Thai floral garland crafting toolkit: a human-centred design approach to normalize British culture and behaviour of having a conversation about death and dying
In the beginning, my project’s interest is to try to understand the differences between Thai and British culture. Which later on, due to the incident that my grandmother passed away, it influences me to reframe my research from looking at the differences of culture in overall to focus primarily about death and dying. Therefore, it’s set at the start that this research will adopt a human-centred design approach. The problem that I discover along the design processes is the weak link between the deceased and the living in British culture. As Thais, I found this insight very different from where I come from. Thais’ culture (in terms of religious, education, and traditions) has shaped and influence people behaviour and connections to be strong towards death and dying in many ways, such as worshipping and make an offering to the spirits. While in the UK, it is different. The traditions that could help the deceased and family to connect has become weaker and ineffective unlike how it used to be. Consequently, people starting to seeks for other alternatives, such as personalize cremated ashes to makes jewellery and gemstones or using cremated remains mixed with tattoo ink to create a permanent memorial tattoo. For these reasons, it became clear that people still want to reconnect and to feel the loved one around them in some way. I then expanded my interest to the usage of flower in the British’s funeral traditions. Considering that it might be a medium to reconnect those connections. And refering to an interview that I had with several florist shops in Edinburgh, apart from the insight related to funeral’s flowers, the demographics of the customers were in questions as well. And it indicates a very interesting fact that the majority of customers are adults, which to be more specific, between the age of 40 to 50. Furthermore, leaving me to question about the involvement of kids and teenager in these scenarios. For this reason, I decided to investigate more about this. By conducting primary and secondary research, it proves that kids are always excluded in funeral traditions. Because in general, children do not have the knowledge or experience that adults have and they are unprepared to deal with the death of the loved one, or even animals and plants; therefore, their parents end up excluding them in order to protect them from the harsh reality that they might not be able to comprehend (Graham, 2017).

Furthermore, after conducting another primary research, I have learnt that even though people don’t consider kids to be an age group that would be appropriate to involve in funeral traditions, but the fact is that British people, in general, aren’t feeling comfortable talking about death either. It’s a topic that they would avoid having a discussion with even their own family because it brings up many uncomfortable emotions. There’s a case study which proves that being prepared to handle the situation helps not just the deceased but also their family. By being able to discuss dying and death will make it easier for people to have their end of life wishes met. And for the deceased’s family to get to deliver that wishes while also

In final, I came up with a Thai floral garland crafting toolkit. Using crafted base activity to construct an appropriate environment to initiate a conversation about death and dying within a family. Phuang Ma Lai, a Thai crafted base floral garland which Thais use as an offering to honoured guests, relatives and loved ones. Making Phuang Ma Lai can be a nice thing to do, and it is a creative way to express artistic side and feelings. All material required is a long needle and thread. The main idea is to carefully push the thread through the flowers and the rest is up to each person design preferences, which implies its personalisation quality. The maker will need to be patient and focused in order to do it right; therefore, it is a creative mindfulness practice and a relaxing activity. By using this toolkit, the traditions of offering flower in order to pay respects or to show condolences will be more personal. It’s not just flower arrangement processes, which British people usually ordered from a florist shop, but with this tool it will provide an opportunity for people to handcrafted the flower themselves, and even give them the freedom of selecting any types of flower they want without concerning whether the flower shop would be able to provide one. The most important part is that it makes the process of using a flower to pay respect and to express feelings in funeral tradition more relational than just transactional. Crafting process adds values to the artefacts. This tool kit will help the grievers remember their loved ones and maintain the bond between them. Even though one of the main concept of the toolkit is to reconnect or create a bond between the living and the dead, but by doing this activity together, it also could provides a quality time within the family as well. And what the most crucial, regardless of the outcome (garland), the process involved in using this tool kit will help constructing a conversation about death and dying (according to NSPCC (n.d.), it’s never easy to start a serious or sensitive conversation, especially with a child. It’s hard to define a right or wrong way to approach a person because each individual is unique and different. However, it’s a good strategy to make the conversation relevant in some way. In this scenario, parents could encourage their kids to interact with the toolkit together as a family activity. And at the beginning, they could explain briefly about the usage of this form of a flower in Thai culture, which is for funeral traditions, and they could start off from that by initiating a discussion on their kids’ opinion about funeral flowers). In pursuit of the approach, I designed a Thai flower crafting activity toolkit that comes in a circular container shaped box, comprises with small containers, instructions, information card box, and tools. The small containers, instructions, and tools are the basic components to make a garland, but the significant addition is on the information card box. Information card, in this sense, is a set of cards that will provide the users basic information about Phuang Ma Lai, introduction to the toolkit, and how to create a right environment in order to construct a conversation, and a recommended questions to act as a guideline to initiate the discussions. And this is one of my participant’s feedback, she wrote: “It was a really nice and relaxed way to talk through the topic of death and dying with my children, they didn’t seem upset by the conversation in anyway and were very relaxed, which surprised me. My husband didn’t take part but was interested to know what we had been up to, so I spoke to him about it later that night again and he thought it was an unusual task, but a novel way to introduce the topic of death into the family” (Jessamy, 2019).

Throughout these phrases of design processes, the participants have shared the stories about their losses with me which they haven’t really talked about it with anyone. And it’s not that they don’t want to, but there isn’t an opportunity to do so. It proves that the toolkit can help the users to feel confident and open up for a discussion. By sharing an emotional experience about their losses make them realize that if another person’s experiences loss too in the future, they could come and talk about it in order to get through it together. All things considered, I honestly believe that this toolkit could really make changes.
In final, I came up with a Thai floral garland crafting toolkit. Using crafted base activity to construct an appropriate environment to initiate a conversation about death and dying within a family. Phuang Ma Lai, a Thai crafted base floral garland which Thais use as an offering to honoured guests, relatives and loved ones. Making Phuang Ma Lai can be a nice thing to do, and it is a creative way to express artistic side and feelings. All material required is a long needle and thread. The main idea is to carefully push the thread through the flowers and the rest is up to each person design preferences, which implies its personalisation quality. The maker will need to be patient and focused in order to do it right; therefore, it is a creative mindfulness practice and a relaxing activity. By using this toolkit, the traditions of offering flower in order to pay respects or to show condolences will be more personal. It's not just flower arrangement processes, which British people usually ordered from a florist shop, but with this tool it will provide an opportunity for people to handcrafted the flower themselves, and even give them the freedom of selecting any types of flower they want without concerning whether the flower shop would be able to provide one. The most important part is that it makes the process of using a flower to pay respect and to express feelings in funeral tradition more relational than just transactional. Crafting process adds values to the artefact. This tool kit will help the grievers remember their loved ones and maintain the bond between them. Even though one of the main concept of the toolkit is to reconnect or create a bond between the living and the dead, but by doing this activity together, it could also provides a quality time within the family as well. And what the most crucial, regardless of the outcome (garland), the process involved in using this tool kit will help constructing a conversation about death and dying (according to NSPCC (n.d.), it's never easy to start a serious or sensitive conversation, especially with a child. It's hard to define a right or wrong way to approach a person because each individual is unique and different. However, it's a good strategy to make the conversation relevant in some way. In this scenario, parents could encourage their kids to interact with the toolkit together as a family activity. And at the beginning, they could explain briefly about the usage of this form of a flower in Thai culture, which is for funeral traditions, and they could start off from that by initiating a discussion on their kids' opinion about funeral flowers). In pursuit of the approach, I designed a Thai flower crafting activity toolkit that comes in a circular container shaped box, comprises with small containers, instructions, information card box, and tools. The small containers, instructions, and tools are the basic components to make a garland, but the significant addition is on the information card box. Information card, in this sense, is a set of cards that will provide the users basic information about Phuang Ma Lai, introduction to the toolkit, and how to create a right environment in order to construct a conversation, and a recommended questions to act as a guideline to initiate the discussions. And this is one of my participant's feedback, she wrote: “It was a really nice and relaxed way to talk through the topic of death and dying with my children, they didn't seem upset by the conversation in anyway and were very relaxed, which surprised me. My husband didn't take part but was interested to know what we had been up to, so I spoke to him about it later that night again and he thought it was an unusual task, but a novel way to introduce the topic of death into the family” (Jessamy, 2019). Throughout these phrases of design processes, the participants have shared the stories about their losses with me which they haven't really talked about it with anyone. And it's not that they don't want to, but there isn't an opportunity to do so. It proves that the toolkit can help the users to feel confident and open up for a discussion. By sharing an emotional experience about their losses make them realize that if another person's experiences loss too in the future, they could come and talk about it in order to get through it together. All things considered, I honestly believe that this toolkit could really make changes.
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