

The Strive Towards Genuine Sapphic Representations in Thai Queer Cinema Continues: Analysis on The Pre- and Post-Pandemic GMMTV's WLW Representations, The Discursive Construction and Resignification of Sapphic Images, And the Fracture Between Commercial And LGBTQ+ Rights Advocacy Goals

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ABSTRACT

Based on the current representations existing in the media market from the 2010s to now, many queer feminist audiences, including myself, deem various Thai women-loving-women (WLW) media texts problematic due to its maintaining of the normative heterosexual gaze upon queer women. There is an urgent need to investigate the coherence of these media texts with the realities of queer women. More importantly, whether there exist genuine representations or whether they are still retaining in patriarchy. Furthermore, media texts about queer women in the context of Thailand are still less than in terms of production, dissemination, and accurate representation compared to the West and to its counterpart within the same queer romance genre that is Boy Love (BL)¹. Thus, it is necessary to explore the patterns of meanings disseminated through WLW media texts, what they reveal about the perceptions towards the actual WLW community in Thai context, and how all of these can be tied to the reluctance to grant Thailand's LGBTQ+ community the Equal Marriage Law.

Literature Review: The Background of Thai Queer Cinema

Thai queer cinema experienced its first spark only in the 1980s with some of Thailand's first films ever to allow individuals from the LGBTQ+ community at the center of the story: *Last Song* (1985), its sequel *Tortured Love* (1987), and *I Am A Man* (1987). Although Thai queer cinema of the 1980s no longer present *kathoey*² and gay men as the laughing stock, which was the prior stereotypical image (Kaewprasert, 2005, p. 5), they still perpetuate the belief that being queer signifies a defective characteristic borne by bad karmas according to Buddhism with the majority of the mentioned films ends with tragic deaths, suicides, and miserableness. This signifies social construction of queerness as inferior to the conventional heterosexual relationships.

Andrew Grossman (2000) categorizes queer cinema into two classifications depending on its purpose. Firstly, there are queer films created for the acceptance of general audiences by conforming to the societal expectations placed upon queer individuals. Secondly, there are queer films with radical messages aimed to challenge the gender and sexuality norms (Grossman, 2000, p. xv). According to Kaewprasert, because Thailand's LGBTQ+ community has never experienced gay liberation movements, Thai queer cinemas connote the sense of conformity and commerciality,

¹ In Thai, the BL genre is also known as 'ชายรักชาย,' which can be directly translated as 'men who love men.'

² The term can refer to both transgendered women and effeminate gay men.

rather than the sense of progressiveness and the call for social changes (Kaewprasert, 2005, p. 3). Not limited to the 1980s Thai queer films, but those in the modern era are merely profit-driven and the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights through Thai queer cinema is considered scarce. This is exacerbated by the lack of funding either from governmental agencies or from the already rare queer organizations (Kaewprasert, 2005, p. 3).

At the start of the 21st century, profit-driven Thai queer cinema continues to expand with the popularization and mainstreamization of queer-themed television and online series commonly known as the Boys Love (BL) or *Y* (adopting from 'Yaoi' in Japanese) genre. First of all, Peter A. Jackson points out that the influences that constitute Thailand's queer cultures are "inter-Asian queer regional networks," in which BL *lakorns* gain a fanbase all over the Asian continent (Jackson, 2017, p. 14). Therefore, a new economic potential for Thailand has been created due to the BL series' popularity and their acclaimed reputation as a cultural export. Locally, however, queer autonomy and social acceptance is not guaranteed. According to Thomas Baudinette (2019), the reason behind the previous statement is that some Thai BL series, with *Lovesick, The Series* (2014) as his case study, still uphold "heteronormative conventions" and maintain that homosexual relationships are inferior (Baudinette, 2019, p. 123). Interestingly, according to Peter A. Jackson, it is because of the BL series that Thai queer individuals feel the need to conform to the "commodified lifestyle" presented in the *lakorns* (Jackson, 2017, p. 14). Thus, Thai queer cinema remains unhelpful in assisting queer liberation due to its commercial aspect.

While there had been works about queer identities in Thai cinema, very few are about WLW. It is important to note that all of the mentioned Thai queer cinemas in Kaewprasert, Grossman, Jackson, and Baudinette's research only depicts the lives of *kathoey* and gay men in Thailand with disproportionately fewer stories about individuals in the WLW community. This is partly because there are disproportionately fewer Girl Love (GL) series available in Thailand's mainstream television channels. Additionally, most of the analysis also neglects that GL series are a part of Thai queer cinemas altogether despite the fact that they are increasing in number of production and broadcast.

Methodology

In order to conduct research on the contemporary Thai queer cinema and its representations of the WLW community, I aim to perform textual analysis on the eight selected, most contemporaneous television and online WLW series of which broadcast years range from the early 2010s to the early 2020s. These series will be selectively chosen from those produced by GMM Grammy Television, better known as GMMTV, a subsidiary company of GMM Grammy and The One Enterprise. These selected series have been broadcasted on their distribution channels, which include GMM25, Change2561, and GMMTV-owned YouTube account. The names of the selected series are listed below. I have also noted that in some of these series, the queer female characters are not always the main characters, but their presence remains significant due to the lack of WLW couple representations in contemporary media.

List of Thai GL Series Analyzed

Name of the Series	Year of Broadcasting	Notes
Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา	2013	main characters
Club Friday The Series Season 7 เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์	2016	main characters
Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง	2017	main characters
Club Friday The Series 11 รักที่ไม่ได้ออกอากาศ: รักล้ำเส้น	2019	main characters

Angkhan Khlumpong The series: EP.3 มือที่สาม	2021	featured episode; main characters;
Wake Up Cha Nee: Very Complicated Season 2	2021	featured characters
Bad Buddy Series	2021	featured characters
Club Friday The Series: Love & Belief: รัก 7 ปี	2022	main characters

Unfortunately, this research was conducted at the beginning of 2023 when new GL series from GMMTV and other media production companies were only in their pre-production and production processes. This inhibits the ability of this research to observe the hopeful future that the upcoming GL series may bring about.

As I watch the eight selected series and analyze them, I will identify the emerging and recurring themes, which will be beneficial to the research findings regarding Thai queer cinema's impacts on the real situations of queer women in Thailand. Through my analysis, I hope to problematize the issues regarding the heteronormativity and the situatedness in patriarchy in Thai queer. I will also look into the presentation of gender and sexuality identities of the queer female characters to analyze the relatability of the characters among queer women in Thailand.

Because some insights are required, I will perform qualitative research through personal in-depth interviews. The targeted subjects of analysis will be the audiences of GMMTV WLW series who are the members of the WLW community in Thailand. The questions for the interview subjects will be orchestrated with an aim to analyze their emotional connection with the representations on queer love between individuals identified as female, or the lack thereof, as well as to analyze the notion of queer visibility and recognition given by the GMMTV series. This research project, thus, will be data-driven, aiming to channel the much-needed-to-be-heard voices of Thailand's sapphic community members.

Data Findings and Critical Analysis

There are a total of five individuals interviewed. The criteria for which they were selected as parts of this project are that they must be public and active on their Twitter accounts; this means that they must have the number of followers ranging from 10 to more than 10,000, for as long that their accounts are open for public audience, and that they must Tweet about WLW representation of GMMTV and the opinions they have regarding the series. Below are some personal backgrounds of the respondents. The respondents' real names will be replaced by a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality.

Personal Details of the Respondents

Name (Pseudonym)	Twitter handle	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Occupation	Affiliation with any groups	Number of series from the list watched
Mew	@Thaiglplsmass	24	Female	Sapphic - lesbian	Online shop owner and creator and administrator of her page "Thai GL จะแมสได้ยัง?" (@Thaiglplsmass)	Participated in conferences by Lily Fest and GirlxGirl Thailand as the creator of "Thai GL จะแมสได้ยัง?"	8
Jule	@JrOrjc2	25	Non-binary	Sapphic - unlabeled	Employee in a company	Signed a petition in support for the Marriage	8

						Equality Bill but not affiliated with any LGBTQ+ rights group	
Anne	@cxrry_mx	17	Female	Unlabeled - sexually fluid	High school student	Has her own GL art account and plans to create a YouTube channel but not affiliated with any LGBTQ+ rights group	7
View	@wanmakka	25	Female	Bisexual	Unemployed	Not affiliated with any LGBTQ+ rights group	1
Pat	@glonair	32	Female	Queer	Creator of various pages about Thai media industry	Not affiliated with any LGBTQ+ rights group	8

Section 1

Thailand's Lack of Sapphic Representations and The Stages of Media Production

Thailand's Lack of Sapphic Representations and the Quantity Over Quality Debate: Queer cinema allows people to better understand who they are while simultaneously informing and inspiring them that there are possibilities await. One scholar has put the joy of seeing queer fictional characters on screens or pages into words: "I feel a little more accepted, as if society is telling me, "It's okay. You belong. I see you, and your existence is valid"" (Harris, 2017, p. 6). Unfortunately, this productive effect of queer representations are limited in Thailand, where there have not been enough queer cinemas centering around WLW relationships to begin with. Although television series from GMMTV are selected in this project as case studies, this does not mean there are adequate representations of Thai WLW. GMMTV was merely among the first to explore relationships between women on television and thus, the first in which respondents can see themselves.

Pat, the owner of the online page *Girl's Love On Air*, expressed her dissatisfaction with how GMMTV's GL media have been since the early 2010s as WLW characters only fleetingly appear as supporting characters with no dynamism and no power to move the plots forward. Due to this reason, Pat stated that she had not developed any emotional connection with the characters nor could she see herself in them. This raised a question of whether actual sapphics can feel like their existence matters if their appearances on screens are also insignificant.

Because there was a severe lack of representation, Mew, who runs another online page *Thai GL Pls Mass*, would even force herself to watch the horror genre she disliked just because there are WLW characters (Mew, personal communication, February 21, 2023). Worse yet, another respondent, View, revealed that she has only become a fan of GL series actresses, Pansa "Milk" Vosbein and Patranite "Love" Limpatiyakorn, in 2021 because it was difficult to access GL media living in the countryside of Thailand ten years ago without advanced electronic devices and internet connection. This shows an unevenness within the experiences of the same audience demographics. Because the ability to access queer cinema is an essential part of queer experience, being deprived of such representations also signifies the unevenness among the Thai sapphic community itself.

Nevertheless, many respondents were aware of the emergence of new GL series that will be publicized in the next few years and were extremely hopeful that it could bring positive changes to the ways the community had been portrayed in the past. With only cast lists, teasers, and a few pilots coming out, Pat answered confidently that everything would be different for the GL genre this year and in years to come because the series will finally be created with

dedication by producers who care about the genre. Interestingly, Pat did not even want to count the past portrayals of female queer relationships as ‘representations’ (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Pat’s answer helped raise the critical question: can every media with female homoeroticism be considered sapphic representations? Media presence should be differentiated from accurate representations, which have the power to humanize the characters and allow the audience to confide in them. Sadly, the past WLW media portrayals may not have had that type of power.

Mew analyzed the trajectory of the future GL trends in Thailand to be optimistic regarding the increased number of productions. She emphasized the importance of having as many representations as possible because “it could automatically increase the chances of better representations although there are also chances of negative ones” (Mew, personal communication, February 21, 2023). Furthermore, Mew stated that the quantitative growth of the GL series could solve the prevalent issue in which the audience has to ‘dig’ deep for a small drop of unfulfilling representations. For her, this could result in media diversity and the audience’s freedom of choice. To a certain extent, Mew’s preference for quantity over quality is understandable and even agreeable. However, once again, a question emerged, what if the future collection of series still deprives a real understanding of the sapphic community?

First, Mew’s idea of media diversity may differ from mine. It is crucial that we not only discuss genre diversity but also take into account the intersection of identities represented in the characters. Moreover, as Mew stated herself, there is no guarantee that the increased number of representations will be all accurate and uplifting of the community they are based on. As appealing as it sounds to see ourselves on the television screens, there is a risk that negative images would be perpetuated to the point of irreversibility. If “a flawed version of a community of people” is selected as the truth by the media, “it serves as a gateway for flawed understanding and perceptions of that community to arise and persist” (Reddy, 2014, p. 4). In fact, the Thai BL series can serve as a cautionary tale of this concern since the ongoing issues with BL series are that they have been overproduced without regard to the actual experiences of the Thai gay male community and that fetishization of gay males looms large as their dominating theme. This has resulted in a global-scale misunderstanding of the Thai LGBTQ+ community.

In order to not repeat what had happened with the Thai BL series, the series ought to accurately reflect the queer experience of WLW. Hyper-visibility is “the Band-Aid to an embarrassing problem” rather than the long-lasting solution for the lack of accurate queer representations (McDonald, 2015). Nevertheless, because the upcoming era of female queer representations with the risk of overproduction has barely started, one can only hope that the increase in quantity would go hand in hand with the increase in quality and that meaningful and fulfilling WLW representations can be achieved after all.

The Stages of GMMTV’s Sapphic Representations, The Movements of Content in Media Production, and The Significance of LGBTQ+ Producers in the Making of Improved Adaptations: From my observation, GMMTV’s Thai WLW representations can be divided into two stages: the pre-pandemic (from the early 2010s to the late 2010s) and the post-pandemic (from the early 2020s to present) stages. The two stages were separated by the four-year gap which is a relatively long period because when the GL series returned to the television screens in 2021, many aspects of series production had changed. The representations of female queer relationships from GMMTV during the pre-pandemic stage were evidently not as flourishing as they are today. The few media products that chose to tell the love stories of queer women were those within *Club Friday The Series*, a miniseries consisting of only four to five episodes per season. *Club Friday The Series* is based on the live radio show of the same name on Green Wave 106.5 in which the audience would call into the studio and consult their relationship issues with the co-hosts Napaporn “Aoy” Triv-itwaregune and Saithip “Chod” Montrikul Na Ayudhaya.

As *Club Friday The Series* dramatized and exaggerated the radio program audience’s stories, the homoeroticism among women became one of its overarching themes in the 2010s. In my opinion, the past representations of our community from *Club Friday The Series* had been nothing but the appropriation of female queer identities into shock value for the sake of the heterosexual mass audience’s entertainment. Queer experience has been transformed into dramatic melodrama and even misery porn that plays with the theme of queer tragedy. Throughout the years 2013 to 2019, such plots were included in *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา*, *Club Friday The Series 7*

เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์, *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง*, and *Club Friday The Series 11 รักที่ไม่ได้ออกอากาศ: รักล้ำเส้น*. It can be said that *Club Friday The Series* was almost the only accessible female queer representation back in the 2010s since they were funded by such a big company and got to be published on mainstream media channels, unlike other GL media produced by amateur filmmakers that were published on YouTube.

In the post-pandemic stage, *Club Friday The Series* chose only one female homoerotic story to be retold: *Club Friday The Series: Love & Belief: รัก 7 ปี* (2022). The first reason behind this sudden loss of interest in female queer storylines could be that *Club Friday The Series* has not answered the audience's requirements when it comes to producing progressive GL series. First, unlike the BL genre, which acquires a mass and diverse demographic audience, the GL genre mainly attracts Thailand's sapphic community members. 100% of the people interviewed for this project openly identified themselves as individuals with attraction to women. Jule, a respondent who is a member of Milk and Love fandom, also mentioned that most of their friends from the fanbase and the majority of GL series audience members are all part of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically the sapphic community.

However, *Club Friday The Series* as the mainstream media was created with the heterosexual audience in mind by appropriating off of queer tragedy, which cannot be the only thing queer women are known for. As a group of women facing intersectional oppression from homophobia and misogyny, seeing misunderstood versions of their experiences on *Club Friday The Series* would emphasize our pain and leave us feeling disrespected. Consequently, it is understandable that queer women would no longer prefer *Club Friday The Series* as their sole representation. Assuming that the audience reception would be negative, the production team of *Club Friday The Series*, including Aoy and Chod, presumably feel reluctant to include female homoerotic portrayals within the 2020s era of *Club Friday The Series*. Nevertheless, this was merely a respondent's and my speculation of the changing trend in media production.

In the post-pandemic stage, GMMTV's GL series have been increasingly adapted from sapphic fiction from the 2010s. Every respondent in this project has been a fan of the novels long before they are fans of GMMTV's media products. Thus, compared to *Club Friday The Series*, series based on novels have more emotional linkages to the respondents. Some examples of series adapted from novels include *Bad Buddy* (2021) from *Behind The Scenes* (2017) and *Wake Up Cha Nee: Very Complicated Season 2* (2021) from the 2015 book of the same name. From the interview, every respondent was extremely excited and hopeful for GMMTV's first-ever series with WLW couples as the main protagonists, *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around "23.5 องศาที่โลกเอียง"* (2023), which is also based on the 2018 novel of the same name from EverY Publishing. Therefore, this series will be marked as GMMTV's first full-fledged GL series that could open the door for the development of the GL genre within the company. It is quite unfortunate that *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023) will not be broadcasted by the time this project will have already been completed; consequently, the influences that this series may have on the hopefully more future productions of GL series from GMMTV will not be covered in this project.

The trend of upcoming GL series being increasingly developed from the 2010s popular sapphic fiction sparks an intriguing conversation about the nature of adaptations and the flow of content across media forms and genres. Katherine Sender's "concentric model of mainstream/minority media" (2012) can act as the lens through which we can observe more flexibility in the ways media products are developed. Sender contends that LGBTQ+ portrayals range from those situated at the "professional center" to those at the "peripheries," depending on the amount of funding, the level of training of the professionals, and the extent of content flexibility (Sender, 2012, p. 209-210).

GMMTV and its LGBTQ+ media products are located at the media center, which is described by Sender to be "institutionalized, economically advantaged, and highly professionalized" with mass audiences (Sender, 2012, p. 210). This is due to the fact that GMMTV is one of the most well-known analog television stations and is under GMM Grammy and The One Enterprise, one of the most influential and long-lasting companies in Thailand's entertainment industry. Thus, it is no question that GMMTV can invest a lot of money in their series productions, resulting in higher quality and audience acceptance of their media products, as acclaimed by the amount of awards they have received from Siam Series Awards, Thailand Digital Awards, Howe Awards, and especially Kazz Awards with as high as fourteen wins, among many other prestigious media awards, in these past few years (The One Enterprise, 2021;

Nangdee, 2022; Banmuang, 2022; Sanook, 2022). A limitation of the LGBTQ+ representations at the professional center is that the media conglomerates, like GMMTV, still have to take into account audience members outside of the LGBTQ+ individuals since they remain to be the majority of the audience. As a result, constraints are placed upon the representations of gender and sexual non-conforming individuals, including the sapphic community. This signifies that while GMMTV chooses to represent the gender and sexuality minorities through their entertainment media, their portrayals have been extremely cherry-picked in order not to disrupt the heteronormativity within Thai society.

On the other hand, EverY Publishing, which published both novels that turned into GMMTV's series, *Behind The Scenes* (2017) and *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2018), can be classified as semi-professional media at the margins of the center. This is because many novels selected to be published by EverY Publishing were originally posted on public online platforms by relatively new and 'amateur' authors but later gained popularity and attention from the publishing. Compared to the media conglomerates that GMMTV and its parent company GMM Grammy are, EverY Publishing is a much smaller company with presumably less profit but more interactions with its audience. Most importantly, EverY Publishing's books are quite diverse in genres, be it coming-of-age, fantasy, detective, horror, or even Chinese historical novels. This genre diversity gives LGBTQ+ individuals better opportunities to be seen in a much broader light. Their identities are no longer limited by what the media products at the center tell them what they can or cannot be.

Despite their differences, this does not mean a rigid boundary exists between media conglomerates at the center like GMMTV and smaller companies at the margins like EverY Publishing. Previously GMMTV adapted many BL novels from EverY Publishing into their BL series. At the beginning of 2023, GMMTV selected *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2018) to become their first-ever series with WLW main characters. These all align with Sender's analysis that "evolving media forms and genres that prove profitable may be pulled centripetally towards the economic, industrial, professional center" (Sender, 2012, p. 211). The issue with the flow of content from the margins to the center is that more limitations would be placed upon the representations, making them "less sexually explicit and politically resistant" (Sender, 2012, p. 211). The difficult task for the producers and crew members is to produce the series in a way that would appear tolerable to the mass heterosexual audience while still appealing to the fans of the original books. View, a respondent who was previously a fan of GL novels, revealed that these alterations to be made in the television adaptations are essential because too many sexual and political expressions can lead to the sapphic community being misunderstood by those outside of the community (View, personal communication, March 2, 2023). View's answer made me question whether queer cinema will ever genuinely represent the multiple realities of queer women if the producers and those involved have to think of ways to please the cisgender heterosexual audience constantly. However, considering that the majority of the audience and the political authorities and legislative power remain in the hands of those outside of our community, constraining parts of ourselves for the sake of their recognition and acceptance may continue to be the safest and the only option at the moment.

Another issue with current and upcoming WLW representations is that many continue to be adapted from too outdated novels, according to P. Although the examples of adaptations Pat gave were not from GMMTV, they act as the epitome of how the flows between media forms and genres in media production do not always mean positive things. One of which media products adapted from a 1950s novel perpetuates the Psycho Lesbian trope, a common queer stereotype since the twentieth century (Jenzen, 2013, p. 351). The other reiterates the toxic masculinity and seniority prevalent in the Thai BL series from a decade ago. Pat was so disgusted by these adaptation choices and regarded these WLW media products as "unethical media representations" (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). The conversation with Pat sparked the debate on what a good adaptation truly means. I contend that good adaptations are not always those that strictly follow the texts; they are not those that perpetuate the age-old hurtful perceptions towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Rather, adaptations should be able to give new meanings to the texts and reflect both the time-specific states and the future hopes for our society.

Looking at this issue from another perspective, television adaptations give a chance of redemption for the original content to be improved and more uplifting of the community the authors based their writings upon. Although there is no promise, GMMTV and its television adaptation of *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023) give the

audience a hopeful future to look forward to. As I interviewed the respondents, I recognized the longing for and optimism to see better representations in their voices. This is because they were fans of the original novel, and, most significantly, they knew who would be the director for this future project: Kanittha “Fon” Kwunyoo. Fon is extremely well-immersed in the media scene, having worked as a screenwriter, director, and producer. Her previous directorial works include *Karma* (2015), *Happy Birthday* (2018), *Who Are You* (2020), and *10 Years Ticket* (2022).

With these media products, Fon was praised by two respondents, Jule and Pat, for her talent in portraying social and familial issues in films and television series. They expressed high hopes for *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023). The novel was originally written with more of a light-hearted tone that did not touch upon the issues of LGBTQ+ rights as much. However, with Fon’s background, the respondents were certain that the television adaptation of *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2018) would be improved by including new nuances to the series and showcasing the issue of LGBTQ+ acceptance in family institutions, among many others. Due to this reason, future fans of the series are more likely to feel even more related to the series than to the original text, and relativity is the key to the success of a media product.

Gender and sexuality diversity backstage can ignite changes on screens. Having Fon directing GMMTV’s first-ever GL series is a pivotal moment in Thai queer cinema history because Fon herself is a masculine-presenting woman who never hides the fact that she is part of Thailand’s LGBTQ+ community. It is also public knowledge, too, that the acclaimed director is currently in a relationship with a well-known Thai actress. Although Sender states that “GLBT producers and writers are involved in both minority and mainstream representations” (Sender, 2012, p. 208), the majority of contemporary Thai LGBTQ+-themed television series are directed by cisgender male directors who “take up 99% of the industry” (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Therefore, Fon, as the only queer female director in GMMTV that the respondents knew of, is the exception that the Thai LGBTQ+ audience longs to see. In my opinion, sapphic media products can become meaningful to the community when they are produced and directed by those who embody experiences of being queer in Thailand. What the producers have gone through in real life is what other queer women have at least once experienced and, hopefully, what they will see translated through the characters’ emotions and actions. Although barely even starting, the future for GMMTV’s GL genre seems much more promising than ever.

Section 2

Patterns and Significations of Sapphic Images and Their Regulating Discourses on Female Queer Sexuality as Presented on GMMTV

The Discursive Formation and the Resignification of Images Through Thai Sapphic Media: Contemporary representations of female homoeroticism by GMMTV can be recognized as one of the many sites that help to establish a standard set of meanings of and perceptions towards female queer identities in Thailand. With the repetitive portrayals of certain types of images representing female queer relationships, a pattern “of discursive events that brings into being a common object” is constructed. This process is understood as “discursive formation” (Barker, 2008, p. 90), which is most evident in the pre-pandemic stage of GMMTV’s Thai WLW representations. Unfortunately, the images and their meanings predominantly connote immense negativity among female queer individuals. Three out of five respondents, Mew, Jule, and Pat, expressed strong discontentment towards the multiple seasons of *Club Friday The Series* —and rightly so as the 2010s images of erotic and romantic love between women had created numerous misjudgments towards the Thai sapphic community represented as the immoral and inferior group.

The unethical sapphic trope is the first unfavorable pattern of discursive events (Barker, 2008, p. 90) that I could recognize from the majority of the sapphic series from the 2010s. Under this trope, queer women are presented as sexual and moral deviants who break social norms. It involves a pattern of scenes portraying women making love

and cheating on their respective and ‘appropriate’ heterosexual partners with each other, as seen in *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013). This trope renders female queerness one of the most controversial identities in *Club Friday The Series 11 รักที่ไม่ได้ออกอากาศ: รักล้ำเส้น* (2019), where the sapphic protagonist has an affair with her mother-in-law. Other than this visible pattern, from both *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013) and *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017), the meaning that can be connoted is that disloyalty is a female-queer-specific trait. The repeated images in both series are those of the protagonists cheating on their long-term female partners with another man.

In Thai society, the aforementioned misconducts are considered sexual misconduct that deters not only from the heteronormative values but also from the well-respected Buddhist precepts, which undeniably are the determination of a ‘good person’ in Thai society. Theravada Buddhism in the Thai context is already sexist in the ways women are perceived as more impure by nature compared to men, who can be purified by ordination into monkhood. Women, in the Thai Buddhist teachings, are described as “more firmly rooted in their worldly attachments than are men” (Sharp et al., 1975, p. 185) —these worldly attachments include the obsession with sexuality by going against the third Buddhist Precept that is to refrain from lustfully and sensually immoral behaviors. As queer women, we are already transgressive due to our subversive sexuality. Presenting sapphic characters as sexual deviants who cannot contain their lustful desire is thus the reiteration of everything negative about female homosexuality as women in a Buddhist society whose sexual impurities, including homosexuality, are much more condemned than those of men. This further alienates us away from the normative center where acceptance lies.

Various seasons of *Club Friday The Series* from the 2010s are also fond of creating a pattern of images where queer women are mentally-ill and suicidal. In the two earliest portrayals of queer women on television screens, *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013) and *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017), the protagonists of each series immediately resort to attempting suicide after a miscommunication with their respective female partner. It is true that off-screen LGBTQ+ individuals disproportionately suffer from mental health issues and suicidal thoughts due to their day-to-day encounters with prejudicial acts like bullying and hate crime, as well as anxiety deriving from fear of such violence (Clayton, 2020). However, these television representations do nothing to report the truth about queer mental health crisis. Instead, they merely present queer women as irrational and unreliable partners who are not fitting to be in a relationship with anyone. Although the characters’ suicidal attempt does not result in their death as they used to for the Thai queer cinema in the 1980s, it prolongs the generalization that queer relationships are unrequited, miserable, and toxic, sustaining the stigmatization of love between women.

One of the most harmful tropes that can be found in the pre-pandemic series is the depiction of WLW relationships as inferior to heterosexual ones. This trope is manifested into multiple patterns, but all of them highlight that men need to be involved in every female queer relationship. Firstly, in every pre-pandemic season of *Club Friday The Series*, at least one or both of the main characters would be depicted as though they ‘turn gay’ because of previous bad experiences with men. This renders female queerness the second option with less significance. Thus, the character’s relationship with their female partner would always be fleeting in how a man can intervene in their relationship at any time. *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013) can be the example of this pattern when Dream, one of the protagonists, found her partner Jay cheating on her with a man and Jay asks her to leave them alone, saying “We should try to live a normal life. I don’t want anyone calling me a pervert” (Montrikul Na Ayudhaya et al., 2013/2013). Here, the perception of female queer relationships as abnormal is reflected in the sapphic character’s own words.

In *Club Friday The Series 7 เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์* (2016), although there is no male involvement in the main characters Ohaey and Rung’s relationship, the idea that a female partner cannot fulfill the role of a man is heavily accentuated. In one scene, Ohaey helps Rung carry her shopping bags but struggles at the task and abruptly the peace of the shopping mall with her fumbling gestures. In another, Ohaey feels weakened by her family issues but realizes that she cannot find comfort in Rung because she is a woman and what she truly wants are strong shoulders of a man that can ‘protect’ her (Montrikul Na Ayudhaya et al., 2016/2016). This statement is the most apparent

evidence of how the past representations of female queer love constantly treat WLW relationships as inferior, with the way the producers view romantic expressions between women as unfulfilling.

From my analysis of the recurrent discursive patterns within the 2010s *Club Friday The Series* (2013-2019), it is not to say that there is no chance of the resignification of images. Images are not fixed and stable; instead, they are the site of struggle for establishing and re-establishing the dominant discursive meanings. When asked the respondents if the contemporary sapphic media since the beginning of the current decade has had any taunting images of the Thai WLW community yet, Mew and Pat stated that they felt they did not have the absolute answer to this question because there have not been enough representations that help them realize the repeated chain of images.

With the post-pandemic representations and the Thai GL genre only in its initial development stage, all respondents are not only hopeful but confident that the once negative pattern of images will shift. Consequently, they expect societal perceptions of queerness in women to be transformed. The respondents genuinely wish the pre-pandemic perceptions constructed by harmful tropes would be erased. Mew and Pat specifically chose to rely on the newly-developed images of our community that they have yet to see.

Additionally, another reason why Mew, Pat, and other respondents seemed highly confident in the future sapphic representations so much, despite them not even broadcasted yet, is that there are increasingly positive patterns in the 2020s series. For one, the intersecting identities and the diversity within the WLW group are gradually included in GMMTV, specifically in *Friend Zone 2: Dangerous Area* (2020). This series was constantly brought up and praised by three respondents, Mew, Jule, and Pat, because of its inclusion of an asexual sapphic character Amm and her partner Chris, who is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The three respondents deemed *Friend Zone 2: Dangerous Area* (2020) highly realistic because it portrays the multiplicity within the sapphic community, which has often been understood as monolithic by outsiders.

On the contrary, the characters of Amm and Chris demonstrate the complexity in being queer as an identity and queerness itself. Although not initially included in the list as the research object for this project, after listening to the respondents, this series and its decision to include non-normative but realistic images of female queer relationships are a big step for sapphic representations in Thailand. Despite the expected boom of the Thai GL genre, there are community members who continue to be underrepresented in the media. While the success story of some community members getting the representations they always wish to see should be applauded, we must be aware of “the exclusion of those members of sexual minority communities who aren’t happy, healthy, well-adjusted, and well-to-do” (Sender, 2012, p. 217). Chris and Amm are a good start for GMMTV. Still, the company should make exploring diversity within LGBTQ+ groups a priority in their future media productions.

Second, another positive pattern seen from the post-pandemic sapphic series and expected from future representations is that the WLW characters nowadays are no longer encumbered by the tropes of queer tragedy that have almost always led them to bad endings, be it heartbreak, separation, or even death; these were prevalent in the pre-pandemic GMMTV series *Anne*, the youngest respondent, explained that she disliked some past representations because they highlighted the images in which LGBTQ+ individuals are not accepted in Thai society and family institutions. Now that there are increased representations where the main protagonists can end up together without any political and societal restraint, Anne believed that this would facilitate the acceptance of queer people outside of the television screens (Anne, personal communication, February 27, 2023). Therefore, for Anne, contemporary sapphic representations should focus on the positive and progressive images of queer individuals, rather than the restrictive ‘past.’

Unlike Anne, I believe the painful experiences and emotions of queer individuals remain integral to our identity construction and relationship formation. It might be tempting to present what we wish to see in real life on screen because it serves “our desires not to be trapped, to be aware, to have agency” (Sender, 2012, p. 216). It might be alluring to imagine for once that we, as the whole community, have moved on from the hurtful past by erasing such a narrative of queer history from contemporary LGBTQ+ media representations. However, it remains the reality that difficult emotions, be it “‘nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness’” (Love, 2007, p. 4), linger and shape the everyday queer experience. The decision

to detraditionalize queer media portrayals is equivalent to the decision to obscure the legacies of queer past that still haunt and remain the reality of many LGBTQ+ individuals today. Thus, sapphic representations that are entirely rid of queer struggles may not be the most accurate portrayals of our community.

With producers building the on-screen utopian world of the all-too-perfect queer lifestyle, the collective queer history and experiences in the largely heteronormative world have been completely erased from the dominant narratives. Not only that, the mediated optimistic images of queer individuals are constructed upon the refusal to portray the lives of some community members. This is especially true for those who continue to face denials from society, family members, and friends, along with ongoing discrimination and homophobia in real life. To exemplify, contrary to the series *Bad Buddy* (2021) View consumed, in which the characters can openly engage in homosexuality without anyone's eyebrows raising, she expressed her worry about telling her best friend that she is bisexual because it might affect their friendship (View, personal communication, March 2, 2023).

Post-pandemic sapphic media, including the upcoming GL series, thus, can feel extremely detached from the truth off-screen. As the Thai media industry persistently feels uncomfortable discussing the 'hard feelings,' it will continue to be challenging for the sapphic community members to find the representations that are reflective of our experiences as queer women in Thailand. Additionally, minimizing and burying away the 'hard feelings' misinforms the majority heterosexual audience that the long history of queer struggles is over. In fact, the march toward LGBTQ+ rights persists. This is not to say that positive queer representations should not be included in Thailand's mainstream media and that the only necessary depictions of our community should be the ones that keep us miserable. What sapphic women, along with other LGBTQ+ individuals, genuinely need is representations that could reflect the queer pain and give a sense of closure to the community members while also helping us explore the possibilities of queer pride and joy.

The Governing Discourse of Heteroflexibility in GMMTV's Sapphic Series: Heteroflexibility is the idea that cisgender heterosexual individuals can explore same-sex romantic and erotic relationships without losing their status quo as heterosexual persons. This concept is deeply rooted in heteronormativity while continuing to romanticize queer relationships as exotic and experimental (Annati & Ramsey, 2021, p. 316). It is one of the most prevailing tropes in *Club Friday The Series* back in the 2010s, because adopting from Pat's statement, they were created by those who lacked understanding of the sapphic community (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Between 2013 and 2019, three out of the only five mainstream female queer representations employed heteroflexibility in their narratives. These series include *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013), *Club Friday The Series 7 เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์* (2016), and *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017).

The heteroflexible narrative is permeated within the homoeroticism found in women's friendships. There has long been a common social perception towards WLW that "women engaged in same-sex relationships, or masculine-identified females, are often framed within a narrative of innocent, almost childlike love" (Sender, 2012, p. 214). Accordingly, the three seasons of the pre-pandemic *Club Friday The Series* play with the idea that it is ubiquitous for women to 'confuse' platonic love with romantic love.

This is most evident in *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013). The protagonists, Jay and Dream, are shown to have issues in both of their relationships with a man. As childhood friends, they resort to each other during hard times and gradually develop a romantic and sexual relationship. Their relationship is presented to us as though their mentality has never evolved past their time as teenagers, as it is incredibly childish to the point of irrational. However, this relationship ends after Dream reveals that she is pregnant and that she wishes for a 'normal' life without Jay in it. This similar theme is also explored in *Club Friday The Series 7 เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์* (2016). The characters, Ohaey and Rung, initially become friends through an online game, although Ohaey pretends to be a man the whole time. After their relationship develops and Ohaey reveals her true gender identity, Ohaey realizes she is just so desperately lonely that she misunderstands platonic love for a romantic one.

Both examples demonstrate that while homoerotic tensions are common in friendships among women, they cannot mean anything more than a fleeting confusion that usually occurs when the two women are passing through a vulnerable time in their life, often caused by men. It is highly prevalent that, in the end, the developed romantic relationships in the GMMTV's pre-pandemic series are represented as inauthentic as the characters would 'return' to their default heterosexuality. Consequently, female queer relationships in real life are invalidated through their media portrayals since society would not perceive them as lasting.

Moreover, the idea that women's friendships are interwoven by homoerotic tendencies can be interpreted as the manifestation of the male gaze and fetishization of lesbianism. *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017) plays with this exact conception of the ambiguity between homoerotic friendships and female queer relationships. The two characters, Cee and Kate, hide their committed romantic relationship behind the facade of friendship. Although David, the male character who is involved in their relationship, speculates the homoerotic tensions, he simply concludes that it is because both of the women are attracted to him and one is jealous of her 'friend' for getting to be his wife-to-be. In line with Lisa M. Diamond, an American psychologist with a specialty in female sexuality, the only valid and approved romantic and sexual relationship between women is that which arouses male audience "while reassuring them that the participants remain sexually available in the conventional heterosexual marketplace" (Diamond, 2005, p. 105). This harms not only queer women in a way that their romantic relationships would rarely be recognized as anything more than an exceptionally close friendship but also heterosexual women whose even slightest interactions with their female friends would constantly be fetishized under the male gaze.

Additionally, GMMTV's pre-pandemic sapphic representations act as a disciplinary technology that reinforces the idea that all women, queer or not, are obligated to abide by the normative and expected gender roles for women: to form a socially-accepted nuclear family through heterosexual marriage and child-raising. Female queer relationships are presented as an "experiment phase" (Annati, 2020, p. 8) that can be abandoned and transformed to heterosexuality when the perfect family-building time arrives. Female same-sex relationships are depicted as an exploratory tool for heterosexual women to realize that their faithful, irresistible, and 'natural' sexual orientation is heterosexuality by highlighting the 'illegitimacy' and 'superficiality' of female queerness. This is evident in all three pre-pandemic *Club Friday The Series* seasons.

To exemplify, the character of Ohaey from *Club Friday The Series 7 เหตุเกิดจากความรัก: รักออนไลน์* (2016) realizes that she is not homosexual after having already been in more-than-a-year-long relationship with Rung because she feels as though she has not been properly fulfilling her roles as a mother and that she still needs a man to protect her. Moreover, in both *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013) and *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017), one of the characters ends up marrying a man and carries his child for the sake of normalcy in others' perceptions. This happens even after the two characters of each series already agree to be life partners. These heteroflexible images from the 2010s imply that family formation and motherhood, suggested as the better choice for women, will never be attainable for queer women. Having seen none other than the representations where women have no chance of ending up together because one's partner will eventually 'turn straight' can cause off-screen sapphic women to feel disheartened that they would ever find stability and security in their relationships with women.

More often than not, human sexual orientation is fluid and "constantly fluctuating throughout our lives," as stated by Mew (Mew, personal communication, February 21, 2023). However, heteroflexibility within the 2010s GMMTV's series, in my opinion, does not equate to bisexuality, pansexuality, or even sexual fluidity. This is because, at the end of each mentioned series, a protagonist will refrain from homosexuality altogether, stating that they have learned now that they are wrong to engage in romantic and erotic relationships with women in the first place. These heteroflexible characters are depicted as confused heterosexual women who engage in a homoerotic relationship with another woman as a mistake that they should be ashamed of and run away from by marrying a man. Through these portrayals, sexual fluidity is completely erased from the mediated queer narratives. This, in turn, reinforces the binary system of gay and straight.

Interestingly, one of the series I have an aversion to, *Club Friday The Series 3: รักเธอ รักเขา และรักของเรา* (2013) is praised by Pat to be an accurate representation of queer women because she stated 80-90% of women that she have encountered have to once be attracted to their female childhood friend before marrying their husband (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). I do agree with this conception as it is very common for one to explore their sexuality throughout their life but especially when they are younger as it does not mean that their previous romantic experiences with women are not genuine, which is in accordance with Mew's statement on sexual fluidity. However, what made me strongly disagree with Pat was her overgeneralization that “almost all WLW can ‘return to heterosexuality,’ unlike gay men who would no longer find women attractive” (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023)

For me, this statement is deeply rooted in patriarchy, which is essentially what the 2010s GMMTV's series were constructed upon. A variety of questions emerged within me. Why is it that when a relationship has zero involvement with men, people will find a way to center the narrative around them? Why is it that when women love other women, our relationships are repeatedly contested for validity? And finally, why and how could this statement come from a sapphic community member herself?

According to Pat, the series presenting queer women who end up in a marriage with a man is not the epitome of heteroflexibility like I have criticized, but rather the accurate depiction of queer women. I then asked Pat if these heteroflexible representations can truly bring about the acceptance of diversity or the lack of it. This is because, in the 2010s, there were very few representations that helped normalize healthy and long-lasting lesbian and female queer relationships. From my observation, they rather reinforce the misunderstanding that queer women can ‘turn straight’ after meeting the right man. After my question, Pat got defensive on behalf of the GMMTV's producers by criticizing queer feminists on Twitter, known among Thai internet users as *Femtwit*³ (“เฟมทวิต”), for their excessive complaint and attack on these media representations and their creators. According to Pat, the media can only present a selective and limited number of realities, which is not their fault. Thus, we must give some time and chances for the media producers, not absentmindedly attacking them (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). I understand Pat's hopefulness in waiting for the right time for the perfect and accurate representations to be produced. However, I still believe in the power of audience criticisms and their ability to ignite changes in media production.

Nevertheless, Pat did acknowledge that this common phenomenon of queer women ‘turning straight’ and engaging in normative heterosexual married life can be because of the pressure for Thai women to uphold certain social expectations (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). I contend that queer women, with Pat as an example, can internalize the heteronormativity discourse and become what Foucault termed “docile bodies” by complying to the social ideals (Barker, 2008, p. 91). Suppose GMMTV continues to produce media products that inform us that our relationships are invalid compared to those of heterosexual individuals. In that case, off-screen queer women are more prone to internalize that it is realistic and possible for us to completely eliminate our homosexual ‘past.’

Fortunately, heteroflexibility is rarely presented in the post-pandemic female queer representations. This engenders the normalizing trend of female same-sex relationships and sexuality. To exemplify, in *Wake Up Cha Nee: Very Complicated Season 2* (2021), although the characters Aoey and Miriam did not end up together, it was not because one ‘realized’ that she is straight as it was instead because they carry different values in a romantic relationship. Another example of this improvement can be found in *Bad Buddy* (2021). While the series initially plays with the idea of homoerotic tendencies and ambiguity in friendships among women, they conclude that such ambiguity can also result in a healthy romantic relationship, unlike the past representations.

Eroticism and Sexuality in Media as Queer Liberation or Fetishism?: The issues of Thai queer women being met with both ostracization from society and fetishism by the male gaze have been carried onto their mediated identities on television. While sensual scenes in heterosexual media are often interpreted as romantic and, thus, well-approved by

³ Femtwit is an online slang invented by a group of anti-feminist Facebook users to criticize feminists who discuss the issues of gender inequality via online spaces, specifically Twitter.

the predominantly heterosexual mass audience, love scenes in female queer television series are often regarded as problematic and disruptive of society's good morality. This issue is relevant to the aforementioned unethical sapphic trope in the pre-pandemic stage of female queer representations.

Female sexuality is already a taboo topic in Thailand (Sinnott, 2004, p. 143) due to the Thai Regime of Images, a concept by Peter A. Jackson (2004). It explains the Thai-specific phenomenon in which the "surface calm" of the nationalistic appropriateness in the public sphere is maintained not by physical force, but by the Thai subjects' self-monitoring, disciplining, and silencing (Jackson, 2004, p. 182). In terms of female queerness, since most already would not believe that two women can be in a relationship, it is easier to keep their sexuality personal (Sinnott, 2004, p. 144). This helps maintain their public social status as heterosexual, while simultaneously resulting in the invisibility and the lack of understanding towards WLW identities. Consequently, the mediated images of sapphics as sexually and morally deviants become the sole 'truths' of the off-screen queer women. This is done while capitalizing on the 'provocative' images of queerness by rendering sapphic identities into shock value, attracting more audience and media coverage.

To exemplify, when *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017) was on air, many online news platforms reported on the series by only emphasizing on the love scenes and using headlines that sexualized the actresses while also expressing the platform's homophobia, such as "From Besties to Lessies Woonsen-Paula's Heated Love Scenes, Deliciously Hot!!" ("จากเพื่อนซี้เป็นเลสเบี้ยน วันเส้น - พอลล่า เลิฟซีนเดือด แชนแนลเลยคะคุณ!!") (Kapook, 2017) and "Woonsen Pleasurably Kisses Paula, Admits They Are So 'Lesbian,' They Get Goosebumps" ("วันเส้น จูบ พอลล่า เฟลลิ่งๆ ยอมรับเป็นกันจนขนลุก") (Thairath, 2017). One other online news platform also highlighted the fact that provocativeness could attract more audience since the series received 2.4 million views in the first twenty-four hours that it was broadcasted, (Topline Digital, 2017).

Another issue with eroticism in GMMTV's sapphic series emerged. According to Jule, the message that Thai sapphic media products from GMMTV have disseminated since the early 2010s is that queer women must have hyperfixation on the sexual and erotic aspects of a relationship to the point of acquiring hypersexual behaviors (Jule, personal communication, February 24, 2023). The issue of hypersexuality in mainstream LGBTQ+ media is, however, not entirely new since many series within the Thai BL genre have also been criticized for portraying gay male characters in an excessively sexualized light, placing sex as the focal point in their relationships. Pat expressed that she feared history would repeat itself with the newly-developed GL genre (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Her worry is not without reason, as there is a high chance that the GL genre will follow the path the BL genre already laid down for them, including all the mistakes it has made along the way.

Interestingly, Pat stated that provocative sexual and erotic performances between actresses are much more damaging than those between male actors. According to Pat, this could lead to "the devaluation of women" (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Within Thailand's queer cinema scene, the images of female homosexuality are considered more disruptive and, thus, even more assigned to the private domain than those of male homosexuality. Pat's statement can reflect the social values placed upon Thai women whose assertive sexuality, or lack thereof, is constantly scrutinized and viewed as a negative characteristic. On the other hand, male sexual assertiveness is recognized as a normative trait for men (Eden, 2015). This is because the Thai Regime of Images is always in operation in Thai society and permeates into the issues of sexuality, creating "an idealized form" of sexual expressions (Tong, 2014, p. 55).

A question emerged: who is there to determine how valuable a woman is based on her experiences with sex and eroticism and whether those actions are normatively heterosexual? I have received the response to my own question from Pat's statement. As one of the state organs and power apparatuses (Tong, 2014, p. 55), the entertainment industry, specifically GMM Grammy, GMMTV, and its distribution channels like GMM25 and Change2561, can regulate the dominant discourse on female eroticism and determine which aspect of sexuality should be publicized or kept private. Unfortunately, all of us can fall victim to the Thai Regime of Images, experience "anxiety over appearances" (Morris 2002, p. 53, as cited in Jackson, 2004, p. 182), and become hyper-focused on the acts of 'saving face.'

From this explanation, Pat has become one of the many victims of the Thai Regime of Images since Pat even slightly criticized those who believe that the liberation in sexual expressions is a part of women's rights.

Although I understand the standpoint of my respondents, I would like to argue that sex is an integral dimension to the love life of some queer women as much as it is for heterosexual and male homosexual relationships. To successfully create a humanistic queer representation, the media industry should not feel reluctant to portray the sex life of queer women if they can do so accurately. Most importantly, the media should refrain from intentionally presenting us as the social disruptors for merely existing and expressing love. Hence, there is no point in advocating for an even more restriction of sexual expressions for the fear of devaluation of women. In my honest opinion, female queer representations already exist in the ambiguity between the hypersexualization of queer love and the restrictive queer sexual expressions. In the first instance, sapphic women are depicted to be overtly-sexual beings. In the second instance, the media industry employs censorship to restrict the mere expressions of love shared between female characters; this automatically labels off-screen sapphic women as a possible threat to Thai society.

Although not repressive in terms of physical force and violence, the censorship of a media product is a delicate and well-thought-out suppressive operation carried on by "an extended network of state regulatory bodies" (Tong, 2014, p. 2), be it the Ministry of Culture, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), or the mainstream media conglomerates, like GMMTV, which can be privately-owned but continue to be implicitly state-regulated. As some non-conforming sexual practices and relationships are censored, it informs us as the audience who in Thai society are considered 'deviant' and deserving of social sanctions. To prevent their media products from being canceled altogether, the producers and those involved need to abide by altering their media products to conform to the preexisting gender and sexuality mold. Though not even as extreme as those in heterosexual and BL lakorns, almost reaching the point of nudity, hypocritically, sapphic series is the only type of media being governed and disciplined.

The most recent case of unreasonable censorship was in 2021 with an episode of a horror series *Angkhan Khlumpong The Series: EP.3 มือที่สาม* (2021). It was revealed by the director Aticha "Mui" Tanthanawigrai herself that the GMM Grammy's distribution channel GMM25 ordered those involved with the series to cut out scenes that could have bad influence on the morality and goodness within Thai society, which turned out to be the intimate scenes between two female characters (Tanthanawigrai, 2021). Nevertheless, the uncensored version is still available on the application AIS Play, which ironically becomes more accessible after the broadcasting period on television ended. Comparing the two versions, I found some scenes that were deleted by GMM25 unproblematic. Although there is one implied scene of the two female characters initiating sexual intercourse, there is no nudity. The rest of the love-expressing scenes only involve minimal touching and kissing. In fact, it was less provocative than some of GMMTV's heterosexual *lakorns* I have watched in the past. Thus, it is questionable when the female same-sex love scenes were exclusively ordered to be eliminated. This demonstrates that even in the post-pandemic sapphic media portrayals, romantic and erotic relationships between women are still demonized by the largely heteronormative Thai society and its entertainment industry.

My issue with contemporary sexual images of queer women differs from my respondents' concern over the public appearances of sapphic women. In my opinion, it is not that sexual representations are not regulated enough or that there are too many and too explicitly erotic. Instead, it is the ongoing fetishism of female, queer sexual and romantic relationships that I believe is urgently in need of change. As mentioned before, the male gaze of some cis-gender heterosexual men continues to fetishize the love between women based on a desire to engage in sexual activities with two women simultaneously (Annati, 2020, p. 8-9). Unlike GMM25, I deem that the most provocative, and thus most uncomfortable, scene to watch in *Angkhan Khlumpong The Series: EP.3 มือที่สาม* (2021) is when the characters of Plearn and Nutty take turns to seduce a male character Koh. While the two women arousingly touch his body, Koh, tied to a chair, smiles contentedly. This particular scene initially agitated me because it permeates the idea that female homosexual sexuality is catered to the male audience.

However, the writing approach of the series allows me, as one of the queer feminist audience members, to reclaim the predominant narrative of sapphic women as fetishized objects. Although still filmed in a way that mimics

the male gaze, the series takes an opposite turn. It is revealed that all the seduction is only to lure Koh to sit on the cursed chair. The episode ends with Koh's death after the ghost from the chair takes him with her. It can be interpreted that Koh dies because of his exorbitant lust, especially toward queer women who have no interest in him. Although I am uncertain of the producers' intention when writing this ending sequence, I personally read this scene as a criticism of the male gaze and the fetishization of female homoerotic expressions. The ending affirms that no matter how confident and how much cisgender heterosexual men believe that female sexuality is geared towards them, there is an abundance of possibilities that sexual and romantic expressions between women can exist outside of heteronormativity and for other women's pleasure alone.

With *Angkhan Khlumpong The Series: EP.3 มือที่สาม* (2021) marking the beginning of the post-pandemic era of GMMTV's sapphic media, we can speculate that the upcoming representations will bring about the liberation of queer eroticism. This has to be done in a way that does not perpetuate the social stigmatization of queer women as provocative beings. In the end, the answer to the question of whether the inclusion of sexual scenes in female queer representations signifies queer liberation or fetishism continues to be ambiguous. It is all about creating a balanced and correct understanding unencumbered by the male gaze and social stigmatization. Beyond what the outsiders see us, it is most significant that the Thai sapphic community refrains from internalizing the hatred towards queer sexual expressions and starts advocating for female queer representations that humanize our romantic and sexual experiences.

Section 3

GMMTV and the Division Between Profitability and LGBTQ+ Rights Promotions

GMMTV's Commercial Goals as the Hindrance to the Production of Sapphic Representations: Pat, a respondent who is well-immersed and highly knowledgeable in the entertainment industry, revealed that the most significant factor for GMMTV when deciding to produce a new media product is whether it will attract a large number of audiences and sponsors. Unfortunately, the company seems to speculate that the GL genre would not generate much money and perceive them as a business risk. GMMTV's lack of belief in the success of female queer representations simultaneously signifies a lack of confidence in the significance of female same-sex relationships and the sapphic community, who are desperate to see themselves accurately depicted on the television screens. As a media conglomerate, GMMTV undoubtedly prioritizes the profitability of its media products more than its promotion of LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality.

I contend that all of these reasons are related to why their first full-fledged GL series, *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around*, has only recently been broadcasted. Additionally, the delay in the GL genre investment is also a result of GMMTV's attempt to observe the GL market size and growth from the smaller media companies prior to making any crucial decisions. Having GMM Grammy and The One Enterprise, one of the most influential entertainment conglomerates in Thailand, as the parent organizations automatically makes GMMTV more privileged than smaller companies. If GMMTV finally decides to start developing their GL series, this would automatically mean the impediment of the chances to generate profits of the semi-professional entertainment companies. It can be recognized that not only does GMMTV attempt to imitate other companies' patterns of GL series only when it finds it convenient, but GMMTV also starts to "stunt small-business growth to keep new entrants and potential competitors at bay" (Stewart, 2021). This is in accordance with Pat's statement during the interview I conducted (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023)

It is also public knowledge that there are various cases of mistreatment of GMMTV actresses. GMMTV has long been reluctant to promote their female actors and give them leading roles in series across genres. On the contrary, its male actors are given excessive opportunities to play diverse characters, allowing them to grow as an actor. Their possibilities are almost limitless since they can initially grow their fan base by taking the protagonist role in a BL series and continue to take the same role in GMMTV's heterosexual *lakorns* (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). One Twitter account already mentioned the mistreatment of GMMTV actresses back in 2022, signifying that this has been an ongoing and unsolved issue. The owner of the post stated that while all of these opportunities are

given to the company's male actors, the actresses continue to be confined to their supporting roles if they are not given the role of a female protagonist, which not everyone would receive this career-changing opportunity (สตอรัชชีเลนย์, 2022). With the reluctance of the company to invest in not only the female queer series but also their actresses, this issue of actress mistreatment has been exacerbated.

This informs me that, despite their talent and charisma, which are not inferior to the male actors, GMMTV actresses are not allowed to shine on their own and lead women-empowering narratives. Pat revealed that some company staff claimed that they have tried to pitch the idea of including female actresses in more projects but it was turned down by the company's higher-level officers as well as sponsors (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Thus, while we ask for better WLW representations regarding number and accuracy, the discussion about gender inequality under the GMMTV building's roof must be involved (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). The complaint over GMMTV's innumerable manifestations of gender inequality for its female actresses is found among fans and the actresses themselves, who find it prejudicial to be treated so unfairly by the company that should have taken care of them. One of such actresses is Yongwaree "Fah" Anilbol, an actress signed under GMMTV who is currently on hiatus. On May 7th of 2023, Anilbol went on a live stream on her personal Instagram account and discussed the toxic work environment that disproportionately prioritizes and pampers male actors and the discrimination she and other GMMTV actresses have been facing: "If you are a female actor, you are always wrong... If something happens, you will get blamed first. And that's the system, and I don't know why but if you are a guy, you will just get out of it easily" (Anilbol, 2023).

I argue that the belief that female actresses and series that place them at the forefront would be unprofitable is rooted in misogyny. This would result in unfair treatment that many actresses under GMMTV must endure. Hence, the lack of GL series and opportunities for GMMTV actresses is interconnected. For as long as GMMTV continues to hesitate to grant more significant roles to its actresses, the GL genre, which unquestionably has to be led by GMMTV's actresses, would also be produced in a much less amount, and vice versa. One of Fah's statements reflects the reality that many women, especially queer women, both under GMMTV and outside of the television screens, can identify with: "We are trying hard to have a place to stand, and sometimes we just don't have that" (Anilbol, 2023).

Despite the cowardliness of GMMTV in exploring the GL genre, there are people behind the scene who act as resisting forces and help increase the visibility of female queer characters on screens. *Bad Buddy* (2021) and its producer and director, Noppaharnach "Aof" Chaiwimol, can be the exemplar of the tension between the people behind the camera and the company which owns a media product. According to Pat, Chaiwimol added an independent romantic storyline for the WLW characters, Ink and Pa, making them much more significant than mere supporting characters (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). It demonstrates hope in the future of LGBTQ+ media production if at least one person believes there is room for enhancement to represent the diverse communities in society.

The addition of Ink and Pa's love is exceptionally well-received, much like Chaiwimol's speculation (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Contrary to GMMTV's underestimation of the GL genre, the Ink-Pa couple has created a fandom of its own, along with the fandom of the actresses who portrayed them, Milk and Love. Four out of five respondents are a part of both fandoms and deem the WLW representation in *Bad Buddy* (2021) as the most accurate for its mundanity, which was considered rare for what we commonly found in other portrayals of female queerness.

It is undeniable that monetary value remains the primary reason why a media company chooses to produce a media product in the first place. I contend that the upcoming representations should be those that can bring not only profits to the entertainment company but also accurate and non-toxic images to our television screens. This renders true for the characters of Ink and Pa, who were so popular that they were included in a mini-series commercial for Oishi Green Tea named *Magic of Zero: Zero Photography* (2022), which has a total of more than five million views in total on YouTube. The audience acceptance of this mini-series commercial helps confirm that GL media can generate profits for the company just like heterosexual and BL series. This should inform GMMTV that creating improved

representations in which queer women are allowed to live a mundane life with their partner can go hand in hand with generating the company's profits.

The Fandom and Shipping Culture Within the Thai GL Genre: Much like other groups of popular media fans in today's digital age, the fandoms of GMMTV's GL actresses connect and mobilize through online spaces. These actions encourage the establishment of friendships among people who share the same interest. This can be seen in how the majority of my respondents know one another and help me connect with others who also wish to see the betterment in Thailand's future GL series production. Most importantly, the fandom culture has also granted media consumers the power to be seen and heard by media conglomerates. This signifies the ability to negotiate with the media producers through online spaces to "bring the flow of media more fully under their control" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 37).

The fandoms of GMMTV's GL series and its actresses play an extremely significant role in the processes of media production. To a certain extent, the fandom has the power to pressure media conglomerates like GMMTV to create media products according to their demands. The fandoms of the television couple Ink-Pa from *Bad Buddy* (2021) and its actresses Milk and Love can act as an embodiment of the previous statement. After recognizing that the fandoms have participated in such a vast number of conversations online and expressed such excellent fan power, GMMTV decided to authorize the birth of the new GL project in 2023, *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023), despite initially being reluctant about establishing the GL genre.

Furthermore, with the empowerment of the online platforms and friends they have formed in the digital world, many respondents are confident that they can even pressure the media conglomerates like GMMTV to rethink some of their already-made decisions. I will introduce a case study from the debate that has been going on around *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023). Ever since the teaser of this future GMMTV's project was released in November of 2022, many fans of Milk and Love have expressed discontent with the producers' decision to add two new gay male characters into the series as their second lead couple since the characters were not in the original texts, but were added merely because of the actors' rising popularity (Jule, personal communication, February 24, 2023).

The scarcity of female queer representations for the past ten years has led the audience to place a high expectation on the only complete and expectantly non-toxic portrayal of us and exacerbated the dissatisfaction with some of GMMTV's decisions. *23.5 When the Earth Spinning Around* (2023) is arguably the beacon of hope for female queer representation because it is the first-ever full-length GL series from GMMTV. Consequently, the fans of Milk and Love, along with general GL-series-watchers, whose majority are LGBTQ+ community members, are rightfully protective over the series.

To inform GMMTV what the audience actually wants to see on their television screens, the Milk-Love fandom is attempting to amplify their voice via online platforms, especially Twitter, in the hope that GMMTV would take their complaints into account. This statement is in harmony with Jenkins' description of the new consumers in the media convergence era: not only do contemporary audiences establish solidarity within the group, but they are also unafraid of expressing "a declining loyalty to networks or even media" if their requests are not being adequately responded (Jenkins, 2004, p. 37).

Pat, another respondent, had an opposite idea from Jule, stating that GMMTV is too powerful to listen to the fans' voices (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). However, we cannot underestimate the power of media fans, especially in this day and age, where a fan's perception of a media product and its production company can make or break its profitability. While it is true that the only thing deemed significant by a capitalist media conglomerate like GMMTV is profit-generating, it is also true that the primary source of such profits is the fan communities. The entertainment industry has depended too much on the fandom culture to abandon them and leave their needs unmet. Instead, the media conglomerates, especially GMMTV, recognize "the value of constructing... fan communities around their products and building long-term relationships with their consumers" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 37). After the interview had already been completed, this statement turned out to be true as GMMTV respected the audience's voices by deleting the added characters that the fandom said to be outshining the WLW portrayal.

Nevertheless, one must be aware that the relationship has been built under the premise that fan communities give money to a media company as it attempts to lure them with media products and other services. One of the ways in which the media industry does so is through the acts of shipping and serving fan service, which is also ubiquitous in the GL fandom culture.

According to Pat, the media conglomerates including GMMTV adopt the K-POP model of commodifying their artists. In this business model, commercialization leaps outside of the television screens into fan service activities, be it on-site and online fan meeting, photocard selling, and interacting with fans on personal social media platforms. All of which provides intimacy to their fans since it imitates similar actions that a person would perform to their romantic partner. Due to this reason, Stephanie Jiyun Choi argues that K-POP idols, and in this case, GMMTV artists, can be considered Intimate Laborers who generate profits by pleasing their fans with “docility, humility, and obedience” (Choi, 2020). Therefore, the series is no longer the only type of product GMMTV sells to its audience. Instead, the body and intimacy of its artists is rendered a commodity, which has gradually become the focal money-making strategy. As Intimate Laborers, GL actresses must express their love towards not only their fans, but also their co-actresses to induce positive audience reception and imply that their performances on the television screens are ‘realistic.’ To exemplify, during the first fan meeting of one GL series from another company, the two actresses reenacted the intimate scenes, which Pat said to be in a sexualized manner, from the series on stage (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

According to Pat, the fandom culture of both the BL and GL genre has long been constructed upon shipping and fan service (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). So much so that these actions have become a defining characteristic of what it is like to be in a fan community. In simple logic, the fans like it and the companies can make money from it. Thus, the commodification of homoerotic tensions between actors has become one of the most effective profit-generating tactics in the Thai media industry and has become so normalized and deep-rooted that it would be difficult to separate one from the other. We will likely be trapped with the commodification of female queer identities without a proper understanding of our community for a long time.

This money-making method is exceptionally profitable and agreed upon even by some queer audience members. Pat also viewed this as an issue that the Thai queer cinema struggles to find its way out (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023). It is important to note that my statement here is not a criticism of the queer audience members who enjoy consuming the loving content of their favorite actresses together by any means. They are simply looking for ways to see our identities and the romantic love familiar to us in the public sphere, which cannot be found in heterosexual media products and even in real life for some cases. Therefore, while recognizing that fan service activities performed by actresses are part of the carefully-calculated money-extracting strategy of the media industry, the audience is willing to spend their money to see more—with autonomy in their own choices.

For me, capitalizing on the queer audience’s desire to be seen, heard, and recognized should not be considered progress for the queer communities. Whether on-screen or off-screen, queer baiting is ultimately employed to attract queer audience members’ money. Although the Thai television series scene has improved with their on-screen portrayals of female queerness, queer baiting is still a prominent issue in the off-screen romantic performances of actresses during social events.

Not only can queer baiting hurt the queer audience, but it can also negatively affect GL actresses and constrain their life choices. What is real and what is performed are so ambiguous that some actresses must keep their personal life hidden from their fans to maintain their popularity. Consequently, some GL actresses cannot open up as much about the fact that they are in a heterosexual relationship in real life. To exemplify, some avid Milk-Love fandom members may know that Love has a male partner in real life but choose not to talk about it and only focus on Love’s interactions with Milk during social events and online posts. Pat, wanting her favorite actress to be successful in this highly competitive industry, stated that it is a pity that Love already has a boyfriend in real life because it could affect the fan loyalty towards Milk-Love ship (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

In the end, every decision made by GMMTV depends on whether it can generate profit or not. This includes the issue of whom and how the actresses should interact to maintain their and their series’ popularity. As this is

prolonged, female queer identities are capitalized and rendered as mere money-inciting tools. This signifies the politics of visibility in which queer women and sapphic love are only allowed to exist on the condition that they can generate the media conglomerates income. Several questions remain: when can we finally have female queer representations completely rid of the commodification of our identities if profitability remains at the center of all media production? And how long do queer women outside of the television screens have to put up with this exploitation for the sake of merely having the representations?

The Questioning Possibility for the Promotion of LGBTQ+ Rights Through GMMTV's Sapphic Representations:

With GMMTV and other media conglomerates alike putting profitability as the core value, the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights is eliminated from Thai sapphic series. As previously mentioned, the Thai media industry has a pattern of constructing a fictional, utopian world where intolerance and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals seemingly do not exist. On top of that, it also makes it seem like LGBTQ+ rights are secured, alive, and well, although some queer women still face verbal and physical discrimination if they ever dare to openly show affection to their romantic partner in public. I read this situation as highly hypocritical since queer love is only permitted when it is produced by a large media company and performed by heterosexual actresses for profitability. On the contrary, the rights to love and build a family for LGBTQ+ individuals had not been achieved until the legislation of the Marriage Equality Bill in June of 2024.

It becomes evident how the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights is not the focal point of GMMTV's media production when only one out of the eight series within the list mentions the lack of legal rights for gender and sexuality non-conforming individuals to get married. That series is surprisingly *Club Friday The Series 8 รักแท้...มีหรือไม่มีจริง: รักแท้หรือแค่...ความหวัง* (2017). Although considered a harmful representation of the sapphic community, the series calls out the inadequacy of Thailand's legislative branch by situating the plot around the two main WLW characters' inability to get married. This drives one of the main characters Kate to hold a wedding ceremony with a man and carry his child before promising to return to her lover Cee, which is an extreme extent a sapphic couple would go to build a family together. Kate complains that it is because "they are citizens of Thailand that they don't have the right to marry each other" (Montrikul Na Ayudhaya, 2017). Apart from this series, the storylines of many WLW representations exist in an imaginary world where laws do not have any impact on marginalized individuals like the LGBTQ+ community.

Nevertheless, whether or not the Marriage Equality Bill can pass, it has to begin with social acceptance from the Thai majority outside of the LGBTQ+ community. When asked if the sapphic series from GMMTV have the productive power of making female queer relationships more accepted in Thai society, 99% of the respondents stated that they do. Still, according to Mew, the quantity and the quality of sapphic media products have to be simultaneously improved to create this positive effect (Mew, personal communication, February 21, 2023). The youngest respondent Anne said that with the improved media products, the visibility of female queer identities, who used to be one of the most invisible groups within the LGBTQ+ community, will be shifted. According to her observation, this progress is evident in how there are an increased number of celebrities who came out as sapphic as the Thai media scene has become more accepting (Anne, personal communication, February 27, 2023).

Interestingly, another respondent, View, is assured that we will finally experience the turn away from the discourse of heteronormativity. Although still produced with profitability as the primary focus, View contended that the hypervisibility of WLW images could lead to the normalization of female queer identities in Thailand — "much like how we became familiarized with heterosexual conventions" (View, personal communication, March 2, 2023). I wholeheartedly agree with View's statement, even though this would mean that the increased acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals has to exist in parallel with the capitalization of queer identities. Nevertheless, it would signify a positive shift where the LGBTQ+ community will be able to take one small step away from the shadow.

However, as much as 60% of the respondents are more reluctant to say that the available sapphic representations can support the implementation of the Marriage Equality Bill in Thailand. The respondents did not aim to attack the WLW media products by any means. Instead, their answers show the distrust in the previous government and their

carelessness towards LGBTQ+ rights. Mew's reply is the most reflective of this argument. She stated that “although the queer cinema of other nations may have the ability to bring about legislative changes, this was not the case in Thailand under the repressive military junta regime” (Mew, personal communication, February 21, 2023). Pat, however, is hopeful that with the change of the government after Thailand's national election in May of 2023, which was contemporary to the complete development of both the GL and BL genres, the outlook towards Thailand's gender and sexuality equality is brighter (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

It can be argued that the democratization of Thailand and the movements toward LGBTQ+ rights should and must go hand in hand with each other. Thailand cannot become a completely democratic state without the liberation of the queer communities, who have been at the forefront of the marches for democracy. However, a sad reality remains that some avid pro-democracy political activists in Thailand continue to view the gender and sexuality justice issues as existing outside of Thailand's democratic movements, as nonsensical. During the interview, Pat also expressed her anger regarding these so-called activists who neglect the fight for equality of all people, including queer individuals, and even help maintain “the same form of heteronormativity as the military junta government” (Pat, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

Still, no matter how small, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ narratives in the mainstream is considered pivotal for me, the respondents, and other queer persons in Thailand because it signals to the authoritative figures that we deserve the same rights as our heterosexual counterparts. Just by merely existing in real life and on the television screens, LGBTQ+ individuals can be considered as an undercurrent that can disrupt the repressive heteronormative social norms and body of laws and, thus, as an initiator of changes. I believe that the upcoming generations of GL series can do more than making money off of our identities. We should never be content just because we are ‘allowed’ to exist somewhere in the imaginative world of television. On-screen LGBTQ+ individuals should fight the same fight that all of us outside of the television screens do. What I demand and believe other queer individuals in Thailand would also want is the inclusion of narratives that would help pressure the government and the legislative power to grant us what we truly desire: the legal rights to protection and marriage from the state.

Conclusion

Project Findings

After a thorough analysis of GMMTV's sapphic representations, three findings emerge.

In the first section, it is found that the lack of WLW media products in Thailand in the past left the respondents unsatisfied to the point that they found hypervisibility agreeable. I also classified GMMTV's sapphic representations into two categories: the pre-pandemic stage, characterized by unprogressive queer tragedy, and the post-pandemic stage, characterized by series based on GL novels.

In the second section, the resignification of harmful discourses related to female queerness previously constructed in the pre-pandemic stage is possible in the media products of the 2020s. However, some respondents have already internalized the heteronormative discourses that pathologize and devalue queer women in Thai society and our expressions of love. Finally, I suggested that the media industry produce more female queer images without connotations of heteroflexibility and fetishism of sapphism.

In the third section, I contended that with GMMTV's prioritizing profitability, the potential of its sapphic media products to help promote LGBTQ+ rights is lost. Nevertheless, as the fans are the primary source of GMMTV's income and also empowered by the fandom culture, they can influence the increased media visibility of sapphic love; yet the representations remain apolitical. Despite the slight improvement, the respondents were distrustful that LGBTQ+ rights could be achieved with the betterment of the media industry as Thailand's political and legislative authorities continue to be negligent towards the issues of LGBTQ+ rights.

Due to the research project being only undergraduate-level, the number of respondents must be kept at five. Thus, this project can only reflect a small number of WLW media audience members. This by no means signifies the lack of value of the knowledge gained from the respondents, as without it, there would be no insight regarding the experiences and emotional linkages that a group of queer audiences has towards contemporary sapphic media products.

With the in-depth textual analysis and the detailed interview data, I believe this research project will be highly beneficial as a reference to any media companies who wish to improve their media production by listening to the genuine thoughts and expectations of their media consumers who are sapphic community members. For like-minded aspiring cultural studies scholars like I am today, I hope this research project will assist their future research on Thailand's queer media scene, which urgently needs more exploration.

As a final remark, I wish to accentuate how the strive towards genuine sapphic representations in Thai queer cinema continues. Although a positive and hopeful outlook is emerging, the complete utilization of the media to support LGBTQ+ rights is still far from the reality due to the circulation of superficial and profit-driven sapphic images. Many questions remain for the media conglomerates, especially GMMTV, to answer: how long until mere visibility can be transformed into authentic representation, understanding, and acceptance? And how long will all of us queer feminist audiences have to tolerate WLW representations that are apolitical and meaningless when all of our rights and livelihood depend on every political aspect of it all?

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