

**Relationships behind the camera: addressing the influence of  
the Thai cultural context on the relationship between filmmaker  
and participant in documentary filmmaking**

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## **Abstract**

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This practice-led research aims to address the influence of Thai cultural context on the relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants in documentary filmmaking. I was attempting to understand and conceptualise what kind of relationships are formed behind the camera and what the dynamics are. Furthermore, it explores how being Thai influences the development of relationships. I employed autoethnography as a method to critically reflect on my own experiences while interacting with participants during the filming process, to better understand how relationships develop and what factors influence the relationships. In addition, I conducted interviews with other Thai filmmakers to better comprehend any differences in the relationships formed behind the camera as a result of other filmmakers' experience. The diverse characters and the context of Thai culture framed my practice-led research; thus, the development of the practice provided insights into character relationship building based on how they influence the filmmaking process and represent different points of view and attitudes.

The findings highlighted the boundary tension between the different relationships and the fact that these are continually being negotiated and renegotiated, depending on several factors, including trust, intimacy, performance, and cultural setting. Through the lens of a Thai cultural context, I discovered that gender, age, and social status have an influence on performances and decision-making as a filmmaker. Furthermore, some Thai characteristics are a barrier to developing professional relationships because of a tendency to take everything as a personal matter and value the hierarchy which leads to inequality; however, some characteristics facilitate the filmmaker in developing relationships such as humility and consideration for others (Kreng Jai). Several significant points were revealed: humility can lead to trust and benevolence, trust in a relationship can be transitive in the form of a third-party recommendation, and the participants' performance was driven by the technological configuration as well as the presence of the camera, which might shift between the camera and the filmmaker depending on who they wanted to impress. Thus, they spoke with half an eye on the conversation with the filmmaker and half an eye on the imagined audience which could be a collection of performances.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Research background

My interest in relationships between filmmaker and participant started in 2011, during my master's degree project, when I followed my participant to work as a commentator for K-1 Kickboxing in Hungary and filmed his journey; Sandy Holt is a British boxer and the owner of a Thai boxing school in Bolton, Manchester. This boxing event was indeed massive and well-organised; however, Holt helped me gain access to the event and to obtain filming permission with a VIP pass. I believed it was due to our closeness; I spent a lot of time with him both before and during the shoot. As a result, he was always supportive of my work. Aside from that, he appeared to be very natural in front of a camera and willing to open up to me. Two years later, I filmed a small village in Southern Thailand, where Thai Buddhists live together with Thai Muslims. I interviewed the leaders of the two groups, and, though it went well, it was more from the point of view of a journalist rather than a filmmaker. It was not what I expected but an undeniable result from my approach, without having forged a prior relationship with the participant.

These occurrences made me question whether if I had spent more time with these two religious leaders, would they have naturally opened up as the British boxer had shown to me? However, in addition to the time spent getting to know the participants, I wondered what could be done to help the participants feel more at ease, to be their own selves, and for them to completely and naturally reveal their stories. Importantly, as I am Thai, I was curious whether Thai culture would influence my relationship as a filmmaker and participant in terms of my behaviour and performance.

One of the filmmakers interviewed by Aufderheide et al (2009, p.7) noted: "I am in their life for a whole year. Thus, there is a more profound relationship, not a journalistic two or three hours". For this reason, documentary filmmakers are different from journalists/news reporters, because filmmakers work with people whom they have chosen and sometimes even see themselves as a part of the participants' stories. Similarly, Sherwood (1979, p.16) remarked in Flaherty's first



film, *Nanook of the North* (1922), “Mr. Flaherty had to spend years with the Eskimos so that he could learn to understand them. He could not have made a faithful reflection of their emotions, their philosophy, and their endless privations”. Likewise, Phil Agland, who spent two years in Cameroon’s rain forest living with the Baka, believed that good stories and emotions present themselves at unpredictable moments; hence, he preferred to wait for those moments while spending time with participants for them to familiarise themselves with the camera and crew (Aitken 2005, p.18-19). Based on the examples as stated, I therefore believe that in order to better understand the person being filmed, sometimes the filmmaker has to immerse in their daily lives and form a long-term relationship between filmmaker and the participant.

In the documentary filmmaking process, one of the essential challenges which the filmmakers have to be aware of and what I believe is at the heart of documentary filmmaking is the relationship between filmmaker and the person being filmed. According to Comolli’s statement:

“It’s fairly clear that the link between documentary filmmakers and those who agree to be in their films is essentially undefined and undefinable. A ‘two of us’ is created, an ensemble that’s not stated as such” (1999, p.45).

I agree that relationships are complex, abstract, and unpredictable. However, this will be a challenge for my research because I will attempt to define the ‘undefinable’ in the relationship between filmmaker and participant through the lens of the Thai cultural context. In the context of documentary filmmaking, being a filmmaker always means wearing two hats. All filmmakers realise their obligation to tell the truth and express that story through a film; however, they are sometimes influenced by their sensations and emotions as human beings. As a result, the boundaries between subjectivity and how emotion engages audiences are a grey area which could lead to an overlap of personal and professional dimensions. Here, I am defining professionalism as having trained and skilled qualities such as effectiveness, skill, organisation, and seriousness of manner (Cambridge University Press 2022), either in the academy or in the professional (paid/unpaid) industries.

This account made me concerned about the dimension of the filmmaker - participant relationships and this led to the crucial questions: How close did I get to the participants? How crucial is the relationship between filmmaker and participants in the filmmaking process? More importantly, how does the Thai cultural context influence the filmmaker-participant relationship?

## **1.2 Aim and objectives**

This practice-led research aims to address the influence of the Thai cultural context on relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants in documentary filmmaking. I am attempting to identify what kind of relationships are formed behind the camera and what the dynamics are. I am, as a researcher and a practitioner, also intending to conceptualise the relationship between documentary filmmakers and participants, particularly in the Thai cultural context. Therefore, it is appropriate to engage in a practical approach that leads me to reflect on the transition in my own practice.

My objectives are to address and critically reflect upon my interactions with participants during the filming process, in order to better understand how relationships are formed and what factors influence the relationship between a filmmaker and a participant, as well as how the Thai cultural context affects the relationships. The diverse characters and the context of the Thai culture are the two aspects that frame this practice-led research; in this way the development of the practice will allow insights into the characters' relationship building based on how they influence the filmmaking process. I intended to provide a portrait of Thai culture through several characters who represent different points of view and diverse attitudes with respect to their backgrounds, careers, ages, gender and circumstances. My goal, therefore, was to make a 'research film' which culminated in the achievement of a 50-minute film that serves as an illumination of my relationships with three participants as well as the basis for my reflection on adopting an autoethnographic approach.

### **1.3 Research question**

Having identified that understanding the influence of the Thai cultural context on relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants in documentary filmmaking is the primary research objective, my research question is, “How does Thai culture influence the filmmaker-participant relationship?”

The intention in using practice-led research was to integrate creative practice and a textual component, in which the two components are not independent, but interact and work together to address the research question (Smith and Dean 2009, p.5). By doing this, the research film and written thesis are both essential components of philosophical inquiry, though they operate differently. The research film involves self-reflection through self-authored video diaries; the writing uses an autoethnographic and reflexive approach to contextualise and reflect on the filmmaking process, and, simultaneously, they complement the research film by clarifying and expanding concepts presented in it, in order to examine myself as a performer and agent in the above relationships. Therefore, I suggest that the reader now watches the research film on the accompanying DVD before continuing with the written thesis.

### **1.4 Ethical challenges in documentary practice**

In terms of procedural ethics of this research, the ethics were approved by an appropriate Research Ethics Panel, Bournemouth University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). The agreement forms were signed by the participants who were taking part in the film before I started shooting, with consent willingly being given throughout by the use of the Participant Agreement Form (See Appendix C). I clearly informed them of the purpose of my PhD research project, and the participants showed interest and agreed to participate voluntarily. However, there was another critical ethical issue that needed to be addressed when doing documentary work because the participants open their lives and make themselves vulnerable on camera. Moreover, reading the work reveals some quite personal information about both the participants and the researcher/filmmaker, relating to the individual experiences and opinions. Whilst

it is very difficult, if not impossible, to ensure anonymity in this form of research, it raises ethical tensions between public and private, personal and collective.

Through the research film I attempted to address sensitive matters that are difficult to talk about, particularly by revealing my thoughts and feelings to my participants in specific events. Without the research film, the writing would not have been able to expand beyond my story. In this respect, the text and the film complement each other, enriching my autoethnographic journey. I am aware of the significance of what to include and exclude, share or restrict and I had to make these decisions ethically in order to protect both myself and others. As a result, ethical decisions needed to be revisited at each stage of the research project, and not just during the filmmaking phase but also when writing up (Magolda and Robinson 1993).

Ellis (2007) argued with regards to a dimension of ethics in autoethnography, which refers to the ethics involved in writing about personal experiences where intimate others are included. As Ellis put it:

"The bad news is that there are no definitive rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic "do no harm". The good news is that we are accumulating more and more stories of research experiences that can help us think through our options" (2007, p.5).

Despite the fact that there are some issues to consider when conducting autoethnography, I agree with Ellis (2007, p. 26) when she says "...autoethnography itself is an ethical practice". Writing autoethnographically entails being ethical and honest about the self, the events, and the people involved; it shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean (Bochner and Ellis, 2006, p. 111). Therefore, writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain (Ellis 2007, p. 26).

## Chapter 2: Literature and Practice Review

This chapter addresses an overview of the conceptual framework, the practice review (films, interview, symposium, etc.), and discusses the key concepts, ideas, and theories that are relevant to the relationships between the filmmaker and participant in documentary filmmaking. Existing literature is generally aimed at practitioners, discussing how relationships between the filmmaker and participant can be formed and maintained (Aufderheide et al. 2009). Although I may draw on this work, my research is from an academic perspective and because most film theorists are looking at media texts and finished artefacts, there is a gap in the literature. I therefore consider a range of literature from other disciplines in relation to relationships, for example, counselling approaches – to gain a better understanding of the meaning of 'trust' and 'intimacy' in the context of filmmaker-participant relationships, and social theory – to describe the performance of both parties. These perspectives will help me in illuminating the dynamics of factors that emerge between filmmaker and participant.

I will firstly consider the nature of the filmmaker and participant and the factors that affect the dynamics of the relationship, that is trust and intimacy. The second area of focus is a performance framework through engaging with sociologist Erving Goffman's notions of the presentation of the self in everyday life. Thirdly, I will investigate and clarify Thai culture and behaviour which play a significant role in my interpersonal interactions, performance and even that of the participants because we are all Thai. In offering a contribution to knowledge to the field, I attempt to draw together a clear conceptualisation of relationships behind the camera and test the empirical everyday practice of documentary filmmaking. Therefore, I, as a researcher and a practitioner, am well placed to articulate and consider these tensions, and I intend to offer some clarity into my specific approach towards exploring the relationships between filmmaker and participant, through critically reflecting upon my practice in this practice-led approach.

## 2.1 The nature of filmmaker and participant relationships

Documentary filmmaking is built on the relationships between filmmakers, their contributors, and the audience. As Nichols argued, “assumptions about the relationships that should exist between all three go a long way towards determining what kind of documentary results” (2017, p.47). By this he means, the quality of the relationship between filmmaker and participant may affect the audience and film outcomes; while Rabiger claimed “documentaries are only as good as the relationships that permit them to be made” (2004, p.227). However, what should be taken into account in these assumptions is that a good relationship between the filmmaker and the participants does not always imply that the film will be successful (For example, winning awards or achieving high audience numbers). On the other hand, even if both parties have a poor relationship, there is no automatic outcome that the film will fail (for example, low audience numbers). Although the relationship between filmmakers and participants is the crucial aspect of filmmaking, it is the complicated nature of the relationship that needs to be examined and understood, and this is where it is my intention to delve deeper in this research.

When a documentary filmmaker asks someone to take part in a film, a seed of a relationship is established, following which the documentary film itself can be seen as a record of this relationship between filmmaker and participant (Rabiger 2004, p.352). It serves as the site of analysis of the documentary maker-participant relationship (Nash 2010, p.22), which can grow or change over a period of time (Bruzzi 2006, p.97).

There are occasions when the filmmaker has to become immersed in participants' daily lives in order to better understand them. It becomes a long-term relationship between them both (Canet and Pérez 2016, p. 217). If we take Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* (1922) as an example, it documented the life of an Inuit and his family, living in Northern Canada. Flaherty's engagement with the participants required that he became familiar with the people and explored how they lived. Therefore, Flaherty lived among them for much of the decade before starting to film and remained there for a year once the filming had begun (Barbash and Taylor 1997, p. 24). Flaherty was keen to get to know them well in order to tell authentic stories about their lives. Moreover, Eckhardt (2012, p.11) supported

that approach because Flaherty's participants were comfortable with him, and they would therefore cooperate, without compromising their actions.

Likewise, Phil Agland, director of *Baka: The People of the Rainforest* (1987) stated that "with Baka we spent a year without filming but then shot most of the film in eight weeks..." (Masterclass, Philip Agland and Molly Dineen, Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 1999). Agland believed that emotions are unpredictable moments, hence, he preferred to wait for those moments while spending time with participants for them to get used to the camera and crew (Aitken 2005, p.18-19). Following these examples, the necessity of capturing emotions is mentioned and what emerges here are relationships which can be built on familiarity and proximity, when filmmaker and participant agree to take part in the project. Thus, the commitment of time by the filmmaker creates the conditions for a 'superficial' relationship to become an 'authentic' one.

Building a relationship between the filmmaker and participant can take time, which means that time, perhaps days, months, or even years are given over to developing the relationship. In the observational documentary mode (Nichols 2017, p.22), the development of the relationship between filmmaker and contributor is particularly important (Nash 2011, p.225). As Pryluck (2005) argued, there is a tendency for the observational mode to intrude on privacy and individuals in emotionally difficult situations. For this reason, the filmmaker seems to spend long periods with the participants to get to know participants, to understand their beliefs and values (Nash 2011, p.236), and to establish more profound relationships. This makes a clear distinction of the process between documentary filmmaker and journalist (Aufderheide et al. 2009, p.7).

It is clear, however, that this process is always in the service of the film and spending lengthy periods with participants prior to filming is by no means universal; some filmmakers choose to develop relationships on camera in order to capture their participants. British documentary filmmaker Molly Dineen, for example, always observes and interacts with her participants right away while shooting. Dineen argued "if you know someone too well, you do not have the freshness on film and the questions I want to ask them on film, I will have already asked them" (Masterclass with Phil Agland and Molly Dineen at Sheffield

International Documentary Festival, 1999). She further contests that she prefers to limit time with the participant in the situation:

“... I never spend much time, I think casting is crucial but once you have met someone, in the army series I did as soon as I met Major Crispin Black. I thought he is great, then I spent no time with him at all, other than to say...Would you mind if I did some interview with you...? I kept it casual, I met him on the film” (DocHouse Camera Masterclass with Molly Dineen 2013).

Dineen develops an intimate relationship with participants by interrogating and featuring her voice in the finished film (Aitken 2005, p.617). She therefore becomes more of a participant than just an observer. Similarly, visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker David MacDougall argued that starting to film immediately will give filmmakers an advantage because they may record the initial reaction and “freshness” of the participants/events that they might lose later on (Barbash and Taylor 1997, p. 70).

It seems as if these different approaches map onto different modes of documentary making – the observational mode seeks authenticity through an ethical engagement with participants, whereas the participatory mode (Nichols 2017, p.22) seeks to confront direct interaction between filmmaker and participant and the drama of the live encounter. There are, however, greater complexities to uncover, which can be best be explored via some key themes which expose the tensions in the nature of relationship between filmmaker and participant that need to be taken into account, namely trust and intimacy, which will be discussed in the following sections.

### **2.1.1 Trust**

The literature on trust crosses a wide variety of disciplines. It provides a useful basis for investigating the relationship between the filmmaker and participant. Clearly, the counsellor-client relationship is one in which trust is highly significant as a concept for helping us understand the mechanisms by which these risks and interdependencies are managed (Avakian et al. 2010, p.130). Trust is one of the



crucial concerns in the early stages of counselling. The counselling process cannot begin unless clients are willing to reveal their “secrets” and make themselves vulnerable to the counsellor (Fong and Cox 1983, p.163). Trusting the other is linked with considering that person to be competent, consistent, benevolent, interested, and open to conversation (Erdem and Aytemur 2008, p.56).

Taken into consideration in the context of documentary making, ‘trust’ is also one of the key factors that play an important role in a relationship between filmmaker and participant. In a stereotypical relationship, two individuals grow to know and trust each other by spending time together in mutual activities, exchanging favours and help, and sharing confidences. In the filmmaker-participant relationship, roughly the same process takes place, except that the same amount of time and range of activities are not available or possible. Nash (2011, p.236) argued that trust is something that two people in the relationship can build together when they decide to believe in each other. In other words, trust is a two-way process that is being established, a give and take process (Fong and Cox 1983, p.163). Establishing and maintaining trust with participants may not happen in the first meeting. Furthermore, Nash (2012, p.325) and Quinn (2013, p.251) argued that trust between filmmaker and participant will develop gradually over time, based on interactions between the person involved. Building trust requires mutual commitment and time – the trust that filmmakers have with people with whom they are working is everything. Thus, both filmmaker and participant commit to doing something with the other:

“The filmmaker makes the assumption that the participant will continue with the project while the participant assumes that they are not being exploited” (Nash 2010, p.28).

Nash suggests here that the filmmaker trusts participants to provide access and information and, meanwhile, the participant trusts the filmmaker with their reputation and relies on ethics that they do not take advantage of the participant. Nevertheless, Pryluck (2005) catalogued the many ways in which filmmakers have taken advantage of participants, since the filmmaker has the power to manipulate the process, and the participants themselves are rarely allowed any role in the creative process. Similarly, Bruzzi (2018, p.211) stated that “the

relationship between who is *doing* the looking and who is being *looked* at becomes an unequal one". Therefore, in order to reconcile the power between the filmmaker and the participants, negotiation may be required; the precise details of revelation are unlikely to be prescribed in the consent form (except with celebrity participants, possibly), so this is continually negotiated informally.

Linked to the issue in negotiation, Barbash and Taylor (1997, p.44) advocated an "ethical conversation"; the filmmaker should be both honest and tactful in explaining their curiosity about the contributors' lives. They felt that it is better at the start to tell them the filmmaker's objective and the reason why they have selected them for a filmed story.

Another important element of building trust which is a similar element to building the relationship, is the time spent with the participants. Stubbs (2002) provided some examples of filmmaker's experiences, such as documentary filmmaker Susan Froemke, who said "...how you get these great scenes is by really spending a lot of time with your subject and just waiting for things to happen". Froemke also felt it is important to get the trust of participants quite quickly, but to get intimate material might take an appreciable time (Stubbs 2002, p.29). Furthermore, Liz Garbus argued:

"I guess the general rule is that I spend many days hanging around with people before a camera is introduced, getting them comfortable with it" (Stubbs 2002, p.117).

On the other hand, Nick Broomfield, like Dineen, argued that he does not spend very long with his participant to gain their trust because he believes people are much more revealing at the beginning: "...I find that you get much more offhand things from people, much more revealing in the first five minutes than you do when they're all settled down... people defining themselves very quickly" (Stubbs 2002, p.133). Broomfield believed that people reveal themselves when they first meet, and they may change over time. As Broomfield referred to "people defining themselves very quickly", by this he meant, we may create our new self or perform after we have met a couple of times. I am therefore now paying attention to the issue of 'performance' in relation to trust and to the intimacy involved. To do this,

I engage Goffman's theory of frontstage and backstage behaviour to explore my practice and to guide my self-reflective writing. For the participant, trust is essential to overcome the risk entailed in giving the filmmaker access to participants' lives (Nash 2009, p. 193). Indeed, it requires a lot of trust because he/she not only tells his/her story to the filmmaker but to the whole world (Rosenthal and Eckhardt 2016, p.197). As a result, I agree that establishing trust is central to documentary filmmaking.

### **2.1.2 Intimacy**

It is important to define intimacy before considering its place in the filmmaker-participant relationship. There is no widely agreed definition of intimacy regarding documentary filmmaking, and perhaps one reason for this paucity in the literature is that the term 'intimacy' is often associated with romantic or sexual relationships. It is not a wholly appropriate term to describe the relationship between filmmaker and participant, but at times it seems to have some similar qualities. However, the concept of intimacy is worth considering, especially in the relationship between the filmmaker and the participant, because people rarely discuss how close both parties should be. I therefore borrow a framework from a counselling perspective to help to understand the meaning of intimacy in the context of the filmmaking relationship.

When it comes to counselling, Feasey, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, argued that intimacy occurs in the therapy room when work is in progress and "has been built upon more clearly defined, professionally friendly, relationships, where boundaries and commitments towards therapy are understood and respected" (2005, p.193). In addition, Sullivan, a social work/therapist, suggested that intimacy involves four characteristics: proximity, mutuality, trust, and self-disclosure (1993, p.119-129). By applying these frameworks in documentary filmmaking, I believe intimacy is defined as a feeling of emotional and physical closeness, being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings, and experiences with someone, keeping promises and telling the truth, and willing to reveal personal information. The documentary maker often strives for this quality of relationship with their participants, therefore, when intimacy is built between

filmmaker and participant; they are being open and talking through their thoughts and emotions. However, the filmmaker tends not to share their thoughts/feelings or even talk about personal matters with the participant beyond sharing their sense of the film's purpose. Hence, one could say this relationship is similar to that between a counsellor and client and is based on a one-sided disclosure.

Consider the sense of intimacy, which was enabled and driven by technology, in *Streetwise* (1984). Martin Bell shot the children on the streets of Seattle with wide-angle close-ups in order to capture intimate conversations between characters as well as a rapport between filmmaker and participants. Technological advancements have allowed documentaries to shift direction, allowing for greater intimacy and immediacy (Bruzzi 2006, p.122). Similarly, the documentary filmmaker Daisy Asquith has worked with small cameras to get very close to her subjects; she films almost “under the skin” of her participants and interacts with them (Jong et al. 2013, p.23). Clearly, a sense of intimacy has been made possible by small digital cameras. John Bishop aptly stated:

“Video is very intimate, the camera gets uncomfortably close to people and the camera person has to break normal assumptions about staring at people unflinchingly and close-ups are the stuff of documentary. Initially, it takes a lot of confidence and courage to get in close, but your camera is your licence” (1993, p.34).

Bishop’s use of the word “uncomfortably” reveals a key difference between intimacy in a counselling situation and intimacy in a documentary. Here closeness is a form of intrusion which may capture emotion in minute detail but may also be unwelcome. There is, however, an implied ‘honesty’ about “getting in close” because the participant will be aware of, and permit, the proximity. In contrast, the telephoto close-up might achieve superficially similar effects, but without the same transparency of the process. We must also acknowledge that intimacy in a counselling scenario is for the benefit of the participants in order to make them feel comfortable in expressing themselves in an uninhibited way, whereas intimacy in a documentary primarily benefits the film and filmmaker.

Another example can be seen in Molly Dineen's films; her signature technique is to use her voice off-camera to ask questions to create a sense of friendship and intimacy with her participants (Bruzzi 2006, p. 65). When a relationship is developing on-screen, Dineen uses her voice as commentary, which means she can control the film with her subjective presence through her voice (Bruzzi 2006, p. 199). For example, in *Geri* (1999), following Geri Halliwell in the weeks after leaving the Spice Girls, Dineen comments on how lone filming will affect the intimacy:

“...a scene in a car, Geri read the newspaper out loud, at that moment I felt that she is talking to her new friend. It was an intimacy I expect would not have happened if I have somebody in the car with the mics or she has been radio miced up” (The Molly Dineen Collection Volume Three 2011).

Dineen here raises the impact of technology, suggesting that Geri would not have been as unguarded if technology and crew had been overt. According to Roger Graef's principles of being “inconspicuous” when making *The Space Between Words* (1971), which is underpinned by a similar logic, namely that in order to capture people being themselves it is necessary to minimise any reminders that they are being recorded (Vaughan 1974, p.78). In a similar way to therapeutic encounters in counselling; the counsellor also seeks the unguarded moment from the participant. They expect the participant to reveal themselves during the counselling session. This ‘self-disclosure’ is a common practice in counselling, self-disclosure can involve the sharing of intimate and non-intimate information between both parties (Ladany et al. 2013) and may be conveyed with an open and empathetic approach (Batiste 2020, p.7).

Nevertheless, in order to create intimacy, some filmmakers decide to be an integral part of the outcome. *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (1991) is a life story about “Aoi”, a Thai woman who was working as a prostitute in Patpong. To make this film, the Australian filmmaker, Dennis O'Rourke, went to Bangkok. His first intention was to find out about love; however, in the film, we see him hire a prostitute (the main participant) in order to have sex with her, but he then makes a film about her, and, in interviews given later, he admits that he fell in love with her (Piotrowska 2012, p.115-116). This example is of a film in which the filmmaker

truly delves into his story by being a part of the participant's life to be able to gain the intimacy and narrative of the authentic story, through which we may, however, question his ethics and the 'line' between professional and personal practice and the limits of acceptability.

The similarity between filmmaking relationships and counselling relationships is that they both involve a one-sided 'emotional sharing' and an 'unequal power' differential between both parties. Therefore, to maintain professional boundaries, Nichols suggests how the filmmakers take a stand in relation to the people who are portrayed in the film and the people who are addressed in the film:

"This requires negotiation and consent. The outcome provides some measure of the respect accorded to others, even in the face of disagreement...Signs of trust and respect provide evidence of the ethical considerations that went into the film's conception, acknowledging that some films will deliberately challenge or subvert these values" (2017, p.47).

Making a documentary film is a process of discovery, and filmmakers will need to consider ethics throughout this process, particularly relating to trust and intimacy. Nevertheless, although trust helps create intimacy, it does not always result in a reduction in hierarchy. Indeed, in unequal relationships such as master and servant; trust can exist; thus, trust can also be involuntary (Sullivan 1993, p.124).

### **2.1.3 The concept of the 'dance with participant'**

In addition to trust and intimacy, the nature of the relationship between the filmmaker and the participants led to the formulation of the metaphor – 'dancing with the participant'. I came across this idea of the 'dance' from Michael Winterbottom's interview with filmmaker James Marsh in which Marsh talks about the difficulties in negotiating with Philippe Petit, the subject of *Man on Wire*:

"...every single [documentary] has one figure like that, who you have to do this prolonged and very careful dance with. If you step on their toes once – it's all over" (Winterbottom 2021, p.62).

This concept appeals to me as it is comparable to how a filmmaker interacts with their participants – it is like they are dancing. Dances typically consist of two positions: a leader, who choreographs the steps and sets the rhythm and direction and a follower, who supports and follows the leader's movement; this helped to conceptualise my own interaction, whilst understanding the participants' performance to resonate with individuals and the meaning of shared experience. This concept, therefore, served as a foundation for structuring my thesis and shaping my experience both analytically and reflectively.

This notion of the dance metaphor is useful for two reasons. Dance is an incredible art form that allows me to understand the interaction, firstly to focus on the dance partner (participant) who is in front of me and be aware of every move I decide to perform because every action affects my partner's performance. Secondly, the dance is informed at every step of the way by a commitment to individuals' agendas. Thus, during the procedure, I was able to observe and interpret their gestures from verbal and non-verbal communication during the process.

In the dance paradigm, Valerie J. Janesick is an anthropologist and dancer who uses the metaphors of dance and choreography to explore and describe qualitative research. She said, "dance is about lived experience, the perfect metaphor for qualitative research design" (1998, p. 36). She suggested that the qualitative researcher's design decisions are similar to the three steps of the dance: warm-up, exercise, and cool-down (1998, p. 53). In other words, both the dancer and the researcher are involved in decision making at the beginning, middle and end of the project. By using this metaphor, this was a unique opportunity for me because I was not just an observer; I was a participant/dancer. So, being a practitioner myself, I needed to develop reflexivity in order to separate myself from the mindset of my participants.

Through rhythm, body positioning, and movement, dance was used as a lens for portraying and understanding each individual's stories, particularly family of origin and culture. Dancing on the dance floor, as a result, required the dancer to stay balanced, focused and commit to the movement and to the moment. However, there were risks involved, and just like in real life, you could step on your partner's foot at any time.

## 2.2 Performance

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances ...

–William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

In this famous Shakespeare speech, the metaphor suggests that humans are like actors, playing different roles according to the different contexts. In other words, everyone is a player and performs the assigned roles in everyday life. This relates to social interactions in general but is particularly useful in the context of this research, which explores the ways in which performance occurs not just on-screen in documentaries, but off-camera. According to Erving Goffman, the sociologist, people in their everyday lives manage settings, clothing, words, and nonverbal actions to “convey an impression to others” (1959, p.4) like actors on the stage. Goffman's dramaturgical theory is a sociological perspective that focuses on how people conduct and manage everyday interactions in social situations. By applying Goffman's concepts, it provides a useful way of understanding the interactions of the individual, particularly in the relationship of filmmaker and participants in documentary filmmaking.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) presented the concept of dramaturgical perspective to explain social interactions. He is drawing a metaphor that we are performers, acting out roles as if we were on a stage. Some people might play multiple roles, which change depending on the situation and audience. In terms of dramaturgy, Goffman (1959) distinguished between frontstage and backstage, in which it is common and often expected that the *frontstage* is any place where we act in front of others, and from where we deliver our lines and perform. Goffman (1959, p.22) used the term “performance” to refer to all the activity of an individual in front of a particular set of observers, or audience; thus, the individual's performance is ‘part of a ‘front’.



### 2.2.1 Frontstage

In addition, Goffman (1959, p.4) believed that when we appear before others, sometimes we will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing ourselves in a given way solely in order to give a certain impression to others. The reason we do that is because we want to get a specific response from the intended audience. Ichheiser (1949) similarly suggested that we intentionally or unintentionally express ourselves, and the others will, in turn, have to be impressed in some way by us. Thus, the action is said to be performed for reasons; in this respect, it is to impress the audience. It is therefore a given status that influences our performance. For example, when we meet with very high-ranking officials, we tend to be well-behaved either because of their power or due to the fact that we feel inferior to them. It follows then that performance can be seen as a function of interaction with different groups of people – one presents oneself differently to friends, family, and colleagues. To apply this concept into the documentary making process, filmmakers may perform differently with different participants to create credibility and familiarity, as we see in Nick Broomfield's film, where his interaction with Aileen Wuornos in *The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992) and Eugène Terre'Blanche in *The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife* (1991) are different because the participants have different statuses and life situations. Goffman's concept explains how a performer generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. By this, he means that we do not show ourselves to our children as to our club companions, to our own masters and employers as we do to our intimate friends. I recognise that we have a different role to play based on "audience segregation" (Goffman 1959, p.49). Thus, it is common that different social groups express themselves in a different way in different settings, even with the same person. Therefore, we have a tendency to act differently according to the social setting.

To better understand why *frontstage* plays an important part in our lives, Park argued:

"It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...In a sense, and in so far as this

mask represents the conception, we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons” (1950, p.249-250).

Park explains that whatever we do, we are playing out some role on the stage of life. In the frontstage, we always keep in mind that others are watching us. Therefore, we must keep playing our roles even though we have doubts about the ‘realness’ of what is shown; in other words, ‘the show must go on’.

In terms of the performance paradigm, Goffman (1959) identified seven crucial elements to express information through performance. These are: 1) *Belief* (p.17). Goffman distinguishes between sincerity and cynicism when it comes to playing out social roles; that is sincere people genuinely believe their act is an expression of their own identity, and they truly want others to believe this also. Cynical people do not invest ‘themselves’ in their roles. Instead, they are acting to achieve another goal potentially for self-gain, for example, in the case of the lawyer who acts tough in arbitration to strike a better deal. 2) *The front or mask* (p.22). Front is a part of the individual’s performance which serves in a general and fixed manner to define the scenario for those who observe the performance. 3) *Dramatic realisation* (p.30). People try to portray themselves in a manner that is acceptable according to their social status and emphasise things that they want the audience to know. It is crucial to note that a person has many roles in their life, but they can only play one role at any given time. As a result, dramatic realisation helps us to understand the complexities of performance in different situations. 4) *Idealisation* (p.34). When we present ourselves in front of others, we tend to play up or down our actual status based on how we think others perceive us. We attempt to present an *idealised* version of the front, in order to maintain the performance. For example, we generally dress more formally on days when we have meetings with high-ranking officials. People also engage in *negative idealisation*, which involves concealment or playing down while engaging with people they believe to be of lower status, in order to fit in with them. 5) *Maintenance of expressive control* (p.51). All of our social interactions rely on the interpretation of minor cues that we give off in our facial expressions, words,

and behaviour. Minor cues that were not intended for the audience to read, may be interpreted as significant, undermining the image the performer is attempting to convey. For example, we might lose muscular control by tripping, burping, or yawning, we might show too much or too little concern for an interaction. Looking at a mobile during a meeting is seen as rude, and we might also lack dramaturgical direction. Our setting might appear shoddy if beach clothes are worn to a business meeting. As a result, we must always remain 'in character' (p.51). 6) *Misrepresentation* (p.58). This is where an individual attempts to mislead the audience into believing things that have no basis in reality. Most misrepresentation does not involve blatant lying. It is about not putting everything one needs to do to fulfil one's social roles on display. And finally, 7) *Mystification* (p.67). Maintaining a distance between oneself and one's audience is one of the easiest ways to conceal information from the audience – the more distance a performer can maintain between themselves and their audience; the more elbow room they have to maintain an idealised image of themselves. For example, teachers maintain their ability to keep discipline and respect within a classroom by keeping their personal lives hidden from their students.

Goffman also argued that there are three elements involved during the front performance: setting, appearance, and manner (1959, p.22-30). These may be adopted for unique and specific activities depending on the situation. There is the *setting* for the performance, including furniture, props, background, and location. Different settings will have different audiences and they thus require the actor to alter his performance for each setting. In addition, he stated that if the setting is a part of their performance, they will not begin the performance until they have it or they are in the appropriate place. Indeed, how we decorate our settings or *props* may give clues as to how we want others to see us. For example, a businessman with a family photo on his desk might want people to have the impression that he is a family man, and they are important in his life.

The term 'setting' refers to the *personal front*, which is also linked to *appearance* as to the way we look. It may include insignia of office or rank, clothing, sex, age, and racial characteristics, size and look, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. Some of these are quite fixed, such as racial characteristics, and some are transitory, such as facial expressions, which can

be changed during performance (Goffman 1959, p.24). The last element, *manner* which refers to the way we behave ourselves and communicate without spoken words. For example, a meek, apologetic manner may give the impression that the performer expects to follow the lead of others, or at least that they can be led to do so.

### **2.2.2 Backstage**

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman explained that the *backstage* is the place behind the curtain, where nobody is looking, for it is where we do not have to be pressured by those around us, and where we truly get to be our authentic self and get rid of the roles that we play when we are in front of other people. It is where we behave differently to when we are in front of an audience on the frontstage because we are often more relaxed and comfortable when backstage. Thus, we may even change how we speak and act when we are backstage (Cole 2020). Furthermore, Cole (2020) also claims that when we are backstage, we often prepare/rehearse for our next frontstage performances, which may include practice of our smile, a presentation or conversation as we prepare ourselves to look a certain way once we are again in public. Nevertheless, backstage behaviour may influence people who are close to us, such as family members, partners, and housemates because we may reveal too much of ourselves and we forget about other people. In documentary filmmaking, the filmmaker seeks to capture the backstage moment of participants, as Goffman claims that behind the curtain they might let their guard down and behave in ways that reflect their uninhibited or 'authentic' selves. However, the participants may try to hide their identity but, interestingly, they might prepare themselves to look a certain way once they are again in the public eye. This means it is not possible to see their 'authentic' selves until they give permission.

When Goffman's concept is adopted to explain the documentary filmmaking process, the distinction is the way Goffman uses the metaphor of the theatre to explain social interaction: frontstage and backstage. Taking this example then in documentary filmmaking, the camera represents an audience/frontstage, but the camera sometimes follows the participants around even in their private life, where

it seems that every place is the stage for participants to perform. For this reason, the only place that looks like backstage, as Goffman described it, is 'behind the camera' or when the 'camera is off'.

As Goffman (1959) suggested, we all make a presentation of ourselves to others. We choose what should be shown or not shown in a specific setting. We spend much of our everyday life on the frontstage, at the same time, not forgetting that we have roles to play in the backstage. When it comes to an individual, Goffman believed that we could interact with ourselves because human beings are not one person, but "persons" (p.20), which is not in the sense that we have multiple personalities, but we play different roles in different environments. Similarly, Nichols (1991) called the person being filmed (participant) a social actor, a term underpinned by Goffman's thinking, which refers to the idea that 'authenticity' in documentary filmmaking is never possible, suggesting that even trust and intimacy are a performance. As discussed earlier, Broomfield raised the issue that there is a crucial moment at the first period of a meeting when the participants might not have had time to adjust themselves and might not be aware enough to express their identity (see section 2.1.1). Hence, our performance might affect the relationship during the process. Nevertheless, I will investigate these in my practice.

### **2.3 Thai culture and behaviour**

The study of culture is an important tool for understanding the development of the relationship between the filmmaker and the participant in documentary filmmaking. Therefore, understanding the cultural dimensions that influence the relationship can help with understanding the interpretative framework from which both parties structure their expectations for the other. As I am a Thai filmmaker, and as this research includes Thai participants in the filmmaking process, it is necessary to consider the specifics of Thai cultural norms that might illuminate aspects of the process.

Thai culture is deeply rooted in the historical and religious traditions of the Thai people, and it has a profound influence on the daily life of the extensive majority of Thais today (Jirapornkul and Yolles 2010), which, in many cases, are very

conventional and have been transmitted from generation to generation. The young Thais are taught to pay respect to their parents, elders, teachers, and Buddhist monks (Klinchan 2017). Some advice from the elders is expected to be followed without question. Offering one's seat on a bus to the old and pregnant women, as well as monks, is expected practice. For these reasons, Thai people are often represented as the most respectful and polite people. In fact, there is an inherent link between culture and behaviour, from which Thai people shape their standards and behaviour and in the way that Thais interact and understand the world around them. Nevertheless, it is possible that the behaviour of Thai people has changed by their movement from rural to urban areas and through Westernisation (Punyapiroje and Morrison 2007). However, the ever-changing spirit of the Thai culture has remained dominant.

It is undeniable that socio-cultural behaviour has an impact on that of the individual. As a result of this, the individual's behaviour may also affect performance during the relationship building process. Benedict (1970), who studied the national identity of Thai people during World War II, claimed:

“Thai culture can boast of a centuries-long continuity..., and its carriers have been conditioned from infancy to certain kinds of behaviour appropriate to its fundamental tenets – it is possible to see what consistency emerges and in how far certain patterns of Thai behaviour can be stated” (p.ii).

By this she means that Thai culture has become part of Thai behaviour birth, and this appropriate behaviour is integrated into certain patterns which are manifested not merely in our interacting with other people or business matters or in family life; all these aspects of the culture are equally relevant and are interrelated with one another.

In addition, in Thai culture, if the differences appear on the basis of age, gender and rank, it may reflect the individual interaction and the way to approach others which must be taken into account. Therefore, this study reviewed literature relating to culture and behaviour in the Thai context. Furthermore, it helps me to understand myself and the participants who are Thais through self-recognition,

and to study how Thai cultures drives and, in turn, guides my behaviour and performance. More importantly, studying the culture helps me to explain the interplay of identity and difference in authentic human relationships (Kondo 1990) and to interpret the phenomenon that occurred in the filmmaking process.

In order to achieve this, I borrowed the conceptual framework from Komin (1991) in *Psychology of the Thai people: Values and behavioural patterns*. She identified characteristics to describe Thai people and provide insight into the cognitive aspects of Thai social systems from the perspective of cross-cultural psychology (Punyapiroje and Morrison 2007). These Thai characteristics shaped my behaviour, which means they influenced how I present myself in particular situations. At certain times those cultures may not be found in other cultures or Western cultures.

**Ego orientation** – This is an accepted rule for all Thais that we tend to not hurt another person’s ego. This ego orientation leads to three values of Thais: (1) *Saving face* – As is true in Thai and other Asian cultures, not losing face is important. Thai people will not accept anyone looking down on them. They are willing to go into debt to “keep face” (Watjanasontorn 1985, p. 31-32). For example, if a person’s friends are using brand-name products, it is incumbent on the individual to buy one of the same or better than them. (2) *Avoidance of criticism* – It is important for Thais to avoid public confrontation and criticism, so people always use indirect ways to soften negative messages or non-verbal cues. If the person really wants a comment, they should be criticised privately. (3) เกรงใจ (*Kreng Jai*) – It is usually interpreted as consideration for other people’s needs. The word 'consideration' is taken to infer an awareness of other people’s feelings and of caring about their thoughts and actions. Moreover, it means things tend to be done individually, in order not to interrupt or bother others. To give an instance, if a person’s boss were to offer to send them home after working late, they are likely to refuse in order not to bother the boss.

Interestingly, I have noticed that Thai people tend to be naturally considerate (*Kreng Jai*) of their parents, elders, and people in positions of responsibility such as teachers, bus drivers; even those in more intimate relationships, such as close friends or spouses. However, this behaviour can be frustrating, especially to Westerners because it does not encourage Thais to express their actual

thoughts. For example, if someone's friend gives them a sweet which they do not like, they have to accept it because they do not want to hurt other people's feelings. For this reason, Thai behaviour sometimes leads to misunderstanding among outsiders from other cultures (National Identity Board 2000).

**Grateful relationship orientation** – Komin (1991) gave the meaning of the word 'Grateful' in Thai as บุญคุณ (Boon Khun), which means when they receive any good things, help or favours from someone without expecting anything in return, which entails appreciation or obligation on the part of the beneficiary, Thai people should feel and express gratitude. Gratitude should further be extended towards their parents, teachers, and those who have supported them in any way. In Thai culture, there are many ways to express gratitude to those people who have shown benevolence (without involving money or interest). For example, most men in Thailand have entered monastic life at least once in their lives, in order to show respect to parents (Phaeksoongnern 2021, p.24). In Buddhism it is believed that this is the way to bring the parents to heaven after they pass away. Furthermore, this behaviour gives a deep sense of loyalty, for even though a person may not be able to repay the benefactor, they will never betray or talk behind their back and never make them feel bad.

**Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation** – Thais place a high value on a group of "other-directed" or called "social smoothing" values (Komin 1991). Thais are taught to be kind, humble, non-assertive, and polite in order to maintain solidarity among society. In addition, Thai people like to put aside their own personal feelings to avoid unnecessary clashes or face-to-face confrontation. Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation has been described as (1) showing caring, politeness, and humility toward social partners and senior citizens; (2) showing consideration for others, and (3) emotional expression suppression (Iamsudha 2001, p.202). For this reason, Thais sometimes try to be friendly and pleasant with other people because they want their lives to go smoothly, without any conflict.

In addition to the Thai culture and behaviour reviewed above, a few others should be noted too. For example, Thai culture does not distinguish between 'professional' and 'personal'; it is all personal (Hays 1990). In other words, Thais expect to be treated 'at work' in the same way as in 'personal' matters. To give



an illustration, if the boss is kind, they may expect the boss to not to lay blame when mistakes are made at work.

When speaking about Thai culture, what cannot be left unmentioned are status and rank (Klinchan 2017). This can also include age-based roles, which describes those who are in senior roles as being generally older. They also have accumulated significant experience (Supap 1999, p. 10). Thus, Thais tend to respect their elders in the same way as the respect shown for those who are of a high rank. When meeting elders and those in authority, we adopt *Wai* (The traditional greeting of Thailand – by putting the palms together in front of the chest, all fingers should be close together and the head should be slightly bowed) to show respect. In addition, we have to have good manners, politeness, good behaviour, and self-control while with them, an example being never standing over or sitting above the elder. Furthermore, when speaking to the elderly, we should bend forward a little to show respect. The Thai World View (2021) highlights the fact that in Thai society, rank and status are very important. We do size up other's status and rank when we meet for the first time by asking their age, family, job, and wages and thus we must be aware of how to talk and behave to the person being addressed. From all the above described, I am positive that being Thai will affect my behaviour in my relationships and my interaction with the participants, specifically in this study. However, to help readers to visualise relations between cultural spheres and interaction that each party brings to the relationship, I mediate this by using a hybrid form of self-reflection with the video diary, in order to encompass these cultural influences.

In this study, I am an 'insider researcher', which offers both advantages and disadvantages. A main benefit of being an insider researcher was “being native to the setting and so having insights from the lived experience” (Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p.60), which means that I may have already established rapport with participants because I was familiar with the group's language or norms. This familiarity may lead to the researcher having “better in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and interpretation of their lived experience” (Berger 2015, p.230). Being a member of the group provides access, entry, and being more accepted by the participants; moreover, a membership instils trust and openness in the participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p.58).

Nevertheless, Brannick and Coghlan argued that “insiders are perceived to be prone to charges of being too close, and thereby, not attaining the distance and objectivity deemed to be necessary for valid research” (2007, p.60). Being too close to the data may also cause blind spots because the researcher does not consider certain issues in the way that outsiders do (Saidin and Yaacob 2016, p.850). Finally, the researcher may also struggle between their role as a group member and their role as a researcher (Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p.70). Therefore, being the insider has brought new challenges for me that have required me to reflect on how to maintain an ethical stance and a critical distance from the participants.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodologies**

These methodologies have been chosen because they provide an opportunity to explore the richness of experience and meaning, through which it is possible to account for the subjective and contextual nature of experience. Furthermore, McIlveen (2008, p.5) emphasised the interconnected and dynamic relationships between “theory-research-practice-person”, which is pertinent in relation to the process of cultivating self-compassion in personal and professional contexts.

### **3.1 Reflective Practice**

The reflective practice methodology applied here draws on practice-led and autoethnographic approaches in order to understand "the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and/or practice" (Finlay 2008, p.1). As a result, my research sample comprised three participants, and the source of self-reflective material was from my own experiences. Additionally, this research is written in the first-person, thus adopting autoethnographic principles to address the research questions and for navigating through the multidimensional nature of the inquiry. Writing from a personal position brings particular responsibility and accountability in terms of transparency and authenticity through the act of documenting one's own experiences as the data for the enquiry (Dyson 2007).

#### **3.1.1 Practice-led research**

Practice-led research had been selected because this approach promotes the relationship between creative practice and research, which served to assist me as a practitioner/researcher and to understand and develop the processes involved. This method was considered suitable to address the aim of the project and to provide a contextual understanding of the relationships between filmmaker and participant. Smith and Dean (2009, p.5) argued that the product of creative work itself contributes to a body of knowledge about creative processes and leads to answering the research question. Furthermore, the knowledge that occurred during that process can deliver specialised research insights which can then be

written up as research, which means that using documentary practice can lead to research insights.

This methodology enabled me to “dive in, to commence practising to see what emerges” (Haseman 2006, p.100), to speak and observe from the inside-out. Therefore, I was able to write a critical exegesis to contribute to new knowledge about the creative processes and reflect the implicit knowledge that naturally develops through the creative practice into an explicit exegesis that the field can engage with. Likewise, Nelson (2013, p.62) provided a workable approach that takes account of the messiness of any creative endeavour, articulating it as follows:

“Insights in Practice as Research have proved to arise as much in the process as in the product, and I emphasised the value of documenting process and critical reflection along the axis aiming to make the tacit more explicit”.

Making the “tacit more explicit” was a central concern of this practice-led approach, and, consequently, was the focus in order to explain the phenomena that had occurred behind the camera between filmmaker and participant in documentary filmmaking. It might deal with personal feelings and emotions, which could be difficult to present in a tangible form. However, the use of this practice allowed me to understand my own experience and interpret the relationships formed between me and my participants, through videoing and capturing moments of which I might sometimes be unaware. As a result, the process of capturing and reflecting upon the creative process illustrates the pertinence of the methodological approach used here.

In using the term ‘practice-led research’, I am referring to “the creation of the work as generating research insights” (Smith and Dean 2009, p.7), the development of which unique processes for creative work leads to specialised research findings which can then be generalised and written up. This has given me the opportunity to define the relationship formed in the context of a diverse range of participants. The aim of the research required the examination of opportunities for developing forms of understanding about Thai cultural representation through the use of documentary filmmaking. Furthermore, it required me to reflect on the

transition in my practice. Here it helps to explain the transition, in terms of a practice-led approach. These, crucially, were the intentions of the research addressed through this thesis, which included practice as an integral part of its method.

### **3.1.1.1 The making of the research film**

The research film is a documentary film to articulate a scholarly understanding of the relationships behind the camera. I am using this as part of my data collection which becomes valuable evidence for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' identities. Moreover, the research film can convey an illuminating body of information about the documentary filmmaking process (Smith and Dean 2009, p.1).

This research film was a combination of my video journals and a documentary practice that focused on interactions between myself and participants. In so doing, I inter-cut between my reflections, the thoughts of the participants, and how I interacted with participants to show how I built the relationships with them, while applying the autoethnographic approach. Using this, I aim to bring the "readers into the scene" – particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions (Ellis 2004, p.142) – in order to "experience an experience" (Ellis 1993, p.711) about my relationship with participants. This combination of my reflections, both on screen and in writing, together with the reflections of my participants, have generated useful insights which I describe and analyse.

In exploring this relationship from many interactive behaviours which occurred on different levels, it was my hope that through this multi-faceted data gathering I would be able to see the dynamics of the filmmaker-participant relationship, which was part of relationship development, growth, and building those forms throughout documentary filmmaking. The research film was undertaken by myself and it started in June 2019. The participants were also filmed with their consent and advanced notice. Taking this into account, data gathering began promptly after I had made contact with participants. I immediately started collecting data regarding access to each participant and I began keeping a journal, documenting

the experiences by recording myself through making the aforementioned video diaries in order to keep memories alive and to remind me of important issues. They constituted a useful tool for me to recall the essence of the experience. This is a process that autoethnographers have often used in order to share a personal experience, including short stories, fiction, novels, layered accounts, poetry, memoirs, songs, dance, photos, and performances (Holman Jones et al. 2016, p.98).

I had been observing and participating in the participants' lives and events, while also interviewing them and recording their activities. The purpose of the participant videos is to examine the participants' reactions during the process, focus on personal relationships and/or professional relationships and to discover their thoughts and feelings regarding these. In the meantime, I had been recording a personal video diary to share my experience about building relationships with selected participants. My process for this autoethnographic work included acknowledging my feelings and reflecting upon my performance which was framed by relevant theoretical and Thai cultural phenomena (Adams et al. 2014, p.26). Through this I became a participant, and I expressed my thoughts and feelings through creative work.

Three participants were involved in this research: 1) H.E. Mr. Pisanu Suvanajata, the Ambassador of Thailand; 2) Mrs. Piyanan Tepnarin, the owner of the Thai Takeaway in Bournemouth, UK; and 3) Lin Inter, a transgender traditional folk singer in Amsterdam, Netherlands. I considered they were appropriate for this research because each participant represents a diverse background, which would then help me to understand the relationships formed between filmmaker and participant under different conditions.

Before I began my filming, I had planned to prepare equipment to suit my own timeframe and that of my participants. Therefore, I chose The Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 4K, which I purchased with funding granted by Bangkok University for this study. This video camera was capable of recording high quality footage and was small and easy to use. As Muir (2008, p. 4) argued, "the camcorder's appearance may seem a trivial matter, but it can influence participant interest and enthusiasm". It follows that the camera was small enough

to be comfortable to use. In addition, the quality of the footage was good enough to illustrate participants accurately; the camera had to appear business-like to make me look more professional to the participants. I also bought a wireless microphone with two receivers, for my participant and myself, as I intended to record my voice while interacting with the participants. However, I avoided lights as I was a lone filmmaker and I wanted to keep the kit as simple as possible.

While I was making the research film, I kept the research question anchored. I therefore had to keep questioning and interrogating my own decision making in order to ponder if things were to contribute to the research. In practice, I always participated in the participants' activities, and I sometimes asked them how they felt about me. By doing this, I was able to record their reactions which were used as evidence for my interpretations, reflections and autoethnographic writing. Nevertheless, these are not the kind of things that I would not normally do when I make a narrative film, but were important for the research process. Initially, I recorded my experiences and feelings in a written journal, but as I began to use the video diary technique, a hybrid form emerged to reflect my thoughts. It made my thoughts and feelings become visible through my facial expression, tone of voice, and gesture – a fusion of documentary and autoethnography, which became my specialised 'research film'.

### **3.1.1.2 Video diaries**

More recently, researchers have begun to experiment with video diaries as a way of sharing many different stories; the sheer variety of topics that video diaries have been used to investigate illustrates the possibilities that they have opened up (Vannini 2020, p.116-117). There have been several studies where researchers asked participants to make a video diary, and these could then be used as tools for an ethnographic study for an outside observer. For example, recording stories of ageing and self-representation of Australian Vietnamese women; undertaking a cross-cultural study (Threadgold 2000), to explore the potential of video diaries in capturing identity performances by queer participants (Holliday 2004), and hearing directly from a participant's voice about the everyday lives of living in rural Andhra Pradesh by using a video diary interview (Sudbury 2016). However, there are few, if any, studies that employ video diaries as a tool

for researchers to capture their personal experiences and reflections while conducting research.

The role of video diaries in this research was to capture some of the complex nuances of the representation and performance of myself who engaged in the research process emotionally and through physical experiences. The video diaries provided authentic stories (Azzarito and Sterling, 2010; Cooley et al., 2014) and empowerment (Holliday, 2004; Lundström, 2013). I therefore argue that video diaries are a valuable tool within a practice-led methodology because, as mentioned earlier, it may be difficult to study relationships behind the camera because it is a subjective matter and involves emotions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, and actions. By using video diaries to capture all those things, it is a way of presenting my complex experience and allows the reader to gain an understanding of body language and facial expressions even where there is no verbal communication (Vannini 2020, p.124). Furthermore, Derry et al (2010, p. 4) argued that “video technologies provide powerful ways of collecting, sharing, studying, presenting, and archiving detailed cases of practice”.

During the filmmaking process, I began keeping a journal documenting the experiences gained by making personal recordings. I was sometimes making video diaries on the day before events and/or after the events to keep memories alive and it would remind me of important issues and constitute a useful tool for me to recall the experience. I used a smartphone to record because it made me feel more comfortable talking on a small device and, further, it was more manageable. When I started to make the research film, I discovered that there was in fact a more interesting opportunity here, for my video diaries brought something crucial to the research. These were one of the stronger elements that made me much more central to the film. In essence, I became one of the participants. In consequence, I decided to focus on the self-authored video diaries as well as documenting the interactions that developed between the participants, in order to concentrate on the research question.

Another crucial issue for discussion is mentioned in Gerry Bloustein’s study (1998, p.122), where one participant said that the camera “became like my best friend” and similarly in Valerie Walkerdine’s Project 4:21 (2011, p.142): “The camera was described as a trusted confidante, a good friend who listens but does



not pass judgement”. As Maria Pini and Valerie Walkerdine wrote, “the camera became for many of these young women a ‘friend’ who accompanied them on their various outings, who sits listening to them late at night and who shares secrets”. I experienced this and felt at first that I was talking to the camera, but as time passed, I felt as though I was talking to a friend with whom I could discuss, reflect, and share my thoughts (Taylor 2015). I sometimes freely ‘confess’ my feelings “for intimate emotional processing and reflection” (Nash and Moore 2018, p. 8). Therefore, it is obvious that I was comfortable talking through the camera as if it were a friend/acquaintance who always listened when I shared my thoughts and feelings.

### **3.1.2 Autoethnography**

There is a growing trend to use autoethnography in a variety of academic disciplines and it has advantages for both practitioners and researchers (Woodley 2016, p.44). Autoethnography has been referred to in such diverse terms as self-evident (Hay 2007, p.567), self-focused (Ngunjiri et al. 2010), self-narrative (Reed-Danahay 1997, p.9), and self-reflective (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p.747). I do, however, acknowledge that observing and writing about oneself as an academic requires employing the method in a systematic and rigorous way to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of personal experiences and social phenomena involving self (Ngunjiri et al. 2010). Thus, I became aware of how this approach could help me to understand my own experience and interpret and reflect on relationships between filmmaker and participant.

The autoethnographic method is a mode of personal narrative writing because it focuses on researching “into an experience” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p.50), through which it allows researchers to explore from the inside feelings and emotions and communicate them to an outsider. It may include the environment and the perspective of past, present, and future (Méndez 2013, p.280). Denzin elaborated on the notion of “inside out”:

“Autoethnographies move from the inside of the author to outward expression while working to take readers inside themselves and ultimately out again” (1997, p.208).

In the meantime, the readers may learn something from the researcher’s personal experience and apply it to their own lives (Ellis 2004, p.46). Similarly, Liamputtong (2009, p.334) agreed that the readers might reflect on their own experiences when they have connected experiences with the author. However, this particular experience requires “the nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences, and relationships rather than *general* information” (Adams et al. 2015, p.21). Additionally, Geertz’s concept of “thick description” (1973) suggests that ethnographers should do more than just take notes, keep a diary, and report on what they see. Ethnographers’ primary goal is to describe extremely complex details. Geertz argued that ethnographers should avoid making broad generalisations based on their observations (p.40).

As Mitch Allen argued, in Ellis et al., an autoethnographer must:

“Look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you’re] telling [your] story – and that’s nice – but people do that on *Oprah* [a U.S.-based television programme] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else’s? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That’s your advantage. If you can’t frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as “my story,” then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else’s I see 25 times a day on TV?” (2011b, p. 276).

Using the autoethnographic approach required me not only to share ‘my story’, and rely on reflection in my own practice, but also to analyse the cultural context as well as the thoughts of others that may affect my outlook. Additionally, my written story was framed by critical themes in the filmmaker-participant relationships in order to shape my experience analytically, such as the effect of time spent with the participant, issues of trust and intimacy concerns, and performance.

Collinson (2012, p.193) defined autoethnography as a way of *writing in* her/himself as a key player. This is similar to O'Hara (2018, p.14), where the researcher is both the observer and the participant. I began to understand that using autoethnography allowed me to delve into my own stories and become *one of the participants* which meant that my written work became evidence of a witness testimony (Pelias 2011, p.661). Moreover, narratives made it possible to witness the "rawness of real happenings" (Clough 2002, p.8). Consequently, these texts will be given a sense of authenticity that comes from the researcher's perspective, which might not have been possible if they are interviewed by someone else (Ngunjiri et al. 2010).

One of the main advantages of autoethnography is that it gives readers access to researchers' private worlds and provides rich data. (Pavlenko 2007, p.164). It allows the researcher to write first-person accounts which enable his or her voice to be heard (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995) and, because of the researcher's use of self, the voice of the insider is truer than that of the outsider (Reed-Danahay 1997). Thus, feeling the experience described to be authentic, it is believable and possible (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). Moreover, personal narrative writing seems to make for a more engaging and common genre than academic writing, which could contribute to bridging the gap between researchers and ordinary people (Foley 2002, p.487) which is especially beneficial for practical research – to help to describe "the process of figuring out what to do, how to live and what their struggles mean" (Bochner and Ellis 2006, p.111).

The use of autoethnography allows for many different styles which are categorised by how much the researcher seeks to emphasise themselves and interact with others. There were two styles which I used to frame my autoethnographic writing: *Layered accounts*, which focused on my own experiences as a documentary filmmaker parallel to relevant theoretical frameworks, and self-reflection on building relationships with participants (Ellis et al 2011, p.278-279). By using this, I was able to engage readers into the real experience of the documentary filmmaking process and the dynamics of filmmaker-participant relationships. I was also employing the *Personal narrative* style to tell stories and wrote evocative narratives about personal lives, specifically focused on academic research, which included feelings, attitudes,

and beliefs (Adams et al. 2014, p.26). This style provided me with a better understanding of my own life while connecting to others, and, in so doing, it might be necessary to compare the personal experience with existing research (Ellis 2004, p.46).

During the autoethnographic process, researchers are recommended to keep and make records of diaries and journals to collect all information. As Chang (2008, p.71) suggested, diaries and journals are used in order to avoid questions about reliability as a “building block of autoethnography”. Moreover, I understand that it also helps to recall events, conversations, feelings, and lived experiences (Ellis et al. 2011a). My diaries and journals included video diaries, which were a powerful tool for reflection, and an appropriate channel to keep my focus on the filmmaking process.

In the process of applying autoethnography, reflexivity plays a key role in writing. It is a helpful tool for researchers to bring “consciousness (of) some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing” (Richardson 2000, 254). I understand that, apart from reflecting on personal experiences, researchers learn to understand themselves through “the eyes of the others” while interacting with the world of others (Baron 2017). In other words, we try to understand the way they/others see us. Thus, this particular method helps us to grow our self-awareness, empathy, and sensitivity to others who participate in research (Parkes 2015, p.94).

I believe that personal experience may influence the research process. That is why the use of the autoethnographic approach allowed me to introduce my own lived experience into my research, to share critical moments of the research journey, and to reflect on the process of building the relationship with participants through narrative writing. For this reason, the use of this approach would help me to delve deeper into my thoughts and feelings and to understand myself through this creative practice, particularly within a Thai context.

### **3.2 Interview with Thai filmmakers**

As a way of mitigating the “subjectivity” that may over-influence my autoethnographic writing, Ellis and Flaherty (1992) suggested that data from external sources—other individuals, visual artifacts, documents, and literature—provide additional perspectives and contextual information to help you investigate and examine your subjectivity. Furthermore, Chang (2008 p.55) highlighted the fact that autoethnographers sometimes fall into the trap of relying on their personal memory as the source of data and it can be questionable if it is only collected from one source without other measures for cross-checking. Therefore, I decided to collect “external” data from other Thai filmmakers by interviewing them to minimize subjectivity and use multiple sources. By applying this, it helps me to understand any similar/different experiences in the relationship formed behind the camera. Moreover, this also can help me to check the authenticity of the autoethnographic writing and gain useful data from actual embodied experience and shared experience with other filmmakers who have similar experience in building relationships with particular participants; as Anderson (2006) argued, one not only uses one’s own experiences in autoethnography, but also other people are asked about their experience to draw connections between own experiences and the broader context.

Thai filmmakers were chosen with regards to their style and the kinds of characters they include in their films – LGBTQ, famous people, and marginal people, for example. There are some correspondences here with my selected participants, who are a transgender dancer, a Thai Ambassador, and the owner of a Thai Takeaway. I have conducted interviews with three Thai independent filmmakers (See Appendix A) as follows; Mr.Thunskas Pansittivorakul, Mrs.Pailin Wedel, and Mr.Urupong Raksasad.

This interview generates the primary data of my research. This will help me to understand better, using empirical data, whether or not these ideas about documentary filmmaking or Thai culture might actually be exemplified in practice. By doing this, I have chosen a semi-structured interview that involves asking Thai filmmakers a set of open-ended questions, in order to collect information. The interviews were transcribed and translated from Thai to English (See Appendix B).

## Chapter 4: Preparation Stages

In chapters four, five, and six, I aim to provide critical reflection on the practical work that I carried out for this practice-led research. Although Rabiger (2004, p.332) highlighted that the relationships formed between filmmaker and participant are *unseen* relationships, by using these methods, I intended to investigate these 'off-screen' relationships through the research film and self-authored video diaries. Moreover, engaging the autoethnographic narratives helped me to connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political (Ellis 2004, p.xix), understand oneself or some aspect of life in a cultural context. Additionally, I have included an interview with Thai filmmakers to support my reflection on whether the generic concept stands up to scrutiny in a different context and individual. These chapters have been formalised and structured in terms of how I built and maintained the relationships with the participants from the beginning of the filmmaking process, which I adapted from the dance with participant's concept proposed by Janesick (1998, p. 53). A theme of each stage was classified according to my own procedure of relationship building; therefore, there are three stages: preparation stage, action stage, and the final stage.

This chapter describes the preparation stage; I focus on how I found and cast my specific participants. I reflect on the reasons why I chose these participants and how they were appropriate for the research and would be able to contribute to the new knowledge. Furthermore, I shall also reflect on how I approached the participants, the expression of respect, and the gatekeeper.

### 4.1 Casting

Since I started doing the research, I began to look for participants who were appropriate individuals for my research. My main objective was to address the influence of the Thai cultural context on relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants, and thus, for a part of the practice-led research, I wished to make a research film which reflected on the record of my relationships with the participants in documentary film production. While I was thinking how the film

would turn out, I began to choose Thai participants who had moved away from home to live in Western countries. The benefits of having Thai participants in this study are, as Smith (2010, p.463) stated, that “people are more likely to trust those who are similar in race or ethnicity”. Since I myself am a Thai person living in the West, my focus will be equally shared between ‘self’ and ‘culture’. Through this, I am privileged to have the opportunity to gain a more personal access to Thai people who live in the West through a common language and understanding of the issues associated with their situation. Furthermore, I also intended to interview and interact with them in Thai because speaking Thai might be easier to convey feelings and thoughts as well as to prevent problems caused by a language barrier and also it was easier for me to get them ‘on board’ with what I wanted to explore. Crucially, it would create a level of intimacy which would have been difficult in a second language.

According to Geertz, an ethnographer, “...man (sic) is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (1973, p.5). When it comes to describing culture, I must go beyond the action to include both the specific social understanding and interpretation of their meaning, because culture is so complex. As a result, I should avoid attempting to find patterns that explain cultures. Instead, I should look at specific moments and contextualised happenings, and these make up the *thick description*. This is an advantage, but it also presents particular challenges in terms of ‘over-identifying’ with the participants, which is why the autoethnographic reflections are so important. Nevertheless, I seek to maintain a critical distance from the participants in order to minimise any possible influence.

The beginning of the relationship with my first participant actually happened before I travelled to study at Bournemouth University. One of my friends who lived in London introduced me to Aew. She is the owner of a Thai Takeaway and also the founder of Thailand Non-Formal and Informal Education Learning Centre in Bournemouth, which provides Thai language classes to Thai children who were born in England. Shortly after arriving, I had a chance to meet her. Since then, I have been working as a part-time employee at her Takeaway shop and a volunteer Thai teacher at the Centre. The research process caused some of my assumptions and beliefs about documentary practice to emerge. For example, I

think that a better or different quality of film can be made if there are personal relationships between both sides first as they may enable participants to open themselves better to the filmmaker and make them act more naturally. As a result, I think that Aew is appropriate for my research in terms of prior intimate acquaintance.

The different kinds of my participant's social status were one of the key factors for me which I wanted to examine when I tried to look for appropriate participants. Previously, I have never had a chance to film a person of high rank (in Thailand) before. Indeed, I realised that power, manners, and etiquette played a big part for me in relation to how to establish relationships with potential participants (Supap, 1999, p. 14). Thus, it was a huge challenge for me to approach the Ambassador and ask him to be one of my research participants since he was the highest diplomatic Thai person living abroad that I could think of.

Due to his status and his age, this provided an opportunity to address a different relationship which would be helpful to explicitly address the research question. More importantly, perhaps my decision to choose the Ambassador to be a research participant might be a turning point for making the research film. This was because I focused on accessibility and building relationships with a person of high rank from behind the camera process, which should be beneficial to practitioners dealing with a person of high rank. Luckily for me, Aew knew the Ambassador's local secretary. Aew introduced me to her. Not long after sending the local secretary my curriculum vitae and research proposal, I had a chance to meet with the Ambassador for an official introduction.

The process of casting a documentary is often a mixture of design, luck, and accident. Mine was no different. I got to know Lin, a traditional North-eastern Thailand singer (Mor lam) through Aew. She was one of the performers at the Thai Summer Fair in Bournemouth, which took place on August 4th, 2019. In fact, the Fair was organised by Aew, and I was assigned to be a photographer. Lin lives in Amsterdam, Netherlands. She has a band as well. I was interested in her abilities and wanted to know more about her life in Amsterdam. So, that was my initial approach to her, but it was later finding out more of her story that confirmed it for me. I was convinced that she would be an interesting character to explore



and build relationships with. By then, I presumed that she was a transgender woman, but I never asked her directly because I felt that it was too sensitive to ask someone whom I had just met this kind of question (19:01). I did not want to make a bad first impression as well. I kept rethinking why I did not ask her directly. It was probably because I was concerned about her feelings. If a new acquaintance looked at me and asked if I was a tomboy or not, I would have felt I was judged because of my appearance, and such a person had not really known who I was. Moreover, my thought about her being a transgender woman was not the reason why I chose her to be one of the participants.

Since I needed to address the relationships that happened behind the camera, it was necessary to understand the participants' purposes of being filmed. As Wedel, the Thai filmmaker, said:

“Filmmakers must anticipate the participant’s agenda, the reason why they participated in the interview, and the motivations behind the answer whether there is any hidden agenda” (personal communication, 7 December 2019).

Thus, to assess their motivations on being participants, I directly asked each of them; “Why did you decide to become my participant?” Aew said that she joined this project because she wanted to help me to get my work done as intended, and she was willing to do what she could because she loved me like her own sister (37:16). I think that was just her expression through words. I then told my supervisors about this conversation. They were surprised because it was so unusual in Western culture to say something like this to someone who you had just met. I thought about what Aew meant by saying ‘loving me like her own sister’. I acknowledged that since there were many levels of *love* in the Thai language, perhaps she just meant that she was fond of me; it was probably because I had always respected her, worked diligently, and listened to her whenever she needed to. All of these might make her feel good about me. However, I felt relieved that at least we had started a good relationship, or she might say so to increase my trust in her. This was an early indication of the potential intensity and intimacy of the relationship between Aew and myself.

Considering how the stated motivations of my participants impact on my process, my thoughts, my emotion, and even my performance, there was some similarity between the Ambassador and Lin regarding the method I used for examining the use of reciprocal bargaining. Lin was different from Aew because she made it clear that she expected me to make her a short film in order to use it to promote her band and present her life story. That was the reason why she was willing to do everything to get this job done. Working on the research, I myself also had an agenda. Thus, it made me feel that Lin was a sincere person because she did not hide what she wanted. In fact, she was the only one among the participants who I did not have to interpret what she said or expressed. Likewise, if I could not meet her needs, I would tell her straight away as well.

For the Ambassador, he said he wished to support Thai students who were studying in the UK as much as he could. However, due to his duties and responsibilities, he was very busy and could not support everyone; he would choose to support some cases only and I was one among them. I felt very privileged. However, this made me feel like I was only a receiver, which I disliked. I thought of repaying him by making a video clip about what he had done as the Ambassador, which he could broadcast publicly. He did not deny it; however, the clip has never been broadcasted. I could sense his sincerity in supporting me in my study. Nevertheless, I understood that he might not like it, but he was too courteous to refuse me or to ask me to do what he wanted. However, I had already fulfilled my promise. The participants have reasons for appearing in the film and these reasons may change over time. I therefore had to keep observing their agendas and considering their hidden agendas which may not be spoken overtly, particularly with the Ambassador and Aew. This is a significant issue for my thesis, whether as a filmmaker or a researcher.

## **4.2 Approaching the participants**

Approaching the participants is always a challenge for a filmmaker and I have considered it with this particular mindset; approaching others requires both courage and skill. When I look at how I first approached Aew to be my research participant, at first, she refused to join because she said her life was not

interesting and she had never let anyone follow her before. That was a real challenge for me as a filmmaker to convince her. Aew also said that if someone else had asked her to do this, she would have refused because she was neither a celebrity nor a well-known person, as well as she did not want to reveal her personal matters (43:15). She had that kind of preconception because she thought that the person on-screen had to be famous and good-looking as well as have an interesting life story. Since she thought she did not have these kinds of attributes at all, she then was not interested in being filmed.

Despite her first refusal, I had not given up trying to persuade her because I had a sense that our relationship started to get interesting, and that it should be addressed in the research film. Most importantly, she would be a participant with whom I could examine the hypothesis that a filmmaker who was previously known to the participant before the start of the filmmaking had several advantages because a level of interpersonal trust had already been established. However, I did not push her because I also needed more time to determine if she was the right person for my research film or not. We had seen each other quite often since I worked at her Takeaway shop. I felt that she started to open up to me. For example, she started telling me her personal issues such as her business, shop income, expenses, and tax, including her family matters. She sometimes talked about her family in Thailand as well. In the meantime, I also told her about my family and life in Thailand. Since I had many conversations with her, I decided to ask her again if she was interested in participating in my research. She finally agreed and said that as she got to know me better and I had worked well at her Takeaway shop, she was willing to support me. I thought that the reason why she accepted to be a participant was to repay me. I felt that she was not interested in being the character in the documentary at all; she just wanted to help me. Therefore, it confused me, and I also mentioned this issue in the video diary (12:37). I was not sure whether she decided to help me because I had worked for her. If one day I was no longer working for her, would she continue to do it? Thus, this made me realise that uncertainty in the relationship between filmmaker and participant influences the filmmaking process. Her consent did not guarantee that she would not withdraw. Of course, she could do so at any time. As for me, one thing that made me confident that the shooting was going to be smooth was the healthy relationship between the two of us.

As Riechel et al. (2018, p.10-21) highlighted, one of the key elements affecting relationships is expertise. I am confident that it is relevant when approaching high-ranking people. Furthermore, professionalism and etiquette are practical tactics, especially when approaching seniors. When I first met the Ambassador and his local secretary at the Thai Embassy, I was wearing a suit because I wanted to look professional and felt it could help to create a good first impression. From my point of view, he was smart, well-dressed, polite, and his tone of voice was gentle, constant, and firm. Everything he said, even trivial matters, seemed to be solemn. Thus, it made me feel nervous when I was talking to him; however, while I was worried about offending him, I also attempted to persuade him to agree to take part in my study.

The Ambassador seemed to be interested in the film industry. He probably wanted to discuss topics that were related to my field so we could share our interest. Then, he started by asking my opinion about the direction and the trend of the Thailand film industry. There was only a short time available for me to sell myself. I thought that was like a job interview. But even then, I could not help thinking he might have just been testing me to see how confident I was in talking about details related to the field, or he was just being kind and chose to talk about something I knew in order to break the ice. Whatever the reason, I appreciated him because he made our conversation become more relaxed. I could share my opinions on what I had learnt from my experiences. On the other hand, although I did not have knowledge of diplomacy, I tried to do some research about him. Therefore, I had issues to discuss with him, for example, I asked him about the differences between his jobs in Myanmar (Burma) and England (before taking a position in England, he had worked in Myanmar). Deep down inside, I wanted to make a great first impression which reassured him that I was serious and valued the meeting. However, I had to perform appropriately and humbly in order to make sure he understood my purpose and was willing to be my participant.

For Lin, after we first met each other at the Thai Summer Fair, I kept contacting her via Facebook. I talked to her online and tried to get to know her through our conversations and her reactions. I knew she was willing to be filmed because it was her intention from the beginning. Nevertheless, I worried about how much she would reveal to me. I asked myself why I was worried. The answer was that

if she revealed everything to me, whether through or behind the camera, it would have been good for my research but what if she expected me to reveal everything to her. It is normal when you tell your best friend a secret that you too would want to hear your friend's secret. I neither cherished privacy nor intimacy; I just asked myself where the limits of the filmmaker and the participant's self-expressions were in documentary filmmaking. To put it another way, to what extent did I have to reveal intimate and personal information about myself to the participant? There was no compulsion that I had to do so but would I have felt obliged in order to maintain the relationships. I felt I had only recently met her, but she seemed to be ready to talk and had things she wanted to 'get off her chest'. It was because of the way I talked to her and my expression or my personality that made her trust in me and open up to me. It reminded me of the Thai filmmaker who said "I sometimes talk to the participants as a friend. Thus, the level of privacy was showing too high in our words and topics" (personal communication, 22 November 2019).

Because of Lin's willingness to open up, I could not help but think that she gave me a key to access all aspects of her life. However, I was the one who proved to be reticent. I was afraid I could not reveal myself as much as she did to me. Consequently, I realised that there was a very fine line I could overstep if I had very good access; however, I had to be aware that whatever I decided to ask or to shoot, it would not harm her later which included the right to intrude in her privacy (Pryluck 2005, p.200).

Finding a story idea is hard; however, gaining unique access to the people involved is harder. De Jong (2013, p.50) stated that "access to the story is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the realisation of the films". This is especially true in the case of the Ambassador. It is normal for Thai culture that people of high rank always have secretaries to handle things and arrange schedules for them. Hence, by having good relationships with their secretaries, there is nothing to lose; she/he can probably be a helpful gatekeeper for you. Since the local secretary was the Ambassador's gatekeeper, I definitely needed her help in order to gain access to him. I therefore had to get to know her better. In other words, I had to build a relationship with her as well. In general, when I think of the gatekeeper, I imagine layers or walls surrounding high-ranking officials such as the

Ambassador, acting as a protector or even an obstacle, making it nearly impossible to reach the person. Demonstrating my trustworthiness and developing positive relationships peels back those layers and tears down the walls.

I started contacting the secretary and made an effort to visit her frequently in order to establish a relationship. Afterward, the local secretary introduced me to the first secretary who was an official secretary and the one arranging the Ambassador's schedules. I did not know that the Ambassador had two secretaries. Consequently, I had to get to know the first secretary because she had become my new gatekeeper. However, I kept in contact with the local secretary and treated the first secretary in the same way as I had treated the local secretary.

There were many times that I volunteered myself to help with the Embassy's media activities because I personally felt that it was the way to reciprocate the Ambassador for being one of my participants. As I could not provide compensation or assist on diplomatic works, I could offer my particular skill in media-related work. Perhaps this demonstrated how access is often a process of bargaining and the unspoken 'economics of labour'. In addition, it created an opportunity to pursue my own agenda in meeting the first secretary and the Ambassador in the Embassy which would otherwise have been more difficult to access. Thus, I tried to get myself in there in order to have opportunities to build relationships with the first secretary and the Ambassador. I was trying to create my presence there, familiarising myself to him and establishing his trust in me as well as allowing me to contribute to the Embassy's media work. This helped them to have confidence in my abilities which, of course, were more convincing than what I wrote on my CV or what I said. I believed this would have a positive effect on building my relationships with the Ambassador in the future.

I was once invited as a Press Assistant to The Tipiṭaka Handover Ceremony at the British Library. I thought that I was given this opportunity because I had a good relationship with the secretary. Indeed, it was not necessary to let me join an official event like this. I thought she wanted me to feel like I was being given a privilege as if I was a special person to her. I believed that with her authority at

work, she was able to present to the Ambassador which events I could join or not. In this case, I could clearly see how we both were *circulating our power* (Thomas 2010, p.35) to each other. This continually evolved as the production progressed and we attempted to make the relationship work for us, without losing the cooperation of the other. It was like playing tug of war. I knew when to pull and when I should relax to allow her to play her part because I believed that if I allowed her to feel that she had power over me, it would lead to smoother negotiation. This method is always effective in the Thai context; it is related to the characteristics of ego orientation, as Thais tend not to like losing face and will not allow anyone to look down on them (Watjanasontorn 1985, p. 31-32). Because I treated her with respect, she might feel satisfied and agree to negotiate as a result.

#### **4.3 The expression of respect**

I showed respect to my three participants in different ways. According to Thai culture, we have our own very specific way of honouring elders and showing more respect towards elders. For the Ambassador and Aew, they were in positions of authority. Although Aew and I were close, she was also my employer and a senior. I therefore treated them politely, for example, I always greeted them with a *Wai*, the Thai ultimate sign of respect. I spoke softly with a respectful tone of voice, used formal language, and never interrupted them while they were talking. From my interviews with the three Thai filmmakers, only Wedel shares the same experience as me in behaving in such a manner; it could be due to the fact that we are both women. For Lin, I respected her because she was such a fighter. She had to work to support herself since moving to the West. She was promoting in the West, 'Mor lam', the Thai northeastern-style songs, and she made this traditional Thai performance known among foreigners. In addition, she also ran a Thai bar and restaurant in Amsterdam. I have personally admired people who are talented and passionate about living. Even though Lin was just making a living for herself, she set goals for everything she did. Hence, I had accepted Lin for who she was, and I did appreciate her for being bold since there were not many opportunities in Thailand for transgender people to express their abilities.

Another point related to the notion of respect, in particular with Lin, was that I never said, acted or expressed anything to insult her, for example, I never asked where she graduated, or made fun of her English accent (because she was used to speaking Dutch), or addressed her status as a trans person. In the research film (24:50), she revealed that she was impressed by me because I never looked down on her. I assumed that she had previously been insulted and humiliated, whether by Thais or foreigners, and that this had caused her to consider herself inferior; as such I moderated my behaviour accordingly. This links to the Thai culture and behaviour that Thai people tend to have a high self-esteem sensitivity and do not want anyone to look down upon them, particularly in terms of background, education, and financial status. Thus, I talked and acted carefully; there are ways that can damage relationships, for instance, by belittling someone, making someone feel worthless, or acting with contempt rather than respect (Supap, 1999, p. 17). By showing participants' lives through the camera, they may feel as if they are exposing their weak spots and putting themselves in a vulnerable position; however, a consistent respectful approach may make them feel more comfortable and willing to dance with me.



## Chapter 5: Action Stages

In this chapter, I critically address and reflect on key themes which emerged and developed from the rich accumulated experiences of relationship building between myself and each of the three participants in respect to Thai culture and behaviour. As discussed in Chapter two, establishing and building relationships between filmmaker and participant is central to documentary filmmaking; it involves the crucial elements of trust, intimacy, and performance. These three factors have been reflected through the lens of Thai culture; I will be able to reveal the role of cultural spheres through relationships which are not only to be generated but also maintained.

### 5.1 Establishing Trust

At this point, my practice in this research has made me realise that trust in the documentary filmmaking context is a two-way process and can be exchangeable which is related to what Fong and Cox (1983, p.163) said about the counselling relationship. This notion of a give and take process is pertinent to the relationship I had with the three participants in my research. I found that it was essential for me to be the person whom they trust while I had to trust them as well. I recall how Wedel, the Thai filmmaker, approached her participants at the first stage of her documentary:

“I have to make sure that I can put my trust in them and their stories. At the same time, I believe that participants also keep their eye on me, how trustworthy I am” (personal communication, 7 December 2019).

It was like an epiphany moment for me in the documentary filmmaking process, proving that I deserved to be trusted; they needed to trust in me in order for them to reveal their stories. This reminds me of a dance class when I was in high school. I had to take a dance class (Ballroom dance) that required students to dance in pairs. I invited my friend to dance with me and expected that the one I chose would be a good dancing partner. When the music began to play, we were on the floor dancing. I could not predict what would happen; I had to put my trust

in my friend's dance abilities and for him not to step on my feet while we were dancing. At the same time, he had to have this trust as well. My interactions as a filmmaker with my participants were similar; I had to trust in them, and they had to trust in me so we would be able to keep on dancing until the song ended.

I and the three participants are Thai, and our understanding of trust is influenced by Thai culture. This shapes the way we interact and perform in the relationships, and these naturally become our characteristics and lead to our behaviour. To be able to conceptualise the nature of trust in the filmmaking process, particularly in the Thai context, I firstly classify a trust-related characteristic of myself as a filmmaker with each participant in order to clearly see what elements of trust were established which can be observed as a practitioner during the filmmaking process (see Table 1). Then, in order to better understand the nature of trust in my practice and experiences, I reflected on qualities in greater depth.

<b>The Ambassador</b>	<b>Lin</b>	<b>Aew</b>
<i>Filmmaker Characteristics: what makes him/her trust me (in the order of importance)</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Humility</li> <li>- บุญคุณ (Boon Khun)</li> <li>- เกรงใจ (Kreng Jai)</li> <li>- Keeping my word</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keeping my word</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Humility</li> <li>- บุญคุณ (Boon Khun)</li> <li>- เกรงใจ (Kreng Jai)</li> </ul>
<i>Participant Characteristics: what makes me trust him/her (in the order of importance)</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seniority</li> <li>- Benevolence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Willingness to Disclose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seniority</li> <li>- Benevolence</li> <li>- Willingness to be vulnerable</li> </ul>

Table 1: Trust-related characteristics in documentary filmmaking

### 5.1.1 Humility

Thai people tend to respect seniority because those with seniority are generally older (Supap 1999, p. 10). Therefore, building trust with the Ambassador is rather different from other participants since he is an elder and a high-ranking official. Due to his job role, position, qualification, reputation, and age, these are elements that prompted me to trust him; nevertheless, they made me feel smaller, and it seemed to be difficult to make him trust me or even get access to him. In the research film (32:35), I said: “the Ambassador was the only person who made me think I needed to build trust”, because at that time, the Ambassador was the most difficult person to reach compared to Aew and Lin. There are a number of layers of sensitivity in hierarchy within the Thai culture, and, as a result, it was crucial to earn the Ambassador's trust, which was not easily accomplished. In addition, I did not have much time to spend or opportunities to talk with him like any other participants. Therefore, I had to work harder to gain his trust and encourage him to ‘dance with me on the floor’.

I believed that building trust requires time and can be built by a sequence of actions over time, for example, participating in various events organised by the Thai Embassy to take the opportunity to meet him, be recognised, and become more familiar to me. I therefore decided to offer myself as a volunteer to support media work by making videos and taking photographs for the Embassy. Hence, I could go to the Embassy and meet with the Ambassador more often, even though I did not have an appointment for filming him. There were opportunities for me to greet him, speak with him, and get to know more about him. Moreover, the Ambassador was able to recognise my abilities because of my work for the Embassy.

My willingness to volunteer was to keep myself low profile. This did not mean that I wanted to be unprofessional or ‘undersell’ myself, but I wanted to prove to myself that I could work well in any position. I made myself a ‘glass-half-full person’ by being humble to let the others see that I was willing to learn from everyone. This seemed to be an appropriate approach because I have often used this approach to build trust when working with high-ranking people and those who are older than me, for instance, coordinating a project with government officials.

This was particularly effective in the Thai context. It makes elders feel that they are respected. Since I tried not to show off nor boast that I was a lecturer and a PhD student, they were willing to cooperate and open up to me. In like manner, I treated Aew with the same humility and was willing to do any work she asked me to do (36:30); this included working at the Thai Takeaway shop, leaflet distributing, helping with (her) house removal, to gain her trust and build a good relationship.

### **5.1.2 Keeping my word**

Among all the characteristics of both parties that could possibly influence trust building, 'keeping my word' is different from other characteristics because it requires more effort. By this I mean I see the value of investing what I promised. For example, I promised the Ambassador that I would edit the interview clip for him and was willing to help the Embassy with their media work. Therefore, I invested my time, talent, and money for travelling expenses in order to keep my promises. Lin made it clear right from the beginning that she was willing to participate and would tell me her story, which made me feel that she already trusted me as the filmmaker. As she lives in the Netherlands, I could only contact her via video calls. Fortunately, on one occasion, when I knew that she had agreed to perform a show in Liverpool, England, I requested to accompany her so that I could film while she was performing. It was a very good experience seeing her at that time. Before the show, we had time to talk in the hotel room. We sat back and talked comfortably. She began to tell me stories about her life and family. I deliberately did not make any recording at that time because I wanted to examine how much she was willing to reveal to me when I was not filming. This notion of attempting to circumvent the façade of a professional performer is reminiscent of Molly Dineen's work with/on Geri Halliwell:

“...But there are other moments when she is absolutely holding the reins because she's basically showing off and singing, and I am going along with it filming it and there it is in the film, and of course she's doing it for the camera and performing. So I think the film goes on quite a strange meander through whether it's me in control or her” (Quinn 2013, p.87).

I had a similar feeling with Lin, because she wanted a short film about herself for professional promotional purposes in return for participating in the project; thus sometimes, I perhaps felt as if I were being used. Even though I offered to do what she wanted, deep down, I was not sure who benefited the most in this reciprocal arrangement. I had to manage this contradiction in me while building a relationship and working with her to get some essential truth and authenticity I needed for the film and acknowledged that she was a performer.

Spending time with Lin, I felt like I was on holiday with a friend. Even though deep down I knew the reason why I was there, whenever I did not have the camera in my hands, I felt relaxed and listened intently to what she said. It really made me feel as if the relationship behind the camera was an authentic one. In front of the camera, Lin could be anyone such as a singer, an actor, or a superstar, but off-camera she was just an ordinary woman, and she wanted to talk and express herself with someone she could trust. Most importantly, I did not have to perform my role as the filmmaker for a while and I was just listening to Lin as a friend. It can be said that this investment was worthwhile because I got to know deeply about her – Lin's life experiences. Furthermore, the fact that I put myself out to fit in with her schedule as I invested money to pay for travel and accommodation and my time to meet her. This had a significant impact on her; my investment impressed her. Therefore, I believed that trust, as 'keeping my word', was strengthened when implicit and explicit undertakings are followed through. This is, initially, a form of trust based on deferred evidence, but it becomes consolidated quickly as evidence mounts up.

### **5.1.3 Seniority**

Thais are raised and taught at a young age to obey and respect elders and those in authority. Meanwhile, seniors are expected to be polite and kind as well as have self-control. These issues made me realise that status is a huge matter in Thai culture (Williams 2018); age, family connections, job types, education, and income levels are all contributory factors to a person's perceived status in Thai society. As a result, in the research film (32:43), I reflected about the Ambassador that "because of his position and authority, I was inclined to have immediate trust

and believe in him”. Apart from being an elder, he is also a senior government official. These two elements are the basis of my trust in him.

*Wai*, is the way of Thai people showing respect to the elders and those in positions of authority as well as a greeting. There are also other gestures to show respect, for example, stooping slightly or bowing the head when walking past and interacting with elders or figures of authority, as I did with the Ambassador and Aew. I also maintained a physical distance as a barrier when speaking to them, but lessened it when I was speaking to Lin. Moreover, I always ended my sentences with the word “คะ” (Kha) when I was talking to the Ambassador and Aew. In Thai, “คะ” (Kha) is used by females and “ครับ” (Krub) by males as a polite words for ending sentences to show respect to elders. These manners were just examples of showing respect to elders, which can lead to trust. On the contrary, if we show them disrespect, then it might be hard to gain their trust.

The use of language is another interesting aspect to mention. Thai people generally address others by using a title to indicate seniority – a person’s age, followed by a given name or nickname which is common in Thailand. The title “พี่” (Pee) is used for addressing and showing respect to relatives and those who are older, and “น้อง” (Nong) for someone younger. In my case, I called Aew and Lin as “Pee-Aew” and “Pee-Lin” but for the Ambassador, I addressed him as “ท่าน” (Thaan) to honour his status because not only he is an elder but in a high position. “ท่าน” (Thaan) is used consistently for authority figures. These Thai personal pronouns are non-gender specific honorifics used in most formal, professional settings, or when addressing others.

On the other hand, this social practice sometimes implies the participants’ attitudes towards the filmmaker. Wedel, the Thai filmmaker, shared her experience that when she met a high-ranking participant for the first time, she was called “หนู” (Noo). This word is normally used for calling a little girl or boy in order to show a certain level of endearment. However, Wedel revealed:

“The language he used with me is stratified; I am lower than him. He called me “Noo”, which meant he thought I was not as powerful as him. It made

me feel that I was not equal to him.... As a result of this, I could not ask him very serious questions and just had to use gentle words” (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

I agree with Wedel because if I had had such an experience, I would have felt the same way as well. Nevertheless, I do not think it is an act of abuse but rather a demeaning behaviour, to belittle someone. This reminds me of the dance metaphor; in this case, by addressing the filmmaker in that manner at the beginning of the conversation, it feels like the participant is leading the dance; it certainly changes the dynamic of the interview. Because of the culture, a filmmaker may not want their participants to feel that they are being aggressive, suppressing the feeling, being professional and showing respect still, in order to make the relationship work. The filmmaker will have to correct the immediate situation by recalibrating the questions to show the respect.

This particular issue has never been a concern for Urupong Raksasad and Thunskana Pansittivorakul, Thai filmmakers; it is a strong possibility that this is because they are men. It is unlikely that any man will be called “Noo”. In terms of showing respect, they personally see it is more important to pay respect to the elderly than respecting those in high positions as Raksasad mentioned in the interview:

“I respect everyone for who they are as human beings, including elderly. For me, the high position of a person is not the factor of influence that makes me pay my respects or treat them differently from others. Age is the most influential factor for Thai people. Naturally, we respect those who are older rather than the younger ones” (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

All of the aforementioned link back to the Thai cultural significance of hierarchy and striving for a sense of self-esteem. Fortunately, this did not happen to me; the Ambassador called me “คุณ” (Khun). “คุณ” (Khun) literally means “You” and it commonly be used as a title, a polite way to refer to someone of a perceived higher status, but it might be a little too formal to use with people we are close with. According to this, I understood that the Ambassador honoured me as a filmmaker, teacher and Thai student who came to study in England, interacting

politely, and keeping distance by using the word "คุณ" (Khun) to convey the fact that our relationship was quite official; it was not the relationship between friends or acquaintances. Hence, Thai people place great importance on status; utilising it well and beneficially, it may enable us to build better relationships with the participants. If we know who we are, what our status is, and who we are talking to, it is easy for us to show proper etiquette. This concept of hierarchy is also expressed in non-verbal language. For example, walking past older people or those higher in rank, I need to lower my head and bow slightly, especially when that person is sitting. This is a gestural expression of one's respect for seniority.

#### **5.1.4 Benevolence**

Benevolence is the perception of willingness and desire to do good and is valuable to those who believe in it without self-interest. This characteristic played a major role in building the relationships with Aew and the Ambassador. Here, benevolence served as a basis of trust. Initially I felt that it was a great opportunity for me to have a part-time job at Aew's Takeaway shop (I was working there before inviting Aew to be my participant). This allowed me to spend more time with her than other participants. Thus, it seemed that building trust with Aew was not that difficult. I believed that she trusted me because of my characteristics – I was competent, always committed, and dependable, showing humility and always fulfilling my promises. On top of that, as I discussed in section 4.1, in the previous chapter, Aew revealed that she loved me. This might be the reason that she favoured me over others, for example, when I was working at her Takeaway shop, she treated me very well and I could feel that she was kind to me more than to other staff; even when I did something wrong, she would never complain to me. However, I sometimes felt uncomfortable with that treatment because with the privilege I had received, somehow it made me feel pressurised.



Interestingly, Mayer et al. referred to the propensity to trust:

“People differ in their inherent propensity to trust. Propensity might be thought of as the general willingness to trust others. Propensity will influence how much trust one has for a trustee prior to data on that particular party being available. People with different developmental experiences, personality types, and cultural backgrounds vary in their propensity to trust. An example of an extreme case of this is what is commonly called *blind trust*” (1995 p.715).

I received favours generously from Aew and the Ambassador right at the very beginning, and sometimes I felt almost as though it was from God. They provided assistance for my requests including access, time, and information and did not make me feel that it was a burden for them.

#### **5.1.5 Willingness to disclose**

I previously asked myself how much, as a filmmaker, I would be willing to reveal myself to the participants, as mentioned in section 4.2 in the previous chapter. This was a pertinent question with regards to the relationship with Lin. I got to know her better through our conversations and her reactions during our stay in Liverpool. She showed her vulnerable side to me by sharing her problems and obstacles about living in a Western country. Not many Thai individuals are willing to open up about their terrible experiences because of their *saving face* behaviour (see section 2.3). Kirsch (2005, p.2164) pointed out that the close relationship could lead to deeply personal revelations. If I, the interviewer, show interest in her story and make her feel comfortable enough to tell the story, Lin, the interviewee, may forget that what she shares is being recorded.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I had a concern about opening up to Lin, yet she seemed very comfortable with it. At this point I was just worried about how much I should reveal of myself to her in return. Most of the time, I was the one who asked questions and she was willing to tell me everything. I acknowledged that, based upon her career, she was probably used to being in

front of the camera. She was therefore willing to reveal her stories and she may have enjoyed the process of reflecting on and sharing her life experiences. However, I was personally concerned about my actions and intentions; I could choose what and how much to reveal – or to conceal – about my experiences during interviews, which made me realise that there was the power imbalance involved in the relationship. Cotterill suggested that “close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear” (1992 p.599). There is a specific boundary of openness to each relationship. I feel uncomfortable sharing my personal things while I am working as I reflected in my research film (23:05). I always switch to professional mode when I am behind the camera. That is why I am in a dilemma when I face someone who is as open as Lin. I constantly assess to what extent I have to be open, also carefully considering what role I want to play (and what to avoid) by setting clear boundaries about whether being a filmmaker or a friend.

I can be friends with my participants; however when the camera is turned on, I make it clear to them directly that I am in a work mode. This reflection chimes with Piotrowska's discovery that feelings similar to love might occur in that encounter through transference while making a film because one person takes a risk to give a personal account and the other listens (2012, p. 243). I believe that Lin and I can be friends in the future; our relationship has developed considerably as she is willing to disclose her personal stories and deep emotions because she trusts me. As I am wearing many hats in this relationship, it is sometimes difficult for me to distinguish between professional and personal relationships.

#### **5.1.6 Willingness to be vulnerable**

While trusting others is essential for building and maintaining relationships, it can also uncover our vulnerability. This is exactly what Nash said about trust in observational filmmaking, that it is “a response to the inherent vulnerability” (Nash 2009, p. 193). To put this into Mayer et al. 's (1995 p.712) terms, it is the willingness to take risks for the actions based on the expectation of others' performance in a particular action that is important to the trustor. Although I felt close to Aew because we spent a lot of time together, I had never exposed myself

emotionally to her or even with the other participants. I know I am not actually a vulnerable person, and I am not easily open with others, which is my characteristic. In contrast, Aew used to cry and grumble with me because she wanted to get something off her chest, and she trusted me to be her listener. This was surprising to me; it made me think that she was showing her vulnerabilities and emotions, making a confession and sharing sensitive information in the hope of inspiring disclosures and compromises from me in return. Perhaps I realised that I had an agenda as a filmmaker, hence, I try to maintain my distance to avoid the complexity of relationships that might happen during the filmmaking process. Even so, I was getting too involved with Aew's life and this was why I was confused by what I really expected from the relationship.

Since Aew put so much trust in me in every aspect of our relationships, it was natural that I trusted her in return. I also expected a lot from our trust in one another, probably because we were close and spent a lot of time together. Nevertheless, as we can see in this scene (43:53), I mentioned an incident that raised doubts about my trust in Aew. This doubt became clear to me when I asked Aew about the rental price of a room in her place which I was interested in renting. She said she would give me a low rental price; I understood that it was because we were close so that she offered me such a cheap price, and I agreed to go ahead with the rental. As time passed, before I moved out of my previous accommodation, I re-confirmed the rental price with Aew, but it turned out that it was not the same price she had told me previously. At that time, I was tight-lipped and did not tell her that we had agreed on a different price, so perhaps I was *saving her face* by avoiding a confrontation with her inconsistency, even though the decision had disappointed me. Furthermore, I was afraid that if I blamed her for this, it would be like *stepping on her toes*. This meant that if I did or said something she did not like, it could cause the relationship to end.

This may help explain how Thai culture shapes the expression of my unconscious psychological processes, including desires and convictions, and how these are manifested in behaviour – to make a person lose face, that is, to be embarrassed or ashamed, is also a big sign of disrespect. In the end, I backed out of renting her room. By then, I felt heartbroken and had lost my personal trust in her. Actually, Aew had done nothing wrong. She might have had a clear boundary between the personal relationship and the professional relationship (as a

businessperson). From the business perspective the rental price she later confirmed was just a standard price in the market. Perhaps I was expecting too much from that trust, and closeness we had, thinking it would bring me some privileges apart from work-related issues. In consequence, when things do not go as planned, I will be disappointed and lose trust. Regardless, this helped me to understand the delicate nature of trust in a relationship; it can be earned or lost.

There is a question that occurs to me, which I discussed in Chapter two on the topic of trust: what would a filmmaker do if it is uncomfortable to relate to and build trust with a participant? In my case, the relationship and trust were built, but because of some incidents, I lost my trust. I chose to continue with a better understanding of the limits of the relationship between personal and professional relationships. I therefore realised that even though I am not a vulnerable person, when I completely put trust in someone, I became more vulnerable as I began to expect and rely on others more. Thus, with trust comes a willingness to risk disappointment or lose trust itself.

### **5.1.7 បុណ្យគុណ (Boon Khun)**

I realise that different cultures have a different impact on trust, which leads to an individual's actions in both personal and professional contexts. Although there is no direct translation of the Thai concept of *Boon Khun* in English, according to Komin (1991) as described in Chapter two, the closest meaning of *Boon Khun* is 'gratitude'. You feel appreciated and grateful for those who have done a good thing to you, but to return the gratitude is rather optional. However, for me, I seem to be conscious of gratitude and try to pay it back, which (I think) is a 'process of reciprocity'. It chimes with what documentary filmmaker, Liz Garbus, argued: "I make films with people who I feel intimate with, people who trust, people who I trust, people who I like, and people who like me on a personal level" (Stubbs 2002, p.123). Thus, a filmmaker may gain the favour from participants easily because of their personal relationship; the filmmaker perhaps places their trust in a participant in return because they appreciate the support and cooperation. In the same way, Wedel, the Thai filmmaker, commented that:

“I consider it rather an exchange, the participants have a chance to raise their voice; to allow people to get to know and understand them better through my documentary, at the same time, I feel it is *Boon Khun* the reason that they are giving their time for my film. What I do in return is genuinely care for and stay in touch with them to see how they are” (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

In my case, for example, I received help and favour from Aew and the Ambassador. I therefore expressed my gratitude by putting in a lot of effort into making myself available for them, and to offer to do something without getting paid, in exchange for the amount of time they gave me. For example, volunteering at the Embassy and Thai school, being a hard-working staff member in a Takeaway shop, as well as assisting helping Aew in moving the house.

In fact, in particular with Aew, I realise that the process of building a relationship and trust involves the mutual practice of giving and receiving. At times Aew might have wanted to give and help without expecting anything in return, but I myself felt indebted and would like to repay her. This kind of feeling is unprofessional because I might repay her by showing only the good side of her in the film or doing whatever she asked me to; as a filmmaker/practitioner, this may threaten my ability to present my thesis/research film without prejudice.

#### **5.1.8 เกรงใจ (Kreng Jai)**

*Kreng Jai* is usually interpreted as consideration and being aware of other people’s feelings and showing respect towards them (Chitrada 2004). Thai people are more likely to be group-oriented, compared to Western individualism, so Thais tend to avoid criticism and confrontation. This sensitivity is linked with the Thai concept of not wanting to lose face; displaying *Kreng Jai* is one way in which a person can help another not to lose face or avoid causing embarrassment. Due to the complexity of my relationship with Aew – boss and employee, friend, and colleague – I am often confused about trust in each role as you can see in my video diary entry (13:08). As we were close, it affected my professional relationship and it appeared to be overlapping. For instance, Aew

asked me to re-shoot because she was not wearing makeup and then I complied with her requests because of the *Kreng Jai* towards her. Due to our closeness, I had a feeling that she just wanted to make a demand on something and might have assumed I was obligated to grant all of her wishes.

This give and take of power and compromise are evident in the experiences of Raksasad, the Thai filmmaker, who once said that “as a filmmaker, we try to listen to the participants on what they want to do, but in the end, we are the one who makes a decision what is the story we want to tell” (personal communication, 15 November 2019). At some point, I found myself in a dilemma; I also wanted to tell the story in my own way, but her trust in me had made me feel a bit uneasy. She often said that “I believed that you would cut out the parts that made me look bad.” Therefore, her trust influenced my decision-making since I did not want her to feel betrayed. I was concerned how she would feel if I chose to include something that she did not like.

These issues made me understand that, ideally, there should be a clear line between personal relationship and professional relationship, but in reality, this line shifts and is often blurred. It reminds me of the unequal relationship between who is *doing* the looking and who is being *looked* at in documentary filmmaking, which is emphasised by Bruzzi (2018, p.211). However, in the case of Aew and the Ambassador, I felt like I was the one being looked at during the process. I felt that they were always watching me and evaluating me all the time because of my junior status. This proved to be consistent with Komin (1991) which argued Thais are often naturally *Kreng Jai* towards others. Wedel, the Thai filmmaker said:

“During the production, I had this feeling of *Kreng Jai* all the time because I was not their relatives or friends. When they are not comfortable to be filmed at times or asked in particular matters, I could not do anything about it. I did not think it was something about me; however, after a while of spending time with them, the pressure of *Kreng Jai* had gradually declined” (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

In hindsight, I am aware of the significant power of *Kreng Jai* that influences Thai filmmakers on the decisions and actions in the process. Whether it has a positive or negative effect, filmmakers will have to consider to what extent it is allowed

and will not compromise the integrity of film production and professionalism. On this matter, Wedel and I hold the same opinion, that is seeing the advantage of being *Kreng Jai*, having space between filmmaker and participants, being sensitive with filming and questioning. Similarly, in English terms this is allied to ‘empathy’, whereby this practice implies that you should treat others the way you want to be treated.

### 5.1.9 Trust transitivity

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics that influence the development of trust between the filmmaker and the participant, interestingly, in the case of the gatekeeper of the Ambassador, I worked on the assumption that trust can be “transitive” (Abdul-Rahman and Hailes 1997, p.49). The idea behind trust transitivity is that when, for example, the Ambassador trusts his secretary, and the secretary trusts me, then the Ambassador can derive a measure of trust in me, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, which was adapted from Jøsang et al. (2005). This trust considered in transitivity is obviously reliability trust, not decision trust. Therefore, the secretary explicitly communicated her trust in me to the Ambassador, as a ‘recommendation’; however, this kind of trust may not be absolute because the Ambassador may trust me less than the secretary does, based on the secretary’s recommendation.

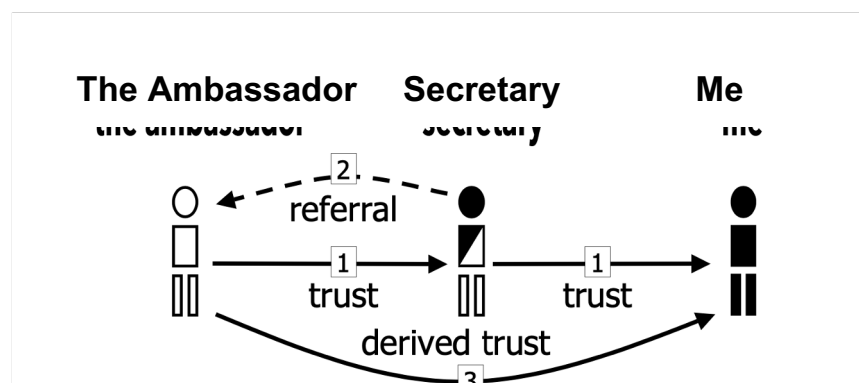


Figure 1: Trust transitivity between the Ambassador and myself

This diagram illustrates the way in which trust can be a commodity – and how I can vouch for another – to ‘transfer’ that value on their behalf. In my case, I believe that trust is also transitive from the local secretary's trust in Aew to me. Once my relationship with a local secretary developed, she introduced me to the first secretary, a government official who was in charge of the Ambassador's itinerary. This was discussed in the previous chapter in regard to my reflection on the relationship with the two secretaries. I believe that my characteristics, my social status, and the manner in which I treated them with polite words, respectful actions, consistency (in coordination), and humility influenced them to trust me, and that trust was recommended to the Ambassador.

## **5.2 Intimacy**

The concept of ‘intimacy’ is difficult to define. The literature discussed in Chapter two indicates that intimacy is something associated with closeness in familial relationships and friendships, and it may be felt and experienced in different ways. In the context of documentary making which is characterised in many ways by a technical, rational, and contractual relationship between filmmaker and participant, a similar, but different form of intimacy can emerge, and it needs to be understood. According to Piotrowska’s work exploring documentary as an “encounter with the other”, it compared the relationship with a therapeutic one, but argued:

“Contrary to the analysis, however, the process of the intersubjective encounter in documentary film produces a public text which in the end cannot be changed and is reminiscent of mortification, lacking the essential fluidity of the psychoanalytic encounter and the intimacy and privacy of any psychotherapeutic encounter” (2012, p.87).

In other words, although the relationship forms through the process of making a documentary might be like a psychoanalytic encounter, the end product of the encounter between the filmmaker and participant will be seen in public and fixed on screen unlike the psychotherapeutic encounter which takes place in private and is constantly evolving. Even if the documentary outcomes are locked



permanently, I recognise that the process includes the dynamic flow of intimate encounters since occasionally, in my work, there was a lack of distinction between personal relationships and professional relationships. Therefore, I realised that intimacy was an essential element in my work; intimacy was clearly one of the defining qualities I needed to understand in my relationships with the three participants in the filmmaking process.

To better understand the concept of intimacy in the documentary filmmaking process, particularly in the Thai context, I had attempted to examine the factors that contribute to the intimate relationship by mirroring my own practices consisting of time spent with participants, physical closeness, and empathy.

### **5.2.1 Time spent with participants**

Intimacy is not something that happens instantly in a relationship; it is built up over time as exemplified by my closeness to Aew, which I have mentioned several times throughout this thesis. When I considered what made me feel connected to her, I realised it was because I spent a lot of time with her. In comparison with the Ambassador and Lin, I was Aew's employee working at her Takeaway shop and volunteering at her Thai school. I met Aew at least three times a week for about a year and we discussed our daily experiences and shared our feelings during our time together. My deepest feeling was that I felt comfortable talking to her and enjoyed spending time with her. She was not only the first Thai person I met since starting my PhD programme, but she was the one whom I could trust and with whom I could share my thoughts and emotions.

There were several scenes showing the sense of intimacy between me and Aew. For instance, Aew said to the camera (she was talking to me while I was behind the camera) that if she did not look pretty, could I delete that shot or not use it because she was worried about her appearance (10:58). It could be clearly seen that she made such a demand of me because of our closeness. No one has ever made a request like that since I have been filming; if so, they would talk to me when the camera is switched off. Therefore, I am certain that she felt like she was

in a position to negotiate with me while I was wearing the filmmaker's hat because we had such an intimate relationship.

In another scene when I was interviewing her, I noticed that my memory card was running out of space, so I told her to answer my question in less than a minute and speak more quickly. Aew willingly complied with what I asked (35:50). This occurrence made me wonder why I gave Aew such an instruction. The answer was that I felt I was close to her to a certain degree, so I was able to make that request. I was confident that she would not feel offended or disagree with me and would comply with the request. This could explain why, at certain moments, I felt like we were intimate friends whereas I would say or do anything without worrying about her being angry, or alternatively, she would tell me immediately if she was unhappy about anything. In contrast, I would not dare to say anything like this to the Ambassador or Lin because I did not want them to feel that I was unprofessional or unprepared for work. Therefore, I would ask them to let me change my memory card so that the interviews would not stop halfway. In addition, both of them were familiar with being in front of the camera; I did not have to remind them that they were being recorded. This was due to the fact that I was not intimate with them enough to make such a request.

To build and maintain the intimate relationship between filmmaker and participant, spending time together is very important. It could be seen that Aew and I had shared activities and spent a lot of time together, for example, going for a walk, shopping, drinking, and eating meals together; these led to feelings of intimacy. I found that in addition to the total amount of time spent together, 'continuity' and 'frequency' of meetings could also have a huge effect on maintaining a relationship. In my case, it was imperative that I saw Aew every week as I also worked for her, and, therefore, I spent a lot of time with her. As a result, we became close friends quickly.

### **5.2.2 Physical closeness**

Every culture has different levels of physical closeness that are appropriate to different types of relationships, and individuals learn these distances from the

society in which we grew up, all of which makes me realise that attitudes towards public displays of closeness or personal space in Thailand greatly differ from those in the West. As an illustration, Thais may prefer to maintain a distance of at least an arm's length; when conversing with friends and close acquaintances this distance is a bit less, but personal space is still maintained. This is the reason why we prefer *Wai* – an acceptable form of greeting for Thai people in all situations, business or casual – rather than handshakes or hugs as in the West.

In fact, Thailand is still in many ways a very conservative country and Thai attitudes towards physical closeness between men and women as well as those seniors or juniors have reflected this. Therefore, as the Ambassador was an elder and also a man, my relationship with the Ambassador was rather formal. I had to behave appropriately while approaching him, for instance, it can be seen in my video diaries (33:50) that I kept my distance from him whether sitting or standing. I think the interesting aspect of this point was that I never attached a clip-on microphone to his shirt at all for the interviews. Every time I would have set it up for him and he attached it himself. I then would double-check to make sure that the clip-on microphone was well positioned. If I needed to adjust its position, I would ask him to do that by himself. Deep down I think that I was afraid of getting close to or touching him. Conversely, my physical interactions with Aew and Lin were different as sometimes I would attach the clip-on microphone for them to make sure that it was at the best position to capture all the necessary sound.

As Raksasad pointed out, Thai culture influences filmmakers' decisions about physical closeness:

"Actually, I treat everyone equally, but there was a time that my participant was a female adolescent. I let one of my team of her gender be present with the production. The advantage was the naturalness from the participant. More importantly, I considered it was more appropriate, as a man, shooting with the opposite sex, I somehow had the impression that it is not appropriate" (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

It is linked to those customs and conventions as physical touch between people of the same sex is more common in Thailand while of the opposite sex is

considered taboo (eDiplomat 2021). This impacts upon my practice as a professional filmmaker because I had to be aware and pay more attention to personal space, particularly with the Ambassador, which made it difficult for me to get close to him. Aside from gender, I had to consider seniority, status, and social position. Even if I had spent more time with the Ambassador or tried to get closer to him, I could not guarantee that I would have developed a more intimate relationship with him as the Thai cultural context was like an impenetrable wall that I could not break. As the filmmaker, I myself sought opportunities to get closer to the participants, whether physically or emotionally. Even though they were kind to me, I could not break the wall or disregard the cultural context. I might be afraid of making them feel uncomfortable with being too close. What I have learned arose from solving technical problems during shooting rather than getting close to the participants to record intimate conversations between us since the cultural context made it impossible to do so. I therefore maintained the physical distance by using the 'zoom in' technique to adjust the focal length so that images seemed to be bigger and closer as well as capture intimate moments and close-up shots (Knudsen 2013, p. 235) with the Ambassador and Aew. This was similar to Martin Bell's technique in *Streetwise* (1984) as he shot children on streets with close-ups via a telephoto lens as he wanted to get close to the participants without getting physically close. As can be seen, these technological advancements can assist filmmakers in achieving their desired outcomes while minimising participant interference.

Due to the ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that occurred during my practice, I rarely met with Lin face to face. However, we chatted a lot via social media, text messaging, and video call. This gave us a sense of "virtual proximity" (Dyben 2018, p.12); even though we lived far away from each other, we felt close because both of us were 'following' each other on social media. I often saw her posts or page updates on my news feed on Facebook. Thus, it seemed that we were tacitly familiar to each other. Indeed, I initially noticed that the physical closeness, particularly in documentary filmmaking, depended upon a face-to-face encounter. However, in the course of my research, I realised that it was possible to achieve proximity via online. This was exemplified in my relationship with Lin; our proximity occurred without being together in the same place, it was on screen proximity. It was different but might

bring about the same results as I was able to get to know her through her words, facial expressions, and gestures that appeared on screen. I found that Lin seemed to enjoy ‘dancing’ with me because she accepted my approach and set aside her time to talk to me. While we were talking, she looked natural, was being herself and opened up to me. This brought me a feeling of positivity that our intimate relationship would progress even if it took place on the internet.

### **5.2.3 Empathy**

Marc Isaacs, a documentary filmmaker, raised another interesting point about how he creates intimacy with his participants when he said:

“I kind of look and search for that intimacy with a character, and it really only works if you genuinely feel something for that person – you feel a kind of genuine empathy in some way—and then the intimacy just comes” (Quinn 2013, p.258).

To be able to get intimacy, Isaacs tended to choose the participants with whom he had empathy; I can understand what his point is when the intimacy between a filmmaker and participant is described as a kind of empathy. It might be possible because when you understand what other people feel and see things from their point of view, it might result in them liking and accepting you, and the intimacy then follows. Similarly, in my own practice before approaching the participants, I had to find some basic information about them. During that process, I then had empathy which enabled me to feel how they felt or understand them based upon the situations they had been facing. These made me actually understand reasons and feelings from their point of view.

Therefore, this idea influenced my actions, especially with Lin, as I knew that she had had a hard life before moving to live in another country and it made me try to understand her feelings. Lin told me once in the research film: “I did not have to think whether you would look down on me” (24:51). I guess that she said so because she thought she seemed inferior to me, in terms of education and social status. This sentence confirmed that I was sensitive to her feelings, and I treated her as I did the other participants. I respected Lin and shared my feelings with

her, which made her feel that I never thought of looking down on her. Nevertheless, the feeling of empathy had an impact on my professionalism with Aew. I mentioned earlier in this section that Aew asked me to reshoot because she did not look pretty, and I decided to do as she asked. As the filmmaker, between empathy for participants and the desire to capture moments of crisis, I chose to express my empathy for the participants. If I were Aew, I myself would want to look good on camera because the film would finally be revealed in public; I was also worried about my image.

It is clear from the preceding example that my relationship with Aew revealed tension; it was a complicated relationship where the line between professional and personal was blurred. However, there were advantages and disadvantages to this blurred line. On the one hand, our personal relationship allowed me to get access to her life, but on the other hand, the personal relationship made her feel that she had the right to demand of me about what to include and what not to include in the film. I was, therefore, trying to balance the personal and professional relationships by making compromises to maintain our relationship as well as get the work done in the meantime. However, I realised that professionalism should come first otherwise I would not have started the project in the first place. If I just wanted to build personal relationships with Aew, I would not take the camera with me.

In this section, I have tried to enhance my understanding and explore the concept of intimacy throughout my relationships with the three participants. I discovered that, as the filmmaker, to have an intimate relationship with the participants, in addition to the amount of time both sides have spent together, it also requires continuity and regularity as occurred in the relationship between Aew and myself. Furthermore, physical closeness plays a significant role in building and maintaining the intimate relationship. The last factor is empathy, about which I agree with Isaacs, that empathy for the participants can build solid foundations for intimacy. However, the Thai cultural context has a significant effect on how to treat participants. For instance, maintaining distance while standing with elderly participants and avoiding touching opposite sex participants. The 'dance' metaphor can be extended to account for my actions very well; during the dance, if I get too close to my dance partner, it may cause a feeling of discomfort or an

invasion of privacy, creating awkwardness in a relationship. Additionally, I initially thought that physical closeness was only possible with face-to-face interaction, but my relationship with Lin proved that “virtual proximity” plays a big part in building intimacy. Although being far away from each other, online communication can act as a relationship bridge at anytime, anywhere.

The Indian philosopher, Osho, proposed another perspective on intimacy, which is interesting:

“You want the other person to be intimate so that the other person drops his defences, becomes vulnerable, opens all his wounds, drops all his masks and false personality, stands naked as he is. And on the other hand, everybody is afraid of intimacy—you want to be intimate with the other person, but you are not dropping *your* defences” (2001, p. viii).

There is something crucial here. Osho said that nobody wants to drop their defences, and nobody wants to come in utter nakedness and sincerity; nevertheless, everyone still needs intimacy. Deep down, as a human being, I might be the same. As a filmmaker, I want my participants to trust me and disclose to me. However, after reflecting, I found that I was still concerned about my privacy. I had concealed my identity and controlled myself without revealing all the personal stories with the Ambassador, Lin, and even Aew. Thus, I sometimes felt guilty that I made them open up to me (whether in the personal relationships or professional relationships), but I refused to do so because I still could not take off my mask and stand naked.

Even though I convinced myself many times that I had already opened up and revealed all of myself, in reality, there was something still hidden inside, which reminded me of the imbalance of power in relationships. Indeed, the filmmaker is understood to be in a relationship of power over the participant throughout the filmmaking process including in the editing (Nash 2010, p.22). This imbalance of power is recognised in Pansittivorakul as well:

"I think the power of the filmmaker is always there. We take charge of the participants by directing them, the camera is pointing out from the view of

the director, which is a bit of a ruse. But, of course, editing is even more deceptive" (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

Nonetheless, I still find this imbalance in a personal relationship in terms of self-disclosure. As described earlier, for example, I expect that my close friend would open up to me and vice versa. In the context of a relationship as a friend or an acquaintance, I can do such things comfortably. However, in the context of the documentary, I feel that there is something 'deceptive' about it. For me, it is difficult to build and maintain a professional relationship while seeking something personal from the participant. I sometimes still cannot distinguish between those two relationships, so it all often seems to be personal.

### **5.3 Performance**

In my discussion of Goffman's, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) in the literature review, I noted how he argued that every individual could be viewed as a stage performer; people present themselves in everyday life in ways that differ from a consciously adopted role (1959). Goffman's frontstage refers to a place where the performance is given to the intended audiences while the backstage is a place where the performers are naturally more relaxed and comfortable. Nevertheless, even people's backstage lives tend to involve others, for example, family members, partners, and housemates, where they may not fully let down their guard. This is consistent with Tseëlon's findings, from his research on self-presentation through appearance, which claim that "presentational efforts are not limited to unfamiliar others, but we care about our appearance even when with familiar others" (1992, p. 504). I agree that even when we are backstage with familiar people, we are still performing.

This section applies this insight to the documentary context, to explain how performance plays a role in the interactions between a filmmaker and a participant. I am also looking at different degrees of performance which will be manifested in my experiences with my participants, particularly the participants' performances while they are being filmed.



In relation to documentary filmmaking, “the presentation of self in front of a camera in (a) documentary might be called a performance” (Nichols 2010, p.8). Nichols argued that a participant does not present in exactly the same way to a companion on a date, a doctor in a hospital, his or her children at home, and a filmmaker in an interview. Therefore, a filmmaker expects participants to “present themselves in this sense, not perform the role of a character of the filmmaker’s devising, even if the act of filming has a definite influence on how they present themselves” (Nichols 2010, p.9). I agree that the presence of the camera essentially leads every participant to perform or even adapt their behaviour. There may be different levels or modes of performance, for example, when participants are aware of a camera recording, when they are aware of a camera but think it is not recording, or when they are not aware of a camera but still ‘performing’ for a filmmaker.

There were obvious examples in Aew’s scenes when she started to worry about her appearance when she realised that she was being filmed and repeatedly enquired if she was looking good (on the camera). This shows that her moment of realisation did not happen until later in the shooting. However, the moment she realised that whatever was being shot would be included in the film and that what she said and expressed would last forever, she then changed her attitude. When carefully considering the presence of the camera in connection with self-presentation, Delofski underlined this idea when he reflected on the idea of the ‘camera provocateur’:

“...that the presence of the camera may provoke a degree of self-consciousness in a documentary participant’s behaviour that delivers a particular truth, that the presence of a documentary camera will inevitably inflect the behaviour of those being filmed” (2009, p.8).

The presence of the camera affects consciousness and can alter a participant’s behaviour in front of the camera, but it cannot guarantee that what a participant shows in front of the camera is always authentic or that it is his or her ‘real’ self, because with an awareness of Goffman’s notion, all of these things could be considered as performances. To put it another way, I would argue that our self-expression in front of the camera is merely a collection of performances.

In my practice, when the camera was part of the setting in frontstage, it instantly became a representative of the audience. I believed that Aew's performance was consciously delivered to make an impression for the intended audiences (and the filmmaker) with an element of *dramatic realisation*, portraying a particular angle and emphasising on the selective information by controlling and communicating the information through performance. In this she was endeavouring to convince the audience of the propriety of her behaviour and consonance with the assumed role, for example, when she was concerned about her look (see research film at 10:42). It revealed that she wanted to show a vulnerable side of herself with low self-esteem even though she was normally full of confidence. On the other hand, she might attempt to present an *idealised* version of herself to the audience as a 'normal' person, not a celebrity, nor professional actress, so that audiences would not expect beauty and perfection from her.

I have drawn a guiding notion from the work of Goffman (1959) about the stages, referring to the areas where there are different behaviours with different roles that people engage in every day (see Figure 2). I adapt it to reflect my own practice, for I am *frontstage* when the camera is switched on, and the participant steps out before the camera and microphone, I am physically behind the camera, ready to shoot; I am the filmmaker who also works as a camera operator. Then, when the camera is switched off is where I observe the relationships between the filmmaker and the participants, while I am still *frontstage* alongside the participants.

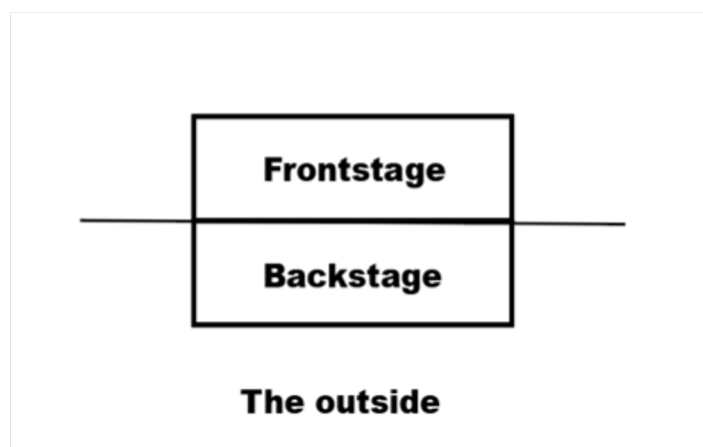


Figure 2: Goffman's concept of social interaction (1959)

Goffman's dramaturgical model is useful, but the complex mediated interactions that we have in the 21st century require more complex models. Ellis argued that humans are social beings, and therefore their "face" must be maintained (Ellis 2012, p.47). The term *face* here relates to how we present ourselves to society and react to other members within a social group, which is similar to Goffman's concept of *face* to social theory in his article in *On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements of Social Interaction* (1955, p.213); this states that *face* is an image of self-delineation in terms of social attributes approval. Simply put, we create our face in order to gain social acceptance. Therefore, the face is a mask that changes depending on the audience and the variety of social interaction. Merging with Goffman's concepts, it can be said that we tend to wear different masks depending on whether we are frontstage or backstage.

In a better understanding of *face* in a documentary context, Knudsen presented the concept of interaction between filmmaker and on-screen participants, which is comparable to Delofski's truth about the participant's behaviour exposed by the camera provocateur. Knudsen stated:

“...every person has a private and a public face; we all show the world one side of us, while there is another side of us that is essentially very private. There is, perhaps, a third face – the face that you, the filmmaker, see, the face that is to be uniquely revealed in your film” (2013, p. 211).

What is interesting here is that Knudsen mentions that everyone has both private and the public faces, which is akin to Goffman's notion that *face* is presented differently frontstage (public) and backstage (private). However, Knudsen introduces “the third face” into this scenario; he explains that participants may have a third face to be shown during the filmmaking process, and this will only be exposed in front of the camera and the filmmaker. In other words, this “third face” is a hybrid of public and private – a ‘performative face’ which is not formally presented as performance (like the one on screen) but which is also characterised by vulnerability and intimacy. In terms of “the third face”, Knudsen stated that each participant has their own (hidden) agenda and tries to manipulate the filmmaker to serve their own purposes (Knudsen 2013, p. 211); therefore, the filmmaker needs to evaluate the participants' motivation at the beginning of the filmmaking process.

As I reviewed Goffman's concept of frontstage and backstage, it seems like an excellent place to begin reflecting on social interaction (Fig.2). However, integrating Goffman's idea into Knudsen's concept, especially in the documentary filmmaking context, I discovered that the participants reveal their private information in a public space. Hence, an overlap area will occur when the camera is switched on. A visualisation in the following Venn diagram (Fig.3) attempts to illustrate this point.

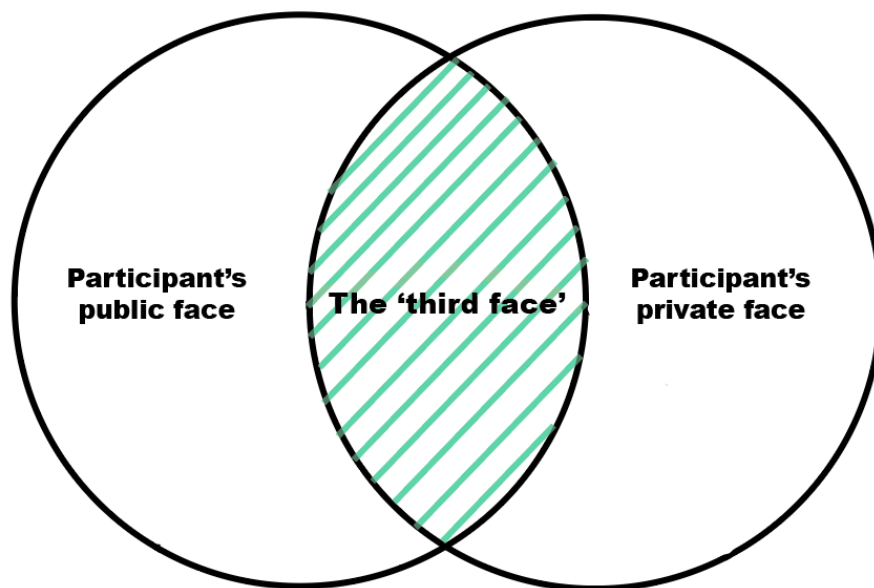


Figure 3: Knudsen's concept of "the third face" (2013)

Figure 3 shows the relationship between two overlapping areas of the participant's face, the third face's characteristics belong in the middle; that is the face that the participant performs when in front of the camera, and the filmmaker. This diagram reveals that the appearance of the third face will be apparent only when the camera is switched on. This diagram represents the position of the filmmaker who observes the participant's life, and the concept is viewed from the filmmaker's perspective.

Reflecting on my own practice and experience in making my research film, where I build on Knudsen's concept, I discovered another dimension of his third face. In order to understand the complexity of relationships behind the camera, I was

including myself in the research film, acknowledging that I was one of the participants, not just an observer, in other words, I was involved as one of the performers and represented the position of an insider. As a result, I found that the participants sometimes perform differently when in front of the filmmakers and the camera; it seems that they may perform to an imagined audience. Sometimes those situations are simultaneous and can be shifted in the performance between the camera and the filmmaker, perhaps characterised by a different direction/projection of participant's motivation. For example, on the film set, Aew talked to me differently when the camera was switched on than when it was off. When it was on, she became more concerned with her appearance. This posed a question whether or not Aew's motivation was to impress the camera, or me, the filmmaker.

To consider the way in which the process of being filmed interacts with and affects non-fiction participants' self-presentational methods, Marquis analysed the *Up* series (Michael Apted, UK, 1964-2019). This was a documentary film which follows the lives of ten men and four women in England; in terms of filmic performance, Marquis argued:

“...the non-fiction performer engages in expressive activities that will communicate not only to his or her immediately present interaction partners, but also to an extended group of spectators who will later view the performance as part of the finished documentary text” (2013, p.49).

This evidence supports my assumption that the participants' performance may shift between the camera and the filmmaker depending on who they want to impress, so they speak with half an eye on the conversation with the filmmaker, and half an eye on the imagined audience.

In my practice of documentary filmmaking, I discovered that there are various elements that affect individual performance, which can be built on Goffman's notion as I have mentioned earlier. In fact, my reflections on my practice have been developed through the notions of both Goffman and Knudsen through the Thai cultural context and also take into account social status, the performative agency of technology, private spaces, and personal relationships. According to the literature review, Goffman stressed seven crucial elements of the individual

performance which are belief, the mask, dramatic realisation, idealisation, maintenance of expressive control, misrepresentation, and mystification (1959, p.17-76) and each performance can be a mixture of these elements depending on individual consciously adopted roles and the context. Thus, I have put into practice, and I will apply these to discuss in more detail in the following section.

### **5.3.1 Social status influences performance**

Based on my experience, I found that the Ambassador's performance was consistent regardless of whether he was in front of or behind the camera. When we were not filming the Ambassador would look more comfortable and relaxed (I noticed from his sitting posture as he sat back and made himself comfortable; also his manner of speaking was more like a conversation, rather than answering interview questions). My initial thought was the Ambassador performed formally when the camera is switched on and informally when the camera is switched off but later, after the filming, I felt that he still performed in his own way. However, I could say that the Ambassador's professional face dropped at times, and he allowed me to see a more personal side of him when the camera was not rolling.

When applying Goffman's performance paradigm to explain the reason why the Ambassador always performs professionally, it appears to be because he needs to stay 'in character', which Goffman calls *maintenance of expressive control*. When the Ambassador performs his duty, he puts on the *mask* of his role all the time, even after I had met him more often and established some familiarity with him. I believe that he has never dropped his *mask* of Ambassador whether in front of or off-camera.

Indeed, it is arguable that it is not feasible for public figures to 'be themselves', perhaps because they are always careful as to how they present themselves in public, and even with friends, and family. Geri Halliwell's complex performances in *Geri* (1999) exemplify this phenomenon, as Tolson puts it:

“Perhaps it is possible for Geri, as a celebrity, to be ordinary – but only in a circumscribed context. That is to say, she can be ordinary, not as an

ordinary person, but as a celebrity-being-ordinary, in this performance, in the documentary film” (2001, p.450).

Bearing this point in mind, public figures who might be familiar with the presence of the camera may still perform, perhaps paradoxically as in the case of Geri, who performed her ‘ordinariness’ in order to fit the context; when they are in front of a documentary camera, they realise the nature of documentary as well as audience expectations. Thus, “they are playing up for the camera or are behaving in ways that are somehow ‘not true’ to themselves” (Ellis 2012, p.3), but to meet the expectations of the audience and the filmmaker. Nevertheless, Bruzzi argued that “Halliwell comes across as likeable but wholly unaware of the multiplicity of her performances and of the fragility of her distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’” (2006, p.203). From my experience as a Teenage Spice Girls fan, I also thought that Ginger was a ‘real’ character. In this case, it made me realise the complexities of the fan-star relationship, in which fans invest in the authenticity of the star. Therefore, Geri tried to present the *idealised* version of herself in Dineen’s film, in contrast to her prior alter persona, Ginger. Furthermore, Bruzzi proposed an interesting point of presenting ‘real’ self in documentary, with the realisation that everyone can have a variety of performances and all performances are genuine. However, I believe whether Geri is being truly genuine or not, it is all about trying to maintain the *idealised* image of herself by concealing certain information, which is what Goffman calls *mystification*.

On the other hand, I also put on my *mask* when I met with the Ambassador, as, in the context of Thai culture, I am conditioned to be submissive to authority in high-ranking positions and seniority. At the first meeting, I approached him with my filmmaker’s *mask* to present the *idealised* version of myself because I wanted to create a good first impression and to be respected for my filmmaker role, not merely as a Thai student. Therefore, I had to stay ‘in character’ all the time with him as well. Similarly, Wedel, the Thai filmmaker, stated: “To talk to seniors, we must be well behaved” (personal communication, 6 April 2022). Even though it is not a law, it is what we (as a Thai) must perform when interacting with elders, especially for women. In the Thai context, women are expected to be gentle, respectful, and submissive; thus, we have to keep ‘in character’ all the time in order to fit in the social context.

To summarise, when I was performing with a high-ranking/public figure, such as the Ambassador, it was natural for him to lead the dance (a leader, who sets the rhythm and direction of the dance). Similarly, in Geri (1999), Geri Halliwell got on the phone to her lawyer, to tell him that she was taking over the film while Dineen was filming her. I believe Geri did that because she either felt more superior or was trying out a performance of superiority over the filmmaker. She might see Dineen, and the process of filmmaking, as a mere medium for conveying her story or an opportunity to manipulate what she wanted people to perceive. However, Bruzzi stressed “despite her fame, Halliwell’s image is filtered through Dineen’s perception of it” (2006, p.204), implying that ultimately the filmmaker has authorial control over the footage. To interact with the Ambassador, I needed to play my role as a filmmaker/researcher professionally whether in front of or behind the camera. When I was with him, he never revealed himself *backstage*, so I never got a chance to be in his personal space and it was a controlled performance led by him. However, I realised that, ultimately, I was in control of the process of filmmaking, especially the editing of the film in post-production.

### **5.3.2 The performative agency of technology**

Although the technology of filmmaking may not be considered important to the nature of relationships, it is important to address its symbolic significance as well as its practical impact. As I am a solo filmmaker, I have to work with equipment that makes it possible to work alone; it must be manageable for carrying and filming and should also be user-friendly. However, I do believe that the selection of equipment has a ‘meaning’ for participants; I tend to use high quality equipment and well-known brands to help me gain confidence and a good impression of my abilities as a professional from the participants, especially for the Ambassador and Lin as they are familiar with media production and equipment to some degree. This equipment was referred to as a *setting* by Goffman (1959); it has been used in helping me to create the *impression* of the front performance, which contributed to my *dramatic realisation* in this particular situation. The filmmaker should be seen as a trusted professional and competent, both in equipment selection and efficiency. Therefore, the selected equipment will be considered as



a setting of the stage performance, for, clearly, first impressions make a major impact on everyone.

On several occasions, for example, the Ambassador inquired about the camera equipment, in terms of performance, cost and suitability (26:11). I had the impression that the questions were attempting to assess my expertise and professional knowledge, and he appeared to be satisfied. The fact that choosing quality equipment and how expert I am in operating it has an effect on the participant's feelings and confidence. Thus, I learned and practised on the equipment I chose until I mastered it before actual filming to ensure smooth handling and to impress the participants.

The relationship between the impact of the equipment selection and the performance can be significant. I used a mobile phone, for example, to film the working atmosphere in Aew's Takeaway shop in the research film (39:32). I asked Aew for permission before setting up the phone camera, which she granted. During recording, however, it seemed that Aew forgot about the presence of the camera because she was telling a story about her daughter going on a date with someone she met via an online application (Tinder), which, previously, she had not mentioned on camera. The size and discreteness of the technology perhaps led her to forget that it was there and let her guard down, even though this does not necessarily mean that there was no performative dimension. On the contrary, if I used a handheld camera, Aew might have behaved differently towards it. This is despite the fact that the participant may be unaware of the camera's existence because it is so small or installed in an unnoticeable location where the participants will not spot it. However, I do believe they become aware of being watched as a result of social interaction.

It appears that the performance is driven by the 'technological configuration' because when the technology is present, it is a trigger for the realisation that they are being filmed. When we consider the term 'agency', technologies are not mere tools, but they shape the way we are using them and the result of it as well. If I am using a handheld camera, the participants will be able to notice easily that they are being filmed, which influences their behaviour. In this way, I am not the

reason behind the participant's motivation on what they do/perform. Instead, the technology itself is shaping their interaction with it.

### **5.3.3 Performance in private spaces – the making of video diaries**

In this section, my intention is not only to reflect upon my performance towards the participants and their performance towards me, but also to study my own performance when I am in a private space; this occurs when I make the video diaries as part of an autoethnographic process of self-analysis and reflection. This is also an opportunity to re-examine and test the notions of performance spaces and masks, as discussed above.

The mode of address I adopt in the video diaries is a complex one. I am speaking to and for myself in my own language, being as honest and reflective as possible, but I am also aware that these confessional sequences will be presented to the audience at some point. It made me cautious about what I would say or perform, and it affected my preparation, such as putting on make-up and choosing clothes that would make me look good in front of the camera. Thus, when I was in front of the camera, I was revealing "the third face" (Knudsen 2013, p.211), through conversation with an imagined audience. Based on my personal experience, I found that the camera was more than just an imagined audience, for it became an "extra participant" (Ellis 2012, p.3). I began to realise that while I recorded the video diaries, I felt I was talking to friends, and someone was listening to me. I occasionally forgot about the third face, which was meant to be heard and seen by the audience, so I expressed myself more openly and personally. I felt relief each time I finished, as though I had been in a therapy session and the camera was my personal therapist. Therefore, whether in public or private areas, when I perform in front of the camera, I become aware that I am engaged in this process of personal construction as well as other participants.

### **5.3.4 The effect of personal relationships on performance**

With reference to a couple of documentaries about the relationship between the filmmaker and the participant, *This Was My Dad – The Rise and Fall of Geoffrey Matthews* (Matthews, 2007) and *Mum and Me* (Bourne, 2009), the fascination

lies with the close relationships, whether they are blood or friendship related. When it comes to distinguishing between personal relationships and performance, Tseëlon (1992) argued that even with a person with whom we are close to or familiar with, we will still practise some kind of performance. When we adopt the dramaturgical model of Goffman to look at that behaviour, I suggest that whether in a private arena or backstage, we still sustain our performance, and this might be different to that of frontstage. It could be a mix of *belief* and *maintenance of expressive control*. When we are frontstage, we tend to believe that our act is an expression of our own identity; perhaps we have forgotten to leave it behind before entering the backstage area, and thus we retain that character all the time.

Despite the fact that we are with people to whom we feel intimate with, it does not mean we can let go of our performance. Reflecting on my own experience, although Aew and I were close, I was not convinced that I fully comprehend her interaction. When she said that she loved me like her sister, deep down I was not sure if she meant it, or if she just wanted to impress me, or was looking for something in return. For instance, she could have been encouraging me to say that I adored her as if she were my own sister, and therefore I would have to be more submissive and respect her or even work harder at her shop in response to her love for me. It was difficult to interpret the purpose of her performance, but I conjectured why Aew felt that she was able to demand or request of me, it might have been because she thought she was performing the role of my (blood) sister. In the Thai cultural context, it is easier to ask a family member to follow an instruction than to ask a friend or acquaintance, so it is not surprising that she demanded that I do things beyond what one would expect from a normal employee. For example, she asked me to assist her with moving her belongings and painting her apartment to be ready for rental purposes.

Nonetheless, I recognised that I was also performing toward Aew, and having my own agenda, continually 'playing the role' myself, in order to maintain a believable performance. The reason that I agreed to help her both personally and professionally was because I was afraid that she might refuse to cooperate with my doctoral research. However, I realised that I must reconsider the scope and my priority when it came to assist her; according to my video diary, I said that I

was involved too deeply in this personal relationship, and it crossed the line of my professional relationship which caused extreme awkwardness for me. Nonetheless, what I experienced was unique in comparison to other Thai filmmakers, as Wedel suggested:

"I have to maintain a state of neutrality at all times, as I did not enter into the documentary process with the intention of becoming friends with them. I need to consider the audience as well as society because it is the main objective of documentary filmmaking" (personal communication, 6 April 2022).

And, Raksasad also said "Thai culture has an impact on work, such as how we behave toward the participants because we might meet them somehow once the filming is finished. It's not just about work; it's also about friendship" (personal communication, 6 April 2022). Therefore, proper manners and distinguishing between professional and personal relationships is probably the best solution for me.

Indeed, since I had become familiar with Aew and Lin, I did not need to impress them because we knew each other personally. Conversely, I did not think I became close with the Ambassador because I rarely spent time with him apart from the process of filmmaking; we only met on set and never shared personal matters. Goffman referred to this as *mystification*, which caused me to keep my distance from the Ambassador; I did not want to reveal too much to him since I wanted to maintain my professional image.

As a result, I attempted to show the Ambassador that I was a professional, to impress him, and to perform well in order to gain his trust and access to him. Moreover, I also wanted to encourage him to give an effective performance on camera. I found that he maintained his image as the Ambassador at all times. It turned out that I felt more comfortable performing in front of those who might expect me to perform. In other words, when I am expected to give a performance, it feels much easier than when having to give a performance unexpectedly. I realised that when I was with the Ambassador, I had to put on a really strong performance, so I did my best to prepare for it, and, in return, he gave me a strong

performance back. This reminds me of an interview given by Pansittivorakul, Thai filmmakers, on how to manage the performance:

“When I work, I become a different person, I’m more willing to compromise. If a participant makes a request, I try to fulfil it. So that I can get what I want. I will be instantly overly friendly and fake. As I am an introverted person, what I normally do is to involve my team to build relationships with my participants instead of me to enable me to continue doing my job” (personal communication, 22 November 2019).

In my video diaries, I expressed the thought that “I was confused about my roles, but every role I have played is reflecting my identity” (12:50). Even though I was occasionally confused by the roles I performed, I was honest with every role I had to play. Connecting these to the Pansittivorakul interviews, it makes me realise that what I feel is not different from others. What I need is to be crystal clear about the project's objectives and ensure that personal and professional relationships do not cross paths. Furthermore, I discovered that performance is not equal to insincerity as we all just play our roles while interacting with others; my level of performance is completely different, depending on my personal relationship with the participant as illustrated by the significantly different performances with the Ambassador and Aew.

To summarise, during the course of filmmaking and reflection I became aware of my own different performances while interacting with the three participants, which led to my assumption that the degree of relationship between a filmmaker and a participant would be inversely proportional to performance level. In other words, both parties may not perform much and they also can be themselves if they are very close and intimate with each other. However, we may need to perform a lot with people with whom we are not familiar with, to make a good impression in order to maintain our self-image.

## **Chapter 6: Final Stages**

This chapter concludes the research and this thesis by first considering the extent to which the research has addressed the aim and research question. The chapter then proceeds by considering the implications of the key findings in terms of the Thai culture and the complexity of the relationships between filmmakers and participants, and it takes on further the dramaturgical metaphors of performance and dance. Importantly, it continues with a discussion of the value of the research and contribution that it has made to the practice of filmmaking, especially in a particular cultural context. The strengths and limitations of the study are considered and opportunities for future research are proposed. The final section reflects on the autoethnographic approach I took, illustrating this by further considering my personal thoughts about myself and the three participants who took part in this 'dance' with me.

### **6.1 Addressing the aim and research question**

The research agenda aimed to address the influence of the Thai cultural context on the relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants in documentary filmmaking, identifying the kind of relationships and dynamics that are formed behind the camera. The original question was, "How does Thai culture influence the filmmaker-participant relationship?" In terms of expected or unexpected findings related to the aim and the research question as outlined above, here is what was discovered.

I began this research project concerned about the kind of relationship behind the camera between filmmaker and participant. From my filming experience, I was curious as to how much time I needed to spend with my participants to be able to earn their trust and what elements affected the development of relationships such as personality traits, attitudes, personal background, and so on, with a particular reference to the Thai context. In order to conduct appropriate and clear research on this issue, I intended to seek answers through the study of literature and previous research in relevant subjects, as well through filmmaking practice and

employing a self-reflective approach to describe the “rawness of real happenings” (Clough 2002, p.8) from a unique perspective.

This reflective journey has explored, and further revealed, the materialisation of the relationship between the filmmaker and the participants, specifically in the Thai cultural context. In this thesis, I focused on my practice process and the methods I developed during this process. Furthermore, I applied a metaphorical relationship between the filmmaker and the participants in the documentary filmmaking as 'dance' to better articulate and share this embodied knowledge through the research film and in written reflection on my practice. Therefore, not only did my research address my original research question and aim but it also went on to develop a theoretical understanding through the use of reference to performance and dance.

## **6.2 Implications of the key findings**

I now draw two major areas of conclusions from the research, focusing on the effect of the Thai culture in this study, and teasing out the complexity of the relationships.

### **6.2.1 The effect of the Thai culture on relationships**

This research study has opened windows on my experiences as a researcher/practitioner and illuminated the challenges faced by Thai filmmakers. The findings explicitly demonstrate the research problem that Thai culture influences the relationships between filmmaker and participant, as evidenced by the fact that it was clear that Thai culture had a significant effect on both behaviour and attitudes. I discovered that some Thai characteristics are a barrier to developing professional relationships, for example, some Thai people take everything as a personal matter and value the hierarchy which leads to inequality and the awkwardness of building relationships. Other characteristics facilitate the filmmaker in developing relationships with the participants such as humility and consideration for others (namely *Kreng Jai*).

Based on my findings, in relation to issues of hierarchy, I conclude that gender, age, and social status are all treated differently in Thailand; elders are implicitly respected by the young, and people in high rank are accustomed to being treated with privilege and respect. This was demonstrated in the case of the Ambassador and Aew, presented in chapter 5 (section 5.1.8). I saw myself (as they recognise me) as a junior. Even though I tried to demonstrate my professionalism, I still had less bargaining power than them. This is due to the importance of Thai culture's hierarchical structure. During my interview with Wedel, I acknowledged that gender is a factor that impacts the relationships, particularly when a Thai female filmmaker interacts with male participants. However, gender was out of scope of this research but could be a future line of research in a separate study.

Further, evidence from interviews with Thai filmmakers revealed that they are more confident when interacting with nations other than Thai because there are issues to be concerned about, such as interpersonal etiquette, physical distancing, and language usage. Thai culture is strictly stratified, with a well-established hierarchy of status. Filmmakers working with Thais should be aware of this because it will undoubtedly affect the nature of the relationships. It is hard to break down this wall because it has been ingrained in Thai habits and personalities. This conclusion was a novel one, emanating from my research, though not necessarily unexpected, given that I am member of the Thai community.

### **6.2.2 Unravelling the complexities of relationships**

The nature of the relationships between filmmakers and participants in documentary filmmaking vary, depending on several factors such as trust, intimacy, performance, and cultural setting. I had noticed that certain factors emerge from shared interactions, such as trust and intimacy, which implies that both parties need to agree to take part. On the other hand, individualism was paramount when it came to performance and behaviour.



Furthermore, the use of dance metaphors to describe the interactions between the filmmakers and the participants is particularly appropriate for describing relationships in the Thai context. I discovered this through the literature as well as research observations that the filmmaker is the leader in the dance. The purpose of a filmmaker is not to engage in the lives of participants in order to become friends with them. Rather the filmmaker must have a clear agenda when involving themselves in the participants' lives, which made me realise that the relationship between filmmaker and participant in documentary filmmaking should be treated as a professional one. However, the findings highlighted the boundary tension between the Thai cultural context and those different relationships, and the fact that these are continually being negotiated and renegotiated depending on the circumstances. As a consequence, Thai people have a tendency to compromise and, hence, being a leader can be awkward at times. Despite Lin being trans like many of my friends and the same age as me, I still was afraid to ask her personal stories or enquire about her gender because I felt *Kreng Jai* and I did not want her to feel different or insulted because of her gender.

Other evidence from my research demonstrated how I built and developed a personal relationship with Aew before moving on to the professional one. This turned out to be exceptionally beneficial. Nevertheless, this prior personal relationship influenced my decision-making as a filmmaker. For example, when Aew requested me to remove the scene where she did not look good, I complied. I did not want to offend her because I was afraid that she would be disappointed and stop participating, so I would do anything to please her. But then I tried to take the lead again by negotiating with her not to delete the footage because I might need it later, which she agreed. As a result of these observations, I came to realise that the participant sometimes takes the lead in the dance; Aew considers her bargaining power to be expanded by taking advantage of the Thai social hierarchy. Therefore, I acknowledge that power is constantly in play and being passed back and forth between both parties. Hence, the art of negotiation is a way for filmmakers to reclaim that power.

According to the findings of this study, each of my participants' relationships was driven by a different primary factor: First, there was Lin who I felt might expect me to be as eager to open up to her as she was to me. This was a consequence of age, and it appears that age was probably the dominant factor in this case. The fact was that we were closer in age, so we were able to be more casual with each other than Aew and the Ambassador. This was a possibility as to why intimacy was achieved sooner than expected. Furthermore, the fact that she is transgender made me feel more at ease when talking to her because I have transgender friends (21:16). Nonetheless, it made me concerned about how much transparency I required as a filmmaker. In the literature chapter, I discussed how the process of filming a documentary could be compared to a counselling session because it involved a one-sided discussion or disclosure. What I discovered as a result of my relationship with Lin was, in fact, a two-way process that is exchangeable, which can be referred to as a give and take relationship (Fong and Cox 1983, p.163). This resonates strongly with the dance metaphor. On this dance floor, even though I invited her to dance, Lin also had a clear agenda in participating in the research. Thus, in the dance, we were both leader and follower at the same time; it was not surprising therefore that she would want me to reveal to her as much as she revealed to me. I recognised that my terms of engagement had to be different with each participant due to their age and their status; however, I was constantly aware of the professional dimensions that emerged throughout the process.

Second, as a filmmaker, having a senior and high-ranking participant like the Ambassador posed a challenge for me because the Thai cultural context makes such groups difficult to reach. All communication must go through the secretary (gatekeeper), and whether I was building a relationship with the secretary or the Ambassador, I must always maintain professionalism because I believed they expected it. In fact, being aware at all times that there would only be professional relationships in this relationship, it allowed me to concentrate on my job. In addition, as they only had a limited amount of time each time we met, I had to be certain that every word and action I demonstrated would be able to impress them. Regarding the reflection regarding what he thought or felt, I had to rely on speculation and interpretation based on my experience of working with these

groups in the past. Even if I asked the Ambassador directly, I could not be sure if those answers were just part of his performance.

Aside from maintaining professionalism, humility was another factor that made him be more benevolent to me, as it was with Aew. Being in the Thai context, I was taught to be humble with others, especially those older than myself. As a result, when I showed my humility towards them, they might respond to me with kindness. The Figure 4 below illustrates how I applied humility to develop relationships with Thai participants (listed in order of importance).



Figure 4: A model of my humility in developing relationships with Thai participants

Nevertheless, working as a documentary filmmaker with Thai participants, I could not afford to be too humble because I needed to assert my professionalism, in particular with higher status participants. Otherwise, it would appear that I was attempting to flatter them. Through my research I have identified several areas where trust could be enhanced in filmmaker and participant relationships and this was part of the new knowledge generated by my research. For example, by the use of humility, this could lead to trust, which is useful in practice. Humility can be conveyed by being unpretentious, uncynical, speaking or acting in a way that does not make the other person feel inferior, and not thinking that we deserve more attention or have more privilege than others. For me, I was more than willing to assist the participants in their work, even if they did not request it. I offered to

assist by working at a Thai Takeaway shop, volunteering to teach English-born Thai children for Aew, volunteering for media work at the Embassy because I believed it would not only help me gain trust, but facilitate access to them as well. However, the utilisation of 'economic labour' could have had an impact on how I was seen; it could either have made me appear low profile or might also cause people to dismiss my value as a filmmaker. As I previously stated, I believed it was a give and take relationship, and I was willing to invest in order to achieve what I was aiming for. For example, when I travelled to Liverpool, England, to film Lin, I believe my investment made Lin feel important and reassured her that I can keep my word and value her as a person.

Furthermore, this study revealed that my professional experience and social status were also important factors in their decision to trust me because Thai people place a high value on social status; this is due to social hierarchy constructions. For this reason, trust was established before we were acquainted. Another aspect to reflect upon as I reviewed these findings is that trust in a relationship can be *transitive* (see section 5.1.9) as recommended by a third person – the gatekeeper. Since the Ambassador was a difficult person to reach, the gatekeeper played an important role in the development of this relationship. I treated the gatekeeper with the same sincerity that I treated the Ambassador because I realised that if I did not establish a rapport with the gatekeeper, I might have failed to develop a relationship with the Ambassador as well.

Thirdly, as I spent so much time with Aew, both before and during the filmmaking process, our intimacy grew and blossomed into a strong personal relationship, yet that intimacy created prejudice as the lines of professionalism were blurred by personal feelings. She began to exercise her power by asking me to do something in order to fulfil her requirements such as reshooting her scene. On the other hand, I also expected more from her than the other participants, for example, requesting her to speak faster because I was running out of memory card space on the camera; what I learned from this situation was that 'the closer it gets, the more vulnerable it becomes'. Due to our closeness, I dared to say something, feeling reassured that she would not be upset or deny it. It appeared that I was using my personal relationship to boost my professionalism. Thus, in order to minimise the personal relationship, in the future, I might need to keep more distance between my relationships with participants by clearly identifying

the roles and responsibilities of both parties, which was where the art of negotiating was useful.

Building on the work of Goffman (1959), a dramaturgical perspective was employed in order to describe all of the individual activities involved in relationship building. It was noticeable from this research that different degrees of performance were used in response to interactions with different participants, which contained related elements such as social status, the performative agency of technology, and personal relationships. Significantly, my research has highlighted the provocateur of camera (Delofski 2009, p.8); participants' performances were influenced by the presence of the camera (even myself when making the video diaries) which revealed the participant's "third face" during the filmmaking process (Knudsen 2013, p. 211). In addition, participants' performance might change based on who they want to impress, the camera or the filmmaker. An unforeseen outcome of this research was how seemingly the performance was driven by the 'technological configuration' (see section 5.3.2). With Aew, I used a lightweight camera to minimise her awareness of the existence of the camera with the aim of developing an intimate relationship. However, in the case of the Ambassador and Lin, my selection of equipment was used to create an impression of my professional performance.

### **6.3 Contribution to knowledge and professional practice**

In terms of investigation and contribution to knowledge in the field, this research explicitly codifies a contribution to practice-led documentary filmmaking and achieves the goal of addressing the influence of the Thai cultural context on the relationships between Thai filmmakers and Thai participants. My practice and theory are intertwined in the research, enabling me to articulate the implications of the analysis for the wider field of Thai documentary practice. Looking through the lens of Thai culture reveals that this influences both the behaviour and decision-making of Thai filmmakers and also Thai participants, which in turn affects the relationships formed in documentary filmmaking. It assists Thai filmmakers in recognising the impact of the Thai cultural context on relationship building during the filmmaking process. As a result, Thai filmmakers are able to

plan for the cultural impact. However, it is important to be mindful of the fact that even though a culture is shared, each individual is unique with different agendas and backgrounds, and thus it is necessary to take this individuality into account and be prepared for the unexpected.

Despite the fact that there has been research on the relationship between filmmakers and participants, nonetheless, my research was viewed through the lens of the Thai cultural context and conducted by a Thai researcher and participants, which demonstrated an in-depth and complex level of cultural nuance that shaped an individual's performance and relationship; this includes the perception of a hierarchical structure within Thai society, which directly influences the documentary film makers work. This approach is a step forward and a contribution to academic knowledge, and it has considerable potential for filmmakers and researchers who wish to collaborate with Thai people in the future.

I conducted this research by turning the camera on myself and forcing myself to perform in front of it; I have gained new insights into the process through reflection on it, as well as doing a form of secondary reflection on my own performance when I interacted with my participants. It illuminated a complex and dynamic of the filmmaker's and participants' relationships into previously unexplored areas of the Thai context, which is both valuable and challenging.

In terms of the methodological approach that was selected, I used a hybrid of practice-led research and autoethnography to examine and illuminate the relationships formed behind the camera, as well as how the relevant factors interact with and maintain the relationships. I also framed my written thesis within a performance and dance metaphor. The research film had been produced as a result of these approaches; this is a 50-minute film that serves as a record of my relationships with three participants as well as offering a 'shared personal experience' (Holman Jones et al. 2016, p.98) for my own reflection. It includes my use of dialogue and scene setting, flashback, monologue, and dramatic recall. I have discovered through these methods that abstract aspects such as interpersonal relationships and social interaction between individuals can appear more clearly. I concur with Nelson when he described the "Practice as Research aiming to make the implicit more visible" (2013, p.62).

By considering the documentary relationships from the different disciplines, in particular with counselling and sociology studies, this gave me a broader perspective and allowed me to go into greater detail when describing thoughts and actions, such as trust-related characteristics. It also discovered the elements that influence intimacy and described the phenomenon that occurred with regard to the performance. Furthermore, this research has demonstrated the challenges faced by a prospective study, which means I recorded and captured moments of my relationship formed during the filmmaking process with a diverse range of participants while reflecting about the processes and performance that happened on and off screen at that time. This allowed me to gain insight into the experiences and work processes in the beginning, the middle and the end of the course (Danielsson and Berge 2020, p.3). Hence, it provided a deeper understanding of the dynamic changes in levels of exposure over time and any changes in outcome.

Therefore, using these approaches to elaborate the phenomenon behind the camera between filmmaker and participant allowed for a more tangible presentation. A collection of my video diaries, in particular, played an important role in the research. They provided rich evidence that assisted me in recalling my experiences when writing the autoethnography. It felt like a personal therapy session, forcing me to constantly reflect on my thoughts and performance throughout the research process, which is beneficial when conducting prospective research and it took the reader on a journey, showing rather than telling (Ellis, 2004). Furthermore, as I was one of the participants in this research, I could claim to be an insider; I was placed at the centre of knowledge production. These enabled my thesis to consider not only the narrative and mechanical elements of research, but also the immersive, affective side of research.

#### **6.4 Strengths, limitations and future directions**

The above discussion and conclusions indicate the belief that the study I conducted was innovative, unique and produced new knowledge regarding the nature of relationships between filmmakers and participants within a particular cultural setting. The combination of the production of video and written evidence

adds to its authenticity. However, there are two notable limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, I was a lone filmmaker, researching on the relationship between filmmaker and participant, and, whilst this had an advantage in terms of working fluidity and decision making,, undertaking all the activities on my own caused me anxiety. For instance, as the camera operator, I had to check to see if it was recording properly whilst interacting with the participants by asking and answering question. All of this occurred simultaneously. Furthermore, the fact that I was the editor might bias the results of the research. For this reason, having a third party or team to help provide feedback may benefit the research.

Second, difficulties encountered in this study were exacerbated by the 2019 global coronavirus pandemic, which disrupted the research and filming process significantly. Due to travel restrictions and the obstacles of lockdowns, I was unable to film the participants. In addition, I could not meet and talk in person to build a relationship. This was the case especially with Lin, who was living in Amsterdam, Netherlands at the time. Despite the fact of physical separation, technology allows face-to-face communication in real time, enabling the constant development of the relationship. In a positive vein, I felt a sense of virtual proximity (Dyben 2018, p.12); however, I am confident that physical intimacy and confrontation would enhance such a study and enable even more extensive results through the research film and reflective writing.

As the research progressed, I was privileged to investigate diverse and fascinating areas from fresh and unique perspectives, specifically the relationships between filmmaker and participant within a Thai cultural context. Nonetheless, in order to invite further in-depth exploration and provide a rich source of data and multidimensional perspective relevant to the relationship between filmmaker and participant in documentary filmmaking, there could be a cross-cultural investigation, perhaps a Thai filmmaker collaborating with a foreign participant, or a foreign filmmaker collaborating with a Thai participant.



## 6.5 Personal reflections

My perceptions of the filmmaker-participant relationship have changed and I have gained new insights as a result of this research and practice. The participants in this research demonstrated a diversity and individuality that challenged stereotypes of Thai people and revealed the richness and uniqueness of the Thai culture and how the filmmakers' and participants' relationships are influenced by the distinctiveness of 'Thainess'. Throughout this journey I have focused on relationships, which are crucial to the nature of documentary filmmaking. More particularly, I have focused on those relationships through the lens of the Thai cultural context. The Ambassador, Aew, and Lin have joined me on this 'dance floor'. We have exchanged and shared our experiences during the process, for which I felt privileged, and I was grateful for their cooperation. Even though this dance is coming to an end, I am confident that the bond I formed with the three participants will be prolonged because I am still in contact with them. Even if there is no professional relationship involved, I believe I still treat them in the same way.

Prior to beginning the research, I used to believe that the filmmaker needed to have a personal relationship with the participants in order to access and be a part of their world and to be able to capture the authentic story, but what I have learned from this study is that personal relationships can intrude on my professionalism, resulting in awkward decision making. I occasionally have too much empathy for the participants; if the participants were to be in a state of uncertainty, it would not be pushed even further in order to observe their tension and genuinely unintended reaction. Importantly, being Thai has shaped the way I think and perform differently from other people.

Through an autoethnographic approach, I have undoubtedly learnt to identify myself as a practitioner and academic with lived experience. Moreover, this encouraged me to confront the tension I perceived between my professional and personal identities. Thus, it helped me understand why I struggle with my hybrid identity and made me conscious of the possibility of bias, both professionally and personally. Using self-reflection in different situations, it encouraged me to look back on my experiences and address various aspects inward of myself that I would not like to disclose or reveal. Thereby, my writing

and video diaries demonstrated my vulnerabilities as they emerged throughout the process. Through my own reflexivity with lived experience, I have aimed to use research practice, in the Thai cultural context, to make a complex phenomenon more visible.

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## Selected Filmography

*Geri*, 1999. [film, DVD]. Directed by Molly Dineen. UK: BFI

*The Good Woman of Bangkok*, 1991. [film, DVD]. Directed by Dennis O'Rourke. Australia: Film Australia Productions.

*The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife*, 1991. [film, DVD]. Directed by Nick Broomfield. UK: Universal Pictures.

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## Appendix A

Biographies of Thai filmmakers who were interviewed

**Filmmaker's name:** Pailin Wedel

**Date of the first interview (face to face):** December 7, 2019

**Date of the second interview (online):** April 6, 2022

**Filmography:** Hope Frozen (2018), which was picked up for distribution through Netflix in 2020.

**Filmmaker's name:** Thunska Pansittivorakul

**Date of the first interview (face to face):** November 22, 2019

**Date of the second interview (online):** April 6, 2022

**Filmography:** Voodoo Girls (2002), Happy Berry (2004), This Area is under Quarantine (2008), Reincarnate (2010), The Terrorists (2011), Supernatural (2014), Spacetime (2015), Homogeneous, Empty Time (2017), Nang Yai Na Budnee (2019), Santikhiri Sonata (2019), Avalon (2020), and Morana Sati (2021).

**Filmmaker's name:** Urupong Raksasad

**Date of the first interview (face to face):** November 15, 2019

**Date of the second interview (online):** April 6, 2022

**Filmography:** March of Time (2001), Stories from the North (2006), Agrarian Utopia (2009), The Songs of Rice (2014), and Wandering (2016).

## Appendix B

### Interview Transcripts

(P=Pailin Wedel; T=Thunskya Pansittivorakul; U=UrupongRaksasad; I=Interviewer)

#### **I: How do you approach the participants?**

P: I first talk to them about what I want. I go without a camera because it makes them feel more comfortable. While talking to participants, I will observe how much they revealed to me. It is when we have to approach someone, whether we have only known them for a few hours or two and a half years (in the case of my films), that we must build a relationship. However, the only discernible difference is the length of the shoot. The longer we shoot, the stronger our bond with the participants becomes.

T: I sometimes talk to the participants as a friend. Thus, the level of privacy was showing too high both in our words and topics. I completely forget how is going to affect the participants when publicly released.

U: I always introduce myself as a local to build a relationship and to create familiarity with them. My participants have said that I am an ordinary person, easy-going, and trustworthy. They do not see me as a filmmaker, but they see me as a friend who gives a visit.

#### **I: How do you build relationships with the participants?**

P: Of course, I have to make a relationship with my participants. I have to make sure that I can put my trust in them and their stories. At the same time, I believe that participants also keep their eye on me, how trustworthy I am. Our relationship has changed since we started the project. The more time I spend with them, our relationship grows deeper.

T: I think, it is a filmmaker's choice what kind of relationship they want from participants. I am an introverted person. I do not like to hang out with people but when I am working I can pretend to be a nice person. I will do what the participant wants. I will try to do them a favour in order to get the job done. My first intention is not to have a relationship with the participants. Sometimes I feel like wasting my time to build the relationship and get to know someone or become their friend after finishing the project. I think it is tiring because I have something to work on.

Nevertheless, I asked my team to build a relationship instead of me because I want to continue the project. I do not want anyone to hate me.

U: It is not taking long for me to establish relationships, about two to three days. It depends on the participant's personality. However, I always reveal myself to them when we first met. I tell them what I want. I try to get to know my participants as much as I can and observe the location at the same time. As we are interested in the same things, so it makes things easier.

**I: How do you maintain relationships in filmmaking?**

P: I try to keep my distance from participants. I would never nag them or put too much pressure on them. I always give them a reason why I ask and shoot a sensitive scene. Time will help to reduce the barrier between us. At the same time, filmmakers must increase their credibility by showing that they are serious about this project.

T: During the filming, I must do anything to make the participants feel secure while we have the conversation. Once the participants feel insecure then they are uncomfortable telling stories. Thus, I need to find the balance which I try to keep in mind as if I were the participants, what should be told in front of a camera. I must find a balance between what I want and what might affect participants.

U: A filmmaker expects the intended audience to believe what has been told in a story; for this reason, it is necessary for the filmmaker to develop relationships with participants and gain their trust because if they do not trust you, it will appear on screen and the audience can feel it. Most importantly, I try to listen to the participants what they want to do, but by the end, I am the one who decides what the story is that I want to tell.

**I: Do you assume there were any factors that influenced the filmmaker-participant relationships throughout the process?**

P: As I have a journalism background, I believe transparency is the key to starting relationships. Whatever role I am in, either the reporter who reports for a few hours or the filmmaker who made the documentary for two and a half years, I still need to show them my sincerity. Another point, I have never sympathized with my participants; on the contrary, I empathize with the audience if I show them the scene of, he was crying – it did not give any information but just play with feelings. Moreover, filmmakers must anticipate the participant's agenda, the reason why



they participated in the interview, and the motivations behind the answer whether there is any hidden agenda.

T: I started by showing my sincerity toward the participants, for example, at our first meeting, I told them what I wanted and how much budget I have. I believe that a relationship is about communication such as agreement, negotiation, and disagreement. It needs to be clear from the start what we want and what they want.

U: I personally think that we need to be honest and trust each other. Moreover, do not judge the participants. To give an illustration, I made a documentary about criminals. However, I told the story from both sides. I give them respect as human beings and let the audience decide by themselves. The filmmaker and participant relationships are two-way communication. Each documentary is unique as same as relationships.

**I: Do you think the filmmakers can be friends with the participants, and how open are they?**

T: I didn't choose to do this based on the relationship I had with this group. I will select people who have stories to tell about their lives. Perhaps someone we knew previously did not have an interesting story to tell. Strangers, on the other hand, have more fascinating stories. Things we would like to know.

U: Yes, but only up to a certain point. Some friends are very close, while others are not. The majority of them will recognise our sincerity. There is no hidden agenda here.

**I: Is the Thai people's culture of respect affecting your work?**

P: Thai society is stratified by age, power, and position. I once conducted an interview with an individual in authority. He called me "Noo" the first time we met. The language he used with me is stratified; I am lower than him. He called me "Noo", which meant he thought I was not as powerful as him. It made me feel that I was not equal to him. As a result of this, I could not ask him very serious questions and just had to use gentle words. At the same time, we will not refer to ourselves as "Noo." Because I intend to inform him that we do not wish to be addressed in this manner. Because the social structure is similar to that of Korea, but they are not as egocentric as Thai people.

U: I respect everyone for who they are as human beings, including the elderly. For me, the high position of a person is not the factor of influence that makes me pay my respect or treat them differently from others. Age is the most influential factor for Thai people. Naturally, we respect those who are older rather than the younger ones. Additionally, I had the opportunity to film a documentary about the Bangkok protests. At the time, the atmosphere began to riot, and I didn't notice a woman who was upset because she was included in it. I continued filming and used that shot in the film as well, and every time I watch it, I feel guilty for violating her rights. The incident happened in a public place and there were a lot of people at the event. I reasoned that there should be no issue. However, I was prepared to comply with the law if someone came to sue me. Documentaries must sometimes compromise some ethical principles in order to present facts that are valuable to society. We are accountable for the decisions we make.

**I: What about trust?**

T: What will we choose as a filmmaker as the participant's trust grows? Because we have to find the right balance between what we want and what doesn't abuse the trust. I think about participants if other people heard about this kind of thing, what would other people think of them? So we try to avoid affecting the participant too much, or some people make up the entire story. As a result, we must define our own position in terms of what we have to offer.

U: Documentaries must persuade audiences, so it is necessary for filmmakers to build relationships and convince participants to a certain level of belief and trust in order to have natural performance from participants on the film. If the participants do not trust us, the filmmakers, it will be visible on the screen, and the filmmakers will not get the best out of the participants.

**I: Does your Thainess (personality, behaviour) affect your relationship with the participant?**

P: Absolutely, during the production, I had this feeling of *Kreng Jai* all the time because I was not their relative or friend. When they are not comfortable to be filmed at times or asked about particular matters, I could not do anything about it. I did not think it was something about me; however, after a while of spending time with them, the pressure of *Kreng Jai* has gradually declined. Moreover, to talk to seniors, we must be well behaved.

P: I consider it rather an exchange, the participants have a chance to raise their voice; to allow people to get to know and understand them better through my documentary, at the same time, I feel it is *Boon Khun* the reason that they are giving their time for my film. What I do in return is genuinely care for and stay in touch with them to see how they are.

T: Being Thai has undoubtedly had an impact. Especially when it comes to those in positions of authority. Those who want to present themselves will be excited to see us and will flock to people or try to get us to interview some individual when we come to make a documentary. There are some threatening words that do not ask specific questions. I've been having the same experience.

U: Thai culture has an impact on work, such as how we behave toward the participants because we might meet them somehow once the filming is finished. It's not just about work; it's also about friendship. I think it's the advantage of being considerate and grateful because I'm not going to take advantage alone. Therefore, I will still have some distance for the participants. I honoured their story, which we would document, whether the participants were Thai or "Farang". It will make the job easier, especially if it is a long-term interview. However, whether or not the participant is willing to provide information depends on the circumstances at the time. Including the filmmaker's way of speaking.

**I: How long do you think it will take us to convince one person to open up and allow us to film their life?**

P: With our working experience in this line, we can see how open this person is. That is, if they refused from the start, we could try again. However, if they remain closed, we will not go too far or too deep. Because I am not a naturally persistent person. Except that the people we interviewed were public figures such as politicians and celebrities, who are accustomed to being persistent. We can be persistent and dig deep, but we may have to calculate the level of the person we are filming. Even so, we may be biased when we are close to someone or cause a distortion in our work. However, when we enter the editing room, we allow others, such as producers and editors, to critique our work, and we must listen. They are not acquainted with the participants. As a result, he will assist us in being cautious about where we lean when we are not impartial and help us see it from a different perspective.

U: Working on a documentary, as a filmmaker and participant, there is always a communication. Without knowing where it will end up that is what makes each documentary interesting and of no fixed form. Each story is unique. We can have an intimate relationship while remaining moral, that is sufficient. There is no prohibition against it. However, it may have an impact on the plans we've put in place, because I believe that making movies is akin to creating art. There is a state known as "magic happens," which is a feeling that a participant has that the audience can feel.

**I: In terms of performance, how do you manage your performance in order to interact with participants?**

P: We must get to know each and every one of the participants. We may need to draw on personal experiences from meetings and know a lot of people. It aids in judging our expressions, reactions, and empathy for each individual. It varies depending on the research conducted prior to the interview.

T: When I work, I become a different person, I'm more willing to compromise. If a participant makes a request, I try to fulfil it. So that I can get what I want. I will be instantly overly friendly and fake. As I am an introverted person, what I normally do is to involve my team to build relationships with my participants instead of me to enable me to continue doing my job.

U: I pose as a regular person, not a filmmaker or someone more powerful than the participant. This characteristic makes it simple to reach the intended audience. Actually, I treat everyone equally, but there was a time that my participant was a female adolescent. I let one of my team of her gender be present with the production. The advantage was the naturalness from the participant. More importantly, I considered it was more appropriate, as a man, shooting with the opposite sex, I somehow had the impression that it is not appropriate.

**I: Do you believe the filmmaker has more power than the participant?**

P: I think the power of the filmmaker is always there. We take charge of the participants by directing them, the camera is pointing out from the view of the director, which is a bit of a ruse. But, of course, editing is even more deceptive.

**I: In your opinion, what is the definition of relationship building between filmmaker and participant?**

P: I have to maintain a state of neutrality at all times, as I did not enter into the documentary process with the intention of becoming friends with them. I need to consider the audience as well as society because it is the main objective of documentary filmmaking.

# Appendix C

AJ BU ethics v1:  
Ethics ID: 26336  
Date: 13 June 2019



## Participant Agreement Form

**Full title of project:** Relationships behind the camera: An examination of relationship between filmmaker and subject in documentary filmmaking

**Name, position and contact details of researchers:**

Areerut Jaipadub / Student No. 5086336 / 074 4478 0800 / ajaipadub@bournemouth.ac.uk


**Name, position and contact details of supervisor:**

Dr Sue Sudbury / 078 4077 4799 / smsudbury@bournemouth.ac.uk

Dr Mark Readman / 077 1866 9736 / mreadman@bournemouth.ac.uk

**Section A: Agreement to participate in the study**

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (ref. 'AJ BU ethics', v.3) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant <a href="https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy">Privacy Notice</a> which sets out how we collect and use personal information ( <a href="https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy">https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy</a> ).	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary.	
I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being filmed during the project</li> <li>• my words will be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs using my real name</li> <li>• I will feature in any film made as part of this research project and this may be broadcast publicly or shown to third parties.</li> </ul>	
I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study <b>except</b> where it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed.	
Should I not wish to answer any particular question (s), I am free to decline. _____	
I give permission for members of the research team to use the film footage for the purposes of this research project.	
	<b>Initial box to agree</b>
<b>I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)</b>	

**Section B: The following parts of the study are optional**

You can decide about each of these activities separately. Even if you do not agree to any of these activities you can still take part in the study. If you do not wish to give permission for an activity, do not initial the box next to it.

	Initial boxes to agree
I agree to being photographed during the Project.	<i>PS</i>
I agree for my photograph to be included in research outputs.	<i>PS</i>
I agree that my real name can used in the above.	<i>PS</i>

**I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.**

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS) H.E. MR. PISSANU  
SUVANASATA

Date 30/03/2019  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

*P. Sivangtho*  
Signature

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) AREERUT JAIJADUB

Date 30/03/2019  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

*Areerut Jaijadub*  
Signature

Once a Participant has signed, **please sign 1 copy** and take 2 photocopies:

- Original kept in the local investigator's file
- 1 copy to be kept by the participant (including a copy of PI Sheet)

### Participant Agreement Form

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**Name, position and contact details of researchers:**

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**Name, position and contact details of supervisor:**

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I give permission for members of the research team to use the film footage for the purposes of this research project.	
	<b>Initial box to agree</b>
I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	



**Section B: The following parts of the study are optional**

You can decide about each of these activities separately. Even if you do not agree to any of these activities you can still take part in the study. If you do not wish to give permission for an activity, do not initial the box next to it.

	Initial boxes to agree
I agree to being photographed during the Project.	/
I agree for my photograph to be included in research outputs.	/
I agree that my real name can used in the above.	/

**I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.**

Name of participant **PIYANAN TEPNARIN** Date **26/07/2019**  
(BLOCK CAPITALS) (dd/mm/yyyy)

*P. Tepnarin*

Signature

Name of researcher **AREERUT JAIPADUB** Date **26/07/2019**  
(BLOCK CAPITALS) (dd/mm/yyyy)

*Areerut Jaipadub*

Signature

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Areerut Jaipadub / Student No. 5086336 / 074 4478 0800 / ajaipadub@bournemouth.ac.uk

**Name, position and contact details of supervisor:**

Dr Sue Sudbury / 078 4077 4799 / smsudbury@bournemouth.ac.uk

Dr Mark Readman / 077 1866 9736 / mreadman@bournemouth.ac.uk

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I give permission for members of the research team to use the film footage for the purposes of this research project.	
	<b>Initial box to agree</b>
I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	✓

**Section B: The following parts of the study are optional**

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	Initial boxes to agree
I agree to being photographed during the Project.	✓
I agree for my photograph to be included in research outputs.	✓
I agree that my real name can used in the above.	✓

**I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.**

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS) LIN INTER

Date 4/08/2019  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

  
Signature

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) AREERUT JAIPADUB

Date 4/08/2019  
(dd/mm/yyyy)

  
Signature

Once a Participant has signed, **please sign 1 copy** and take 2 photocopies:

- Original kept in the local investigator's file
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