deal to do with this. It is unlikely that a high ranked (or any) individual would be willing to deal with ‘unknown’ researchers. Therefore, the best strategy for me was to approach these selected institutions through those teachers and academics whom I knew personally. I had also been introduced to an academic of a private university as I intended to obtain participants who, I had expected, came from high-income families. I was confident that the sample was sufficiently diverse since students attending those four institutions were from families with different incomes, ranging from low to high income (discussed more later in this chapter).

It should be noted that even though they were recruited from the same four educational institutions the focus group participants were not the same students who had completed the original media consumption survey. I had requested schools and universities to provide appropriate participants who would fit the following criteria:

- **Willingness to participate:** Students were to be selected on voluntary basis. I personally believed that in order to gain as much information from student participants as possible, they should be willing to take part.
- **Comfort to discuss sensitive issues:** Students should not feel uncomfortable to discuss taboo subjects such as sex
- **Students should know each other somewhat well.** More importantly, focus group discussions were required to be unsupervised and undisturbed by teachers/academics. I believed that a friendly setting would support teen participants in expressing feelings and opinions that might be different from others.

Although there were other factors involved, I decided to compose groups based mainly on gender and age of participants (detailed below). Group composition consisted of two groups in each of the four different age-gender categories as follows:

1. **Male Middle Adolescents (MM)**

2. Female Middle Adolescents (FM)
3. Male Late Adolescents (ML)
4. Female Late Adolescents (FL)

The first and second categories represented high school students (Year 10) while the third and fourth university freshman students (Year 13). This would focus the study on attitudes within different stages of adolescence – middle and late.

In the process of putting together the focus groups, I approached two high schools that were positioned differently in regard to class. My first choice (for groups MM1 and FM1) was a public academy that was widely considered as a popular, expensive and hard-to-get-in institution; it was attended mostly by children of wealthy families³. Although the tuition fees are not high, the donations that were expected to grant admittance (also known as ‘supporting fees’) would be considered excessive by many working or even middle class families. Such donations could range from 50,000 to 200,000 Bahts or so (£ 735-£ 2,941). The other high school was one which enrolled mostly children from working-to-lower middle class background (groups MM2 and FM2). Most students who were enrolled here came from low-to-moderate-income families.

One of the universities I selected was a public institution (ML1 and FL1) which only provided a limited number of seats each year for high school graduates who passed the entrance examination. These students came from across the country with different family backgrounds. The tuition fees were relatively low, and the students represented a fairly diverse selection of class backgrounds as they had entered the university based on academic ability. The other (ML2 and FL2) was a private academy, with the ability to admit more students each year, but with much higher tuition fees as well. The students enrolled here were mostly of middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.

I believed that focus group participants drawn from both public and private, in other words, average and expensive, institutions would constitute a more diverse group in

³ According to the school’s director, 60% of students are from middle to upper-middle class families which run their own businesses (*Matichon*, February 20, 2004). It should be stressed that while this was not a private school and it was therefore not allowed to charge any extra fees beyond the moderate tuition fees charged by all state schools, this school was known to be in the practice of welcoming donations. Some of these ‘supporting donations’ were of a size that would be beyond the means of a typical middle class Thai family (see page 29). Even though this practice is not publicly discussed (or even admitted), the fact I knew about it (from friends and relatives) allowed me to draw conclusions of the class profile of the students recruited for these focus groups. In 2002, a minimum daily wage in Bangkok was 169 Bahts (£2.5) and between 133-168 Bahts (£1.9-2.5) in provinces (Thailand Board of Investment (BOI). An average annual income of a new university graduate is around 7,000 Bahts.

terms of class and family income. Table 3.2 presents the details of types of academy and educational field.

Table 3. 2 Group Composition with Types of Institution and Study Major

Group	Type of Institution*	Type of Major
MM1	Public expensive high school	Art
FM1	Public expensive high school	Art
MM2	Public average high school	Science
FM2	Public average high school	Science
ML1	Public expensive university	Education
FL1	Public expensive university	Humanities
ML2	Private expensive university	Mass communication
FL2	Private expensive university	Mass communication

*I decided not to reveal the names of institutions and students in order to respect their privacy.

Several factors were taken into consideration in the process of constructing the sample: gender, age, class and study major. The first two – age and gender – were used as the main categories determining the selection of focus groups and remained in the focus throughout the study. While class was taken into consideration, there were practical reasons that did not allow me to give it such prominent position in the group construction as age and gender. The last category – study majors – was deemed to have little influence on the responses received. In this study I focused on two of these factors – gender and age – first and foremost. The main reason was that it was straightforward to recruit students based on age and gender because they were readily available. If I had used a screening questionnaire asking their parents’ income, education, or occupation to find out about their class, it could have made poor/unprivileged students feel inferior or suspicious why they were selected and others were not or vice versa. Further, teachers or academics who recruited students would not have been willing to do that for me or allow me to do it myself because it would have taken more of students’ studying time. Here I will discuss each of the factors I considered and discuss why I feel they are important.

Gender

As mentioned previously, numerous studies have revealed that gender differences result in different media use and choices (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995) and influence the meanings that are constructed (Slater et al., 1997). Panich (1995) found that Thai male and female teenagers differ in their exposure and response to pop singers. Consistent with Raviv et al.'s observation, idolization depends upon gender (1996). With regard to media influence, Hoffner (1996) found that physical strength of role models influences boys while physical attractiveness more affects girls.

I was aware that group composition could considerably influence responses and heighten the possibility of violating cultural norms (Van den Bulck, 2002). As a Thai female, I personally believed that discussing sensitive topics such as sex and drug abuse would make female teenagers feel uncomfortable exchanging their opinions in front of their male counterparts and possibly vice versa. Therefore, I decided not to conduct mixed gender focus groups. I will discuss gender dynamics of the groups in the concluding chapter.

Age

Studies of media usage and reception suggest that choices of and responses to media effects depend upon the age of the consumer (e.g. Arnett et al., 1995). Deepanwong's study, for example, reveals that junior high school students were exposed to non-verbal language by celebrity singers more than other teenage groups (1996). Similarly, Raviv et al., argue that idolization changes with age (1996, p. 644). According to Jeffres (1997), age also influences the message processing skills that have been developed, the amount of knowledge and experience accumulated, and interest. Age also has to do with the preference of media content that changes through the life cycle (Jeffres, 1997).

I decided to choose two different age groups – middle and late adolescence after discussions with schoolteachers. The reason was that early teenagers (first year of secondary level, aged 12) would be to some extent too immature or unwilling to discuss sensitive topics such as sex and drugs. I also felt that it might be inappropriate to lead them to think about sexuality and their attitudes toward sex. I also believed that studying what effects the degree of maturity and experience between middle and late Thai teenagers had upon critical thinking as well as using, understanding and decoding media texts would yield significant new information. Since it could have made younger teens

feel uncomfortable and incompetent in front of the older. I decided not to conduct mixed-age groups.

Class

Class could be another important factor that makes a difference in teens' media usage and interpretations. In attempting to include 'class' difference in the context of my study however I encountered significant limitations ; mostly because in the Thai culture the concept of 'class' can be related to two categories that are difficult to reconcile (i.e. Keyes, 1987).

The traditional western concept of sociology equates class to a social standing which can be reduced to two main components related to 'power' and 'wealth.' In the hierarchical Thai society, class also involves another important dimension which is usually connoted by the Thai concept of 'chat-tra-koon' (most closely translated as 'ancestral origin,' 'descent' or even 'caste').⁴ Even though elements such as wealth, power, and education largely form the class divisions in Thai society as well, 'chat-tra-koon' makes for an added dimension of social divisions. In the modern national system, the hierarchy of status begins with the hereditary nobility – the royal family and the holders of royal titles, followed by political/military and bureaucratic elites – upper class, affluent individuals – upper middle class, socially and occupationally advanced individuals – middle class and finally working class.

My goal was to obtain a sample with as many various backgrounds as possible. Unlike age and gender, however, class standing was not an obvious characteristic so it was not feasible to collect information on the class standing of the focus group participants before the actual focus group discussions had taken place. All that was possible to do beforehand was to hold discussions with different teachers at the public school who reassured me that a majority of students there were from working and middle class families. After having conducted two pilot focus groups with students from the public school, I examined the allowance of these students. The results showed that most

⁴ This aspect of class in Thailand class is often expressed in the family name. Unlike in the west, Thai family names are unique. The family names of affluent families and those of elites (military/bureaucratic/political) are well-known. The last names of families that are related to the royal family are also recognizable as most contain a specific element (in Thai, 'na'). If one carries a well-known family name, people immediately associate it with one's social standing and 'chat-tra-koon.'

of them received very limited amounts of pocket money (less than £1 a day), suggesting that they were likely to represent individuals from working class to lower-middle class families. This reassured me that the sample was well-balanced also from point of view of class. My other reason not to make class a major focus was that applying the category of class to teenagers can be misleading because, due to the education they receive, some of them may end up in a class different from the one that is pre-determined by the social standing of their parents.

Although I wanted to make sure that the focus group participants were from different class backgrounds, it would be impossible to accurately identify students' social standing, indicated by their parents' income, education and occupation as such data would not be readily available. As I myself had attended that expensive high school and was yet coming from an average middle class background, I was convinced that teenage students from this school came from different social backgrounds ranging from working class to upper-class and I also knew that students are recruited based on outstanding academic ability or athletic competence. Together with my awareness that most of the students in the 'average' high school were from working-to-middle class families, I was assured that the sample would be sufficiently diverse from a class point of view.

As far as the group of university freshmen was concerned, the students were coming from all over the country and from all kinds of family backgrounds. The class diversity of the sample was ensured by virtue of the inclusion of one private and one public institution.

After the focus groups I was able to analyze the data on the weekly income of the teenage participants (provided in the questionnaires they filled out). My expectations on class diversity proved correct and that the sample included students not only from the middle and upper-middle classes but also from working class families. According to the data, for the selected public average high school most students (MM2 and FM2) were from low-to-average income families. Twelve out of 14 students (85.71%) from this school reported receiving the lowest weekly income, compared to the other high school where seven out of 15 students (46%) (MM1 and FM1) reported having the lowest range of weekly allowance.

One point I find worth noting is that at the average high school, students had to buy lunch themselves while at the expensive one lunch was provided. Yet those who had to spend some of their allowance on lunch each day received the same amount of weekly money as those being provided with school lunch. The amount of money given to the

university students varied much more significantly (from less than £1 to more than £ 3 a day), suggesting that the sample, while not representative of young Thai population at large, was sufficiently diverse to adequately represent most social classes in Bangkok.

As pointed out above, class of the students was not an obvious characteristic, nor was it simple to obtain and use such information. The only way to ensure that participants from the same class were included in each group would have involved using screening questionnaires. However, I did not want the students to feel uncomfortable answering questions about their parents' income, education and occupation. Further, I believed that each student was aware of their own social standing. Therefore I did not want them to feel inferior or suspicious about why they were selected while others were not or vice versa because that could have affected the way they interacted during the discussions. In my analysis, however, I took into consideration that class might have affected the students' responses.

It is also essential to point out that each student seemed to recognize their own social standing and probably the standing of their peers. In other words, they were aware that they only represented a given group, not the young population as a whole (discussed more in Chapter 8).

Study Majors

Table 3.2 reveals that students were drawn from different types of academic majors. I did not give special preferences to any particular majors. This side of the recruitment process was left to the teachers and academics I had approached. In the selection process they followed strictly the list of criteria I had provided them with. Their second consideration was the students' availability at the time of fieldwork.

Before the actual focus group sessions it became clear that two of the groups (ML2 and FL2) would mainly include students from the faculty of communication arts. I carefully considered whether I should accept these students as I thought they may be more aware of the functioning of the media than average teenagers and thus bias the study. After careful consideration, however, I decided not to reject these groups because I knew that they were entry-level students, in their second semester of the first year (a time when most courses taken would be basic ones such as mathematics, social science, music, Thai, English, etc.). Nonetheless, in my analysis I took into account that

the participants in these particular groups might have been a little more conscious about mass media than those from other fields.

It should be mentioned as well that in the context of some of the other groups most of the female students were recruited from within the humanities major while their male counterparts were drawn mostly from the education major (see Table 3.2). Again, I did not think these differences in the field of study would make much difference as all these students were in their freshman year.

As far as the high school students were concerned, they were also in their first year of senior high school (Year 10). One teacher from the expensive school recommended I do my focus groups with art students as she believed that these students (MM1 and FM1) were talkative and would be more willing to participate and share their opinions. In contrast, a teacher of the other high school believed that science students (MM2 and FM2) would be more cooperative and responsible for helping me do the project.

Group Size & Number of Groups

All participants were recruited from ‘pre-existing groups.’ Informants of each group were from the same classrooms (for high school students) or the same majors (for university students). During November and December 2000, I conducted eight focus group discussions, including two pilot groups. These two pre-testing groups, with seven students in each group, were very useful in helping refine an interview guide and a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix E). All focus group discussions were solely conducted by myself. They took place at school and university premises from where student samples were drawn.

Group size was also worth considering. As Mytton suggests, “Too large a group can lead to some members losing interest or to the development of sub-groups within the group” (1992, p. 48). Media examples were used to encourage the participants to discuss specific issues. Small-sized groups would give each participant more time to express and exchange ideas. The ideal group size is between six and ten (e.g. Hensen, 1998a; Van den Bulck, 2002). More importantly, controversial topics also benefit from the deeper acquaintance that develops in smaller groups (Morgan, 1998, p. 74). Therefore, I decided to conduct small groups to facilitate better interaction. My original plan was to have

seven participants in each group. However, anticipated numbers were not met in some groups due to students’ availability (see Table 3.4).

I conducted eight focus group discussions with a total of 54 participants in groups of between five and eight students. I felt that eight groups would be sufficient to represent age and gender differences in the study population (Hansen, 1998, p. 269). I did not feel that more discussions would produce new ideas as comments and patterns began to repeat and little new material was generated (Livingstone & Lunt, 1993, cited in Hansen, 1998, p. 269).

Informant Profile

A total of 54 students participated in focus group discussions, 29 from high schools and 25 from universities. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 provide details on total number of participants by age and gender and information on number of participants in each group respectively.

Table 3.3 Number of Participants by Gender and Stage of Adolescence

Stage of Adolescence	Male	Female	Total	Avg. Age
Middle	14	15	29	16
Late	12	13	25	19
Total	26	28	54	16.5
%	48.15	51.85	100	

Table 3.4 Number of Participants in Each Group by Category

Category	MM I	MM II	FM I	FM II	Total
No. of Participants	7	7	7	8	29
Category	ML I	ML II	FL I	FM II	Total
No. of Participants	7	5	7	6	25

As mentioned earlier, students from the expensive public high school (MM1& FM1) represented individuals from working to upper-middle class families while most of those from the average public high school (MM2 & FM2) were from working to middle

class families. Those from both universities (ML1, 2 and FL1, 2) represented individuals from different family backgrounds, ranging from working to upper-middle classes.

Instrument and Discussion Format

Due to the sensitivity of some topics that were to be put up for discussion, I feared that some informants would feel uncomfortable articulating their views and attitudes in front of their peers. Therefore, prior to discussions, each student participant completed a short, self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix F) about typical patterns of media use and attitudes toward three social issues. Without the fear of embarrassment inherent in group discussions, participants would feel more relaxed and willing to answer sensitive questions. Consequently, this three-page questionnaire would greatly help me obtain required information and elaborate on data from group discussions. The questionnaire was also expected to yield additional quantitative data that interview technique would not provide.

Various samples of media representations of celebrities (Table 3.5) were shown during the discussions in order to encourage the informants to discuss them and to express their own perceptions, opinions and attitudes. The selected samples were newspaper and magazine articles. I decided not to use media items from television programs since they represented the same issues and it was not practical to use video recorders at the available premises.

Table 3.5 Selected Media Articles Discussed in Focus Group Discussion

Fashion	Drugs and alcohol	Relationships and Sexuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ploy• Bow & Joyce• Britney Spears• Western & Japanese Bands• Bvlgari & Hollywood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oat• Maew• Navin Tar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe• Kong• Prince Andrew• Umm• Angelina Jolie

Discussions were divided into two parts; the first part focused on the reading/interpretation of media texts about celebrities. I encouraged the respondents to talk about media items regarding celebrities, how they thought about them and how their behavior, roles, etc., related to social and other issues. In the second section, the

emphasis was on media shaped behavior and the influence of celebrities on the teens' own identity construction. After having discussed their media interpretations, I asked the students to what extent media personalities had impacted if any, on their own identities.

Additionally, after discussions, all participants were asked to complete one-week media and social diary (see Appendix G for English version). The purpose of the diary was to obtain deeper understanding and gather more data on activities in which the teenagers participated on a regular basis. In addition to regular media usage, the diary also included the teens' participation in social, cultural, educational and religious activities. Eighty five percent of the participants submitted their diaries. Like the questionnaires, I believed that useful and detailed information obtained from the returned diaries would in great extent help explain and support the findings from focus group discussions.

All discussions took place in school/university premises and were conducted in Thai. The length of discussions varied, lasting from 50 minutes to two hours, depending on classroom periods. Refreshments were provided and the setting was quite friendly. By using a particular form of address, respondents did not regard me as a *researcher*, rather as an *older sister*.

Data Analysis

A conventional way to analyze focus group transcripts is to scan the comments and develop a category system then code each comment into the appropriate category (Wimmer & Dominick 1997; Seidman, 1998). Similarly, Höijer suggests the coding scheme to examine interview material by developing the categorization, grounding it theoretically and letting an explicitly formulated perspective guide the categorization (1990, p. 40). In the process of analyzing the discussions I used the same sets of categories and sub-categories as I used in the analysis of media content (see Table 5.9). Each category, however, consisted of different codes (Table 6.2), some of which also had sub-codes. I then determined a coding unit that was participants' statements about sub-themes in selected media items being discussed. Discussions on each category were analyzed thoroughly, using 'reception analysis'. My analysis of teens' media interpretations of celebrities was drawn on Hall's encoding/decoding model (see Chapter 2).

All discussions were carried out in the Thai language. It is therefore important to note that even though I tried to translate them as closely into English as possible, in the process of presenting the findings some nuances may inevitably have been lost in translation.

In this study, in addition to focus group transcripts, I analyzed data gathered from questionnaires with the SPSS program, using basic analyses: frequencies, descriptives, crosstabs and means. These quantitative data presented important details in numbers that qualitative information, obtained from focus group discussions would elaborate in-depth. Qualitative data obtained from media and social diaries were also examined. Both quantitative and qualitative data were expected to support and triangulate qualitative ones and are reported throughout Chapters 6 and 7.

Actual Limitations

- *Class* – As mentioned previously, I was aware that social standing could affect the way individuals use and interpret media messages. However, the information on class was not readily available, except for that derived from discussions with teachers and my own experience. It was also not feasible to obtain information on student's allowance until after all focus groups discussions were complete. If such information and that of their parents' were available beforehand, my sample would have been better balanced. However, I do not believe that it was a significant drawback.
- *Study majors* – The sample was recruited only from a few fields. If students were from more diverse study majors, the results could have been varied. Despite such limitation, however, I do not consider it a major disadvantage.
- *Literacy* – The project was limited to students as it was important that the teenagers I studied could read the selected media texts and have some knowledge of English. (While the fact that all focus group participants were high school or university students could appear as a limitation, I do not think the results from a more diverse group would be much different, considering that the literacy rate in Thailand is 95.5%⁵ and the majority of teenagers complete upper secondary level (Year 7-9)⁶).

⁵ Illiterate population was 2.1 M. Both data were as of July 2002, estimated by UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

⁶ Thailand provides a compulsory nine-year education (six years of primary school and three years of lower-secondary level) for each individual free of charge (from the age of seven to sixteen). It also plans to extend it to twelve years (three more years of upper-secondary level).

- *Group dynamics* affected some group discussions. There were times where talkative students dominated discussion over reticent ones. Consequently, it was difficult to obtain equal insights from each participant. However, during discussions I tried to keep one or a small coalition of participants from dominating the group (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365) while encouraging quiet informants to speak more. Occasionally it was necessary to redirect the discussion from irrelevant issues.
- As stated before, generalizability is an issue (Höijer, 1990). Since this study focused exclusively on teenagers in Bangkok applying the findings to say rural Thai teenagers could be inappropriate. Without greater time and resources this limitation is unavoidable in a study such as this.
- I was also aware of the issue of group pressure. Fortunately, all groups were selected from ‘naturally existing groups’ or ‘pre-existing groups’ (Hansen, 1998a, p. 268; Kitzinger, 1993, p. 272) therefore they were free to express ideas and share opinions that may differ from others.
- ‘Gaining trust’ (Fontana & Frey, 1994) was important when it came to asking sensitive questions. Some participants, high school students in particular, felt worried that what they have discussed would somehow be disclosed to their teachers. I carefully reassured them that the discussions would be treated confidentially.
- As I conducted the groups unassisted, it was very difficult, and impossible at times, to take notice of body language, gestures, and facial expressions as well as tones of voice and rate of speech (Seiter, 1996, p. 110). Since only audio tapes were made it was difficult to identify the different students by voice. I found it even more complicated to transcribe tapes accurately when more than one student talked at the same time (Seiter, 1996). However, additional observational notes (Hansen, 1998a, p. 280) taken during the interviews were useful for my interpretations.
- Although I had requested institutions to make sure that only willing students participate in this study, it seemed that not all students had volunteered. Therefore, some, especially male high school students had no or little interest in sharing opinions.
- Focus groups were conducted at academic venues due to convenience and practical feasibility (Hansen, 1998a), and most groups were conducted during classroom hours generally near the end of school. Therefore, some participants, particularly high school students, lost concentration at the end of discussions.

- To make sure that students voluntarily participated in the discussions and were not influenced by any kind of reward, I did not reveal that cash payments were provided at the end of discussions. In retrospect it may have elicited more discussions from reticent individuals.
- As mentioned before, gender and age of the moderator can be a limiting factor. During discussions, I did not feel that my gender and age hindered the teens from expressing their opinions about sexuality. Male participants were comfortable and confident in sharing and expressing their opinions and attitudes toward sex. This might be because they regarded me as a *sister*. On the other hand, this would have been an obstacle for the female participants with a male researcher as they could have felt intimidated discussing sex issues with a person of opposite sex. Consequently, supplemental questionnaires were given to each participant to help gain such information.
- While every attempt was made to have frank and open discussions, there were some discrepancies between data from focus group discussions and those from questionnaires. This made triangulation more difficult.
- Many older students believed that young people in early adolescence were more susceptible to mass media messages than themselves. Despite some potential third person effects, it would be more useful to expand the body of research by including early adolescents in the samples for further investigation.
- All discussions took place at school and during class, I had no opportunity to conduct a structured participant observation. Because students were required to wear school uniforms I could not observe their actual dress style and other aspects of fashions such as hairstyles and body adornment. I believe that an ethnographic approach using participant observation would enable a researcher to observe the young's actual behavior in the context of everyday life, especially outside the school environment such as popular shopping centers and pubs. This approach would enable the researcher to better relate their mediated attitudes and actual behavior.

Conclusion

Each one of the research techniques was well suited to achieve the objectives of the study, and the combination of three different methods proved satisfactory. Despite the

weaknesses and the limitations of each approach there was sufficient provision for triangulation.

The preliminary survey yielded the initial necessary data on specific media to which the young were exposed regularly. The quantitative analysis of media content proved a useful tool yielding data on the extent to which media covered celebrities while the qualitative analysis provided interpretation and meanings of selected media items.

However, neither survey nor the analysis of media content could reveal an in-depth understanding of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and experiences of the young audiences in relation to media texts about celebrities. Despite all practical limitations that were explicitly discussed, I remain confident that focus groups were the best approach to understanding the meaning production of Bangkok youth, particularly if one keeps in mind the significance of interpretive community in the context of audience research. It is this approach that can reveal the norms that are characteristic of youth (sub)cultures which influence how young members of that community use texts and take meanings from them (Hermes, 1995), as well as the possible mediation and formation of their attitudes (Hansen, 1998a).

After having provided background information on Thailand, Bangkok teenagers and celebrity culture and after having discussed the theoretical framework and the methodological choices pertaining to this study, I can now begin reporting on the findings. This will be done in Part Two.

PART TWO

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

It has been claimed that mass media and celebrity culture have been responsible for changing the young's attitudes and behavior in ways that are in conflict with traditional Thai values. Thai adolescents are often seen as simple media victims who are susceptible to imitating inappropriate behavior of celebrities. In my view, however, Thai youth are not only active media users but also active *readers*. I hypothesized that they would not always read the texts in the same way they were encoded, but rather created their own meanings of the texts according to their particular interpretive strategies. This suggested the presence of resistance and negotiative strategies, i.e., they will not always imitate celebrities nor buy the products they promote. Cultural beliefs tended to be different enough to raise the possibility that text interpretations and effects vary widely.

However, media and celebrity cultures were not always influential to some Bangkok youth. Although some were influenced, the degree of influence was not significantly high. The study also revealed that compared to celebrity culture, peer pressure had a significant impact on these young people in various negative ways. On the contrary the findings strongly suggested that celebrity culture had positive effects on the young. They beneficially learned creative and desirable forms of behavior from their favorite celebrities.

Part One provided background information on Thailand and its current issues. It also outlined the theories and methods concerning how I chose research techniques. In Part Two, I discuss the results of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the findings of the preliminary survey and content analysis respectively. The results of focus groups are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Lastly, Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the study, providing critical reflections of the research. This part is outlined as follows:

- Chapter 4 reports on the results of the preliminary survey, which was conducted in February 2000. With the intent to supply initial data on media consumption of Bangkok teenagers, the most popular media selected for further analysis are looked at in detail.
- Chapter 5 discusses the findings of analysis of media content as the second step of the project. The quantitative aspects of analysis aim to reveal the frameworks of media

representations of celebrities given in selected media. The qualitative aspects build upon the quantitative ones. A series of the most prominent coverage, grouped into main categories, is examined qualitatively. This qualitative approach allows for an examination of media discourses.

- **Chapter 6** examines focus group discussions, using reception analysis. This is to explore how Bangkok youth decode media messages. It also investigates interpretive frameworks used in decoding such texts. This chapter is divided into four sections:
 - **Details of Focus Group Participants Revisited**
 - **Analysis of Media Reception by Bangkok Teenagers**
 - **Different Readings of Media Texts**
 - **Interpretive Frameworks of Bangkok Teenagers**
- **Chapter 7** reports on further aspects of group discussions, focusing mainly on the influence of mass media. This is to examine whether the text readings of these youngsters relate to their own identity construction. This chapter also concludes the main findings by providing evidence of the relationships between media interpretations and behavior. This concluding chapter is composed of five sections:
 - **Bangkok Teenagers' Awareness of the Influence of Celebrity Culture**
 - **Peers VS Celebrity influences**
 - **Bangkok Teenagers' Perceptions of Media Roles**
 - **Bangkok Teenagers and Reported Influences of Celebrities**
 - **Are Celebrities That Influential?**
- **Chapter 8** provides critical reflections of the research where I discuss the key findings of the study, and what and how I have learnt from conducting the project, especially the significance of group discussions. Finally, I also assess the contribution of this study to audience research, media effects, and celebrity and youth culture studies.

CHAPTER 4

Media Consumption Patterns of Bangkok Teenagers

Introduction

The goal of this study is to explore teenage media readings and in particular the influence of celebrity culture. In this context, it is essential to be aware of how and what media these young audience actually use on a daily basis. This chapter reports on the findings of the preliminary survey to provide the data on media usage of Bangkok adolescents. It addresses the pattern of media consumption of these young audiences. Here I report on the details of the survey sample as well as on the demographics of the respondents. I then report on the questionnaire results. The most popular media of the teenagers – television/radio programs, magazines and newspapers are discussed in detail. I hypothesize that being in a formative period young audience uses media for different purposes, information, and entertainment in particular. In addition, youth culture also plays a vital role in the young’s media use in relation to creating their own identity.

The Profile of Survey Sample

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the subjects were students, representing young people of both middle and late adolescence. The former were high school students while the latter were university students. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 303. Details on demographic data are given in Table 4.1. The sample were aged between 15 and 22 years old. The average age was 18.5 years old. While 68.64% were female students, 31.36% were male.

Table 4.1 Demographic Data of Survey Sample

Age (Yrs)	Male	Female	Total	%
15	17	24	41	13.53
16	29	47	76	25.08
17	20	58	78	25.74
18	11	21	32	10.56
19	7	39	46	15.18
20 - 22	11	19	30	9.9
Total	95	208	303	100
%	31.36	68.64	100	

Different Media Consumption of Adolescents

Before beginning to report the findings, I would like to re-address the questions in the survey questionnaire. The one-page questionnaire (see Appendix A) contained two open-ended questions and one closed-ended question. The first fill-in-the-blank question asked the respondents to name their five favorite programs/names of television programs, radio programs, newspapers, and magazines and rank them in order of preference. The second question asked for the number of movies attended in a typical one month period. The last question asked the respondents to rank five different media in order of frequent use.

Teenagers are very active media users and tend to consume some medium/media more than the others. Table 4.2 shows that the students used more broadcast media than print form. One explanation could then be that broadcast media such as television and radio, are easier and more convenient to use than print media: newspapers and magazines. Broadcast media is free (cable television excluded) and a television set is available in almost every Thai household (Wongtes, 2000). Age and gender determine what media people use, and there is a difference in media usage between the two genders (e.g. “Thai teen.” 1999; Bruno, 1996; Woodroffe et al., 1993).

Table 4.2 Rank of Media Use in Order of Frequency

Rank	Type of Media	Sig. Value*
1	Television	1,363
2	Radio	1,125
3	Newspaper	924
4	Magazine	704
5	Film	579

* Significant value was the raw data obtained from survey questionnaires.

In the following paragraphs, I will be discussing details on each medium used in order of frequent use. Brief descriptions on each of the most popular media item are also reported. Table 4.3 shows the overall details of the three most popular programs reportedly used by the respondents.

Table 4.3 The Three Most Popular Programs among Bangkok Teenagers by Media Type

Rank	Television			Radio		
	Name	Type	Sig. Value*	Name	Type	Sig. Value*
1	Ch. 3 Drama	Drama	802	Radio Vote	Music	1,076
2	Twilight Show	Variety	450	Radio No Problem	Music	958
3	Teen Talk Inter	Documentary	448	Green Wave	Music	640
Rank	Newspaper			Magazine		
	Name	Type	Sig. Value*	Name	Type	Sig. Value*
1	Thairath	Thai Daily Nat'l	1,350	The Boy	Teens	509
2	Daily News	Thai Daily Nat'l	1,156	Tergubchan	Teens	469
3	Matichon	Thai Daily Nat'l	491	Image	Women	342

* Significant value was the raw data obtained from survey questionnaires.

Television

Strasburger (1995) notes that young people spend more time watching television than doing any other leisure time activity except sleeping (p. 2). Supportably, Table 4.2 suggests that television is the most frequently used medium among Bangkok teens. These students reported watching 67 different television and cable television programs (see Appendix H). Most of these are entertainment programs, while few are news, educational and documentary programs. This suggests that young people tend to use mass media more for entertainment than other purposes.

Table 4.4 Characteristics of the Top Three Television Programs

Program	Type	Channel	Air Time/Day	Duration	Target
Ch3 Dramas	Series	3	Various/everyday	Various	All
Twilight Show	Variety	3	3 p.m./Sunday	3 hours	All
Teen Talk Inter	Music	5	10.30 a.m./Sat.	30 mins	Teens

Entertainment television and cable programs could be divided into main categories such as series/drama, game show, talk show, variety show, music, movies, and sports. As shown in Table 4.4, the three most watched programs are *Channel 3 dramas*, *Twilight Show*, and *Teen Talk Inter*. Although all are entertainment programs, broadcast on regular television channels, they fall into different types. *Channel 3 drama*, as its

name indicates, is a drama/series program. *Twilight Show* is a variety show while *Teen Talk Inter* is a documentary program. Details on these programs are now discussed.

Channel 3 Dramas ranked first by teenage students, although other dramas/series are also broadcast on channels 5 and 9. The Channel 3 Drama program consists of a variety of different series, aired everyday at different times: in the late afternoon, and before and after the evening news program. However, the most popular dramas are broadcast during the prime time (after regular newscasts), daily between 8:20 p.m. and 10:00 p. m. During this particular period, there are three different soap operas, one broadcast on Monday and Tuesday, one on Wednesday and Thursday and one on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Although the questionnaire failed to ask the respondents to specify the time of exposure to the dramas, it is most likely that they watched the ones broadcast during prime time. This is most likely because students attend schools during the day and return home late. More specifically, it could be claimed that the drama programs broadcast during the prime time on Friday, Saturday and Sunday are viewed most. Some evidence shows that most teens watch soap operas to entertain themselves and because they like the actors ("Public preference for TV programs," 1999). This is why soap producers have tried to attract the audience with popular actors. For a decade, they have also put a huge investment in filming dramas overseas to draw more audience with the exotic locations (Lewis & Hirano, 2001).

Twilight Show, produced by Born and Associate Co., Ltd., is a three-hour long variety show program, sectioned into 12 different parts. The program features six different shows: *Show Off*, *Special Show*, *Talk Show*, *Life Show*, *Kon-soo-chee-wit* (Fate-Fighting Man), and *Twilight Thai Luk toong/Luk kroong* (Thai rural/urban music). *Show Off* covers a variety of interesting issues in society such as new technology and special events. *Special Show* is a music show and most guests are famous singers whose songs are popular at the moment. *Talk Show*, believed to be the highlight of the program, presents famous people who are interviewed by a well-known host, *Traipop Limprapat* with straightforward questions. *Life Show* is a comedy show, alternatively performed by different groups of famous comedians each week. *Kon-soo-chee-wit* covers true stories of individuals who have been through difficulties in life but have never given up. *Twilight Thai Luk toong/Luk kroong* features a traditional Thai music in order to value and preserve Thai culture. This popular variety show is aimed at all different groups of audience since the program features different interesting shows that attract viewers with

different interests. This main characteristic results in the program becoming one of the most voted talk shows in the country (“The most remarkable news” 1999) and having a high rating for years (Lewis & Hirano, 2001). A number of celebrity guests are often invited each time

Teen Talk Inter is a 30-minute long documentary program, produced by *Grammy*, a Thai leading recording company. The program is divided into three different parts. As its name indicates, Teen Talk Inter particularly targets young audience. This program features different aspects of teenagers around the world. They include, for instance, lifestyle, hobbies, sports, fashion, education, etc.

Audience are invited to play games and win awards. They are also encouraged to recommend any country where they would like to know more about its young population. Since this program is broadcast on Saturday late morning, it successfully draws a number of young viewers. Teen Talk Inter host is a male teenager, named *Ray McDonald* who himself visits every country where the program is filmed. Ray is a Thai-American youngster who speaks both Thai and English fluently. His language capability is an asset when travelling and hosting the program.

Drama Series

I feel that it is important to discuss the genre of drama/series here for two reasons: this media genre ranks first, according to the survey findings and it is a natural format for the broadcasting media (Cantor & Pingree, 1983, p. 19). With very common themes of love, revenge and jealousy, Thai soaps are quite predictable. Lewis and Hirano (2001) have noted that most popular Thai dramas are straightforwardly melodramatic, often using the ingredients of love, goodness, and riches. Quite similar to Thai themes, Cantor and Pingree observe that love, duty, family, and intimate relations are at the core of soap operas the world over (1983, p. 14).

Similar to Connell et al.’s (1996) observation of pop stars, in several interviews Thai actors admitted to getting tired of the same roles and images and want to try different characters. However, some program directors do not even encourage new actors to play different, particularly bad characters too early, due to a fear of not being accepted by the audience that could affect stars’ images and the program rating. Media and the public often comment on television dramas, both negatively and positively, in terms of story line and actors that are most important in soap operas (Cantor & Pingree, 1983).

However, some people watch television dramas because they like the storylines and the characters (Connell et al., 1996, p. 33).

It appears that in the West, experts, scholars and parents have been concerned about the content of soap operas, especially those containing violence, drug and alcohol abuse and sexuality (e.g. Ward, 1995). Studies show that soap operas represent the most sensational, inaccurate and addictive view of adult sexuality. Greenberg, Abelman and Neuendorf (1981) note that extramarital sex is portrayed eight times more commonly than sex between spouses; 94% of the sexual encounters depicted are between people not married to each other. Similar to these findings, Cantor and Pingree (1983) claim that soap operas may be stimulating people to engage in sexual activities more frequently. This is because the programs present of a mixture of different types of sexual incidents, between married individuals and unmarried ones (p. 135). Further sex is frequently portrayed as being impersonal, emotionless and exploitative (Sprafkin & Silverman, 1982). Although most characters are good, negative events occur to them for the sake of a good or dramatic story (Connell et al., 1996).

In contrast, in Thai dramas/series, although intimate relationships are one of the most common themes, sex is extremely rare (Lewis, 1998, p. 243) because sexuality is a taboo subject. In addition, explicitly sexual scenes are not permitted. Thai media regulations also forbid on camera cigarette smoking or consumption of any kind of alcoholic beverage (Chirapravati, 1996). Nevertheless, such contents are often found in American series broadcast on Thai cable television channels.

Uses and gratifications theory suggests that affective and escapist needs are served by the diversion and entertainment functions (Katz, Gurevitch & Hass, 1973). In a study on reasons for watching evening television soap operas, Stone and Stone (1990) report that respondents rated the habit statement (It's an enjoyable habit I like doing) as the reason closest to why they watched the programs. Most Thai teenagers in the study watched television series for entertainment. A study of media use of Thai people, living in Tampa Bay, Florida, revealed that those people entertained themselves by watching Thai soaps on videos, available for rental in Thai groceries (Thapthiang, 1998). Such activity also served their affective needs. The interviewees admitted that they felt familiar with the characters and that they felt like being home when they were exposed to Thai media. Consistently, Lewis and Hirano (2001) studied Thai people's use of videos in Australia. They found that Thai people, especially, women, living in Australia used videos for two main purposes: as a site of escapism and as a source of up-to-date Thai

entertainment and news. The researchers also note that their respondents are very well informed of the personal lives of popular Thai TV stars (Lewis & Hirano, 2001, p. 205). In addition, in terms of cultural identification, watching Thai drama videos helped these expatriates relate to Thai culture.

In addition to satisfactions mentioned above, Cantor and Pingree (1983) observe that some audience may learn from soap opera characters' mistakes and avoid making similar mistakes in their own lives. Whereas others might adopt strategies that soap characters used effectively or discard strategies that did not help to solve problems concerning their own interpersonal relationships (p. 132). Similarly, Lee and Cho (1990/1995) found that some female Korean soap operas viewers related stories to their own experiences.

Radio

The preliminary survey showed that radio is the second most frequently used media. Respondents reported listening to 23 radio programs (see Appendix I). Most are music radio programs whereas only one is a traffic report program. All the top three were music broadcasting stations: *Radio Vote*, *Radio No Problem* and *Green Wave*, owned and run by *A-Time Media*, a subsidiary company of *Grammy*. According to their targets, all programs serve various groups of listeners from teenagers over 18 to young adults and those who are interested in the music and entertainment area. Table 4.5 details the most popular radio programs among Bangkok youth.

Table 4.5 Characteristics of the Top Three Radio Programs

Program	Type	Station	Air Time/Day	Duration	Target
Radio Vote	Music	93.5 FM	5 am – 2 am /Everyday	21 hours	Teens & others
Radio No Problem	Music	88.0 FM	5 am – 2 am /Everyday	21 hours	Teens & others
Green Wave	Music	106.5 FM	24 hr/Mon-Fri	24 hours	Working Adults

Radio Vote and *Radio No Problem* share similar characteristics, in terms of broadcast time and program style. As shown in Table 4.5, they are broadcast everyday

from 5 a.m. to 2 a.m. of the following day. The program plays both Thai and international songs. Unlike the other two, *Green Wave* only plays Thai songs 24 hours a day and is broadcast seven days a week. A-Time Media has a number of famous disk jockeys, scheduled for different times. Some of the disc jockeys are pop singers. Possibly, this helps increase their ratings. I also believe that the popularity of such programs has to do with the fact that they are around-the-clock programs. Therefore, audience can flexibly listen to the programs any time that best suits their schedule.

Despite being similar to others, another characteristic of the three programs is that listeners can join activities such as games, and vote for or request songs. A-Time Media has a web site (www.atimemedia.com) where information on its radio programs can be obtained. Music charts of each program are also available on the web site for listeners to keep track of their favorite artists. Furthermore, the Internet users are also able to listen to these three programs live via this web site. In addition to playing songs and providing update information on music and artists, these three programs have regularly held activities to create environmental awareness and encourage their fans to be aware of and to take part in protecting the environment. The programs also feature live interviews with celebrities of all types. Addition to these three most popular stations, there are many other music broadcasting stations to which the teenage sample reported listening regularly. They are for instance, *V. Channel* and *Love FM*. In general, this kind of program mainly plays songs both new and old, Thai and international.

Music is important for the young in every society. As Connell et al. put it, music has always meant a great deal to young people and reflects their ideas and interests (1996, p. 50). Like their counterparts around the world, Thai teenagers express their identity through music. Although radio has an obvious disadvantage of being unable to broadcast images, this medium is still one of the most important vehicles to promote and play songs (Phusitranusorn, 1998).

Newspapers

Newspaper, ranked third, is one of the most important print media. Nineteen different newspapers were read by respondents (see Appendix J). The three most read newspapers are *Thai Rath* (Thai Government), *Daily News*, and *Matichon* (Public Opinion). Table 4.6 shows overall characteristics of the top three popular newspapers. With a large quantity of sport and entertainment coverage, *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* have become the

most popular Thai language newspapers. Since teenagers are usually interested in entertainment and sports, they also read the papers to get updated information on their favorite topics. As described in Chapter 1, *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* are considered tabloids whereas *Matichon* is considered a quality newspaper. They are all published in Thai.

Table 4.6 Characteristics of the Top Three Newspapers

Newspaper	Type	Price (Baht)*	Circulation**	Target
Thairath	Thai Daily/National	8	1.2 M.	All
Daily News	Thai Daily/National	8	700,000	All
Matichon	Thai Daily/National	8	550,000	Educated

* Approximately 68 Bahts is equivalent to £ 1.00

** The figures are as of 2000

Thai Rath, with the largest circulation (Ekachai, 2000) contains a large amount of soft and entertainment news. Therefore, it is considered the most popular tabloid newspaper in the country. This paper has two separate parts. The main section features general news: national, international, economic, political, education, and so on. The sport section contains entertainment and social news as well as advertising. Further, in this separate section, several pages cover popular television soap operas verbatim (currently broadcast on Channels 3 and 7). This could explain why *Thai Rath* has been the most popular among Thai audience who like watching television dramas. In addition, similar to Barbas’s observation (2001, p. 23), the entertainment section provides a Q&A column where the reader can ask questions about celebrities. The paper has its web site: www.thairath.co.th where news can be electronically obtained.

Daily News and *Thai Rath* have very similar characteristics, in terms of content and format. Like *Thai Rath*, *Daily News* includes a separate sport section, containing not only entertainment and sport news but also social and regional news, gossip columns featuring news of celebrities, both local and international as well as movie advertisements. The Internet users can also visit its electronic version via web site: www.dailynews.co.th.

Matichon has long been one of the Thai quality newspapers, read by the educated elites (Ekachai, 2000). It features more political coverage and critiques than do *Thai Rath* and *Daily News*. Academic articles are always included. Compared to the other two,

Matichon contains significantly less coverage of celebrities. On the other hand, it features extensive coverage on politics, economics, social, education, and culture. However, due to the increasingly competitive market, Matichon has loosened up its coverage by adding more soft news stories to attract a wider audience (Ekachai, 2000, p. 442). Like the other two, coverage of sport is in a separate sport section. Matichon also provides readers with its web site: www.matichon.co.th to serve Internet users.

Magazines

Magazines rank forth in order of frequency of media use. The survey revealed that the teen respondents read 71 different magazines (see Appendix K). Available are a variety of magazines such as fashion, music, sport, computer, women’s, travel, home and garden. However, only certain types of magazines contain coverage of celebrities. These include fashion, music, movies, and sport magazines, for instance. In terms of content, such magazines contain similar columns: celebrity interviews, gossip, fashion, health and beauty, letters to the editor, media critiques, horoscopes, and of course advertising. According to the survey results, the teens’ most popular magazines are (1) *The Boy*, (2) *Tergubchan* (You and I), and (3) *Image*. Brief characteristics of each magazine can be seen in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Characteristics of the Top Three Magazines

Magazine	Price (Baht)*	Frequency	Circulation	Target
The Boy	60	Monthly	150,000	Teens
Tergubchan	60	Biweekly	N/A	Teens
Image	80	Monthly	100,000	Women

* Approximately 68 Bahts is equivalent to £ 1.00

The Boy is a popular monthly teen magazine. The magazine is divided into four main parts: (1) Hello Part Boy, (2) Hello Part Girl, (3) Hello Part Boy Meets Girl and (4) Hello Part Planet Pop/J-Wave (see Appendix L for overall content). The findings show that despite its name the magazine was read by young teens of both genders (high school students, aged between 15-18). The magazine also has its web site (www.theboy.ksc.net) where information on current issue is available.

Tergubchan is a popular biweekly magazine. The content of the magazine is divided into four main sections: (1) Interview Centre, (2) Beauty & Health Area, (3) Another Side of the World and (4) Club Zone Wave (see Appendix M). Like *The Boy*, *Tergubchan*'s web site: www.tergubchan.com provides magazine details.

Image is a famous monthly magazine not only for teens but also for young adults. The magazine contains seven different categories: (1) Regulars, (2) Interview, (3) Beauty & Trend, (4) Fashion, (5) Feature, (6) Travel & Leisure and (7) Articles (see Appendix N). Like *The Boy* and *Tergubchan*, *Image* has its web site: www.i-am-image.com that only provides reviews of the current issue.

It would be useful to provide the overall content of these three magazines because they indicate as to what kind of information to which teens are exposed. According to the Appendices L, M, and N, it is quite clear that apart from Thai celebrities, young people receive a great deal of information about foreign celebrities, especially US, UK and Japanese pop singers. Other main areas such as: fashion, beauty and health, sex and relationships and imported brand name products are also extensively covered. As showed in Table 4.1, magazines ranked forth in popularity. This may be due in part to the price of the magazines that has gradually increased.

Film

Film was identified by the teen respondents as the least important medium. As shown in Table 4.8, almost half (47.52%) of the sample went to the movies less than once a month, while almost 40% reported seeing between two and three movies a month. Strasburger (1995) observes that in general, teenagers tend to go to the movies with friends. This allows the process of socialization to temper whatever potential effects may exist (p. 45).

Table 4.8 Overall Frequency of Monthly Movie Attendance

Frequency	(%)
0 – 1	47.52
2 – 3	39.60
4 – 5	5.94
More than 5	6.93

Going to the movies is one of the most common activities for adolescents. This percentage is, therefore, quite high, though this activity is no longer a cheap entertainment due to huge investment in developing theaters with more advanced technology (Wongtes, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, most films shown in Thailand are imported, especially from the USA. I would argue that despite being the least used medium, for Thai adolescents, film has been one of the important sources from which they learn about other cultures, especially in terms of fashions, lifestyles, and celebrities. Consistent with previous studies (e.g. Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988), Ekachai et al., maintain that apart from television programs, film is an influence sources of image formation of Americans among Thai students (1999, p. 277).

Conclusions

Data obtained from preliminary survey suggest that Bangkok teenagers are exposed to various media, both print and broadcast, and both local and international. Compared to other groups, adolescents are more receptive and mass media serve as a great educator. However, there are various factors resulting in different use of media: age, gender, personal interest, affordability, etc. Jeffres (1997) notes that age influences the message processing skill and individual preferences of media usage change throughout life. Consistently, McDonald and Glynn (1993) point out age differences resulting in different preferences (cited in Jeffres, 1997). They argue that light drama is least preferred in the youngest and oldest age groups and preference for news grows consistently with age, while preferences for sports is high in adolescence and drops after the age of thirty. The following paragraphs reiterate the results of media consumption patterns of Bangkok youth from the preliminary survey, questionnaires, and media diaries.

- **Television** – As reported above, the three most popular television programs among Bangkok teenagers were all entertainment programs. This indicates that adolescents used such medium mostly for entertainment. Young people receive messages about celebrities, through different types of television programs, especially variety, game and talk show programs. From such programs, they then learn more about celebrities' lifestyles and personal matters. Additionally, these respondents also used television

as a significant source of information and knowledge, e.g. newscasts, which they reported watching regularly. Further, to some, television also serves as a source for advice and guidance, particularly drama/series programs.

- **Radio** – As young people are so attached to music, the three most popular radio programs were radio music stations. Music represents youth culture as it reflects their ideas and interests (Connell et al., 1996, p. 50). Apart from relaxation, Bangkok youths used music to express their own culture in accordance with pop stars they adore. While doing their homework, driving, eating and even taking a shower, they also reported using radio for a source of information on music, songs, and pop stars rather than news or serious information.
- **Newspaper** – Many of the respondents, especially girls, said they liked reading articles about celebrities and horoscopes. Newspaper, as a key source of such information, seems to be the best medium for this purpose. Tabloids are always best sellers, as far as soft and entertainment news is concerned. In such papers, news, rumors and gossip about media personalities usually take up a great deal of space. Boys, read more sport news. The survey has shown they read newspapers not only for entertainment but also for other information and knowledge, particularly news reports. This supports the concept that gender difference results in different reasons to use mass media.
- **Magazine** – Like newspapers, magazines contain a number of columns about celebrities in forms of interview, gossip, and quotes. In *The Boy* and *Tergubchan*, the space devoted to pop stars and their pictures is extremely high (Connell et al., 1996) while *Image* concentrates greatly on fashion and other pursuits such as travelling. Additionally, teens reported reading columns about beauty and cosmetics. Many girls admitted looking for fashion trends both local and overseas, especially in *Cleo*, *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*. According to Duke, teen magazines serve as guidebooks on acceptable appearance, gender roles, and relationship formation in adolescence (2000, p. 369). In her study on *Jackie*, a girl magazine, McRobbie (1978) focused on what she called ‘codes of femininity’ that were codes of romance, personal, and domestic life and fashion and beauty (cited in Duke, 2000). Boys, on the other hand, paid more

attention to sports, games, and technology. Strasburger notes that adolescents who read sports or music magazines were more likely to report engaging in reckless behavior (1995, p. 46).

- **Film** – Like their foreign counterparts, film and video were two media that Bangkok teens used mostly for entertainment and education. These youngsters learned a great deal of different cultural norms from films, particularly foreign ones. They gradually absorbed other cultures, mostly in terms of music, fashions, lifestyles, and social values. These teenagers also used film and video to learn about sex. Although sexually explicit scenes in imported films, shown in theaters or television, will be removed, X-rated movies on videos are still illegally available in video shops to the young audience.

This chapter has provided the details on media consumption patterns of Bangkok teenagers. This survey focused on five major media: television, radio, newspaper, magazine, and film. As mentioned earlier, the survey questionnaire did not cover the use of Internet and other advanced media. However, information on how Thai teenagers use the Internet and other electronic media such as DVD, video games, etc. was discussed in Chapter 1.

In general, adolescents use a great deal of media in everyday life. Through different media, they are bombarded with various types of information. According to the findings, the degree of media availability was high in Bangkok both in terms of local and international media. As seen in the survey Bangkok teenagers were active media users. They used different mass media for various purposes. I would suggest that these young audience used media for six main purposes. These include (1) entertainment and diversion, (2) information and knowledge, (3) advice and guidance, (4) social interaction, (5) passing the time and (6) youth culture identification.

However, this chapter only provided quantitative data on media consumption of Bangkok teenagers in general. In the next chapter, the content of most popular media will be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to examine media framework of coverage of celebrities and how the famous are represented in such media.

CHAPTER 5

Mass Media and Celebrities

Introduction

Chapter 4 provided details on what media young audiences used on a daily basis. It is, however, essential to obtain a deeper understanding of the meanings of celebrities in media texts. This is why here I will undertake to explore a select sample of media texts regarding celebrities, thus providing evidence that in spite of extensive coverage, the representation of celebrities does not significantly vary between the various types of media. Regardless of the media type, the way in which media professionals report stories may not only reflect their personal ideologies but also affect how media users understand the stories.

In this context, I analyzed media content both quantitatively and qualitatively with the intention to disclose what is embedded in the media (Liebes & Katz, 1990). This analysis also allowed me to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of media texts and to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of media representations of celebrities (Deacon et al., 1999). The quantitative aspects of the analysis mostly provided ‘a big picture’ of media coverage; yet there was not much opportunity to explore media and develop ideas and insights (Deacon et al., 1999). As the aim of the thesis is to identify the degree of overlap between the audience readings and the readings proposed by the media, it was necessary to examine how the famous are covered by looking into more detail at select texts and analyzing them qualitatively.

This chapter is divided into two main sections:

- In the first section, I report on the quantitative analysis: an account on the numbers of media items regarding celebrities, obtained from selected print and broadcast media: newspaper, magazine and television (see Table 5.1). Type and tone of coverage and nationality of the actors¹ (celebrities) are also reported. Then each media item is classified into the five most dominant categories and each category is discussed.

¹ By actors here, I mean the subjects who are celebrities of any kind, being reported in media items.

- The second part discusses the qualitative aspects of the analysis. Media items, representing each dominant category are chosen for further analysis in order to explore in detail how mass media represent certain celebrities. Each item of coverage referring to celebrities is qualitatively examined and discussed.

The results presented here show that although the framework of the coverage is limited celebrities are covered extensively in all media types sampled, and this pertains both to Thai and international celebrities. Further it is shown that the focus of the coverage (fashion vs relationships vs drug abuse) depended on the media type to a significant degree. One of the most important results was to show that in all sub-categories studied differences exist in media representations of celebrities which arise from media bias and cultural idiosyncrasies. Men and women involved in promiscuous sexual behavior are presented differently. Celebrities can engage in one type of behavior but advocate another. Western celebrities can receive little criticism for behavior which would cause disapproval if engaged in by Thai celebrities. It is argued that media representation of celebrities is dependent upon media spin as well as factual content.

Section I Quantitative Aspects – Analysis of Media Framework

The preliminary survey provided details on the media that Bangkok teenagers used to acquire information about celebrities. The most popular televisions programs, radio programs, newspapers, and magazines were selected for quantitative analysis (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Selected Media for Analysis of Content

Television		Newspaper		Magazine	
Name	Type	Name	Type	Name	Type
Twilight Show	Variety	Thairath	Thai Daily Nat'l	The Boy	Teens
Teen Talk Inter	Documentary	Daily News	Thai Daily Nat'l	Tergubchan	Teens
				Image	Women
				Cleo*	Women
				Elle*	Women

* The overall contents of *Elle* and *Cleo* can be observed in Appendix O and P.

After grouping together overlapping themes, all samples yielded four dominant categories: (1) *fashion*, (2) *drugs and alcohol*, (3) *relationship and sexuality*, and (4) *work-related activities*. Any that did not fit within these four categories was labeled *other* (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Main Categories Derived from Selected Media of June 2000

No.	Main Categories
1	Fashion
2	Drugs and alcohol
3	Relationship and sexuality
4	Work-related activities
5	Other

In this study, fashion refers to clothing, hairdos, behavior, language, and lifestyle that are usual or popular among teenagers at the time of analyzing the media content. Drugs and alcohol refers to abuse of drugs, including tobacco, and of alcohol. Relationships and sexuality includes any intimate relationships and sexual behavior. The forth issue concerns work-related activities of the famous such as behind-the scene reports, concerts, sport competitions, critiques/reviews, etc. that did not relate to any of the three categories above. Other, the last label includes any coverage about celebrities that did not fit into any of the other four categories, for instance, accidents, education, and anti-social behavior. Full details on number of articles covered in each magazine, newspaper and television program by category can be observed from Tables 5.3 to 5.5. In the following paragraphs, I will be discussing each category in further detail.

Fashion

Celebrities and fashion seem inseparable. Media figures are often seen as fashion leaders whereas consumers, the young in particular are the followers. Media coverage of celebrities' fashion appears far more in magazines than in newspapers. Due to marketing and advertising, most teen and women magazines devote a great deal of space to fashion. Such coverage is often in the form of fashion photography and new product introductions. Additionally, articles containing gossip and interviews, often accompanied by photographs, represent styles of media personalities.

The concept of fashion can range from dress-style and accessories to body adornments such as tattooing, piercing and colorful hairdos. These aspects are noticeable to the audience. However, although photo shoots do not always represent the true character of celebrities, they can provide and reinforce ideas of fashions to the media consumers.

Drugs and Alcohol

Most media coverage of celebrities about drugs and alcohol are in the form of news reports while a few are in the form of interviews. Reports on drugs and alcohol appear both on television and in newspapers and magazines. Although some celebrities have promoted anti-drug campaigns, there are numerous reports about celebrities' involvement in drugs, smoking and drinking.

It is a dichotomy that on the one hand celebrities are anti-drug campaigners frequently encouraging people, especially youngsters, not to get involved in drugs, alcohol or smoking. On the other hand, media coverage about celebrities using drugs, alcohol and tobacco often makes headlines, in newspapers, and on radio and television news.

Relationships and Sexuality

Most media coverage about celebrities' relationships and sexuality are reported in the form of gossip, interviews, and criticism, both in newspapers, magazines and television. Media and the public seem always eager to know about celebrities' private lives, especially love affairs and marital status (Barbas, 2001). Stories about media figures' engagements and marriages are also often front page news. This type of coverage has been an essential ingredient of tabloid newspapers. Magazines also devote a great deal of space to such reports. Thai mass media often try to associate female and male celebrities, especially when they star in the same television dramas. However, this could be one of the marketing strategies of drama and film production companies by using the mass media as a promotion tool. Another type of activity that often makes headlines in Thai tabloids are so called fashion photographs which are perilously close to being pornography.

Work-related Activities

A significant number of reports about work and work-related activities of celebrities appear in all types of mass media. Such reports are, for instance, behind the scenes interviews about new projects, concerts, sport competitions, and reviews and criticisms of their work. This is not particularly surprising as celebrities use mass media to promote their work. At the same time, media need to cover celebrities in order to sustain their own circulation and popularity (McQuail, 2000).

Other

Any coverage of celebrities that does not fit into any of the four categories above are classified as ‘other.’ Such coverage varies as mass media report anything they know about media figures. Most importantly, stories about anti-social behavior often make headlines just as reports about accidents. Some young celebrities are high school students while others study at university level. Their achievement in education is highly recognized through all kinds of media. This is often covered when celebrity high school graduates passed the matriculation examination and celebrity university students graduated with degrees.

Table 5.3 Number of Magazine Coverage of Celebrities by Category

Category Magazine	Fashion	Drug & Alcohol	Rela & Sexuality	Work-Re. Activities	Other	Total
The Boy	22	0	13	60	23	118
Tergubchan	10	0	10	49	23	92
Image	17	0	4	16	17	54
Cleo	5	0	0	10	13	28
Elle	14	0	0	7	13	34
Total	68	0	27	142	89	326

The total is five issues, one of each.

Table 5.4 Number of Newspaper Coverage of Celebrities by Category

Category	Fashion	Drug & Alcohol	Rela & Sexuality	Work-Re. Activities	Other	Total
Newspaper						
Thairath	0	5	37	444	46	532
Daily News	1	4	18	480	54	557
Total	1	9	55	924	100	1089

The total is 16 issues, eight of each.

Table 5.5 Number of TV Coverage of Celebrities by Category

Category	Fashion	Drug & Alcohol	Rela & Sexuality	Work-Re. Activities	Other	Total
TV Program						
Twilight Show	0	0	1	34	0	35
Teen Talk Inter	2	1	0	0	0	3
Total	2	1	1	34	0	38

The total is eight broadcasts, four of each.

Types of Media Coverage and Nationality of the Actors

In the media, celebrities are represented in different forms of coverage I classified the coverage into nine different types. These include gossip, interview, quote, review/criticism, letter/Q&A, news report, front-page headline, fashion section and other.² In addition, as mentioned earlier, mass media in Thailand do not only cover Thai celebrities but also international media figures, especially from USA, UK, and Japan. In fact, young people have learned novel behavior from foreign celebrities through mass media to which they are exposed, especially film, music videos. I feel it is useful to look into the nationality of media personalities reported in selected media samples. Celebrities

² (1) Gossip – talk or rumor without direct quote, (2) interview – either in person or indirect (e.g. translation), (3) quote – either from direct or indirect interview, (4) review/critique – critical reviews or commentaries about celebrities or their work, (5) letter/Q&A – letters to editor or Q and A column asking for information about celebrities, (6) news report – a formal form of reporting news, (7) front-page headline – any coverage appeared in front page (newspapers only), (8) fashion section – celebrities in fashion shooting (magazines only) and (9) other – any coverage that did not fit into the other eight types.

are classified into four codes representing different nationalities³. Tables 5.6 – 5.8 present the number of media coverage of celebrities by type and nationality.

Table 5.6
Number of Magazine Coverage of Celebrities by Type & Actor’s Nationality

Type	Gossip				Interview				Quote				Review/ critique				Fashion				Letter/ Q&A				News Report				Front Page				Other				
Actors Magazine	T	W	J	O*	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	TTL				
The Boy	7	25	0	0	4	6	4	1	28	1	1	0	6	7	0	1	4	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	2	0	118
Tergubchan	24	0	0	1	3	3	1	0	7	6	0	0	3	9	0	0	3	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	3	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	92
Image	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	1	0	1	0	5	0	0	7	3	0	0	5	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	0	54
Cleo	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	0	0	1	5	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	0	28
Elle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	34
Total	31	25	0	1	8	10	5	1	46	16	1	1	10	30	0	1	18	15	0	1	21	1	0	1	15	23	5	0	0	0	0	0	14	18	2	0	326

* T represents articles referring to Thai celebrities, W - Western, J - Japanese and O - others

Table 5.7
Number of Newspaper Coverage of Celebrities by Type & Actor’s Nationality

Type	Gossip				Interview				Quote				Review/ critique				Fashion				Letter/ Q&A				News Report				Front Page				Other				TTL
Actors Newspaper	T	W	J	O*	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	
Thai Rath	49	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	36	3	0	1	153	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	117	111	1	4	19	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	532
Daily News	43	19	0	1	4	0	0	0	55	4	0	1	132	32	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	128	96	2	3	22	18	0	0	3	0	0	0	557
Total	92	15	1	1	4	0	0	0	91	7	0	2	285	44	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	1	0	0	245	207	3	7	41	29	0	1	3	0	0	0	1089

* T represents articles referring to Thai celebrities, W, Western celebrities, J, Japanese and O, others

Table 5.8
Number of TV Coverage of Celebrities by Type & Actor’s Nationality

Type	Gossip				Interview				Quote				Review/ critique				Fashion				Letter/ Q&A				News Report				Front Page				Other				TTL
Actors	T	W	J	O*	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O	T	W	J	O					
TV Program																																					
Twilight Show	0	0	0	0	33	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35				
Teen Talk Inter	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3				
Total	0	0	0	0	36	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38				

* T represents articles referring to Thai celebrities, W, Western celebrities, J, Japanese and O, others

³ These four nationality codes are Thai, Westerner, Japanese, and other. Thai– Thai or half-Thai celebrities. Western refers to those who are American, British and European. Japan only represents Japanese celebrities. Other refers to celebrities with any other nationality.

The tables show that the framework of the coverage about celebrities is quite limited. In interpreting the quantitative findings I aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of media representations. I decided to put my focus on the first three dominant categories: (1) fashion, (2) drugs and alcohol abuse and (3) relationships and sexuality. I chose these three for two reasons: these issues concerned the teenage population more than any other group of society and they have tendency to link to other potential problems. For instance, unprotected pre-marital sex could lead to unwanted pregnancy. It is necessary, to note however that Thailand has faced more than these three problems within its young population. Other social issues such as education, employment, economy, politics and environment also relate to young people (detailed in Chapter 1).

Section II Qualitative Aspects

This section supplements the quantitative findings by examining in more detail the celebrity media coverage. In the process of this investigation of media content, all media texts about celebrities, with regard to three social issues, were thoroughly examined and then categorized into different sub-categories, representing the whole concept of each category (see Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 Sub-categories Representing Each Main Category

Fashion	Drugs & Alcohol	Relationships & Sexuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Global Trends & Unconventionalism• Materialism & Superiority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socialization• Two-sided Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liberalism vs. Conservatism• Freedom of sexuality• Gender Roles

From each topic, some media items were selected for in-depth analysis. The goal here was to scrutinize how celebrities were represented in each selected media item and to examine the ‘preferred reading’ of the media texts about public figures. Table 5.10 lists all media items, chosen from each category.

Table 5.10 Selected Media Items for Qualitative Aspects

Fashion	Drugs & alcohol	Relationships & Sexuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ploy*• Bow & Joyce**• Britney Spears*• Western & Japanese Bands*• Bvlgari & Hollywood*• Jibby*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oat*• Australian Teens***• Maew **• Navin Tar **	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe** & ***• Kong** & ***• Prince Andrew **• Umm**• Ramona Sanorali**• Angelina Jolie* & Boom**

* Items selected from magazines.
**Items selected from newspapers.
***Items selected from television programs.

Fashion

As defined by the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, fashion means the way of dressing or behaving that is usual or popular at a certain time, and a manner: way of making or doing something. This includes both verbal and non-verbal languages. I classified this category into two sub-categories: (1) Global Trends and Unconventionalism, and (2) Materialism and Superiority. Table 5.11 lists selected media items, representing each sub-category, for further examination.

Table 5.11 Selected Media Items of Fashion Sub-category

Fashion	
Global Trends & Unconventionalism	Materialism & Superiority
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ploy• Bow & Joyce• Britney Spears• Western & Japanese Bands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bvlgari & Hollywood• Jibby

Global Trends and Unconventionalism

Through mass media, fashion has truly become international and global. Over the last decades, not only Western celebrities but also Japanese singers and musicians have been popular among Thai youngsters. Therefore, fashion styles seen in Thailand are mostly Western and Japanese oriented. These range from clothing, hair dyeing, body adornment to accessories like platform shoes, colorful bags, etc.

It often seems that it is important for celebrities to look different from ordinary people. These individuals always look distinct by their dress styles, hairdos, etc. Being entertainers they, especially singers and musicians, try to create their own styles that can easily be recognized (Phusitranusorn, 1998). Their clothing styles can easily be identified, particularly by teens. Star creators/managers generally feel the need of making their artists both distinct and distinctive, in terms of both appearance and personalities. In promotional terms their goal is to make stars *marketable* and *popular* (Phusitranusorn, 1998). Therefore, promoters tend to do whatever makes their artists different from others. Having a noticeable image could be a selling point for some celebrities, especially pop stars and athletes.

Body adornments: tattoos, colorful hairdos, uncommon body piercing are clearly noticed, and becoming more commonplace than before. In terms of fashion, females seem to have an advantage in that their dress styles are more diverse than men. At any formal occasion, female celebrities often appear in remarkably nice and trendy dresses or distinctive clothing, often designed by well-known designers. These days, Thai female celebrities wear more sexy and revealing clothes than in the past. These skimpy outfits range from spaghetti strap and halter tops to tight mini skirts and shorts. Media users are bombarded with such images of celebrities' styles through the mass media. They, therefore, gradually become familiar with the way in which celebrities are represented. People then create their own frames of reference when interpreting whatever they might encounter in a given moment (Shore, 1996). However, I would like to note that such skimpy clothing more often seen in western countries is considered provocative in Thai society.

Although celebrities want to be accepted by the audience, sometimes it appears they do not consider whether their fashion is acceptable or appropriate in certain circumstances. Generally, most singers and musicians have their unique styles. As far as image is concerned, most recording companies usually have control over their artists' appearances (Phusitranusorn, 1998; Satirakul, 1993). These companies often have specific themes for each artist or band. Some are too extreme to be accepted in Thai

society, particularly by people in older generations. While celebrities find ways to make themselves look *cool* among the young audience, the older generation and the media frequently comment upon their inappropriate fashion statements. Many media figures have been seriously criticized on their fashion styles, males with unusually colored hair, tattoos and earrings, females with sexy dresses, etc. The media claim that some young celebrities do not dress their age and expose themselves too much in such clothing styles. Their fashions are often described as improper, too sexy, unconventional and unacceptable in Thai society. Many of these fashions come from overseas. I chose the following media items to represent global-oriented fashion seen as improper and unconventional by the older generations of Thai society (Table 5.11).

Ploy – ‘Hot even before having been born’

The caption describes a teenage actress-cum-model *Chermarn Boonyasak*, better known as *Ploy* (*The Boy*, June 2000, p. 63). This initial comment is followed by another one claiming that gossip and rumors about her have been common in the media. A fashion section by Ploy immediately follows this brief interview with her.

Over different 50 photographs were presented in ten full pages of a 134-page magazine (see Appendix Q for example). Although she looked very pretty and joyful as the fashion theme described, her breasts were obviously exposed in many photographs.

- Tergubchan:

“What do you think about young girls wearing revealing clothes?”
- Ploy:

“I dress sexily too but occasionally, like when I go to dinner with friends or family...”
- “I dress in style and have *sai-diow* (spaghetti strap tank tops), everybody does but mine are not deep cut-necked ones”
- “Sometimes I feel sad and sorry for some parents whose teen daughters dress too sexily... Young girls leave home with proper clothing, telling their parents that they are going to their friends’, and then in a taxi they get changed to revealing clothes such as strapless top with deep cut on the back, shorts, colored hairdos...”

Ironically, Ploy’s concern about girls wearing revealing clothing contradicts the way she was represented in the fashion shoot as well as her own actual fashion preferences. As pointed out earlier, fashion in the media does not necessarily portray

celebrities for who they actually are. This is not the case here. Although in real life she admitted liking to dress revealingly, her statement implied that it was advisable to consider what occasions young girls should and should not do so. The implication here is that the *when* and *where* should be taken into serious consideration. It seems that as much as she personally likes wearing such clothes, she would like young girls to dress appropriately for their age and most importantly, consider circumstances: place and time.

As the fashion theme indicated, Ploy was represented as a pretty and happy girl in the photographs. Many photographs show that the young star had her bellybutton pierced. Among other fashions, bellybutton piercing has become popular for teenage girls. Here, the unusual piercing is not created by the media, rather it is the 'real' her. Clearly, Ploy was represented as a very sexy and fashionable young girl. Not only did the fashion section represent the way she dressed, but her own statement also supported her own clothing style and fashion preferences. The overall tone of this article is positive. The writer did not express his/her personal comments on the star's clothing styles.

Bow and Joyce – The Exposed Bellybutton Girls

Like Ploy, media representations of Bow and Joyce, a young female duo, are often represented in very sexy ways. *Thai Rath*'s front page (June 25, 2001, Appendix R) featured a photograph of *Surattanawee Suwiporn* and *Pornpan Rattanametanon*d, better known as *Bow* and *Joyce* respectively, in revealing clothes, with a caption focusing on their exposed bellybuttons. Words such as *sexy bellybuttons* and *lucky bellybuttons* were emphasized and repeatedly used to illustrate these two singers who always appear in revealing attire: sexy, tight and short tops, exposed bellybuttons and hot pants in particular. In this gossip article, the columnist also pointed out that the girls shocked people with their *Japanese girl style*, wearing 'exposing bellybutton tops' (p. 29). The paper also mentioned that they have been negatively criticized about both 'bellybutton top' and 'spaghetti strap top' styles which many teenage girls throughout the country imitated. According to the columnist:

'Before their first album successfully ended, the duo said "That's enough for revealing clothes." In fact, with the second album, they wear even more revealing clothing which expose 'much more of the body' (p. 29).

The paper claimed that the duo had to loose weight in order to be able to wear such outfits to show their flat stomachs. Inverted commas are used to emphasize words (Poole, 1999). Two pictures, one on the front page, the other on the inside page, show clothing which was described as unconventional fashion style. Although it seems such outfits are ideal for a tropical country like Thailand, it is viewed as provocative in the Thai society. Such dress style worries parents and guardians because it has had a great impact. Many female teenagers follow the same style that is regarded by people in older generations as not appropriate for their age.

Interestingly, despite dealing with the similar style of clothing as the Ploy article, this piece gave an overall negative impression. The only purpose of the article was to criticize the way in which the two girls dressed. The emphasis was put on how they exposed their bellybutton by wearing revealing outfits.

Britney Spears

Fashion of any kind has long become international. It is difficult, if not impossible, to verify where one particular fashion originated. An article, ‘Hot Singer’ in *Tergubchan* (June 2000, pp. 110-111) featured an interview with *Britney Spears*, a very successful 20-year old American singer who is very popular among Thai teenage audience. The article started with questions about her new album and went on to her personal life:

- Tergubchan:

“I have just noticed that you got your belly button pierced. What was it like?”
- Spears:

“Big needle, very scary. It took only two seconds but it was the most excruciating moment I’ve ever experienced. I don’t regret it, I like it though.”
- Tergubchan:

“What kind of thing does your mother not allow you to do?”
- Spears:

“Just no tattoos, no drugs, other than that I can do anything.”

The article also included several photographs. The biggest one featured her in a turtle neck sleeveless top and hot pants. She was also in revealing clothes in the other two. Britney Spears was presented as a typical American teenage girl who had freedom. The overall tone was positive. As the original interview was in English, the magazine columnist did not make any personal comments on her piercing or fashion style. That is in contrast to the article about Bow and Joyce where the duo’s dress style was criticized.

Western and Japanese Bands

The Boy (June, 2000) donated several pages to a big section called *Planet Pop/J Wave* (pp. 110-134) which contained numbers of articles on Western and Japanese pop singers. I then selected a series of different articles, representing both Western and Japanese pop stars. A number of Japanese bands and singers favor an extreme fashion look, especially hair dyeing with unusual colors. Members of Japanese bands have their hair dyed either blonde, pink, yellow, or purple. In addition, some of the men wear very thick and unnatural make-up.

The *Planet Pop* cover featured a full-page photograph of *N'SYNC*, a popular US boy band (p. 111). This band favored a casual style of clothing. Three out of the five members were wearing earrings. In an article of 'Passage to Thailand,' *Code Red*, a UK boy band, also possessed a similar comfortable fashion style (p. 118). One of the four band members had a big tattoo on the upper arm.

In another article of 'Japanese Hot News' (p. 130), a photograph featured *Malice Mizer*. Apart from having their hair dyed red, yellow, and purple and they were all wearing unusually heavy make-up (Appendix S). The columnist ended the column with the following remarks:

'There are only three of them left in their latest single and video, '*Nonakade No Yugi*,' coming with a new image that is more scary. Don't you think?'

This series of articles show different styles of clothing, accessories, body adornments from the West and Japan. Overall, these articles are written in a positive way although one columnist jokingly mentioned that Japanese fashion style of *Malice Mizer* looks scary.

Summary

Media claim and some star managers admit that Thai singers have copied and adapted Western and Japanese styles as their own (e.g. Singhara, 2001). For decades, Japan has been well known among Thai people through cartoon characters merchandise and comic books. Music videos and teenage magazines are now important media means through which information about Japanese fashion and music is obtained. In addition to clearly

seen fashion accessories, the dancing style of many Thai celebrities is believed to have been learned from the West (Singhara, 2001). Although unconventional fashion styles are believed to have come from overseas, it is difficult, or even impossible, to verify where one particular fashion initially originated. However, in general, young people are very fashion-conscious and learn new things through mass media all the time. One could argue that celebrities are fashion leaders while young people are fashion victims.

Materialism and Superiority

Using extravagant or brand-named items is believed to be superior, to improve celebrities' characters and personalities (Phusitranusorn, 1998) and to sustain their appearance (Barbas, 2001). The famous are often seen using and wearing such products. One explanation could be that these people believe that such accoutrements could make them look classy and stylish. Extremely expensive items supposedly indicate their wealth and good taste. Accordingly their lifestyles are often described as lavish ("Spend it like Posh and Becks," 2003). The following articles were chosen to examine celebrities' fashion and their attitude toward extravagant lifestyles (see Table 5.11).

Bvlgari and Hollywood

The article of 'Trend Focus' with a caption of 'Bvlgari and Hollywood' in *Image* (June, 2000, p. 114) features ten photographs of female Hollywood stars (*Catherine Zeta-Jones*, *Drew Barrymore*, and *Winona Ryder*), wearing and using luxurious Italian brand fashion items (Appendix T). Each photograph had its description of what Bvlgari items were being used by each celebrity. Nine out of the ten show Hollywood stars in elegant and revealing evening dresses, attending big events such as the Oscar Awards, Sag Awards, and movie premiers. It is traditional that when it comes to evening events they are expected to be in such outfits ("Stars dressing badly," 2002) preferably with expensive jewelry. The ornaments include necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. On the bottom of the article, the audience is informed where to buy such elegant and expensive items, along with a contact telephone number.

Furthermore, the columnist points out that Bvlgari also merchandizes watches, bags, perfume and home decorations which are very popular among (real) high-so people, and Hollywood stars. This was reinforced by the columnist's comment: "if you take a

careful look, you'll see that celebrities wear or have at least one Bvlgari item on them." These Hollywood stars obviously represent and help reinforce extravagance in fashion. Celebrities are often used as a channel through which a message on luxury has been sent out to the audience, particularly fashion consumers. Celebrity endorsers do not only effectively promote products and services to improve sales; they also improve the image of the products and themselves. Therefore, the popularity of the products is emphasized by the popularity of the celebrities. This could apply, of course, to any kind of products and services, advertised by the famous. The overall tone of this article is very positive. Not only did the columnist extensively value the extravagant lifestyle but he also stressed that Bvlgari products were only meant to serve either 'real' high so individuals (emphasizing the word 'real') or celebrities. Inverted commas were used to emphasize the words such as '*real*' wealthy individuals emphasizing the high cost of the products.

Jibby

The Boy's fashion section of 'Boy Meets Girl' (June, 2000, pp. 89-94) featured *Piraporn Techasawaddinan (Dede)* and *Tawan Chetang (Jibby)*. A young Thai model Jibby, was born and grew up in the US. He is now working on his bachelors degree at the University of California, Berkeley. In the interview section (p. 95) that followed the fashion pages, when talking about Thailand, he gave some viewpoints on Thai teenagers.

The Boy: "Thailand is the best. Don't you think?"

Jibby: "Absolutely, Thailand is a loveable place and Thai people are friendly... But when I came back this time, I found that Thailand has changed a great deal, especially Thai teenagers. They have become more modern. They dare wear more colorful clothing than ever before."

The Boy: "What would you like to say before you go back to the States?"

Jibby: "As far as I see, nowadays Thai teenagers are very much in trend, using expensive products for example. In fact, in the countries where such brand name merchandise is produced, they don't encourage young people to buy it because the young don't earn their own money just yet. You should try to buy things that are suitable and affordable for your age."

The columnist showed his support by ending the column: "I agree." Jibby's points of view about Thai adolescent's ways of spending and fashion indicate that he is

aware that the dress style of the teens has changed. More importantly, he has realized that Thailand has become a materialistic society and that its young population prefer brand-name expensive products. However, he encourages young people not to buy such items if it does not suit their budgets. Other than agreeing with Jibby's views, the columnist made no other comments.

Summary

Due mainly to their status and financial means, many celebrities tend to live their lives comfortably, and in some cases lavishly. Being public figures, many of them feel that they need to sustain their good image. One way to do so is to use brand name products. These range from clothing, accessories to automobiles.

The articles presented above show that while some media personalities spend a great deal of money and effort to maintain their media image, others declined to do so or see no need to live their lives lavishly. Although lifestyles of celebrities could affect audience' attitude, affordability is one main determining factor; some individuals are able to afford to buy expensive products while others are not.

Drugs and Alcohol

For the purpose of this study, drugs refer to any illegal substance used for pleasure or excitement. Although cigarettes are not illegal (unless sold to people under 18), cigarette smoking is also included in drug abuse due to its fatal effects and because it has been a serious problem in Thailand. Alcohol abuse is the excessive drinking of any intoxicating liquor containing alcohol.

As mentioned earlier, the abuse of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco among both adolescents and adults has long been one of Thailand's major problems. For several years, many concerned parties, both from the government and from the private sector, have tried to solve this problem. This category is divided into two sub-categories: (1) socialization and (2) two-sided image. The list of selected media items, representing each sub-category, for further analysis can be observed from Table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Selected Media Items of Drugs and Alcohol Sub-category

Drugs and Alcohol	
Socialization	Two-Sided Image
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oat• Australian Teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maew – Celebrity drugs party• Navin Tar – Celebrity anti-drug campaign

Socialization

In general, human beings try to fit into the society where they live. Individuals socialize with one another partly in order to be accepted in a given society. Therefore, they tend to do similar things to others in their culture. Although one of the five basic Buddhist precepts is to refrain from any kind of intoxicants, many people do drink and smoke. However, in Thai society, female drinkers may be regarded more negatively from their male counterparts as Thai people regard drinking as more a male activity.

Usually alcohol is served whenever parties, celebrations, or get-togethers take place. It is often considered as an activity that people do to socialize with each other. Like many other societies, many Thai people like going out drinking. A Thai saying says Thais drink to celebrate in almost all occasions, either happy or sad. It is more likely that drinking is an out-of-home than a home-based activity (Hansen, 1988). In general, the famous are easily noticed wherever they go and whatever they do. Celebrities going out, drinking and taking drugs are reported a great deal in the media. Unlike ordinary people going out to enjoy nightlife, however, media figures doing the same could be in the news, particularly when illegal drugs and/or alcohol related incidents are involved.

Like sports, drinking is a social activity in which many people engage, for both business and pleasure. For some celebrities, drinking is a part of their career. They often have to attend parties where alcohol is served. Others run their own pubs or restaurants (e.g. Buasomboon et al., 2000, p. 16). Unsurprisingly, many of their customers are groups of celebrities from both the same and other fields (Naimaengmao, 2000, p. 27). Their fans are another major group of customers. Media often promote and support such businesses, as frequently seen in magazine and newspaper columns. The following articles examine celebrities' use of alcohol.

Oat – Mr. Hangover

Tergubchan (June, 2000, vol. 396/1, pp. 50-52) nicknamed a young model, *Oat Kriangsak, Mr. Hangover* due to his physical condition when he came in for interviews and fashion shoots. The following excerpts show how Oat talks about this drinking behavior:

Tergubchan: “Do you go out a lot?”

Oat: “Yes, I do but I’ve just stopped for a few weeks now. I like loud music and like to have fun. ...”

“I used to go to *Klern-saek* (a popular pub) everyday because I know the owner and staff there. So I feel comfortable. ...”

Tergubchan: “Do you spend a lot of money each time?”

Oat: “Suppose there were ten of us, we each would probably pay 50 Bahts. I mean, we don’t drink so much that we puke. We go out to listen to music and have a chat.”

“Young people shouldn’t go out, spending money like they all do now. My main purpose of going out is to socialize with friends. ...”

Oat mentioned that teenagers should not go out much, although he admitted that he liked to go out. However, he also admitted that there was a time where he went out every night and could not work due to his exhaustion. Although his statements indicate that he is a heavy drinker, his main purpose of drinking is to socialize with friends rather than getting drunk. The columnist teased and made several comments on his drinking habits. Overall, the tone of the article regarding his drinking behavior was negative.

Australian Teens

Teen Talk Inter, broadcast on June 17, 2000, was filmed in Perth, Australia. The program host, *Ray McDonald*, a Thai-American teenager, visited the house of *Sunny (Sunisa Brown)*, a Thai-Australian teenager and Channel V⁴ VJ (Video jockey) who was a special guide for the program. The program featured lifestyles and activities of Australian

⁴ Channel V is a music program, broadcast on cable television by UBC. The program is similar to MTV.

teenagers. They include sports, fashion, nightlife, drinking, and smoking. The second part of the program intentionally features Australian young people drinking while spending their afternoon by the beach. However, Ray McDonald has noted that:

“I’m not encouraging people to drink but I am just presenting their lifestyles.”

It seems clear that Ray McDonald was aware that such images of drinking by the Australian youngsters could affect Thai audience, particularly young people who were the target audience of the program. His statement shows that it is not his intention to encourage the audience to drink, rather he only presented one aspect of Australian teens’ lifestyle that is similar to that of their counterparts. The whole program is presented positively.

Summary

According to the articles studied above, one could argue that drinking is a typical social activity in most societies, including Thailand despite that the use of any intoxicants contradicts one of the five basic Buddhist precepts. Drinking often takes place in out-of-home locations, in venues such as pubs, discotheques, and restaurants. Like ordinary people, many celebrities drink to socialize with friends and drinking is part of their lifestyle. However, being media personalities, their drinking behavior could affect youngsters’ attitudes toward drinking. This by no means says that all adolescent drinkers are encouraged by celebrities. Family and friends are also major factors (e.g. Hansen, 1998; see Chapter 2).

Two-sided Image

Celebrities have been involved in the issue of drugs for two opposite reasons: (1) as celebrity drug abusers and (2) celebrity anti-drug campaigners. On the one hand, they are reported engaged in using or selling drugs. This kind of coverage usually makes headlines. On the other, with government cooperation, celebrities have tried to persuade young people not to become involved in drugs. In this part, I will discuss both sides of the celebrity image with regard to the issue of drugs.

Celebrity Drug Abusers – Image Destruction: As noted above, nightlife has been popular for both many young adults and teenagers in Thailand. They go out to pubs or discotheques to drink and/or dance. A number of pubs, especially in Bangkok, have opened to facilitate such lifestyles (Buasomboon et al., 2000). Unfortunately, drugs have begun to accompany drinking in many cases (e.g. Buasomboon et al., 2000; Strasburger, 1995). There have been several reported cases that celebrities drank, smoked, used, and even sold drugs in such venues (e.g. “Joey Boy,” 2002; “The Ten Strict Rules,” 2000). In some cases, they were reported being caught with drugs in their possession.

Like foreign celebrities, some Thai media figures were reportedly involved in using and selling drugs. As in many countries, Thailand has long dealt with and tried to solve such problems. Deadly drugs such as ecstasy (also known as E, MDMA, and Love) and ketamine, are widely used by young celebrities and teenagers (Buasomboon et al., 2000; Suthisakorn, 2000). Singers and musicians are believed to be the main group of celebrities who use more drugs than others. It is sometimes argued that drugs like marijuana can help them cope with excitement before concerts. In most cases, drugs are also used to keep them alert when working long hours. I chose the following news report featuring celebrities using illegal drugs.

Maew – Caught in a Hellish Drugs Party

The headline on the front page of *Daily News* (June 11, 2000), read ‘Actress caught in a hellish drugs party’. Two pictures, one of an actress and the other her model friend, were clearly shown next to the headline. *Parichart Insee*, *Maew*, an actress/model along with her model friend and others were taking drugs while the police broke into her luxurious apartment.

‘Daily news’ reported that all went out to drink at a pub and came back to the apartment to continue partying. The police reportedly found different kinds of illegal drugs such as ecstasy, ketamine, ice (Methamphetamine Hydrochloride), and cocaine. According to the paper, although drugs were found in her premises, the actress was released after having undergone a urine test. There was no further report as to whether she was charged with possessing drugs. Apart from the use of the word ‘hellish’ in the caption, no other comments on this case have been made by the paper, although it was an important case. As it was a serious case it is noteworthy that the columnist did not condemn the actress and her friends’ behavior. One explanation could be that *Maew* has

a good relationship with the paper. Only the headline showed a negative reaction. This is because in general, newsroom editors write the headlines.

Celebrity Anti-drug Campaigner – Image Construction: With great effort and cooperation, the government and private sector have tried to find ways to solve this serious national problem. Celebrities, believed to have influence on audience, are used to launch campaigns against tobacco and drug abuse. Several awards from various government offices have been given to celebrities who joined anti-drug campaigns. They are such offices as the Office of the Narcotics Board, the Police Narcotics Suppression Bureau, the Ministry of Education, the National Scout Executive Board, and the National Youth Bureau. The main purpose is to present celebrities as good role models to encourage young people throughout the country to stop smoking and taking drugs. Rather, media figures persuade teens to spend their time on sports or education in order to stay away from all addictive substances.

Record companies, supported by several government offices, especially the Ministry of Education, have organized a number of concerts mostly held in schools and universities to promote such campaign as the *White School* and *Drugs Free Hearted Thai Youth*. Several artists of music companies have been selected as presenters for such anti-drug campaigns. These campaigns are also conducted with TV and radio ads, posters, etc. Additionally, seminars on drugs and discussions between famous stars and youth have been organized. The media have been very supportive in promoting such activities. Awards given to celebrities are always recognized in mass media: television news, radio and newspapers. These celebrities are represented as anti-drugs campaigners who with great effort tried to encourage the young not to get involved in drug taking. The following short articles show how a music company runs anti-drug campaigns, using its popular young pop stars.

Navin Yaovapolkul, Tar

Navin Yaovapolkul, better known as *Navin Tar*, a famous young singer of *Grammy* has been officially appointed the leader of *Drugs Free Heart Project*. There have been a number of articles in newspapers written about his anti-drugs campaign activities. In one of those, he gave an interview, explaining how he has involved in the campaign:

One of the main policies of *Grammy* has been to support and organize anti-drugs activities. I have personally participated in anti-drugs campaigns for the youth.... The latest campaign is called 'Drugs Free Hearted Thai Youth'. The project includes various activities, which are educational and entertaining. These activities include a seminar, held by the Police Narcotics Suppression Bureau and a discussion between the youth and celebrities... (Daily News, June 11, 2000, p. 31).

In another column, the caption reads, '*Grammy* to send its artists to join anti-drugs activities, led by *Navin Tar*.' Navin represented his record company and explained the purpose of the campaigns:

June 20th is the *Drugs Free's Day*, I, as a representative of Thai youth, would like to take part in helping get rid of drugs throughout the country. It is not only myself but also many other singers joining the campaign. I'd also like to tell all the people who have gone the wrong path to quit. Your life's worth more than drugs... It'd be much better to have some hobbies. That would keep you away from drugs (Daily News, June 25, 2000, p. 35)

Other following news reports on his anti-drugs campaign activities to promote the program read:

'*Grammy* and three state offices to hold the *Drugs Free Hearted Thai Youth* program.'

'*Tar* invites the young to join *Drugs Free Heart* activities.' (Thai Rath, June 21, 2000, p. 39)

The above articles were chosen from many others reported within one month. This indicates that newspapers have given importance to and supported such anti-drugs campaigns organized by *Grammy*. All articles are presented very positively, in favor of both the celebrity and the recording company. It is clear that mass media are very supportive and are significant channels through which messages from celebrity anti-drug campaigners are sent to the young Thais.

Summary

Drugs as a national issue has long been difficult to resolve. Like any other controversial conduct, if practiced by celebrities, drug abuse often makes headlines. The articles examined above reveal two opposite sides of the issue. On the one side, celebrities themselves are drug users. On the other, media figures act as anti-drug campaigners. Some celebrities destruct while others construct their own images and reputations when

getting engaged in this issue. At the same time, mass media can either destroy or support celebrities’ reputations. I would argue that celebrity drug abusers make the front page while mass media are more likely to report news about celebrity anti-drug campaigners less prominently. However, celebrity anti-drugs campaigners, in return, use media to promote their own career and improve their image.

Relationships & Sexuality

This issue deals with personal and intimate relationships: love affairs, marriage and sexual behavior and orientation. Both local and international mass media, especially tabloids report frequently about the personal relationships of the famous. Some times media cover stories of celebrities favorably and other times unfavorably, and while some stories are true others are rumors.

Media often reflect value judgments in their coverage of relationships and sexual orientation with gossip, interviews, critiques, etc. Mass media can be fast and furious with this type of coverage, because the public is curious about the personal affairs and relationships of stars. Through the media, especially television, newspapers, and magazines, some celebrities may admit having relationships with someone though in most cases celebrities refuse to have their personal and private lives revealed (Barbas, 2001, p. 23).

Such coverage is available to the audience especially in magazines and tabloids. Mass media are well aware that such stories attract the audience and become the talk of the town. It often seems that mass media report anything about stars whether it is good or bad, true or untrue. This topic consists of three sub-categories: (1) Liberalism vs. Conservatism, (2) Freedom of Sexuality and (3) Gender Roles. The list of selected media items, representing each sub-category for further interpretation is given in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13 Selected Media Items of Relationship and Sexuality Sub-category

Relationship and Sexuality		
Liberalism vs. Conservatism	Freedom of sexuality	Gender Roles
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe• Kong• Ramona	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Angelina Jolie & Boom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe & Kong• Prince Andrew• Umm

Liberalism vs. Conservatism – Cultural Aspect

Through mass media, the audience are informed of how liberal or conservative celebrities are. Like ordinary people, media figures can have liberal or conservative attitudes toward relationships and sexuality. In Thailand, since sexuality is a sensitive matter, anything that contradicts Thai social and cultural norms and mores is to be negatively criticized or even condemned publicly.

Liberalism: As stated previously, Thai society has dramatically changed in many aspects. One is the way in which Thais view relationships and sexuality. Through mass media, we, as audiences, are bombarded with information on sex from around the world. To Thais, Western celebrities (and Westerners in general) are more liberal about sex. In contrast, Thai celebrities seem more conservative. For years, however, a number of famous Thai people are represented as becoming more and more modernized toward such matters. For them, this awkward topic has become an easier issue to discuss through mass media.

Both western and Japanese cultures have influenced Thai people in fashion, pop music and their attitudes toward sexuality and relationships (e.g. Komolbut, 2000; PIVVEE, 2000). Still, most people in Thai society find it difficult to accept untraditional sexual behavior such as premarital sex and cohabitation. Both sympathetic and sarcastic comments concerning celebrity morals have been written, especially in newspaper articles. Some celebrities are described as having modern perceptions toward relationships and sexuality. Through the media audience learn, celebrities' attitudes toward these matters.

Over the years, premarital sex, cohabitation and homosexuality have become commonplace in Western societies. Thai mass media increasingly report Thai celebrities having more liberal and modernized lifestyles. Some openly admitted cohabiting with their boy/girlfriends. Mass media frequently report on celebrities sexuality and relationships. How such individuals are portrayed seems to depend in part upon their personal relations with the media. In similar contexts, two different stars could be represented in opposite ways. Therefore, unconventional sexuality in Thai society could be described either neutrally or negatively depending upon how the media report it as well as how the audience defines it. I chose to analyze the following articles that show different aspects of relationships and sexuality. Some of which reveal more than one facet.

Joe – 'I've always been dumped', reveals Joe.

This piece of news appeared on the front page of *Thai Rath* (June 4, 2000, Appendix U), with the headline 'I've always been dumped, reveals Joe.' A big photograph of him, along with three other female celebrities, was also presented with the headline. The details were in the separate entertainment section. A singer/actor, *Jirayut Wattanasin*, also better known as *Joe*, has been very popular among teenagers for over a decade. According to a rumor, his last relationship with a famous Thai-French model, *Martin Morey*, ended due to a 'third person,' *Odet Hendriat Jackomine*, a teenage Thai-French DJ/singer. In the interview, Joe refuted the rumor and agreed to talk about all his past relationships with female stars.

In the article, Joe was referred to as *Valentino*, *Casanova*, and *Don Juan*. Labels are very important in defining and representing characteristics and personalities (Poole, 1999). These names personify 'promiscuous sexuality' and 'superficial relationships.' As most Thai audience are aware, he had dated at least four female celebrities (one at a time he claimed). Such phrases as 'living with me', 'moving out' and 'leaving me' indicate these individuals' attitudes toward relationship and sexuality, which of course, imply premarital sex and co-habitation. One of the reasons that his story interests the audience as well as the media is that he is a very popular singer/actor and the women involved are also well-known.

However, the lady-killer label mistakenly represented Joe, according to the columnist. Joe openly revealed his relationships with ex-celebrity girlfriends. All their names were clearly mentioned along with photographs of them.

"I'd love to have a long term relationship but if it doesn't work out, it'd come to an end."

Although he refused to get into details about his past relationships with all female stars, he explained that:

"Let me put it this way, they were all good women but we just couldn't work it out, that's it. Although the way we broke up probably wasn't so nice, we ended up being friends."

"I never left anyone but have always been dumped."

“Although all relationships failed, I never got angry with any of them... I’m not just saying this to make myself look good but that’s how I really feel.”

In the article, words representing failed relationships and unfaithfulness were emphasized in bold. Although Joe has given the interview, the columnist put in a great deal of his/her own criticism. Some comments were on co-habitation and unfaithfulness:

‘On the career path, Joe has been very successful but on the intimate relationship side, he has always failed it and he is never lucky in love.’

This article mentioned several aspects of relationships and sexuality: cohabitation, premarital sex, and probably promiscuity. However, I put the focus on the first two for this particular article. As described in Chapter 1, traditional Thai women are supposed to get married before having sexual relations. The article apparently indicated that Joe and his ex-girlfriends had lived together which contradicts Thai cultural norms. More importantly, this could influence the way the audience perceives relationships and could also alter their attitudes in this regard.

As the article discussed a morality different from Thai values and norms, it created a discourse about what was right and wrong. However, the media (this newspaper) did not establish a consensus around specific norms regarding sexual relationships. The columnist never once framed the story in the values of traditional Thai culture, but rather focused on Joe having had failed relationships with different celebrity females. I would argue that this could affect ways in which the audience interprets this media text.

The paper used harsh words such as *got him and dumped him* and *not truly loved him* that reflect negatively upon his ex-girlfriends. Emphasis on rejecting Thai norms of sexual behavior was solely put on the females. Therefore, in such a case, at least in this paper, Joe was not seen in a negative light or subject to penalization by cultural norms (Poole, 1999). On the other hand, he was depicted as a victim and received the sympathy and support of the columnist.

Five names of female celebrities were explicitly mentioned, three of them with photographs. As implied by the words ‘living with me’ and ‘moving out’, co-habitation here is considered commonplace by both sides. However, it should be noted that two of his ex-girlfriends were somewhat westernized. One grew up in the US while the other is

Thai-French. Possibly, their sexual attitudes might have been different from those of other traditional Thai females. These two women, therefore, might not have perceived co-habitation as detrimental to Thai norms. Here 'premarital sex' was also implied. Overall, the attitude of the newspaper towards Joe was positive while the one to his ex-girlfriends was disapproving.

Kong³ – 'Kong Has No Problem with Cohabitation'

Like his best friend *Joe Saharat Sangkapricha*, better known as *Kong*, a famous singer/actor gave his points of view on relationships in the *Daily News* (May 30, 2000). He is known to have been with his girlfriend for over ten years. Kong pointed out that he had no problem with cohabitation and his family was *modern* about it. The word *modern* represented his attitude that contradicts Thai traditional norms and value on sexuality and marriage. Like Joe's article, no criticism has been made by the columnist. Kong was not seen as a target for penalization by Thai norms (Poole, 1999).

Conservatism: Despite the rapid changes in Thai society in many ways, not all Thais have changed their attitude towards sex. Although some have become more liberal, others remain conservative. Dating someone of the opposite sex is by no means unusual. On the other hand, having a sexual relationship before or outside marriage is still taboo.

Some young stars have claimed that dating someone is normal for people their age as long as no sexual relationship is involved. This suggests that they still value the importance of chastity as well as marriage. The following article shows how a conservative female actress regards relationships.

Ramona – 'Mona Openly Talks about Her Boyfriend'

The headline was captured in a small frame along with a photograph of her on the front page of *Daily News* (June 25, 2000). A long interview with this young actress was featured in the entertainment section (p. 32). According to the paper, there was gossip about her dating an educated rich man, a son of the owner of the most popular Thai brewery. She admitted:

³ Despite being reported in the May's issue, I decided to include the article in this section because it is relevant to Joe's article (discussed above).

“I now have a boyfriend but don’t want to reveal his name... Both our families approve because we don’t do anything bad or wrong. We see each other during the day...”

Her statement implies that the couple are not in an intimate or sexual relationship due mainly to her cultural ideologies. As a Thai-Swiss woman, Ramona Sanorali, has often been mistakenly perceived as a westernized girl who is most likely to behave in modern ways. According to the interview, she admitted being upset each time that she heard such a claim:

“... Because I’m half Thai half western, people tend to think that I drink and smoke. In fact, I neither drink nor smoke. My mother taught me that as a Thai woman, you’re supposed to have morals and not to do anything that could lead men to think you don’t behave. I prefer to be an old-fashioned woman which is rare today...”

“It depends on individuals, not all 100% Thai women are culturally and morally decent. Some are and some aren’t. There are also some good half-Thai women but most are usually seen as westernized....”

Although her father is Swiss, she explained what he was like:

“My father is very conservative... He taught me to be a decent person. I really am old-fashioned.”

The columnist ended commenting:

‘Although she is not a 100% Thai girl she is typically more conservative than some 100% Thai women who’d prefer to be westernized.’

It is obvious that the interview reveals that this mixed-blood actress presents herself as conservative. It also implies that by many Thais, westerners are perceived as more liberal toward sex and relationships. Moreover, according to her statements, she is aware how much Thai society and women have changed concerning sexual matters. The columnist explicitly praised the actress in being a typical Thai girl while sarcastically commenting on liberal Thai females in general. Mona was presented in a very positive way.

Summary

Traditional Thai ways of thinking about relationships and sex have drastically changed. This by no means indicates that all Thais have become more liberal toward this sensitive issue. Celebrities are not different from ordinary people. Some are more liberal than others. This is a personal issue. Nationality in this case can not determine an individual's sexual attitude. Rather, social and family background particularly family-taught values are determinant.

Freedom of Sexuality

*Angelina Jolie and Boom*⁶

In the column of 'Talking About,' *Cleo* (June 2000, pp. 70-71) ended an interview with *Angelina Jolie* by asking about her sexual orientation:

Cleo: "You've announced that you are bisexual, haven't you?"

Jolie: "Yes. Why would I hide it? Everybody knows how direct I am. I feel good being able to love both females and males..."

On the contrary, *Boom*, a Thai actress ended an interview about her career and love life in *Matichon* (May 22, 2000) with a careful statement:

"I've been dating a woman but I didn't want to reveal this because I feared that Thai teenagers would imitate me."

Compared to the Thai actresses' statements, Jolie's makes it clear that she sees bisexuality as normal. *Boom*'s account, on the other hand, indicates that she feels that such sexual orientation is still considered uncommon in Thai society. A comparison of the two statements from an American Hollywood star and a Thai actress show that there are differences in attitudes toward sexual preferences. Media, *Cleo* for Jolie's and *Daily News* for Boom's, are only a channel through which messages, representing celebrities'

⁶ Although the article about *Boom* is in the May's issue, I decided to discuss it because it would be useful to compare how Thai and American celebrities deal publicly with the same issue.

attitudes toward this sensitive issue, have been sent out to the audience. In these examples the media made no criticism of such behavior, rather left it to the audience to judge.

It is obvious that the two actresses feel differently about bisexuality. Being conscious that this behavior is still regarded as unusual in Thai society, Boom appreciated that her position could shape young people's sexual attitudes that could then lead to imitation of observed behavior. Angelina Jolie, on the other hand, viewed it as beneficial to be able to love people of both genders and showed no concern about how people would think. It would appear that Angelina Jolie believes bisexuality has become more acceptable or she may not have been concerned about what people might think of her.

Summary

Bisexuality, still considered improper by traditional Thais, has been discussed in Thai media. As Jackson (1996) observes, the impact of contemporary Western gay lifestyles has also spread to Thai urban society (cited in Lewis, 1998, p. 250). The impact of celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Boom publicly announcing their bisexuality is difficult to determine. It is evident, however, that subjects which were once considered taboo are now receiving media attention.

Gender Roles

In Thailand, women and men are perceived differently in issues of relationships and sexuality. When it comes to issues of premarital sex and promiscuity, Thai women are more vulnerable to criticism. It is a cultural tradition that Thai females should remain virgins until marriage while such rules do not apply to men. Flirtatious or promiscuous men are often perceived as superior, attractive, and successful while women would be seen as disreputable or trashy. This is one example of how Thai women are unequally treated.

Despite the fact that Thai women have increasingly become equal to men, Thai women still feel inferior when it comes to dealing with the issues surrounding sex. A number of female celebrities feel degraded by rumors that they are mistresses. Media often claim that old rich businessmen provide these female stars with money, houses, cars, and such and a number of articles have gossiped about female celebrities'

involvement in such secret relationships. Unfortunately, this also indicates that in Thai society some men see women as subordinate. Such scandals can affect female celebrities' dignity and reputation. It is noteworthy that very few have legally challenged the media and sued them for defamation.

I feel that it is important to differentiate 'promiscuity' from 'flirtation'. By promiscuity, I mean having many sexual partners, while flirtation means behaving with a member of the opposite sex in a way that attracts interest and attention.

Like other personal issues, media often report on and gossip about the love affairs of the famous. A number of male and female celebrities have been negatively represented in mass media as being 'flirts' or even promiscuous. Articles have been written about both Thai and international celebrities dating different people at the same time. Some have also been targets of gossip about cheating on their boy/girlfriends or even having extramarital relationships. Whether or not these media messages are true, infidelity, promiscuity and flirtation could be equally scandalous. Thai people appear to feel less offended by international celebrities involved in such behavior than when Thai celebrities behave in the same way. The following two articles show how celebrities with different genders and cultures are perceived in situations of flirting and promiscuity

Umm – 'I'm not a flirt. I'm just selective,' responds Umm

The above caption appears on the front page of *Thai Rath* (June 18, 2000). *Pacharapa Chalchue*, better known as *Umm*, a young actress, has been claimed to be dating both young and old men. Details were in the entertainment news section (p. 33). The article also featured a picture of her in an elegant strapless dress. In response to the claim, Umm explained as follows:

"That's not true, I'm not a flirt. I deny it. I think every woman has the right to choose who's best for her. As long as you don't find the right person yet, you'll just keep looking. ..."

"I don't date men over 32, I don't want people to call me *dek-sia*⁷ (a mistress)."

"I'm selective. It takes time to find the right man. Nowadays, men are flirts, today he's with you, the next day with another woman...."

⁷ *Dek-sia*, literally a young girl of a rich man, indicates a woman supported by a rich older man in terms of money and other conveniences such as automobile and accommodation. However, the term implies a sense of contempt.

Her expressive statement seems to show that it is common for men to date different women. While she denied being a mistress Umm did admit she had dated different men. She also revealed that she is now dating someone and expressed the following views:

“I’m not afraid of gossip about it. I’m sincere, I don’t need to keep my celebrity image...Besides, I’m now dating a decent man. So why would I hide it?”

Her attitude toward relationships might be different from that of other celebrities who keep their personal lives private. Being on the front page indicates that the paper felt the article was important. Despite the fact that Umm is a very popular actress who appears in many television series, the overall tone was negative.

*The Randy Prince: Duke Andrew of York*⁸

The article in *Thai Rath* (June 18, 2000, p. 24) starts by stating that there have been a number of gossipy reports, in both newspapers and magazines, about Prince Andrew’s relationships with different women. All these women are claimed to be beautiful, rich, popular, and noble. *Randy Andy* was a nickname that the media used for the Prince. The article took more than half a page of *Thai Rath*, featuring a big photograph of him and a number of well-known female celebrities mentioned in the article. The article claimed that the Prince was *unlucky in love*. It pointed out that something always went wrong when he dated someone. The columnist questioned why he tended towards brief affairs, except for his first love *Koo Stark*, and *Sarah Ferguson*, his ex-wife who was also mentioned unfavorably. According to the article, Sarah traveled abroad regularly, particularly to Italy where she lived with a married Italian noble. British people strongly resented her behavior. However, it seems that the couple enjoy free lives and are not concerned about what people and the media would think. The overall article is very negative.

Summary

⁸ Written by Judy Wade and published in *OK* magazine, this article was translated into Thai by Watcharee Saisingtong.

Even though cultural norms change over time, gender roles within a given culture determine perceptions of acceptable sexual roles. While polygamy was accepted in Thailand many years ago it is unacceptable for modern Thai society, both socially and legally. Double standards still apply in regard to what is seen as acceptable male and female sexual behavior. Promiscuity, premarital sex and cohabitation are off limits for women while no particular stigma is attached when these are practiced by men.

Conclusion

This chapter looked both into quantitative and qualitative aspects of media content dedicated to celebrities. The quantitative analysis revealed that although a great deal of space was devoted to reporting on celebrities, the type of coverage was rather limited with some differences between media and coverage types. Three categories, fashion, drug and alcohol abuse, and relationships and sexuality were selected for further analysis. Since all selected media are in Thai, translations were needed to report the findings in this thesis. Therefore it was important to keep in mind that some nuances in language could have been lost in translation.

The qualitative investigation revealed how celebrities were reported in the media in relation to these same specific issues. Examination of language, tone, attitude, and bias shown in the selected articles suggested that mass media played a significant role in the process of social definition (Gross, 1991/1995) by holding the power to define the meanings of celebrities. It was apparent that stories that are more controversial (and disagreeable) tend to be larger (Poole, 1999). This was particularly true in the sensational coverage of *Bow* and *Joyce*, *Joe*, and *Prince Andrew*, which was more detailed than the other instances. In addition to being an educator, mass media also act as an image creator, constructing both negative and positive images of celebrities. The media can and may also distort stories. Mass media are not only responsible for sending messages but can also reinforce morality by making comments on and by criticizing the reported events.

Media professionals' predisposition and attitudes toward certain celebrities are also significant. I would argue that what media say, comment on, and criticize can affect the way people read the media texts. The ways in which media report stories also reflect their own professional ideologies. Mass media may favor some celebrities over others. Consider the 'revealing clothing' articles about *Ploy*, and *Bow* and *Joyce*, for example,

where the same issue was treated differently. The magazine columnist did not make any negative comments on Ploy's preferred sexy clothing. In contrast, *Thai Rath* strongly criticized the way in which Bow and Joyce dressed. It appears that the different types of publications (Ploy in an interview of a magazine and the duo in a gossip column of a tabloid) have different agendas.

Similar discrepancies were found in the reporting of relationships. Despite similar sexual behavior one newspaper tried to make excuses for *Joe* and to create a better image for him while *Prince Andrew* was disparaged as *Randy Andy*. Media perpetuate, reinforce and provide readers with 'ways of seeing and thinking.'

It appears that when reporting about celebrities, mass media rarely commit to personal comments or clear-cut attitudes. In most cases they opt to use sensational and misleading headlines ("You are what you read," 2000). On the contrary, when it comes to gossip, quotes, and interviews, the commentary is abundant and opinionated.

This chapter provided the (encoded) framework of media representations of celebrities but did not explore how audience decoded media texts. The following two chapters will reveal that individuals' ideologies, attitudes and beliefs are significant determining factors in reading media texts. The same media item can be read differently by individuals with different ideologies and social positions. The patterns of audience reception will be looked at in more detail and I will report the findings of focus groups discussions, exploring how Bangkok adolescents understand media texts and the relationships between their interpretations and mediated behavior.

CHAPTER 6

Audience Reception and Bangkok Teenagers

Introduction

By bringing together audience reception and media effects studies, my aim was to explore how young citizens of Bangkok use, process, and interpret media content and to see if and to what extent they are affected by the mass media. This chapter reports on the analysis of focus group discussions, emphasizing on audience reception. The goal is to understand how audience decodes media representations of celebrities in relation to three social issues: fashion, substance abuse, relationships and sexuality.

All fifty-four respondents were students recruited from four different Bangkok institutions according to the selection criteria (see Chapter 3). These students represented young people in middle and late adolescence. Participants were classified into four gender-age categories: Male Middle, Female Middle, Male Late, and Female Late. Two groups each were conducted, giving a total of eight. Participants in each group were either from the same classrooms or the same majors. Due mainly to practicalities, all discussions took place in school/university premises without supervision of teachers/academics.

Prior to discussions, each student was required to complete a questionnaire asking about their media consumption and their own behavior regarding three social issues. They then were shown newspapers and magazine articles, representing celebrities being engaged in social issues and were asked to discuss them. I urged them to express their views and to elicit their responses to celebrities' behavior relating to the issues. After discussions, they were given a one-week media diary asking for details of media use on a daily basis as well as their social and cultural activities.

In this chapter, I examine how meanings of celebrities are produced in the interaction between media messages and the young audience. The intention is to examine:

- To what extent Bangkok youth are susceptible to the discourse offered by the media.

- Whether they ever read media texts differently, and if so, what are the decoding strategies used.

Bangkok youth were well aware of both Thai and international celebrities and the issues discussed. A great deal of their information was coming from the mass media, magazines and newspapers in particular. Where socially acceptable beliefs and thinking had not been proposed in the media text, the young were critical of media content.

The discussions revealed that Bangkok youths are not fully susceptible to the discourse offered by the media. They are educated and have well developed critical thinking skills; they create their own meanings by ‘rejecting’ or ‘negotiating’ with the ‘dominant readings,’ resulting in various interpretations of the same texts. However, different individuals used different interpretive strategies. It could then be suggested that not only do these young people decode the texts differently from the media, they also differ in their interpretations, depending upon various contributory factors such as age, gender, and personal ideologies.

As a result it became clear that each one of the selected media text triggered different decoding and that the respondents did not always read the texts in the same way as they were encoded. On the whole, however, they agreed with the ‘dominant reading’ in eight out of twelve texts (66.6%). However, three texts generated close margins between the ‘preferred’ and ‘oppositional’ readings. The most obvious factors were cultural worldviews, attitudes, and personal experiences.

This chapter is divided into four main sections:

- Firstly, I reiterate demographic details to provide an idea of how respondent groups are differentially positioned. More specifically, I discuss the significance of age and gender as two key determinants. As focus group participants were not the same students as in the preliminary survey, brief details on media consumption of group participants, obtained from questionnaires given prior to discussions, is also provided.
- Secondly, I report on the analysis of audience reception of media texts. I first give brief details of each selected media item. I then analyze the discussions, using the

same sets of categories and sub-categories, based on three social issues, as I used in analyzing the media content (see Table 5.9).

- Thirdly, I summarize the media interpretations of celebrities by the focus groups. I also discuss in detail significant findings obtained from the four differently positioned groups of these audiences, using Hall's encoding/decoding model. The differences and similarities of interpretation are also addressed.
- Lastly, I discuss the interpretive frameworks that young respondents use to read media texts about celebrities. Apart from age and gender, other factors that determine their interpretations are reported.

It came through quite clearly that cultural differences and changes in attitudes had significant impact on text readings. The older participants were more articulate and critical in their responses than the younger. This suggests that their experience and knowledge had grown over time. Gender also plays an important role, especially in reading the texts about relationships and sexuality.

Section I Details of Focus Group Participants Revisited

Importance of Differences in Age and Gender

Gender

Studies have revealed that there are differences in media use between genders (e.g. Bruno, 1996; Woodroffe, Glickman, Barker & Power, 1993). Other evidence suggests that gender is one of the key factors resulting in different interpretations of media texts. Panich's study (1995) reveals that Thai male and female teenagers differ in their media exposure with regard to pop singers. Similarly, Niramansakul's (1996) study on foreign brand name products and teens' purchasing behavior reveals that demographic factors, namely gender, age, and occupation, determined the differences in adolescents' purchasing behavior. His study also showed that women bought more of such items than did men. One possible reason could be that most products are targeted to and attract more women, especially cosmetic items (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994, p. 47). Similarly,

Nakamura (1996) reports that female high school students bought more imported fashion products than their male counterparts. Teenage girls tend to be trendier and imitate each other more than boys.

Thai women are more likely than men to be conservative and tend to perceive sexuality and relationships differently from men. In his study, Kasemsuk (1996) reports that male and female undergraduate students have different attitudes toward the presentation of American culture in television commercials. Unlike some western societies, female drinkers may be seen as less acceptable in Thai society. This may also influence their readings of alcohol consumption in the media.

Age

Choices of and responses to media effects depend upon the age of consumer (Arnett et al., 1995). Age also influences the message processing skills that have been developed, the amount of knowledge and experience accumulated, and interest. Media content preferences change through life (Jeffres, 1997). For instance, light drama is least preferred in the youngest and oldest age groups. McDonald and Glynn have observed that a preference for news grows consistently with age, while preferences for sports start out high, hit a plateau in the adolescent years and drop after the age of thirty (1993, cited in Jeffres, 1997).

Age determines the degree of freedom of Thai youngsters. High school students are supervised more closely than those in universities. Therefore, younger teens have less opportunity to be engaged in media-related activities during school hours. Moreover, a great number of college students live independently in dormitories or private apartments. Living without close supervision would give these older teenagers more freedom and allow them to do more activities including improper use of media such as phonographic videos, magazines, and the Internet. Nonetheless, having less opportunity does not necessarily mean that younger teens have no chance to engage in similar behavior.

Deepanwong (1996) reports that junior high school students are exposed to non-verbal language by celebrity singers more than other teenage groups. Senior high school students tend to spend a great amount of time on studying in order to get prepared for the entrance examination, while university freshmen try to adapt to their new environment and spend time on various college activities. However, maturity alone by no means can

explain differences in media readings. Upbringing and mentality have a great deal to do with teenagers’ attitudes and behavior. These will be discussed in later sections.

In order to give an overall picture of how the focus groups were constituted, it is useful to provide brief demographic details of the teenage informants. In this study, gender and age (stages of adolescence: middle and late) are main variables of how audience groups are differently positioned in order to examine the way they read the media text. I categorized them into four different audience groups: (1) male in middle adolescence (MM), (2) female in middle adolescence (FM), (3) male in late adolescence (ML), and (4) female late adolescence (FL). High school students represented the first and the second groups and university students the third and the forth. Table 6.2 details number of teenage respondents divided by age and gender.

Table 6.1 Number of Participants by Age and Gender

Stage of Adolescence	Male	Female	Total	%
Middle (aged 15-18)	14	15	29	53.70
Late (aged over 18)	12	13	25	46.30
Total	26	28	54	100
%	48.15	51.85	100	

Gender & Age

The number of female participants (51.85%) was slightly higher than that of male counterparts (48.15%). While 53.70% of students were those in middle adolescence, 46.30% were in late adolescence.¹

Class

Although class is not used as a main factor in this study, it helps better understand teenagers’ choice of media use as class is an indicator of household income. While it is difficult to classify the participants by social class, their educational institution suggests their family income. Of the four academic institutions selected for the study, one was a

¹ Focus group participants representing middle and late adolescence will be referred to as ‘Middle’ and ‘Late’ respectively hereafter.

private university where tuition fees are relatively high. The rest were public institutions. One of the high schools is popular and hard to get into, so parents pay a high fee to get children enrolled. Nonetheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that attending state institutions does not necessarily mean that students are from lower income families than those attending private institutions.

Cultural Aspects: Religion and Language

The majority of participants (94.4%) are Buddhists while three (5.6%) belong to other denominations: two were Christians and one was Muslim. Their native language is Thai and they all learn English as a second language in school.

Use of Media

The data on media usage were derived from questionnaires, given prior to discussions. Focus group participants were asked to name their favorite print and broadcast media. The following section summarizes the results:

Print: The participants reported reading seven different newspapers. The majority (51.85%) read *Thai Rath*, while 24.07 % read *Daily News*, both famous tabloids selected as media examples in this study. Twenty-two different magazines were listed. *Cleo* (11%), one of the five selected magazines for this research, is the magazine read predominantly by the participants, followed by *Katch* (9.25%).

Broadcast: Sixteen television programs were reported by the respondents. The most watched television program is *Millionaire Millenium* (25.96%), first broadcast in March 2000, one month before the preliminary survey was conducted, followed by *Dramas/series* (7.41%). Seventeen different radio programs were reported. *Hot Wave* (22.22%) ranked first, followed by *Radio No Problem* (14.81%) and *Radio Vote* (12.96%). All are music stations.

Section II Analysis of Media Reception by Bangkok Teenagers

The section will examine Bangkok youth's readings of media texts about celebrities. It will explore how they understand and relate them to personal knowledge and experiences (Höijer, 1990, p. 41). Not only do people make choices about the media they consume,

they also differ in their interpretations of media content (Arnett et al., 1995). Real suggests that differentially positioned individuals in the social structure in terms of class, race or sex will have access to distinct codes and subcultures useful in decoding and interpreting texts (1996, p. 96).

Audiences interpret and read media texts differently, depending upon various factors; meaning is polysemic. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hall’s (1980) classic encoding/decoding model suggests three different general readings. The *preferred reading* fully accepts the message given in the text. The *negotiated reading* consists of acceptance and rejection of the dominant code and the preferred meaning offered in the text. The *oppositional reading* understands the dominant and intended meaning but interprets the message in a totally contrary way. Höijer (1990) suggests the coding scheme to examine interview material. In the process of analysis, after having read and marked the transcripts (Siedman, 1998), I began to label the interesting passages and determined a coding unit. In this study, I chose participants’ statements representing categories, set up for qualitative aspects of content analysis (Chapter 5). Table 6.2 details discourse codes, derived from each category (some consist of sub-codes).

Table 6.2 Overall Discourse Codes Derived from Group Discussions

Fashion		Drugs & Alcohol		Relationships & Sexuality	
Sub-Categories	Codes	Sub-Categories	Codes	Sub- Categories	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Trends & Unconvention-alism Materialism & Superiority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriateness Unique Characteristics of Adolescents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socialization Two sided-image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential reasons of involvement Celebrity image Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberalism vs. Conservatism Freedom of sexuality Gender Roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural aspect Social Status Media

To avoid redundancy, selected media samples that were discussed in Chapter 5, will not be repeated here in detail. Rather Table 6.3 shows all media texts discussed in group discussions. However, due to the limited time with some groups, not all of these items were presented and discussed. Although the emphasis was on three social issues, other relevant questions were also raised and will be reported.

Table 6.3 Media Texts Discussed in Focus Groups

Fashion	Drugs & alcohol Abuse	Relationships & Sexuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ploy*• Bow & Joyce**• Britney Spears*• Western & Japanese Bands*• Bvlgari & Hollywood*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oat*• Maew**• Nawin Tar **	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe** & ***• Kong** & ***• Prince Andrew**• Umm**• Angelina Jolie*

* Items selected from magazines.
** Items selected from newspapers.
*** Items selected from television programs.

I will first present a synopsis of each media item. I then discuss each code and sub-code, derived from the three themes. As this section analyzes qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions, it is essential to quote what the teenage informants said in the group discussions. The quotations throughout this chapter (as well as the next one) derive from a series of eight focus group discussions, conducted in November and December 2000. ‘P’ stands for participants while ‘R’ stands for researcher/focus group moderator (myself). In addition to these qualitative data, valuable quantitative data obtained from both questionnaires, given prior to the interviews, and media dairies, given afterwards, were also used to elaborate the focus group findings.

Fashion

I selected a series of media texts to represent various aspects of the issue of fashion: clothing, hairstyles, and body adornment (piercing and tattooing). Categories and codes derived from these articles are given in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Sub-categories and Codes Derived from Articles on Fashion

Fashion		
Media Texts	Sub-Categories	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ploy• Bow & Joyce• Britney Spears• Western & Japanese Bands• Bvlgari & Hollywood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Global Trends & Unconventionalism• Materialism & Superiority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriateness• Unique Characteristics of Adolescents• Freedom

The synopsis of each media item discussed is as follows:

Ploy and Bow & Joyce: These two articles feature Ploy, a young actress/model, and Bow and Joyce, two female singers in revealing clothes. The way in which they dress received a great deal of criticism.

Britney Spears: This article presents an interview with the singer who has her belly button pierced. Although she admitted that the process was extremely painful, she did not regret it, rather she liked it.

Western & Japanese Bands: This series of articles features the famous Japanese bands: *Malice and L'Arc en Ciel* and Western boy-bands: *Red Code* and *N'SYNC*. The former has been criticized on their unusual colorful hairstyles and heavy make-up while the latter presents their members with tattoos and earrings, as other types of fashion adornment.

Bvlgari & Hollywood: The article concerns ten female Hollywood stars, using Bvlgari items while attending media events. Bvlgari products range from jewelry, bags and watches to home decoration items. The emphasis of the article is on the extravagant lifestyles of Hollywood stars and hi-society people.

Appropriateness

When discussing the articles about different areas of fashion, all participants focused on the matter of appropriateness, meaning suitability for a particular person, condition, occasion, or place. It is difficult, however, to define what is appropriate and what is not due to different definitions by young people and adults.

I classified the responses into three sub-codes: (1) social status, (2) social and cultural acceptance, and (3) circumstances. The following section examines how participants read the media messages concerning celebrities' fashion in each sub-code.

Social Status

Some teens pointed out that sexy attire was more appropriate when worn by celebrities such as models and singers than by ordinary people walking in the street. Others also argued that they should not be worn by very young girls. The following statements illustrate their views:

‘It’s just their (celebrities’) style. It’s their selling point. I sometimes disagree. It’s too extreme sometimes.’ (MM2²)

P1: ‘They’re able to do that because they’re celebrities. It’s their job to present themselves this way.’

P2: ‘To make themselves distinctive.’

P1: ‘They have to look different...’ (FL1)

‘It’s just because of their career. I’ve met them (Bow and Joyce). They didn’t actually dress as extremely as this (see Appendix R). They just wore jeans and T-shirts.’ (FM2)

The above remarks indicate the respondents’ awareness of how celebrity culture works in marketing terms. That is, celebrities are in the position where they look for uniqueness to be easily identified and to promote and maintain their image.

Similarly, when discussing the article about Bvlgari and Hollywood, one student showed her awareness of the fact that celebrities, with their social status, are often used for advertising purposes and gave the following remarks:

‘It’s more about advertising than anything else.’ (FL1)

Social and Cultural Acceptance

Although most admitted that extreme fashion such as colorful hairstyles, revealing clothing, piercing, and tattooing have become commonplace, they showed some social and cultural concerns. As some commented on unusual piercing:

P1: ‘I think that the world is changing. It’s normal that we should be able to follow new fashion.’

P2: ‘It’s depends on who does it.’

P3: ‘Also on society and culture.’

² Annotation when quoting from group discussions is as follows:
Any added word for clarification is enclosed in parenthesis ().
A series of dots (...) with a quote indicates an unfinished statement or a pause.

Quotes are referenced as follows:
Male Late adolescence groups: ML1, ML2
Female Late adolescence groups: FL1, FL2
Male Middle adolescence groups: MM1, MM2
Female Middle adolescence groups: FM1, FM2

- P1: 'In the US, it's very commonplace.
P3: 'Not a lot of Thai people accept it though.' (ML2)

These male respondents viewed the text by implying that Thai people are less open than westerners. They then believe that this results in some difficulty for older Thais to accept the extreme fashions of the younger generation. When specifically asked what they thought about the way Ploy as well as Bow and Joyce dressed (see Appendix R), respondents expressed both negative, positive and ambivalent views:

- P1: 'I like them but I think their clothes are a bit too revealing.'
P2: 'Too revealing.'
P3: 'Sometimes, they don't dress properly.'
P4: 'Some of their dresses look nice but some are too extreme.' (FM1)

These responses are mixed. However, most suggest negotiated readings. Although some felt that some fashions were too unusual, at the same time they admitted that they liked them and felt that young people should be able to dress as they like and be socially accepted.

Circumstances

With regard to sexy clothing, most respondents, regardless of age and gender, agreed that circumstances such as place and time, should be taken into account. According to them, teenage girls or women should avoid wearing such attire, especially when going to temples or to formal ceremonies. The majority (80%) felt that girls were supposed to consider when and in what kind of setting they should or should not wear such outfits.

- P1: 'It depends on where you go'.
P2: 'It depends on situations. Like you shouldn't wear those (revealing clothing) when you go to the temple'
P3: 'Depending on circumstances: when and where. (ML2)

'Actually, it's ok, they (revealing clothes) are nice but you have to take the when and where into consideration'. (FL1)

These teens were not only concerned about the situations where such clothing can be worn. Safety was another concern. Those who were wearing revealing clothes should consider their own safety, according to some participants:

P1: 'It depends on situations'.

P2: 'Yes, it does'.

P3: 'Yes, it depends on where you're going'.

P4: 'Yes, like if you're going to the temple, you have to dress properly but if you're going out with friends, you may wear *sai-diow* (spaghetti strap top). But when going out at night, you shouldn't wear too-revealing clothes, that'll be inviting to men (laugh)'. (FM1)

'I think sometimes teens resemble celebrities wearing too-revealing clothes which is no good because our society now is not as safe as it used to be. It's more a concern over the teens... Report about rape is in the news everyday. Now television producers have encouraged celebrities to wear appropriate clothes. (FL2).

More importantly, this statement shows that media professionals are aware of media mediation. That is, the famous could affect young people's dress style.

Unique Characteristics of Adolescents

During the discussions, all respondents indicated their awareness of youth's characteristics. As described earlier, in general teenagers use media for cultural identification and like to try out novelties. In order to express their identities they tend to do something seen by adults as different and unusual. In discussing this code concerning characteristics of adolescents, two main attitudes were revealed: (1) expression of identity, and (2) tendency to imitate.

Expression of Identity – Desire To Be Different and Extreme

As adolescence is a period of searching for self identity, the young have tendency to do what adults often find deviant and to make them different from other groups. As one argued:

'I think celebrities want to do things differently from others to draw attention.' (FM2)

One female university student expressed a reasonable remark on tattooing, which others found convincing:

- P1: 'If you had a tattoo, you'd tend to dress revealingly (to show it). It's like one thing leads to another.'
- Some: 'Oh, yes.'
- P1: 'If you had a bellybutton piercing, you'd probably have to wear a short top to show it.'
- Many: 'Yes, that's right.' (FL1)

When discussing colorful hairdos and tattooing, a group of male university students made the following comments:

- P1: 'They (teenagers) have opportunities to do things, society should accept it. It's normal. I think they have their own judgment. It's like...(interrupted by P2)'
- P2: 'Once in a lifetime thing. You have to make the most of it, get wild at least once.'
- All: (laugh) (ML1)

These participants were aware that most adolescents, be they celebrities or ordinary individuals, tend to experiment with novelty.

Tendency to Imitate and Conform

As mentioned previously, since the late 1990s, skimpy dress styles have been popular among young Thai girls and women. Ploy, Bow and Joyce have always appeared in such attires so much that those styles have become their symbols (see Appendices Q and R). Some argue that the spaghetti strap top style, pioneered by Bow and Joyce (Suthisakorn, 2001, p. 89), is not locally originated (observed by Phiphitkul, a mass communication researcher, personal communication, February 20, 2001). Thai adults often claim that young people are influenced by fashions from overseas, especially the West and Japan.

Generally, young people are interested in what is trendy. They are very well aware of the status values connected to certain goods (Souninen, 2001, p. 214). As one male student puts it:

"...Everybody has to conform to the trend because they know they'd look cool" (MM2).

It is suggested that teenagers are more easily affected by advertising than other groups (Strasburger, 1995). Through mass media, young people learn that if they wear the ‘right’ kind of trainers, drink the ‘right’ kind of cola and listen to the ‘right’ kind of music they will be a popular member of the crowd (Connell et al., 1996, p. 153).

Adults often find the young confused with how they should behave. Generally, teenagers tend to find some models whom they can imitate (Cole & Cole; 1996; Raviv et al., 1996). When discussing female celebrities and their revealing clothes, some girls shared their ideas of imitation and conformity:

P1: ‘It’s not appropriate. When they (celebrities) are in the media, they are like models for young people.’

P2: They (young people) would like to copy celebrities. (FL1)

‘They (celebrities) are bad models to the young.’ (FM2)

‘On the one side, they look nice but on the other, they are bad examples.’ (FM2)

The young are a main customer group for brand-name fashion accessories (Liamoa, 1997). Concerning the article of Bvlgari and Hollywood (Appendix T), female students made more comments than their male counterparts.

P1: ‘I’d like to have some (Bvlgari items).’

P2: ‘Especially if they’re worn or used by celebrities I adore, I tend to copy them.’ (FM2)

Consistent with Haward’s argument, the appearance of celebrities in fashion pages of teen magazines affects young people, especially girls. Teen magazines set the trend for what young girls would wear in the same way as the pop stars like to set trends with their clothes (1998, p. 55).

Summary

As in most societies, Thai adults often regard teenagers as willingly accepting and following fashions. It is important to note that these young audiences observe such fashions, mostly from the mass media, especially presented by famous individuals. In

addition, finding it difficult to understand or even tolerate certain extreme trends, Thai adults argue that the young lack their sense of self and are confused (e.g. “Stick to pure love,” 2000; “New values,” 2000).

Various evidence suggests that Thai teens greatly adore Western and Japanese fashions and find them more interesting, appealing and fascinating than local styles. Many believe that some extreme and yet bizarre fashions are from Japan. “Japanese style has replaced Western. Thai teens nowadays lean heavily on the Japanese whereas those in the 60s-80s looked for trends from the West” (Otaganonta, 1999). According to *Hirosisa Maegawa*, a famous Japanese make-up artist and stylist, Thai women, particularly teenagers, tried to imitate Japanese styles that they have observed from magazines (“Hear from *Hirosisa*,” 2000). Such changes in values and preferences are perfectly normal for developing societies (Noor, 1997)

Further, it seems impossible to justify where exactly each extreme global trend initially originated. As one girl puts it,

The hot and distinctive fashions of the Center Point teens were initially brought in by international school students. It is normal for the Westerners to dress like this (sexy and revealing clothing). But it’s provocative when Thai teens do it. Besides, the media and celebrities like Bow and Joyce made the spaghetti strap top fashion a big hit (cited in Suthisakorn, 2001, p. 89).

As stated previously, young people generally like to do things differently from the mainstream. A female teenager explains:

Tattoos and unusual piercing are fashions. They make people look ‘unique and different’ to draw attention... That can be seen in two different ways though. Some see them cool while others comment on them negatively.... But like I’ve said earlier, it’s basically all about fashion’ (Cited in Suthisakorn, 2001, p. 99).

In the past in Thailand, tattooing was not in fashion. One female university student pointed out this changed concept of tattooing: “In the past, only prisoners had tattoos. But nowadays, they (tattoos) are everywhere.” One explanation could be that famous people, heavy metal and rock musicians in particular, especially from the West, have initiated such fashions, which then have some influence on media consumers.

Most importantly, the above discussions suggest a change in Thai youth’s concepts of fashion that comes as a result of foreign cultural influences through mass

media. Media shaped concepts of what is trendy have changed over time. Whatever celebrities bring in could become fashionable again as in general, young people like to conform to what their heroes, role models or idols do in order to identify themselves as specific groups (e.g. Ganetz, 1995; Raviv et al., 1996). It is essential, however, to keep in mind that not all teenagers imitate.

Drugs and Alcohol Abuse

To represent the issue of drugs and alcohol abuse, I selected three different media texts. Table 6.5 gives details on categories and codes, derived from these articles.

Table 6.5 Sub-categories & Codes Derived from Articles on Drugs & Alcohol Abuse

Drugs and Alcohol		
Media Texts	Sub-Categories	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oat• Maew• Navin Tar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socialization• Two-sided Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential reasons of involvement• Two-sided celebrity image• Media responsibility

The synopsis of each media item discussed is as follows:

‘Oat’– Drinking as a social activity: This interview presented drinking as a common activity in which people engage to socialize with one another. *Oat* admitted that he used to go out drinking every night.

‘Maew’ – Celebrity drugs abuser: This front-page article reveals that a female model along with her friends were caught in a drugs party held in her own premises.

‘Navin Tar’ – Celebrity anti-drugs campaigner: This famous singer/actor is represented as a leader of celebrity anti-drugs campaigner. He has been presented with awards by various government offices for his contribution to campaigning against drugs and alcohol abuse and is regarded as a role model.

Potential Factors of Involvement

According to evidence and group discussions, there are reasons why young people turn to smoking, drugs and drinking. This particular code consists of two sub-codes: (1)

tendency of teens' misperception and imitation and (2) socialization and social interaction. In the section that follows, I report how teenage informants decode the texts about celebrities using drugs and alcohol in each sub-code.

Tendency of Teens' Misperception and Imitation

When discussing the article about Oat, the initial reactions were all negative. Many respondents claimed that a number of young smokers and drinkers believe that smoking and drinking make them look 'cool' and see them as 'fashionable' activities to practice. High school students mentioned that Oat was not supposed to say so in the media since he could be a bad influence:

- P1: 'He (Oat) just wanted to make himself look cool.'
P2: 'It's just like he is showing off that he could go out every night.'
P1: 'Yeah, it's like, "Hey, I'm cool" but he's actually nothing.'
P2: 'Real cool guys don't need to show off.' (FM1)

It appears that many participants felt that there are possibilities that the young could misinterpret his message. In addition to images of fun-loving, sexy, successful young people having the times of their lives (Strasburger, 1995, p. 69), alcohol consumption may be interpreted as a cool and macho activity. Further, some pointed to the fact that Oat's drinking behavior could encourage the young to drink:

- P1: 'This (Oat's statement) could encourage the young to imitate.'
P2: 'Yeah, it's like he's a celebrity, then he could go out.'
P3: 'And why can't we, right?' (FM2)
- P1: 'It's just like he meant to say that it's ok to go out every night. People could imitate.'
P2: 'He shouldn't have said so. It's a bad example for the youth. They could copy his behavior.' (ML2)

The above discussions suggest that respondents were aware of the possibility of media influenced behavior. They believed that this kind of message could have an impact on young people, who are searching for role models (e.g. Cole & Cole, 1996.). This demonstrates that these students understand the psychology of people their age, e.g. teenagers are more likely than other groups to be susceptible to mediated behavior.

Socialization and Social Interaction

Participants of both genders perceived 'drinking' as a social activity, which people usually do when they get together. Like smoking, drinking has become very common. Going out at night is very typical among young people. After having discussed the article about Oat for a while, many respondents moderated their disapproval by pointing out that going out to drink was acceptable for relaxing and socializing with people. This showed that negotiated readings were then being employed. As some reasoned:

P1: 'It depends. It's common that people socialize with friends.'

P2: 'If it's not too much, that's fine.' (ML2)

'It's ok to go out to relax.' (MM1)

'It's ok to drink to socialize and to have fun occasionally but it's no good to do it everyday or often...' (MM2)

According to most students' statements, drinking is acceptable when it is practiced as an occasional social activity. It is interesting to note that regardless of gender or age, participants generally see drinking as an excellent social lubricant (Lowery, 1980, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 72). One possible explanation could be that media make drinking look normal (Hansen, 1988).

Two-sided Celebrity Image

Mass media can be regarded as a double-edged sword. I divide this code into two completely opposite sub-codes: (1) image destruction and (2) image construction. The former refers to a situation where celebrities' conduct destroys their image and reputation while the latter refers to behavior that helps improve celebrities' image and reputation. The following section describes each sub-code.

Image Destruction

All groups of respondents disapproved of celebrities who were caught using and possessing illegal drugs. They read the media text in very much the same way, with regard to the article about *Maew*'s drug party. They also agreed that what the model has done was absolutely unacceptable and illegal. Unanimously their comments showed strong disapproval of celebrity drugs users.

P1: 'They're celebrities, they should be good exemplars.'

P2: 'Yes, good models.' (MM1)

P1: 'Very very bad'

P2: 'That's right. They're like a mirror.'

P3: 'They're like our reflection.'

P2: 'That's right. Behaving this way ruins our respect for them...' (FL2)

Being adolescents themselves, not only were they well aware that the young search for role models but they also acknowledged potential media-shaped behavior. Consistent with an academic survey ("Public expectancy towards singers," 1999), these reactions clearly show that the young expect celebrities to be positive role models in many aspects including drugs. However, their awareness of celebrities' misconduct results in their losing trust in celebrities.

Image Construction

Thai celebrities have often been used to campaign against drug abuse. Singer *Navin Tar* has officially been appointed the leader of 'Drugs Free Heart Project.' A number of articles in newspapers were written about his anti-drug campaigns. Only a few participants saw such campaigns as effective.

'That's good because young people normally adore celebrities. If they encourage them to stay away from drugs, the young would listen to them more than to parents. Celebrities are more influential.' (MM2)

On the contrary, most respondents perceived the campaigns as another subtle way to promote the artists. This is probably because the young were aware that a number of

celebrities have been reported to be involved in drugs. The following are some opposite interpretations of such media message:

‘They (record companies) are just promoting their own artists.’ (FM1)

‘It’s like they just create a good image for themselves...’ (FL1)

‘It’s an image construction.’ (FL2)

Respondents were very critical of this particular media text. Employing the oppositional reading, they expressed the following rejections:

P1: ‘They’re supposed to behave themselves before even teaching others.’

P2: ‘They should behave themselves before telling others not to get involved in drugs.’
(MM2)

P1: ‘Celebrity campaigners themselves are smokers and drug users.’

P2: ‘In the media, they encourage the young not to smoke, in real life, they themselves smoke. I’ve lost faith in them. So why bother listen to them?’ (FL2)

P1: ‘Don’t they do drugs themselves?’

P2: ‘It’s just more like advertising.’

P3: ‘Yes, that’s right.’

P4: ‘Just promoting themselves.’

P2: ‘Lying to themselves.’ (ML1)

According to these respondents, record companies held concerts to promote anti-drug campaigns using their singers and musicians to bring the message to the young audience. Most of them did not read the text as intended. One student argued that:

‘The more concerts, the more drugs problems.’ (FM2)

Consistent with an academic survey (“Teenagers’ perceptions of celebrity,” 1997), all teenage students were aware of celebrity drug activities. The above discussion indicates that their awareness affects their reading of the media text. Consequently, their reactions to the text suggest that such campaigns are not convincing or effective.

Media Responsibility

Media are often seen as a great educator. Consistently, teenage participants pointed out that the media should not only report what happens but should also teach the young by informing consequences of drug abuse. One group of informants saw such a news report as a double-edged sword:

- P1: 'It's good that media reported this (celebrities' drug abuse).'
- P2: 'But there is still some disadvantage. If the young were mistaken, this could be an unintended example. They might then go like 'Well, party? That's good'.'
- P3: 'If they don't make good judgement, they might think that's a good thing.'
- R: 'Do you think that this could be perceived in two different ways?'
- P2: 'Media should not only report the happening but teach right from wrong.' (FL1)

The discussion shows some concerns about teen imitation of mass-mediated behavior. Many students acknowledged the educational role of mass media, similar to the results of one academic poll ("Teenagers' perceptions of celebrity) where 76.6% agreed that media should report celebrities' involvement in drugs.

Summary

It seems clear that most respondents tended to regard drinking as an acceptable social activity. However, their reactions changed when discussing excess drinking in the case of Oat. Not only did they disapprove, they also expressed concern that Oat's interview could encourage young readers to copy his behavior. This indicates that the teens were aware of media influencing inappropriate behavior.

Teen informants responded negatively to the article about the celebrity drug party and showed their strong rejection of the article about anti-drug campaigns. Exposure to media reports about celebrity drug abuse and awareness of the self-promotion associated with celebrity anti-drug campaigns influenced the readings. It was also apparent that teenagers felt media had an important role to play in educating the public in positive ways.

Relationships and Sexuality

Five articles were selected to represent issues of relationships and sexuality. Details on categories and codes, derived from these media texts are given in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Sub-categories & Codes Derived from Articles on Relationships & Sexuality

Relationships & Sexuality		
Media Item	Sub-Categories	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joe• Kong• Prince Andrew• Umm• Angelina Jolie	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liberalism vs. Conservatism• Freedom of sexuality• Gender Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural aspect• Social Status• Media

The synopsis of each media item discussed is as follows:

Joe – ‘Flirting,’ cohabitation and premarital sex: Joe has been labeled as a promiscuous man. In the interview he reveals his past intimate relationships with different female celebrities. He also discloses that he never broke up with any of them, rather he was regularly *dumped*.

Kong – Cohabitation: Completely differently from *Joe*, his best friend, *Kong* declared that he cohabits with his long-term girlfriend with his *modern* family’s approval.

Prince Andrew – ‘Flirting:’ The Prince was criticized about having had short-term relationships with different women. This led to the media characterization *Randy Andy*.

Umm – ‘Flirting:’ The media claimed that she has dated different men at the same time. In response she argued that she has the right to see anyone and to choose the right person.

Angelina Jolie – Bisexuality: The interview with Angelina Jolie confirms her admission of bisexuality. According to her statement, it is good to be able to love people of both sexes and there is no need to hide this.

Cultural Aspect

Thais have traditionally been conservative in sexuality matters; men and women are held to different sexual standards. I divide the cultural aspects of sexuality into three sub-codes: (1) cultural conflict and destruction, (2) gender difference and (3) social acceptance.

Cultural Conflict/Destruction

Presenting the articles about *Joe* and *Kong* regarding cohabitation and premarital sex in group discussions caused a flood of mixed reactions:

P1: 'I agree (with the concept of cohabitation and premarital sex).'

Many: 'It's commonplace.' (FM2)

R: 'Does anyone think it contradicts Thai culture?'

P1: 'Sort of.'

P2: 'It still does.'

P3: 'It's common nowadays.' (FM2)

Some respondents felt that such sexual practices are common while others believe it contradicts Thai culture:

P1: 'Well, it depends on how individuals see it.'

R: 'How about in terms of Thai cultural perspective?'

P2: 'It's degrading it a great deal.'

P3: 'Yeah, a lot.' (FM1)

P1: 'Nowadays, it's normal to cohabit. ... It might contradict our cultural norm a bit but not much.'

R: 'Do you personally agree with it?'

P1: 'Personally, I partially agree.'

P2: 'I disagree because according to Thai culture, two parties are not supposed to engage in sexual activities before marriage. ...' (MM2)

Other participants were more conservative:

P1: 'Let me add something. It's about Thai culture. Thai people are conservative.'

P2: 'That's right.'

P1: 'Well, maybe not too conservative but Thai culture teaches us not to have sex before marriage.' (FL2)

Most teen students were aware of the cultural perception of Thai female sexuality:

P1: 'In Thai society, it's hardly acceptable.'

P2: 'But in the western societies, they ... (interrupted by P3)'

P3: 'They see it commonplace.' (FL2)

P1: 'They (Kong and his girlfriend) might see it with a western perspective.'

P2: 'He might define 'modern' as 'cool'.'

P3: 'It's commonplace.'

P4: 'I disagree.' (ML1)

Both female and male students pointed to the degree of acceptance of such sexual customs in Thai and Western societies. This indicates that they believe that sexual openness is more acceptable in Western society than they are in Thai culture. The overall impression is that all respondents are aware of how important it is for girls to stay virgin until marriage. However, despite their awareness, some are more liberal than others. Further, it becomes clear that their cultural ideologies affect the way they decode the media texts. That is, the more conservative they are, the less acceptable cohabitation and premarital sex are to them.

Gender Difference: Inequality, Feminism

Nowadays, many Thais seem to believe that men and women are socially equal, however, inequalities remain when it comes to sexuality. Many students felt that men and women are socially seen or judged differently with regard to their practices.

It is interesting that both female and male participants from both groups mentioned that it was typical for men to date or to have many different girlfriends. Men and women as 'flirts' are also viewed differently. Equality was mentioned a great deal. The following conversation shows how men are seen:

P1: 'It's probably because he's (Joe) a man, so it's no big deal.'

P2: 'It's common.'

P3: 'Like *Nino* (an actor/singer), people think he's cool dating different girls. Why not condemn him? Why do people see him cool?' (FL2).

Women are seen more negatively than men when it comes to flirting. Therefore, difference in gender was a focus in the discussions.

P1: 'But it would be more common for the man than for the woman to be a 'flirt'...'

- R: 'Are men and women viewed differently?'
- P1: 'Women might be viewed more negatively.'
- P2: 'I agree' (MM2)

Obviously Thai culture and society play a significant role in how people view matters of sex. Most male students in both middle and late adolescence agreed with Umm's view on having the right to choose the right person and see different men. From their cultural perspective, however, they accepted that female 'flirts' were still viewed negatively in Thai culture.

'Umm is right.' (ML2)

- P1: '...In the (Thai) society, if you were a female celebrity and dated one man and then another, people would see you in a negative way. If you were a male celebrity, you would be viewed less negatively.'
- P2: 'That's the way most people see it.'
- R: 'So you think that it's common for men. How about women?'
- P2: 'It doesn't look good.'
- P3: 'It has to do with Thai culture too. (ML1).'
- P1: 'Yes, it's different between the two.'
- P2: 'Probably.'
- P3: 'Thai society sees women in a negative way. I think it's getting better though. Women now have rights to do more things.' (ML2)

When discussing the article concerning *Angelina Jolie's* bisexuality, it was interesting to see that teenage respondents perceived homosexuality in men and women differently. Most male university students found female homosexuality more acceptable than male same-sex relationships. The following discussions reveal their disapproval:

"I must admit that, deep down inside, male same-sex relationship really disgusts me. But I won't show my feeling in front of them..." (ML2)

- P1: 'I think a female same-sex relationship still looks cute.'
- P2: 'That's right!'
- P3: 'Not male same-sex relationship.'
- P1: 'I can't stand it.'
- P3: 'Male same-sex sexuality is like ... (paused) yuck!'
- All: (Laugh) (ML1)

As in the West, men have more difficulty feeling positive or neutral towards male homosexual behavior. The etiology of these strong feelings is a complex issue and outside the focus of this thesis however, one male student briefly explained that because he is a straight man, male-male sexuality is something he cannot personally identify with; he simply could not imagine himself in that situation. A similar type of disapproval was observed in a group of high schoolgirls where six out of eight disapproved of lesbianism. The following discussions show how they responded:

- P1: "...I can't take it. It's like yuck. How can a woman have sex with another woman?"
P2: "They use fake stuff." (FM1)

The above statements indicate that the lack of specific information on sex leads P1 to disapprove of bisexuality. They also show that these two girls have different levels of knowledge about homosexuality.

One student mentioned gender difference when she discussed how she read the article on Prince Andrew's sexual conduct:

- 'It has nothing to do with cultural difference. Men lose nothing while women lose something. Men always have advantages over women anyway.' (FL2)

This female respondent did not see differences in the two cultures with respect to gender role systems. She showed her perception of how women and men are viewed in Thai society. Her remarks imply that Thai society is a patriarchal one where women are still in a subordinate position.

Female students perceived cohabitation (the article about *Kong*), showing a degree of feminist perspective:

- P1: 'They (Westerners) cohabit and if it doesn't work, they split up. Women don't get insulted. That's how it works there.'
P2: 'But Thai women are seen degraded here.'
All: 'That's right!'
P3: 'That's right, that's the way they see it here.' (FL1)
- P1: 'Cohabitation isn't good. I disagree. It's not good that he (Kong) doesn't respect his girlfriend.'
P2: 'But both parties have to agree to cohabit though.'

P1: 'That's right, but he said that his family accepted it. What about the woman's? Where is the dignity of woman?' (FL2)

Their women-conscious standpoint could indicate awareness of how significant gender system is viewed in Thai society as regards sexuality and relationships. Like cultural ideologies, feminist perspectives have an impact on how the teens read media articles about cohabitation.

Social Acceptance

When discussing the article about *Joe's* different celebrity ex-girlfriends, many participants of both genders found being a 'flirt' acceptable and typical for men. Two groups of male students expressed the mixture of negative and positive responses as follows:

'I think it's an individual's right. People can do what they want to do.' (MM1)

P1: 'It's typical for men, they just keep changing girls.'

P2: 'No big deal.'

P3: 'It's just common. Very common.' (MM1)

P1: 'It's typical for men...'

R: 'Do you see it right or wrong?'

P2: 'It's probably become commonplace.'

P3: 'I disagree. It has to do with our old Thai culture.'

P4: 'It's not appropriate.' (MM2)

A group of females also shared different views:

P1: 'That's not appropriate.'

P2: 'I disagree with him (Joe).'

R: 'Any different opinions?'

P3: 'It's commonplace.'

P4: 'Yes, it is.' (FM2)

Culturally and socially, Thai women are not supposed to express their sexual desires, and are expected to refrain from sexual relations before marriage. Therefore, a

woman dating different men or being a ‘flirt’ could be considered degrading. However, according to the above discussions, it is clear that the informants held different perceptions of being a ‘flirt.’ As a result, they reacted to the Joe article in accordance with their own views. Therefore, they equally took the preferred and oppositional readings (see Table 6.14).

Some students found it inappropriate to be open about sexual preferences in the media. They mainly focused on the fear that teenagers could copy celebrities whom they adore. As one respondent expressed her concern:

‘That’s good that she (Angelina Jolie) is open. But she shouldn’t have done that in the media in order not to encourage the young to imitate.’ (FL)

High schoolboys exchanged different opinions:

- P1: ‘It’s commonplace in her (American) society.
P2: ‘That’s not good.’
R: ‘Would there be any affects?’
P3: ‘Absolutely, there are some’
P4: ‘As a celebrity, her reputation could be ruined.’
R: ‘Do you think she should be open?’
P3: ‘No, it’s not appropriate.’
P4: ‘It’s better than someone finding out about it later.’
P5: ‘It’s better than lying. It’s better than hiding. Being open about it is better than someone finding that out later.’ (MM1)
- P1: ‘Celebrities make this ‘stuff’ look more acceptable.’
P2: ‘The more they hide, the more curious people get. So it’s ok if they are open.’ (MM1)

The article generates diverse interpretations as to whether or not it is appropriate for celebrities to be open about their sexual preferences. Some are concerned about the young’s tendency to resemble their idols while others focus on celebrities’ own reputation.

One female university student gave an example of a Japanese gay celebrity. Her view, however, contrasted with that of another student:

- P1: ‘Like *Jenny Tomayaku*. She’s gay. She lives happily in the States as an ordinary person with her mate. I don’t think it’s a big deal.’

P2: 'But it could affect those who are currently making a decision whether to be gay or not.'
(FL1)

It is particularly true that knowledge and experience can affect the way individuals view media text (e.g. Poole, 1999; Shore, 1996). In this case, P1's awareness of a gay celebrity makes her react to the article positively. P2 focused on the fact that media information could reinforce or alter people's attitudes and could be used as a reference on which a particular decision is made.

In relation to 'flirting,' most participants read the article on Prince Andrew in a similar way. Cultural difference was the main argument in the following discussions in all groups:

P1: 'It's more open in his (British) society.'

P2: 'It's more acceptable.' (ML2)

P1: 'He's a Westerner. It makes it look even more common. They (Westerners) don't think the same way as we do. We (Thais) have too many strict cultural rules.'

P2: 'Yes, they (rules) are annoying.'

P3: 'Things should not get too tied up.' (FM1)

P1: 'That's no big deal in the west.'

P2: 'Unlike Thai culture.'

P3: 'Don't worry, we'll copy it all from them later (sarcastically).' (MM1)

The discussions emphasize mainly on the fact that Prince Andrew is a Westerner. According to their perceptions, these students feel that it is more common for Westerners to act in such a way.

Like every other aspect of sexuality and relationship, Thai culture is inevitably one of the main considerations when discussing cohabitation. However, although some respondents disagreed with *Kong's* cohabitation, others responded to the article positively. The latter considered cohabitation acceptable and commonplace nowadays:

"It's commonplace. I've seen many couples do it and then they got married." (ML1)

"I've seen a lot of student couples live together in dorms. It's not unusual." (ML2)

One female turned her focus to legal process:

“It’s (cohabitation) not good for me but they might think that that’s a good thing for them... You can never be *Miss* again. But You can still be *Miss* while cohabiting till you’re sure of someone, then you get married and become *Mrs.* once...” (FL1)

It is interesting to notice that although this student herself did not agree with cohabitation, she considered the advantages of it. In this case, she took the negotiated position to react to this media text.

Social Status and Family

In addition to cultural aspects, others such as maturity, family acceptance approval, and income were also discussed. A person raised in a more modern and less conservative family is more likely to be liberal. Psychologically, children learn and pick up parent’s characters and personalities (Strasburger, 1995). However, in my view this does not apply to all children. Liberal parents tend to be able to accept some unusual behavior in their children while conservative ones find it difficult to understand or accept children’s attitudes that are completely different from theirs. The following comments illustrate how liberal respondents view the issue of cohabitation:

P1: ‘I agree.’

P2: ‘Both families accept it. That’s enough.’ (FM2)

‘It’s commonplace. They’re grown ups. He (Kong) is a celebrity. He makes money. Besides, his family accepts it. There should be no problem.’ (MM2)

With regard to social status, several students argued that it would be all right for people to cohabit if both parties were financially independent and make their own income. In a group of high schoolgirls, where similar views were shared, one participant seemed to be left out, having a different view from the rest when discussing the article about Kong’s cohabitation:

P1: ‘They’re grown ups.’

P2: ‘They’re responsible.’

- P1: 'They have their own income.'
- P3: 'So they should get married then. That (cohabitation) doesn't look good.'
- P1: 'You old-fashioned Thai girl!' (FM2)

In this discussion, their interpretations make it clear that the girls focus mainly on cultural and socio-economic factors. Most feel that if a couple is mature and financially independent, they should have no problem in cohabiting. In addition to financial independence, a cultural conflict concerns one of the girls (P3). She argues that people who are mature and financially ready to live together, should get married rather than cohabit. However, as the group pointed out this issue is closely linked to individual personal values. The girls mainly took the preferred reading to react to the article.

Media and Soft News

As mentioned earlier, media and celebrities are inseparable and dependent upon one another. Media however can be biased. Soft news is not always accurate or reliable. Gossip about celebrities can rarely be verified. Generally, tabloids contain a great deal of soft news, especially gossip. The article about *Joe* is from *Thai Rath*, the Thailand's biggest circulation tabloid where entertainment and soft news is regular fare (Ekachai, 2000). The following remarks showed how some respondents felt about gossip in tabloids:

'You can't just listen to one side. You have to listen to what the women (Joe's ex-girlfriends) have to say too...' (FM1)

- P1: 'He (Joe) is popular, whoever he dates is in the news. It's pretty common.'
- P2: 'He's a celebrity, whatever he does is in the media.'
- P3: 'Sometimes I get annoyed with such news.' (FL1)

- P1: 'He (Joe) happens to be a people person.'
- P2: 'He probably didn't want to reveal this.'
- P3: 'If he was somebody else, he wouldn't be in the news.' (ML1).

- P1: 'It's a selling point.'
- R: 'You think so?'
- P1: 'Yes, newspapers need selling points. They can't live without such news.'

P2: 'Especially gossip about celebrities.' (ML2)

Most male and female respondents were well aware of the fact that Joe was famous and knew about his girlfriends. More importantly, they also recognized that tabloid newspapers were usually interested in covering celebrities' personal lives, especially love affairs. In addition, like the article about *Joe*, one student responded similarly to the one about *Prince Andrew*:

P: 'I don't think it has to do with culture. It's more because he's a celebrity than any other reason.'

R: 'Do you think it's because he's a celebrity, so he can date anyone?'

P: 'Sort of. If he were an ordinary person, he wouldn't do it. But he's a Prince, women want him.' (MM2)

Students maintained that famous people were featured in gossip articles in order for the papers and magazines to increase their sales. Cultural factors here could hardly explain anything. Additionally, a group of male university students placed the emphasis on the legal aspects of marriage and possible imitation:

P1: 'Actually, I think it (cohabitation) is a good thing. Getting married involves legal documents. Getting divorced is even more complicated because it involves laws. Therefore...(interrupted by P2)'

P2: 'Everything has to be split in two.'

P1: 'That's right.'

P3: 'It has something to do with being a celebrity. He (Kong) is a people person, he shouldn't have done this, which could be an example. It might have effects.'

P2: 'So just don't follow anything they (celebrities) do then.'

All: (Laugh) (ML1)

These students focus their arguments on both legal issues and the fact that people might see celebrities' conducts as examples. Some also focused their discussions on media shaped behavior and believed that Kong's beliefs could alter those of media consumers.

Summary

I would argue that cultural ideologies are crucial determinants that respondents use when they make sense of media texts about relationships and sexuality. Traditional ways of thinking about sex influenced the discussions. Teen students, however, hold differing ideologies, leading to different interpretations of media messages.

It also seems that gender roles are quite significant. A particular sexual behavior could be seen differently when practiced by people of different genders. However, many female respondents pointed out that women should be equally treated and should have the right to do the same things. They agreed that exposure to messages about cohabitation and bisexuality may influence audiences' attitudes and behavior. Young people can also use media as a source of information that may reinforce their previous knowledge and attitudes leading to actual mediated behavior.

Section III Different Readings of Media Texts

This third section summarizes how focus group participants read and make meanings of the media messages. As hypothesized, although media consumers are positioned by the 'preferred meaning' of a text, they are able to oppose or negotiate with them, based on socio-cultural factors (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980, cited in Poole, 1999). In the following sections, my analysis of focus group discussions is drawn on Hall's encoding/decoding model suggesting that a text is polysemic and open to different readings (1980). It is also necessary to note that I will be borrowing Poole's (1999) format of presenting the findings of media text readings. Tables 6.7 to 6.18 summarily indicate how differentially positioned groups of Bangkok teenagers read media messages about celebrities. I will also elaborate the results of each table for further discussion. The figures represent the number of statements made by each different respondent group. One statement means either one word or a series of sentences spoken by one person before the next one speaks. In addition, I will provide intended readings of each article in order to compare how far focus group respondents share the discourse with the media.

Fashion

Global Trends & Unconventionalism

Table 6.7 Readings in Response to the Article on Triumph Kingdom (Bow & Joyce)

Intended reading: Negative

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	2	7	4
Female Middle	12	7	1
Male Late	1	21	16
Female Late	13	4	5
Total	23	39	26

(See Chapter 5, pp. 156-7 and Appendix R)

Table 6.7 table shows that most statements took the negotiated position. As described earlier, most respondents accept the revealing and sexy clothing fashion but would reject it if worn at the wrong time and place. However, there is a close margin between preferred and oppositional readings. Some respondents read the text as encoded while others rejected it. I would argue that this might have to do with audience' personal attitudes toward these particular stars. As discussed previously, several older male students, who took both negative and oppositional stances, liked the way in which these female celebrities dressed. On the other hand, most female students of both categories took the preferred reading. However, they used different framework to decode the text. Younger students used their personal attitudes while the older focused on appropriateness.

Table 6.8 Readings in Response to the Article on Britney Spears

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle*	3	0	0
Female Middle	7	5	7
Male Late*	7	2	3
Female Late	6	3	6
Total	23	10	16

(See Chapter 5, p. 157)

*For time limitations, this article was not discussed in MM1 and ML2.

Most respondents agreed with the preferred reading. Not only did many like Britney Spear, they also liked what she has done. However, they would not get a piercing

themselves due partly to their fear of pain. Others focused on hygiene and appropriateness that led them to take the oppositional stance.

Table 6.9 Readings in Response to the Article on Western & Japanese Bands

Intended reading: Mainly Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	8	11	7
Female Middle*	0	3	6
Male Late	28	8	8
Female Late	18	16	43
Total	54	38	64

(See Chapter 5, p. 158 and Appendix S)
* For time limitations, this article was not discussed in FM2.

This media text also shows a close margin between preferred and oppositional positions. While some male informants admitted trying such fashions, most girls opposed them, especially colorful hairstyles. The girls argued that such hairstyles did not suit Thai people and used strong words to express their disagreements and dislikes. These girls mostly took the oppositional stance.

Materialism & Superiority

Table 6.10 Readings in Response to the Article on Bvlgari & Hollywood

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	6	6	1
Female Middle	12	3	5
Male Late	0*	0*	0*
Female Late	5	6	8
Total	23	15	14

(See Chapter 5, pp. 159-60 and Appendix T)
* For time limitations, this article was not discussed in ML1 & 2.

Overall, respondents responded positively to the text mainly because they liked the fashion items. However, most girls agreed that such items were not for teens their age

with one main reason these fashion accessories were far too expensive for them to afford. Alternatively, they proposed using fashionable but cheap items that suit their budget. Therefore, there is a close margin between negotiated and oppositional positions.

Drugs and Alcohol

Socialization

Table 6.11 Readings in Response to the Article on Oat

Intended reading: Mainly Negative

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	4	5	5
Female Middle	14	1	2
Male Late	10	9	9
Female Late	12	11	3
Total	40	26	19

(See Chapter 5, p. 163)

Although most students found social drinking acceptable, they disagreed with the fact that *Oat* went out to drink almost every night. This results mostly in their taking the preferred reading in response to the article. To these respondents, drinking is acceptable when practiced occasionally.

Two-sided Problem: Users vs. Non-users

Table 6.12 Readings in Response to the Article on Maew (Celebrity Drugs Party)

Intended reading: Negative

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	6	6	0
Female Middle	8	0	0
Male Late	10	0	0
Female Late	20	20	0
Total	44	26	0

(See Chapter 5, pp. 165-6)

This article appears to be the only one that triggered mostly negative statements. All students from FM and ML categories accepted the preferred reading and none read with the other two stances. While MM and FL took both preferred and negotiated readings. However, none took the oppositional stance. They strongly felt opposed to celebrities who were engaged in drug abuse. Interestingly though, some students in the MM and FL groups also responded to the text with negotiated position, being more understanding towards the celebrity abuser.

Table 6.13

Readings in Response to the Article on Navin Tar (Celebrity Anti-drugs Campaign)

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	8	1	14
Female Middle	3	1	37
Male Late	6	4	30
Female Late	0	1	72
Total	17	3	153

(See Chapter 5, pp. 166-7)

Compared to the article about the celebrity drugs party, this media text created more statements, though some were short. Interestingly, although the preferred reading is positive, most students took the oppositional position to react to the article. Their discussions clearly revealed that they did not believe that celebrities tried to genuinely encourage the young not to smoke or use drugs. This is mainly because all respondents were well aware that a number of celebrity anti-drugs campaigners were themselves smokers and drug abusers. As a result, they lost trust and faith in them. Their awareness, therefore, results in negative reactions. Some teens even severely criticized celebrity drug users. However, Navin Tar who represented this article and was the leader of the campaigns was not attacked. On the contrary, he was highly valued for his achievements in education and career (described later). One explanation could be that he has never been reported to be involved in drugs. The focus of the teens when talking about him, therefore, was more on his educational success than on his leadership role in anti-drug campaigns.

Relationships and Sexuality

Liberalism vs. Conservatism

Table 6.14 Readings in Response to the Article on Joe

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	8	0	4
Female Middle	2	0	6
Male Late	7	1	5
Female Late	28	0	14
Total	45	1	29

(See Chapter 5, pp. 170-2 and Appendix U)

Female university students reacted to the article more than any other group. Overall, however, respondents agreed with the preferred reading. Most focused their discussions mainly on the fact that the tabloid only tried to increase its circulation as Joe was very famous and the reader would want to know about his relationships. More specifically, they perceived Joe’s behavior as normal for men.

Table 6.15 Readings in Response to the Article on Kong

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	18	4	8
Female Middle	26	1	8
Male Late	27	10	19
Female Late	17	14	40
Total	88	29	75

(See Chapter 5, p. 172)

It is noteworthy that this article generated the most extensive discussions. This suggests that teenagers were particularly interested in sharing their views on this issue. As this text concerns both cohabitation and premarital sex, female students had more

views to express compared to their male counterparts. One reason could be that girls are more conscious of cultural restrictions concerning women and premarital sex. It is also interesting, however, to note that most younger girls (FM) agreed with the preferred reading while most older girls (FL) took the oppositional position. Most male students in both groups agreed with the preferred reading. Nonetheless, both male and female respondents were very critical and articulate about this issue. During the discussions, traditional ways of thinking about sex were well expressed. Additionally, students pointed to several disadvantages and advantages of cohabitation when reading the text with the negotiated position.

Freedom of Sexuality

Table 6.16 Readings in Response to the Article on Umm

Intended reading: Negative

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	9	2	1
Female Middle	20	4	0
Male Late	11	3	8
Female Late*	6	2	13
Total	47	11	22

(See Chapter 5, pp. 176-7)
* For time limitations, this article was not discussed in FL1.

It is obvious that the first three groups agreed with the preferred reading. While high schoolgirls (FM) used negative words and strong language to express their attitudes toward the actress, female university students read the text with the oppositional stance. Most students from FL group rejected the preferred reading, rather they agreed with the celebrities statements and focused their discussions mainly on the individual right to date people of the opposite sex. Most students were aware of the existence of inequality in the Thai society and acknowledged how differently Thai people view such behavior when practiced by individuals of different genders. With their cultural perspectives, most therefore, took the preferred reading.

Table 6.17 Readings in Response to the Article on Prince Andrew

Intended reading: Negative

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	3	0	11
Female Middle	1	0	9
Male Late	2	2	10
Female Late	6	0	9
Total	12	2	39

(See Chapter 5, p. 177)

Surprisingly, overall, students took the oppositional position to react to the article. This could indicate that they viewed such behavior as common for men. Additionally, they may have realized that celebrities are always a media target for what they do. In this case cultural differences were not found to be an important factor for them in interpreting the media text.

Table 6.18 Readings in Response to the Article on Angelina Jolie

Intended reading: Positive

Status	Preferred	Negotiated	Oppositional
Male Middle	10	0	14
Female Middle	13	2	14
Male Late	24	7	15
Female Late	23	0	7
Total	70	9	50

(See Chapter 5, pp. 174-5)

Table 6.18 shows that most younger students (MM and FM) took the oppositional position while those in the other two groups agreed with the preferred reading. This could be due in part to the fact that older students were more mature and knowledgeable about this issue. As a result, the older had more sympathy and were more understanding toward individuals with different. Therefore, they gave the preferred reading.

Without supervision from teachers or academics, students from every group had no fear of expressing their opinions. However, I found that older respondents were more relaxed and interested in the discussion than the younger ones. Although some of their views were different and somewhat deviant from others', most were confident to share them. Some students were more articulate and critical than others. It was also obvious that older male and female students were able to rationalize their understandings better than were the younger when asked to elaborate.

It seems that the respondents in both middle and late adolescence shared similar frameworks of understanding and interpretations of all articles. Most, if not all, participants were familiar with the celebrities represented in the selected media items, except for *Oat* from the article about social drinking.

Students' perceptions towards celebrities in the texts are based mainly on their general awareness and prior knowledge as well as their direct experience and personal attitudes. This is clear, particularly in the anti-drug campaign article when most respondents felt opposed to what was said in the media text when it was in opposition to what they have seen for themselves. They, therefore, took on an oppositional stance to the preferred reading. Although they agreed with the idea, they saw themselves as disagreeing with the article, partly because they themselves have witnessed celebrities using drugs.

Since I focus on age and gender as main determinants as to explore how teenage participants decode media messages, I will examine in detail media readings derived from each focus group.

Male Middle (MM)

Despite their general knowledge about celebrities, high schoolboys were less articulate and critical than their female counterparts. Many had a sense of humor. There was a great deal of laughter and teasing during discussions. When discussing materialism, revealing dress style, hairdos, and tattooing, they mostly took the negotiated position, while preferred position was taken over when unusual piercing was discussed.

'It depends on circumstances. If you go out at night, you shouldn't wear too revealing clothes like those (worn by *Bow* and *Joyce*). But if you go out during the day, it's just normal because girls

want to look beautiful. If they don't wear such outfits, you think they are not trendy... If they (revealing clothes) weren't trendy, you wouldn't wear them...' (MM2)

Their awareness of social issues enabled them to relate the issue of teen sexy outfits to other social problems:

'It's not appropriate. Adults see it too extreme. It makes girls look bad and easy. That could lead to other problems like rape, prostitution and things like that.' (MM2)

Additionally, their awareness of cultural differences resulted in a positive response toward the article about Britney Spears' pierced belly button:

'American culture is different. Their society is more open. Ours is strict, we have to be under parental control. Americans are more self-confident.' (MM2)

This group responded positively to the article about drinking for socialization, taking a negotiated position. However, this is one of the two groups that took a negotiated position for the article about celebrity drug party (Table 6.12). The following statement showed empathy toward celebrity drug users:

'Celebrities are human beings, just like all of us. They've taken the wrong path, they want to come back... They may want to quit but they aren't able to and they might have been persuaded by friends to join the drugs party where they got caught which made the news.' (MM2)

Most students this category took the oppositional position to the article about celebrity anti-drugs campaigns. They strongly believed that this was not worth the effort. Some argued without hesitation:

P1: 'They themselves (celebrity campaigners) should quit using drugs too'

P2: 'They have little influence. They organize concerts, right? But after the concerts, they go for a drink and sometimes people even fight during the concerts.' (MM1)

As regards the issue of sex, this group viewed the articles about sexuality and relationship with cultural perspectives, although they were quite liberal. They were literate, showing their knowledge of news constructions. Their awareness of media bias

also made them critical of the article about Kong. When discussing cohabitation, they mostly read the text with the preferred positions. The following discussion shows that they agreed with the preferred reading:

- P1: 'People living together don't have to get married.'
P2: 'It's all about love.'
P3: 'You love each other. If you're both ok with that, there should be no problem.'
P4: 'You both agree to cohabit.' (MM1)

However, they perceived flirtation in males and females differently. They mostly took the oppositional position when reading the article about Prince Andrew, while preferred reading was mostly taken when interpreting the one about Umm.

'They (westerners) are liberal. We (Thais) have norms.' (MM1)

- P1: 'If she (Umm) thinks about it that way, that's fine. But others might think otherwise.'
P2: 'Men and women are seen differently.'
P3: 'It's common for men.' (MM1)

Despite the fact that this group was liberal toward cohabitation, they obviously were less sympathetic when it came to bisexuality. Most responded negatively to Angelina Jolie's sexual orientation but seemed unable to elaborate much when asked for reasons. The following were some reactions toward bisexuality:

- P1: 'That's no good.'
P2: 'No good.'
P3: 'Scary!'
P4: 'Weird!' (MM1)

One group (MM2) in this category was far more articulate than the other (MM1) but neither of them expressed agreement with alternative sexual lifestyles. This indicates that most of these boys hold similar views toward the issues discussed.

Female Middle (FM)

Although participants in this social position were more articulate than their male counterparts, girls in FM1 group were more talkative and more articulate than those in FM2. Respondents in this category expressed strong opinions during the discussions. Their use of slang and vulgar language emphasized their points of view. They openly shared different opinions without fear or hesitation. Some slight arguments, therefore, existed when discussing the following issues:

- P1: 'I want to do that too. It's nice.'
P2: 'It's disgusting.'
P1: 'No, it isn't.' (Regarding tattooing) (FM1)
- P1: 'I don't accept it.'
P2: 'It's not acceptable'
P3: 'That's ok. She has the right to love anyone. Love has no boundaries.'
P1: 'But it's unacceptable.'
P3: 'People love someone for who they are, not for what (gender) they are.'
P4: 'But God created women to love men.'
P3: 'But God could have made a mistake, couldn't he?'
P1: 'I agree with you (P4). I can't stand it. It's disgusting.'
(Regarding bisexuality) (FM1)

The conflict of ideologies between individuals is noticeable in their responses to the articles on cohabitation and bisexuality. As regards all aspects of fashions, this group equally took preferred and negotiated positions for the article about revealing outfits, while most of them responded negatively to unusual body piercing, bizarre hairdos and tattooing. The following statements show how they read the articles about sexy dress styles, body adornment and colorful hairdos:

- "Too revealing." (FM2)
- "One the one hand, they look cute, on the other they are bad examples." (FM2)
- P1 'I don't think I like it (unusual body piercing).
R: 'Why not?'
P1 'It looks nasty...
R: 'How about bizarre color hairdos?'
P1 'Awful, very awful.'

- P2: 'I don't like that.'
- P3: 'It looks good for some (Japanese) but it looks *mor-chit*³ for Thais.'
- All: (laugh) (FM1)

These girls clearly expressed strong disapproval of such fashions. Their use of language reveals a certain degree of pugnacity in their resistance to such extreme hairdos. According to P3, such fashion suited Japanese more than Thai people.

However, it is interesting to note that they read the texts based in part on their attitudes toward particular celebrities, which resulted in different responses. They read the articles about Ploy, and Bow and Joyce differently. The following statement showed their responses, when asked about Ploy's skimpy fashion:

- P1: 'It (dress style) doesn't bother me but I hate her.'
- P2: 'Same here, it doesn't bother me but I hate her.' (FM1)

On the other hand, the same girls responded positively to the article about Bow and Joyce and Britney Spears:

'They are cute. I like them.' (FM1)

- P1: 'She's cute!'
- P2: 'I like her.' (FM1)

When discussing the article about Bvlgari and Hollywood, representing luxury and materialism, their gender presumably positioned most of them into the preferred position:

- P1: 'It's nice to own some, if you can afford them.'
- P2: 'They are beautiful.'
- P3: 'Yes, to use them for special occasions.' (FM1)

'You should have some. But you should consider when to wear them. If you go to school, you shouldn't wear them but you can when you go out with your parents...' (FM2)

³ *Mor chit* is the name of coach station that houses coaches for the northeastern routes. The term, used as slang in a sense of contempt, indicates *low taste*.

Not only did this group take the preferred position when they read Oat's article about drinking for socialization, and celebrity drugs party, they also expressed their strong disapproval toward alcohol and drug abuse, fully taking the preferred reading:

'It's just stupid. She's (the model) basically stupid...' (FM1)

On the other hand, they articulated oppositional responses to Navin Tar's anti-drugs campaign article. They were obviously able to give clear examples especially when discussing this issue. They resisted the preferred meaning by sharing their direct experience of witnessing celebrities using drugs:

P1: 'For example, *James* (pop singer) who is campaigning against anti-smoking is a smoker.'

P2: 'Lots of them, like *Ploy*⁴... Behind her innocent face, she smokes, sleeps around...' (FM1)

P1: 'Especially, *Ploy*.'

P2: 'They say she's out every night too.' (FM2)

Despite their gender and understanding of inequality between Thai men and women, girls this group were very liberal toward the idea of cohabitation as shown by the preferred position, taken in most statements. It was clear that their gender did not position them in opposition to such an article. Compared to their male counterparts, these girls were more vocal. Their personal background and values are shown in their responses.

P1: 'Well, it depends on how you see it. But nowadays, things have changed. If you do it (cohabit) and it does no harm to yourself or anyone else, there should be no problems.'

R: 'What do you think about it?'

P2: 'It doesn't bother me.'

P3: 'If you're sure about someone, go ahead, no big deal.' (FM1)

Like their male counterparts, high schoolgirls mostly took oppositional positions when reading the article about Prince Andrew, while they generally took the preferred position when interpreting the article about Umm. They articulated negative responses to this particular article as follows:

⁴ This female star is the same as the one studied with regard to the issue of revealing fashion.

- P1: 'Being picky is fine but not slutty.'
- P2: 'She's a slut.'
- P3: 'It's awful, she sees one man after another.'
- R: 'Is that more than friendship then?'
- P1: 'Well, she could choose someone but not like...'
- P2: 'Seeing many different guys at the same time.' (FM1)

This group yielded almost an equal amount of positive and negative responses to the article on bisexuality. More interestingly, some used direct experience to respond to the article of Angelina Jolie:

- P1: 'For some, I think, err... A female friend of mine who went to a girl school. She could have been a real girl but she went to that school, so she was like...'
- P2: 'You copy each other.'
- P1: 'Yes, you do and when she moved to a unisex school, boys hit on her, she had a boyfriend and she's changed.' (FM1)

It is particularly true that individuals use their own experience to decode media text. Consequently, this student (P1) reacted to the text quite positively due to her experience and understanding of the issue.

As several discussions show the girls from FM1 used a greater deal of stronger terms than those from FM2, to describe their intense animosity toward some celebrities being discussed during the discussions. One explanation could be that they were all very close friends from the same peer group. Therefore, they felt relaxed to express their views freely, using harsh words.

Male Late (ML)

Compared to high schoolboys, male university students were far more articulate and critical. Generally they were aware of relevant issues. Interestingly, with the article about sexy outfits, this group mostly took a negotiated position, followed by oppositional reading. They read the text with gender perspectives. Most openly admitted that they liked watching women in revealing clothing:

P1: 'I like that.'
P2: 'I sure do.'
All: (laugh) (ML2)

However, as anticipated, it was interesting to note that some from the other group (ML1) expressed the following dichotomization of liking and disliking such popular female outfits:

P1: 'Oh, I like that!'
P2: 'I find girls in those outfits confident.'
P3: 'I like watching them but I wouldn't let my girlfriend dress like this.'
P4: 'Because we're all men.'
R: 'Because men like watching this stuff?'
Many: 'Oh yeah.' (ML1)

From the positions they took, it is clear that male participants in this category responded positively to and were very open toward unusual fashions: unusual body piercing, colorful hairdos and tattooing in particular:

'I think it's good to be able to express themselves...' (ML2)

'Some people look cool. Sometimes when I see it, I want to do that too, like ear piercing, tongue piercing. But it's painful, so I don't do it. Some people look terrible though.' (ML2)

Respondents responded to the article about drinking, taking all three positions almost equally. Like other groups, they showed awareness of celebrities' drinking behavior. They also read this media text based upon their own experience of drinking:

'When you get a bit high, it's fun.' (ML1)

'If you drink and are able to control yourself, it's ok.' (ML1)

'When I go out, I often see celebrities...' (ML2)

Like the two groups of high schoolboys, all took the preferred position with regard to the article about celebrity drugs party, while they took the oppositional position

when reading the one on celebrity anti-drugs campaigns. Their direct experience of witnessing celebrities using drugs made them more critical of latter article:

‘Like *Ta Boy Scout* (a young pop singer), he smokes pot.’ (ML1)

These students were also aware of cultural and gender differences, resulting in more liberal perspectives toward sexuality and relationships. Despite their gender, they responded almost equally to the article about Umm’s as a ‘flirt’ both in preferred and oppositional manners. Therefore, there is a close margin between the two positions.

‘It’s common for men to date different girls at once but it’d be seen differently for women doing the same.’ (ML2)

‘That’s right. I totally agree with her. Everyone has the right to choose. So do I.’ (ML1)

‘She’s right.’ (ML2)

In addition, not only did they seem liberal toward sexual practices such as bisexuality and flirtation, they also agreed with the preferred reading when responding to the article about cohabitation. Their awareness of college classmates’ cohabitation and homosexuality made them more familiar with and open to such sexual behavior.

P1: ‘There are lots of them out there. That’s not unusual.’

P2: ‘That’s just normal.’ (ML2)

They reacted both positively and negatively to the article about Angelina Jolie, suggesting possible causes for her bisexuality. They had somewhat liberal and tolerant attitude toward female same-sex sexuality.

P1: ‘I think it’s common.’

P2: ‘It’s an individual right.’ (ML1)

Interestingly, however, when discussions continued, they obviously showed strong disapproval of male same-sex relationship (see p. 204). It was, in my view, their gender that positioned them in opposition to this particular sexual orientation. It is quite typical that (straight) men are less likely than women to tolerate gay men. One

explanation could be that women are naturally more sensitive and understanding than are men.

Compared to other groups, these respondents appeared to be more relaxed during discussions which I believed, resulted in a comfortable environment, allowing them to share points of view that were different from others' without fear or hesitation. Further, there were a great deal of laughter and teasing.

Female Late (FL)

Respondents in this category were the most articulate and critical compared to the other three. They were able to elaborate on their answers when required and to give clear and substantial examples. Most of the time, they used first hand experience as a resource.

Despite being the same gender, this group took the preferred position when reading the article of revealing fashion styles. They focused more on appropriateness, other social issues, media responsibilities, etc when elaborating on their answers.

'... teens resemble celebrities wearing too-revealing outfits which is no good because our society now is not as safe as it used to be... Now television producers have encouraged celebrities to wear appropriate clothes...' (FL2)

Most statements indicate negative responses to the article about Western and Japanese bands, regarding extreme fashions: unusual tattooing, colorful hairdos, and body piercing. They resisted the preferred meaning by suggesting alternatives:

P1: 'Having a tattoo removed is more painful than getting it done...'

P2: 'Therefore painting is better.'

P3: 'That's right, painting.' (FL1)

'I think painting is better (than tattooing). It's removable. Whenever you want to change or remove it, you can do it.' (FL2)

Unlike high schoolgirls, these female university students took mostly the oppositional position to the article about Bvlgari and Hollywood, though there is a close

margin between the other two readings. When responding to the text, their concerns about economic issues and quality of products made them more critical:

- P1: 'If quality products are on sale, it'd be better to buy them. But if you know that you'd use something for a short time, it'd be better to just buy the counterfeits'
- P2: 'Yes, that's right.'
- P3: 'That way you could buy things more often.' (FL1)
-
- P1: 'It depends on... Well, some thing are worth investing.'
- P2: 'They are good quality.'
- P3: 'Yeah, they are better quality. A bag for example, the quality of a 700-800 Baht bag is different from the 199-Baht one.'
- R: 'So you focus more on quality, don't you?'
- P3: 'Yes, but if the cheap one was good quality, I'd buy it...' (FL2)

Like their male counterparts, when reading the article about drinking these students took the preferred and negative readings almost equally (see Table 6.11). The following statement shows how one of them responded to Oat's drinking behavior:

'From what I've experienced, it's like celebrities realize who they are. While they just enjoy themselves, we just enjoy ourselves. They are just people in the society who want to have fun. We can't blame them because they have the right. But in *Oat* case, it's too much.' (FL2)

Like the other three categories, this one mostly took the preferred position when reading the article about celebrity drugs party, though the negotiated reading was also equally taken. Students also took an almost entirely oppositional position when responding to the article about celebrity anti-drug campaigns. Their awareness of poorly administered law enforcement as well as direct experience of witnessing celebrities using drugs make them more critical toward the article about drugs party.

- P1: 'Thai laws aren't serious about this stuff (drugs problem). When they've caught drug dealers, the punishments went public. Then the problem has subsided a bit. But after a while it starts again.'
- P2: 'For example, if the police seized 100,000 amphetamine pills, they would say to the media there were less than 1,000. I'm dead serious. My uncle is a cop. That's what he does. He says, they (the police) just keep and sell them (drugs) for their own benefit...' (FL2)

They also showed strong disagreements regarding the article about anti-drugs campaigns.

- P1: 'It's not working at all. Musicians, athletes, they all do drugs. Seriously, wherever concerts are held, people who get this message that the media have sent out are not those who tend to do or try drugs. Those who are already addicts have no intention to quit anyway.'
- P2: 'They won't listen.'
- P3: 'That's right.'
- P2: 'They don't care. People who go to the concerts are people like us who don't use drugs. But those who take drugs won't have time to go.'
- All: (laugh)
- P2: 'They only have time in their own world.'
- P4: 'That's right, they have their own world.' (FL2)

Often they read media texts regarding relationships and sexuality with ideological and feminist perspectives. They also made critical statements, particularly concerning cohabitation and premarital sex. Their gender positioned them in opposition to the article about Kong's cohabitation. Most found themselves somewhat liberal but were aware that such sexual practices were still rarely acceptable in Thai society. Therefore, their feminist perspectives and the awareness of cultural differences were factors in rejecting the dominant reading:

- P1: 'In Thai society, it's hardly acceptable.'
- P2: 'That's right. But in the West...'
- P3: 'They see it as commonplace.'
- P2: 'They cohabit, if it doesn't work, they spit up. Women don't get condemned. That's how it works there'
- P3: 'But (Thai) men think less of women who have cohabited before. They see them as worthless.'
- P2: 'Yeah, that's right.'
- P1: 'That's the way it works here in Thailand.'
- P2: 'Yes, it still does here. Even they (Thai men) say it (chastity) doesn't matter, but in fact they see those women as worth less than the virgins.' (FL1)

These female students showed a higher degree of media literacy, concerning news distortion and soft news construction and used it to respond to the articles about flirtation. Therefore, despite their gender, they responded to the article of Umm by taking the oppositional position:

‘From what I’ve learnt from the media, when it comes to flirting, it seems, men and women are seen differently.’ (FL2)

‘For women, people see them as very bad persons... Why can’t women have lots of male friends? The media create such image where woman are seen as ‘flirts.’(FL2)

‘The media have created an image that is in people’s minds, that results in viewing people in society the way media want them to be seen.’ (FL2)

It is worth noting that the awareness of media characteristics plays a vital role in how these students make sense of messages, presented in a tabloid newspaper. In addition, they read the text within feminist interpretative frameworks:

P1: ‘*Umm*’s right.’

P2: ‘Yes, if you have the chance to. Men can. Why can’t you?’

P3: ‘... It’s impossible to get the right person right away. Umm is right. But if you consider whether or not that is the right thing to do, you have to define what a ‘flirt’ is. You have the right to choose the right person but you have to be sincere with everyone you date. You can’t expect this from one man, and that from another at once. That’s not right. I disagree with that.’ (FL2)

This group took almost an entirely preferred position when reading the media text regarding Angelina Jolie’s bisexuality. Their awareness of cultural differences allowed them to be more critical.

‘It should depend on how people see it. In the West, people are open. Does anyone condemn them? No! They can be open because the society gives everyone the chance to be whatever they are. It doesn’t matter what you are, just be good and useful to the society, that’s it.’ (FL2)

According to their critical answers, these female university students considered themselves as mature individuals who were least influenced by celebrities. On the other

hand, they viewed younger teenagers, especially in early adolescence as the most susceptible individuals to celebrity influences.

These students appeared to be the most understanding, articulate and critical informants. They showed the capability to elaborate and reason very well on all the issues discussed. As noticed, all students from both groups (FL1 and FL2) showed their interest in participating in the interviews and were willing to share their views. The interviews with these two groups turned out to be the longest ones.

Section IV Interpretive Frameworks of Bangkok Teenagers

This thesis has hypothesized that although young consumers receive identical mass media messages, they do not always decode such messages in the same way as the messages were encoded. Bangkok audiences construct their own meanings differently, depending upon various factors. They include social, psychological and cultural factors such as age, gender, education, class, prejudices, previous experience, and family upbringing (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Hall, 1994; Höijer, 1998; Jensen, 1991; Morley, 1985; Real, 1996).

According to the preceding discussions, there appear three types of reading suggested by Hall (1990). This last section concludes how Bangkok teenagers read media texts and what interpretative strategies they brought in when reading such media messages about celebrities.

Interpretative Strategies in Decoding Process

Reception theory proposes that not only the significance of the media experience as such but also the meaning derived from media contents is dependent greatly on the perceptions, experiences, and social location of audience members (Jensen, 1991). I will now discuss the frameworks of interpretation that Bangkok teenagers used in their readings of media messages about celebrities.

Interpretive Communities

Interpretive communities refer to practices of reading placed within a social and institutional context, a context, which is different from institutions of encoding (Angus,

1994, p. 269). As Real (1996) puts it, 'media consumers do not live in social vacuums when they read media texts' (p. 112). Rather, group members constitute communities of shared interest and usage (Jensen, 1987, p. 29). Hall has concisely suggested that, "your readings arise from the family in which you were brought up, the places of work, the institutions you belong to, the other practices you do" (1994, p 270). Interpretive communities are, therefore, influential in reading media messages. Based on the findings, I will discuss three main contexts, each of which possesses some unique possibilities for attributing meaning (McQuail, 2000). These include family, peers and school, and social context (society).

Family and Cultural Norms (e.g. cultural and religious identifications)

Individuals are brought up in families that vary, in terms of culture, and ideology. In general, however, it is more likely that family-taught values and norms are influential for children. These factors influence the way they see the world. As Hall (1994) notes, the family in which individuals were raised influences the way they read media texts. This notion is supported by some responses to the articles about sex and relationships, especially cohabitation and premarital sex. Some female respondents claimed that although they themselves were not disturbed by the unusual sexual behavior of celebrities, they would not practice them themselves. The following statements and discussions showed their cultural views toward cohabitation:

'Personally, I don't accept it. I've been brought up in a Chinese⁵ family. They can't take it at all... But I don't mind people around me doing that. It's ok with me. I just don't do it myself. My family won't accept it.' (FL1)

P1: 'Not at all. I still think about it in the way I've been taught. That won't change it.'

P2: 'I think more about what my parents have taught me (than about what celebrities do).'

P1: 'Yes, what we've been taught isn't a bad thing.' (FL2)

'My older brother said that he sees *easy girls* worth nothing. He can *dump* them whenever he wants to...' (FL1)

⁵ Thailand has a large Chinese population.

The above accounts clearly suggest that the way in which these female respondents were raised plays a vital role in interpreting texts regarding cohabitation and premarital sex. Their cultural ideologies and family-taught values were used to construct the meanings of media texts. These responses illustrate the importance of both their cultural and religious identifications in framing their interpretation of cohabitation and premarital sex.

In contrast, the following comments made by a male student who presumably came from a more liberal family reveals an opposite worldview:

‘I think it (cohabitation) is commonplace. My older brother who’s a college senior lives with his girlfriend too.’ (ML1)

However, one point I find worth noting is that the same male participants who seemed to be very liberal toward cohabitation, would become hesitant in their response. When asked how they would think or feel, if this happened to their own female family members: sister or daughter, some put it:

“If I were a father, well I probably wouldn’t see it commonplace.” (ML2)

“We are all selfish, I think. You’d be happier being a taker than a giver. I think that’s what it is.” (ML2)

Such views suggest that it would be more difficult for them to accept their own female family members engaged in such sexual behavior. This situation is particularly similar to the male university students who claimed that they would not allow their own girlfriends or younger sisters to wear sexy/revealing clothes but admitted that they liked watching other girls in such outfits:

P1: ‘It’s ok for me to see other girls wearing them but it wouldn’t be to see my girlfriend in those.’

P2: ‘Other men would ogle.’

R: ‘Would any of you guys let your girlfriend wear those clothes?’

P3: ‘Well...’

P1: ‘No.’

All: (laugh) (ML1)

It is clear that these male students enjoyed watching celebrities or any women other than their own girlfriends, in sexy fashionable clothes. One explanation could be that being males they recognized how men view women in such clothing and did not want their girlfriends to be seen in such a way in Thai society.

The following statements show how high school boys' cultural ideologies affected how they viewed Prince Andrew's behavior, resulting in their taking the oppositional position:

P1: 'It's more common for them (Westerners) but it's ...(interrupted by P2)'

P2: 'Wrong for us.'

P3: 'We have to value our culture. That contradicts it.' (MM1)

When discussing the article about Kong's cohabitation, two girls expressed their opposite views:

P1: 'So they should get married then. That (cohabitation) doesn't look good.'

P2: 'You old-fashioned Thai girl!' (FM1)

Most importantly, all discussions above clearly suggest that judgments about the text, not comprehension were the source of disagreement (Real, 1996, p. 108). Real further notes that the conflict was not because the text was 'polysemic' but because of values, the 'polyvalent' responses to the text by different readers (1996, p. 108). This then supports Fiske's contention that the polysemy of texts always creates oppositional interpretations (cited in Real, 1996, p. 108). Additionally, such disagreements also occurred when teenage informants responded to other media articles discussed in focus groups.

Peer, School and Youth Culture

As mentioned previously, adolescents spend a great deal of time with friends both at home and at school. As a consequence, peer environments and interaction do not only play an important role in young people's media consumption, they also influence the way they use and understand the media messages (e.g. Suoninen, 2001). Young people read media text in the context of their own youth sub-culture. Two groups of female students shared similar views as regards the influence of peers as follows:

P1: 'For some, I think, err... A female friend of mine went to a girl school. She could have been straight but she went to that school, so she was like...'
 P2: 'You copy each other.'
 P1: 'Yes, you do and when she moved to a unisex school, boys hit on her, she had a boyfriend and then she's changed.' (FM1)

P1: 'It sometimes has to do with society, social group, like girl schools...'
 Many: 'Yeah.'
 P1: 'There are *toms* (tomboys) and stuff like that. (FL1)

These discussions could indicate that the more familiar the context, the more positively the teens interpret the text because they personally appreciate the situation. These findings also support those of Durham where peer context was found to be one in which emergent gender identity was consolidated via constant reference to acceptable sociocultural standards of femininity and sexuality (1999, p. 210).

Social Context (e.g. feminist, gay & lesbian cultures)

Societies in which individuals live have impact on their worldviews. Many studies on *Madonna* show that people read her media images from within the interpretive communities of gay and lesbian culture (e.g. Henderson, 1993; Patton, 1993; Schwichtenberg, 1993, cited in Real, 1996, p. 113).

One male student admitted how much influence social contexts have on certain individuals:

'Very much, I think. Well, let's leave a straight man with gays, he could become gay too, I think. Generally, people hang out with ones that like or do similar things. (ML2)

In another culture, feminist interpretive community is obviously used when discussing the article about Umm's being claimed as a 'flirt.' Most female informants were aware of inequity in Thai society.

'Women being equal to men is just an abstract concept. But in practice, no way!' (FL2)

'For women, people see them as very bad persons (when seeing different men at once)... Why can't women have lots of male friends? ...' (FL2)

- P1: 'That's right (Umm's statement).'
- P2: 'Yes, if you have the chance to. Men can. Why can't you?'
- P3: '... It's impossible to get the right person right away. Umm is right...' (FL2)

These female students read media text from within feminist interpretive community based upon their feminist standpoints and in the context of feminist struggle within patriarchal society (Real, 1996). Most took the oppositional and negotiated positions to the preferred reading.

The 'degree of closeness' between men and women is their other consideration. As female participants strongly argue:

'Being selective is fine but not sleeping around.' (FM1)

'Dating male friends but not having 'something' with them is nothing wrong, just a friendship. Basically, it's ok to some extent. If it's 'too much', it's not good. It depends though on to what extent your relationship is with your male friends.' (FL2)

It became obvious that these teens and probably people in general, usually assume that individuals who are dating each other are more likely to have sexual relations. As a result, some females reacted very negatively to this article.

In addition, Morley (1985) notes that the reader will construct the meaning of text according to the discourses they bring into reading media texts. Such discourses are, for instance, knowledge, prejudices and resistance (cited in Höijer, 1990, p. 239). Further, individuals' life histories (background) (Höijer, 1990) and experience are also influential in giving us different ways that we use to understand and make sense of media stories (Jhally, 1994, p. 164). According to the discourses derived from the focus group discussions, it appears that respondents read media texts heavily on their knowledge of and attitudes toward celebrities. Their experience and background were also used to help them understand and interpret media messages. In the following part, I then discuss discourses of experience and background, attitudes, and knowledge used in meaning-making by teenage participants.

Direct/Personal Experience (Firsthand Experience) & Background

Individuals' experiences, whether direct or indirect, and background play an important role in how people understand the world. As Hall (1980) has put it, audiences decode the meanings proposed by sources according to their own perspectives and wishes, although often with some shared framework of experience. Many male and female participants are familiar with a range of sexual behavior. They have friends or know people who cohabit, who are homosexual, or who are involved in premarital sex. Most importantly, some are engaged in sexual relationships themselves. (Questionnaire data suggested that three male and two female students reported having sexual relationships). Therefore, these students read media text based on their own experiences. One female respondent shared her direct experience as follows:

'I went to a unisex junior high school and I liked boys. At the time I wondered how on earth girls liked girls. But when I went to a girl senior high school, I myself liked girls too. It was like, I couldn't get to find any boy.' (FL1)

Having had such first hand experiences, teenage respondents were not surprised by uncommon sexual practices among celebrities. 'Celebrities are just ordinary people like we are', as one puts it. Therefore, they did not feel completely opposed to the article, rather they showed understanding and sympathy.

One group of high schoolgirls used personal and prior experience to read the text about drugs:

P1: 'They themselves smoke, like *Ning* (an actress). I saw her smoke...'

P2: '*Look-gade* (a model/actress) too.'

P1: 'They encourage the youth not to smoke but they do it themselves.'

P3: 'Especially, *Ploy* (an actress/model), I saw her smoke.'

P1: 'They all show the good and hide the bad.' (FM1)

Attitudes and Prejudices

During several discussions, some participants gave clearly biased accounts about some celebrities. When discussing certain articles, they showed negative attitudes; some even made harsh criticisms using strong words:

‘Oh, lots of them (smoke), like Ploy. She denied all rumors. But behind her innocent face, she smokes, she *sleeps around*. Everything about her is *nasty*.’ (FM1)

When discussing the issue of celebrities’ lavish lifestyle, the girls in the same group openly expressed their hatred over *Victoria Beckham*:

- P1: ‘Like *Victoria Beckham*., she got a haircut for 20,000 Bahts (£ 300.00).’
P2: ‘Oh boy!’
P1: ‘Just for a haircut.’
P3: ‘*Over-doing!*’
P1: ‘She likes *overdoing*. *Too much!* Not only is she *not beautiful*, she also *overdoes*.’
P3: ‘I *hate* Victoria.’ (FM1)

The same girls also made another strong criticism about Umm’s alleged flirtation as follows:

- P1: ‘Being picky is fine but not *sluttish*.’
P2: ‘She’s a *slut*.’ (FM1)

It is worth noting that all above statements came from the same group of high schoolgirls. They constructed their own meanings of media texts based upon their negative attitudes toward celebrities. On the contrary, however, the same girls responded positively to those they adored. The following reactions were made when discussing the articles about the Duo, *Bow* and *Joyce*, and *Britney Spears* respectively:

‘They are cute. I like them’ (FM1)

- P1: ‘Oh, cutel!’
P2: ‘I like her.’ (FM1)

One female university student commented on skimpy dress style with a milder statement:

‘... About *Ploy*, I don’t like her. Probably because I once saw how she was like, so I don’t like her.’ (FM1)

In my view, this type of reading is more likely to derive from the respondents' attitudes toward the female stars than from how they thought about certain aspects of fashion. Consequently, their attitudes toward certain celebrities influenced how they read media texts about them.

Generally, individuals have their own attitudes and opinions resulting in how they see the world. While some Thais consider homosexuality and bisexuality deviant, others see it as more acceptable. As previously indicated, various views were openly responded by both genders to the article on *Angelina Jolie's* bisexuality. Being in a comfortable environment, a group of high schoolgirls who were obviously close friends, shared different points of view (see p. 223). These girls were very critical and had no fear to express contrasting opinions. In the discussion, only one girl (P3) reacted to this article positively. She was sympathetic and understanding toward bisexual individuals. More importantly, she did not feel pressured to express opposite views. Consequently, this particular girl took the preferred reading while the rest took the oppositional position.

One university female student showed her positive attitude toward the same issue:

'It's a personal matter. It's an individuals' taste (laugh). You might see it as deviant but individuals have different feelings toward this. Individuals are different... If you are happy with the way you are and are able to live happily in the society, there shouldn't be a social problem. But if you are open and get rejected by the society, there'd be a problem regardless of who you are...' (FL2).

Knowledge/Awareness

Respondents' knowledge and awareness of people and events is also important in critical decoding of media messages. The following statements indicate that the teen respondents were well aware of celebrities' personal lives:

'Like *Jenny Tomayaku*. She's gay. She lives happily in the States as an ordinary person with her mate. I don't see anything wrong with that.' (FL1 – Article regarding Angelina Jolie)

'Like *Jay* (a singer/actor/model), he has a daughter but he's still dating *Pin* (an actress)⁶.'
(FL1 – Article regarding Joe)

⁶ This couple officially got married in 2001.

This knowledge is presumably derived from reading magazines or newspaper gossip articles about celebrities' private lives. However, the teens brought it in when making sense of media texts. As another informant points out:

'It's because of their career. I know them (Bow and Joyce). They don't actually dress as extremely as this (see Appendix R). They just wear jeans and T-shirts.' (FL2)

This informant personally knew the Duo and decoded the media text based upon her knowledge of the stars. It is, therefore, clear that she rejected the intended reading of the text. Similarly, oppositional readings were prevalent when the respondents read media texts about both drugs. The following statement was a reaction to the article about Maew's drugs party:

'... Like the case of *Namfon* (a young singer) and *Sai* (a young actress). *Sai* meant to sell drugs. But they didn't get the same conviction. While Namfon got banned, Sai has starred in a drama despite the fact that she (Sai) has used, sold and thrown drug parties... It's just because Sai's father is a policeman. He could change things around. So that could make people think 'well that's no big deal, so let's do it then.' (FL2)

This student's awareness of the incident indicates celebrities' engagement in drugs and unfair conviction and treatment by the government authorities. Most show their loss of trust and faith in celebrities. On the other hand, such knowledge could affect how they viewed the article about *Navin Tar*'s anti-drug campaigns. This is one of the reasons why most respondents decoded such article in a strongly negative way. The article originated the following interpretations:

'... Lots of celebrities smoke. I've witnessed that for myself. Like *Ning* (an actress), she smokes *Sai-fon* (a popular cigarette brand).' (FM2)

P1: 'Like Bow and Joyce, I don't know if it's true that they're addicted to some drug.'

P2: 'That's true. I know them personally. When we go out, they are like, *get high*.' (FL2)

'Like *Ta Boy Scout* (a young singer), he smokes pot.' (ML1)

'... Like *Nicole* (a singer), she's an anti-drug campaigner but she's herself a smoker...' (FL1)

Their awareness of celebrity involvement in drugs resulted in the way they made sense of media stories. Consequently, they created opposing interpretations based not on the perceptions of the text, rather on the evaluation of it. In this case, they took almost an entirely oppositional position.

Observations

Before I conclude this chapter, it is worthwhile stressing on some observations derived from all group discussions.

- At times, the discussions became more difficult and respondents' reading positions tended to change. This was particularly obvious when male students put themselves in a hypothetical situation such as being a father whose unmarried daughter lives with a man or is engaged in premarital sex, or having a girlfriend or sister who wears revealing clothes.
- Increasingly, Thai homosexuals and bisexuals openly admit their sexual orientation. There have been many activities regarding these people such as gay beauty contests. This indicates that in Thai society such sexual practices have become more acceptable than in the past. Consequently, several respondents did not find such behavior deviant. The concept of gradual social acceptance also applies to the issues of cohabitation and premarital sex among youngsters. This results in acceptance of the preferred reading of the articles about Angelina Jolie, Joe, and Kong.
- Bangkok adolescents in this study hold attitudes that are different from those of their parents in various aspects. According to their statements, these young students openly and strongly expressed their appreciation of the equality between two genders. Thus, their attitudes and perceptions of sexuality and relationships are different from those of older generations. For many of them, what used to be cultural norms and values may be old-fashioned. These young people have become more liberal. These changes in norms and traditions are what Holstein-Beck calls an *erosion crisis* and *cultural release* – to today's young, norms and traditions have lost or altered the

meaning (1995, p. 112). The idols of the market culture are replacing parents as objects of identifications (p. 113).

However, this is not to say that those holding more liberal attitudes would be engaged in freer sexual practices or other types of unusual behavior. As one female student puts it, “women being equal to men is an abstract concept. But in practice, no way!” Many female participants claim that women are still viewed as individuals who are supposed to conform to the traditionally cultural norms regarding virginity and marriage.

- The findings support, to some extent, the concept of international cultivation. Several teen informants agreed that celebrities with unusual sexual practices, especially bisexuality, premarital sex and cohabitation are accepted as the norm. Consistent with Starsburger’s argument that regular exposure to sexy TV might also alter teenagers’ self-perceptions (1995, p. 43), many Bangkok youngsters perceived that western celebrities (and westerners in general) were more open and freer toward sex and relationships. It is beyond the scope of this study to confirm whether those teens were heavy media users as the questionnaire was not designed to measure the degree of media usage. Nonetheless, this study also reveals that many young Bangkokians believed that sex was for the young and was an action activity rather than a means of expressing affection (Starsburger, 1995, p. 45). They, especially those in middle adolescence, hardly mentioned any aspect of love, caring or understanding.
- Both older female and male students were more articulate and critical than the younger. However, all were well aware of the issues being discussed. In addition, it appears that none of the participants showed fear of expressing their points of view, even when they differed. Nonetheless, the awareness of media characteristics of tabloids is limited among the younger. On the other hand, the older teens held a good knowledge of such media traits. Two explanations could be that half of the older respondents were mass communication students and that the fact that they were older suggests maturity, better knowledge, and ability to reason more critically and elaborately.

- Mass media, particularly magazines and newspapers appeared to be teenage audiences' major sources of knowledge about celebrities, ranging from their entertainment activities to their personal lives. However, these young people seemed to be able to differentiate celebrities in real life from those in the media, *a media image*.

The findings suggest that media texts do not always inform the audience of what is socially and culturally acceptable thinking. In many cases, mass media only report what have happened without giving criticism. This is why some students mentioned that media should act not only as a source of information but also as an educator.

Conclusions

In the context of audience reception, this chapter has discussed the first part of focus group discussions, exploring Bangkok teenagers' reading of media texts. The purposes were to examine:

- How far these young informants share the decoding of the media representations of celebrities with the dominant reading
- What interpretive frameworks these respondents use to make sense of media texts, resulting in their differential decodings

I conclude that the main findings in this chapter are as follows:

- As hypothesized, audiences do not always comply with the dominant reading encoded by the mass media. Each young individual also differs in their reading of media texts, depending upon various family, social and cultural factors. The findings confirm that all articles generated multiple text readings. This supports that texts are polysemic (Real, 1996). It, however, fails to support Hall's view that negotiated readings are probably what most of us do most of the time (1994, p. 265). Although all texts created different readings, overall, eight out of twelve articles were interpreted in the same way as they were encoded – the 'dominant reading.' Three took the

oppositional reading while only the article about Bow and Joyce's sexy dress style mostly originated negotiated readings. It is, however, important to note that in the cases of *Bow & Joyce*, Western and Japanese fashions, and *Kong*, there was a close margin between the 'preferred' reading and 'oppositional' stance.

- It is clear that cultural ideologies, knowledge, and direct experiences are the most significant factors for Bangkok youngsters in reading media texts about celebrities. These determinants enabled them to critically recognize, negotiate, or resist the dominant/intended reading of the media. It is essential, however, to keep in mind that knowledge and direct experience depend mainly on age as they accumulate over time while cultural ideologies depend greatly on upbringing and gender. The latter case is particularly obvious as Thai girls are more likely to be reserved than boys. For example, feminist and conservative ideologies evidently played a vital role when respondents decoded the culture related media texts, particularly relationships and sexuality. These ideologies often overrode dominant media representations.

Mass media, magazines and newspapers in particular, appear to be Bangkok youngsters' major sources of information about celebrities' activities and personal lives. This chapter has provided evidence that mass media both portray celebrities and define the meanings of them. However, media consumers often, perhaps mostly, create their own meanings of media figures based upon their ideologies and personal framework brought to their interpretation of texts. Bangkok adolescents in this study appeared to be an active and critical audience who did not always recognize or accept the dominant readings provided by the mass media. However, they received knowledge about celebrities more from media such as magazines, newspapers, and television than from direct experiences.

This chapter reported on how Bangkok teenagers understood media texts about celebrities in relation to three issues. However, the thesis not only draws on audience reception but also seeks to explore how celebrity culture impacts on media shaped behavior of Bangkok youth. How media interpretations relate to identity construction will be the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Media Shaped Behavior and Bangkok Teenagers

Introduction

Chapter 6 presented the analysis of the first part of group discussions, examining how Bangkok teenagers read selected media texts about celebrities within the context of audience reception. In this last chapter, I will analyze the findings of the second half of the discussions, focusing predominantly on media effects. My intention is to incorporate the findings of these two approaches. The purposes are to:

- Examine how the text readings of Bangkok youngsters relate to their identity construction, in terms of media influenced behavior
- Provide evidence of the relationship between celebrity culture and learned/modeled behavior of the young audience, in relation to both positive and negative effects.

I will establish that although media and celebrity cultures are influential to young people not every youngster will be affected to a significant degree. Media shaped behavior appear in various ways. Powerful media and celebrities do not always have negative impact on the young's attitudes and behavior as is often claimed, but they may also exemplify certain desirable patterns of behavior. In addition I also expect to provide evidence that media and celebrity cultures are not the only source of negative behavior in young people. Environmental influences such as friends and family affect the way in which youngsters think and behave.

Reception theory helps understand how they read media texts and what decoding criteria they bring into the texts. Uses and gratifications theory has been a focus of media effects research, it helps us understand the way in which Bangkok teenagers use media in their everyday lives. Social learning and modeling theories explain how the young learn from modeled behavior through mass media and what effects, if any, models may have on them. This chapter examines the relationship between the youth's interpretations of media and how media texts shape young people's identities.

This concluding chapter is divided into five sections:

- **First, I discuss to what degree young people are conscious of the influence of celebrities in relation to three key social issues: fashion, substance abuse, and sexuality. The goal is to explore the relationship between media interpretations and actual media influenced behavior.**
- **The second part addresses the influence of social environment. In discussing the significance of peer pressure as an essential factor affecting young people's behavior and attitudes, I will try to explain what role peer influences plays in young people's lives. I will also provide evidence of the extent to which youngsters are aware of the influence of peer pressure and celebrity culture.**
- **The third section opens with a brief report on media consumption of the participants. It addresses the role of mass media as seen by these young students. The goal is to provide evidence that perceptions of mass media and media literacy determine their interpretations of media texts about celebrities.**
- **The fourth part summarizes the reported media shaped behavior of Bangkok youths. This covers not only destructive but also constructive influences of media figures. As celebrities are often used in advertising, it is also important to address the impact of advertising, using celebrity endorsers.**
- **Finally, the fifth section concludes the key findings of the chapter in relation to media effects. This is to test the hypotheses that Bangkok youth's media readings play a significant role in their identity construction and that celebrity culture may not always negatively affect the young. It also provides evidence that factors other than celebrity culture shape the attitudes and behavior of Bangkok teenagers.**

The above sections will be followed by the conclusions where I will establish the correlation between audience reception and media effects on Bangkok adolescents.

Section I Bangkok Teenagers' Awareness of the Influence of Celebrity Culture

Three social issues: fashion, substance abuse, and relationships and sexuality were represented in media items used for focus groups. However, other relevant issues that sprung up unexpectedly were discussed as well. Table 7.1 provides the overall picture of degree of celebrity influence teenage respondents acknowledged regarding the three issues. The figures, as will be described later, derived from main discussed topics.

Table 7.1

Percentage of Degree of Awareness of Bangkok Teenagers Concerning Three Issues *

Issue/Degree	Not at all/ Very little	Little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely	Total
Fashion	13.0	25.9	48.1	13.0	0.00	100
Drugs & Alcohol Abuse	55.6	27.8	13.0	3.7	0.00	100
Relationships & Sexuality	33.3	25.9	35.2	3.7	0.00	98.1**

*Data derived from Questions 59, 61 and 63 (Appendix F).

** One respondent (1.9 %) failed to answer.

Table 7.1 illustrates that 13 % of the respondents were reportedly very much influenced by celebrities’ fashion while almost half (48.1 %) thought they were moderately influenced. In relation to drugs and alcohol abuse, 55.6 % were not at all or very little influenced. Most interestingly, 35.2 % said they were moderately influenced while 3.7 % were very much influenced by celebrities’ relationships and sexuality. However, celebrities did not influence the participants to the highest degree in any of the three issues. The following parts discuss in detail the degree of awareness of Bangkok teenagers concerning each issue.

Fashion

As fashion means various things from clothing to piercing, it is no longer limited to females. According to Table 7.1, as a whole, 13.0 % reported that celebrities had no to very little impact on their own identity construction while 48.1 % said the famous were moderately influential.

Table 7.2

Percentage of Degree of Celebrities Influence on Teenagers' Fashion *

Groups/Degree	Not at all/ Very little	Little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely	Total
Male Middle	7.14 (1)	14.28 (2)	64.28(9)	14.28(2)	00.00(0)	100.00(14)
Female Middle	26.66(4)	20.00 (3)	46.66(7)	6.66(1)	00.00(0)	100.00(15)
Male Late	00.00(0)	25.00 (3)	58.33(7)	16.66(2)	00.00(0)	100.00(12)
Female Late	15.38(2)	46.15 (6)	23.07(3)	15.38(2)	00.00(0)	100.00(13)

* Data were derived from Question 59 (Appendix F). Numbers in brackets represent numbers of respondents.

Table 7.2 breaks down the percentage into four different groups. No respondents reported the highest degree of effect on them. Interestingly, although none of the older male students said that they were not at all/very little influenced, on the whole male teenagers were more affected than their female counterparts by celebrities' fashion. Those who claimed that they were not at all/very little influenced mentioned that they wanted to be themselves and wore what they liked; there was no need to conform to celebrities' fashion styles.

'No effects, it all depends on myself. If I like something, I'll go buy it. It has nothing to do with celebrities.' (FM1)

P1: 'Not at all.'

P2: 'I do want I like. I don't see the need to copy them.' (FM1)

'Not in any aspect. I never thought of getting tattoos or piercing...' (FL1)

'Not at all. Celebrities just do things for their job, extreme hairdos, etc ...' (FL2)

'Sometimes I see people dress exactly the same as celebrities which made them look funny.'
(FL2)

The highest percentage (64.28 %) of high schoolboys admitted being moderately influenced by media figures while only 7.1% were not at all/very little influenced. The affected youngsters were able to articulate what sorts of fashion influenced them. For both genders, clothing seemed to be one of the aspects that influenced them most, followed by body adornments (piercing, tattooing). On the other hand, celebrities did not

have much effect on their hairstyles. The influenced teenagers shared the following views:

‘I must admit that everyone wants to be trendy. Celebrities are influential. Everyone copies them. Every fashion comes from them, especially young celebrities.’ (MM2)

‘Mostly on clothing. I dress the way they (celebrities) do, like colorful clothing and that’s it, no other influences.’ (FM2)

‘... Celebrities have effects on some things but not everything. For example, they have several piercing, I want to do that too... They are influential.’ (FL2)

Many students, especially females, mentioned that although they copied some clothing styles from celebrities or imitated fashions like piercing, they had to obtain permission from their parents. Similarly, some male participants admitted that although they were influenced by celebrities’ styles, they did not copy them because their parents did not allow them to do so.

‘Yes, they (celebrities) influence me, hairdos and clothing for instance but not much. If I like anything, I go for it, but it has to suit me and my parents have to approve of it.’ (FL1)

‘... Do I copy them? Well, for example when I see them have their ears or noses pierced, ‘yes’ they have effects on me because I want to get my bellybutton pierced. I want to get a tattoo, I want to do things that...(paused). I want to know what it feels like to do what they do. I want to go extreme... But when it comes to hairdos, I would say ‘no’, they don’t influence me. I do what I like...’ (FL2)

‘Sometimes I copy them but not much, depending on my moods...’ (ML1)

‘For clothing, I have my own styles but for ear piercing, I follow fashion and celebrities...’ (ML1)

Interestingly, many older students pointed out that celebrities had more influence on younger teenagers, especially those in early adolescence, than on themselves. As third person effect suggests, people usually assume that media contents affect others more than themselves (e.g. Perloff, 1989; Shim, 1991, cited in Jeffres, 1997). Further, they saw themselves mature enough to be able to think more sensibly and to consider what should or should not be imitated.

According to one university student, early teens imitated the way the famous duo (Bow and Joyce) dressed, believing that they could draw attention from men:

- P1: 'I could say that junior high school students are very susceptible. For instance, I read an interview with them, they admitted that they dressed like Bow and Joyce. They also knew they (Boy and Joyce) mentioned in an interview that they went to *RCA*¹, then they (teens) sneaked out and went there too.'
- P2: 'Men really adore Bow and Joyce...'
- R: 'So do you think that encourages younger teens to imitate them?'
- P1: 'Yes, because they (the teens) want to attract men's attention and they think they can achieve that by doing what Bow and Joyce do.' (FL1)

The above claim from these older students supports Ganetz's observation that young women still dress to attract the male gaze to confirm their individual and sexual identity (1995, p. 92). Despite the influence of celebrities' dress style, most teens pointed out that they did not wish to resemble celebrities exactly. Rather they picked up some ideas and adjusted them to suit themselves:

'Mostly on clothing styles but I adjust them to suit myself.' (MM1)

'Yes, on clothing... I look for different styles from different celebrities. I then pick and adjust the ones that suit myself most.' (ML2)

Some female respondents pointed out that although they were interested in some celebrities' clothing styles, they did not imitate them because they were aware that those styles did not suit them.

'For clothing, I pick up some ideas but don't completely copy everything... And they have to suit me...' (FL1)

Although the young were influenced by the media figures' dress style, they tended to only look for and pick up some styles from the famous they adored. As one put it:

'Well, probably clothing styles but they don't necessarily have to be the exact same brands, just similar styles. Sometimes, I see celebrities wear sneakers, I change from formal shoes to

¹ *Royal City Avenue*, also best known as *RCA*, is the most famous street, housing numerous discotheques, pubs and restaurants, where teenagers hang out.

sneakers... They (celebrities) have different styles, I don't follow them all, I pay attention only to those I like... (ML2)

Male university students who admitted being influenced by celebrities' fashion mentioned that they found some styles 'cool' while others were not. Surprisingly, they differentiated between celebrities. Some were seen as classier than others. The following discussion shows that these participants shared a unanimous view on a particular style they disliked:

- P1: 'But I don't dress the *RS*² style.
All: (laugh)
R: 'What is it like?'
P1: 'Tight tops'
P2: 'Very tight'
P3: 'Silver color, for example.'
P4: 'Tiny tops'
P2: 'Too tight' (ML1)

In contrast, they appreciated another style:

- P1: 'Then teenage boys copy some casual styles from foreign celebrities, like wearing jeans, Adidas, things like that.'
P2: 'Yes, *Das* (Adidas) and T-shirts'
P3: 'They look cool.'
P4: 'They look more cool.'
P1: 'More comfortable' (ML1)

These respondents clearly showed their disapproval of a particular style of Thai stars while they adored international musicians. More importantly, this suggests that they used this fashion style to make status distinctions and to express membership in well-defined classes and status groups (e.g. Christensen & Roberts, 1990 cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 80; Johansson, 1994, p. 271).

A group of high schoolgirls also showed their admiration for some boy bands:

² *R S Promotion Co., Ltd.* is the second biggest record company in Thailand. It possesses a number of contracted popular singers.

- P1: 'Phutan, a hip hop band. They are nine men. They are so cool. Topac, they are musicians too. I like them. I want to get close to them (speaking with an exciting tone).'
- P2: 'They are really cool.' (FM1)

It is typical that male performers attract female audience. As Ganetz puts it, "the idol as love object usually becomes the main focus of the media, especially with the arrival of popular male bands with almost exclusively young female fans" (1995, p. 90). Adolescent psychology points out that teenage girls are generally interested in individuals of the opposite sex and in those whom they admire (E. B. Hurlock, cited in Ngernbamroong, 1996, p. 132).

Like adults, teenagers have different preferences and lifestyles. As research into youth culture suggests, there is a variety of different youth sub-cultures. Although music plays an important role in adolescence (Connell et al., 1996), this by no means at all indicates that adolescents listen to the same kind of music or adore the same stars. Rather, young people listen to various types of music: pop, rock, heavy metal, country, R and B, etc. Musicians also have their own styles of clothing and accessories that represent their music types. Consequently, the styles of singers as well as music performers, ranging from clothing to tattooing, influence different youth sub-groups.

One male respondent used his own direct experience to respond to unusual body piercing, and colorful hairstyle and tattooing in particular.

'Hair dying, I've tried. Ear piercing, I've done that. I felt that I wanted to try things just to see how other people thought about me and how I would feel about it.' (ML1)

With his awareness of adolescent psychology, this student also added the following statement:

'That's (doing unusual things) just what adolescents are like. They just want to do something different. That's one of the desires in adolescence. They want to show what they can do.'
(ML1)

Extravagance

I decided to include the issue of extravagance in the aspect of fashion for two reasons. Celebrities tend to use brand name items, especially clothing and accessories to improve

their image (Phusitranusorn, 1998) and to sustain their appearance (Barbas, 2001). Moreover, stars are often used in advertising to draw consumer attention in order to increase sales (Mathur, Mathur & Rangan, 1997; Ohanian, 1991).

Expensive and international brand name items appeared to have effects more on girls than boys. It is clear that items advertised by celebrities attract young consumers. According to focus group discussions, some teenage students own expensive fashion items although they are still not able to earn their own income. The questionnaire (see Appendix F, Question 36) asked how many brand name items they owned. All items such as bags, watches, shoes, clothes and accessories were international brands, high-priced, and popular among Thai teenagers. These luxurious articles included, for example, *Louis Vuitton*, *Prada*, *Gianni Versace* and *Burberry*. According to the questionnaire, 25% of female students owned more than three expensive items, compared to 11.5% of their male counterparts. When asked why they used such items, quality, affordability and acceptance in peer groups were referred to most.

Two girls from a well-known and expensive high school argued different views:

P1: 'That's a very bad value.'

P2: 'Well, but you invest in them (expensive brand name items) once and they last forever.'

P1: 'I see you get new stuff every month.'

P2: 'They're worth it. They last till I go to college.'

P1: 'Whatever!'

Many: '(Boo)' (FM1)

According to a schoolteacher who helped recruit participants, these eight girls were from the same peer group. As suggested by adolescent psychology, young people in the same peer group tend to do the same or similar things. Nonetheless, it is quite obvious that, in this particular group, there was only one girl who the rest of the group agreed had a lavish lifestyle and used a great many expensive fashion items. However, despite being criticized by the rest of the members, this girl was not inhibited from expressing her opposing views. This strongly suggests that there was no group effect where individuals changed their positions through interaction (Poole, 1999).

A group of male adolescents from a public university expressed their points of view regarding their own extravagance:

- P1: 'To be honest, I've never used counterfeits... If you buy a *Louis (Vuitton)* item, you should buy a genuine one. If you use counterfeit stuff, it's just like you don't respect the brand name.'
- P2: 'We shouldn't buy expensive stuff because we're still financially dependent.'
- P3: 'It depends on family income though.'
- P4: 'Yes, some can afford them so they have no problems. They have the right to buy them. If you can't afford them, just don't do it.' (ML1)

The following statements were made by a group of male adolescents from a private university where tuition fees are extremely high.

- R: 'What do you think about the young using 20,000-30,000-Baht (£ 294-441) worth bags?'
- P1: 'If you can afford them, that's fine.'
- P2: 'I think that is so ridiculous. When I was in France, I saw people waiting in line to buy *Louis (Vuitton)* bags. 99% of them were Japanese and Asians. I just don't know what to say... (shaking his head).'
- R: 'But some people think it's the quality that counts.'
- P2: 'It depends. Ok, you say *Louis (Vuitton)* bags are quality. I think they get as worn out as the counterfeits. Why don't you try to cut them up? It's unnecessary to buy that expensive stuff...' (ML2)

It is obvious that one of the respondents (P2) expressed his strong disapproval of people using expensive accessories. The words used and the way he boldly talked with an upset tone shows a considerable degree of rejection. Further, one point I find worth making is that the types of academic institutions sampled in this study do not always determine participants' family income or class. Although this student attended an expensive university, he still perceived using high-priced fashion items as irrational. However, these discussions reveal that many teens value brand-name fashion products. This finding strongly supports Souninen's (2001) views that to many young people, certain products are seen as status objects that are used to gain one appreciation from peers (p. 214).

Summary

As discussed earlier, young people use media for, among others, identity formation and cultural identification. Group discussions suggest that Bangkok teenagers conformed to celebrities' fashions in different ways. For example, girls learned from the media

especially magazines and television that dressing in a certain way could be considered very fashionable and could attract attention from the opposite sex (Arnett, 1995). Boys, on the other hand, from watching music videos learned how to dress in certain ways to identify their membership of a given youth sub-culture.

Regardless of the fashion aspect, it is clear that not all Bangkok teenagers were affected by celebrity culture and those who were, were not influenced to the same degree. According to the findings, not every area of fashion played an equal role in individuals' personal styles. In addition, comfort, self-confidence, parental approval, and suitability were major considerations when adolescents dealt with fashion aspects.

Generally, young people are susceptible to mediation. Some of the findings here, however, do not support that notion. Several respondents argued that despite celebrities' influence on fashion aspects, they were very conscious about suitability. In spite of their personal acceptance of celebrity styles, they would not imitate or copy them, unless they were certain that those influenced styles suited their personalities and characters. This indicated that besides the desire to be trendy they also want to be satisfied with their looks.

Social learning theory is useful in explaining some of my findings. Although teenagers learn a great deal about all kinds of fashion from celebrities through mass media, they do not simply copy everything because learning and performing are separate processes (Bandura, 1994, p. 69). Some refused to conform to observed behavior because they foresaw potential unsatisfied consequences – they acknowledged that certain fashions were not acceptable in Thai society, therefore, conforming to them could expose them to criticism.

I would however argue, the possibility that these students were not fully able to recognize the actual degree of celebrity influence and their own susceptibility. They may have not been aware that they were influenced, or that they were more or less influenced than they thought they actually were.

Drugs and Alcohol

According to Table 7.1, overall, 55.6 % reported that celebrities' drinking behavior and drugs abuse had very little/no effects on theirs. However, 67.9% were female of both middle and late adolescence. More specifically, Table 7.3 shows the extent to which

Bangkok teenagers in each category were influenced by celebrities’ drugs and alcohol usage.

Table 7.3
Percentage of Degree of Celebrities Influence on Teenagers’ Drugs and Alcohol*

Groups/Degree	Not at all / Very little	Little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely	Total
Male Middle	50.00(7)	28.57(4)	14.28(2)	7.14(1)	00.00(0)	100.00(14)
Female Middle	60.00(9)	20.00(3)	13.33(2)	6.66(1)	00.00(0)	100.00(15)
Male Late	33.33(4)	41.66(5)	25.00(3)	00.00(0)	00.00(0)	100.00(12)
Female Late	76.92(10)	23.08(3)	00.00(0)	00.00(0)	00.00(0)	100.00(13)

* Data were derived from Question 61 (Appendix F). Numbers in brackets represent numbers of respondents.

According to Table 7.3, one high schoolboy and one high schoolgirl were admittedly being influenced by celebrities drinking behavior to a very high degree. On the whole, however, female students were less affected than their male counterparts. The following statements, made by different groups, clearly support the data from the questionnaire, indicating that celebrities’ use of alcohol or drugs had no impact at all on most respondents:

‘Not at all.’ (FM1)

‘Not at all influential. I’m aware of what they’ve done but that doesn’t affect me...’ (FL2)

Although all were aware that drinking and cigarette smoking are not illegal, some argued that individuals had the right to engage in these two activities:

‘It’s just an individual’s right.’ (FM1)

Male high school and university students similarly pointed out that alcohol and drugs abuse was more about individuality than imitation of celebrities’ behavior:

‘About drugs, I think it depends more on individuals because celebrities don’t tell you that they do drugs...’ (MM1)

**‘I think it depends more on individuals. Celebrities don’t intentionally reveal that they use drugs.’
(ML1)**

According to these students, no celebrities would disclose that they use drugs, drink, or smoke yet people would make their own mind up about engaging in such activities or not. However, they seem to be unaware or fail to remember that celebrities are often used in advertising of cigarettes and alcoholic drinks. This is far more powerful than their awareness of celebrities’ using drugs or smoking in real life.

Some teens stated that celebrities made such behavior look normal:

‘I don’t copy them (celebrities) because it’s (drinking or smoking) not good. But they make me think of it as normal.’ (FM1)

‘They make people think that it (drugs and alcohol abuse) is commonplace. But I personally don’t think it is so I don’t do everything they do.’ (FL2)

These statements are consistent with Strasburger’s observation that through mass media, advertising in particular, smokers are depicted as independent, healthy, youthful and adventurous (1995, p. 65). Cultivation analysis helps explain that the more exposure to such media, the more acceptable the teens perceive drinking and smoking. This results in inaccurate perceptions of such activities.

It appears that female university students were very critical of this issue. They saw themselves as mature enough to make sensible judgments. They were also able to elaborate critically on their responses:

P1: ‘No, they have no influence on my daily life.’

P2: ‘It’s like those people are too far to be connected with us.’ (FL1)

P1: ‘Absolutely not. I’m just aware of what they do but they don’t effect my reasoning or make me want to try to do the same.’

P2: ‘No, we’re grown ups. We’re all college students. We rationalize what we should or should not copy...We’ve learned how dreadful drugs are...’ (FL2)

Although most students admitted that drinking alcohol was not good, 61.1% found social drinking acceptable. Surprisingly, social drinking and cigarette smoking

were not only acceptable among male respondents but also among female counterparts of both age groups. Some openly expressed their views as follows:

‘I drink just to socialize with friends but I’m not able to do exactly what celebrities do. They’re rich, they can go out every night.’ (MM2)

‘Drugs addicts disgust me. Alcohol and smoking are common...’ (ML2)

‘Smoking is acceptable but using drugs is absolutely not.’ (FM2)

‘They (celebrities) don’t have any effects on me. Using drugs isn’t good. Alcohol drinking and cigarette smoking are acceptable, if exercised occasionally.’ (FM2)

Overall, 76.9% of male and 60.7% female respondents reported drinking occasionally. This is regarded as a considerably high percentage. With much lower percentage, 15.4% of male and 4.6% of female teenagers reported smoking occasionally. One explanation to the fact that drinking was more acceptable than smoking could be that many of the teens themselves consumed alcohol and smoked.

One female student who quit smoking after having seen a documentary on extremely ill smokers, not only admitted trying illegal drugs but also had knowledge of how they were used among young people.

‘For E (ecstasy), you can’t mix it in the water, you have to take it as a tablet... I’ve tried it. It really has to be taken intentionally, nobody can drug you with E...’ (FL2)

This girl went on explaining how ecstasy has usually been taken by young people and how the young have been taught how to get away without being caught. Her knowledge of fatal drugs also surprised other members of the group. This suggests that the young learn more about drugs from friends than from media figures. They, therefore, tended to believe that celebrities had no effects on them in relation to this issue.

Almost all respondents disagreed that being aware of celebrities’ involvement with drugs and alcohol influenced them to use or try them. Rather they agreed that peer pressure was one of the most influential factors that affected themselves and teenagers in general to get involved in consuming alcohol and using drugs (Coleman & Hendry, 1999) (discussed in detail in the next section).

‘Celebrities don’t influence but friends do...’ (ML1)

One participant argued that although teens were influenced by celebrities’ fashion styles, the famous would not influence young people in terms of drugs and alcohol use. Rather, in her view, there were other factors:

‘Not at all, not even on junior high school students. Although celebrities have impacts on fashion they don’t influence the teens on alcohol or drug abuse. It all depends on individuals, peers and environment.’ (FL1)

Summary

Obviously, all focus group participants disapproved of drug abuse. Apart from their knowledge that drugs are illegal, they were all aware of potential consequences. Many criticized celebrity anti-drugs campaigners for not being ‘genuine’ role models due mainly to their own drug abuse. Although the students themselves drink and smoke cigarettes, celebrities have nothing to do with their intentions or decisions to drink or smoke. Rather, this matter is quite individual. Most believed that they had the right to do so. Psychologically, the young tend to care more about how their peers think of them when they have decided whether or not to drink or smoke, or even experiment with illegal drugs (Strasburger, 1995).

Socialization was the reason most mentioned for why the respondents drink. Most agreed that drinking to socialize with friends on occasions was very common, alcohol consumption was widely acceptable and was not seen as bad or inappropriate. The questionnaire showed that 61.1% considered drinking alcohol as a common social activity. However, the percentage (76.9%) in male groups was significantly higher than that of females (46.4%). Interestingly, although 65.4% of male students disagreed with cigarette smoking, the questionnaire showed that 15.4% smoked occasionally while 7.7% smoked regularly, all of who were in late adolescence. On the other hand, almost all (96.4%) females did not smoke at all whereas only one (3.6%) reported smoking regularly.

Although most students agreed that celebrities’ drinking, smoking, or drug taking in real life had no impact on them, they believed that such activities could influence other

teenagers, especially younger ones. Peer pressure was agreed to be a more influential factor for these activities. Adolescent psychology suggests that peer pressure is important (e.g. Strasburger, 1995). Being challenged or encouraged by friends to smoke, drink or use drugs is quite normal during adolescence. Most teens find it difficult or impossible to refuse the offer due mainly to the fear of loosing face (Lindon, 1996.). Further, many considered these activities common. It is possible that they have learned from mass media (without recognizing it) that such practices constitute normal behavior (Atkin, 1993; Kilbourne, 1990, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 59).

Some findings support earlier studies that one behavior could lead to another. Adolescent smokers and drinkers are more likely to use fatal drugs such as cocaine or heroin while cigarettes may lead to alcohol use (Bailey, 1992; Mayer & Brown, 1994, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 60). Some students argued that alcohol consumption may lead to the use of fatal drugs such as ecstasy, especially in pubs and discotheques where many youngsters hang out.

Relationships and Sexuality

Surprisingly, as shown in Table 7.1, in overall, 35.2% (of which 46.2 % were male) reported that celebrities had impacts on their attitudes toward relationships and sexuality to a moderate degree, while 33.3% (of which 46.4% were females) were not at all/very little influenced by the famous. Table 7.4 breaks down the degree of influence on relationship and sexuality in each group.

Table 7.4

Percentage of Degree of Celebrities Influence on Teenagers’ Relationship and Sexuality*

Groups/Degree	Not at all/ Very little	Little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely	Total
Male Middle	21.43(3)	35.71(5)	28.57(4)	7.14(1)	00.00(0)	92.85%(13)**
Female Middle	26.66(4)	26.66(4)	40.00(6)	6.66(1)	00.00(0)	100.00(15)
Male Late	16.66(2)	16.66(2)	66.66(8)	00.00(0)	00.00(0)	100.00(12)
Female Late	69.23(9)	23.08(3)	2.70(1)	00.00(0)	00.00(0)	100.00(13)

* Data were derived from Question 63 (Appendix F). Numbers in brackets represent numbers of respondents

** One respondent (7.15 %) failed to answer.

Table 7.4 shows that one high schoolboy and one high schoolgirl admitted being influenced by celebrities’ relationships and sexuality to a very high degree. Almost 70% of older females reported that celebrities had no/very little effect upon them, indicating their conservatism.

When asked if celebrities had any impact upon their sexual attitudes, most male and female respondents argued that the famous did not alter their attitudes toward sexuality. It appears that they still perceive this matter in the same way in accordance with their personal ideologies. The following are some excerpts from the discussions:

- P1: ‘Not at all.’
- P2: ‘No.’
- P3: ‘No, but they just make me aware that more and more people are more open.’
- P4: ‘No.’
- P5: ‘No.’
- P6: ‘Well, it doesn’t bother me. She (Angelina Joile) doesn’t disgust me but I just don’t like that (bisexuality). She couldn’t change my attitude.’ (FM1)

‘No, they (celebrities) don’t change my views. I don’t care about them anyway...’ (ML1)

- P1: ‘No, they (celebrities) don’t change my attitude. I personally don’t care much about them. I don’t know, I don’t like them... ‘It’s their business. But sometimes they overdo, like telling the public that they’re gay...’
- P2: ‘I agree. Like you said, they shouldn’t have overplayed.’ (ML1)

‘... It’s their business, it’s a personal matter. But they should behave themselves though.’ (ML1)

‘Not at all, they don’t change the way I think.’ (FL2)

These remarks indicate that attitudes newly learned from the media may not easily alter individuals’ previous attitudes and perceptions. Some also confidently pointed out that they would not copy celebrities’ sexual behavior although they realized that some unusual sexual practices have become more common and acceptable in Thai society. The following statements show their strong determinations:

‘Not at all but celebrities just make me realize what they do.’ (FM1)

‘No effects on me...’ (ML1)

‘They don’t influence me at all...’ (FL1)

P1: ‘It’s their business... I don’t imitate them. They have no effect on me.’

P2: ‘No effect.’

P3: ‘Not on me either. People live their own lives. Kong’s case, for example, makes me feel like ...I personally don’t think he’s done this intentionally to be an example. So it makes me think why more people cohabit, rather than think like, ‘Hey that’s good to cohabit.’

P4: ‘No, it’ll be all your decision to cohabit or have sex with someone. You wouldn’t go like, ‘Hey, celebrities can do it, so can you’. They have nothing to do with you. It depends totally on you. I’m mature and suppose I wanted to sleep with someone, I’d go head, I wouldn’t think about celebrities... They don’t influence me.’ (FL2)

When arguing that celebrities had no effect on their sexual behavior, most made their statements confidently, using strong words such as *not at all*. To some extent others admitted to being influenced yet did not imitate any sexual practices. The following remarks made by two female respondents indicate that some information they acquired recently did not correspond to their cultural ideologies. This results in some impact and confusion:

‘People often say that this matter (sex) is commonplace so I sometimes get confused. But I personally don’t imitate them because I believe that that’s (either cohabitation or premarital sexuality) unacceptable in Thai society...’ (FL1)

‘They (celebrities) influence my views by making me realize that it (uncommon sexuality) is commonplace. But I don’t copy them.’ (FL1)

Another point worth making is that teenagers use mediated knowledge in numerous ways. According to uses and gratifications, people use mass media for information, knowledge, and understanding (Katz, Gurevitch & Hass, 1973). Individuals often relate what they have observed from mass media to their own lives (e.g. Ang, 1985; Cantor & Pingree 1983; Lee & Cho, 1990; Lewis & Hirano, 2001). The following example shows how one student used his knowledge about media figures’ sexuality:

‘No effect on me. Mostly, I use celebrities experiences as examples to teach others...’ (ML2)

This statement suggests that individuals not only use information obtained from the media for themselves but also for others. This social integration is one of the four mass media functions (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972), used as a social utility of information in conversation.

While discussing this issue, many participants happened to focus greatly on the topic of premarital sex. Another relevant issue: public display of affection was also brought up. The following section demonstrates these two aspects.

Premarital and Premature Sex

As the word indicates, premarital sex refers to sexual relations between two unmarried individuals while in this study premature sex refers to sexual relations between individuals who are still in school or college (for their first degree). It is surprising that two groups of female university students made very similar remarks concerning students in their second year of junior high school (M.2). According to these informants' views junior high school students, representing early adolescents, are easily persuaded and influenced while their senior counterparts are more mature. The following comments made by these respondents show how they perceived sexual behavior of the younger teenagers:

P1: 'They've (younger teens) had sex when they were in high school.'

P2: 'In junior high.'

P3: 'Yes, junior and senior high school students.'

P1: 'Then they got pregnant when they were 15. I'm like...(paused).'

P3: 'Yes, as we can see...' (FL1)

P1: M. 1³ students are new and still adapting in the new environment.

P2: Yes, they are.

P3: That's right.

P4: The M. 2 are absolutely getting to learn things.

P1: The M. 3 are busy getting ready for senior high school level and they're not that bad. But the M. 2 are absolutely extreme.

P2: Yes, these days M. 2 students are absolutely extremists. (FL2)

³ M. 1 (Mattayomsuksa 1) students refer to those attending the first year of junior high school, M. 2 and M. 3, the second and the third years respectively. These are equivalent to the UK Years 7, 8, and 9 respectively.

- P1: M. 2 students are extreme.
P2: They are sex experts.
P3: Boy, they would go, 'This (sex) is very normal stuff.' Boy, we might get too old now.
(FL2)

As mentioned earlier, in relation to the third person effect, individuals tend to assume that others are more likely than themselves to be affected by mass media. However, my belief is that these older adolescents see their younger counterparts to be engaged in sexual activities with immature thoughts, misperceptions, and misunderstanding. According to these older students, the younger ones do not take sexual relationships as seriously as they do. They speculated that younger students were engaged in such sexual behavior just to prove their maturity and to beat their peers (Lindon, 1996) and such perceptions have already become values for early teenagers. This has been supported by some observational studies (e.g. Suthisakorn, 2001, p. 32). It is obvious, however, that while all participants in both age groups argued that celebrities' sexual behavior could affect young people's attitudes, they always seemed to exclude themselves.

The data show that 25% of female and 38.5% of male students in this study perceived premarital sex as commonplace. Only 3.7% (one male and one female university students) were in favor of such sexual behavior. Nonetheless, despite their perceptions toward these sexual practices and the older respondent's views about younger counterparts' sexual values, questionnaires revealed some discrepancies. According to the data, three male and two female university students (9.3%) reported having had sexual relationships with their boy/girlfriends or someone they knew. Most (77.8%), however, reported having had no sexual relationship while 13% were disinclined to comment.

Public Displays of Affection

Despite disapproval and personal conflicts young people, even students in school uniforms, express their affection in public especially in shopping malls. Most respondents (53.7%) disagreed with public displays of affection, while only 1.9% stated otherwise and 29.6% perceived it as commonplace. However, expression of affection could mean various activities, ranging from holding hands to kissing.

Most participants view hand holding as commonplace while kissing is regarded as inappropriate.

P1: 'Public display of affection is not good.'

P2: 'In public, holding hands is ok.'

R: 'You think holding hands is common?'

All: 'It's common.' (FM2)

Considering cultural differences, most students felt that kissing was considered detrimental to Thai society while it was common in the West.

P1: 'It's common.'

P2: 'Hand holding is considered common but kissing is too much.'

P3: 'It's common in the West.'

P2: 'Society is important. Thai society is different from the West. Here kissing in public is not appropriate.' (MM1)

P1: 'It's not good.'

P2: 'In France, when I saw people do it, it didn't bother me. But I feel uncomfortable when I see Thais do it. I think it has to do with cultural differences.'

P3: 'It's a different society.' (ML2)

It is obvious that the respondents' awareness of cultural differences between Thai and western societies concerning this matter results in their disapproval of such behavior. As discussed earlier, Thai women are not supposed to express their sexual desires and public displays of affection are a taboo (Cooper & Cooper, 1991).

Summary

As established in Chapter 6, the concept of sexual practices such as bisexuality, homosexuality, cohabitation, and premarital sex are no longer new to Thai society. Not only did the respondents all recognize such sexual orientations and activities, many had personal experiences or had direct contact with people who did, such as friends. Not surprisingly, there are some discrepancies between data obtained from questionnaires and those from focus group discussions. According to the questionnaire, 35.2% were moderately influenced by celebrities' relationships and sexuality. On the other hand,

focus group discussions showed that none of the respondents admitted to being affected by the famous to any extent. One possible explanation could be that the teenage respondents found it easier to answer sensitive questions in the questionnaire than face to face in group discussions in the presence of others.

Adolescents (43%) of both genders agreed that they learned and obtained most information on sex and relationships from the media, particularly movies, videos and magazines. Further, many admitted that they also learned from and discussed this issue with friends. All felt that sex education received in school or from family was far from sufficient. However, the data from the questionnaire reveal that male and female respondents differ in their views regarding sexuality and relationships. As anticipated, the percentage of male students who perceived premarital sex (38.5%) cohabitation (46.2%), and public displays of affection (38.5%) as commonplace is higher than those of female counterparts (25.0%, 42.9% and 21.4% respectively). This suggests that girls are more conservative than are boys. One explanation is that Thai girls are more aware of the cultural restrictions since by and large they pay a higher price for flaunting them than males. This cultural ideology is a significant factor that results in different worldviews. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that although they may not practice such activities themselves, they disapprove more of public displays of affection than of premarital sex and cohabitation.

Sexuality is a truly personal and private matter and discussion about sex generates awkwardness in Thailand. Therefore, it is an uncomfortable topic to discuss either within family or at school. Nevertheless, most teenage participants pointed out that individuals should use their own judgment in respect to this matter. I would also argue that even if the sexual practices of celebrities actually affected or altered their attitudes they would be unlikely to recognize or even to admit it. One explanation could be that since this matter is very sensitive and personal, people would hardly admit to being affected themselves, rather they would assume that others are more influenced, as the third person effect theory hypothesizes. With the presence of their peers, there was no possibility that any of these students would admit being homosexual, bisexual, or simply having had sex. This results in slight discrepancies between the data from questionnaires and those from focus group discussions.

It remains difficult to establish to what extent Bangkok youngsters were actually conscious of the degree of influence in relation to the three issues covered. Most of them

tended to believe that celebrities had more effect upon others than on themselves. It is clear that celebrities had more effect upon these youth's fashion than on the other two issues. The degree of influence differs from one individual to another. Most agreed that peer pressure was the most important factor in terms of attitudes and behavior toward drugs and alcohol as well as relationships and sexuality. The next section addresses what roles peer groups play in young's people lives in relation to the social issues.

Section II Peers VS Celebrity Influences

This section discusses the importance of peer pressure in teenagers' attitudes and behavior. Adolescent psychology tells us that peer groups play a considerably vital role in young people's lives (detailed in Chapter 2). A wide range of studies on adolescents have shown that in this stage of life, young people isolate themselves from family and spend a great deal of time with friends both at and outside school. Peer groups become significantly important to adolescents of all stages. Peers tend to like similar things, have similar tastes and do similar activities. Young people also use media with friends. They go to the movies together and often share magazines, books, CDs, videos, etc. With so much time spent together peers influence each other on many different levels.

During all group discussions, it became clear that all Bangkok teenagers agreed peer groups were their most influential determinant, having a great impact on all discussed issues. They maintained that peers were more influential than media figures, especially in relation to the issues of extravagant lifestyle, drugs and alcohol abuse, and premarital sex.

- P1: 'I think peers are more influential than celebrities.'
- P2: 'That's true.'
- R: 'In what aspect?'
- P1: 'I think in every aspect.'
- P3: 'Almost every aspect.'
- P2 'Besides, you live together like this...'
- P1: 'Like living in the same dorm.'
- P2: 'You leave your family and you spend almost 24 hours a day with friends.'
- P1: 'You just see celebrities on TV. Unlike friends, celebrities don't hang out with you, you don't have personal contact with them.' (ML2)

The above conversation supports such notions as young people spend more time with friends than with family, and friends play a significant role in their lives. Some students pointed to the concept of physical contact and media exposure – celebrities were just media figures with whom they had no direct contact. I believe that it would be necessary to include the discussion of peer pressure in this study. The next parts discuss the influence of peer groups concerning the three specific issues.

Fashion

Although most students admitted that to some extent celebrities influenced their attitudes and behavior toward fashion, they agreed that peer group also had an impact on this matter. It is quite common that young people, girls in particular, go shopping for clothes and fashion accessories together. As young people tend to have similar tastes, they believe that friends know better than their parents about what to wear, and what is trendy.

Some mentioned that they helped each other pick what suited them most. They also made comments and gave advice as to what was in fashion. Generally, adolescents are also aware of where to go for fashion items, mainly through friends and mass media.

P1: 'Yes, friends help you, like...(paused)'.

P2: 'Very much. They give you comments, ideas...' (FM1)

P1: 'Sometimes you get ideas from friends. It's like, 'Hey, that's cool.'

P2: 'Peer groups are the most influential.'

R: 'Do you all agree with that?'

P3: 'Yes, I do.'

P1: 'Yes, friends are number one.' (MM1)

P1: 'Very much.'

P2: 'Because when you dress in style, you go see friends not celebrities.' (MM1)

As adolescents value peer acceptance or the approval of their friends (Lindon, 1996), they try to do what most people in their age do. The following statement indicates how important it is for young people to be socially accepted in a group:

'If you don't dress like most people do, you wouldn't be accepted in the society.' (MM2)

Teenagers are even marked or defined partly by their costuming (Durham, 1999). These identifiers often clearly indicate to which group young people belong. When discussing the issue of extravagance, all participants believed that peer-group pressure and the society in which adolescents live play the most crucial role. These essential factors influence adolescents' attitudes and behavior toward lavish lifestyles. When asked how much influence peers have on each other with regard to this issue they made the following comments demonstrating similar views:

'Yes, social group... if you go to an average school, there's no problem. But if you don't, then social group and peers are influential. You'd feel you must have this and that... It depends more on a social group. It has nothing to do with celebrities.' (FL2)

P1: 'Very much.'

P2: 'Influential.'

P3: 'Very much.'

P4: 'Well, adolescents and peers.'

P1: 'Especially girls, when one has something new, others feel inferior.'

R: 'Really?'

P1: 'That's true.'

P2: 'For example, if you were in a group of four and three had mobile phones but you didn't. You'd go like, 'what do I do now? I have to get one too.'

P3: 'It depends on where you are and many other factors.'

P4: 'It depends on society.'

P2: 'It depends on people in a society as to whether or not they look down on others.' (ML1)

These conversations are self-explanatory, indicating that peer pressure is more influential than celebrities. These students also confirm the claim that teenagers, girls in particular, are very conscious about possessing fashion items that their friends own. This concept is consistent with Souninen's discussion on status objects – to children and teenagers, it is important to own certain objects because everyone has them and owning them can earn one appreciation from peers (2001, p. 214). The respondents further argued that young people with such misperceived ideas use such expensive items to compete with one another and look down upon the unprivileged:

P1: 'Teenagers compete with each other'

P2: 'Yes, they do.'

P3: 'It's like, 'you have it, so do I.' (FM2)

- P1: 'Teenagers are just like this. They also look down upon others like...'
P2: 'Seeing others as inferior.'
R: 'So they compare themselves to others?'
P1: 'Yes.'
P2: 'Because they use authentic stuff and when they see others use fake ones, they'd go like
'Well, mine is real stuff.' (FL2)

These young students discussed this issue based mainly on either their personal knowledge or direct experience. This suggests that they have encountered or known someone who behaves in such a way. Male respondents also addressed similar observations:

'Some teens imitate their friends. It's like people have something, so you have to have it too.'
(MM1)

- P1: 'I think that Thai people like to show off and compete with each other for expensive stuff just to brag that they are wealthier, things like that...'
P2: 'That's true. They do... They buy expensive things mainly just to show them off to others.' (ML2)

Clearly, when discussing this issue, the students put an emphasis on why today's teenagers use expensive fashion items. The most common reason could be that while some youngsters try to be superior, showing off what costly fashion articles they possess, others try to be equally trendy by using and owning the same items.

Drugs and Alcohol

Most male and female respondents agreed that peer group pressure was one of the most important factors, affecting teenagers to start drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and in the worst case, using drugs. Consistent with Coleman and Hendry's (1999) view, young people are encouraged to engage in smoking, drinking, sex and drugs by peers. On the contrary, they argued that celebrities did not shape their smoking and drinking behavior. Personally, I believe that the peer factor could be the main reason that some respondents themselves got into some of these activities because they smoked and/or drank occasionally.

When asked how much influence peers have on their alcohol and tobacco use, some made lucid explanations:

‘Very much. For example, if you hung out with friends who were drug addicts, you would tend to do the same things. But if you hung out with friends who were geeks, you would be the same, you couldn’t be different...’ (FM2)

P1: ‘Very much.’

P2: ‘Yes.’

P3: ‘They persuade each other.’

P4: ‘Yeah, they do.’ (MM1)

According to these participants, peers are a group of people with who they spend time and hang out, whereas celebrities only exist in the media and have no direct contact with them.

‘It (alcohol and drugs abuse) begins with friends, really. ...It has nothing to do with celebrities, or wanting to imitate them. Well, celebrities smoke, teens follow? No, I don’t think so.’ (ML2)

P1: ‘This has more to do with peers than with celebrities.’

P2: ‘Yeah, peers.’ (FL2)

Some described potential situations young people tend to get themselves into as follows:

P1: ‘If your friends started (engaging in those activities), you’d follow them.’

P2: ‘If your friends told you to try it, you’d have to. You probably can’t say no.’

P3: ‘That’s right.’

P2: ‘Even if you don’t want to but they’d go like, ‘Well, just a bit.’

P3: ‘Yeah, just a bit.’

P2: ‘So you can’t say no.’ (FL1)

P1: ‘It’s probably because of the environment. Or you see friends do it and then you’d go like, ‘Well, it’s tempting.’

P2: ‘Sometimes you don’t want to do it but friends push you. They’re like, ‘Come on, try it.’ and then after a while you’d go like, ‘Well, it’s fun.’ (FL2)

Male students were very articulate about this issue. This could be because generally male adolescents regard drinking and smoking as a macho activity (Strasburger, 1995). The following statements made by male respondents indicate how they valued peer acceptance:

‘You want to look cool in front of your peers. You want them to accept you.’ (MM1)

P1: ‘I just drink a bit.’

R: ‘When you go to parties, don’t you?’

P1: ‘Yes, that’s right otherwise I loose face to friends. But I don’t do drugs...’ (MM2)

‘You just talk about celebrities but you don’t want to imitate them. I think it has to do more with wanting to beat over your peers.’ (ML2)

The above discussions evidently show peer pressure has an impact on them and their decisions whether to try cigarettes or alcohol. Their statements support Lindon’s (1996) observation that adolescents find it difficult and in some cases impossible to resist peers’ offers to experiment with alcohol, cigarettes or even drugs. As peer acceptance means a great deal to young people (Lindon, 1996), several respondents admitted that turning down the offers could mean loosing face and that made them feel or look ‘un-cool.’ This, however, could indicate that some perceived such activities as what Lindon calls ‘a necessary addition to a stylish image’ (1996, p. 181). Despite peer pressure, some students pointed out that the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs also depended upon an individuals’ own sensibility. Not all teens would try drinking, smoking or using drugs because of peers’ influence. Rather, if they had a strong character and were determined not to do what they considered inappropriate they could resist the temptation.

‘... Teens always discuss problems with peers. But for drugs, no matter how hard they try to persuade you, it all depends on you whether to try them or not.’ (MM2)

‘No, celebrities don’t influence me but peers do. However, I can control myself...’ (ML1)

Apart from peer and society influences, stress and failure could encourage teens to smoke, drink or even use drugs.

‘Like ... (a male name), for example, he smokes a lot because he’s stressed out with his studies. And his friends copy him, now they all become smokers. That’s terrible.’ (FL1)

Additionally, one group of male students pointed out the influence of mass media on young people’s drinking and smoking behavior, which I will address in the last section.

Relationships and Sexuality

I found it noteworthy that almost all groups of participants brought to notice a school environment, which seemed to be one of the most powerful and influential factors leading some teenagers to become homosexual. They were also able to address various examples of how societal influence affect young people’s sexual behavior:

P1: ‘For some, I think, err... A female friend of mine went to a girl school. She could have been straight but she went to that school, so she was like...

P2: ‘They copy each other.’

P1: ‘Yes, they do and when she moved to a unisex school, boys hit on her, and she had a boyfriend and then she’s changed.’ (FM1)

P1: ‘It sometimes has to do with society, social group, like girl schools...

Many: ‘Yeah.’

P1: ‘There are *toms* (tomboys) and stuff like that. (FL1)

‘Very much, I think. Well, let’s leave a straight man with gays, he could become gay too, I think. Generally, people hang out with ones who like or do similar things. (ML2)

These statements show that the informants were well aware of how powerful environment was in altering people’s attitudes and behavior over time. This by no means indicates that a given surrounding would affect everyone. Yet, it is more likely that those who are sensitive and vulnerable to such environments will be more easily affected. One female respondent herself has experienced such environmental influences and openly shared her direct and personal experience:

P1: ‘I went to a unisex junior high school and I liked boys so at the time I wondered how on earth girls liked girls. But when I went to a girl senior high school, I myself liked girls too. It was like, I couldn’t get to find any boy.’

- All: (laugh)
- P2: 'You thought that girls were cool at that point.'
- P1: 'It was just like it only happened right at that given period and I'm now in college, I don't like girls anymore, I just like boys as I did before.'
- R: 'So it is all about environmental influence?'
- All: 'Yes.' (FL1)

The above discussions obviously indicate that respondents felt peer group and school environment have a great impact on homosexual behavior during adolescence. Such sexual experimentation is not uncommon, however, in many cases such behavior is short-term. Most experts recognize sexuality as a continuum between complete heterosexuality at one extreme and complete homosexual orientation at the other with most individuals somewhere in between. While all individuals have a sexual *preference*, the strength of the preference and whether or not it is followed can be driven by circumstance. Adolescents frequently find themselves in same sex groups and this in addition to their strong hormonal drives can lead them to indulge in homosexual activities which may be contrary to their actual preference. As teens grow older and have increased contact with members of the opposite sex preferences tend to be more adhered to.

As mentioned previously, young people's attitudes toward relationships and sexuality, pre-marital sex in particular, have changed a great deal compared to those of their parents'. Some are more likely to view sexual activity as a proof of maturity (Lindon, 1996), allowing them to boast among their peers (e.g. Suthisakorn, 2001). One group of respondents made an ironic comment:

- P1: 'Nowadays' early teenagers go like, 'I *got* that guy already (sarcastically taking with pride).'
- All (Laugh)
- P1: 'To them it's become commonplace.'
- P2: 'Yes, that's exactly what they really say.' (FL2)

In addition, one female student shared her conversation with a seventh grade boy who was 11 but has already had sex with his classmate:

'He was a bit shy but he seemed kind of proud that he was able to do it, even he's only a seventh grader.' (FL2)

To adolescents, parents and adults have become less understanding whereas friends understand them better and allow them to be themselves (Lindon, 1996). As a group of students expressed:

- P1: 'You don't listen to your parents.'
- P2: 'You listen to friends.'
- P3: 'That's right.'
- P1: 'Peers and society play a major part. When you were young, you were close to your parents...'
- P2: 'That's right.'
- P1: 'You used to go shopping with your parents... Now things have changed... Parents spend less time with you. Well, they still discipline you but they aren't as influential as your peers.'
- P2: 'You listen less to your parents. You'd go like, 'Everybody does that, why can't I?, things like that.' (FL2)

This discussion supports the notion that for adolescents, friends are more influential than parents. More importantly, their comments are consistent with Strasburger's observation that heavy media use may reinforce young people's feelings that everyone is *doing it* and encourage them to have sexual intercourse at the early age (1995, p. 44).

As stated previously, there have been debates on insufficient sex education in Thailand (e.g. Bunnag, 2000; Chupaka, p. 2002; "Junior high school," 2001). One reason is that sex is regarded as a taboo and a very awkward topic to discuss. Unsurprisingly, all focus group participants agreed that sex education provided in school was far from adequate for them. According to the questionnaire, 46.3% received most information about sex from mass media and 31.5% from friends, while 18.5% from classrooms. As both male and female teens put it:

- P1: 'Mostly from friends.'
- P2: 'Yeah.'
- P3: 'They give you advice.' (MM1)
- R: 'Do you learn anything about sex from friends?'
- All: 'Yes.'
- R: 'How about from the media?'
- P1: 'Yes, then I pass it onto friends.'

All: (Laugh) (FM2)

Some girls even admitted seeking for such information from their male friends. The following discussion shows how these girls obtain the sex information they need:

P1: 'Sex education in class isn't enough at all. You have to learn from friends.

P2: 'Also from talking to and asking male friends.'

R: 'Do you receive lots of information about it from the media?'

P1: 'Mostly from friends.' (FM1)

Respondents' accounts reveal that young people normally talk and share information about sex with friends. This suggests that friends are an important source of information about sex for young people and that they are in need of such important information, which is inadequately and improperly given in classrooms (e.g. Bunnag, 2002; Chupaka, 2002). This finding is strongly consistent with what American researchers have found. Young people rank the media behind peers and parents as sources of information about sex. In addition, they also show greater peer influence on sexual attitudes and behavior (Strasburger, 1995, p. 41). More importantly, peer influence (Fine, 1988, cited in Garner, Sterk & Adams, 1998, p. 60) and the popular media (e.g. Moore & Rosenthal; Thompson, 1995, cited in Garner et al., 1995, p. 60) compensate for the lack of sex education in school.

This section provided evidence that all teenagers agreed peer pressure was particularly significant. Although most agreed that celebrity culture had some impact on their dress style and body adornment, they maintained that the peer group pressure was more influential when it came to extravagance, abuse of drugs, tobacco and alcohol, and premarital sex. It is worth noting that to most of these Bangkok teenagers, celebrities only existed in the media whereas they have physical contact with their peers with whom they spend a great deal of time. Being well aware of the role of mass media, Bangkok youth are active and critical media consumers. The next section provides discussions how these youngsters perceive the roles of mass media in a consumerist society.

Section III Bangkok Teenagers' Perceptions of Media Roles

This section provides evidence that the young's awareness of the role of mass media affects the way in which they interpret media texts about celebrities. Not only are young people a major group of media consumers, they are also active and involved (Jeffres, 1994). The findings prove that most Bangkok youngsters, particularly those in late adolescence, were well aware of media roles. Their awareness of media, as the findings clearly suggest, is one of their main decoding tools. I will begin with a brief discussion of their media usage and concentrate the discussion on the role of media in their own views.

Adolescents' Media Usage in Brief

It is useful to briefly address the media consumption of focus group participants in order to give an overall idea of what these teens actually used on a daily basis. Consistent with uses and gratifications theory, they use different media for different purposes. Media diaries reveal that boys read specific magazines, especially sports, computer, and technology, while girls read more teen and womens magazines. This supports the concept that difference in gender plays an important role in media consumption of individuals (e.g. Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995; Panich, 1995). As one group of male students reveal:

- R: 'Does any of you read 'Soccer'?'
P1: 'I do.'
P2: 'Regularly.'
P3: 'Everyday' (ML1)

According to the following discussion, the students were well aware of the need of social integration, which is one of the various functions that mass media perform (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972):

- R: 'What kind of magazine column do you normally read?'
P1: 'Sports'
P2: 'It's teen stuff that you have to know or you get out-of-date. (MM1)

Like other groups of people, youngsters use mass media for social utility of information in conversations. Interestingly, how a medium presents its image could either encourage or discourage the audience. As male freshmen put it:

- P1: 'For me, it depends on what's on the magazine cover, like...(interrupted)'
 P2: 'Like 'Safer Sex.' (pointing at *Cleo* magazine)
 All: (laugh) (ML1)

Interestingly, magazine issues have been reportedly sold out because of their covers. This is particularly true in such cases as appearances of female stars in swimsuits or popular celebrity couples. As mentioned previously, almost half of informants (46.3%) admitted that mass media were their primary source of information and knowledge about sexuality. More specifically, 33% reported receiving such information from books most, followed by film and magazines, 24.1% and 22.2% respectively.

According to uses and gratifications, mass media provide information to fulfill users' cognitive needs (Katz, Gurevitch & Hass, 1973). That is, people use media to acquire information, knowledge, and understanding. The following conversations show that Bangkok teens found new information about sex provided in magazines useful for them:

- R: 'Do you read articles about sex in magazines?'
 P1: 'Yes, I do.'
 P2: 'I like them.'
 R: 'Do you find them useful?'
 P3: 'Very useful.' (FM1)
- P1: '... I read articles about sex. But it's just part of the reason I read this magazine (*Cosmopolitan*). It's relaxing.'
 P2: 'Relaxing?'
 All: (laugh)
 P1: 'Well, seriously. You also get to learn something too.'
 P2: 'Yes, that's right.'
 P1: 'There's nothing wrong with sex. When I read it, I go like, 'Well, that's how you're supposed to do it, stuff like that. If its cover wasn't about sex, most people wouldn't buy it.'
 All: (Laugh)
 P1: 'I'm serious. Most of my friends think so...' (FL2)

These discussions reveal that young people use mass media to look for information they need in everyday life. Since most feel there is insufficient sex education

in school and are uncomfortable talking about sex with parents or other adults, mass media and friends seem to act as their primary sources. As another male student puts it:

P1: 'I must admit that I use all kinds of media for information about sex (laugh), magazines, VDOs, film. But I just use them to educate myself and that doesn't make me want to try anything.'

Many: 'Boo' (teasing and laughing)

P1: 'Well, it makes me realize what sex's all about. It's natural for human beings...' (ML1)

With the notion of uses and gratification, mass media, in this case magazines and videos, can offer the most direct information when young people lack experiences and interpersonal advice required to serve their information needs (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

Availability of time and channel loyalty are other factors that influence media usage. One communication arts student explained some media consumption patterns of Thai people in general:

'... For example, you know that some television programs are good. How come they aren't popular?... It's because of bad PR. It doesn't only depend on good quality but there are also many other factors such as program host, channel. People usually stick with some particular channels and times.'

(FL2)

The following parts discuss how Bangkok teenagers viewed the role of mass media. It is clear that many of them, especially 11 mass communication students, were well-aware not only of the role of but also of the characteristics of mass media. In many cases, their awareness helped them read media texts and become more critical in their interpretations.

Sexually Oriented Media Content

Harris (1994) has argued that issues about sex are at the heart of several major social problems in the world today. Thailand is not an exception. Such issues range from premarital and premature sex, cohabitation, uncommon sexual behavior to unwanted pregnancy, abortion, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. As mentioned

previously, 46.3% of participants received most of their information about sex from mass media, followed by friends (31.5%) and school (18.5%).

Some pointed out that the older children grow, the more chances they have to be exposed to sexually explicit media content without parental or adult control. This is in part because during adolescence, young people spend less time with parents and more time with peers. One group of female respondents shared the following views:

- P1: '... You used to go to the movies with your parents... But you now hang out and go to the movies with friends. So you don't get proper guidance from parents.'
- P2: 'That's right and now most movies are...(paused)'
- P3: '...In the past, censorship control was strict but nowadays it's not.'
- P2: 'That's right.'
- P3: '... *American Pie* for example.'
- P2: 'Yeah yeah.'
- R: 'Didn't they remove any sexually explicit scenes?'
- P2: 'No, not at all.'
- P1: 'Very graphic' (FL2)

This discussion reveals how easily young people could expose themselves to such media content. Sexual arousal is a straightforward effect of mediated sexuality and exposure to sexually oriented material, especially explicit magazines and video (Harris, 1994, p. 251). The following discussion shows how such materials could sexually stimulate young audience:

- P1: 'It's in part because of the media, I guess. It's like when a boy watches VDOs, he goes like, 'Hey, I want to do that. Let's do it.'
- All: (laugh)
- P1: 'That could cause problems.'
- R: 'So you mean he sees media as a guidance?'
- P1: 'Yes, the media guide him.'
- R: 'As a stimulant?'
- P1: 'Yeah, stimulation.'
- P2: 'Actually, men learn about sex more from books and VDOs than from school.' (ML2)

As Strasburger puts it, "although teenagers are probably not as susceptible as young children to media violence, they may be more susceptible to sexual content (1995, p. 43). Similar to Harris's (1994) study of the US's situation, in Thailand X- and R- rated

films are readily available, though illegal, to teenagers in theaters and video rental stores. One male student expressed his concern over the influence of sexually explicit material on younger people's attitude and behavior as follows:

- P1: 'Second class theatres don't screen audience. I've seen those under 18 go there.'
- P2: 'How did you know that?'
- P1: 'Well, I've been there. They play X-rated movies. Young people might not understand and want to try things. They are teenagers. If they tried things, they could get in trouble, like unwanted pregnancy.' (ML1)

According to the above view, young people may have a tendency to try improper sexual activities after having been exposed to sexual media. One point I feel worth pointing out is that only one group of older male students discussed the hidden impact of music videos. This is consistent with Starsburger's observation that sexual intimacy appeared in more than three quarters of the music videos studied and was more implied than overt (1995, p. 88). Although Thai-made music videos are not sexually explicit, they portray hidden sexual messages. Like this group of informants put it when discussing the issue of cohabitation and premarital sex in young people:

- P1: 'Like in music videos, you see a couple living together, cooking together. But you never see them work (laugh)'
- R: 'That's all you see then?'
- P1: 'That's it. You only see that happy bit and you go like 'oh, that's so happy.'
- P2: 'Yes, media then very much influence young people.' (ML1)

This supports the concept of cultivation, i.e. that heavy media users are more likely to believe that TV depicts the real world or that the real world should conform to television's rules (Gerbner et al., 1994)

Another issue is uncommon sexual orientations. Many argued that an increase in media coverage and reporting of such behavior opened up opportunities for those who practice uncommon sexual behavior, and at the same time may increase social acceptance. Mass media consumers are bombarded with information about uncommon sexual practices. The following discussions indicate that media make such behavior look normal and more acceptable:

- P1: 'There are lots of movies about gays and stuff like that.'
- P2: 'Movies about...(paused).'
- P3: 'Sex.'
- P2: 'That makes gay people more open. (FL)

In addition, even more critical yet subtle are the effects of media depicting sex on values and attitudes (Harris, 1994). Being immature could lead youngsters into crucial problems due mainly to their lack of understanding and knowledge about sex. According to cultivation analysis, people who watch more explicitly sexual mediated materials make higher frequency estimates of various sexual behavior (Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993) and often believe that what they observe on television is real (Harris & Associates, 1986, cited Strasburger, 1995, p. 43). According to a study of the content of current American television, heavy viewers would believe that uncommon sexual practices such as pre- and extra-marital sex, rape and prostitution are all more common than they really are (Greenberg, 1994, cited in Strasburger, 1995). Consequently, sexually explicit media may encourage people not to take sexual issues as seriously as they should (Harris, 1994, p. 252).

Media Reliability

When asked how important mass media are to them and the society, all respondents agreed that mass media played a significant role in disseminating information to the public. The teens, however, seemed aware that mass media are not always a reliable source of information. Thus, media exaggeration and distortion were greatly mentioned in most group discussions:

- P1: 'Yes, the media are important.'
- P2: 'Very important.'
- P3: 'It depends.'
- P2: 'You know everything from the media.'
- R: 'What about media reliability?'
- P1: 'I think it also depends on the reader'
- P2: 'I think some times they (the media) are exaggerated.'
- P3: 'They are.'
- P2: 'They are and people get hurt.'
- P1: 'The reader should use their own judgment.'
- P4: 'You should judge what to believe and what not.'

P1: 'You don't believe everything.' (MM1)

'Newspapers sometimes are exaggerated.' (FM2)

'I believe half of what I read. You read it but you don't believe everything...' (FM2)

These discussions imply that the teens perceived themselves as active media consumers. In respect to knowledge of mass media, two groups of university students appeared to be the most articulate. Being communication arts students, they were very vocal and critical in their expressions of mass media reliability. These respondents showed their awareness of mass media characteristics. In their opinion, mass media could never be 100% reliable. Nor are they free from political powers.

P1: 'The media are not reliable. They are under political influence and powerful individuals.'

P2: 'I agree.'

P1: 'Every news is not 100% true. Sometimes it seems that media manipulate you to believe in what they do. So they put you under their power, rather than be your friend.'

P2: 'It looks like they just sell news.'

P1: 'That's right.'

P2: 'The media make little things bigger by coloring the facts...'

P1: 'Yes, you are under mass media influence. When they say something, your first reaction is like, 'No, it doesn't sound right' but you already buy it.'

P2: 'Yes, you do.'

P1: 'You're like, 'Oh, it doesn't seem trustworthy' but you already accept it as true'.

P3: 'Because you can't verify it.'

P1: 'That's right.'

P3: 'Besides, there is no way that you can verify it.'

P1: 'Front page news, for example, ... when you read something, you believe it. Later they say it differently, you believe it too...' (FL2)

The above statements suggest the third person effect. They saw themselves active and skeptical while they described others as passive, relying on what the media said. Their male counterparts were equally critical:

P1: 'I read newspapers. I read news about celebrities and politics. I know what's going on from newspapers and television. I don't know if they are reliable because that's all you can get from them. You believe what you see and hear.'

- P2: 'Not very reliable, I guess. According to what I've learned, they are not giving out all the facts. During 'Bloody May'⁴ When in Thailand I'd never seen the footage I saw in France at the end of 1999. There was a news summary on television. They showed the shooting scene... I've never seen it before in Thailand... Had I not been in France, I would never have seen it.'
- R: 'Each country has its own censorship rules that may be different.'
- P2: 'They (French media) do the same.'
- R: 'Our reason may be that such scenes are too obscene.'
- P1: 'That's right. I don't believe that anyone is too dumb to realize what blurred thing is. But for important news, they (media) shouldn't hide.'
- R: 'How about media reliability?'
- P1: 'Thai media are little reliable...'
- P2: 'Some may have powers. You can't mess with them. So you have to write in a subtle way.'
- R: 'Elite's power?'
- P1: 'Can I say it (asked hesitantly)?'
- P2: 'Everybody knows it. Nobody wants to mess up with politicians.'
- P1: 'The royals are untouchable, for example.'
- P2: 'Here in Thailand, it's very different from other countries.' (ML2)

Their awareness of media being under political and cultural restrictions was clearly shown. However, these participants admitted that it was impossible to verify what was heard, read and/or viewed. Rather, it was audiences' own sensibility and judgment as to whether or not to believe what was in the media.

Apart from those media students, other groups also shared similar points of view:

- P1: 'Both negative and positive sides...'
- P2: 'You have to have your own judgment. You can read anything, it's relaxing. You should only imitate what's good, not what's bad.'
- P3: 'You have to make judgment.' (MM2)
- 'You have to use your own sensibility.' (ML1)
- P1: 'I personally don't believe what I don't see for myself. So I believe a half of what the media say.'
- P2: 'It also depends on what that news is about. Gossips are like...'

⁴ The 'Bloody May' crisis (also known as 'Black May') of 1992 was an uprising under the military dictatorship of General *Suchinda Kraprayoon*.

P3: 'Everyday stuff. You hear them everyday.'

P2: 'I don't read celebrity gossip...' (ML2)

A group of university students took *Thai Rath*, one of the most popular tabloids in the country, as an example of exaggerated newspaper.

P1: '*Thai Rath*, for example, comments on celebrities too acutely. If I were them, I would have killed myself. They (comments) are too acute.'

P2: 'Sometimes, impolite.'

R: 'How about reliability?'

P3: '*Thai Rath*...(interrupted).'

P4: 'Not reliable.'

P3: 'I don't like it.'

P4: 'Very exaggerated.' (ML1)

It appears that these respondents all acknowledged the media institutional ideologies. They were all aware how this tabloid dealt with news coverage of both general soft and entertainment news. On the other hand, respondents from the same group showed their satisfaction with credibility and reliability of the Independent Television channel (ITV). The following discussion could explain how restricted media could be under some state restrictions:

P1: 'For example, ITV made a documentary about officials' corruption. I think it did a great job. I never would have thought that it would be able to get that shot.'

P2: 'I really like ITV.'

P1: 'That's because it doesn't belong to the government. If it did, it wouldn't have been able to it.' (ML1)

It is quite clear that not only does the discussion show the media literacy of the respondents but it also indicates their awareness of the political power that affects the degree of freedom of expression in the Thai society.

Media Responsibility

Most students with mass communication backgrounds were quite critical and articulate. They pointed out that media should not only act as a source of information for the public but also be responsible to the society. One student admitted smoking and using lethal

drugs and knew a great deal about how to use and buy drugs, how to avoid being caught, etc. She shared her views as to how mass media could encourage smokers and drug users to quit:

- P: 'There's one way the media could help is to show all the effects. That's why I myself quit (smoking).'
- R: 'Because you've realized the consequences?'
- P: 'Yes, I have. For example, seeing smokers having pierced throats, getting operations, alzheimer, and stuff, they are all terrifying.'
- R: 'So do you believe that media showing all these consequences to the young would be more effective than celebrities' campaigns?'
- P: 'Yes, it sure does.' (FL2)

This girl believed that showing possible effects of smoking cigarette through the media would surely be an effective way to draw audience's, specifically smokers', attention and make them consider quitting smoking, just like she did. Similarly, a study reveals that half of students who were exposed to anti-drug ads were convinced to decrease or stop using drugs (Reis, Duggan, Adgar & DeAngelis, 1992, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 63). Consistent with social cognitive learning, transmission of factual information and fear arousal could draw views' attention and change their behavior (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987, cited in Bandura, 1994).

Another group of older female students also suggested that mass media should act as a public educator. The following case here concerns mass media impact on teenagers' use of drugs:

- P1: 'When media report news about bad behavior, they should teach the reader at the same time.'
- R: 'You mean that they should educate the reader while reporting news?'
- All: 'That's right.'
- P1: 'They should not only report news but also educate the reader.' (FL1)

It is interesting to point to the fact that with respect to the articles about the celebrity drugs party, the newspaper did not clearly reprove such behavior. On the other hand, female stars in skimpy clothes were reproved. It could be that different celebrities might have had different connections with the tabloid columnist that reported the incidents with different tones.

Media Characteristics

As active audiences, most Bangkok youngsters held awareness of the relationship between mass media and famous individuals. It appears that they see mass media as the celebrities' image creator with a lot of power. As they critically pointed out:

- P1: 'In fact, mass media pay attention only to these three issues (fashion, drugs and sex), concerning celebrities. So that makes celebrities look influential.'
- R: 'Do you all agree then?'
- P2: 'It's like you hear it repeatedly each day.'
- P3: 'That's right.'
- R: 'Mass media repeat it everyday?'
- P1: 'It also depends on the media. Celebrities get popular because of the media.'
- P2: 'Yes, because of the media.'
- P1: 'It depends on how media want to present celebrities, as drug users, flirts or fashion leaders. So it depends more on the media as to how they want celebrities to look.' (FL1)

The above discussion suggests that these students acknowledged that media could manipulate the audience's attitudes and opinions. The following is an example of how media cover the issue of fashion by the young duo (Bow & Joyce) whom many believe pioneered revealing outfits which have been trendy among young girls for years:

- P1: 'I must admit that the media do emphasize the way they (Bow and Joyce) dress.'
- P2: 'Yes, that's right.'
- P3: 'They comment on them badly.' (FL1)

Other groups shared similar views regarding characteristics of tabloids:

- P1: '...Newspapers always write bad things.'
- P2: 'They (media) should have written about ordinary people...'
- P3: 'News about celebrities sells.' (MM1)
- P1: '... Newspapers always talk about celebrities' love affairs and stuff. They can't live without them.'
- P2: 'They love celebrity gossip.' (ML1)

A group of communication arts students was articulate about mass media identity. Different media, whatever type, have their own characteristics, which represent their identity and image. These female respondents explained how a popular womens magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, was defined:

- P1: 'A friend of mine once saw me carry *Cosmo* (politan) and he went like, 'Wow, you *Cosmo girl*. Well, I read them every month. What's wrong with being a *Cosmo girl*? I don't know.
- R: 'Did he see you as a sexual oriented person?'
- P2: 'Yes.'
- P1: 'That's right.'
- P3: 'Each issue's cover reads like...(paused).
- R: 'Safer Sex', for example.'
- P3: 'Yeah. There are other interesting matters but they just don't show them on the cover.'
- P1: 'That's right.'
- P3: 'The cover reads 'How to be healthy' (sarcastically).'
- P1: 'If the cover read something else other than sex, who would buy it then?'
- All: (laugh)
- P3: 'Otherwise the magazine wouldn't have its own identity.'
- P1: 'That's right.' (FL2)

Apart from information on sex and relationships, *Cosmopolitan* contains similar features to many other womens magazines. It is full of advertising, especially of clothing and beauty products (Steinem, 1990/1995). The characteristics of this magazine in Thai are not different from those of editions in other languages. As Goldman puts it, 'Cosmopolitan' represents its woman as a consumer of objects that symbolize the worth of emancipated woman – signifying lifestyle leisure activities, disposable income, professional and person roles, concern for appearance and travel (1992/1995, pp. 90-91).

This section has shown that Bangkok youth are critical of how they interpret the media texts about celebrities. It is clear that their awareness and media literacy have an impact on their interpretations of texts. This is most evident when they discussed articles about celebrity love affairs. However, despite being critical, most Bangkok teenagers admitted being influenced by celebrity culture one way or another. The next section explores the impact of celebrity culture upon these youngsters.

Section IV Bangkok Teenagers and Reported Influences of Celebrities

This fourth section specifically summarizes the findings of actual effects of celebrity culture on Bangkok youngsters. It appears that most effect studies have been focused on harmful effects (e.g. Buckingham, 1993; Rosengren, Johnsson-Smaragdi & Sonesson, 1994). Yet, many scholars and researchers believe that mass media can create positive effects. As Jo and Berkowitz (1994) put it, the media can promote pro-social behavior as well as increase the chances of antisocial conduct by reporting and/or portraying instances of socially desirable forms of behavior. I have been interested in some studies focusing on the positive sides of mass media effects. For instance, Real (1996) refers to a news coverage of *The National Enquirer*, under the headline “Can We Learn From Media” (March 8, 1994, p. 3) which reported that a 5-year old girl saved her 2-year old brother by performing a Heimlich maneuver that she had learned from the film *Mrs. Doubtfire* and then called 911 for further assistance as she had learned to do from television. Other studies found that television programs have some effects, although short-term, on increasing children’s observed displays of kindness and consideration, generosity, or altruism (Watkins, Huston-Stein & Wright, 1981; Rushton, 1982; Feshbach, 1988; Gunter & AcAleer, 1990, cited in Quantlett, 1995, p. 49). More evidence shows that television and newspapers can serve as a source of occupational and political information for adolescents (Wroblewski & Huston, 1987; Garramone & Atkin, 1986, cited in Arnett, 1995).

In this study, I pay an equal attention to both destructive and constructive effects of celebrity culture on Bangkok youngsters. As Cole and Cole put it, adolescents seek out heroes to worship and imitate (1996, p. 697). As reported in Chapter 6, students in this study admitted that people of their age and even themselves sometimes imitated what they observed from the media, either positively or negatively. I will now report the findings derived from group discussions, focusing on media shaped behavior.

Destructive Influences of Celebrities

I have already covered the influence of celebrities on teenagers attitudes and behavior with regard to fashion, drugs and alcohol, and relationships and sexuality. I will now address two main aspects of destructive influences of celebrities reported by Bangkok adolescents.

Violence and Delinquency

Violence has been a subject of mass communication throughout history. Similar to other studies on media effects are the following discussions showing examples of celebrities' negative influence on Bangkok adolescents which caused an imitation of media-displayed behavior:

- P1: 'Hide (a late famous Japanese pop singer), for example.'
- P2: 'Yes, I've heard that teenagers made copycat suicides.' (FL1)
- P1: This tends to affect more on teens who are in...(interrupted)
- P2: Early adolescence.
- All: That's right!
- P3: They are very susceptible.
- P4: That's right.
- P2: Teens in middle adolescence think more maturely.
- P4: They have more mature thoughts.
- It's like they (those in middle adolescence) have had enough with teen stuff, isn't it?
(FL1)

The above discussion was derived from a group of female university students. Demonstrating the third person effect respondents often reported that younger teens were more susceptible than themselves. The same group pointed to another negative effect:

- P1: 'Sometimes, media have effects on you by providing some guidance. For instance, watching a drama where a character had an argument with parents and ran away.'
- P2: 'Yes, imitation.'
- P3: 'Yeah, you'd imitate that.'
- P4: 'Yeah, you go like 'Well, that's one way to do it.'
- P1: 'Like in the film *Dek-sae-plae* (The Delinquents).'
- P2: 'There was a scene of robbery of a gold shop. You'd go like 'Hey, that's cool, let's do it.'
(FL1)

These particular cases indicate what James (1993) calls 'direct and immediate' imitation which often makes headlines. Individuals may learn aggressive attitudes depicted as necessary. Berkowitz theorized that whether justified, media portrayed

violence becomes a key determinant in whether it will be adapted (1962, 1964, 1973, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 9). It is important however to note that in the above discussions respondents put their focus on potential media shaped behavior of ‘others’ – early teenagers, not ‘their own.’

Others

According to the preliminary survey (detailed in Chapter 4), drama series are the most watched television program among Bangkok respondents. One group of girls made some remarks on how characters in drama series could have an influence on the audience. They shared their own experience of being influenced by some characters in television series:

- P1: ‘Sometimes I watch a drama in which a character has nice character...’
P2: ‘We imitate the way *Miowwadee* (a leading character in a drama series) speaks with an accent.’
All: (laugh) (FL1)

This imitation, though not as physically harmful as teenage delinquency, can irritate adults when they hear young people speak the Thai language incorrectly.

As pointed out previously, attractiveness is considerably valued during adolescence (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Unsurprisingly, many girls are impressed by female models’ bodies. Two girls admitted their desire of having nice figures as follows:

- P1: ‘Sometimes I feel like being as thin as models.’
P2: ‘Yeah, to be able to dress nicely like them.’
P1: ‘So I skip starved myself which harms my health.’ (FL1)

The discussion reveals how exposure to attractive celebrities affect the girls’ eating behavior. This supports numerous studies carried out to examine the relationship between exposure to thin-ideal models, eating disorders and body dissatisfaction (e.g. Botta, 1999, 2000; Harrison, 2000; Martin & Gentry, 1997). Surprisingly, such effects not only occur in girls but also in boys (Harrison, 2000). As a high schoolboy puts it:

‘... When you see male models who are really built, you’d want to be like that too...’ (MM1)

Constructive Influences of Celebrities

According to numerous debates and news reports, many Thai adults seem to focus solely on the negative impact of celebrities. This thesis, however, provides evidence of various constructive behavior shaped by famous individuals. Several media figures who have made positive achievements in their lives serve as role models for the young. The following discussions describe how celebrities positively affect Bangkok teenagers in the areas of education, sports, music, lifestyles, and characters/personalities.

Education

Singer *Navin Tar* was referred to most often in discussions of positive celebrity influence. Six out of eight focus groups described him as a good influence among young people, in terms of education and career achievement. Not only did his record company appoint him as the leader of one of its drug-free campaigns, he has also received an award from the National Youth Bureau. The following quotes indicate why and how the female participants admired Navin Tar and how he inspired them:

P1: 'Education. Some celebrities give advice as to how to manage time to work and study.'

P2: 'Like Navin Tar.' (FM2)

'It's like when celebrities have succeeded what I have a dream for, I feel like wanting to be as successful as them, Navin Tar, for example. He graduated with an honor class while he was working. All he's done turned out great. He's great. I admire him. When I read interviews about him, I learn about his secrets of success that I can use.' (FL2)

Many others admitted that Navin Tar inspired them and his achievements encouraged them to be as successful as he is. Not only did the respondents admire him, they were also aware of the young idol's history. The same group of female participants showed their awareness of his past life in great detail:

P1: 'Like Navin Tar. He's succeeded and has great future. That inspires you to want to be successful too.'

P2: 'That's right. That makes you want to be successful too.'

R: 'So is he a good example?'

- P1: 'You learn how bad he was before and you learn from his mistakes and never give up.'
- R: 'How badly has he failed before?'
- P2: 'He got kicked out of high school twice.'
- R: 'Did he?'
- P2: 'Yes, from two different schools.'
- R: 'Delinquency?'
- P2: 'Yes, delinquency'
- P3: 'Fighting in school.'
- P2: 'He was very bad.'
- P3: 'He also picked on friends, stuff like that.'
- R: 'Where did he graduate from?'
- All: '*Kaset*⁵'
- P2: 'With the first class honor.'
- P3: 'Gold medal.'
- P4: 'Man, that's so cool!'
- P2: 'From someone who got kicked out off school to...(interrupted).'
- P4: 'To someone who graduated with 3.8 GPA (Grade Point Average).'
- P5: 'He was very determined and he makes a good role model for teens...' (FL1)

Obviously, according to this long discussion, there is one main reason that makes Navin Tar motivating. Though he has failed in high school before, he graduated from college with 3.80 GPA (equivalent to the first class honors degree). This is very impressive considering the fact that he studied and worked at the same time. He has been very successful both in terms of education and his entertainment career as a singer and actor. Being aware that celebrities have busy schedules the fact that he has successfully managed his work and college schedule is what these young students find admirable.

Not only did female respondents admire Navin Tar, three groups of male counterparts also referred to him as a good influence in the academic arena. Although they did not give as much detail as their female peers did, they showed their admiration for this young star and others:

- P1: 'Navin Tar. He's great. I guess many people would follow him but I wouldn't.'
- All: (laugh)
- P2: 'Because you can't do it.'
- All: (laugh) (MM1)

⁵ *Kaset* is short for *Kasetsart* University (KU), one of Thailand's reputable public universities.

'He's an example of good student.'(MM1)

P1: 'Navin Tar'

P2: 'Girls like him.'

P3: 'But he's really good though.' (ML1)

Interestingly, there are many other young Thai celebrities, who attend universities while working in the entertainment industry. This is unlike celebrities in other countries, especially in the West, where most if not all of their time is spent in the entertainment business. Apart from Navin Tar, other stars who have successfully managed their time to pursue both education and entertainment careers were referred to as good role models. The following are more positive effects derived from successful celebrities:

'Probably an influence on education. Some celebrities graduated from college and succeeded in career, like *Ai Pannee*, a singer. She graduated from a university, has a job, and composes songs in her leisure times.' (MM2)

P1: 'Good influences, for example, celebrities who study hard, like *'Oil* (a singer/actress).'

P2: 'Like *Tookta* (an actress) who passed the university entrance exam.' (FM1)

P1: 'The one (Navin Tar) that just graduated with an honor class, I think he's great. If I could do it, it'd be great.

P3: 'Like *Nina* (a singer), she passed the entrance exam.

P1: 'I think Navin Tar is good, graduated with an almost 4.00 GPA. He's really good.' (ML2)

One explanation could be that since all respondents were school age, they regarded celebrities who have achieved educationally and professionally as good influences. I personally see this as a good sign, indicating that many youngsters still consider education as an important in life and have the intention of performing it as well as their idols have.

The findings above support the concept of social cognitive learning in that people are motivated by the successes of others who are similar to them (Bandura, 1994, p. 69). These young students learn the successes of celebrities who they adore and are motivated by desirable outcomes. Being students themselves these Bangkok teenagers are influenced by the achievements in education and/or career of the famous and would like to set up and pursue their own desired goals.

Sports

In general, most adolescents are interested in sports as successful athletes can gain great prestige (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). It is quite interesting to learn that many young respondents have been inspired by famous athletes to the extent that some became involved in certain sports. The following respondents revealed how much influence athlete stars had on them as well as on other youngsters:

- P1: 'Drama series can inspire you too. There was a time where a Japanese series about volleyball was popular. Volleyball then was a hit.'
- P2: 'Like *Slam Dunk* too'
- P3: 'Yeah, people turned to basketball.' (FL1)

This finding supports what Jo and Betkowitz believe, suggesting that depictions of prosocial in mass media, whatever the medium, can activate thoughts and memories that foster helpfulness, kindness and other socially constructive behavior (1994, p. 57).

- P1: 'Speaking of sports, it's got to be *Tiger Woods*. He's inspired me to play golf.'
- R: 'Has he?'
- P1: 'Yes, it's like, 'Man, how did he do all that?'
- P2: 'Nowadays young people are interested in sports. They imitate some popular football players and have skinheads.' (ML1)

When asked about their ideal people, most teen participants were able to name inspiring sport stars. The following responses show some well-known Thai athletes representing different types of sports.

- R: 'Do any of you have any ideal people in mind?'
- P1: 'Yes, *Prim*⁶.'
- P2: 'Zico⁷.'
- P3: 'Jay⁸ for jet ski.' (FM2)

⁶ *Prim Intawong* was a national volleyball player.

⁷ *Zico* is a nickname of a famous Thai football player, *Kiatisk Senamuang*.

⁸ *Jay, Jetrin Wattanasin*, is a very famous singer and actor. He is also a national jet skier who has won several international tournaments.

One point worth mentioning is that some students seem to equate being a famous athlete, particularly international ones, to making a great deal of money. Celebrities who earn a good deal of money can attract youngsters to get involved in sports as a group of male teens put it:

- P1: 'I like sports. Seeing them (athletes) make lots of money makes me want to do it too.'
- R: 'Does it inspire you?'
- P1: 'I guess so. I believe that everyone knows famous footballers and athletes. I'm not talking about Thai athletes... I think you want more to be as good as Brazilian or Italian football players than Thai athletes. That inspires you.'
- P2: 'You just run and then get 10 million.'
- P1: 'Yeah, running for 90 minutes makes millions Bahts.'
- P3: 'I more admire individuals than as a team, like *Michael Jordan*...' (ML2)

Like the influence of celebrities' achievements in education, these students are inspired by the successes and capability of one of the world's most famous and successful athletes. As Bandura puts it, "the evaluative reactions people generate to their own behavior regulate which observationally learned activities they are most likely to pursue" (1994, p. 69). The teens decide to pursue some learned activities that are self-satisfying; in this case becoming involved in certain sports.

Music

Like sports, music and adolescents are inseparable. As Strasburger puts it, "music plays an important role in the socialization of adolescents" (1995, p. 82). In relation to youth culture, young people use music to identify with peer groups (Roe, 1990). Unsurprisingly, famous musicians have inspired many students, especially boys. Similarly, in the US, adolescents find many of the heroes they identify with among popular musicians (Cole & Cole, 1996). As both female and male Bangkok youngsters expressed:

'Music. Like musicians who do great stuff. I see them as role models.' (FM1)

- P1: 'Music. Like seeing guitarists, teens start playing guitar.'
- P2: 'Boy bands have a great influence on Thai teenagers, especially high school teens. They have a dream of being guitarists, drummers, stuff like that.' (ML1)

Being popular or looking ‘cool’ among peers, especially those of the opposite sex, is regarded as one of the most desirable qualities in young people. Popularity, achieved in any way, is highly valued among adolescents (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). The following conversations of male students show some reasons why musicians, have inspired them and teenagers in general to get into music:

- P1: ‘You’d love to be popular too.’
P2: ‘Yeah, playing guitar attracts girls.’
R: ‘Is it like an inspiration?’
P1: ‘Yes, especially for music.’ (ML1)

- P1: ‘Music and sports. Musicians make me want to be as good as them.’
P2: ‘That makes you look cool.’
P3: ‘Yeah, that’s right.’ (ML2)

Not only did local celebrities have an influence on Bangkok teenagers, internationally famous musicians and singers also inspire them.

- P: ‘*Bon Jovi, Queens.*’ (MM1)

P1: ‘If you played guitar, you’d be interested in *X-Japan*. Like a friend of mine, he’d love to be a lead guitarist.’
P2: ‘When teenagers want to be something, they try to the extreme extent.’ (ML1)

Again, the successes of famous individuals in music provides adolescents with a source of motivation (Bandura, 1994, p. 69). The celebrities’ accomplishments and prosperity encourage the young respondents, especially boys, to take up music such as guitar and drums. Many youngsters are inspired by the music and their admiration for stars create an intention to pursue a career in music themselves (Arnett, 1991).

Lifestyles

Earlier I addressed celebrities’ lavish lifestyles affecting young people’s attitudes. However, not all media figures live their lives extravagantly. One group of female respondents gave an example of some *low-key* celebrities who encourage youngsters not

to use expensive fashion items, rather urge them to use similar but cheaper articles that suit their budget.

- P1: 'Each time she appears on television, *Ta-ngaew*⁹ always tells the young not to buy expensive stuff and that cheap stuff that makes you look good will do.'
- P2: 'And her clothing style is cute too.'
- P1: 'Yes, the way she dresses is cute and she doesn't use expensive stuff.'
- P3: 'That discourages your desire to buy expensive stuff.'
- Many: 'That's right.'
- P3: 'I do admire and adore her.'
- P4: 'Another female celebrity, I don't remember who it was, admitted that she used counterfeits.'
- R: 'Did she say that?'
- P4: 'Yes, she did. She said what she used wasn't real stuff.'
- P3: 'Someone like her should be praised. It isn't necessary to use expensive stuff.'
- P4: 'I wish there were a lot of celebrities like her.' (FL1)

The above concept is consistent with Ganetz's study of weekly teen magazines which found the readers urged to copy ideas and make cheaper models of designer clothes (1995, p. 93). As all girls in this particular group were against teenagers' extravagance, they admired and supported the celebrities' ideas. Besides, they all agreed that it was unnecessary for the young to use highly priced fashion articles in order to be trendy; rather, inexpensive fashion items could make them look fashionable as long as they suit the person.

Other Influences

As mentioned earlier, not only did girls want to have figures like female celebrity models, some boys also had a desire to have well built bodies. One high schoolboy explained how he was attracted to male models' bodies:

'Yes, When you see male models who are really built, you'd want to be like that too.... But you have to work out though because you weren't born with it' (MM2)

⁹ *Ta-ngaew* (*Bussaba Mahanpong*) is a famous VJ (video jockey) on Channel V Thailand (a music channel similar to MTV).

Like in other aspects discussed above, many girls pointed out that they learned from the famous' secrets of success and use them to improve themselves. The following are some examples of celebrities' influence on participants' desire to be successful in life.

'Career, I learn about how they work, what they have done before in order to succeed.' (FM2)

'Their influence is probably about their capabilities. Like actors, I want to be like them. I also adore a news reporter who speaks very clearly, I imitate her.' (FL1)

Before I move onto the next discussion of effects of celebrity endorsers in advertising, there is one point I would like to make. I have noticed that in all aspects of negative effects, except for the 'other' category, teenage respondents perceived other teens as being affected, rather than themselves. One explanation could be that when it comes to negative influences, people tend to assume that media affect others more than themselves, as the third person effect theory suggests. On the contrary, for the constructive side of media effects, the teens seem willing to accept that they are positively influenced by celebrities.

Celebrity Endorsers in Advertising

Celebrities, regardless of type, are often used in advertising to effectively draw consumer attention. This advertising strategy is believed to work successfully, particularly with older children and young people (Atkin & Block, 1983). Consistently, Kilbourne (1989/1995) points out that adolescents are particularly vulnerable and inexperienced and therefore are the prime targets of many advertisements.

Male respondents from two different groups discussed how they felt about products advertised by celebrities as follows:

R: 'Did any of you ever buy any products advertised by celebrities?'

P1: 'Yes.'

P2: 'Yes.'

P3: 'Some times there's something I like but I don't buy it.'

P4: 'Like stud (shoes with stud worn by football players), advertised by *Beckham*.'

P1: 'And by *Zico*.'

P2: 'The ones by *Zico* are affordable.'

- P3: 'They are *Pan*¹⁰.'
- P1: 'It depends on your preferences.'
- P2: 'It depends more on your finance.'
- P3: 'Yes, on money power.' (MM1)

'... Some time I go like, 'Hey, they (celebrities) wear them (sneakers), I want them too...' (ML1)

Consistent with a variety of studies, advertising is found to be significantly effective in increasing young people's awareness of and desire to own or use advertised products (Strasburger, 1995, p. 61). More specifically celebrity endorsements are effective in sustaining brand-name recall for several different products (Friedman & Friedman, 1979, cited in Jeffres, 1997, pp. 257-258). However, despite their exposure to advertising, purchasing behavior also depends in part on financial status. These male respondents regard affordability as one major factor. Therefore, advertisements do not always affect their actual purchasing behavior.

Evidence suggests that alcohol and cigarette advertising affect the drinking and smoking behavior of adolescents (e.g. Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1994; Strasburger, 1995). Unfortunately, young people are a target consumer group. The following discussions among male respondents indicate how such advertising has an impact on their attitudes toward alcohol products:

- P1 '... I find beer ads very tempting. Each brand has come up with a great slogan. Like *Chang*, they make it look like when you drink it, you help conserve Thai culture...'
- P2 'Yeah.'
- P3 'It's like you drink it, you look so *cool*.'
- P4 'And you help preserve Thai culture'
- P3 'It's good that you support Thai products. It's a Thai brand name.' (ML1)

Consistent with Atkins study, tobacco and beer companies practice unfair and deceptive ads. They specifically target young people by using attractive role models and youth-oriented messages in order to make smoking and drinking seem like normal behavior (1993a, 1993b, cited in Starsburger, 1995, p. 59). Further, as perceptions of the popularity and credibility of sports figures endorsing smokeless tobacco products

¹⁰ *Pan* is a trademark of shoes, manufactured in Thailand, believed to be more affordable, compared to other brand names.

increased, perceptions of the relative harm of the product decreased (McDermott et al., 1989, cited in Jeffres, 1997, p. 258). The same students carried on their discussion:

- P1 'They allow alcohol ads after 10 p.m. but beer is alcohol too. So it should...' (interrupted)
P2 'How come sports are related to beers? Or does drinking beer help you skate well?'
All 'Laugh' (ML1)

Supporting Gerbner's (1990) argument, the alcohol industry has targeted minority groups and the young, particularly through the promotion of sports and youth-oriented activities. Not only are beer companies big sport supporters, but tobacco companies also have used the same strategies. In Thailand, although the advertising of hard liquor is permitted after 10:00 p.m. for broadcast media (Chirapravati, 1996), there are no restrictions for lighter alcoholic drinks such as beer and wine coolers.

The same students also pointed to the issue of smoking:

- P1: 'In some countries, tobacco companies sponsor sports. They give away money.'
P2: '... Like *Shell*, it sponsors *EUFA* Champion League.'
P3: 'Like *Marlboro*, America says it doesn't allow it (*Marlboro*) to sponsor sports. But in practice, it doesn't work that way because it (*Marlboro*) is a big sponsor.'
P4: 'Like I go to see a football match, beer is just everywhere.'
P5: 'They sell beer and I drink it.'
R: 'So you don't think these (tobacco and beer) companies should be allowed to sponsor sports?'
P5 'They can because they have money. I don't think *7-Up* can.'
P3 'Or *Yakult*.'
All: (Laugh) (ML1)

The discussion above indicates that these teens were aware of how powerful cigarette and alcohol sponsorship was to sporting events. One implication could be that cultivation effects may occur as the greater exposure and attention, the more likely viewers would associate drinking with fun and good times (Wallack et al., 1990, cited in Strasburger, 1995, p. 71). They claim that watching weekend sports programs on TV can affect young people's attitudes toward drinking which is supported by one student's statement.

This section revealed that celebrity culture has had more positive effects than negative effects on Bangkok youth. Celebrities have inspired teenagers in various areas

such as education, music, and sport. Many used celebrity idols to identify their youth sub-cultures. However, it is important to remember that it is more typical for individuals to admit being positively influenced than negatively affected by the mass media. The next section summarizes the findings of this chapter, aiming to provide evidence of the correlation between celebrity culture and youth's identity construction.

Section V Are Celebrities That Influential?

In the context of media effects, this chapter reported the second part of focus group discussions investigating:

- In terms of media shaped behavior, how Bangkok teenagers text readings about celebrities have impacted on their identity construction. Do these media figures influence the young in negative or positive ways?
- Apart from media and celebrity cultures, are there other influential factors associated with the three highlighted social issues?

It is an important caveat that these Bangkok youngsters might not have been totally open or revealed everything on their minds. Some who were less articulate might have been more influenced than talkative ones, or vice versa. Here is a summary of some of the important results:

- As hypothesized, the findings revealed that celebrity culture did not influence all Bangkok teenagers to a significant degree. Even for those who were affected, the degree of influence was different. Although many respondents admitted that celebrity culture had impact on fashions, some were affected by celebrities' dress style while others were influenced by their hairstyle and body adornments. Almost all participants agreed that media figures barely influenced their own smoking behavior, use of drugs and alcohol or attitudes toward relationships and sexuality. However they agreed that such behavior portrayed by celebrities might have had more impact on teenagers in general than on themselves.

In many cases although they were attracted to certain aspects of fashion they would not conform to it due to school restrictions or parental disapproval. This concept of inhibition also applies to the issue of sex. That is, although many teens showed their openness and their liberal views toward bisexuality, premarital sex, and cohabitation, they would not adopt such behavior due mainly to their cultural ideologies and family values. This suggests that celebrities/media influenced attitudes may not always result in actual behavior.

- Teenage students were able to differentiate celebrities in real life from *a media image*. There was some evidence that celebrity endorsers increase the impact of beer and wine ads on young people (Atkin & Block, 1983). One implication could be that although cigarette and alcohol ads alone are already effective, using celebrity endorsers may reinforce the degree of influence.

Nevertheless, despite the effectiveness of advertising, consumers are not equally influenced. That is mainly because individual characteristics, attitudes, experiences, predispositions, and such, all mediate mass media effects (Stewart & Ward, 1994, p. 323). In addition, as social cognitive learning suggests, transmission of factual information and fear arousal could draw viewers' attention and change their behavior (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987, cited in Bandura 1994, p. 81).

Advertisement of fashion items does not only influence teens' attitudes toward the products and services but, in some cases, their purchasing behavior. Actual purchasing though does not always occur. One major obstacle that hindered such actual behavior for these teens was financial power.

- As anticipated, the findings revealed that celebrity culture could not only negatively affect but also creatively influence young people's attitudes and behavior. The most obvious positive effect was the success in education of several young celebrities. Other constructive influences included inspiration in music and sport as well as good personalities and the ideas of inexpensive yet trendy dress styles.

- The findings revealed that in a consumer society, mass media act as agents of socialization (Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991, cited in Johansson, 1994, p. 270). Bangkok youngsters used media images and symbols, music and fashion in particular, to mark their boundaries and articulate identity and difference.
- Group discussions revealed that different youth cultures existed among Bangkok youngsters. It supports the notion that tastes and preferences are socially distributed, and they serve as markers of social distinctions and positions (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994, p. 30). This is most obvious in the case of how they used popular music and fashion to define which group they belonged to. Despite similar music styles, these teenagers clearly distinguished their favorite bands from others. The youth also conformed, to some extent, to some fashions of their favorite stars.

Consistent with Ganetz's observation that adolescents generally like to look like their idols (1995, p. 90), it became evident that the concept of idol is significant. This was particularly obvious when Bangkok teenagers used media to identify with others.

- The findings reveal that teenage respondents agreed that compared to celebrities their peers had much more influence over their attitudes and behavior toward extravagant lifestyles, tobacco, drugs alcohol, and premarital sex.

Although teenage students found alcohol ads on television, endorsed by celebrities very tempting, peer group pressure is a far more influential factor in adolescents' use of both alcohol and cigarettes. Male students in particular admitted trying or getting involved in drinking and smoking mainly due to peer pressure. According to some statements, they also wanted to look *cool* in front of peers. Supporting earlier evidence (Lindon, 1996), they were afraid of losing face in front of friends and were least likely to reject the offer of alcohol or a cigarette if it affected their acceptance in a given group.

I would argue, however, that these teenagers might have forgotten that their peers also acquire information about new behavior mainly from the mass media. My argument supports the view that people fail to realize where their friends or teens in general get

the idea that smoking makes one sexy, athletic, cool or macho (DiFranza, Richards, Paulman, Fletcher & Jaffe, 1992, cited in Starsburger, 1995 p. 65). Such images only occur in advertising (DiFranza et al., 1992).

As mentioned earlier, exposure to some sexual behavior, particularly homosexuality or bisexuality, premarital sex and cohabitation in the mass media could alter the teens' values and standards. This study reveals that as well as by mass media, Bangkok youngsters may also be influenced by what Bandura (1994) calls 'adopters' i.e. interpersonal contact, in this case, peers. This is evident in the case of premarital sex and cohabitation.

The study established that the media affect some individuals to greater or lesser extents, some of the time. In relation to fashion, this study suggests that celebrity culture does seem to have an impact on Bangkok youth to an extent that may be considered significantly harmful. However, celebrity culture was also found to have positive effects on these youngsters in various ways. In sum, celebrity culture has minimal negative effects on the three social problems examined while they were influential in positive ways on the young's attitudes and behavior toward education and lifestyle. Peer groups were found to have a great deal more influence than celebrities; particularly in the areas of lavish lifestyles, drug abuse, alcohol, and certain sexual conducts.

In the last chapter, which provides critical reflections on the research, I will discuss what and how I have learnt from this project and how it has contributed to communication scholarship, especially in the context of audience research, media effects, and celebrity and youth culture studies.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: Critical Reflections on the Research

This final chapter presents the conclusion of the study providing critical reflections on the research in various areas. These include the learning curve, the significance of focus group discussions, the ambiguous aspects of the results and discussion on further areas of research. Lastly, I assess the contribution of this project to communication scholarship, especially in the context of audience research, media effects, and celebrity and youth culture studies. Before embarking on these important areas, I would now like to report the conclusion of the study

My project sought to incorporate the concept of audience reception into the analysis of the potential effects of celebrity culture on Bangkok teenagers. In the course of this investigation I focused on how young people read media texts about celebrities and how their interpretations affected their identity construction and actual behavior. I started the investigation by conducting a preliminary survey to obtain initial data on media usage in Bangkok teenagers that revealed the media they preferred to use on a daily basis. The next step was to understand how celebrities were represented in the most popular media. The quantitative analysis of media content over a month showed that the conceptual framework of celebrity coverage was rather limited although a great deal of space was devoted to reporting on such individuals. Three categories, namely fashion, drug and alcohol abuse, and relationships and sexuality, were selected for further analysis. The qualitative analysis then revealed how celebrities were reported in the media in relation to these specific issues. This involved investigating language, tone, attitude, and bias as shown in the selected articles. The examination suggested that mass media play a significant role in the process of social definition (Gross, 1991/1995) by holding the power to define the meanings of celebrities.

Most importantly, however, focus groups used to examine how, through interactions, Bangkok students constructed their interpretations of media texts, showed that these teenage students did not always interpret texts in the same way as they were encoded. Although the dominant reading was accepted in eight out of twelve articles, the audiences generated alternative meanings alongside the 'preferred reading' for all articles. This revealed the importance of multiple text readings and the polysemic nature of the

texts. Discussions also demonstrated the interpretive strategies of different groups of these young audiences, resulting in different decodings.

Cultural ideologies and personal knowledge and experiences all influenced by *age* and *gender* proved to be the most influential factors in the process of decoding media texts or *meaning-making*. Gender difference also appeared to be significant in interpreting media messages, particularly those concerned with relationships and sex.

Consistent with Fiske's study of Madonna, it is also clear that most female students were not what he calls 'cultural dopes' (1989). Rather, they were resisting the patriarchal framing of female sexuality and constructing their own oppositional stance. These female students held quasi feminist views and made meanings that connected with their own social and cultural experiences. This was particularly evident in readings derived from female university students than from high schoolgirls. This particular finding strongly supported the concept that although media consumers are positioned by dominant meanings, the 'preferred meaning' of a text, these teens were able to oppose or negotiate with them, based on socio-cultural factors (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980, cited in Poole, 1999). Further, the degree of media literacy was yet another important factor used in the process of reading media texts. This particular finding indicated that most students were 'media educated' (Gauntlett, 1995).

My study also established a correlation between personal and cultural ideologies and the degree of mediated influence as not all adolescents behave or are influenced in the same way and each individual adjusts his/her ethical or internal standards to a certain degree. These standards that serve as the basis for regulating one's conduct have greater stability (Bandura, 1994). Additionally, teenagers in this study used media to identify with others (i.e. Raviv et al., 1996), and to mark distinctive status and express membership in a given group and to articulate identity and difference (Johansson, 1994). It was also possible to establish that not only did media figures have both negative and positive effects on these youngsters; peer groups, in several cases functioned as 'interpretive communities,' were also found to be more influential than celebrities with regard to social issues on young people. They read and interpreted media content in more or less the same way using similar interpretive strategies (Fish, 1980 cited in Boëthius, 1995, p. 153).

Media figures had positive effects in the areas of education, sports, music, and affordably fashionable clothing while peer groups were found to be more influential in relation to extravagant lifestyles, substance abuse, as well as premarital sex. Therefore, it

would be fair to claim that in the process of my investigation I obtained results that refuted, to some extent, those widely spread popular views according to which Thai teenagers were simple victims of media and celebrity cultures (i.e. Amornsuksiri, 2000; Lewis, 1998; Liamao, 1997; Srivalo, 2000; Tejapira, 1996). The most important conclusion of my exploration, therefore, was the discovery that celebrity culture did not seem to influence Bangkok teenagers to an extent that could be regarded as socially harmful or culturally detrimental. My study provided evidence that allowed me to argue that Bangkok students were quite well 'media educated' (Gauntlett, 1995). They actively and critically used popular media as a symbolic recourse in creating their own meanings and social identities (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1996). Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that active readings are not necessarily 'resistant' or 'empowering'. Their use of media often involved both 'resistance' and 'negotiation'. This is why the findings of my study should be interpreted further within the wider context of other studies on youth culture.

Looking back into the original research questions that formed the basis for this study, I believe I was able to achieve satisfactory results especially in regard to the first question asking how and what interpretative framework teenagers used to decode media texts about celebrities. In relation to the second question, as far as concepts such as 'identity construction,' 'attitudes' and 'effects,' which were subject to investigation I found these difficult to identify. To prove the prevailing social conception about these young people, the main goal here was to investigate whether what they have learnt about celebrities in mass media had any impact on them. If so, how? So the question should probably have been rephrased by a simpler one like 'What do Bangkok teenagers learn from celebrities'? or 'What effects do celebrities have on the young'?

Lastly, I was proud to have been the first Thai scholar to study the context of audience reception, and youth and celebrity cultures among Bangkok teenagers. The project I ended up with was not very different from the one I envisioned when I started. I initially believed that the study of media effects and audience reception would be quite complicated. There would be various factors that affect the way people understand media texts and result in their attitudes and patterns of behavior. Nonetheless, young people in my study clearly proved to be remarkably active and critical media consumers although media effects were still observable.

However, if I had unlimited time and resources as well as full cooperation from all concerned, some findings might have turned out different and more interesting. Had I

had time to conduct focus group discussions with young Thais of three different stages of adolescence throughout the country with a group of young adults, I might have been able to examine the possible differences in media effects and identity construction as a result of their media interpretation and understanding. This could have allowed me to generalize the findings better. Another thing I would change if I could go back in time would be the materials I used in the focus groups. I would limit the number of articles to discuss in order to make the participants be more concentrated and more focused rather than trying to talk about too many materials. Nonetheless, although the focus of my study (audience research and media effects) did not significantly differ from those from the West, it is the first contribution to Thai scholarship in this area. I also think that my study significantly adds to the scientific literature in Thailand. I can proudly place my project in the context of communication scholarship exploring audience reception, media effects and youth culture.

There follow critical reflections on the research in the areas mentioned above.

I. A Learning Curve

This project was truly a valuable learning experience for me. Prior to beginning the study I had realized that Thailand faced changes in various aspects. Conducting focus group discussion, however, allowed me to better appreciate significant changes in the young Thai population that I encountered personally. These included: changes in cultural values and the generational relationship, changes in their attitude toward sexuality, changing media reality, growing feminist awareness and unconventional patterns of behavior – courageous, expressive, independent, assertive, and opinionated. Most importantly, in some way my own attitudes were gradually changing.

My main interest throughout this project, as well as in media studies at large, was to investigate how people make sense of media and use them to satisfy their needs; I find it fascinating to explore the ways in which young people in particular interpret what they see and read. From early on, I was influenced by the various studies that examined the image of *Madonna* and its interpretations (e.g. Brown & Schulze, 1990/1995; Kellner, 1995a; Real, 1996), as well as by the studies that looked into how media shape young people's identities (e.g. Arnett et al., 1995; Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999; Steele & Brown, 1995).

The work on this project was a real learning curve for myself. My views differed in many respects. Having completed a masters' degree in public relations from the US was only my first achievement. Little opportunity had arisen for me to conduct research in other fields of my interest. Having been interested particularly in the fields of audience reception, media and celebrity cultures encouraged me to pursue my PhD, which would give me an opportunity to conduct a research in the context of communication. I felt that it was my first difficult step. However, having previous scholarly experience and a greater body of knowledge made me more critical than before. That I believe was an important and valued research skill for any researcher regardless of discipline.

Like most Thais, I was aware that there had been a great deal of arguments and debates about the influences of mass media on the young Thai population. These included several aspects, e.g. westernization in terms of their fashion styles, attitudes toward sexuality, their behavior towards the elderly, becoming more materialistic, solving problems with violence, and drugs. However, apart from media reports, claims were often derived from quotes and interviews of intellectuals and polls. Therefore, although they are influential, such claims from mainstream newspapers should not be substantial. The context in which effects were related to media and celebrity cultures had not been widely and properly researched. Yet, the number of Thai studies on audience reception and youth culture was limited. So I was thrilled to have the opportunity to conduct research in the area of my interest.

As mentioned earlier, my project contributed to Thai research in the context of audience reception and media effects on adolescents. I feel that my findings turned out to be more interesting and beneficial than anticipated. They did not only reveal if or how youngsters were affected by celebrity culture but also how actively these people reacted to media messages. This work will also fill a substantial gap in Thai scholarship of youth and celebrity cultures and sociology. My goal was also to increase awareness of how the young Thai population use and interpret media texts. It was my hope that through the words of the students, we – Thai people – can all learn more about the next generation of Thai adults. In addition, I agree with Duke's (2000) reference to Roberts's suggestion, the polysemic nature of many media texts should be positively exploited; teachers, parents, and other adults with influence in young people's lives can help guide them to more constructive interpretation of media (p. 385).

In the process of the study, particularly while analyzing the findings, I learned that it is essential to 'insert' myself into the research. However, while examining the

materials it is also necessary to be mindful not to be subjective. I found it quite difficult to criticize without putting my own views on the materials. I believed that I needed to be visible by including my own insights and criticisms in the process of interpreting the material. The main reason is that it is the researcher who knows best about any aspects that could affect the results of the study. This is particularly true and crucial in my project in which culture was found to be one of the most significant factors that affected the results. Hence, I feel that as a researcher it is impossible to exclude yourself from the study. It is essential to show personal views, be involved, but yet still be critical and objective. Another important caution is that you need to know your own limitations.

Initially in the project I looked at some issues of Thai youngsters superficially. In fact, the problems were far more complex than expected. One thing does not become an issue over night. Rather, it has a combination of factors, disagreements or conflicts. For example, a pattern of sexual behavior such as premarital sex could be an issue to one family but may not be to another. Several factors involved include cultural beliefs, personal worldview, family taught values, gender, etc. During and after the study, my own attitudes and worldviews gradually changed. I started to be able to see things with wider perspectives than before. Another important thing I learned was not to constrain myself with my own views and also not to prejudge others.

Because this project was the very first study, which I conceived and conducted on my own, quite naturally I learned a great deal in the course of my work. On the one hand, to some extent I felt I was constrained to what I had previously perceived and thought. On the other, as I was getting deeper into the study, my views were changing and becoming more informed and complex. There were many situations where the emerging results were not exactly what I had expected, so I was growing more sensitive and more critical in analyzing the unexpected outcomes. Clearly, it was becoming essential not to limit myself or prejudge anything that had come into sight because those unforeseen phenomena could always provide unanticipated yet interesting and fascinating results.

Discussions in focus groups revealed that young Thai people were quite critical and not as easily susceptible to what they were exposed as the prevailing public opinion believed. I enjoyed the exchanges of ideas and opinions of all young participants. I found interactions between group participants most interesting and enjoyable, especially those that evolved in the groups of older students. I could argue that this study relied on the goodwill of the teens to reveal their thoughts. I can still clearly picture their actions,

laughter, seriousness and interests in my thoughts. I am grateful to them all for making this project possible.

It came as a surprise yet I was particularly glad to realize the teens accepted and treated me as an 'older sister.' As they did not feel the impact of the generation gap or uncomfortable in being research subjects; an informal and friendly setting was not at all difficult to build. As a result they were feeling comfortable to talk to me and to each other. One of the lessons I learnt was that conducting focus group unassisted and with only a tape recorder could cause difficulty when transcribing tapes. I found it difficult to identify different participants by voice despite having taken personal notes. Had video facilities been available, it would have allowed me not only to correctly identify the speakers but also to observe body language, gestures, and facial expressions.

In the course of conducting the study I had the chance to realize that, on the one hand my own views had changed significantly due to the long years I had spent in the West, and on the other that teenagers in Thailand had changed more than anything I could have imagined. Teenage girls in revealing and sexy clothes were extremely rare in my teenage years, while such female outfits are prevalent nowadays. I had spent many years living in western countries where wearing such clothes was never a problem to me. Yet, I got quite annoyed when I visited my own country where I had to dress 'properly' (no shorts, no skimpy tops and such) outside the house in temperatures of over 30 degrees centigrade. However, once back in Thailand I have had the experience of being looked at when I dared to wearing revealing outfits (no such strange or disapproving looks/stares were directed to me in the western societies). I sometimes find it difficult to justify what or how much is 'too much' for Thais to handle or accept. Nonetheless, I must admit that seeing very young Thai girls in such outfits in Thailand gives me a different personal reaction from when I see western girls wearing the same type of clothes. Although I always think that light and skimpy clothes are perfect for the Thai weather, they are still frowned upon in the society since most Thai adults think girls should not dress overtly.

The group discussions made it clear to me that not only do today's teenagers have different eccentric fashions from those in my own generation but their attitudes and beliefs also significantly differed. The average age of participants was sixteen and a half years old. It was less than two decades ago that I was of the same age, yet I was surprised to realize to what extent my attitudes and behavior back then differed from theirs in various aspects. Despite some curiosity about sex, when my friends and I were their age, we would never dare think about engaging in premarital sex or cohabitation. In contrast

to what I remember from my own teenage years, today's teens were not inhibited at all and openly discussed their sexuality and relationships in front of someone they had never met before.

As a Thai I have always been proud of my own country and its deep-rooted culture. At the same time, however, I believe that every society is dynamic and susceptible to changes at one point or another. In fact, Thailand is no longer an exception. Thailand has been open to many influences in terms of economics, culture, etc. Like other cultures, traditional Thai culture is a changing one. Or rather, changing culture means changing 'ourselves.' Some of the teens' comments came as a big surprise (even shock) to me. I do recall that one of the female high schoolgirls in a pilot focus group discussion 'confidently' said that she wanted the Thai society to be a 'free sex' one, like some European countries. She pointed out that Thailand had sustained some 'annoying' and 'obsolete' cultural rules and she was in favor of the western ones. Admittedly I found it hard to believe that a Thai girl who was no more than 16 years old had no fear of showing her personal and 'daring' view in front of me.

Apart from mass media, my own project makes me well aware of what is available in our 'consumerism' society. As an aunt of a 13-year old niece, it would be impossible for me not to be concerned with what she can learn from mass media. Most importantly what cultural beliefs and family values will she be holding? I have observed all the current trends and values with apprehension. Already my teenage niece knows a great deal about *Daniel Radcliffe* who plays Harry in the *Harry Potter* films much more than I realize – where he lives in the UK, what website she can send his pictures to friends, etc.

During the course of this study I realized how much the Thai society and its young people's attitudes had changed, and in what directions. Apparently, rapid socio-economic transformation, media availability, overseas education traveling and so on (e.g. Jackson, 1995; Komin, 1995; Muscat, 1994; Tejapira, 1996) have had great impact on the Thais in many aspects of life – how they think, behave and believe, and most importantly, how they change 'culturally.' Ultimately, it depends on the Thais themselves to decide in which direction the Thai society should be heading. It seems that they can and wish to push forward economically while retaining their sense of identity (Hongladarom, 1999; Tejapira, 1996; Wisadavet, 1996).

It would be fair to say that generally people in older generations often find what those in younger generations do disturbing and annoying (though they often understand why younger people do what they do because they themselves had been young once.

Undoubtedly, today's teenagers will find that tomorrow's youngsters' fashions, language, behavior and even cultural beliefs to be outrageous. For myself, I found that teens' conformity to bizarre fashions was not as bothersome to me as their alterations in Thai traditional cultural beliefs and attitudes.

Having listened to these young students discuss and argue over these issues gave me more much insights of who they are than reading or hearing about young people from all kinds of mass media. By talking to them in such a non-threatening setting, I also learnt that they were independent and confident individuals. They sought out independence and equal opportunities in terms of occupation, education, and sexual matters. In addition, they were all eager to be successful in life. Many of these students were not only willing to participate in this study; more importantly, they felt contented that their voices have been 'listened to' and taken seriously in the academic realm (Phiphitkul, 2001). It seemed clear to me that on several occasions students felt repressed by, according to them, strict academic and social rules and wanted to show how they felt about them, and to be understood by adults and authorities. Many of them took this opportunity to express their thoughts, possibly because they previously had no or little opportunity to do so. This resulted in their eagerness to have their voice 'heard.'

As mentioned previously, it has been claimed that Thai adolescents gain knowledge about unsuitable fashions, abuse of drugs and alcohol, inappropriate sexual behavior, and excessive materialism from both Thai and foreign media figures. With regular exposure to such messages, it is believed that they are bound to engage in uncritical imitation. However, the students have pointed out that it was the media who repeatedly reported such coverage to attract the audience, and who hold the power to define the meaning (Gross, 1991/1995) of celebrities and to create their images.

As a Thai female myself, I must admit that I was pleased to know that many female youngsters had strong feminist views, showing subversive feelings towards dominant groups, especially when they talked about the social inequality. We (the girls and I) are well aware of how we are treated and viewed in our hierarchically structured society. Therefore, we need to start to become more assertive and demand equal rights in this oppressive dominant culture in positive ways.

In a way, I was quite happy to see that young people were now more courageous and open in expressing their thoughts and opinions. It is time that giving students opportunities to show intellectual challenges and asking questions should gradually replace rote learning and memorization (Hongladarom, 1999). Most importantly, I find it

gratifying to discover that to most informants education and family are still of utmost importance. As Thailand has rapidly become 'industrialized,' I do hope that these youngsters (and those in general) will apply their skills and knowledge, use their bravery in creative ways, and more importantly learn lessons from 'adults' mistakes to help develop their own country and make it change only for 'the better'. In my opinion, this is a good sign that nowadays individuals in younger generations have a better chance to speak up than those in the older ones. As far as I am concerned, rather than complaining about what young people do, how they behave, Thai adults especially parents, teachers and authorities should now look at how they raise and educate them, how much time and effort they put in them, what their children are provided with, what is available to them, etc, in this 'industrialized' and 'modernized' society which is becoming more and more secular. Who is to blame, if not 'Thai adults themselves'?

In addition to obtaining research skills from having finished this project, I have also become familiar with a wide range of scholarship through extensive reading, which has also changed the way I view things. The reading involved scholarship in communication (e.g. Gauntlett, 1995; Gerbner et al., 1994; Jeffres, 1994; McQuail, 2000), media and cultural studies (e.g. Fiske, 1989a, 1989b; Hall, 1980, 1997; Höijer 1990; 1998; Morley, 1980; 1985; Kellner, 1995a, 1995b; Phiphitkul, 2001), youth culture and psychology (e.g. Arnett (1995; Bandura, 1994; Buckingham, 1993; Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999; Ganetz, 1995; Livingstone, 1990, 1997; Strasburger, 1995) which all had an equally great impact in my learning trajectory.

Last but not least, as an academic in training, having learnt from this very first study, I found it extremely important to be more sensible, sensitive and critical in analyzing results which have unexpectedly emerged. I hope to take any possible opportunity that arises to use my research skills and experiences to carry out more studies in areas such as audience reception, women's studies, youth and celebrity cultures. I also hope to play an important role in helping and encouraging students of different classes, ethnics and cultural backgrounds to engage in conducting research of their own interest, regardless of area.

II Focus Groups Discussions Revisited

In this project focus groups were my main research technique, used to gain in-depth understanding of the ways in which Bangkok youth interpret and decode media texts

about celebrities; provided that each text is revealed to audiences as multilayered (Hall, 1980) or polysemic (Real, 1996). This method was employed mostly because in a media effects context focus group techniques are best suited to provide richer details by discussions of opinions and attitudes. In the context of audience reception focus groups are useful to examine how, through interactions, these Bangkok adolescents constructed their interpretations of media texts.

Conducting group discussions has given me a great opportunity to observe the interactions and reactions of teenage students. Group dynamics were significant in this study in various terms. Although I made every effort to ensure equal participation of all students, it was impossible to achieve. Opinions and participation were not equally weighted. Students had different levels of interest in participating although they might have had the same level of knowledge about most issues.

Group discussions greatly contributed both the expected and unexpected. The answers, arguments, thoughts, opinions and attitudes expressed during the sessions had a great deal to do with various factors. These included gender, age and class of the participants and group composition. There follows a discussion on these aspects.

Gender Conception & Gender Composition of the Groups

As discussed in the methodology chapter, how the groups were composed was based mainly on two factors, age and gender, although other factors – class and study major were also taken into consideration. As studies showed (see Chapter 2), gender is one of the key elements important in interpreting media texts. Gender of media consumers is also significant in terms of potential media effects.

I was aware that group composition was significantly important and needed careful consideration. Due mainly to cultural considerations, I decided not to conduct mixed-gender focus groups even though they could have yielded different and more interesting results. I still believe that the decision not to mix genders within the same group was the right one since I was certain that some girls would have felt enormously uncomfortable to disclose private views about sexuality in front of their male peers (and possibly vice versa), even though they might have been sufficiently acquainted. This view is also shared by scholars such as Allyn (1991) and Jackson (1995). Sex may be discussed explicitly among same-sex peers, but almost never in mixed groups of men and women.

And indeed, the way the discussions evolved only confirmed my intuitive decision and at the end I was pleased that I did not conduct mixed-gender groups. The focus group discussions revealed that gender difference was found to be vital in interpreting media messages, especially those regarding gender and sexuality. In different ways and from different social positions, boys and girls both recognized that such texts could offer what Fiske (1989) calls a 'challenge' or a 'threat' to dominant definitions of femininity and masculinity. I found it fascinating to discover certain attitudes and specific kinds of consciousness about members of the opposite gender. It was obvious that all teenage students conceived of and framed one another. Consequently, gender self-consciousness was noticeably significant in this study. Students clearly showed their understanding of how they viewed and thought about each other. Such perceptions were, for instance, the issues of premarital sex, commercial sex, polygamy, and chastity prior marriage.

When discussing social issues, it became clear that both male and female students were well aware of how people of the opposite sex viewed them and of how they perceived themselves. In the sexual context, I would argue that my findings support Jackson's (1995) in that all these teenage students had a fairly accurate picture of how they were conceived by others of the opposite gender – well-brought-up girls are not supposed to flirt or encourage boys to flirt back while nice boys are supposed to respect decent girls, and playing around with them is considered inappropriate. Further, girls are taught the importance of virginity at marriage. Obviously, these young students well recognized that there are great differences in sexual expectations between the genders. Thailand remains a male-dominated society and women's opportunities for sexual expression are restricted compared to men, who have few limits placed on their sexual conduct (Jackson, 1995). Some girls were very much open about premarital sex or cohabitation and had no fear of expressing their liberal views. The girls were well aware of how they would/could be viewed by their peers of the opposite sex holding opposing points of view, and by society in general if they practiced them. It is important to note that although girls in this study were aware of what was expected of them in the Thai society, not all complied (or were willing to comply) with the traditional rules. Clearly, their awareness of mainstream perceptions and the compliance with them are two different things.

On the other hand, boys obviously realized that they had almost no restrictions or specific inhibitions on such matters and showed no fear of being condemned if they decided to cross the line. They seemed to be pleased with the fact that they did not have

to be as concerned about cultural norms as girls did. However, despite showing themselves as liberals on matters of sexuality, they themselves were aware of how liberal girls would be viewed. When put in a hypothetical situation, the discussions became more difficult and their views tended to change. Many of them openly admitted that they would not want or allow their own female family members or girlfriends to be viewed negatively or unfavorably, especially by other men.

Take premarital sex as an example. Culturally it has been suggested and expected that Thai girls should stay virgin until marriage (e.g. Knodel, Saengtienchai, VanLandingham & Lucas, 1999). However, boys realized not only that it was a 'cultural' expectation but also acknowledged that many girls nowadays engaged in sexual relations. The discussions in the male groups revealed that boys did not accept girls' openness toward sex at face value but revalued the standards of being 'decent' girls (and girls did exactly the same to boys).

Therefore, some male students thought of liberal girls as 'easy' and 'degraded' while they themselves wanted to have some sexual experience. That is, a male teenage student might want to have sex with as many girls (or girlfriends) as possible. However, if he would meet someone special whom he would consider as a possible lifetime partner, he would be likely to expect a virgin bride, as some male informants admitted. That was also a fact of which most girls conceived and were aware. Girls, on the other hand, sensed men going to prostitutes as 'acceptable' and 'commonplace' but would be extremely disapproving if their husbands actually engaged in prostitution. This was also observed by Saengtienchai, Knodel, VanLandingham and Pramualratana (1999). Possibly, the students acknowledged the difference between the 'ideal' and the 'real.' However, as Jackson (1995) has discussed, attitudes to sex in Thailand vary between classes and opportunities for sexual experience also differ markedly for Thai men and women. This could also apply to sexuality in certain societies.

All students of both genders clearly believed that women are still viewed as individuals who are supposed to conform to the traditionally cultural norms regarding virginity and marriage. Being of the same age and in the same stage of life, both girls and boys seemed to understand how they view and criticize each other's behavior.

In regard to another concept of sexuality, despite their personal acceptance, girls realized that girls behaving in flirtatious manners would be viewed as 'easy' and 'unacceptable' by some men while men behaving in the same manner would/could be regarded as 'attractive' and 'interesting' by most women.

In addition, teenage students also showed their awareness of how people of the same gender would conceive of them. For example, all male students were well aware of how they as 'straight' men viewed masculine-identified male homosexuals. They reacted to male same-sex relationships much more negatively and strongly than they did to female homosexuality. It was also clear that the degree of rejection of homosexuality and bisexuality among the female participants in this study was much milder than that of their male counterparts.

As far as drinking and smoking are concerned, some girls realized that men might see female smokers and drinkers as 'intolerable' and 'undesirable.' On the other hand, most male students thought some girls viewed male smokers and drinkers as 'typical', 'mature', 'attractive' and 'acceptable.' With regard to the issue of fashion, most men realized that if they wore an expensive watch, drove an European car, visited a popular pub, there would be a possibility that most girls would be attracted and viewed them as 'rich' and 'fashionable' and as having 'good' taste. On the contrary, if boys had a hairstyle with a bizarre color, they might look 'crazy' and 'stupid' to most girls. Girls in skimpy clothes, on the other hand, might think that they could be considered either as *improper* and *easy* or *sexy*, *confident*, and *trendy*. As noted earlier, some male students admitted that they would not want their girlfriends or sister to dress in revealing outfits because they realized how people of their own gender could interpret girls in that kind of clothing. Clearly, both boys and girls were aware of what was expected of each other. Therefore, it could be argued that there was a possibility that they applied different sets of values and standards to into different situations. Apart from gender, their personal and cultural beliefs, and experiences from friends and immediate family members also had an effect on how they viewed and reacted to the issues.

It was clear throughout the discussions that all teenage students were well aware of difference in gender in Thai society. Gender difference plays a vital role in the behavioral patterns of Thai individuals. The concept of gender has shaped and determined what an individual should/should not and can/cannot do. Individuals disregarding social expectations could be viewed negatively or considered unacceptable.

Group Dynamics: Older vs. Younger & Male vs. Female Teens

Although not all students enjoyed participating in the focus groups, all groups (except MM2) generated a great amounts of interesting discussions and arguments as well as a

great deal of laughter and teasing, especially those groups of late adolescents. As mentioned previously, opinion and participation were not equally weighted as some students engaged in discussions more than others. This was partly because some were more interested in exchanging and sharing opinions and ideas than others. However, despite obvious disagreements, the talkative ones did not appear to dominate the discussions or to impose a particular point of view on their more timid peers.

Having said that it is important to keep in mind that although teens showed no fear of sharing differing views, there was still a possibility that some quiet students might have held some personal views that might deviate from the mainstream culture or different from those more talkative ones that made them reluctant to share. On the other hand, some may have felt that they had to conform to the group norms.

Gender – All, except two groups (ML2 and FL2), consisted of students who were acquainted with one another. Although six girls from FL2 group were all from mass communication major, they did not know each other personally prior to the discussion as there were a large number of students enrolled in that major in this private university. I did not know this fact until the discussion was over (I had expected the participants to be to some extent acquainted with each other – as this was one of my sample selection criteria). A cooperative lecturer had selected these students from his own class. And even though they did not know each other, they were interested in what others said and asked questions when they wanted to know more. They all admitted that this focus group session gave them a great opportunity to get to know each other and to see how others viewed the discussed matters. They showed interest and were willing to participate and this discussion lasted the longest (two hours). Five male students (ML2) from the same major showed less interest in the participation although they produced interesting debates. Seven male education students (ML1) were liveliest and the most relaxed individuals and seven females humanities students (FL1) also apparently enjoyed the discussion. Taken as a whole, most older teens were very informative, sharing a great deal of constructive comments and showing their knowledge in various areas.

Male students tended to bring unrelated issues to the discussions more than their female counterparts, although it did not happen a great deal. Therefore it was necessary for me to re-direct the discussion from irrelevant issues. There were also times when both female and male students in each group interrupted each other. There were also some occasions when they talked on top of each other, either to disagree or support others' views. Some expressed viewpoints that others never thought of before. I found this

very interesting as their peers got more excited to listen and to exchange their own opinions. Although these students seemed very confident in their own views, they to some extent accepted others’.

Talkativeness – When a new question was asked for the first time, I tried to encourage students to answer it one by one. The reticent ones some time simply said one or two words, although they were asked to elaborate more. It appeared to me that these students either had no interest in the discussions at all or they were naturally too shy to exchange opinions and ideas that might have been different from others’, despite being urged repeatedly. When they all had their turns to respond, I asked if any one had more to add before moving to the next question or topic. Some additional responses were regularly coming from the chatty teens. There was a silence only on a few occasions when I did not ask any one in particular, and nobody broke the ice. I was pleased to note that there were several occasions when one student’s response encouraged others to disclose and share theirs. As pointed out earlier, had students known of the cash payment, the silent ones might have been more willing to speak out.

Age – As noted already, older female students seemed more sensitive and understanding, showed more sympathy and used milder words than their male counterparts and the younger teens. Especially when discussing homosexuality and bisexuality, the male groups showed their strong rejection toward male same-sex relationships, using strong words. Regardless of their personal interest in discussions, it was obvious that older teens were more critical, articulate and rational than the younger ones. Older students also showed awareness of some serious matters such as politics, law, culture, etc and discussed them critically. The younger female teens were the ones who used most harsh words when showing their dislikes and disagreements. They often showed some degree of pugnacity to describe their intense animosity. When exchanging different views these younger students seemed to show that their thinking was more acceptable than others’ in many cases without actually giving any reasons. On the contrary, the older counterparts showed more rational disputes when elaborating some points. This was mainly because the older were more experienced, mature and sensible. Additionally, older teens behaved better than the younger ones.

Peer Group – As mentioned earlier, the degree of peer influence was remarkably obvious in the discussion of issues of extravagance, substance abuse and sex (on which celebrities had little or no influence). Interestingly, however, peer pressure had little or

no impact on changing an individuals' personal views during the focus group discussions for these teens were quite self-confident holding onto their original beliefs and thoughts.

Gaining Trust – I was certain that my age and gender did not impede the group discussions. As reported previously, gaining trust was very important in this project as sensitive topics about sex and drugs were discussed. I was fortunate that students regarded me as 'older sister' by which they addressed me and to which I referred myself. This was achieved because of the way teachers and academics introduced me to the students, not as a 'researcher' but as an 'older sister' and partly the way I looked and dressed. How I introduced myself to them was also important – I referred to myself as an 'older sister.' Especially, having realized that I was an alumna of their school, those in groups MM1 and FM1 felt even more comfortable to freely express their ideas about the issues as well as how they felt about strict school regulations that they found unnecessary. Overall, my impression was that students did not feel a significant generation gap with me. Further, they felt trusted that their personal views would be dealt with confidence, care, and respect. Consequently, that all together made the teenage participants more relaxed in sharing their views.

However, it is essential to note that although it seemed that all students of both genders felt at ease with me, I had to be cautious with the way I asked about and reacted to discussions on sexuality and substances. I noticed that male students, to a significant extent, tried to be polite with me while sharing their thoughts. This could be due to the fact that I was an 'older' woman. Therefore, they felt obligated to be respectful and well mannered. Discussions with female students were not cause for embarrassment, although some talked more than others (which also happened when discussing other issues).

The history of the dynamics of the focus group is worth discussing. However, since there was only one session with each group, the development between groups was not feasible. However, it was possible to observe whether students' views changed 'within' the group after the participants listened to others.'

It became clear to me that most students had no trouble in expressing their points of view regardless of the issue. While they had their own views, they were open to others' that were different from theirs. Most of the time, they held on to their own thought and, particularly the older ones, articulated their own reasons. I did not see them change their view completely or become uncertain about their initial views. When they realized that others shared the same or similar standpoints, they happily supported and helped each other to articulate more.

I was aware that I was the one who set the agenda during discussions. After one group, I realized what worked and what did not. I therefore approached the discussions in very much the same fashion with all groups. As I managed to generate enough interest within each group, I did not feel the need to modify the approach from one group to another. Nevertheless, although I did not modify very much the way I conducted the discussions, I was trying to discuss the issues in order of seriousness. I believe that the way in which I led the discussions was quite considerate and did not impinge upon group ideas or thoughts, except for encouraging them to talk and elaborate more when necessary. I also believe that my age and gender had no effects on the results.

The more dominant individuals were generally unable to change others' views. The change of prevailing ideas was not significant as most maintained their own strong, personal and independent views. However, it is important to note that quiet teens may have chosen not to expose their personal views but rather felt compelled to conform to their peers. As noted earlier, in each group there were some strong characters who were out-spoken and others were naturally shy or quiet who either did not want to discuss or had no interest. There were several situations where certain subjects produced more conflicts within the groups. This was particularly obvious when discussing sex and lifestyles.

Furthermore, it became clear that discussions tended to become increasingly complex. In most, if not all cases, the discussions opened up the session. Generally there was a person (or persons in some cases) who drove the discussion in one direction. This occurred in all groups. Most of the time, the discussions on issues moved towards both consensus and conflict. This indicates that young students read media text and decoded/understood them differently. As noted earlier, all group discussions confirmed that teens' cultural values played a vital role in discussing issues about teenagers.

Class Consciousness

Most students were quite aware of their own social and economic standing though they did not mention it directly. They regarded and positioned themselves and their peers (and possibly people in general) as part of a given class. Unlike gender and age, class was not used as a main criterion in composing groups as it was not an obvious characteristic and was not feasible to accurately obtain such information from the young students prior to group discussions. I decided not to use a screening technique because I did not wish them

to feel inferior or suspicious why some were selected while others were not. It could also have affected the interactions during the discussions. Nonetheless, the concept of class differences came to my attention. In the analysis, to some extent class was found to be significant in how students interacted with media and the world. I found it necessary and useful to incorporate their consciousness of social standing in my analysis.

These students were not inhibited in sharing their personal views. This was especially obvious when they were discussing the issue of extravagance and their preferences of music and fashion styles. According to Ganetz (1995), class plays a role as certain bands often appeal to specific classes. Tastes and preferences are socially distributed and determine the entertainment markers (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Many believed that liking particular music bands, especially from the west could identify their status as well as to what social groups they belonged. Some teenage students of both genders openly showed their rejections of other groups who were in favor of different things, which to them, represented 'lower' tastes. This makes it clear that they generally thought about themselves as superior to others.

As I pointed out earlier, although academic institutions could indicate the income of families, it does not necessarily mean that all students attending the same schools or universities are from the same social and economic backgrounds. This is especially true in the case of public universities where students had to pass the competitive entrance examination. These state-run institutions have no restrictions to any family of any class whereas private ones are affordable almost only for families with good or reasonable incomes. Although the school a student is attending represents to some extent class distinction, it is important to keep in mind that it is still difficult to accurately justify individuals' class standing based on that fact alone (discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

A very few students who were financially more privileged seemed to be proud to show their affluence in front of peers and some acts of arrogance and self-confidence were evident (though I sensed they had no intention to make their less privileged peers feel uncomfortable or inferior). These students showed their ability to afford 'authentic' luxury goods when discussing the issue of young people's extravagance. In contrast, the only one in the group (FM1) who consumed a great deal of expensive accessories (which was obvious to the rest of the group) did not show off, but rather explained why she was in favor of such items.

Generally, the teenage students tended to identify of what specific groups they themselves and others were members. This is most apparent when they talked about what

sport they played, what fashion items they owned, what CDs they listened to, what pubs they visited, etc. As mentioned previously, teenage students of both genders used these specific symbols to mark their boundaries and articulate their class and difference (Johansson, 1994).

Although to some extent students were conscious about their own class and others', no student directly mentioned the Thai concept of class at all. This could suggest that the young students might not have wanted their peers who were less privileged to feel uncomfortable about their own social standing. However, class in adult Thais is considerably different and important. Thai adult individuals with power and wealth are widely respected and mentioned. It could be argued that the perception of class is, to some extent less important to the young than to the old.

III Ambiguities

I believe that every research project produces some ambiguities, which need explaining. Here I discuss characteristics of Thai youth, cultural specifics of Thai culture, other ambiguous aspects which arose in the course of my project.

What is special about Thai teens?

The Thai students who took part in this study were not too different from other contemporary teenagers around the world. However, they quite differed from those of previous generations. In the past, young Thai people were much more obedient in general, more submissive and respectful to their elders and much less daring toward others (e.g. Komin, 1995; Suthisakorn, 2001). With obvious strong characters, most teenage students in this study were very opinionated, confident, individualistic, and had high self-esteem. They were well aware of various issues not only about people their age but also about other current affairs. These teens knew what they liked and disliked and they also recognized their own personal needs. They were able to show their points of view openly and to a great extent accept others'.

More significantly, this study revealed a correlation between Bangkok youth's media interpretations and their media shaped behavior in terms of identity construction, even though the degree of influence of mediation differed from one individual to another. The concept of idol has been proved significant, especially in those instances where the students used media to identify with others. Consistent with Raviv et al., (1996) and

Ganetz (1995), they used idols, in most cases musicians, in their own identity construction. There was abundant evidence suggesting that celebrities, regardless of type, could act as good role models for the teenage students. Supportably, when compared to other kinds of celebrities, music performers (Strasburger, 1995) and athletes had a more influential role in adolescent development as potential role models.

However, it is interesting to note that these young students were quite unique in some ways. All of them were quite clear about how strong and strict traditional Thai culture was. Many of them showed their annoyance toward cultural values and social restrictions, especially girls in FM1, FL1 and FL2. Boys in ML1 and ML2 considered traditional marriage too complicated while they regarded cohabitation as more practical. Not only did these students see the deep-seated cultural norms as complicated and annoying but they also seemed to appreciate and look for easier solutions. It also became clear that some female students wished that they could do anything men do without being condemned or negatively criticized or having to face undesirable consequences. These include flirtation, premarital sex and cohabitation.

I also find it interesting to discover that each teenage student in this study had different levels of knowledge about various matters. Some exposed themselves to inappropriate media much more than others. Some had sexual experiences and intimate relationships while others had little or none at all. This could be attributed to the way they were raised as they were from different families and backgrounds with different upbringing.

With a great deal of social and cultural changes occurring in recent Thai history, I am certain that had this study been conducted 20 years ago or with people of older generations, the findings would have been very different and comparing the results would be very exciting. It is usually typical that people from two different generations would have different worldviews. Additionally, the world is always changing therefore one culture influences another; however, in Thailand the speed in which this has taken place, literally within one generation, is quite unique.

Cultural Specifics

As noted earlier, a hierarchical society like Thailand tends to have a very a deep-rooted culture. Thai culture determines the way Thais believe and behave. Cultural and personal values and beliefs were found to be the greatest determinants that interceded in the process of meaning making (Poole, 1999) of the young students in this study. One of

the concepts that was mentioned frequently in the context of all group discussions was Thai 'culture.' In the majority of cases the student's responses and comments related to what they would describe as traditional cultural beliefs and family-taught values. Some teens were more open and receptive than others to change. However, many pointed out that while certain kinds of behavior may be seen as unacceptable and unusual by some Thais these same things are perceived as commonplace in the West. They very much recognized the cultural differences between the Thai and Western societies, in terms of values, attitudes and beliefs.

I find it useful to discuss here the perception and expectations of Thai sexual culture as each society has its own norms and values regarding sexuality. In Thailand, generally when two unmarried individuals date, no sexual relationship is implied even though there may be a certain degree of physical contact. There is a distinction between a friendship and relationship. Although people's attitudes toward sex have dramatically changed, it is fair to say that it makes it much more difficult to justify whether or not the two people engage in sexual relations. With an evidently increasing number of HIV/STD cases, unmarried Thai men, including teenagers start to have sexual relations with their girlfriends (Knodel, Saengtienchai, VanLandingham & Lucas, 1999) because they believe that these women are safer than prostitutes. Therefore, more people throughout the country seek sex outside a commercial context (Lyttleton, 1999) and engage freely in sexual relations with their unmarried partners. This also results in a sharp increase of student prostitutes as men conveniently assume that these girls are free from any STD while these female students try to earn extra money to pay for their tuition fees or expensive fashion items (i.e. Charoensutthipan, 2001; Suthisakorn, 2001; Tanchaisawat, 2001).

As I have noted previously, cohabitation has gradually become commonplace these days (Suthisakorn, 2001; Tanchaisawat, 2001), although not all students agreed with it. Consequently, a number of young Thai adults, including university students cohabit with their girl/boyfriends. Like cohabitation, homosexuality in Thai society, has been widely accepted by many Thai people, though it is still frowned upon by others. It could be argued that famous individuals have helped make such behavior more welcome (Jackson, 1999). Although Thai society has been increasingly tolerant and open to different sexual orientations, public displays of affection are still quite a taboo. In fact, however, this attitude among youngsters has greatly altered as they have become more willing to express their affection publicly. As pointed out earlier, with the awareness of

gender inequality, many girls were able to show their resistance of the patriarchal framing of female sexuality and constructed their own oppositional stance. Female students all acknowledged that Thai married men might have ‘additional wives’ and are not viewed with the same level of disapproval as if Thai married women have an affair with another man.

With regard to traditional Thai cultural values, this project has highlighted two important aspects: sexual culture and clothing. As mentioned previously, over the last few decades, numerous debates and academic articles have been written about the issue of polygamy, virginity and revealing clothes. Academics, activists, social workers and concerned individuals have argued that Thai people have copied certain patterns of sexual behavior and fashion from the West (e.g. Tejapira, 1996; Suthisakorn, 2001). In fact, although polygamy is not socially acceptable nowadays, in the past, polygamous relationships and prostitution were widely practiced by upper-class men and even by various kings (Knodel et al., 1999). These practices were viewed as prerogatives of position and economic success. In relation to chastity prior to marriage, it has been said that Thai women as well as youngsters have changed their attitudes toward sexuality. This results in a lessened importance of woman’s virginity at the time of marriage and a decrease in the age of first sexual intercourse (Jackson, 1999). As a Thai academic Ruj Komonbut (2001) has argued, Thailand embraced the concept of ‘monogamy’ from the West during the reign of King Rama IV to show its civilization while the concept of ‘chastity’ was originally derived from India. Historically, Thai females wore strapless and sleeveless tops (traditional Thai costumes). Although that seems to be the same concept as revealing clothing that people wear these days, young females receive a great deal of criticism because of such clothing styles. Interestingly, no students in the study pointed out any of these previous conceptions. This lack of historical perspective while being very aware of popular culture through media exposure indicates the importance Thai teens give to media messages.

However, most students were aware of the issue of political influences on mass media and other areas. Although every person has the right to freedom of expression (with the exception of the threatening of public order, good morals, public safety or the security of the state), the young students recognized such freedom could never be guaranteed. They well acknowledged what was actually going on in the society when politics or political figures were involved. For example, newspaper writing about political affairs, corruption and such could be shaped by ‘influential figures’ allegedly

with connections to the military, police and government (Rabibhadana, 1995; Tejapira, 1996). Therefore, their media awareness was tempered somewhat by their cynicism.

Another much mentioned word was 'individualism' (or individualist/individualistic). The teenage students argued that how people behave, think and believe independently had to do with their concept of themselves as individuals. To those students, no matter how much Thai society has changed, they strongly believe in their sense of self-uniqueness. Many openly mentioned that individuals should be able to lead their own lives the way they want and not have to follow the mainstream expectations. Some students were clearly individualists themselves. Several examples were the way they viewed gender inequality, issues of sexuality and fashion aspects. This was obvious particularly in the groups of older students (MM1, ML2, FL1 and FL 2).

It appeared that these young students were feeling tension between traditional and modern beliefs. It appears from this study that some wanted to be modern while retaining culturally well-established values. This resulted in emotional conflicts and confusion. On the one hand, they felt obligated to conform to or were even proud of Thai traditional norms and family values. On the other, they wanted to experience or were in favor of novelties, and felt compelled to alter their attitudes due to what was going on around them (i.e. Tejapira, 1996) because they might see certain good aspects of modern/western values.

All teenage informants were well aware of recent social and cultural changes and that their own attitudes toward various subjects were different from those of Thai adults. Rapid urbanization, socio-economic transformation, the impact of both western and Japanese ideas through mass media, the opening of discussions of sexuality, mass tourism and increasing numbers of Thai men and women traveling and studying overseas, are together leading to major changes in Thai sexual attitudes (Jackson, 1995). These changes are apparent in increasing freedom in partner selection, the decreased importance of woman's virginity at the time of marriage, a decrease in the age of first sexual intercourse for both men and women, and more open discussion of sexual matters, especially among the young, educated and urban sections of the population (Jackson, 1995). As reported earlier, some teenage students regarded premarital-sex and cohabitation as commonplace nowadays and they described such behavior as 'consensual.' This view is absolutely different from that of people in older generations.

Ambiguous Aspects of Media Influence

This project left some ambiguous aspects that I find necessary to clarify. These areas cover the teens' education and social background, their recognition of media influence, their ambiguous responses, and their self-differentiation, and problematic translation. Focus groups participants were derived from different education and class backgrounds. It was obvious that the majority of students recognized the influence of media but always tried to exclude themselves from any possible effects, especially negative ones. With the possibility of three different readings of media texts, some responses appeared ambiguous. Finally, it is important to note that Thai-English translation to some extent was inevitably problematic as it was impossible to fully translate one language to another.

I would argue that such issues could have impacted the results. However, the degree of the impact would be different from one area to another. Details on each aspect are given in the following parts.

Study majors. One of various aspects that remained ambiguous was if the study majors had an impact on the findings. As mentioned previously, I did not intend to choose students from one major over another. Mass communication students obviously showed their media literacy when discussing media presentations of news, especially soft news in tabloids. Most students from humanities and education majors, however, were equally critical. This was the case especially when they discussed how Thai newspapers and television operated; they were all able to give examples of media distortion. Clearly, students from both majors were very well 'media-educated' (Gauntlett, 1995) and were able to elaborate on the issues of mass media.

While there was no difference in their awareness of mass media between older students of different majors, there appeared to have a difference between the younger students drawn from different fields. I recall that a teacher who recruited high school students from art majors mentioned that she believed these students had more to say about media than those from the science field. This is because in general science students are believed to be more academically-oriented individuals while art students are expected to be more entertainment-oriented ones. Discussions from high school from both majors proved this comment right. Art majors (MM1 and FM1) were more interested in sharing their views about celebrities compared to those from science majors (MM2 and FM2).

However, I believe that they were exposed to very much the same types of media on a daily basis, possibly with different amount of exposure. It is possible that these science students, seen as relatively studious, were concerned about the lecture they were missing during the discussion than the art students who seemed to care less about missing one lecture. Nonetheless, these younger students from both fields were aware of media distortion and bias, as well as media characteristics although they did not share as many critical views as the older groups.

Consciousness of media effect. As seen in the previous chapters, the issue of self-differentiation from 'other' teens was obviously significant in each group of the teenage students in this study. Most students seemed to believe that others (teenagers) were more affected by the mass media than themselves. In many cases, they did not think they themselves were influenced at all. While they denied any negative effects on themselves, they specifically pointed out that media had such effects on 'other' teenagers. I would argue that generally people are less likely to admit that they are negatively affected by media messages, as the third person effect theory suggests (e.g. Perloff, 1989; Shim, 1991, cited in Jeffres, 1997). In contrast, most teenage students seemed to admit they were positively inspired by celebrities' achievement and success.

There appear, however, to be other factors. As argued earlier, as these Thai youngsters were 'media educated', they probably felt confident that they recognized how mass media operated. They actively and critically used popular media as a symbolic recourse in creating their own meanings and social identities (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1996). At the same time, however, we should keep in mind that active readings are not necessarily 'resistant' or 'empowering'. The young's use of media often involves both 'resistance' and 'negotiation'. The more active and critical the audience, the less predictable their interpretations and the effects are. Together, the more educated and the more mature they perceived themselves to be, the less the teens thought they were likely to be affected by media texts. This was more obvious in the case of older teenage students.

I would further argue that in general educated people are more likely to think that they are better equipped to make right decisions without undue influence from mass media. Some teenage students in this study might have presumed that they were able to differentiate right from wrong and good from bad (Jeffres, 1997). For example, being exposed to a product being endorsed by a celebrity, they might not think they were the

target or the victim of such media. With their higher education, they appreciated how mass media and marketing techniques worked, and that celebrities were effective marketing tools, therefore they were presumably alert to media issues and did not believe that they were or could be affected. However, based upon the results of this study it is hard to understand how they can justify that. I would argue that there were some implications of being educated insulating a person from some of the more obvious examples of media influences; a more extensive education does not necessarily mean that individuals are experienced in life. Therefore, there could be a possibility that some students might have had some kind of 'inherent prejudice' when they went through the educational system and may not have realized that experienced individuals could make valued decisions and would not always be 'media victims.'

Although most students admitted that they did not always believe everything they have read and heard from the mass media, some tended to believe that certain rumors about celebrities from mass media were true (ML1). This had to do, I would argue, in part with their personal attitudes toward particular media figures as it is almost impossible for them or the public to verify any gossip. Therefore, it became clear that they were to some extent influenced by the media, which were dictating certain social meanings (Gross, 1991/1995). I also became convinced during this research that teenage students were aware that celebrity and/or media culture influenced them one way or another. It would be fair to say that at the same time they were both active and passive consumers of media culture. One could argue that nobody is 100% active, nor is he or she 100% passive media user. Generally, some individuals are aware of whether they are influenced or not, how and in what way while others are not (or do not want to admit it). It could be partly a matter of self-consciousness and open acceptance. However, it is certain that the more the teens were aware of what was going on, regardless of what and how the media said and presented, the less they were influenced. This was particularly obvious when the students of all groups discussed the article of celebrity drug campaigners. Most were aware of a number of celebrity drug users. Therefore, such anti-drug campaigns would never affect them while they implied that the campaigns would/might only have some affects on other teens (presumably who had no knowledge of the celebrity drug use).

In addition to their educational background, class position was also important to their attitudes of self-differentiation. Privileged teens might have perceived media messages about extravagant items as being intentionally sent to people like them. Therefore, to these privileged teens, less privileged ones would not be affected. On the

other hand, they might have thought that texts about different and more casual lifestyles would affect those who belonged to a 'lower' class. It is important to note here that many expensive schools and universities do not only hold students from wealthy families. They often accept students with good academic performance and those with sporting talent who they expect will help create a positive image and maintain their institutions' reputation. However, such students are a minority group and sometimes feel inferior and uncomfortable being around wealthy peers. Those in this group were aware that they were not representing those of the same class as their peers. Various items they use and own could indicate the difference between those from different social backgrounds. These included expensive stationeries, fashion items, automobiles, etc. Possibly, when asked about the issue of lavish lifestyles, less privileged students might have responded to it more negatively than those from wealthy families.

In relation to media effects, I would like to further argue the concept of celebrity culture. In general, celebrity culture obviously implies two main concepts – 'success' and 'wealth.' Whether the students accepted being affected or not, there seemed to be three possible types of teenage audience. Take for an example the advertising of sport shoes by *Michael Jordan*, an American basketball super star. First, a certain group of students were already influenced or persuaded by the super star and would want to buy the product. These teens were already adopting and applying celebrity values. A second, group admitted they were interested and affected but were aware that they could not afford such a product. A third group had no interest in either the star nor the product at all. Therefore, when asked if they were affected by celebrity culture, those in the first and second groups might have been confused in their own mind and were not sure whether to admit or refuse such affects. On the other hand, those in the last group would immediately deny any affects upon them. All in all, it is essential to note that although focus group participants yielded a great deal of discussion, both agreements and conflicts, they might not have revealed the full extent of the participants' media influences.

In terms of social standing, it was especially clear when discussing lifestyles. Teens were aware of their own social position, they realized their own limitations of what they could and could not do. For example, some argued that it was not necessary, or in many cases, ridiculous and absurd to spend a great deal of money on a brand name carry bag, realizing that they 'themselves' could not afford one. In the course of discussions, it became clear to me that the issues of gender and class played a vital role in how they responded. Teenage students were influenced by their gender and their social standing in

the society. With those factors, they were aware that they could and could not do certain things. Therefore, both male and female samples of teenagers from different classes either held their own strong views, conformed to or resisted other peers' views. In some cases, they reconciled, while in others they showed open conflicts.

Uncertainties. As noted previously, my analysis of focus group discussions was drawn on Hall's encoding/decoding model suggesting that a text is polysemic and open to different readings (1980). As discussed in previous chapters, because occasionally many of the participants' responses were ambiguous, it was difficult to assign an appropriate reading to each statement. However I tried to make sure that each one of them was put into an appropriate decoding. There were times when students changed their views. I would argue that they were having conflicting feelings or were ambiguous toward issues discussed. That is, the teenage students clearly recognized their own involvement in processes they were criticizing. It became clear that in the discussions, at one point or another, teenage students realized that they were criticizing 'themselves.' It could be argued that they were under a certain pressure. Therefore, they might not have felt that they wanted to be too open or to want me to draw them into giving answers. Their responses, therefore, became vague. I would argue that this had to do mainly with their awareness of this aspect of self-criticism and their own gender and different class standings.

Ambiguity in responses was noted from both girls and boys, although more obvious from the former. In relation to gender, some female students, who were quite receptive and liberal toward sexuality especially premarital sex, wanted to share their openness but also did not want to be viewed as 'easy' girls. That is, while they were open, they were also concerned about the traditional cultural values which could/would make them appear to be less than 'decent' girls. They realized that holding 'modern' views and behaving accordingly might cause others to think they were liberalizing norms, as a result, they could be perceived undesirably in the society and would not be immune to criticism. Boys, as mentioned previously, tended to change their responses and feel uncomfortable about their original reactions when later placed in some hypothetical situation. Therefore, they initially agreed and then disagreed or vice versa.

Language. It is essential to keep in mind that this study examined media published in Thai and that focus group discussions were also conducted in Thai. It is

therefore important to take into account that translations from both selected media and discussions could never be fully translated into English. *Phet*, for example, can be translated as 'sex,' 'gender' or 'sexuality.' Westerners who have studied Thais have faced the task of unpacking and explicating one of the most multivalent and polysemic words in the Thai language (Cook & Jackson, 1999). This view has also been observed and discussed, and certain problems about Thai have been encountered by other researchers (e.g. Bickner, 1992; Chirasombutti & Diller, 1999)

In addition, a great deal of slang and vulgar language were used in both gossip columns and focus group discussions. For instance, *morchid* connotes low taste, *choey* indicates tastelessness while *ver* implies undesirably overreacted actions/behavior and *ubaat* negatively suggests unpleasantness/ugliness. These are the closest English translations. *Context* is significantly important in translating. Therefore, although every effort had been put in when translating, tough-to-articulate nuances and subtle distinctions in degree might inevitably have been lost.

It appears that the above ambiguities are inevitable. Nonetheless the degree of impact of these aspects is not enough to outweigh the other important factors which I identified in this study. It is clear to me that gender and age of the sample, which affect how individuals believe, think and behave are far more important. However, even though qualitative methods are suitable for a study like this one, the results are always based on the openness of the informants.

IV Further Area of Research

For me, this Ph.D. project has acted like a catalyst which will give me opportunities to investigate further. As pointed out earlier, I am aware of the large amounts of data from the 'work-related activities' and 'others' categories derived from quantitative analysis which were not considered in depth here. As reported in the previous chapter, most teenage students are inspired by and have admired the success and popularity of celebrities who are successfully in both the entertainment business and their personal matters, especially education. It would be very interesting to investigate how those celebrities who have been successful started their entertainment career, what did they do and how do they have to behave in order not only to succeed but also to maintain their reputation.

If I continue working in this area, it would be more appealing to employ a participant observation technique. I also feel enthusiastic to carry out a similar project using an ethnographic approach. As ethnographies are based on long-term and in-depth fieldwork (e.g. Seiter, 1996), I believe that this approach would allow for the observation of teenagers' actual behavior in the context of everyday life and for the assessment of the dynamics between their mediated attitudes and actual behavior, shaped by celebrity culture (if any).

I would personally be interested in observing how male and female participants would react to each other's ideas about sensitive issues such as sex and drugs. This would be another opportunity for me to pursue a comparable project with mixed-gender group discussions as well as with early teenagers and adults. I believe that interactions between those groups would yield not only different but also much more interesting data than those which appear in my present study, how the discussions would be exchanged and more importantly how they would react to each other's personal views would have been altered significantly.

I will be working in a university in the south of Thailand where there is a large population of Muslims whose customs, rituals and cultural values of the Islamic way of life have been so intimately ingrained in the ethnic Malay Muslims. I can foresee more opportunities to conduct similar and different areas of research with these people who have such strong cultural beliefs. As being interested particularly in audience reception, I am eager to study the media representation of Thai Muslims in the south of Thailand – how media exposure has impacted on the shaping of the Muslims in the southern Thailand among Thais, and how these Muslims think they are presented in the media. This kind of study, I believe, would be considerably worthwhile and beneficial to both at the national and local levels. It is important, however, to point out that serious and careful considerations must be taken when selecting media and topics to discuss for researchers need to treat the region's people, cultural values and religious beliefs with respect, understanding and sensitivity.

Forty years ago, direct effect studies were based mainly on laboratory research. This study has suggested that media influence is not something straightforward (see also Gauntlett, 1995; Phiphitkul, 2001). My project to study audience reception and media effects has shown to be a more complex task than it first appeared. The analysis was also based on multi-dimensional situations. It could be argued that media consumers may not

always be aware that they are manipulated by media and celebrity cultures. At times, they may be influenced but not realize it. Like many others (e.g. Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999; Real, 1996; Steele & Brown, 1995), my study to examine how teenagers decode the media texts and to what extent celebrity culture influenced them, found that they are not so blindly influenced but still influenced to some extent.

However, I am in agreement with other studies, that the data in this project are not sufficient for making conclusive general remarks about the complex process of meaning production (Poole, 1999). Despite its multiplicity and fluidity, the meanings in the study have been produced within a specific time and place (Poole, 1999). Had the study been conducted at a different time and with different groups of participants, the results could have been different.

I hope that my study will increase the awareness of how young Thai population use and interpret media texts. It is also my expectation that through the words of the students in my project, we, Thai people can learn more about our young people. I agree with Roberts' (1990) view that the polysemic nature of many media texts should be positively exploited; teachers, parents, and other adults with influence in youngsters' lives can help guide them to more constructive interpretation of media (cited in Duke, 2000).

As reported previously, despite a great number of Thai scholars who have published on media effects on young people, research on audience reception and the relation between youth and celebrity cultures is scarce. Media effects in Thailand is limited to influences of various types of media on the users rather than how users read and understand them or the relationship of their media interpretation and potential effects. I believe that I can properly place my study in the context of communication, in particular in terms of audience reception. This is because this project contributes to the audience studies by proposing the link between the encoding of textual meanings and marketing production of the media text and the ways audiences decode meanings from the text (Phiphitkul, 2001). This is an initial contribution that I expect to convey a change to audience reception and media effects research in Thailand. Hopefully, the results of my investigation will also fill a substantial gap in Thai scholarship on media effects and youth culture. I also hope my project contributes to expanding the body of research revealing how cultural identification is still important to young Thais. Additionally, I expect that my work will also be of use to mass communication and sociology scholars, media professionals, parents and teachers, and to members of the general public who are interested in understanding the role of mass media as well as celebrity culture on young

people. Lastly, I am proudly confident that my work is one of the first few projects of qualitative empirical study to challenge the traditional audience analysis in Thai academia extensively dominated by quantitative survey research (Phiphitkul, 2001).

Appendices

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

1.

Please name your five favorite programs in each media and rank them in order of preference
(1=most preferred and 5=least preferred)
- Case No.

Gender

Age

Rank	Magazine	Rank	Newspaper	Rank	TV/Cable	Rank	Radio
1		1		1		1	
2		2		2		2	
3		3		3		3	
4		4		4		4	
5		5		5		5	

2.

How often do you go to the cinema in a month?
1) 0-1 2) 2-3 3) 4-5 4) More than 5
3.

Please rank five different media in order of frequency of use
(1=most used and 5=least used)

TV/Cable

Newspaper

Radio

Magazine

Film

Appendix B

The Ten Most Popular Programs by Media Type

Rank	Television			Radio		
	Name	Type	Sig Value	Name	Type	Sig Value
1	Ch. 3 Drama	Drama	802	Radio Vote	Music	1,076
2	Twilight Show	Variety	450	Radio No Problem	Music	958
3	Teen Talk Inter	Documentary	448	Green Wave	Music	640
4	At Ten	Variety	344	V. Channel	Music	469
5	Jukebox Game	Game Show	340	Love FM	Music	455
6	Bang Bang Bang	Music	310	Hot Wave	Music	345
7	Ch. 7 Drama	Drama	282	FMX	Music	84
8	Ch. 5 Drama	Drama	176	Joh Sor 100	Traffic	72
9	Game Zone	Game Show	173	Sport Radio	Sport	52
10	Joh Jai	Talk Show	165	Fashion Radio	Music	47
Rank	Newspaper			Magazine		
	Name	Type	Sig Value	Name	Type	Sig Value
1	Thai Rath	Thai Daily National	1,350	The Boy	Entertainment	509
2	Daily News	Thai Daily National	1,156	Tergubchan	Entertainment	469
3	Matichon	Thai Daily National	491	Image	Entertainment	342
4	Nation Junior	English Daily National	259	I-Spy	Entertainment	297
5	Siamrath	Thai Daily National	252	Dichan	Entertainment	293
6	Bangkok Post	English Daily National	222	Sarakadee	Documentary	271
7	The Nation	English Daily National	162	Cleo	Entertainment	253
8	Kaosod	Thai Daily National	142	Elle	Entertainment	227
9	Soccer	Thai Daily National	81	Praew	Entertainment	215
10	Naewna	Thai Daily National	68	Praew Sudsapda	Entertainment	212

Appendix C

Coding Sheet

1.

Case Number

2.

Date

3.

Type of Media

Magazine

1.

Tergubchan

2.

The Boy

3.

Image

4.

Cleo

5.

Elle

Newspaper

6.

Thai Rath

7.

Daily News

TV program

8.

Twilight Show

9.

Teen Talk Inter

4.

Main Topics

01

Love affairs/sex/relationships

02

Aspects of fashion

03

Lifestyle

04

Career Activities

05

Hobbies

06

Bad/anti-social behavior

07

Politics

08

Education

09

Drugs and alcohol

10

Other

5.

Sub Topics

6.

Type of Media Representation

1

Gossip

2

Interview

3

Quote

4

Review & Critique

5

Fashion

6

Front Page News Report (Newspaper only)

7

News report

8

Letters/Q & A

9

Other

7.

Tone of Media Representation

1.

Positive

2.

Negative

3.

Neutral

4.

Unclear

8.

Type of Main Actor(s)

1

Actor

2

Singer/Music performer

3

Model

4

Athlete

5

Mixed

6

Unclear

7

Other

Appendix C (Continued)

9.	Nationality of Main Actor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 Thai or Half-Thai	4 More than one
	2 Western	5 Unclear
	3 Japanese	6 other
10.	Gender of Main Actor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 Male	
	2 Female	
	3 Male and Female	
	4 Unclear	
	5 Other (i.e. homosexual)	
11.	Number of Main actor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 One Individual	4 One Group
	2 Two to Three Individuals	5 Two to Three Groups
	3 More than three Individuals	6 More than Three Groups
12.	Type of Minor Actor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1. Actor	5 Mixed
	2. Singer/Music performer	6 Unclear
	3. Model	7 Other
	4. Athlete	
13.	Nationality of Minor Actor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 Thai or Half-Thai	4 More than one
	2 Westerner	5 Unclear
	3 Japanese	6 Other
14.	Gender of Minor Actor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 Male	
	2 Female	
	3 Male and Female	
	4 Unclear	
	5 Other (i.e. homosexual)	
15.	Number of Minor Actor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 One Individual	4 One Group
	2 Two to Three Individuals	5 Two to Three Groups
	3 More than three Individuals	6 More than Three Groups
16.	Number of Photographs Appeared	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 None	
	2 One	
	3 More than one	

Appendix C (Continued)

Coding Form (used to input data)

(1-4) <table><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> (case no.)					(5-10) <table><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> (dd) (mm) (yy)							(11) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (media type)			
(12-13) <table><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table> (main topic)			(14-15) <table><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table> (sub topic)			(16) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (type of rep)		(17) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (tone of rep)							
(18) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (type of main)		(19) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (gender of main)		(20) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (nat. of main)		(21) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (no. of main)									
(23) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (type of minor)		(24) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (gender of minor)		(25) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (nat. of minor)		(26) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (no. of minor)		(27) <table><tr><td></td></tr></table> (no. of pic of appeared)							

Appendix D

Coding Instructions

Section 4 – Main topics

Each media text is to be coded by its main topic and then by subtopics as follows:

- 01 Any text which is about love affairs/sex/relationships.
- 02 Any text that represents any aspect of fashion
- 03 Any text which mentions celebrities' lifestyles.
- 04 Any text focuses on any work-related activities (behind the scenes, sports competition)
- 05 Any text which mentions celebrities' hobbies.
- 06 Any text which indicates bad/anti-social manners
- 07 Any text about celebrities' involvement in politics such as election campaigns.
- 08 Any text what mentions celebrities' education such as success in matriculation exams and college graduation.
- 09 Any text indicating involvement in drugs and alcohol such as abuse of drugs and anti-drug campaigns.
- 10 Any text about celebrities that does not fit into any of the above topics.

Section 5 – Type of Media Representation

- 1 Gossip – talk or rumor without direct quotes
- 2 Interview – either in person or indirect (e.g. translation),
- 3 Quotes – either from direct or indirect interview
- 4 Review & Critique – critical reviews or commentaries about celebrities or their work
- 5 Fashion – fashion shooting, excluding advertising
- 6 Front Page News Report – any coverage appeared in front page (in newspapers only)
- 7 News report – a formal form of reporting news
- 8 Letters/Q & A – letters to editor or Q and A column asking for information about celebrities
- 9 Other

Appendix E

List of Open-ended Questions for Focus Group Discussions

1. What is your first impression about the article and/or celebrity(ies) in the article?
What are your personal opinions about the article/celebrities?
2. What do you think has to do with your responses?
Culture, direct experience, prejudice, age and gender etc...
3. What do you think about the media with regard to this article? Reliability? Biases?
4. Do you think the media have an impact on how you see the article?
5. Does the article affect your reasoning and/or ideas/opinions in any way?
6. Do you ever disagree with any media coverage of celebrities? If so, give example.
7. Do you think celebrities have an impact on your personalities, identities? If so, in what way?
Did you ever pick up any ideas from celebrities in terms of both attitudes and actual behavior?
8. Do you ever see any celebrities (both Thai and international) as role models? Who? Why?
9. Do you ever imitate what celebrities have done? If so, please give examples. (Probe, hairstyle, clothing, etc)
10. How important do you think the media are in your everyday life?
11. How important do you think Thai culture is to you? In what way?
What do you think about western cultures?
12. How important do you think peer group/peer pressure is? In what way?
13. Do you think that your friends affect your media consumption? If so, how?
14. Have you ever bought any items advertised, worn, or used by your favorite celebrities?
15. Do you think that the amount of exposure to the media has something to do with your attitude and behavior? If so, how? Why?
16. Did you ever come across inappropriate media content that you think should have been censored? If so, give an example. Is there anything you want the media to change?
17. More discussions on celebrities' identity and the students own identity construction, media influence and Thai culture and other culture.

Appendix F

Questionnaire (Prior to Focus Group Discussions)

1. Case Number: _____
 2. Gender: 1) Male 2) Female
 3. Age: 1) 15 2) 16 3) 17 4) 18 5) Other _____
 4. Your nationality 1) Thai 2) Other (please specify) _____
 5. Your religion 1) Buddhist 2) Other (please specify) _____
 6. Level of Education: 1) M1 2) M 4: field _____ 3) Freshman: Faculty _____
 7. Weekly Income (Approx 60 Baht is equivalent to 1 GBP)
1) Less than 500 Baht 2) 501 – 1000 3) 1001 – 1500 4) more than 1500
 8. Your favorite television program _____
 9. Your favorite cable television program (if any) _____
 10. Your favorite radio program _____
 11. Your favorite newspaper _____
 12. What is your most favorite column? (circle one)
1) Politics 2) Social 3) Culture
4) Education 5) Economic 6) Science & Technology
7) Sport 8) Entertainment 9) Other (please specify) _____
 13. Your favorite magazine _____
 14. What is your favorite column? (circle one)
1) Health & Beauty 2) Fashion 3) Novels
4) Interview 5) Science & Technology 6) Entertainment News & Reviews
7) Gossip 8) Travel & Leisure 9) Other (please specify) _____
 15. Approximately how many hours a week do you use the Internet?
1) None 2) 1 – 10 3) 11 – 20 4) 21 – 30 5) more than 30 hours
 16. What is your main purpose for using the Internet? (circle one)
1) Not at all 2) Search for info 3) Chat 4) Email 5) Other (specify) _____
 17. Number of movies attended in a month
1) None 2) 1 – 2 3) 3 – 5 4) more than 5
- Other media consumption where 1 is Yes and 2 is No
- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| 18. CDs or Cassette tapes | 1 | 2 |
| 19. VDO or DVD | 1 | 2 |
| 20. VDO or computer game | 1 | 2 |
| 21. Books | 1 | 2 |
22. What medium do you consume the most on a daily basis?
1) Magazine 2) Television 3) Radio 4) Newspaper 5) Internet 6) Other (please specify) _____
 23. Do you parents/guardians control your media consumption? 1) Yes 2) No

Appendix F (Continued)

Fashion

24. How often do you follow fashion?
1) Not at all 2) Sometimes 3) Always 4) No comments
25. Do you have any tattoos?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
26. What do you think about tattoos?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
27. Have you got your ear (s) pierced?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
28. What do you think about men wearing earrings?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
29. Do you have any parts of your body pierced (other than your ears)?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
30. What do you think about having any parts of your body pierced (i.e. belly button, nose, lip, tongue)?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
31. Have you ever dyed your hair an unusual color (i.e. pink, red, yellow, purple, blonde)?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
32. What do you think about dyeing hair an unusual color (as above)?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
33. Do you have any spaghetti strap tank tops?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments 4) No, I'm a man
34. Do you have any strapless tank tops?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments 4) No, I'm a man
35. What do you think about wearing revealing clothes (i.e. spaghetti strap/strapless tank top)?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Depending on circumstances 4) Commonplace 5) No comments
36. How many of the following brand name items do you own such as bags, shoes, watch, clothes and other accessories: Channel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada, DKNY, Versace, Kenzo, Calvin Klein, Celine, Yves Saint Laurent, Bvlgari, Banana Republic, Liz Claiborne, Issey Miyake, Giorgio Armani, Salvatore Ferragamo, Benetton, Philippe Charriol, Bally and Doctor Marten?
1) None 2) One item 3) Two items 4) Three items 5) more than three items
37. How many of the following items do you own: a mobile phone, PCT and a pager?
1) None 2) One 3) Two 4) All above
38. Do you own a car?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments

Drug and alcohol abuse

39. Have you ever tried smoking cigarettes?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
40. Do you smoke cigarettes?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
41. What do you think about smoking cigarettes?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
42. Have you ever tried drugs (other than cigarettes)?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
43. Do you use drugs (other than cigarettes)?
1) Not at all 2) Sometimes 3) Always 4) No comments
44. What do you think about taking drugs (other than cigarettes)?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments
45. Have you ever tried alcohol?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
46. Do you drink alcohol?
Not at all 2) Sometimes 3) Always 4) No comments
47. What do you think about drinking?
1) Agree 2) Disagree 3) Commonplace 4) No comments

Appendix F (Continued)

Relationships and sexuality

48. Do you currently have a boy/girlfriend?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
49. Where 1 is Agree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Commonplace and 4 is No comments
What do you think about public displays of affection?
1 2 3 4
50. What do you think about premarital sex?
1 2 3 4
51. What do you think about having a sexual relationship at school age?
1 2 3 4
52. What do you think about bisexuality?
1 2 3 4
53. What do you think about homosexuality?
1 2 3 4
54. What do you think about co-habitation?
1 2 3 4
55. What do you think about extramarital or promiscuous sexuality?
1 2 3 4
56. Have you ever had sexual relationship with your boy/girl friend, friend or someone you know?
1) Yes 2) No 3) No comments
57. From which source do you most receive information about sex?
1) Media 2) friends 3) Sex education in school 4) family
58. From what medium do you most receive information about sex?
1) None 2) Magazine 3) VDO 4) Movie 5) Books 6) Other (please specify) _____

It is suggested that both local and international celebrities such as actors, singers, models and athletes have an impact on identity's construction of young people in different ways. Please answer the following questions

59. How much do celebrities' identities have an impact on yours in terms of fashion?
1) None/very little 2) Little 3) Moderately 4) Very much 5) Extremely
60. What nationality of celebrities do you think have an impact on your identities in terms of fashion?
1) None (if 1 in Q. 59) 2) Thai 3) American 4) English 5) Japanese 6) Other (specify) _____
61. How much do celebrities' identities have an impact on yours in terms of drug and alcohol abuse?
1) None/very little 2) Little 3) Moderately 4) Very much 5) Extremely
62. What nationality of celebrities do you think have an impact on your identities in terms of alcohol?
1) None (if 1 in Q. 59) 2) Thai 3) American 4) English 5) Japanese 6) Other (specify) _____
63. How much do celebrities' identities have an impact on yours in terms of relationship and sexuality?
1) None/very little 2) Little 3) Moderately 4) Very much 5) Extremely
64. What nationality of celebrities do you think have an impact on your identities in terms of sexuality?
1) None (if 1 in Q. 59) 2) Thai 3) American 4) English 5) Japanese 6) Other (specify) _____

Appendix G

One-Week Media and Social Activities Diary

The aim of this one-week diary is to obtain an understanding and gather data on the media and social activities in which you regularly participate. It includes your usage of various kinds of media activities and participation in social, cultural, educational, religious and sport activities. The tables in the first section allow you to give data on media consumption for one specific week. You may start any day and complete the seven days. The second part contains a set of questions on other activities.

Below is an example for one day of media activities.

Monday

Media	Specify Name	Date/Time	Comments/Remarks
Television (give program name and channel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> News (ITV) Lab chapoh kon ruu jai (Ch 3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 / 7.30 p.m. 6 Nov 00 / 10.30 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View regularly, followed news about election in the US Fun & Wanted to know about celebrities' lives
Cable TV (give program name and channel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discovery Channel (UBC) Series (36) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 / 3.00 p.m. 6 Nov 00 / 9.30 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoyed informative documentary Watched <i>Friends</i>, funny & entertaining
Radio (give program name and station)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joh Soh 100 Radio Vote (93.5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 / 6.30 p.m. 6 Nov 00 / 10.00 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic report on the way to school Enjoyed it & called to play games
Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nation Junior Read some articles and browsed through the rest Thai Rath Read entertainment and sport columns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 6 Nov 00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needed an article for homework Read news about football premier league & singers
Magazines/Journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cosmopolitan Read interview articles and fashion sections Tergubchan Read most articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> October Issue November Issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in international models and fashion Enjoyed reading interviews with singer and gossips
Other Literature (e.g. books, brochures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hua ok ta lok ying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To relax
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> www.yahoo.com www.sanook.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 6 Nov 00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Searched for info on leukemia Emailed and chatted with friends
Other (e.g. movies, VDO/DVD, VDO game, CD, cassette tapes, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlife CD and Nicole tape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Nov 00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listened before going to bed

Case No. _____ Age: _____ Gender: 1) Male 2) Female
 Nationality: _____ Religion: _____
 Level of Education: 1) M1 2) M 4: Field _____ 3) Freshman : Faculty _____
 Weekly Income: 1) Less than 500 Baht 2) 501 – 1000 3) 1001 – 1500 d) more than 1501

Appendix G (Continued)

Part I Media Diary

1. Which media do you use? In each case, please specify the names of media programs, newspaper, websites, etc. as well as the date and time where appropriate. In the comments section, please give reasons why you use such media, likes/dislikes and any other relevant remarks and opinions.

Monday – Sunday¹

Media	Specify Name	Date/Time	Comments/Remarks
Television (give program name and channel)			
Cable TV (give program name and channel)			
Radio (give program name and station)			
Newspapers			
Magazines/Journals			
Other Literature (e.g. books, brochures)			
Internet			
Other (e.g. movies, VDO/DVD, VDO game, CD, cassette tapes, etc.)			

¹ In actual diaries, seven tables for Monday through Sunday were separated.

Appendix G (Continued)

Part II Social and Cultural Activities

2 Have you ever participated in any conferences/seminars? If so, please give details.

3 Have you ever participated in any social and cultural activities, for example sports, music, arts, religious activities? If so, please give details.

4 Are you a member of any organization or association?

5 Is Thai culture important to you? Please describe this in any way you like.

6 How religious do you think you are? Please define and describe this in any way you like.

7 Any other comments on social and cultural activities which you feel are important to you and which help you define and think about yourself?

8 How important are the media in helping you think about yourself and others?

Thank you for your time in completing this diary. If you would like to know more about this research please contact Nuwan Thapthiang at the address below:
Centre for Mass Communication Research
University of Leicester
104 Regent Road,
Leicester, LE1 7LT
ENGLAND
Alternatively, please email me at nt17@le.ac.uk or nthapthiang@hotmail.com

Appendix H

List of Teens' Popular TV & Cable Programs and Category in Alphabetical Order

No.	TV & Cable Program	Category	No.	TV & Cable Program	Category
1	07 show	Variety Show	35	Khaw Ieo Duay Khon	Entertainment
2	At Ten	Variety Show	36	Lap Chapoh Kon Ruchai	Talk Show
3	Bang Bang Bang	Music	37	Man Mai Mem	Entertainment
4	Be On A Hot Kick	Sports	38	Maya TV	Variety Show
5	Big Cinema	Movie	39	Movie On Three	Movies
6	Bow & Joys	Music	40	MTV Night	Music
7	Cartoon 9	Cartoon	41	Music Xchange	Movie
8	Ch3 Drama	Drama	42	News (General)	News
9	Ch5 Drama	Drama	43	National Geographic	Documentary
10	Ch7 Drama	Drama	44	Pee Tu Paw Naw 5	Talk Show
11	Ch9 Drama	Drama	45	Pok Pok Pok	Game Show
12	Channel V	Music	46	Put Len Len	Music
13	Chaw Sanam	Sport	47	Raberd Terd Terng	Comedy Show
14	Chinese Movie On Ch3	Movie	48	Roy Pad Krabuan Tah	Game Show
15	Ching Roy Ching Laan	Game Show	49	Samakom Chom Dao	Talk Show
16	Choh Chai	Talk Show	50	Sanya Maha Chon	Talk Show
17	CNN News	News	51	Saranae Show	Talk Show
18	Discovery Channel	Documentary	52	Shing Shang Cartoon	Cartoon
19	E For Teen	Music	53	Shock Games	Game Show
20	Fantasy Mee Harng	Game Show	54	Sitcom	Situation Comedy
21	Fashion Music	Music	55	Star Movie	Movie
22	Four Teen	Variety Show	56	Super Concert	Music
23	Game Charachon	Game Show	57	Super Sport	Sport
24	Game Gae Jon	Game Show	58	Super Yaam Puk	Game Show
25	Game Hot Pleng Hit	Music	59	Ta Pi Soot	Documentary
26	Game Khon Geng & Lg	Game Show	60	Tee Sanit	Variety
27	Game Zone	Game Show	61	Teen Talk	Documentary
28	Game Luang Loke	Game Show	62	Tong Tiaw Thai	Documentary
29	Gang of Five	Music	63	Took Chai Chai Loey	Game Show
30	HBO	Movie	64	Twilight Show	Variety Show
31	Ie Show.Com	Variety Show	65	Way Tee Tong	Game Show
32	ITV	News	66	World Soccer & Sport	Sport
33	Jukebox Games	Game Show	67	Yu Hoo Team	Game Show
34	Katch Up	Teens			

Number of TV & Cable Programs by Category in Percentage

No.	Category	Number	%
1	Documentary	5	7.46
2	Dramas & Movies	10	14.92
3	Game Show	15	22.38
4	Music	10	14.92
5	News	3	4.47
6	Sport	4	5.97
7	Talk Show & Variety Show	13	19.40
9	Other	7	10.44
	Total	67	100

Appendix I

List of Teens’ Popular Radio Programs and Category in Alphabetical Order

No.	Radio Program	Category
1	88.5	Music
2	104.5 fm	Music
3	Choh Soh 100	Community Service
4	Fashion Radio	Music
5	Fm (106)	Music
6	Fm 98	Music
7	Fm 99	Music
8	Fmx	Music
9	Green Wave	Music
10	Hot Wave	Music
11	Look Toong Fm	Music
12	Love Fm	Music
13	No Problem	Music
14	Pleng Thai Khun Kho Ma	Music
15	Radio Vote	Music
16	Radio Relax	Music
17	R.S. (106)	Music
18	Ruam Duay Chuay Gan	Community Service
19	Shock Fm	Music
20	Soh Who Poh 91	Music
21	Sport Radio	Sports
22	The Shock	Entertainment
23	V Channel	Music

Number of Radio Programs by Category in Percentage

No.	Category	Number	%
1	Music	19	82.61
2	Sports	1	4.35
3	Other	3	13.04
	Total	23	100

Appendix J

List of Teens’ Popular Newspapers and Category in Alphabetical Order

No.	Newspaper	Category
1	Baan Muang	Thai National Daily
2	Bkk Post	English National Daily
3	Daily News	Thai National Daily
4	Khao Sod	Thai National Daily
5	Kick Off	Sport
6	Matichon	Thai National Daily
7	Naew Nah	Thai National Daily
8	Nation Junior	English National Daily
9	Pu Chad Garn	Thai National Daily
10	Siam Banterng	Entertainment
11	Siam Keelah	Sport
12	Siam Rath	Sport
13	Soccer	Sport
14	Sport Pool	Sport
15	Student Weekly	English National Weekly
16	Tee Ded	Entertainment
17	Thai Post	Thai National Daily
18	Thai Rath	Thai National Daily
19	The Nation	English National Daily

Number of Newspapers by Category in Percentage

No.	Category	Number	%
1	Thai National Daily	8	42.10
2	English National Daily	3	15.78
3	Sport	5	26.31
4	Entertainment	2	10.52
5	Other	1	5.26
	Total	19	100

Appendix K

List of Teens' Popular Magazines and Category in Alphabetical Order

No.	Magazine	Category	No.	Magazine	Category
1	All star	Sports	37	Kwan ruen	Women
2	Art ideal	Art	38	Life and family	Life & Experience
3	Au.saw.taw	Travel	39	Lips	Women
4	Baan lae suan	Home & Garden	40	Liverpool weekly	Sports
5	Boom	Entertainment	41	Maha snook	Comic
6	Bong Bong	Teens	42	Manu(nited)	Sports
7	C-Cids	Cartoon	43	Mega	Video Games
8	Chee wit jing	Life & Experience	44	Mix	Music
9	Chee wit rak	Life & Experience	45	Movie Time	Entertainment
10	Chee wit weekly	Life & Experience	46	On air	Music
11	Choo choo	Teens	47	Pink	Teens
12	Cinemax	Entertainment	48	Ploy gam petch	Women
13	Cleo *	Women	49	Pop	Music
14	Cosmopolitan *	Women	50	Praew	Women
15	Dara paapa yon	Entertainment	51	Praew sudsabda	Women
16	Dichan	Women	52	Puen (Gun)	Hobbies
17	Elle *	Women	53	Puen dern taang	Travel
18	Entertainment	Entertainment	54	Quick PC	Computer
19	Fooball Siam	Sports	55	R. S.	Music
20	For men	Men	56	Reader's Digest *	Documentary
21	Future game	Entertainment	57	Sakun thai	Women
22	Game mac	Entertainment	58	Sarakadee	Travel
23	Geographic	Documentary	59	Seven teen	Teens
24	Girl friend	Entertainment	60	Slam dunk	Sports
25	GM *	Men	61	Smile	Entertainment
26	Gold star	Entertainment	62	Spice	Teens
27	Heart	Teens	63	Star soccer	Sports
28	Hobby model	Entertainment	64	Techno garnbin	Aviation
29	Ice	Teens	65	Tergubchan	Teens
30	Image	Women	66	The boy	Teens
31	Inter décor	Home & Garden	67	The mirror	Entertainment
32	I-spy	Teens	68	Tiaw rob loke	Travel
33	J-spy	Teens	69	Tuay toon	Comic
34	Katch	Teens	70	TV Pool	Sports
35	Khai hua raw	Comic	71	Update	Documentary
36	Koo sarng koo som	Life & Experience			

* Foreign magazines in Thai-language version

Number of Magazines by Category in Percentage

No.	Category	Number	%
1	Entertainment	12	16.90
2	Music	4	5.63
3	Documentary	3	4.22
4	Life & Experience	5	7.04
5	Men	2	2.82
6	Women	11	15.50
7	Teens	12	16.90
8	Sports	7	9.86
9	Other	15	21.13
	Total	71	100

Appendix L

The Boy's Contents Page

menu in this issue		JUNE
BOY	1-24	
	26	FASHION BOY
	30	COVER BOY STORY : BACK TO SCHOOL ตอน ตามหาน้องชายจอม อื่นๆ อื่นๆ
	32	OPEN UP
	33	OPEN MAIL
	34	HELLO PART BOY
	35	ALL ABOUT : ถ้า "อินรีนทร์" ดีพิมพ์
	36	ALONG THE WAY
	37	BIG SQUARE
	38	COOL CLUB : มาทำ! VJ SEARCH
	40	CLOSE UP : เพื่อนคู่กายของ 4 สาว
	41	DANCE : KISS อย่าคิดว่าไม่สำคัญ
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ทำผม : สมพร อธิพันธ์
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Brow Shadow, Wonder Curl
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Expert Eye Eyeshadow สี Purple
Rage แล้วริมฝีปากด้วย Moisture
Whip Lipstick สี Posh Plum

แต่งหน้า : ทองหล่อ ฌีเมญ
ทำผม : Lili
บรรณาธิการแฟชั่น : กุศวิทย์ เลาสุวรร

ELLE

A MONTH WITH ELLE

มิถุนายน 2543
No.68

THAILAND

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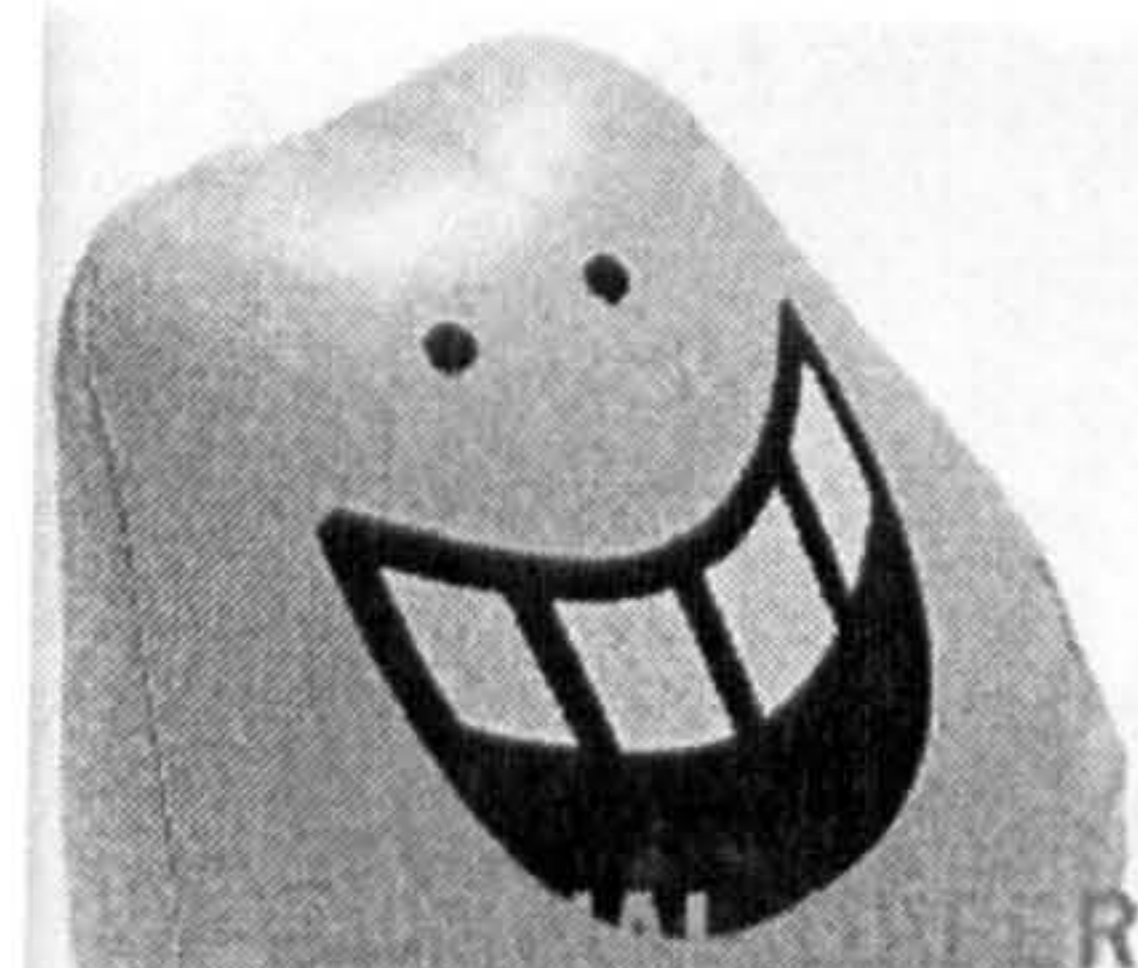
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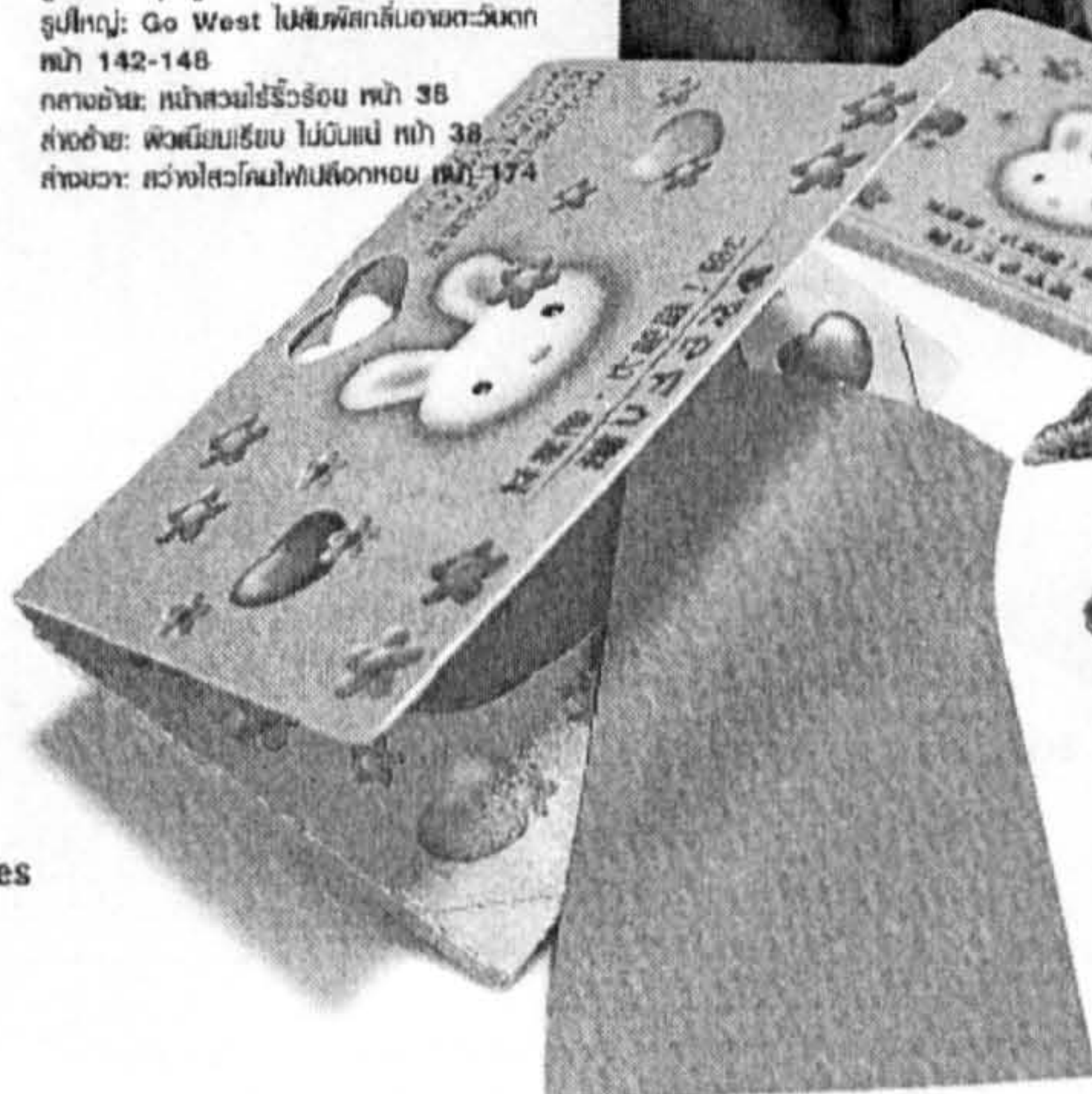
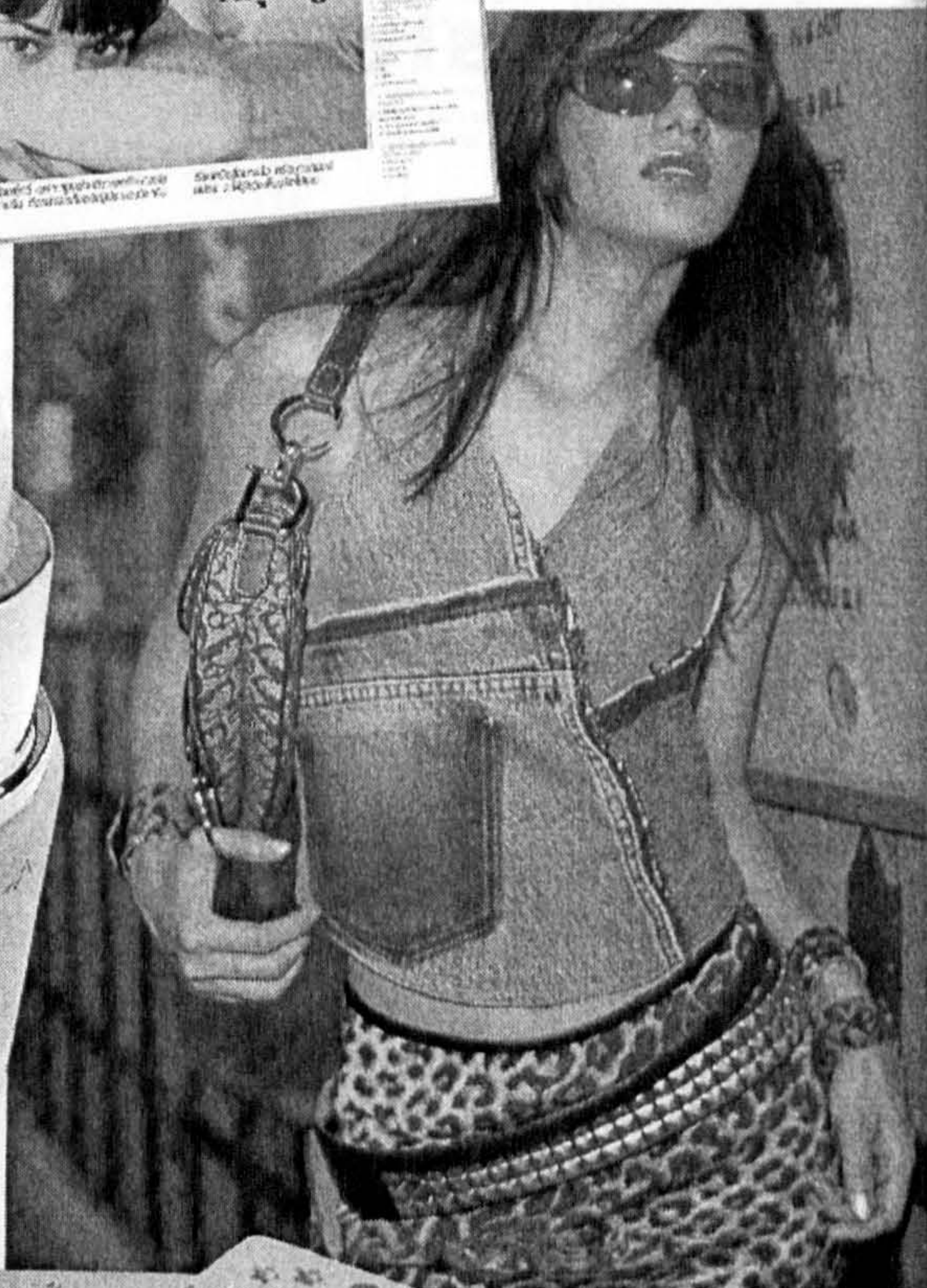
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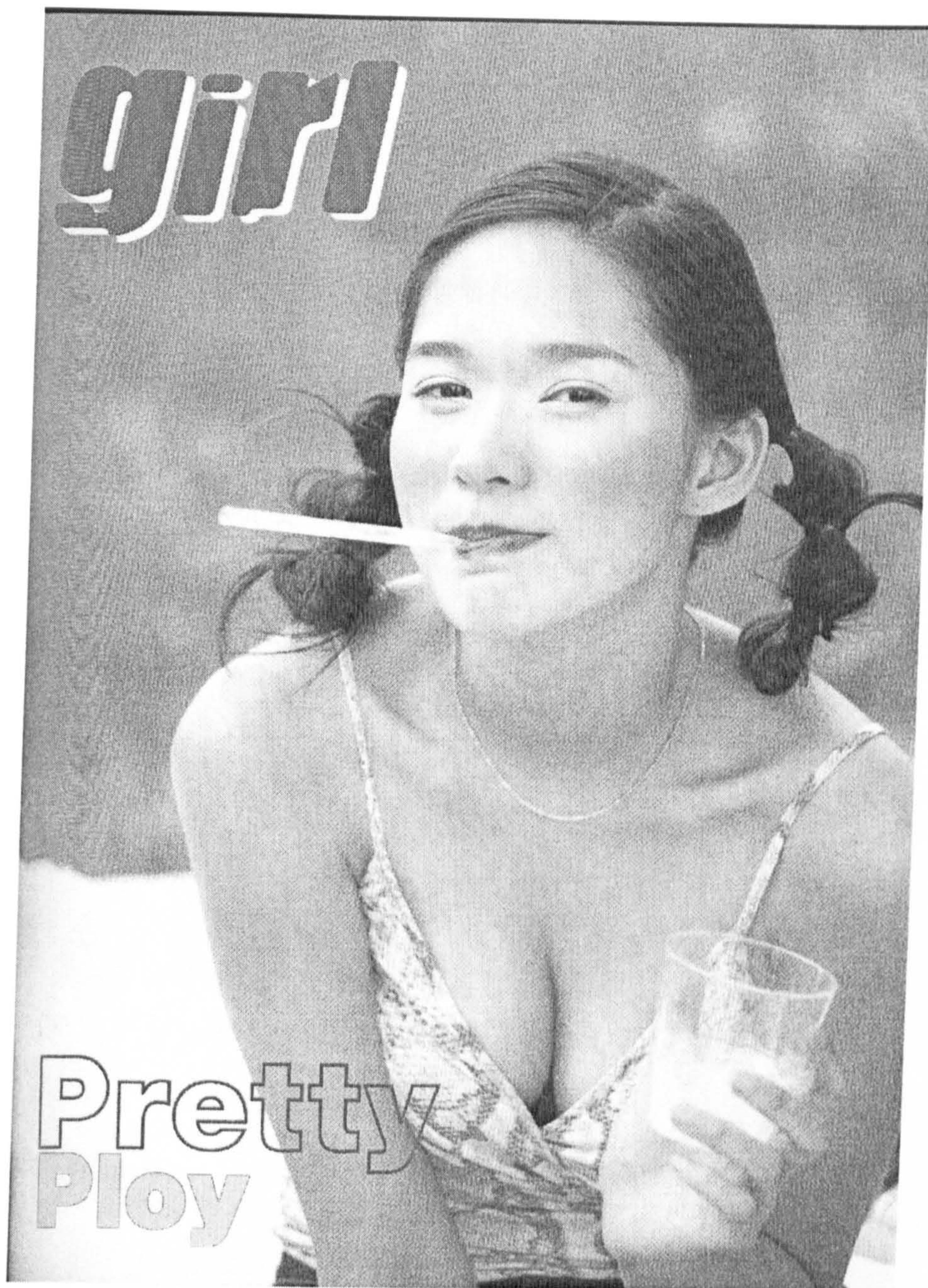
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Appendix Q

Pretty 'Ploy'



Appendix R

'Bow' and 'Joyce'

มาลัยไทยรัฐ



รัก'โบ-จอยซ์'
สาวงามสะกิด

ดูตามอง
ปรับ6พัน
คุกให้รอ
ตัดสินแล้ว "สุ
ณามอง" มือกลอง
★ มีต่อหน้า 15

ที่เค็ด "โบ"
แฟนวัย 16
"ตั้งด้วยแข็ง-
แรงด้วยถาว-
ถาวสะกิด" อื้อ
★ มีต่อหน้า 29



นสพ.จำหน่ายมากที่สุดของประเทศ

ไทยรัฐ

ปีที่ 51 ฉบับที่ 15496 วันอาทิตย์ที่ 25 มิถุนายน พ.ศ. 2543 ราคา 8.00 บาท

Appendix S

‘Malice Mizer’



ไม่รู้ใครรบกวนหรืออาลัยชาวรัญก็ไม่รู้ คุณนาย MANA ถึงได้ปล่อยให้ตำแหน่ง
นักร้องนำว่างอยู่อย่างนั้น หลังจากโดนสัตรีรักจากเจ้าชาย GACKT (ที่มีหวานใจ
คน(ตัว)ใหม่คือน้อง BELL) เพราะตั้งแต่ค้นกูรูริงออกซิงเกิ้ล "การกลับมาพบกับ
อีกครั้งของกุหลาบและเลือด (SAIKAI NO CHITO BARA)" ที่เป็นเพลงบรรเลง
ทั้งคีย์ ตามด้วยซิงเกิ้ล+วิดีโอ ชุด 'SHINWA' ที่อุทิศให้กับ KAMI มือกลอง
ผู้ล่วงลับไปแล้ว ล่าสุด ซิงเกิ้ลและวิดีโอที่ตามมา NONAKADE NO YUGI มีทั้ง
แค่ 3 คน พร้อมภาพลักษณ์ใหม่ที่น่ากลัวยิ่งขึ้น...ว๊านี้!

Appendix T

‘Bvlgari’ and ‘Hollywood’

Trend focus

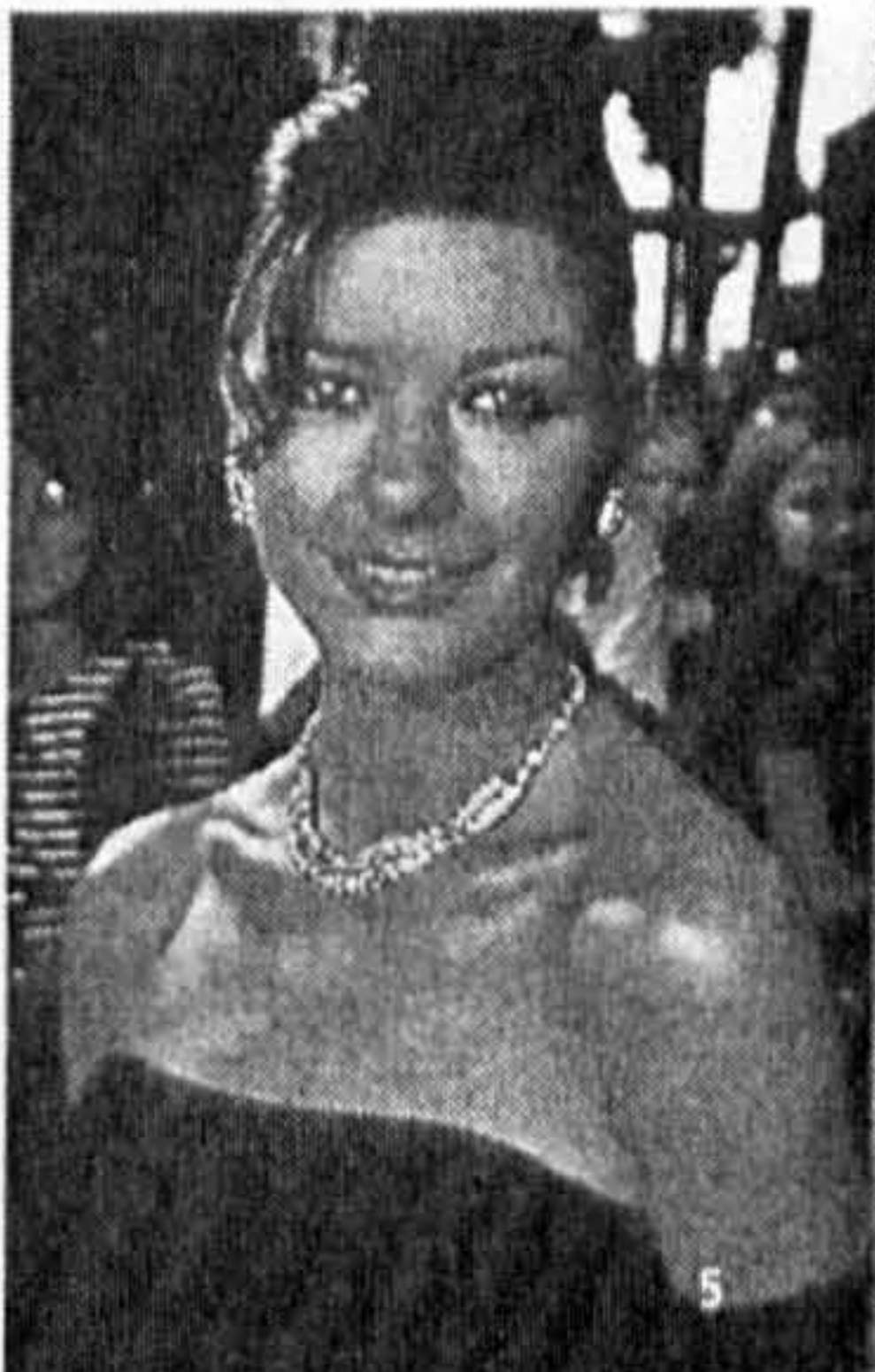
บุ๋ม สบิทธิยาบุชิต

บุลกาเรีย (BVLGARI) เครื่องประดับจากอิตาลีที่มีประวัติความเป็นมาคลาสสิกและยาวนาน ด้วยดีไซน์ที่ร่วมสมัย ปังบอกถึงความเปรี๊ยะไรของอิตาลีอย่างชัดเจน ทำให้บุลกาเรียเป็นเครื่องประดับที่ได้รับความนิยมเป็นอย่างมาก

บุลกาเรีย กับ ฮอลลีวู้ด

ซึ่งนอกจากเครื่องประดับแล้ว บุลกาเรียยังมีกระเป๋านาฬิกาไม้หอม หรือแม้แต่ของตกแต่งบ้านซึ่งได้รับความนิยมสูงจากคนที่ชื่นชอบเครื่องประดับ คนดังในสังคมแล้ว จึงไม่แปลกที่บรรดาฮอลลีวู้ดที่ถ้าคุณสังเกตดูดีๆ จะเห็นบุลกาเรียอยู่บนตัวพวกเขาอย่างน้อยหนึ่งชิ้น

๐



1. Oscar de la Renta ใส่สร้อยคอบุลกาเรียในงานประกาศรางวัลออสการ์ครั้งล่าสุด
2. Winona Ryder ใส่สร้อยคอบุลกาเรียในงานประกาศรางวัลออสการ์ครั้งล่าสุด
3. Charlize Theron ใส่สร้อยคอมีตะกั่วบุลกาเรียในงานประกาศรางวัลออสการ์ครั้งล่าสุด
4. Celine Dion ใส่สร้อยคอบุลกาเรียในรอบปฐมทัศน์ภาพยนตร์เรื่อง The Mask of Zorro ที่ใส่บุลกาเรีย
5. Catherine Zeta-Jones จากเรื่อง The Mask of Zorro ก็ใส่บุลกาเรีย
6. Marie Grech Cuponotto ใส่สร้อยคอไม้หอม สบิทธิยาบุชิต
7. Angela Jones ใส่สร้อยคอบุลกาเรียในงาน Sag Awards ปีล่าสุด
8. Ryan Murphy ใส่สร้อยคอและสร้อยคอบุลกาเรีย
9. Drew Barrymore กับสร้อยคอบุลกาเรียในงาน "Cinderella Ball" ที่ฟลอเรนซ์
10. Courteney Cox ก็ใส่สร้อยคอบุลกาเรีย

บุลกาเรียที่สวมใส่ในรูปนี้ได้รับแรงบันดาลใจจากงานศิลปะของศิลปินชาวอิตาลี (BVLGARI)

Appendix U

‘I’ve always been dumped’ reveals *Joe*

มาลียาไทยรัฐ

ปีที่ ๕๑ ฉบับที่

โจ

หนุ่ม 'โจ' เปิดใจ
มีแต่ผู้หญิงทิ้ง

โชคโชค
แต่ชอกช้ำ
หลายคน
คิดว่าเขาเป็น
"ลัสนาโนว่า"
★ มีต่อหน้า 29

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