"Breaking Up Can Be So Hard to Do": Communication Strategies to Disengage from Male Same-Sex Romantic Relationships between Thais and Non-Thais

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Abstract

Intimate relationships among male same-sex have been accepted and more received significant attention recently, Resulting in emerging of them from the shadows of society. However, unfortunately, these relationships frequently end in breakups. As a result, this study was aimed to (1) examine the communicative strategies used to disengage from male same-sex relationships, (2) explore the elements contributing to the choice of breakup tactics, and (3) investigate the effects of the disengagement strategies on the post-breakup relationship status. Interviews were used to elicit the participants' previous relationships. Five male participants who dated a male were selected using the purposive sampling method, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the data. The adaptation of Baxter's disengagement tactics served as the framework to describe the communication styles of Thai disengagers during the breakdown of the relationship with non-Thai partners. The findings revealed that the degree of intimacy and the culture of the disengagers influenced the selection of disengagement tactics. Moreover, the length of the relationship and the usage of breakup strategies were found to determine the post-breakup relationship status. As for the implications, the study may enable individuals to select the most appropriate strategies if a breakup is necessary.

Keywords: Communication strategies, Intercultural communication, Same-sex relationships, Relationship dissolution, Breakups

Introduction

The breakdown of a romantic relationship is considered one of the most emotionally challenging situations that a person can encounter (Sprecher & Fehr, 1988). Most relationship breakups are unilateral or non-mutual agreements (Hill et al., 1976; Sprecher, 1994; Collins & Gillath, 2012). This imbalance can cause adverse outcomes, such as anger, anxiety, and depression in the affected partners (Sbarra, 2006). This seems to be why people tend to use

various communication strategies to disengage from relationships to avoid hurting their partner's feelings.

The reasons for relationship dissolution vary, but cultural differences are a primary factor if the individuals come from different cultural backgrounds. Nowadays, social media links people around the world regardless of differences and geographical boundaries (Sewyer, 2011), generating a surge in opportunities for Thais to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) and giving them more chances to develop relationships with foreigners.

During the past decade, romantic relationships among different-sex couples had been examined from various points of view; however, relatively few research studies have used same-sex participants. The current study brings point of view to an important aspect in this category of human interpersonal relationships. Individuals who are in the stage of determining their post-breakup status with partners can find this study as a beneficial guideline for their relationships.

Research objectives

1. To explore the communication strategies used by Thai disengagers to terminate romantic relationships with non-Thais

2. To identify the factors that contribute to Thai partners' choice of breakup strategies in same-sex romantic relationships with non-Thais

3. To examine the effects of romantic relationship dissolution done with different strategies on the post-breakup relationship status

Literature review

This section provides the foundation for understanding the study through the related theories and concepts while also illustrating the broader picture of romantic relationships from the beginning to the dissolution phase, along with several components that cause romantic relationships to end. The literature review is divided into six main parts: (1) social penetration theory; (2) relationship deterioration; (3) reasons for the dissolution; (4) intercultural communication; (5) cultural differences; and (6) communication strategies used to disengage from relationships.

Social penetration theory

Social penetration is defined as a process through which communication develops from superficial to deeply personal topics, transforming a relationship from non-intimate to intimate. Taylor and Altman (1973) defined social penetration as *"the process of increasing disclosure and intimacy in a relationship"* (p. 226). The more individuals know each other, the more interpersonal communication will unfold. As a result, the relationship will be expanded, and the interaction will proceed to a deeper level.

Taylor and Altman (1973) described the process of self-disclosure as peeling back the layers of an onion, which possesses both breadth and depth. Breadth refers to the range of different topics individuals discuss with ones, and depth is the amount of information available

on a specific topic. The outer layers of the onion are superficial information about a person's physical appearance and speech. The inner layers represent more confidential information, such as feelings and thoughts. Relationships generally start with a relatively narrow breadth, in which individuals communicate about a few topics that have a shallow depth. The level of intimacy will deepen over time as individuals disclose personal information, such as spiritual values, hopes, goals, fears, and secrets, expanding the relationship's breadth and depth. Thus, social penetration can occur in diverse contexts, including friendships, social groups, and romantic relationships. Figure 1 depicts an onion metaphor in social penetration theory.
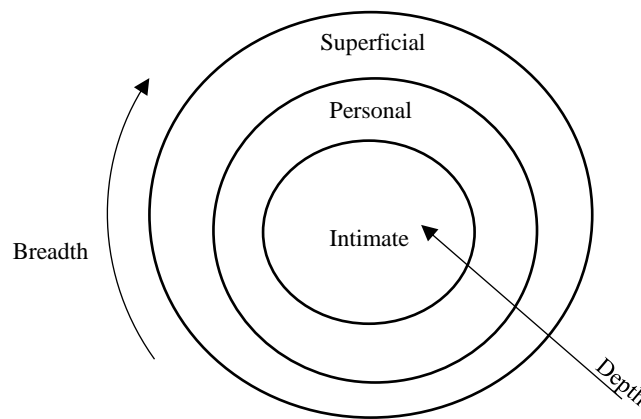

Figure 1 Onion metaphor in social penetration theory
Source: Adapted from Social penetration theory (Taylor & Altman, 1973)

Relationship deterioration

Some romantic relationships end abruptly from critical incidents, such as infidelity, abusive behavior, physical violence, or one partner falling in love with someone else. But several interpersonal relationships scholars have found that most romantic relationships end more gradually through a series of stages (e.g., Baxter, 1984; Lee, 1984; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Table 1 shows a comparison of relationship deterioration models from three perspectives.

Table 1 A comparison of relationship dissolution models

Baxter (1984)	Lee (1984)	Knapp & Vangelisti (2009)
Onset of problems	Dissatisfaction	Differentiating
Desire to exit the relationship	Exposure	Circumscribing
Disengagement actions	Negotiation	Stagnating
Negotiations	Resolution	Avoiding
Repair attempts	Transformation	Terminating

Baxter (1984) based her model in large part on unilateral and bilateral dissolution behavior. The deterioration is classified into six steps: (1) the onset of relational problems, when one considers whether the decision to dissolve the relationship was based on a critical incident or a combination of problems over time; (2) the decision to exit the relationship is either one-sided or mutual, in which both members desire to end the romantic relationship; (3) initiating unilateral dissolution actions focusing specifically on unilateral decisions and the method in which the decision is conveyed to the partner; (4) the initial reaction of the party who was broken up with in terms of the degree of acceptance or resistance to the dissolution; (5) initiating bilateral dissolution action—here the mutual breakup decisions may also be accomplished through direct or indirect communication strategies; (6) ambivalence and repair scenarios, occur when one or both parties change their minds about the breakup and intend to repair the relationship. In Baxter's study, most participants indicated they had passed through the stages several times before ultimate dissolution. Therefore, Baxter's model can allow for backtracking and repetition of stages before the breakup finally occurs. This model's flexibility is crucial for accurately reflecting the breakup process, as it rarely occurs in a systematic and orderly sequence.

Lee (1984) divided relationship deterioration into five stages and pointed out that the breakup process typically occurs over time rather than being just a single event: (1) discovery of dissatisfaction, in which partners report problematic behaviors and become dissatisfied; (2) exposure stage, in which problems are found and brought into open—one partner tends to formulate the discussion of discontent and express them to the partner; (3) negotiation, in which discussion occurs between the partners over the nature of the dissatisfaction and the contentious issues; (4) resolution, in which attempts are made to address the dissatisfaction with the relationship—once a decision is reached concerning the relationship, action will be taken by one or both partners; (5) transformation stage occurs when the nature of the relationship changes; however, when resolution attempts are unsuccessful and changes are executed in the relationship, partners may choose to cease the relationship entirely. Lee highlighted that the negotiation and exposure stages are the most distressing and emotionally exhausting; partners with less intimacy may skip some stages and move straight to relationship termination.

Knapp and Vangelisti (2009) developed the staircase model of relationship deterioration, which has five stages: (1) differentiating is the first stage in the model wherein relational couples emphasize their differences over their similarities and their uniqueness as individuals over their relational identity. In other words, one or both partners begin to focus on how little they have in common and start to talk about being incompatible; (2) circumscribing refers to restraining communication behavior wherein the partner will limit their conversations and set up boundaries in their relationships. As a result, partners avoid getting into any real depth when self-disclosing, fewer topics are raised (for fear of conflict), and more issues are out of bounds; (3) the stagnating stage is when both partners have developed expectations of unpleasant and unproductive conversations, leading them to have less interaction since they often see communication as uncomfortable and pointless; (4) avoiding is the stage where the partners begin rearranging their lives to avoid face-to-face interaction. Although partners still

share physical space, they refrain from communicating as much as possible; (5) terminating refers to ending a relationship. This final stage can result from outside circumstances, such as geographical separation, or internal factors, like changing values or personalities that weaken the bond. Communication during this stage can be simple or complicated, which involves a lot of discussion and even the intervention of third parties. Terminating can be accomplished with considerable reflection on the life of the relationship and the reasons for the termination, or it can be accomplished with relatively little or no discussion between the partners.

The studies above show that relationships undergo different stages. It can be deduced that relational change is inevitable and that deterioration is a recurring stage in most relationship development models. Nevertheless, two options exist when partners experience relational deterioration: repair or dissolution. Once individuals perceive that a relationship has moved into the emotional distress phase, they tend to attempt to repair the relational problems first: If the attempt is successful, their relationship will continue; in contrast, the inability to resolve relational difficulties is likely to lead to the stage of relationship termination.

Reasons for dissolution

Romantic relationships develop when several factors are considered favorable. These include the level of attraction, shared interests, intimacy and trust, and the likelihood of long-term commitment. Similarly, numerous factors contribute to ending romantic relationships (Kurdek, 1991)

The typical reasons for the termination of romantic relationships prior to marriage are outlined by Cate and Lloyd (1992) and can be categorized into three groups. The first concerns a lack of social compatibility, which can have its basis in financial or educational differences, as well as variance in terms of beliefs or interests, age, or goals in life. The second factor concerns the importance of friends and family in granting their approval for a relationship. Finally, the third category concerns the quality of the relationship itself. If there is a lack of communication, few shared interests, and little love, this can lead to the break-up of the relationship, as can external factors, including the need for long-distance relationships that might arise due to relocation for work or other social commitments. These three categories can all contribute to the termination of relationships. Figure 2 illustrates the reasons for relational dissolution.

Several further factors have been found in previous examining the termination of relationships. One such factor is the duration of the current relationship, with short-term relationships proving much more likely to be terminated. In a sample of young couples who were not married and had been in their current relationships for less than one year, it was reported that the number of hours spent in each other's company strongly increased the probability of termination (Rusbult, 1987; Simpson, 1987). Meanwhile, Felmlee et al. (1990) discovered that partners choosing to end their relationships spent an average of 20 hours together each week, while those who chose to stay together during the study spent an average of 34 hours together each week. This idea may be linked to the higher failure rate for long-distance relationships because such couples typically spend less time together, in addition to

the higher cost of sustaining long-distance relationships (Levinger, 1979). Those mentioned earlier above are the reasons for the dissolution that partners encountered in romantic breakups. Besides, the researcher considers that partners from different races and nationalities are more likely to experience conflict in terms of intercultural communication when difficulty in romantic relationships arises.
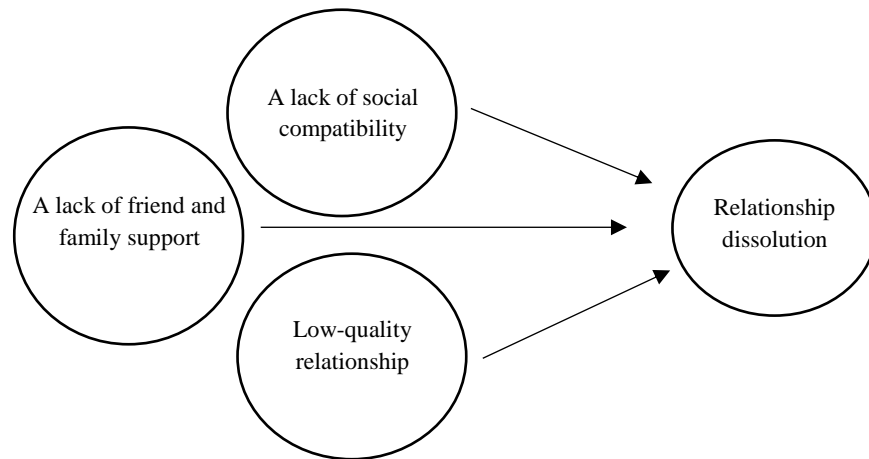
Figure 2 Flow chart of typical reasons for relationship dissolution

Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication can be defined as sharing information on different levels of awareness and control between individuals with different cultural backgrounds, including national cultural differences and differences related to participation in the activities that exist within a society (Allwood, 1985). According to Gudykunst and Mody's (2002) study, intercultural communication involves face-to-face communication between people from different national cultures. Intercultural communication occurs when individuals influenced by different cultural communities negotiate shared meaning in interactions (Ting-Toomey, 1993). Many studies have proposed that stability in a relationship is most commonly attributed to the factor of mutual understanding. In the case of interpersonal relationships, understanding and being open to the partner's culture is paramount in avoiding relationship breakdown. Therefore, when individuals' cultural beliefs and customs fail to harmonize, the relationship tends to enter the stage of deterioration. In essence, unresolved differences and the inability to cope with relational dissimilarity are the significant factors leading to relationship breakdown.

Cultural differences

Hofstede (2001) conducted a pioneering study on how individuals from different cultures interact with each other. The findings revealed significant dimensions in which to compare cultures, having ultimately become criteria that are widely accepted internationally. However, this study focused only on the related characteristics of cultural differences in romantic relationships, as shown in the following.

Individualism-Collectivism describes people's involvement with groups. Individualistic cultures encourage people to act in their and close relatives' interests, with a strong focus on personal accomplishments and the individual's rights. However, in collectivist societies, people will act in the interests of the larger group, which looks after them in return for that individual's loyalty (Hofstede, 2001).

Uncertainty Avoidance describes the extent to which people in a particular society tolerate uncertainty, and it reflects how individuals choose to address anxiety by finding ways to reduce ambiguity. Those who live in societies with high uncertainty avoidance will feel uncomfortable when facing uncertainty and try to avoid such situations. In contrast, societies with low uncertainty avoidance will contain more individuals who are capable of pragmatically accepting changing circumstances (Hofstede, 2001).

These cultural dimensions allow for a better understanding of human diversity. The work of Hofstede is significant in carrying out cross-cultural studies as it allows the theoretical models to pursue practical applications in real-world scenarios.

Ethnocentrism refers to the way individuals conceive of his/her culture as being superior to other cultures (Sumner, 1906). Based on the literature, viewing the world from one's limited perspective often results in negative behaviors and biases toward individuals who do not belong to the same ethnic group or culture. Neuliep (1996) defined the term ethnocentrism as considering one's own culture as central to everything and using their standards to judge the worth of all other cultures. It appears to be the case that every individual has a sense of the ethnocentric to varying degrees. Triandis (1994) argued that an individual naturally considers one's culture as the standard against measuring other cultures. The more another culture is similar or overlaps in concepts compared to their own, the better it probably will judge to be. When individuals think of their own cultures or ethnic groups as the center of the world, it means that what the group practices, believes, and appreciates is the most natural way of living, and the views of other cultures are strange or inferior. Consequently, ethnocentrism may be inevitable in cross-cultural relationships, as individuals frequently have instinctual adverse reactions toward another person's cultural practices or beliefs.

Communication strategies used to disengage from relationships

Hamilton and Kroll (2018) state that communication, in general, is the process of individuals sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways. Individuals use communication daily, in both verbal and non-verbal forms, to create relationships, maintain harmony, enhance understanding, or possibly destroy a relationship. However, communication in romantic relationships is inconsistent and can be frustrating because it hinders the ability to predict what others will say, do, feel, want, and expect. As a result, individuals may feel out of control and unsure about the appropriate behavior, both in regard to their own behavior and that of others (Wood, 2000). Communication in romantic relationships is extremely challenging because it does not always occur smoothly and predictably (Surra & Huston, 1987).

Various tactics are used concerning the communication theories relating to the particular disengagement strategies in relationship breakdown. Table 2 presents Baxter's (1985) disengagement strategies in romantic relationships from both unilateral and bilateral perspectives.

Table 2 Baxter's basic disengagement strategies from two perspectives

Strategies	Direct	Indirect
Unilateral	**State-of-relationship talk** – analyze the relationship (allow a partner to engage in discussions or negotiations) **Fait accompli** - confrontation	**Withdrawal** – avoidance **Pseudo-de-escalation** – excuses **Cost escalation** – excessive demands
Bilateral	**Attributional conflict** – blaming each other for the breakup **Negotiated farewell** – mutual separation without aggression	**Fading away** – acknowledgment by both parties that the relationship is over **Mutual pseudo-de-escalation** – excuses from both parties

In addition to the strategies detailed by Baxter (1985), there were other, more recent ways to communicate the ending of romantic relationships; for instance, the linguistic relationship termination term *ghosting* has received emphasis in the Urban Dictionary (Stevenson, 2016). "Ghosting" refers to unilaterally discontinuing communication (permanent or temporary) in an attempt to withdraw access to individuals initiating relational breakup (gradual or sudden), generally enacted through one or multiple technological mediums (LeFebvre, 2017). Ghosting has similarities to face-to-face disengagement but employs communication technologies such as texting, email, voicemail, instant messaging, or social networking sites to facilitate the breakup.

According to LeFebvre (2017), the initiators in the relationship breakup employ ghosting by indirectly terminating the romantic relationship through implicit, ambiguous, unclear communication that leaves non-initiators without a transparent or coherent message that the relationship is ending. The practice of ghosting emphasizes disengagers' interest with minimal concern for the aggrieved party and represents a low degree of caring and a non-compassionate strategy. Ghosting is utilized as a digital avoidance or withdrawal tactic in the typical dating dialect, with the relational dissolution synonyms being disappeared, separate, disengage, avoid, exit, or stop. The ghosting strategy generates the feeling of missing something because the recipients experience physical or psychological loss (Harvey, 1996).

In addition, the selection of communication strategies to facilitate a breakup depends on the level of intimacy of a couple. Couples with higher intimacy degrees tend to be more concerned for their partner when ending the relationship. In comparison, individuals with lower intimacy degrees are more likely to show less caring for partners (Zimmerman, 2009). Moreover, individuals with more concern and compassion for each other tend to use more

direct strategies to minimize the potential pain involved in the process of disengagement that their partners might feel.

Relevant previous research studies

Several research studies were conducted to investigate the breakup of intimate relationships. The researcher (Villanueva, 2005) explored the breakup strategies of heterosexual romantic couples in college use and the possible factors affecting the choice of breakup strategy. The research was made to determine the common cause of college romantic relational breakups and find out how couples communicate to their partners about the desire to end the relationships. The results were used in the survey questionnaire that included 46 college students. The factors most reported by the participants to be the cause of their disengagement are (1) third party, (2) geographical distance, (3) lack of trust, (4) dissatisfaction with partner, (5) jealousy, and (6) lack of communication. The survey result indicated that participants preferred the use of direct disengagement rather than indirect ones, as supported by the finding that most of them used a face-to-face communication strategy during breakups.

In the last few years (Guzman, 2015) investigated the research on disengagement strategies in heterosexual romantic relationships between Filipinos and foreigners. The results revealed that the most common dissolution strategy from 20 participants was direct strategies fait accompli: straightforward statements to express reasons for ending relationship followed by the state of relationship talk: the intention to analyze the romantic relationship. Another was withdrawal: reducing the time to meet or contact a partner. The next tactic was pseudo-de-escalation: the partner expressed his purpose to leave the romantic relationship with the hope of reunion or closeness. The least common tactic used was cost escalation: the disengagers intentionally made their partners dissatisfied to cause the relationship dissolution.

Methodology

The research methodology in this study is divided into five main parts: (1) participants; (2) research instrument; (3) research consent form; (4) data collection procedures; and (5) data analysis.

Participants

Since only some Thai has been in an intimate relationship with a foreigner, the sample selection for this research could not be randomized. Participants were therefore selected using the purposive sampling technique. The researcher sought out five workplace participants, explaining the study's purposes and considerately asking for participation in the interview session. Potential participants were required to possess the following qualifications: (1) male who dated with male; (2) Thai; (3) having experiences of a relational dissolution with a non-Thai partner; and (4) being the initiator of the ending of a relationship.

Research Instrument

The interview guide reflected all the research objectives to uncover the communication strategies that facilitated breakups in male same-sex relationships between Thais and non-Thais. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with interview question guides for the disengagers. The communication strategies participants described when recalling how they terminated their relationships with former partners were grouped later based on the disengagement strategies framework.

Research Consent Form

To ensure compliance with research ethics, before data collection, all participants were contacted and informed of the full details of the research project. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form. To maintain privacy, the participants were ensured that the data would be kept confidential and anonymous. Once the consent form was signed, the researcher began collecting data.

Data Collection Procedures

The qualitative approach was employed in this study since it offered the most effective way to serve the primary objectives; that is, to understand how participants broke up with their former partners. Also, the study's data analysis depended on the data collected, which was grounded in the theories found in the related literature. The researcher conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews to gather data from the participants. To avoid misunderstandings, the participants were asked all the questions in Thai.

Data Analysis

This study follows the qualitative research paradigm; each interview was digitally audio-recorded to enable complete verbatim transcription for analysis. The researcher analyzed the descriptive data using the thematic analysis approach of qualitative data (Michelle & Lara, 2020). Subsequently, the data were transcribed, coded, and categorized based on the frameworks mentioned in the literature review.

Results and Discussion

Demographic profile of the participants and background of the relationships

The demographic data of the participants, including age, length of the relationship, ethnicity of partner, initial contact, the reason for involvement, and the cause of the disengagement from their relationships, are shown as follows in Table 3.

As seen in table 3, a sense of mutuality and physical attraction were the most common reasons for Thai participants to enter same-sex relationships with non-Thais, followed by compatibility. Prior to a commitment to another person, couples typically become connected by learning and exploring one another; subsequently, they begin to exchange information, such as sharing private thoughts, dreams, goals, fears, and backgrounds at a more intimate level (Taylor and Altman, 1973).

Table 3 Demographic and background data of disengaging participants, including initial contact, the reason for involvement, and the cause of disengagement

Participants	Age	Length of relationship	Ethnicity of partner	Initial contact	Reasons for involvement	Causes of disengagement
First	25	6 months	Asian	Dating application	Common interest	Dissatisfaction with partner
Second	43	7 years	Asian	Vacation	Physical attraction	Geographical distance, cultural differences
Third	24	3 months	Asian	Friend referral	Physical attraction	Cultural differences, lack of communication
Fourth	33	1 year	Caucasian	Workplace	Compatibility	Geographical distance
Fifth	36	6 years	Caucasian	Friend referral	Common interest	Low relationship quality

Furthermore, the researcher explored the factors that led to disengagement. The findings are consistent with Cate and Lloyd (1992) and Villanueva (2005). The most common factors for the relational breakup were geographical distance, dissatisfaction with the partner, a lack of communication, and a third party. Based on the data, it was found that the factors that led to relationship termination among the Thai disengagers were geographical distance, a lack of communication, dissatisfaction with the partner, and low relationship quality, respectively.

Another factor mentioned by participants about experiencing difficulties in a relationship with non-Thai partners was cultural differences. By Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) findings, individuals' cultural beliefs and customs play a crucial role in intercultural communication, especially in romantic relationships. Couples seemingly encounter difficulties when failing to harmonize this cultural diversity. Consequently, their relationship will probably enter the tense stage of dissolution. Another obstacle from the participants' perspective that was a primary factor that led to the ending stage is ethnocentrism, that is, regarding one's own culture as superior and tending to reject other cultures. The theory of ethnocentrism by Sumner (1906) was supported by the fact that one participant who dated a partner with ethnocentric characteristics had a difficult time and felt isolated and excluded. Thus, the view that one's culture is the center of everything was shown to be one of the elements that weaken male same-sex relationships in this study.

Communication strategies used to disengage from romantic relationships

The results showed that the communication strategy is most employed when Thai disegagers in the current study ended same-sex relationships were direct and indirect strategies. Of five Thai participants, three used direct breakup strategies (fait accompli and state-of-relationship talk), while the other two employed an indirect strategy (withdrawal). Table 4 presents the disengagement strategies employed by Thai disengagers.

Table 4 Communication strategies employed by the Thai disengagers

Participants	Strategies used	Types of strategy	Communication channels	Excerpt from the interview
First	Withdrawal	Indirect	N/A	I initiated the breakup and it was like us fading apart slowly.
Second	Fait accompli	Direct	Face-to-face	I said to him that "I think that's it. This is the end of us. We should break up!" Morever, he stood up and walked away. After that, was not very clear.
Third	Withdrawal	Indirect	N/A	We both stopped texting and faded away. We said nothing.
Fourth	Fait accompli	Direct	Messaging application	I made a WhatsApp call and told him, "I don't think it's going to work anymore. We don't see each other much nowadays."
Fifth	State-of-relationship talk	Direct	Phone call	I called and told him that "Hey Martie, I think I have something to talk about with you concerning our relationship."

According to Baxter's (1984) relational dissolution theory, various disengagement strategies were employed in the process of relationship termination. Among the breakup strategies proposed by Baxter, direct styles were the most commonly employed by Thai disengagers. Three of them used direct breakup strategies, including fait accompli, a tactic that can also explicitly be classified as more self-oriented than other-oriented since the disengager openly expresses the desire to dissolve the romantic relationship unambiguously. At the same time, there is no chance for the partner to be involved in arguments or negotiations. The results were also in line with the study of Guzman (2015) that the most common dissolution tactic among Filipino participants was Fait accompli. Another direct breakup tactic is the state-of-relationship talk, in which the disengager shows obvious concern for their partner and is willing to maintain a face-saving environment or try to prevent the partner from having negative feelings.

In the meantime, the other two participants employed an indirect breakup strategy; withdrawal or avoidance, a tactic considered self-oriented and unilateral. The withdrawal strategy is likely to spark ambiguity and uncertainty for the partners because indirect and self-oriented actions are the least caring and compassionate forms of relationship dissolution (Zimmerman, 2009).

Factors influencing the selection of breakup strategies
Determining the elements that contributed to the choice of the breakup strategies of Thai male same-sex romantic relationships was also an objective of the study. According to

the social penetration theory of Taylor and Altman (1973), the duration of time that couples spend together affects the degree of concern and compassion for each other. Collins and Gillath (2012) also presumed that highly bonded couples are more likely to employ direct breakup strategies.

The results in this study greatly support this assumption, as Thai disengagers who utilized direct strategies had dated their partners for at least a year; in contrast, disengagers who used indirect strategies dated their ex-partners for less than a year. Therefore, compassion is likely to be a vital factor in relationship breakdown for many reasons. In particular, it can be inferred that the disengager's choice of a breakup strategy depends on the degree of compassion for their partners.

In the view of Baxter (1984), indirect strategies tend to be explicitly employed when couples are not fully content with their partners, while those disappointed with the relationship are more likely to utilize direct strategies instead. In addition, Zimmerman (2009) emphasized that disengagement due to geographical distance between couples is more associated with direct disengagement strategies, whereas dissatisfaction with the partner is more associated with indirect strategies. In light of this, the results from the previous chapter are broadly consistent with the relational dissolution framework of Baxter.

Interestingly, the results indicate that the culture of the disengagers was a major contributing factor in selecting the communication strategies used to disengage from the male same-sex relationships, given that Thais tend to have high uncertainty avoidance and less tolerance when dealing with unknown circumstances (Hofstede, 2001). In particular, communication in intimate relationships can be challenging and frustrating owing to the difficulty in predicting what others will say, do, feel, want, and expect (Wood, 2000). Consequently, Thai disengagers with the high uncertainty avoidance trait are likely to choose indirect strategies to facilitate the breakup to avoid a confrontation which inevitably leads to a conflict.

Thai culture is also highly collectivistic, which is likely to lead most of the participants in this study to use indirect communication styles to disengage from male same-sex relationships since they are more comfortable avoiding conflict and face-threatening situations. Thus, the findings support Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension theory.

Communication channel employed in relational dissolution
To obtain deeper information on how communication strategies were employed in male same-sex relationships. The participants were asked what channel they used in the breakups.

Those participants who employed direct breakup strategies were explicitly asked whether the communication channel used during the dissolution process was technologically mediated or face-to-face. The results revealed that direct disengagement strategies were employed face-to-face and through technological mediums. Nevertheless, the participants were likely to disengage from male same-sex relationships through technology when face-to-face communication was impossible due to geographical distance. Under LeFebvre (2017), during the disengagement, individuals tended to emerge communication technology to facilitate

breakups as it was the easiest way to convey the messages when they did not physically occupy the same space.

Post-breakup relationship status

Referring to social penetration theory (Taylor & Altman, 1973), intimacy between two individuals often increases when they disclose more personal information, feelings, and thoughts over time. In order to summarize this set of qualitative data, the participants' length of the relationship and the type of breakup strategies used were combined to formulate an assumption regarding their post-breakup relationship status. The participants in relationships for less than a year were considered less intimate than couples who had spent a year together. The relationship duration, the communication strategies employed in relational breakups, and the post-breakup relationship status are presented in table 5.

Table 5 Relationship duration, strategies, and outcomes

Participants	Length of relationship	Types of strategy	Post-breakup status	Excerpt from the interview
First	6 months	Indirect	Acquaintance	We got to talk for a bit, but we are probably just acquaintances now.
Second	7 years	Direct	Close friend	We are still good friends. At the end of our relationship, I planned to settle down to open a business in Bangkok. Moreover, he came to visit me.
Third	3 months	Indirect	Stranger	We both like each other and the thought of being together. We are likely to be obsessed with somebody for a short period, then it just fades away. So now we are absolute strangers, and it's just too awkward to even get in touch.
Fourth	1 year	Direct	Friend with benefits	I would message him and tease him from time to time, and he would tease back, so that's why it turned this way.
Fifth	6 years	Direct	Close friend	We became close friends. We can still talk about everything. He returned to Thailand on holiday with his new boyfriend, and I became friends with him too.

Based on the findings, the appears that the relationship length and strategies usage played a significant role in determining the post-breakup relationship status. It was almost certain that participants who dated longer had more invested in the relationship. This may have made them feel they had more to preserve by continuing their companionship with their ex-partners. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the participants who were in a relationship for at least one year and used direct strategies became close friends with their ex-partners. Direct strategies (fait accompli and state-of-relationship talk) are linked to more

compassion and high commitment than indirect strategies (withdrawal). These strategies were selected by the participants with a high level of intimacy or closeness in the relationship, as intimate couples tend to show more compassion in their disengagement, seeking to minimize the potential pain involved in the process of relationship breakdown (Zimmerman, 2009). Additionally, companionship would continue if there was high network overlap between the couple, with several shared associations, including family members and friends (Banks et al., 1987). On the other hand, using the withdrawal tactic leads to just "knowing each other," not even "friends" after the breakup. The participants who chose the withdrawal strategy reported a lower level of intimacy than those who employed a direct tactic.

Also, the findings indicate a new relational style that blends aspects of friendship and physical intimacy, known as friends with benefits (FWB) which refers to sexual intimacy in the form of an ongoing friendship where both partners agree to avoid an official romantic commitment (Lavoie et al., 2015). This view is supported by the participants in this study who had sexual contact with their ex-partner from time to time. Although there is no indication from the participants that their relationship would transform from a sexual relationship into a romance, they maintain a continuing relationship along with good intentions for their ex-partner; in addition, they sometimes have temporarily physical intimacy without any intention to reconcile their romantic relationships. From the researcher's point of view, FWB is a relationship style in which the individuals are highly likely to be intent on enjoying casual sex without deep involvement, which depends on mutual agreement between both partners.

Conclusions

Thailand is one of Asia-Pacific's most appealing leisure destinations and among the best cities for business travelers, creating more opportunities for Thais who use English as a foreign language (EFL) to form cross-cultural relationships with non-Thais. This study has enhanced our understanding of typical scenarios of how Thais develop same-sex relationships with non-Thai partners. Anchored by many theories and concepts related to relationship development, the study discussed the nature of male same-sex romantic relationships between Thais and non-Thais from the beginning to dissolution. This research may benefit Thais who enter a relationship with non-Thai partners, as it should enable them to be more aware of cultural differences.

On top of that, being cognizant of the nature of male same-sex relationships between Thais and non-Thais and the stages they may go through can enhance the understanding of the common causes of disengagement and the strategies used during the relational dissolution phase. Knowledge of these breakup strategies may be employed by Thais disengagers involved with non-Thai partners.

The awareness that relationship deterioration is often due to cultural diversity and ethnocentrism may prevent the dissolution of a relationship or aid in the decision-making process of whether to carry on with it. With the hope of decreasing the tendency to use less compassionate breakup tactics, the findings of this study suggest that positive disengagement strategies have a salutary effect on the post-breakup relationship status. Individuals who are in

the stage of determining their post-breakup status with partners may find that this study can serve as a beneficial guideline for their relationship.

Recommendation for further research

The researcher suggested that the sample size be increased to explore a wider variety of causes for breakups and that other disengagement strategies of Baxter (1985) be investigated from a bilateral perspective. It is also worth conducting further research studies through a quantitative approach. In addition, the demographic profiles of same-sex participants can be considered by collecting a more homogenous sample to conduct a comparative analysis of the breakup tactics using demographic variables, especially age and occupation. As well as an investigation into whether the language barrier is the main factor leading to ending romantic relationships among same-sex couples or not is also recommended. Another exciting area for future study is to examine the perspective of non-disengagers (who did not wish their relationships to end) or the disengagement resistance strategies, as this may offer further insight into interpersonal communication.

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